

# Waterways Corridor Study 2004

The Shannon River  
between Roosky and Lanesborough

The Royal Canal  
between Cloondara and Thomastown





# Waterways Corridor Study 2004

A study of the area surrounding  
The Shannon River                      The Royal Canal  
between Roosky and Lanesborough    between Cloondara and Thomastown

Produced by

Cunnane Stratton Reynolds

in association with Cultural Resource Development Services,  
KT Cullen White Young Green, DIT Tourism Research Centre

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>i</b>		
<b>SECTION ONE - INTRODUCTION</b>			
1.1	Background	1	
1.2	Project Brief	2	
1.3	Approach and Methodology	2	
1.4	Consultation	3	
<b>SECTION TWO - WATERWAYS CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT AND POLICY CONTEXT</b>			
2.1	Management and Development of the Waterways Corridor	4	
2.2	Statutory Bodies – Waterways Ireland	4	
2.3	Statutory Bodies – Central and Regional Fisheries Boards	5	
2.4	Statutory Bodies – Central Government	6	
2.4.1	National Spatial Strategy	6	
2.4.2	Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government	6	
2.4.3	European Union Water Framework Directive	7	
2.4.4	National Biodiversity Plan	8	
2.4.5	Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme	8	
2.5	Statutory Bodies – Local Government	9	
2.5.1	County Roscommon	9	
2.5.2	County Longford	10	
2.5.3	County Leitrim	11	
2.5.4	County Westmeath	12	
2.6	Semi-State Bodies – Electricity Supply Board	13	
2.7	Semi-State Bodies – Bord na Móna	14	
2.8	Stakeholder Bodies – Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI)	14	
2.9	Stakeholder Bodies – Royal Canal Amenity Group (RCAG)	14	
2.10	Promotion of the Waterways Corridor	15	
2.10.1	Waterways Ireland	15	
2.10.2	Shannon Regional Fisheries Board	15	
2.10.3	Tourism Ireland	15	
2.10.4	Failte Ireland	15	
2.10.5	Regional Tourism Authority – East Coast and Midlands Tourism	16	
<b>SECTION THREE - WATERWAYS CORRIDOR DESCRIPTION</b>			
3.1	Area 1 – The Shannon River between Roosky and Lanesborough	18	
3.1.1	Landscape	18	
3.1.2	Socio-economic Corridor	24	
3.1.3	Cultural-historic Corridor	26	
3.1.4	Ecological Corridor	27	
3.2	Area 2 – The Royal Canal between Cloondara and Ballymahon, including the Longford Branch	32	
3.2.1	Landscape	32	
3.2.2	Socio-economic Corridor	35	
3.2.3	Cultural-historic Corridor	36	
3.2.4	Ecological Corridor	37	
3.3	Area 3 – The Royal Canal Between Abbeyshrule and Ballina	41	
3.3.1	Landscape	41	
3.3.2	Socio-economic Corridor	43	
3.3.3	Cultural-historic Corridor	44	
3.3.4	Ecological Corridor	44	

<b>3.4</b>	<b>Area 4 – The Royal Canal Between Ballina and Thomastown</b>	<b>46</b>
3.4.1	Landscape	46
3.4.2	Socio-economic Corridor	49
3.4.3	Cultural-historic Corridor	50
3.4.4	Ecological Corridor	51

## SECTION FOUR – PROPOSED POLICY AND PROJECTS

<b>4.1</b>	<b>Area 1 – The Shannon River between Roosky and Lanesborough</b>	<b>52</b>
4.1.1 – 6	Landscape and Socio-economic Corridor	52
4.1.7	Cultural-historic Corridor	58
4.1.8	Ecological Corridor	59
<b>4.2</b>	<b>The Royal Canal between Cloondara and Thomastown</b>	<b>61</b>
4.2.1 – 7	Landscape and Socio-economic Corridor	61
4.2.8	Cultural-historic Corridor	69
4.2.9	Ecological Corridor	70

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>iii</b>
---------------------	------------

## APPENDICES

<b>Appendix 1</b>	Consultation Report – Cunnane Stratton Reynolds
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Cultural-historic Report – Cultural Resource Development Services
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Ecological Report – KT Cullen White Young Green

## MAPS

<b>Map 1</b>	Study Area
--------------	------------

<b>Map 2.1</b>	Study Area 1 – Shannon River, Roosky to Lanesborough
<b>Map 2.2</b>	Study Area 2 – Royal Canal, Cloondara to Ballymahon including the Longford Branch
<b>Map 2.3</b>	Study Area 3 – Royal Canal, Abbeyshrule to Ballina
<b>Map 2.4</b>	Study Area 4 – Royal Canal, Ballina to Thomastown / Killucan

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cunnane Stratton Reynolds would like to express our gratitude to the project Steering Committee, particularly Beatrice Kelly, Ruth Delany and Colin Becker of the Heritage Council, Waterways Ireland, Roscommon, Longford and Westmeath County Councils, for their commitment and assistance throughout the study.

Thanks also to the study team, Aislinn Collins of Cultural Resource Development Services, Lisa Dowling of KT Cullen White Young Green and Linda Campbell of the DIT Tourism Research Centre, for their professionalism and enthusiasm.

The study benefited greatly from the participation and assistance of the waterways corridor communities, users and other stakeholders. In particular, thanks to Derek and Una Whelan of Leisureways Holidays, Anne Skelly of Cloondara Concerned Residents, Crea Nolan of the Cloondara Area Action Group and all of the dedicated members of the Royal Canal Amenity Group.

Declan O’Leary, Richard Butler and Darragh Johnston,  
**Cunnane Stratton Reynolds.**

## SECTION ONE INTRODUCTION

*“Ireland’s inland navigations have been used since people first sailed up our river estuaries nine thousand years ago. Our man-made inland waterways were created at the beginning of the [nineteenth] century as a means of transporting goods. The development of road and rail networks over the past two hundred years has now made that primary transport function redundant.*

*“The potential of the inland waterways as a multi-use tourism resource, and as an amenity for their local communities is currently being realised. They have important potential for nature conservation and the industrial archaeology of the waterways is gaining appreciation...”* (The Heritage Council’s Policy Paper on the Future of Ireland’s Inland waterways, Foreword, 1999).



Richmond Harbour at Cloondara; the junction of the Royal Canal and the Shannon River Navigation

### 1.1 Background

In July 2001 the Heritage Council commissioned a Pilot Waterways Corridor Study as a means to recognise and seek ways to realise the inherent potential of the waterways as a heritage, amenity and tourism resource. This aim was in keeping with the subsequently published *National Heritage Plan* (April 2002), in which it is stated that it is Government Policy to: “...

- *place the promotion and enjoyment of heritage at the heart of public life;*
- *promote the measures required for the protection of our heritage;*
- *encourage the accumulation of the knowledge necessary to protect our heritage;*
- *promote awareness and enjoyment of our heritage; and,*
- *play an active role in heritage protection in a cross-border and international context.”*

The Pilot Study covering sections of the Grand Canal and the Shannon Navigation was completed and published in 2002. Under the guidance of a Steering Committee comprising representatives of the Heritage Council, Galway and Offaly County Councils, Waterways Ireland and Offaly and Kildare Waterways, the consultant team lead by Cunnane Stratton Reynolds devised a methodology for the definition and assessment of the waterways corridor, and for the formulation of policy to achieve the Study’s aims.

Following the success of the Pilot Study the Heritage Council commissioned two further waterways corridor studies in July 2003. One study covers the mid-Shannon from Lanesborough to Shannonbridge and a stretch of the River Suck. This study covers *the Upper Shannon Navigation between Lanesborough and Roosky, and the Royal Canal between Cloondara and Thomastown including the Longford Branch* (See Map One – Study Area).

The Royal Canal presents a particular challenge and opportunity to the study. Several culverted road crossings over the canal in Co. Longford, constructed after the canal’s official closure to navigation in 1961, currently obstruct the navigation. However, due to the efforts of the Royal

Canal Amenity Group and Waterways Ireland the canal is now partially restored and works are ongoing. Final restoration of the navigation from Dublin to the Shannon River at Cloondara is expected to be complete in 2006. It is intended that this study provide impetus for the communities along the Royal Canal to optimise the benefits to be derived from the canal's restoration.

The study has been conducted by Cunnane Stratton Reynolds (CSR - land planning and design), Cultural Resource Development Services (CRDS - cultural, historical and archaeological specialists), K T Cullen White Young Green (WYG - ecological and hydrological specialists), the DIT Tourism Research Centre and Brendan Kearney (rural / agricultural development economist).

## 1.2 Project Brief

The aims of the study as set out in the Heritage Council brief are as follows:

- *“To identify ways to manage the waterways corridor environment to the benefit of all, i.e. heritage, land and water-based users.*
- *To improve understanding of an area, and by this understanding, ensure retention of the distinctiveness of a place, while allowing for development and evolution of use for the future.”*

In order to achieve these aims *“The study should ensure that the distinctive aspects of the waterways corridor are identified, and their significance assessed. As a result of this assessment, policies for the retention and enhancement of its significance will be drawn up, along with policies for appropriately designed and located waterway regeneration projects. Actions will be proposed to realise these policies over a 10 year period.”*

## 1.3 Approach and Methodology

The comprehensive brief and the experience of the consultant team suggested a two-pronged approach to the study. Equal emphasis has been given to the assessment of the existing *management and policy context* of the waterways as to the *physical environment*. The research

and assessment of both was supported by consultation with the appropriate parties and by physical survey of the study area.

The theoretical division of the waterways corridor into discrete component parts, i.e. socio-economic, cultural-historic, ecological and landscape / visual, allowed for focussed resource assessment and the formulation of policy and actions that are directed specifically towards the appropriate areas, authorities and stakeholders.

The remainder of this document, comprising the following sections, describes the result of the study:

### Section Two Waterways Corridor Management and Policy Context

- Management and Development of the Waterways Corridor
  - Statutory Bodies - Central Government, Local Government and Semi-state Bodies;
  - Stakeholder Bodies - User Groups and Associations.
- Promotion of the Waterways Corridor

*The various bodies are identified, their roles and responsibilities defined, and their existing policy and activities discussed.*

### Section Three Waterways Corridor Description

- Landscape Overview
- Socio-economic Corridor
- Cultural-historic Corridor
- Ecological Corridor

*Due to the scale of the study area it is divided into four sections, each of which is mapped and described separately in this report. Appendices, comprising inventories of the significant cultural-historic and ecological features, are provided in support of this section.*

### Section Four Waterways Corridor Vision, Policies and Actions

*A vision for the waterways is proposed, along with policies and actions to be adopted or implemented by the appropriate parties to address the issues identified in the course of the study and thus realise the vision.*

*Timeframes and indicators of progress are suggested for the policies and actions as appropriate.*

#### **1.4 Consultation**

Consultation was ongoing throughout the study, with the Steering Group, the statutory authorities and with waterways user groups, communities and individuals living beside the waterways.

At the outset of the study the consultant team identified interested and affected parties with the assistance of the Steering Group. These parties were informed of the study by letter and were requested to make written submissions regarding the study. Each member of the project team engaged with the parties relevant to their particular discipline and responsibility.

Three public workshops were held to discuss the interested and affected parties' vision for the future of the waterways and its communities and to solicit their input in the identification of ways to better manage and develop the waterways corridor. One meeting was held in Lanesborough in conjunction with the consultant team studying the mid-Shannon corridor, and another in Termonbarry. These focussed on the western portion of the study area and the Shannon corridor (including Cloondara and Longford Town) in particular. The third workshop was held in Mullingar, with particular emphasis on the Royal Canal.

The information gathered throughout the consultation process has informed the direction and results of the study and is thus incorporated into the content of this report. In addition, Appendix One includes a list of the parties from whom submissions and participation in the workshops were requested, a list of the submissions received, and the attendance lists and brief summaries of the proceedings of the workshops.

## SECTION TWO WATERWAYS CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT AND POLICY CONTEXT

### 2.1 Management and Development of the Waterways Corridor

Statutory responsibility for the management and development of the waterways rests with *Waterways Ireland*, the administrator of the river channel\*, the canal and towpaths and all associated navigation-related infrastructure. The waterways angling resource is managed by the *Central Fisheries Board* in support of Waterways Ireland. The *County Councils*, through the formulation of County Development Plans, planning policy and development control, govern all development that occurs within the waterways corridor. These bodies are responsible for the implementation of *Central Government* policy as it relates to the waterways corridor.

Several *Commercial Semi-state Bodies* e.g. the ESB, Bord na Móna and Coillte, through their activities in the area have influence over the waterways corridor.

Various non-statutory bodies / stakeholders including *User Groups* and *Local Communities* are to a greater or lesser extent involved in and responsible for the management and development of the waterways.

### 2.2 Statutory Bodies - Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland was established in 1999, as one of six North / South Implementation Bodies under the terms of the British – Irish Agreement 1999. The body operates under the overall policy direction of the North / South Ministerial Council. In the Republic, departmental responsibility for Waterways Ireland is held by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

In order to implement the Department's waterways policy, Waterways Ireland is arranged into five divisions, under control of a Chief Executive:

- Operations
- Finance and personnel
- Technical support
- Corporate services
- Marketing / Communications

*"The Statutory remit of Waterways Ireland is to manage, maintain, develop and restore the inland waterways of the island principally for recreational purposes. The remit is governed by:*

- *The Shannon Acts, 1839 – 1842.*
- *The Canals Act, 1986.*
- *The Shannon Navigation Act, 1990.*
- *Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (Powers and Functions) Act, 1998.*
- *British – Irish Agreement, 1999.*
- *Various associated statutory instruments."* (Waterways Ireland Corporate and Business Plan 2002 – 2004)

Included in the definition of the Body's functions are the Shannon – Erne Waterway and the Royal Canal, amongst others.

The *Waterways Ireland Corporate and Business Plan 2002 – 2004* sets out a comprehensive strategy for Waterways Ireland over the period 2002 to 2004 and beyond, detailing the Body's mission, strategy, core values and strategic aims, etc. Of particular relevance to the study are the following stated objectives:

\* The navigation channel (as defined by the 1841 survey of the River Shannon) was, through the Act for Improvement of the Navigation of the River Shannon, 17<sup>th</sup> August 1839, made the responsibility of the "*Commissioners for the Execution of this Act*". The Act further states that "...*Works which shall be vested in the said Commissioners ... for the Improvement of any of the Rivers aforesaid ... and also of all such Canals, Locks, Harbours, Wharfs, Landing Places, Piers, Quays and other Matters...*, shall from the passing of this Act ... be vested exclusively in the Commissioners of this Act...*The said Commissioners shall ... fix and determine the Limits of the said River Shannon..., within which all the Powers and Authorities by this Act given to the Commissioners for the Care and Conservancy of the said Rivers shall and may be exercised...*" The 1841 maps indicate a line that is "*described by the edge of the Waters of the Shannon when they are at their Ordinary Summer level that is to say 7 Feet on the Upper Sill of Hamiltons Lock*". Thus, the jurisdiction of the permanent river channel (as defined on the 1841 maps), has become that of Waterways Ireland, essentially the 'descendants' of the Commissioners. The 1839 Act was subsequently reinforced by the Shannon Navigation Act. 1990.



Under the current Capital Works Programme of the Operations Division, *“The completion of the restoration of the Royal Canal to the Shannon... and ...improved facilities on the Shannon Navigation through additional moorings at upgraded harbours; new extensions to navigations; additional moorings at a range of existing locations as well as floating and point moorings at a range of quiet locations throughout the system and the extension of one or more locks...”* These objectives complement the ongoing objectives relating to maintenance, repair and management of the waterways.

Among the objectives of the Technical Services Division are the following:

- *“to manage the design of effective solutions to civil and structural engineering problems on the inland waterways,*
- *support the capital works programme with continual technical support,*
- *continue to provide an ongoing design service to projects in the current maintenance programme as well as providing civil and structural engineering design schemes (surveys, assessment, detailed design, planning, costing / tendering, construction and commissioning) for future works outside of the period covered by this Plan,*
- *manage the commissioning and delivery of design work by outside consultants and contractors.”*

In correspondence dated 6 October 2003 from Structural Engineering Design (a sub-division of the Technical Services Division), it was confirmed that schemes to remove the five road culverts and two Bord na Móna culverts currently obstructing the Royal Canal navigation *“should be complete by 2006, subject to land acquisition, planning approval and the necessary finance being made available.”*

The Corporate Services Division states in the Corporate and Business Plan that: *“The major tasks in this area are to identify and establish legal ownership, and to manage the property portfolio for the benefit of the inland waterways... The property asset portfolio has considerable potential for development of projects which would be sustainable and which would enhance, be sympathetic to and benefit the inland waterways. This could be through direct development, joint venture, disposal or lease arrangements...”*

*“Waterways Ireland also receives frequent referrals of planning applications by third parties relating to proposed developments along the waterways for comment. Here, the main issue for Waterways Ireland is identification and assessment of their impact on the waterways, particularly navigation... Waterways Ireland will ensure that developments involving both the Body’s property assets and those by third parties will be balanced and sustainable in terms of overall development of the inland waterways.”*

It is stated as a Social Policy in the body’s *Corporate and Business Plan* that Waterways Ireland will *“continue its outreach policies of developing good relationships with all communities through which its waterways run. To that end Waterways Ireland will continue to support local groups by providing expert technical advice and assistance for Community Enhancement Schemes along the waterways and liaise with other established community outreach activities...”*

### **2.3 Statutory Bodies - Central and Regional Fisheries Boards**

The Central Fisheries Board (CFB) and its six regional boards were established in 1980 under the Fisheries Act. The CFB Coarse Fish Section is contracted by Waterways Ireland to manage and develop the inland waterways (The Royal Canal, the Grand Canal, the Barrow Navigation and the Shannon-erne Waterway) as angling resources. Among the core activities of the CFB, are the following:

- *“promote, support, facilitate and co-ordinate where necessary the conservation, protection, management, development and improvement of inland fisheries;*
- *advise the Minister on policy relating to the conservation, protection, management, development and improvement of inland fisheries; and...*
- *administering schemes, grants etc. involving EU funding and other funds as determined by the Minister;*
- *supporting and co-ordinating where necessary the angling promotion and marketing activities of the Regional Boards;*
- *co-operating and co-ordinating with Bord Fáilte in developing international promotion and marketing strategies and activities in relation to game, coarse and sea tourism angling;*

- *undertaking the efficient and effective management, conservation, protection, development and improvement of any fishery, hatchery or fish farm in its possession or occupation.*

## 2.4 Statutory Bodies – Central Government

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has responsibility for Ireland's inland waterways and provides capital funding for their maintenance and development. Waterways Ireland, under the aegis of the Department, implements its policy objectives of protecting and developing the waterways.

The county councils, regulated by the Dept. Environment, Heritage and Local Government and having regard to Central Government's *National Spatial Strategy* (NSS) and other legislation e.g. the *EU Water Framework Directive*, are responsible for the formulation of County Development Plans, planning policy and development control.

### 2.4.1 National Spatial Strategy

In terms of the waterways' potential role in developing the socio-economic environment, the NSS addresses both the urban and the typical rural / agricultural environment of the study area:

*"Water is a strong environmental component of these areas, for example, the river Shannon and its lakes. There are other river systems, lakes and canals that, with the Shannon system, provide a network for inland travel by water from Wexford to Donegal. The recreational and tourism potential of this water in all its aspects can support the reinforcement of this area and underpin the attractiveness of the Athlone / Tullamore / Mullingar gateway in particular."*

In relation to Mullingar in particular the NSS states: *"...building on the appeal of waterways in the vicinity of the linked centre gateway for the Midlands, to spearhead the emergence of cultural and socially attractive districts on the lines of those already achieved in places like Athlone with the support of recent urban renewal initiatives..."*

In relation to the rural environment: *"...Many parts of the Midlands... traditionally have had a strong agricultural base that gave rise to an extensive network of smaller rural towns, villages and other settlements. This network of smaller towns and villages represents an important resource with much potential for additional development and population... Additional development would help to support the viability of various services. However, the potential for development in smaller towns and villages needs to be unlocked with the support of public and private investment in essential infrastructure to enhance their attractiveness..."*

*"County development plans therefore need to recognise the resource that is the rural village and small town. Such plans should promote policies that incorporate a presumption in favour of appropriate development in villages and small towns, together with specific and practical measures in terms of providing serviced land and improved amenities that support and encourage the development of these towns and villages... This process can be supported through the provision of services and encouraging investment in tourism supports, such as restaurant facilities and visitor accommodation, that harness in a sustainable way the potential of important local resources, such as the natural and cultural heritage, attractive landscapes and inland waterways."*

### 2.4.2 Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government is responsible for the protection, conservation, management and presentation of Ireland's natural and built heritage under National and European law. The Heritage Service of the Department is divided into three main operational areas; Education & Visitor Services, the National Monuments and Architectural Protection Division (NMAPD) and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

The role of the NPWS is to conserve a range of habitats and populations of flora and fauna in Ireland and to implement both national and international legislation pertaining to natural heritage. It is also responsible for the management and development of National Parks and Nature Reserves. The principle legislative tools for nature conservation in Ireland are:

- The Wildlife Act, 1976
- The Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000
- EU Habitats Directive, 1997
- EU Birds Directive, 1979
- Whale Fisheries Act, 1937
- Proposed National Parks Bill
- The Planning and Development Act, 2000
- Non-statutory instruments (National Biodiversity Plan)

The Development Applications Section of the Dept. of Environment Heritage and Local Government assesses the impact of proposed developments on built and natural heritage.

#### 2.4.3 European Union Water Framework Directive

A Directive establishing a new framework for Community action in the field of water policy was agreed by the European Parliament and Council in September 2000. The Directive, generally known as the Water Framework Directive (WFD), rationalises and updates existing water legislation and provides for water management in Europe on the basis of River Basin Districts (RBD's).

The Irish Water Framework Directive website ([www.wfdireland.ie](http://www.wfdireland.ie)) identifies as the Directive's fundamental objective the maintenance of "high status" of waters where it exists, prevention of any deterioration in the existing status of waters, and the achievement of at least "good status" for all waters by 2015. To achieve this, the WFD has in addition set the following objectives:

- *"to protect and enhance the status of aquatic ecosystems (and terrestrial ecosystems and wetlands directly dependent on aquatic ecosystems);*
- *to promote sustainable water use based on long-term protection of available water resources;*
- *to provide for sufficient supply of good quality surface water and groundwater as need for sustainable, balanced and equitable water use;*
- *to provide for enhanced protection and improvement of the aquatic environment by reducing / phasing out of discharges, emissions and losses of priority substances;*

- *to contribute to mitigating the effects of floods and droughts;*
- *to protect territorial and marine waters;*
- *to establish a register of 'protected areas' e.g. areas designated for protection of habitats or species."*

The WFD utilises the river basin as the natural unit for water management. Each river basin within a Member State must be assigned to a river basin district (RBD) and the Member State must arrange for co-ordination of administrative arrangements for water management in relation to each RBD. Local Authorities will therefore have the primary role in promoting, establishing and implementing these projects. The WFD also requires that Member States encourage the active involvement of all interested parties in its implementation.

For each RBD an integrated monitoring and management system will be established, to develop a dynamic programme of management measures and to produce a River Basin Management Plan, which will be continually updated. A River Basin Management Plan will incorporate:

- *"Mapping and identification of protected areas;*
- *Map of monitoring networks and presentation in map form of monitoring results carried out for surface water (ecological and chemical), groundwater (chemical & quantitative) and protected areas;*
- *List of environmental objectives;*
- *Summary of economic analysis of water use;*
- *Register of any more detailed programmes and management plans for the RBD dealing with particular sub-basins, sectors, issues or water types, together with a summary of their contents;*
- *Summary of the public information and consultation measures taken, their results and the changes to the plan made as a consequence;*
- *A list of the competent authorities;*
- *Contact points and procedures for obtaining background documentation and information*
- *Summary of programme of measures;*
- *A summary of significant pressures and impacts of human activity on the status of surface waters and groundwater including:*
  - *estimation of point source pollution,*

- *estimation of diffuse source pollution, including a summary of land use,*
- *estimation of pressures on the quantitative status of water including abstractions,*
- *analysis of other impacts of human activity on water status.”*

As a prelude to the full implementation of the WFD, i.e. the development and adoption of a Shannon River Basin Management Plan, DEHLG with National Development Plan funding has established a Shannon River Basin Management Project, for delivering the objectives of the WFD within the Shannon River Basin District until December 2006.

#### 2.4.4 National Biodiversity Plan

The National Biodiversity Plan 2002 – 2006 was prepared in response to Article 6 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity which Ireland signed in 1992. The Plan’s objectives are to:

- *“conserve habitat diversity, including all sites of special biodiversity importance,*
- *conserve species diversity,*
- *conserve genetic diversity, both wild and domesticated, and*
- *contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and to advancing other obligations of the Convention of Biological Diversity in the EU, regionally and internationally.”*

The success of implementing the National Biodiversity Plan lies with ensuring all sectors / actors take responsibility to promote biological diversity. At Government level, this will be achieved by all Government Departments ensuring that *“their policies and actions do not damage biodiversity and that they take a proactive role in enhancing biodiversity.”* Each Department and relevant state agency is obliged to devise its own Biodiversity Action Plan / Sectoral Action Plan in consultation with stakeholders and in accordance with agreed guidelines. *“These Sectoral Action Plans will aim to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is actively pursued by each Government Department and agency.”*

At a local level, each local authority is required to prepare a Local Biodiversity Plan in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Additionally each local authority is required to appoint a contact officer for natural heritage conservation issues within its area.

The Plan recognises that inland water ecosystems and wetlands are abundant and of special importance for biological diversity in Ireland. The following actions are devised for the protection of these ecosystems:

- *“Maintain and expand the catchment-based national strategy for the protection and improvement of water quality in rivers and lakes by the establishment by Local Authorities of comprehensive projects for river basin management in relation to all inland and coastal waters, and groundwaters.”* These projects will complement other measures conducted by other public authorities in order to implement the EU Water Framework Directive.
- *“Ensure that all significant drainage, including both initial drainage and maintenance drainage, will require assessment of its implications for biodiversity, particularly for wetlands.*
- *Produce guidelines for drainage and wildlife.*
- *Consider initiatives which could be employed to enhance the conservation of freshwater fish species and communities including the need to designate sites for the conservation of important fish communities.*
- *Ensure waters are primarily stocked with indigenous species, including by reviewing the situation in regard to the translocation of fish between catchments and producing appropriate guidelines or other necessary regulations.*
- *Draw up a strategy for the use of machine cutaway and cutover raised bogs as wetland or woodland habitats.”*

#### 2.4.5 Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme

The Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme will continue to affect the ‘Upper Shannon Basin’, including portions of Counties Roscommon, Longford and Leitrim until December 31<sup>st</sup> 2006. The Scheme offers tax relief of 50% of the build cost of a new residential property and 100% of the refurbishment cost of an existing residential property. In terms of commercial and industrial properties the Scheme offers up to 100%

rebate of construction or refurbishment costs to owner-occupiers or lessors, subject to certain conditions.

The Scheme's 'Section 23-type' tax relief has resulted in a recognisable increase in development pressure in parts of the study area, most notably in the Shannon towns of Roosky, Termonbarry and Lanesborough, in Longford Town and along the canal in Ballymahon and villages such as Abbeyshrule.

## 2.5 Statutory Bodies – Local Government

### 2.5.1 County Roscommon

The Roscommon County Development Plan 2002 (RCDP) includes the following policies and objectives:

#### *"Policies*

- *To support the appropriate further development and conservation of the Shannon waterway and environs as a tourism and environmental resource... "The Council will, where appropriate and in accordance with sustainable development principles, support the development of harbours, jetties and quays, the upgrading of locks, extension of the river system and environmental works along the Shannon. The Council will also support the provision of additional facilities for tourism and recreational purposes to increase the attractiveness of the Shannon as a resource and amenity for use by the local population and visitors to the area..."*
- *To facilitate the development of appropriate tourism initiatives along the Shannon waterway... including eco-tourism initiatives that are based on the geology, ornithology, ecology and botany of the area.*
- *To recognise the Shannon, the loughs and the Shannon Callows as habitats for a rich variety of flora and fauna... The Council supports the designation of the Shannon system as a Special Development Area by Bord Failte as well as other amenity and cultural designations...*
- *To facilitate with adjacent local authorities the establishment of a sustainable development and planning strategy for the future development of the Shannon waterway during the period of the development plan.*

- *To ensure the non proliferation of private individual jetties and moorings along the Shannon system and especially within areas of conservation such as Natural Heritage Areas...*

#### *"Objectives*

- *To prepare a planning and development strategy in conjunction with DUCHAS Waterway Services [Waterways Ireland] and other relevant local authorities for the Shannon Waterway System in the County.*
- *To ensure that development proposals in the area of the Shannon are generally located within existing centres, and to prohibit development proposals [such as sporadic housing and chalets, caravans, mooring places, shore line cruiser facilities etc.] where it would be detrimental to visual or environmental amenity.*
- *To seek to locate appropriate development proposals in existing centres within the Shannon Corridor and to direct these to the most suitable locations in terms of visual amenity, access, and pollution control...*
- *To support the maintenance, upgrading and development of the Shannon waterway system...*

In terms of marinas the RCDP states that: *"commercial marinas will normally be required to locate in or close to existing centres, such as... Roosky, Termonbarry, Ballyleague [Lanesborough]... Smaller marinas for the mooring of boats may be more widely distributed, but will be required to have good road access. The development of single jetties and moorings may be acceptable at some locations, such as picnic or landing areas, where their siting and design is appropriate. However, the Council will monitor the number of such jetties and moorings to ensure that there is not an undue proliferation of these facilities."*

Of most significance among the particular projects / developments listed in the RCDP are: *improvements to the R371 Ballyleague to Roosky regional road and the provision of a bridge over the River Shannon on the R371 at Roosky, and the Ballyleague sewerage scheme which involves the upgrading of the existing treatment plant to extend the collection system to serve Ballyleague's environs (including Roosky and Lanesborough).* The latter scheme is expected to be completed in 2005.

Also of relevance to the study is the RCDP's statement that the Council: *"recognises the major benefits that tax incentive schemes have [in particular the Pilot rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme for the upper Shannon Basin] via the promotion of economic development and improvements to the built environment and will seek to encourage the inclusion of the County and its towns in relevant tax incentive schemes as they become available."*

Further County documents that address the waterways include:

- *Roscommon Common Vision, a Ten Year Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development*, produced by the Roscommon County Development Board in 2002. The report reiterates the RCDP's aims, policies and objectives and in addition lists amongst necessary actions the need to: *"Develop improved access for vehicles and pedestrians along the Shannon in consultation with farmers."*
- *County Roscommon Tourism Strategy 2002-2007*, which also reiterates the objectives of the RCDP making reference to a linear park along the Shannon. Furthermore, it refers to the fourteen elements of the Western Development Tourism Programme, of which the following may be considered most relevant to this study:
  - *"Visitor Attractions Strategic Review, with its focus on under performing attractions with potential."*
  - *Cycling and Walking Network Development.*
  - *Water Based Eco Tourism, as a sub-brand for coastal and inland waterway communities.*
  - *Angling Strategic Marketing Plan for less developed areas and products."*
- *Draft Roosky Local Area Plan 2003-2008* (as yet unpublished).

#### 2.5.2 County Longford

The following summarises Longford County Council's appreciation of, and approach towards the management and development of, the waterways, as expressed in the Longford County Development Plan 2003–2009 (LCDP).

The Council recognises the importance and potential of tourism in County Longford to expand further. Therefore, the Council intends to promote a

number of 'honeypot' locations which have been chosen due to their proximity to particular features and the possibility that these settlements may act as a base from which these features may be enjoyed and utilised. These towns include:

- *"Lanesborough – River Shannon, Lough Ree. In particular with a view to developing the amenity area to the south of the town adjoining Lough Ree for commercial/tourism/amenity development."*
- *Abbeysrule – River Inny, Abbey, Airfield, Royal Canal.*
- *Ballymahon – River Inny, Red bridge, Barnacor, Derrynagallia, Lough Ree, Royal Canal, Newcastle, Lough Drum.*
- *Cloondara – Royal Canal, River Camlin, River Shannon, wetland/peatland associations, industrial archaeology and architecture."*

It is the County's aim to promote access to and understanding of the inland waterways. In order to ensure access, for example, to the Royal Canal towpaths, the Council intends to acquire the necessary land to provide public rights of way and parking and lay-by facilities where appropriate. As an example of this approach, it is stated as a recreation objective for Longford Town to utilise: *"the River Camlin and Royal Canal as a walk and park providing a recreational backbone to the town which would provide a wildlife corridor and a potential link to other walking routes, facilitating the establishment of a pedestrian network of pathways."*

In areas adjacent to inland waterways, lakes, canals and rivers, where planning permission is sought, conditions may be attached to any consequent grant of permission requiring the retention or creation of public access to the waterway in order to facilitate the creation or expansion of walking/cycling routes. Aligned with this, development will be strictly controlled in the vicinity of the inland waterways of the County and will not normally be permitted. Alongside the normal planning process, the Council will assess any application for such development in terms of its potential impact on the visual, recreational, ecological and environmental integrity of the area.

In relation to the Royal Canal specifically, the Council intends to assess the potential of the towpaths for the provision of designated walking and cycling routes and wildlife corridors for recreational, amenity and

educational purposes. The harbours along the Royal Canal are identified as potential locations for the provision of amenity facilities. The Council also intends to promote and encourage on-going works to improve the navigability of the Royal Canal and at the same time take whatever measures necessary to protect, enhance and preserve the built and natural heritage of the Canal and its associated structures. *The County Council has indicated to the consultants that any planning applications by Waterways Ireland in relation to the restoration of the Royal Canal will be 'fast-tracked', and that the Council is amenable to any cooperation required by Waterways Ireland in the restoration process.*

The LCDP recognises the designation of the Royal Canal as a proposed Natural Heritage Area and states that it will be protected accordingly. However, no waterway-related structures are included in the County's Record of Protected Structures.

Longford County has over the last six years experienced a significant increase in planning applications for development. The LCDP attributes this growth in the number and complexity of applications to a number of factors, including the introduction of the Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme and the trickling westward of the "economic boom". Planning applications have consisted of a cross section of development proposals from residential to commercial and industrial. Longford Town, Lanesborough and Ballymahon are identified as being under particular pressure for development, with positive and negative results. The following are among the relevant impacts brought about by the Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme (RRS) as identified in a heritage appraisal carried out for the Heritage Council and published in 2001.

- *"Acceleration of growth trends within reasonable distance of major employment and service locations due to increased commuting;*
- *Increased demand for flats/apartments and for second/holiday homes;*
- *Increase in pressures for all types of housing including conversions, refurbishments, rebuilding and particularly new dwellings in the countryside;*
- *A greater attraction for people living in towns and villages to move out to the open countryside;*
- *An erosion of character in both built and natural heritages, partly resulting from increased pressures to relax policies and partly from*

*the inevitable pressures to use standard low quality designs and to urbanise rural settlements;*

- *Increase in applications for groups of dwellings/multiple dwelling applications, both in situations where only one dwelling may have been proposed in the past but also in new situations where no dwellings would have been proposed;*
- *Increase in applications for larger residential developments and a greater number of dwellings applied for in the larger schemes;*
- *An increasing number of applications for development beyond the village boundaries, as landowners in outer areas try to advance the development potential of their land as intervening land is not released (leap-frogging);*
- *Increased demand for leisure, recreation, sport, retail, hotel etc. development and community facilities..."*

The planning and development of Longford Town (2,774 acres of the town centre) is governed by the Longford Town Council. The new Town Development Plan, adopted at end of 2003, includes an objective to reopen the Longford Branch to the main line of the Royal Canal although no reference is made to the reopening of the harbour in Market Square. A substantial area of land adjacent to the canal some 500m short of the railway line currently obstructing the route of the canal to the harbour has been zoned open space, for possible development of a harbour.

### 2.5.3 County Leitrim

Of most relevance to this study among the numerous references to the Shannon Navigation and related issues in the Leitrim County Development Plan 2003-2009 (LeCDP) are the following:

*"The Council recognises the need for population growth throughout the County, the need to support persons building family homes in rural areas, and the need also to strengthen the demographic profile of the County. "*

Thus, the LeCDP promotes the provision of housing in all areas of the county including rural one-off housing and in existing villages and settlements. Accordingly, in its Strategic Development Framework the LeCDP states that the Council supports the extension of the Upper Shannon Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme.

The Council recognises the need for conservation where necessary / appropriate, and the potential of its natural and built heritage in promoting development. Among its strategic goals and objectives are the following:

- *“To recognise that Leitrim’s archaeological, natural and built heritage are important elements in the long term economic development of the county and to promote their conservation and enhancement, public access and enjoyment.*
- *To adopt the precautionary principle in respect of development proposals where significant environmental implications are involved,*
- *Protect important wildlife habitats within Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Natural Heritage Areas (NHA).*
- *To protect the character and identity of individual settlements and avoid over development by protecting and requiring appropriate green spaces in built up areas,*
- *To promote regeneration and the reuse of derelict and obsolete sites and buildings,*
- *To adopt a regional approach in the protection of the environment, co-operating with neighbouring counties in the protection on habitats, watercourses and landscapes...*
- *To protect the unique character of Leitrim’s landscapes*
- *To protect, maintain and enhance the quality of the built and natural environment...”*

In terms of the waterways as a tourism / recreation resource the LeCDP states: *“The Council is aware of the cultural importance of the county’s industrial heritage and in particular of the canal and waterway systems... The importance of protecting these structures is all the greater given the increased importance of the canal and navigation network as a tourism and recreational resource... The Council will facilitate, and where necessary become directly involved in, the promotion and development of amenities such as... the opening of the River Rinn to navigation...”*

It is the policy of the Council to *“promote and protect public accessibility to the county’s watercourses... The Council will promote and facilitate the creation of waterside linear parks and moorings so local communities can make better use of these assets... Towns and village communities will be encouraged to make more active use of watercourses, with new*

*development generally encouraged to front onto rivers / canals and the possibility of new public waterside walkways explored.”*

The Council also supports cooperation with Roscommon County Council on a project to improve the existing bridge over the River Shannon at Roosky.

In support of the LeCDP the Leitrim County Heritage Plan 2003-2008 includes amongst its objectives, *“To raise awareness of the importance of Leitrim’s Waterways, wetland habitats and species... and to promote sustainable planning for Leitrim’s Waterways.”*

#### 2.5.4 County Westmeath

The Westmeath County Development Plan (WCDP) lists the recently restored Royal Canal as an asset in its County Profile and Resource Base. There are numerous further references to the waterways in the remainder of the document which includes the Mullingar Town Plan. Of most relevance to this study are the following:

Under the subject Design in the Built Environment it is stated as a general policy objective: *“To preserve and enhance areas of recognised character and where appropriate – historic landscapes, Protected Structures, townscapes, streetscapes, fine views, open land, canals and other recognised heritage and amenity assets, along with their attendant settings.”*

Under the subject of Transportation it is stated as a policy objective: *“To support the retention and improvement of pedestrian/cycle facilities including public rights of way and accessibility/movement for mobility impaired people. To implement a County-wide rambling/cycle route network and investigate the use of the Royal canal towpath as part of such a scheme.”*

In terms of Conservation and Heritage, the WCDP recognises that the Royal Canal is designated a proposed NHA. Accordingly: *“It is an objective of the Council to preserve the proposed Natural Heritage Areas free from adverse development and to retain these areas in their natural and unmodified state having regard to their natural beauty and scientific*



*interest. It is also an objective of the Council to: “assist in the development of the proposed Natural Heritage Areas for recreational and educational purposes commensurate with the preservation of these sites in their natural and unmodified state.”*

The WCDP lists as a policy objective for Canals, Walking and Cycling Routes, to recognise *“the particular role that these linear route ways and their settings/margins have as wildlife zones and corridors and to ensure that these roles are not threatened by development and where possible to seek to enhance their bio-diversity capacities.”*

No canal related structures are listed in the current Record of Protected Structures.

In terms of Tourist Schemes it is policy of the Council to encourage increased usage of the Royal Canal for barges, walkers etc. Under the subject of Amenity, Open Space and Recreation the following relevant policy objectives are listed: *“To improve public access to the lakeshores,... To protect the landscape setting of lakes, major rivers and canals and to safeguard and further develop in a sustainable manner the county’s amenity assets, such as its canals, walk and cycleways, in order to maximise the recreational and tourism capacity of the county.”*

As a Key Objective it is stated that *“There will be a presumption against development which significantly prejudices the form, character or setting of any recreational and amenity open space, walk and cycleway, or any other identifiable or scheduled amenity asset.”*

The *Mullingar Town Plan* acknowledges the importance of the Royal Canal in contributing to the attractiveness of the area and providing a wilderness corridor for wildlife. It identifies the Canal as an important focus of the town development over the last century. The canal area is a major contributor to open space in the town with the Royal Canal encompassing roughly 40 acres. The Plan highlights the increasing importance of the canal in creating *“an integrated system of amenity and recreational open space which offers potential for further extending the urban pedestrian networks along the banks and integrating this network with the town open space system.”* The Plan identifies the urban section of the Royal Canal as *“an ideal location for water based sport particularly as it is linked to*

*Lough Owel by means of a feeder canal... with potential as amenity open space...”* It suggests *“the possibility of linking the lakeside amenity area with the urban open space by means of the feeder canal, thus providing an integrated system of urban/rural open spaces.”* The urban harbour area is identified as having particular potential for the development of an amenity area for water-based activities.

Further County documents that address the waterways:

- The Westmeath Co. Development Board County Strategy 2002-2012 largely reiterates the WCDP policies and objectives. In addition it recommends the utilisation of the *“resources of rural areas, such as land, landscape, natural and cultural heritage and water resources by defining their potential and setting out the necessary management requirements* and the identification of *areas in the county that require revitalisation or redevelopment”* to ensure that this happens in an integrated manner.
- The *Co. Westmeath Heritage Plan* includes several objectives relating to waterways such as the identification of suitable sites for the provision and / or improvement of access to waterways and the provision of said access *and* interpretation at the identified sites. Furthermore, the Heritage Plan supports the development of a partnership structure including Waterways Ireland, Local authorities, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Local Community and Heritage Groups / Organisations to develop and maintain the network of waterways.

## **2.6 Semi-State Bodies – Electricity Supply Board**

The Electricity Supply Board (ESB) has the statutory right to control the water level on the Shannon system in order to generate electricity. In cooperation with Waterways Ireland, the ESB is capable of regulating the river level *to some extent* through operation of its sluices. This might be required to attenuate floods during periods of high inflow and to supply minimum required discharges during periods of drought to cater for environmental, water supply, navigational and recreational requirements. During flood or drought conditions, effective regulation of the water level ceases to be possible.

## 2.7 Semi-State Bodies – Bord na Móna

The Bord na Móna Group owns approximately 85,000ha of peatland in Ireland. Substantial areas in the western portion of the study area, to both sides of the Shannon River between Termonbarry and Lanesborough, and to the west of the Royal Canal between Ballymahon and Longford (collectively, the Moundillon group of bogs), are in ownership of the Body. Its policy and activities are thus critical to the waterways corridor in these areas. Bord na Móna's *Corporate and Social Responsibility Report*, which includes the Body's policies on the environment, contains the following relevant environmental policies:

- Bord na Móna *“seeks to conduct all its activities in the most environmentally responsible way”*.
- Bord na Móna *“does not produce peat on any peatland considered to be of conservation interest, and assists the State in preserving substantial areas of bogs of ecological or scientific interest.”*
- Bord na Móna is *“committed to planning for the environmentally sustainable after-use of cutaway bogs; carries out research to this end; and implements its plans as areas of cutaway become available.”*

## 2.8 Stakeholder Bodies – Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI)

The IWAI is a voluntary body for waterways enthusiasts, formed in 1954. The main objectives for which the Association was formed are:

- *“To promote the use, maintenance and development of the inland waterways of Ireland, and in particular, to advocate and promote the restoration to good order, and maintenance in good order of every navigable waterway and the fullest use of every navigable waterway by both commercial and pleasure traffic provided such is not injurious to the environmental health of the waterways and the surrounding areas.*
- *To support any proposal that may be calculated to maintain or improve Irish waterways, and also to improve navigation, lay moorings and carry out other works of improvement on and adjacent to the waterways.”* (IWAI web site)

When the Shannon was almost totally undeveloped for pleasure boating, the IWAI fought against the building of low bridges, thus ensuring the development of the river as a national asset. Later, the association successfully resisted the threatened closure of the Grand Canal in Dublin. The Body continues to represent its members in lobbying and advising national and local government and other bodies on all matters relating to the inland waterways including management and future development. The Body organises rallies, social and educational events to bring waterways users together and to raise the profile of the resource and works to raise funds for the improvement and restoration of navigations.

The IWAI publishes a quarterly magazine, which brings local events, activities and developments into national perspective, and it hosts a web site, [www.iwai.ie](http://www.iwai.ie).

## 2.9 Stakeholder Bodies – Royal Canal Amenity Group (RCAG)

The following is taken from the RCAG web site, [www.royalcanal.org](http://www.royalcanal.org). Formed as a local organisation in 1974, the original objective of the RCAG was to promote and participate in the development of the full amenity potential of the Royal Canal in County Dublin. The group now has a membership of approximately 500, having assumed 'responsibility' for the whole canal. Branches of the RCAG (relevant to the study area) now exist in Cloondara, Killashee, Longford, Keenagh, Ballymahon, Abbeyshrule, Ballynacarrigy, Mullingar and Killucan.

The local branches work closely with community councils or residents associations to restore and develop local stretches of the waterway. Much of the Group's work is done voluntarily by members, but it also sponsors Youth and Social Employment Schemes. Of the most successful of these have been the joint RCAG / FÁS project for construction of new lock gates for the Dublin - Kildare - Meath stretch of the canal and more recently the development of a community walkway along the towpath from Longford Town. The RCAG has in the past received financial assistance from local authorities and other bodies but is now almost entirely dependent on membership subscriptions, donations and profits from fund-raising activities. Where possible the Group collaborates with Waterways Ireland in the implementation of its projects.

## 2.10 Promotion of the Waterways Corridor

### 2.10.1 Waterways Ireland

Waterways Ireland's Marketing and Communications Division has a remit for *promotion of the resource and customer relations* amongst other roles. In correspondence dated 29 October 2003 the Division confirmed that *"...a Marketing and Promotions Strategy has recently been finalised... The Strategy has five pillars namely, awareness creation, raising the profile of Waterways Ireland, promoting greater use of the waterways, building partnerships, and building a platform for sustained development."* In addition, it is stated in the body's *Corporate and Business Plan* that it will *"continue to market and promote the inland waterways through participation in associated travel, trade and tourism shows as well as through advertising and promotional campaigns... Particular attention will also be paid to the customer needs of the Body including improved information access and special focus on the Body's user groups, i.e. cruise and boat hire companies, angling associations, walking and water-sports clubs etc."* Accordingly, a Strategy for Enhanced Customer Service will be finalised shortly.

### 2.10.2 Shannon Regional Fisheries Board

In addition to the practical functions of the Central Fisheries Board, the Regional Fisheries Boards play a role in promoting the waterways angling resource. The aims of the Shannon Fisheries Board (as stated on its web site [www.shannon-fishery-board.ie](http://www.shannon-fishery-board.ie)), which has an office in Mullingar, are as follows:

- *"conserve and protect fish stocks, water quality and the fishery environment.*
- *develop and enhance fish stocks.*
- *develop and support the angling product.*
- *assist through angling development, the creation of jobs and bring economic benefit to local communities."*

### 2.10.3 Tourism Ireland

Tourism Ireland Limited was set up in 2002 to market the island of Ireland overseas as a tourism destination and works closely with Failte Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. Tourism Ireland has devised a strategy based on consumer needs and perceptions, identified through in-depth consumer research and industry expertise. The marketing role includes implementing promotional proposals for products and regions overseas and ensuring the consistency and complementarity of both Boards' promotional content with Tourism Brand Ireland.

### 2.10.4 Failte Ireland

Failte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority established in 2003, brings together and builds on the functions discharged formerly by Bord Failte and CERT. The organisation provides strategic and practical support to develop and sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourist destination. Failte Ireland's mission is to increase the contribution of tourism to the economy by facilitating the development of a competitive and profitable tourism industry. Failte Ireland's primary role is to be a catalyst of other people's activity and places strong emphasis on assisting enterprises to lift their performance. The Body emphasises strategic partnership, between the interests in Irish tourism at national, regional and local level. Failte Ireland seeks also to:

- *"Influence policy, not just in tourism, but across all relevant areas of Government that impact on tourism and also be the key channel for implementing Government policies that affect the industry.*
- *Stimulate tourism enterprises to become more competitive and in turn profitable. This includes encouraging start-ups in new and innovative product and service areas, formulating eBusiness and eMarketing strategies and enhancing products and services for the domestic market.*
- *Drive the marketing of Irish tourism, in Failte Ireland's areas of responsibility - niche product marketing, facilitating group marketing and marketing to the domestic market."*
- *Lend support to specific strategic project and product initiatives including influencing policy on key infrastructural projects, supporting*

*cultural and heritage programmes and festivals and supporting more and improved niche products.”*

Failte Ireland's *Tourism Development Strategy 2000-2006* (TDS) highlights the crucial importance of environmental protection and regional development to ensure the sustainability of Ireland's tourism offer.

The TDS distinguishes between established tourism areas, developing tourism areas and undeveloped areas, and advocates a selective range of product supports in a targeted range of geographic areas. The Shannon Corridor is classified a Developing Tourism Area. The TDS states that Regional Authorities should be encouraged to produce detailed development plans for each zone.

The TDS identifies ten priorities for tourism investment of which nine, namely, tourism attractions (including heritage / historic gardens), rural tourism, inland waterways and water-based activities, special interest activities (including equestrian and adventure sport), health and fitness (including walking and cycling), infrastructure and services (including tourist information and visitor management), marketing, training and technical assistance / research, are relevant to the study area. With regard to accommodation tax incentives, any further applicability should be confined to Developing Tourism Areas and Special Interest Activity Areas (SIAA's).

The TDS proposes the development of SIAAs in the Midlands, in which niche brand reputations built on clusters of product strength should be promoted. Amongst the activities / products where SIAAs could drive growth are:

- Coarse angling, where the Westmeath and Longford lakelands have substantial potential.
- Inland waterways, for cruising, water sports, angling, walking and cycling. Walking and cycling are seen as playing a key role in Developing Areas. For the cycling tourist a series of fully signposted cycle routes needs to be developed.
- Rural tourism, specifically in the midlands.
- Ecological tourism, where the midland bogs are seen to have substantial potential.

In terms of waterways and cruising, Failte Ireland recognises the *“wonderful resource of peaceful, uncrowded inland waterways which should become the focus of a fully-integrated development plan”*. Key features of such a plan would include the branding of the Shannon (including its links to the Erne) as one of Europe's most distinctive and high quality leisure waterways and the opening up of additional waterways where a strategic gap is identified, providing greater choice, variety and excitement. This would require a concerted joint marketing effort between the state and boat-hire operators. A strong initial focus on the domestic, Northern Ireland and British markets is proposed. Failte Ireland recognises that the expansion of the cabin cruising market requires renewed investment in moorings and jetty space and strict enforcement of the laws to prevent 'harbour-hogging'. Furthermore, improvements in disposal systems for holding tanks and litter collection are required.

In conjunction with this the integrated development of all tourism opportunities on the waterways including recreation, dining, pubs and entertainment, as well as all activity opportunities such as angling, sailing, water sports, walking, cycling and ecology should be facilitated. Another priority should be finding appropriate new uses for redundant buildings while enhancing the distinctive character of vernacular towns and villages.

#### 2.10.5 Regional Tourism Authority – East Coast and Midlands Tourism (ECMT)

The function ECMT is to generate local interest and enthusiasm for the development of tourism through the provision of services, improvements to tourism infrastructure, etc. within the national tourism policy of Failte Ireland. ECMT manages 15 tourist information offices in the region, two of which are in the study area - Mullingar (year round) and Longford (seasonal). The tourist information offices provide visitor information and accommodation booking services and distribute ECMT's local maps and brochures. ECMT has identified the assets of heritage, golf, equestrian, walking and cycling routes, ecology and waterways as having considerable potential for the development of centres of special interest activities and rural tourism.

ECMT has identified the Tourism Product Development Scheme 2000-2006 (TPDS), which as part of the NDP provides €130m for national

tourism development, as a potential source of funding for SIAAs. TPDS funding is administered by Failte Ireland. Of the four categories of tourism development for which the TPDS will provide finance, Special Interest Pursuits and Tourism / Environment Management are most relevant to the study area. In terms of Special Interest Pursuits, funding is to be directed towards cycling, walking, horse-riding, great gardens, outdoor activities, water based activities and health tourism, including the provision of facilities to enable people with disabilities to partake in these activities. In relation to provision for Tourism / Environmental Management the ECMT has highlighted the centrality of the issue of water quality to the pursuits of cruising and angling.

The NDP also makes provision for a total investment of €39million through the Tourism and Recreational Angling Sub-Measure for development of recreational and tourism angling in the regions. €27million is allocated to the Border, Midland and Western Region. The funding will support the development of the sector through the improvement, conservation and expansion of fishery habitats and stocks, the provision of training facilities for tourists and service providers, the supply of technical advice for fisheries development and the strategic promotion and marketing of the angling product in overseas and domestic markets. This funding is administered by the Fisheries Boards.

## SECTION THREE WATERWAYS CORRIDOR DESCRIPTION

The waterways corridor is composed of the socio-economic corridor (including use and access), cultural-historic corridor (including built heritage) and an ecological corridor. These components combine to generate a waterways corridor landscape of particular heritage value.

This Section describes, illustrates (photographs referenced in the descriptive text, e.g. **3.1-A**) and assesses the waterways corridor in terms of the landscape in general and also with reference to the socio-economic, cultural-historic and ecological corridors. For practicality of mapping and report compilation the study area is divided into four 20km sections as shown on Map One:

**Area 1** The Shannon River between Roosky and Lanesborough (Map 2a)

**Area 2** The Royal Canal between Cloondara and Ballymahon, including the Longford Branch (Map 2b)

**Area 3** The Royal Canal between Abbeyshrule and Ballina (Map 2c)

**Area 4** The Royal Canal between Ballina and Thomastown (Map 2d)

### 3.1 Area 1 – The Shannon River between Roosky and Lanesborough

#### 3.1.1 Landscape

##### 3.1.1.1 Roosky and Roosky Lock

The village is given its structure by the river and bridge, a stone, five-arched structure with lifting section over the navigable channel adjacent the east bank (**3.1-A**). Mooring along both banks south of the bridge is fronted by buildings set back behind open space / parking, creating a distinctive village core comprising pubs, restaurant, hotel, convenience store and tackle and bait shop. The village benefits from the combined traffic of the Shannon navigation and the Dublin – Sligo N4, which follows the east bank through the village. The moored boats, old stores fronting the west bank and extensive signage on these addressing the river and N4, contribute to the distinctive village character (**3.1-B**). An toilet and shower facility beside the west bank, built to cater for navigation traffic, is no longer in use due to vandalism.

The main street extends west from the bridge and is fronted by a combination of houses, pubs, a now derelict court-house, church, school and a Glanbia (foods) processing plant.



3.1-A



3.1-B

Mature trees along the bank and encroaching into the river north and south of the village add to the visual enclosure of the landscape. The tree line continues south of the village to Roosky Lock (<1km), and along the east bank behind the trees a tarred road gives access to the lock. A dry dock cut into the west bank (**3.1-C**) and mooring points on the east bank (**3.1-D**) strengthen the navigation character. The dry dock area is poorly maintained and unsightly. Parallel to the river and some 100m to the west, a strong tree line indicates the alignment of an historic canal leading from Roosky Lock northwards through the village to a point up-river. Currently overgrown and liable to flooding, the canal has been earmarked for development of a walkway or greenway amenity.



3.1-C



3.1-D

A shed and parking area on the east bank, the lockkeeper's cottage on an island west of the lock chamber, and mature vegetation surrounding the lock, create an enclosed and attractive landscape of high quality (3.1-E). New houses of suburban character are however visible to the east and south of the lock (3.1-F).



3.1-E



3.1-F

#### 3.1.1.2 *Between Roosky and Lough Forbes*

A steep slope up from the river banks limiting lateral views to west and east (3.1-G, H), flattens towards the south as the river broadens towards Lough Forbes. The land use is pastoral, with occasional farmsteads visible. In the northern portion a distinctive landscape is formed by large fields separated by hedgerows perpendicular to the river banks (3.1-G, H).



3.1-G



3.1-H

Further south as the landform flattens fields are smaller, irregular and wet, forming callows (3.1-I). Abundant vegetation in the form of hedgerows,

and scrub on the edge of nearby bogs, contribute to the visual enclosure. Notable features along the navigation include several stone cairn markers dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (3.1-I), in varying states of repair, and a small private marina on the east bank. Isolated patches of damage to the river banks, caused by livestock, are visible (3.1-J). Towards the south in proximity to Lough Forbes, Slieve Bawn is visible along the western horizon.



3.1-I



3.1-J

#### 3.1.1.3 *Lough Forbes and the Rinn River Navigation*

The landscape of Lough Forbes and surrounds is dominated by the expansive surface of the lake itself and by the wooded hills of Castleforbes Demesne to the east of the lake. Although these enclose the view to some extent, uplands are visible in the distance, namely Corn Hill and the antenna-topped, conical Bawn Mountain to the south east, and Slieve Bawn to the west. The landscape is devoid of buildings except for a concrete, angular waterworks facility on the north-eastern lake shore (3.1-K). Castle Forbes itself, various related buildings and a church ruin and cemetery, are all obscured by the demesne woods (3.1-L). No access to the shore is available from the navigation, nor from land to the river.



3.1-K

3.1-L

The Rinn River meets the Shannon at Lough Forbes. Previously integral to the Shannon Navigation, the Rinn Navigation was obstructed at Cloonart by realignment of the N4 which left a low bridge across the river. The navigation now terminates at the Rinn River Marina beside the bridge.

Brady Shipman Martin's (BSM's) *National Canals and Waterways Strategy* (1992) identified the potential for the extension of the navigation as far as Lough Rinn in County Leitrim. Subsequent studies and documents including the *Leitrim County Development Plan* (1991) and BSM's *Lough Rinn Navigation Pre-feasibility Study* (1997) addressed the project but due to the predicted cost of implementation and concerns over possible environmental impacts no action has yet been taken.

Current proposals for realignment of the N4 between Longford and Dromod would restore the original air draft below the bridge. While this will restore the navigation to its original condition, additional works would be needed for the navigation to meet the standards / specifications required by the cruise sector of the tourism industry. These works would include alterations to four other bridges, construction of a lock and some dredging of the riverbed.

The extension of the navigation to Lough Rinn would take the navigation through a primarily agricultural landscape including areas of callows. Around the Lough itself there are pockets of woodlands and various heritage features including Lough Rinn House and Gardens, a Neolithic burial tomb, Reynolds Castle and a lime kiln.

#### 3.1.1.4 *Between Lough Forbes and Termonbarry*

At the southern end of Lough Forbes the navigable Camlin River enters the Shannon. The landscape is pastoral but low lying and wet, and the hedgerow vegetation distinctly less consistent than that north of Lough Forbes. Conifers and gorse migrating from nearby bogs are prominent. A few isolated farmsteads are set back to west and east of the river, but most prominent is an extensive factory complex (Atlantic Mills), adjacent to the east of the river. The unsightly factory is most visible on the approach from the north, while dense riverside vegetation obscures all but the building's chimney from lateral views and from the south (**3.1-M**). Concrete drains leading from the factory to the river are visible on the banks. To the west and south Slieve Bawn is the dominant landscape feature (**3.1-N**), with forestry and telecommunications masts prominent.



3.1-M



3.1-N



### 3.1.1.5 Termonbarry and Termonbarry Lock

Detached houses along the roads west of Termonbarry are visible through the riverside vegetation from the navigation north of the village (3.1-O).



3.1-O



3.1-P

The village is given its structure by the seven-arched stone bridge divided by an overgrown island separating the navigation from the main channel (3.1-P). Against the west bank a lifting section in the bridge allows passage for large cruisers (3.2-Q). Mooring points on the west bank north and south of the bridge afford access to the village (3.1-R). The busy N5 extending westwards from the bridge forms the main street of the village (3.1-S). Several attractive pubs and convenience stores benefit from the combined navigation and N5 traffic. Keenan's pub in particular addresses the navigation well from its bank-side location adjacent the bridge (3.1-T). The road traffic is a dominant aspect of the village and restricts pedestrian access from the mooring point north of the bridge to the village.



3.1-Q



3.1-R



3.1-S



3.1-T

A stretch of some 300m separates the bridge and village core from Termonbarry Lock, with informal mooring available against the west bank. Behind a row of riverbank trees an attractively lit tarred road leads to the lock. An extensive private marina and residential development is currently under construction in the lands beyond the access road. East of the navigable channel and lock (3.1-U), a weir crosses the river. Planning permission has been granted for the replacement of a portion of the weir by a small-scale hydro-electricity facility. Adjacent to the west of the lock there is a control office, parking area and somewhat unkempt swimming pool and amenity area.

A row of detached, suburban houses fronting the local road between Termonbarry and nearby Cloondara is prominent beyond the fields in the foreground to the east (3.1-V). Houses and the large grey form of the mill at Cloondara are also visible through the abundant vegetation.



3.1-U



3.1-V

### 3.1.1.6 Cloondara Canal to Richmond Harbour, and the Camlin River

South of Termonbarry Lock and weir, a narrow 350m channel to the east gives access to Cloondara Lock and Canal, connecting the Shannon to the Camlin River and the Royal Canal navigations. The 350m stone-lined Cloondara Canal, overhung by dense vegetation and bridged by the local road from Termonbarry, is uniquely attractive (3.1-W, X). The lock house, built in 1760 by the engineer of the Shannon Navigation, Thomas Omer, stands beside the bridge.



3.1-W



3.1-X

Just south of the junction of the Cloondara Canal and the Camlin River another lock gives access to Richmond Harbour (3.1-Y), the terminus of the Royal Canal and core of the village of Cloondara. East of the junction the modern N5 bridge over the Camlin Navigation is of unsympathetic design (3.1-Z), in stark contrast to the adjacent canal and historic bridge.



3.1-Y



3.1-Z

The narrow and winding Camlin Navigation, roughly 5km in length, skirts the eastern border of a raised bog (Cloondara Bog). The surrounding landscape is variable. Adjacent to the river there are broad areas of flat, wet meadows. On the higher ground there is a dispersed scattering of farmsteads and the large pastures, remnant woods and walls surrounding Brianstown House. Conifer plantations in various stages of development are prominent throughout the landscape.

### 3.1.1.7 Termonbarry to Lanesborough

This section is characterised by a flat, wet landscape adjacent to the particularly broad, sluggish stretch of the Shannon River. A raised, undulating area to the east of the river in the northern portion (Knappoge, west of Cloondara) is the only exception, with a dispersed row of houses fronting the single local road parallel to the river (3.1-Aa).

Bord na Móna's harvesting of the expansive bogs to west and east of the river dominates the land use. Peat stockpiles and rising dust are visible from the river. Drainage channels from the bogs enter the river periodically (3.1-Bb) and a Bord na Móna rail bridge with a lifting section crosses the river. Afforestation of the lands adjacent the Bord na Móna peatlands is a prominent feature, encroaching onto the river banks in places. A private marina development adjacent a farmstead on the west bank is unsightly. The afforested Slieve Bawn mountains nearby to the west are a dominant feature (3.1-Cc), along with the old and new (under construction) peat-fuelled power stations at Lanesborough, which are intermittently but prominently visible to the south.



3.1-Aa



3.1-Bb



3.1-Cc

3.1.1.8 *Lanesborough - Ballyleague*

A seven-arch stone bridge links the settlement of Lanesborough, Co. Longford (3.1-Dd) on the east bank of the river to Ballyleague, Co. Roscommon (3.1-Ee) on the west bank, and forms the core of the town.



3.1-Dd



3.1-Ee

A small historic harbour is cut into the west bank north of the bridge (3.1-Ff). Derelict mooring points adjacent the harbour entrance require clearance and / or replacement. Extensive mooring is available north and south of the bridge along the west bank (3.1-Gg, Hh, Ii). A toilet and shower block has been built beneath the bridge on the west bank to serve the navigation. Generous space on the west bank along with simple landscaping contribute to the village – navigation interface. Several vacant / derelict buildings adjacent the river / bridge including stores and houses have potential for refurbishment and reuse.



3.1-Ff



3.1-Gg



**3.1-Hh**



**3.1-li**

Additional marinas currently under construction west of the river, one public (Waterways Ireland) south of the village and one private north of the village, further denote its prominent location at the northern extent of Lough Ree, second largest of the lakes of the Shannon system.

The landscape of Lanesborough and surrounds is dominated by the peat fuelled power station adjacent the east bank just north of the bridge (3.1-Jj). The massive, angular concrete and glass structure with two tall chimneys is to be made redundant in 2005 with the commissioning of the new station currently under construction east of the existing plant (3.1-Kk). The new building has a smaller footprint, simpler form and a single chimney. Its colouring and relative distance from the river will render it a less obtrusive feature once the existing station is removed. The abundance of associated infrastructure, such as power lines crossing the river, pylons throughout the landscape, transformers, etc, will however remain.



**3.1-Jj**



**3.1-Kk**

With the various buildings, houses and stores fronting the river adjacent the bridge largely derelict, commerce and activity is concentrated further from the river along the main roads extending east and west. A row of attractive houses south of the bridge on the west bank (Ballyleague) addresses the river properly, but opposite, on the east bank a mature row of conifers effectively separates Lanesborough from the river. The eastern river bank has however been well developed to afford access for anglers to the popular 'hot water stretch' created by the power station (3.1-LI). The landscape adjacent the river has further potential for improvement to complement the Lanesborough Tourism Co-op's lighting on the bridge, improvements to angling access, the town park / camping area (3.1-Mm), etc.



**3.1-LI**



**3.1-Mm**

### 3.1.2 Socio-economic Corridor (including Waterways Access, Use and Commerce)

#### 3.1.2.1 Roosky, Co. Roscommon and Co. Leitrim.

The population of Roosky in 2002 was 220 and declining (-10% from 1996). The population will have declined further since the partial destruction of the village's largest employer, a Glanbia meat processing factory, in May 2002. The factory, which until the time of the fire employed 450 staff, now employs 95 in the remaining cannery operation.

Apart from typical village business / commerce comprising convenience / grocery store/s, Roosky (as a result of the N4 traffic) also supports the Shannon Key West Hotel, with a seasonal cruising restaurant (the Shannon Queen), the Rising Sun restaurant, seven registered B&Bs and

the Black Pig Irish Gift Shop. The village also hosts a weekend music festival, the Roosky Spraoi, in the summer. Visitor attractions in the vicinity of the village include Strokestown Park House and Hayden's Equestrian Centre.

Fishing boats and tackle are available from an establishment on the west quay and the Lakeland Fishery nearby the village caters for the coarse angler. However, the waterways tourism product and the benefits derived locally from the navigation are restricted by limited mooring in the village and north of the bridge. Other factors include the out-of-use toilet and shower facility on the west quay, the lack of refuse disposal facilities on the quays (and of regular removal), the lack of lighting / security around mooring space and the limited pedestrian access to the village and surrounds.

A Local Area Plan for Roosky, currently being developed by Roscommon County Council, envisages a 'River Activity Zone' to be developed adjacent the Shannon. This will address current deficiencies in the village's catering for the substantial navigation traffic that passes through, such as the lack of a pedestrian footpath across the bridge, the current closure of the toilet and shower facility, etc. The Plan will also facilitate a significant increase in housing in, and thus the population of, the village, within a defined village boundary.

Recent planning approvals for Roosky west of the river (between 1997 and 2003) include four self-catering holiday homes, two dwellinghouses and a residential estate comprising 29 units with access to a proposed marina on Lough Bofin. Additional permissions for residential developments have been granted for the portion of the village to the east of the river in Co. Leitrim. The village has experienced development pressure as a result of the Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme. The Roscommon and Leitrim County Development plans both indicate the intention to provide a replacement bridge over the river at Roosky.

### 3.1.2.2 *Termonbarry*, Co. Roscommon

The population of Termonbarry in 2002 was 398, growing substantially (+8.7% from 1996). The village supports a typical suite of commerce / business comprising convenience / grocery stores, a petrol filling station

and three pubs. These benefit from the combination of waterways and N5 road traffic. Two of the pubs have well-respected restaurants attached, and provide accommodation. In addition, the three star Shannonside guesthouse and Tarmon House B&B cater specifically to the coarse and pike angling market. A lack of mooring space and facilities (refuse, etc.) and the un-tended condition of the amenity area and swimming pool adjacent the lock are considered restrictive to the development and promotion of the local waterways tourism product. Mooring jetties have been delivered by Waterways Ireland but remain to be installed.

Recent planning approvals for Termonbarry include an inland marina and residential complex including 24 apartments, 26 townhouses, 4 detached houses, a restaurant and tourist centre. The development will provide 25 public mooring berths in addition to the 90 private berths. A proportion of the taxes derived from the development are to be channelled towards the upgrading / maintenance of the adjacent public amenity area, setting a positive precedent. The development will transform the nature and character of the village dramatically, and is likely to act as a catalyst for further development. Another small residential estate some distance from the river on the western outskirts of the village is under construction. East of the river in Co. Longford, the local road between Termonbarry and Cloondara is the focus of pressure for the development of detached houses. This is resulting in the effective merging of the two villages into a larger urban complex.

### 3.1.2.3 *Lanesborough – Ballyleague*, Co. Longford and Co. Roscommon

Lanesborough is designated a Local Growth Centre in the Longford CDP. It effectively forms a single urban settlement spanning the river with Ballyleague in Co. Roscommon to the west of the river. The combined population in 2002 was 943, declining (-4.2% from 1996).

Lanesborough – Ballyleague is a substantial settlement providing local-level goods and services and supports a typical suite of business / commerce, as well as waterways tourism facilities. The activities of local community groups including the Lanesborough Tourism Cooperative and the Lough Ree Development Cooperative (providing an accommodation booking facility) have resulted in significant improvements to the town's tourism facilities and thus its visitor capacity. The Lough Ree Arms hotel,

12 registered B&Bs, five self-catering establishments and a camping site constitute the substantial suite of accommodation facilities in and around the town, supported by 9 pubs / restaurants.

Lanesborough is a renowned angling centre and several establishments in the town provide boat hire and tackle, etc. including the Lakeside Store. Lanesborough hosts several angling festivals throughout the summer including a major five-day ESB sponsored event every August. In addition ESB sponsors Environmental Schools in spring (coinciding with a traditional Easter fair), summer (coinciding with an arts festival) and winter. The town also hosts an annual horse fair and vintage festival in February, a Bord na Móna sponsored 'Floating St. Patrick's Parade' in March and the River Shannon Regatta in August.

Restrictions to the realisation of the town's full tourism / amenity potential are seen as the lack of mooring and ancillary facilities (refuse, pump-out, etc. although these issues are being addressed to some extent by ongoing development), the condition of the historic harbour and adjacent quays and the loss of visual amenity as a result of unsympathetic development.

Both the Longford CDP and the Roscommon CDP recognise the potential for tourism and amenity development in the town, on the basis of its strategic location and capacity to absorb development through existing physical, social and economic infrastructure. Since 1999 Roscommon County Council has granted planning permission for two marinas (one private and one Waterways Ireland), a hotel, over 50 apartments and over 20 houses (including one combination development on the site of the Sliabh Ban Hotel). This increased population capacity has been supported by the improvement of facilities including the development of a football pitch and clubhouse.

The Roscommon CDP indicates the intention to implement the Ballyleague sewerage scheme which involves the upgrading of the existing treatment plant to extend the collection system to serve Ballyleague's environs (including Cloontuskert and Lanesborough). The scheme is expected to be completed in 2005. In addition, improvements are to be made to the R371 between Ballyleague and Roosky.

The new peat-fuelled power station is due for completion in 2005, after which the existing station will be dismantled. The ESB station is fed by the extensive Bord na Móna Mountdillon peatlands that dominate the land use of the hinterland to the north and east of the town. The peatlands will become cut-away incrementally over the next 30 years, after which it is likely that they will revert to wetlands, being generally below the level of the river. According to Bord na Móna policy, the dry areas will be afforested.

### 3.1.3 Cultural-historic Corridor

#### 3.1.3.1 *Prehistoric sites and monuments*

It is likely that the Shannon corridor was inhabited throughout the prehistoric period. The earliest monuments are a number of standing stones and earthen barrows (burial sites). Without additional associations such as pottery or bronze implements these are difficult to date precisely though the majority of Irish examples are thought to be Bronze Age in date.

Excavations undertaken in nearby Bord Na Móna bogs have uncovered a variety of toghers (wooden trackways) and other wooden remains. Toghers were built throughout the prehistoric and historic period to assist movement through areas of bogland. Significant finds have been made throughout Counties Roscommon and Longford including a large excavation at Corlea bog where an extensive system of wooden trackway, wide enough to carry a vehicle drawn by two horses, was uncovered. This is exhibited in the Corlea Heritage Centre nearby Keenagh. A similar though smaller trackway was excavated in Cloonbony townland not far from Lanesborough. Associated finds such as a timber wheel from Doogarymor bog and a pair of matched bronze bridle bits from near Abbeyshrule may be contemporary with the trackways. Another significant trackway may have linked the late prehistoric sites of Uisneach and Cruachain via the fording point on the river Shannon at Lanesborough.

#### 3.1.3.2 *Settlements*

Stray finds of a polished stone axehead, bronze flanged axehead and a decorated bronze spearhead point to the presence of prehistoric peoples

in the vicinity of the River Shannon at Lanesborough in the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods. The town held a strategic importance in the medieval period, protecting the gateway between the ancient provinces of Connacht and Midhe. The possible construction of a stone causeway across the Shannon at this site is reflected in the original name of the settlement “Ath Liag” or “The Ford of the Stones”.

During the Anglo-Norman period the bridge was held by Walter de Lacy and the settlement was part of the Lordship of Meath. De Lacy began to construct a castle to protect the bridge in 1221 but due to repeated incursions by the O’Connor family the castle was not completed till 1227. The settlement was granted borough status soon after the construction of the castle and by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the town was granted a weekly fair and an annual market. Little is known of the settlement in the next centuries and references do not re-occur till the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the granting of the fort at Lanesborough to Sir Thomas Rotherham. The modern name was introduced to the settlement in the mid-seventeenth century when it was in the hands of Sir George Lane.

### 3.1.3.3 *Industrial Heritage - The Shannon Navigation*

The Shannon figured prominently in proposals for navigation schemes in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries including a petition to make the River navigable from Limerick to Leitrim.

In 1755 Thomas Omer began work for the Commissioners of Inland Navigation with the construction of a short stretch of canal and a flash lock at Lanesborough amongst other works. He oversaw the construction of a lateral canal to the west of the Shannon to bypass the shallows at Roosky. First edition Ordnance Survey maps show a double canal channel running from Rabbit Island in the south to Pigeon Island in the north. The western channel of the canal had a lock at its south end and a small quay mid-way along its length. At Termonbarry a small lock was needed and from there the navigation followed the course of the River Camlin, re-entering the Shannon south of Lough Forbes. The Shannon and the Camlin were linked via the Cloondara Canal to facilitate trade on the river. The stone lock-keepers cottage adjacent the canal was designed by Thomas Omer in 1760. Omer’s work on the Shannon

included the construction of a number of stone bee-hive shaped markers which mark the extent of the navigation channel.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the state of repair of the canalised sections of the Shannon Navigation was poor. Navigation improvements were authorized under the first Shannon Navigation Act of 1835 and the 1840s saw the construction of the three new locks and bridges Termonbarry, Roosky and Lanesborough. The bridges were designed by Thomas Rhodes and included an iron swivel section to allow larger boats to pass under.

### 3.1.4 Ecological Corridor

Browne Dunne Roche (2002) identified the habitats of the Upper Shannon Floodplain including the corridor from Lanesborough to Roosky from aerial photographs and through ground validation. Habitat nomenclature followed that of the national ASI survey (Lockhart *et al.*, 1993), with reference to the classification used by the Heritage Council (Fossitt 2000) and the EU Habitats Directive. A total of 17 habitats were identified within the River Shannon Corridor.

1. Lakes
2. Rivers and streams (FW2)
3. Canals (FW3)
4. Reedbeds and other swamps (FS1)
5. Freshwater marsh (GM1)
6. Lowland wet grassland (GS4)
7. Improved grassland (GA1)
8. Raised bog (PB1 - Priority Habitats listed in the EU Habitats Directive)
9. Cutover bog (PB4)
10. Fens (PF1)
11. Heaths
12. Dry broadleaved semi-natural woodland (WN2)
13. Wet, broadleaved, semi-natural woodland (WN6, WN7)
14. Mixed woodland (WD1)
15. Commercial forest (WD4)
16. Hedge (WL1)
17. Scrub (WS1)

The particular ecological value of the River Shannon can be attributed to a number of factors:

- Its importance as a habitat for a large number of bird species.
- Its support of a number of rare and protected habitats, plant and animal species.
- Its significant value as an ecological corridor, with links to other internationally important habitats.

#### 3.1.4.1 Fauna

The Shannon corridor provides a diverse range of habitats suitable for a variety of mammal species. Several of these such as the otter (*Lutra lutra*), badger (*Meles meles*), hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*), Irish hare (*Lepus timidus hibernicus*), red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*), pine martin (*Martes martes*), pygmy shrew (*Sorex minutus*), stoat (*Mustela erminea*) and bats, lesser horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*), whiskered bat (*Myotis mystacinus*), Natterer's bat (*Myotis nattereri*), Daubenton's bat (*Myotis daubentoni*), Leisler's bat (*Nyctalus leisleri*), common, Nathusius' and soprano pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, *P. nathusii* and *P. pygmaeus*) and brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*), are protected. Other mammals likely to occur in the farmland habitats on the corridor's edges are wood mice (*Apodemus sylvatica*), fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) and rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*).

The Upper Shannon Corridor is an important area for wildfowl, particularly over-wintering migratory species, such as the Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*). Wader species occurring on this stretch of the River Shannon include the lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), redshank (*Tringa totanus*) and snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) (Colhoun, 2001). Little grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), great-crested grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*), mute and whooper swans (*Cygnus olor* and *C. cygnus*), wigeon (*Anas penelope*), teal (*Anas crecca*), mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), pochard (*Aythya ferina*), tufted duck (*Aythya fuligula*), goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) and coot (*Fulica atra*) are all known to breed within the Shannon Corridor (Colhoun, 2001). The dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*) and grey wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) also occur in the study area (Cotton, D. pers. comm.).

The common frog (*Rana temporaria*) (protected under the Wildlife Act, 1976) is found across a broad range of wetland habitats in Ireland including the wet fields, drains and cutover bog edges along the length of the Shannon corridor. The Shannon also provides suitable habitats for the smooth newt (*Triturus vulgaris*).

#### 3.1.4.2 Fauna of International Importance

The habitat of the otter (*Lutra lutra*), listed as a priority species in the Habitats Directive, requires designation as Special Areas of Conservation. Its population in Ireland is of international importance (Hayden and Harrington, 2000). This species is likely to be frequent in the Upper Shannon (Browne Dunne Roche 2000).

Greenland White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons flavirostris*), an Annex I species in the EU Birds Directive and amber listed as medium conservation concern (Newton *et al.*, 1999) is known to utilise the Shannon study corridor. Known feeding sites within the study area include the Lough Forbes Complex Special Area of Conservation. Formerly nationally important numbers were recorded at this site in 1994. However, since then, a fluctuating but declining trend is noted from flock counts, since at least the mid 1990s or earlier, so much so that the Kilglass/Lough Forbes flock no longer qualifies for SPA status (Browne Dunne Roche, 2002).

The redshank (*Tringa tetanus*) also occurs within the Shannon corridor (Cotton, D. pers. comm.). This is listed in Annex II of the EU Birds Directive and is an amber listed species of medium conservation concern (Newton *et al.*, 1999).

White clawed crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*), an Annex II species listed in the Habitats Directive, is widespread in Ireland. It occurs in alkaline rivers and lakes, including the Shannon, where water quality is good. They are sensitive to heavy metal pollution and to disturbance such as dredging, draining and channelisation (McCreesh, 1999).

The freshwater pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*) is listed as an Annex II species in the EU Habitats Directive. Browne Dunne Roche



(2002) cites a record of the mussel upstream of the study area in Lough Allen. The status of the invertebrate in the River is however unknown.

### 3.1.4.3 Fisheries

Monitoring on the Shannon water quality is carried out by both the Central Fisheries Board and the Environmental Protection Agency. An overall improvement in the water quality of the system was observed from 1996 to 1999 (Kirk McClure Morton, 2001). Table 3.1 presents recent biological quality rating for the Camlin River and the Shannon including the stretch between Roosky and Lanesborough.

The Shannon system hosts a mixed fishery with 23 recorded freshwater species. The major species to be found are salmon (*Salmo salar*), brown trout (*Salmo trutta*), pollan (*Coregonus antumnalis*), pike (*Esox lucius*), perch (*Persa fluviatilis*), bream (*Abramis brama*), roach (*Rutilus rutilus*), roach/bream hybrids, rudd (*Scardinius erythrophthalmus*), tench (*Tinca tinca*) and eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) (Kirk McClure Morton, 2001).

### 3.1.4.4 Areas of Conservation Importance

Browne Dunne Roche (2002) identified three categories of significance and sensitivity to development in the upper Shannon floodplain.

- A. Zones of high conservation interest where development is likely to have adverse impacts.
- B. Areas of interest where proposals for any new developments should be adequately assessed.
- C. Areas that have been developed, where permissions have been granted for development or for other reasons are of low conservation interest. Developments would be assessed mainly on the basis of their impacts on adjacent areas.

In terms of this study, zones A and B are considered significant and are discussed below. Descriptions of designated areas are taken from The Heritage Division website ([www.heritagedata.ie](http://www.heritagedata.ie)). Descriptions of other areas of conservation interest are synopsised from the Browne Dunne Roche (2002) draft report. Zones categorised as Zone A within the River Shannon Corridor are as follows.

Area	Conservation Rating	County	Distance from Shannon
Clooneen Bog SAC (002348)	National Importance	Longford	80 metres
Lough Forbes Complex SAC (001818)	National Importance	Longford & Roscommon	Part of Shannon
*Aghnamona Bog NHA (000422)	Regional Importance	Leitrim & Longford	0.4 km
Ballinphuill	Regional Importance	Roscommon	Adjacent
Highstreet	Regional Importance	Longford	Adjacent
Kilnacarrow	Regional Importance	Longford	Adjacent
Cloontuskert to Ballyleague	Regional Importance	Roscommon	Adjacent

Table 3.1. River Length by Biological Classification (1999) – Shannon Corridor and Camlin River (Source: Kirk McClure Morton, 2001).

Sub-catchment	Catchment Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	Length of River Classified (km)	Classified Length of River (km)			
			Unpolluted	Slightly Polluted	Moderately Polluted	Seriously Polluted
Camlin	393	38.0	19.6 (52%)	10.0 (26%)	8.4 (22%)	-
Shannon Corridor	2, 222	140.6	64.6 (46%)	37.2 (26%)	38.8 (28%)	-

*Clooneen Bog SAC.* This bog, of high conservation importance, lies approximately 3km south-east of Roosky on the east bank of the River Shannon just north of Lough Forbes. The site comprises areas of high bog, including bog woodland and cutover bog and includes two priority habitats listed in Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive, raised bog and bog woodland,. Mechanised peat-cutting occurs to the north-west and south-west of the high bog, with adverse effects such as drainage and burning. Old cutover is naturally regenerating to the north of the site. A number of rare plant species occur within the SAC.

*Lough Forbes SAC.* This site is comprised of a complex of aquatic habitat coupled with a series of raised bogs, callows grassland and several areas of mixed deciduous woodland. The raised bogs, located on the south-eastern shores of Lough Forbes are called the Ballykenny-Fishertown complex. They are of international importance as unique examples of Shannon river edge bogs. Areas of callows along the Camlin River are also included. These wet grasslands are important for their botanical interest as well as the waterfowl they support. The Lough Forbes area is also important for the population of Greenland White-Fronted Geese that it supports.

*Aghnamona Bog NHA.* Aghnamona raised bog is of considerable conservation significance. The habitat is rare in Europe and increasingly scarce and under threat in Ireland. The site comprises a good diversity of bog habitats including hummock/hollow complexes.

*Ballinphuill.* Located just west of Termonbarry on the west bank of the Shannon, the site is subject to extensive flooding from the Feorish River, inundating the wet grassland and scrub. It is not intensively managed and is a good habitat for waterfowl. Browne Dunne Roche (2002) recommends a detailed survey of the site to determine the extent of callow grassland. Should this occur, its designation as NHA may be appropriate.

*Highstreet.* The site is located 2km west of Cloondara on the east bank of the Shannon and may constitute an important wildfowl habitat. It consists of wet rush fields which flood regularly and may be callows. Curlew, mute swan, tufted duck and great crested grebe have been observed. Browne Dunne Roche (2002) recommends a detailed survey to determine the presence and extent of callow grassland with a view to NHA designation.

*Kilnacarrow.* Browne Dunne Roche (2002) recommends further survey to determine conservation interest of this site, located 3km north of Lanesborough on the east bank of the Shannon.

*Cloontuskert to Ballyleague.* This site is located north of Lanesborough on the west bank of the Shannon and includes a mosaic of vegetation types including wet peaty grassland, marsh and dry grassland. Browne Dunne Roche (2002) recommends further survey to determine the extent of callows vegetation and its conservation importance with a view to NHA designation.

Zone B Areas are areas of interest where any new development should be adequately assessed.

Area	Conservation Rating	County	Distance from Shannon
Kilbarry/Newtown Bog	Local Importance	Roscommon	Adjacent
Cornollen	Local Importance	Longford	2km
Cloondara	Local Importance	Longford	About 1km
Derrycashel	Local Importance	Roscommon	Adjacent
Knappogue	Local Importance	Longford	Adjacent
Cloonkeel Bog	Local Importance	Longford	Adjacent

*Kilbarry / Newtown Bog.* This site is an extensive area of cutaway bog located 3km north of Termonbarry on the western shore of Lough Forbes. The bog is dominated by heather and has abundant lichens and bog cotton. The hydrology of the bog has been compromised through drainage and cutting.

*Cornollen.* This site is a birch dominated woodland outside the boundary of Lough Forbes SAC, approximately 2.5km south of Lough Forbes, at the confluence of the Camlin and Fallan Rivers.

*Cloondara.* This site comprises extensive flooding along the N5, between the Camlin and Fallan Rivers and the Royal Canal.

*Derrycashel.* Located 2km west of Termonbarry on the west bank of the Shannon, this cutaway bog has some relatively intact bog remaining. Birch woodland and gorse are found at the edge of the bog as well as invading rhododendron. There is extensive flooding by the Shannon.

*Knappogue.* Located 2km south west of Cloondara on the east bank of the Shannon, this area may be important for waterfowl. Coot, mute swan and grebe have all been recorded at the site.

*Cloonkeel Bog.* This is a small raised bog, appearing to be reasonably intact, 4km south west of Cloondara.

## 3.2 Area 2 – The Royal Canal between Cloondara and Ballymahon, including the Longford Branch

### 3.2.1 Landscape

#### 3.2.1.1 Cloondara

Situated at the terminus of the Royal Canal, the village evolved as a result of its pivotal location on the waterways and is given its distinctive form and function by the waterways. In addition to the canal the village is traversed by the Camlin River which passes to the west of and roughly parallel to the canal and harbour. The Cloondara Canal, a 350m stone-lined channel linking the Camlin to the Shannon Navigation completes the suite of waterways associated with the village. A local road crossing all three waterways over narrow, stone, hump-backed bridges (3.2-F), gives further structure to the settlement.

The village's historic core surrounding Richmond Harbour includes the 46<sup>th</sup> lock into the Camlin River, lock house, a dry dock, loading area, harbour master's house, stables, warehouses and an inn (3.2-A, B). These buildings form a terrace aligned with the eastern side of the harbour, set back behind the loading area (3.2-C, D). Most are currently employed as residences. The harbour is packed with vessels, and the immediate landscape with numerous features of canal architecture and infrastructure. The presence of a massive stone mill / distillery building with unusual attached Georgian Miller's House (3.2-E), the Cloondara Canal lock house (Omer House – 1760), the abbey and barn church (with unusual sash windows), schoolhouse, Bull House (a bonded warehouse for the distillery) and the Camlin River Weir further contribute to the distinctive village character, which remains largely uncompromised. The dereliction and disuse of several heritage features is therefore unfortunate. The dry dock is no longer in use and the harbour area requires landscape improvement. The bridges, abbey, Omer House and mill complex require maintenance or appropriate refurbishment and reuse.

The waterways and adjacent wetlands and bogs contribute an ecological aspect to the highly valuable landscape of Cloondara and surrounds.



3.2-A



3.2-B



3.2-C



3.2-D



3.2-E



3.2-F

The area between Cloondara and Keenagh is characterised by extensive peatlands. In the area of Begnagh Bridge, active Bord na Móna peatlands abut the canal (3.2-G, H), and a light industrial railway follows the canal for some distance. Two Bord na Móna culverted crossings south of the 45<sup>th</sup> lock require removal to facilitate restoration of the navigation.



3.2-G



3.2-H

#### 3.2.1.2 Adjacent settlements (Killashee, Keenagh, Ballymahon)

The settlements of Killashee, Keenagh and Ballymahon are related to the canal by virtue of their relative proximity to the waterway. However, there is currently no or only limited structural and visual integration of the canal into the settlements. Their proximity is evidenced on the canal by harbours and associated store buildings usually adjacent to a road bridge, such as Mosstown Harbour at Island Bridge nearby Keenagh (3.2-I), Archie's Bridge and Quay and Ballybrannigan Harbour (3.2-J) at Chaigneau Bridge, both near Ballymahon.



3.2-I



3.2-J

These places provide important points of access (in terms of amenity use, commerce, etc.) to the canal from the wider landscape corridor. With the heightened profile and increased use of the canal after restoration, villages such as Keenagh, with its particular concentration of heritage features, will benefit from the improved access.

The landscape surrounding Keenagh includes the wooded grounds of the Mosstown Estate with unique eagle-topped White Gate (3.2-K), a restored pigeon house (3.2-L), the Mosstown Mill, cottage and mill reservoirs, the bog lake Lough Bawn to the west of the canal and within the village itself, the unique clock-tower dating from 1878.



3.2-K



3.2-L

At Mullawornia west of Ballymahon the canal is cut into the side of the limestone hill as it rounds the hill and heads northwards towards Cloondara. The sheer stone cliff rising above the east bank of the canal and the drop away to the fields, bogs and plantations below to the west, makes for a unique landscape with dramatic views westwards towards Lough Ree (3.2-M, N).



3.2-M



3.2-N

### 3.2.1.3 Longford

The large, rectangular harbour occupied the western end of Longford Town's market square before being filled in 1958 after closure of the canal. Evidence of the canal's historic prominence in the urban structure remains only in the form of several buildings fronting what was previously the harbour. The harbour-master's house, ticket office (converted into a residence in the 1920s, 3.2-O) and adjacent workhouses remain in position fronting the square, now crossed diagonally by a road and occupied by an indoor swimming pool and a parking area (3.2-P).

Recent developments including three apartment blocks fronting the harbour area and a retail outlet in the centre of the market square do contribute to the definition of the harbour space by reinforcing the building line established by the historic buildings (3.2-P). However, visible evidence of the once navigation-dominated landscape is limited, despite the design and naming of the two apartment blocks beside the harbour master's house to evoke the place's navigation history. The harbour stone-work remains beneath the current surface of the square; the efforts of the RCAG Longford Branch have ensured that for the time being, the potential remains for its restoration.



3.2-O



3.2-P

The exclusion of the canal from the urban structure was further assisted in the 1960s by alterations to the rail bridge that crossed the canal just south of the harbour (the pivoting bridge was replaced by an embankment). South of the railway line, which now bisects the centre of the town, the canal infrastructure is in place, although dormant. The RCAG in association with Waterways Ireland has developed a gravel-surfaced pathway along one towpath to Churchlands Bridge, to serve as a community walk, giving access to and from the town centre. With assistance from FAS the towpaths along this 2.7km section south from the town centre are constantly maintained and insured as an amenity. The enclosure of this section of the canal by extensive residential development to the east of the canal (alongside existing canal-side sports clubs) and a mixture of residential and industrial use to the west is making of the canal a linear *urban* park (3.2-Q, R, S, T).



3.2-Q



3.2-R



3.2-S



3.2-T

### 3.2.2 Socio-economic Corridor (including Waterways Access, Use and Commerce)

#### 3.2.2.1 Cloondara, Co. Longford

The population of Cloondara in 2002 was 540, remaining stable (-0.5% from 1996). Cloondara's substantial concentration of natural and built heritage features has been acknowledged in the Longford CDP with the village identified as a 'honeypot' location. This recognition has been ensured by the activities of the Concerned Residents group and the Area Action group. A strategic planning workshop held in 2001 identified among the critical issues facing the village in the future, the threat of oversized, unsustainable development, the requirement for managed growth with appropriate tourism / amenity development, and the protection of heritage particularly the water quality of the waterways. The Longford CDP states accordingly, that the Council intends to designate Architectural Conservation Areas in the context of a Village Policy Statement for Cloondara.

Despite its pivotal location and concentration of heritage features, Cloondara does not benefit significantly from commerce arising from waterways traffic. The Richmond Inn guesthouse and pub, dating back to the period of construction of the canal, another pub and a self-catering establishment constitute the visitor accommodation in the village. Apart from the current closure of the Royal Canal, the lack of visitor numbers may also be attributed to the phenomenon of 'harbour hogging'. Access to waterways visitors is restricted by the number of boats choking the

harbour, which limits mooring space to that below Lock 46 on the Camlin River.

The extensive mill / distillery property has been the subject of a series of planning applications for its conversion for residential development but permission has been refused at an Bord Pleanála level, largely due to opposition by local residents. The protection and conservation of all the village's built heritage is considered by the residents groups to be vital to the future of the village. Alternative development of the mill site for light industry (recycling) has been mooted. The local road between Termonbarry and Cloondara is the focus of pressure for the development of detached houses, the linear stretch beside the road affording good views of the Shannon. This is resulting in the effective merging of the two villages into a larger urban complex.

#### 3.2.2.2 Adjacent settlements, Co. Longford (Killashee, Keenagh, Ballymahon)

Killashee had a population of 234 in 2002, remaining stable (-0.4% from 1996). A village Policy Statement Map for Killashee is included in the Longford CDP.

Keenagh had a population of 225 in 2002, remaining stable (+0.9% from 1996). A village Policy Statement Map for Keenagh is included in the Longford CDP.

Neither Keenagh nor Killashee derive any tangible economic benefit from the waterway at present, although an annual heritage festival is held in Keenagh in August. The Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre, situated 3km from Keenagh, interprets the iron age bog road that now lies preserved beneath the Bord na Móna bog.

Ballymahon had a growing population of 827 in 2002 (+4.7% from 1996). It is designated a County Growth Centre in the Longford CDP, having a wide hinterland in terms of service provision and accommodation as well as the capacity to absorb further development with its existing physical, social and economic infrastructure. The local Area Plan for Ballymahon makes provision for residential development extending south from the town centre as opposed to north towards the Royal Canal. The Canal's

current separation from the town structurally will therefore continue. However, landscape improvements to Ballybrannigan Harbour nearby the town, as well as the recent construction of, and additional development pressure for, houses along the road to the harbour, will generate increased use of the canal as an amenity. Due to its location on the River Inny Ballymahon is recognised as a coarse angling centre and hosts the Annual Inny festival. The town also hosts a music festival in July and the Oliver Goldsmith Summer School.

Restoration of the canal is likely to result in a growing tourism economy in these settlements, generated by the angling, boating and walking markets.

### 3.2.2.3 Longford Town

Longford is defined in the Longford CDP as a major growth centre of regional importance with a high level of access and existing services. The population of the town in 2002 was 6,831, stable (+0.6% from 1996) and the town environs, 726, growing rapidly (+34.4%). The Longford Town Council, a local authority with both representational and operational functions, is responsible for the town's development planning including housing and building, water supply and sewerage, environmental protection, amenity and recreation and the granting and refusal of planning permission. A new five year Town Development Plan was adopted by the Council at the end of 2003.

All major banks and lending institutions, as well as the retail sector, are present in the town. The largest urban centre in the north midlands, Longford Town is included in the area of the Rural Renewal Tax Incentive Scheme, and has thus been subject to substantial commercial and residential development pressure in recent years.

The ongoing development of the Mastertech Commercial Park just south of the Town Centre, adjacent the Royal Canal is significant, along with the imminent development of a pharmaceutical diagnostics plant (Abbott Ireland) and the expected confirmation of a similar planned pharmaceutical development in the near future. Adjacent Mastertech, to the west of the canal, planning permission has been granted for a large residential development at Farranyoogan, and opposite, to the east of the

canal, the extensive Prospect Wood residential scheme is currently being developed. In the town centre fronting Market Square and the site of the now covered canal harbour, three apartment complexes have been developed in the last number of years.

No tangible economic benefit is derived from the town's association with the waterways, except through recognition of the canal towpath's amenity value to adjacent residential developments. Since the canal is damaged and dry it does not function as an angling resource. The restoration of the Longford Branch will bring much needed waterways tourism to the town. The retention of the potential for reopening the canal harbour in the market square is vital to ensure that optimal benefit is derived at that time.

### 3.2.3 Cultural-historic Corridor

#### 3.2.3.1 Ringforts

Secular settlement in the Royal Canal corridor is dominated by the occurrence of dispersed protected settlements known as ringforts. 37 were identified within 500m of the canal. Ringforts consist of small circular or subcircular enclosures, c. 15-75m in diameter, encircled by banks of earth or stone and are thought to represent the defended homesteads of early medieval farmers. The waterways corridor runs through an area of high ringfort density which covers most of the North Midlands from South Monaghan, through Meath, Cavan, Longford and Westmeath to the Shannon (Stout 1977, p77). Many ringforts within the study area have been denuded or removed by a combination of natural erosion and modern agricultural practice and survive only as crop and soil marks on aerial photographs.

#### 3.2.3.2 Medieval Churches

The remains of an early medieval church / abbey, constructed of large blocks of well-coursed stone, are located at Cloondara, west of Richmond Harbour. The church is surrounded by a graveyard with the remains of a bullaun stone and two medieval incised cross fragments.



### 3.2.3.3 Settlement

The settlement history of Longford town can be traced back to at least the later middle ages. In 1430 Longford consisted of a fortress of the O'Fearghaill family which was referred to as a longphort. The family supported the town with the foundation of a Dominican priory and the creation of a market by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The town developed quickly from 1619 when it became the primary residence of Francis Aungier, Lord Longford. The Aungier family secured several royal grants of market and fairs and constructed Longford Castle c. 1627 on the site of the original longphort which is now the site of the Sean Connolly barracks. St. John's Church, the parish church of the 17<sup>th</sup> century borough, was constructed at the east end of Church Street subsuming the site of the medieval Dominican priory. The construction of the Royal Canal branch line to Longford increased trade at all of the town's markets. A butter market was held at the Market House at the harbour by the Earl of Longford. Trade in corn and potatoes between the west and Dublin passed through the town.

The linking of Cloondara to the Shannon by means of the Cloondara Canal led to its development as the centre of the grain trade in County Longford. The Camlin River provided a steady water source and was used to power a number of mills in the area. The mill, a large four-storey rubble-built mill on the west side of the Camlin, flourished first as a corn mill and was later converted into a whiskey distillery in 1827. It reverted to a corn mill during the Temperance period in the mid-nineteenth century. Access to local water courses and the completion of the Royal Canal to Cloondara in 1817 provided easy transport of goods to and from the mill. The town retains one of the most significant surviving groups of canal-related buildings in Ireland.

Ballymahon was already a busy market town trading in yarns, clothes, groceries and other agricultural produce when the Royal Canal was built. Ballybrannigan Harbour functioned as the harbour for the nearby town and facilitated further development including two large mills, one at Tinnelick to the east and another at Archie's Bridge to the west of the town adjacent the canal.

### 3.2.3.4 Industrial Heritage - The Royal Canal

Official surveying of the route of the proposed canal was carried out in 1789 and construction of the main line was commenced in 1790. The village of Thomastown was reached in October 1805 and the canal was completed as far as the town of Mullingar late in 1806. The main feeder enters the Royal Canal at Mullingar, drawing water from Lough Owel, 3.2km to the north. Two harbours were built in the town, one for passengers and one for trade with canal stores and graving docks.

In 1809 the canal had been completed as far as Coolnahay when a Government enquiry into the affairs of the Royal Canal Company resulted in its dissolution and the decision of Government to complete the project. Thus, in 1813, the Directors General of Inland Navigation commenced work westwards from Coolnahay towards the Shannon. The contractors Henry, Mullins and McMahon started construction in May 1814, along the route entering the Shannon via the River Camlin. The main line was completed as far as the Shannon by early 1817.

In the beginning of the 1820s a loan was requested to complete a branch line from the Royal Canal to the large market town at Longford. Following Killaly's survey in 1826 construction of the five mile stretch of canal, with no locks, was overseen by J.J. Byrne and William Tarrent. The branch canal and harbour were completed in 1830.

### 3.2.4 Ecological Corridor

Information on the habitats of the Royal Canal was principally extracted from the *Ecological Study of the Royal Canal* (Dromey *et al.*, 1991). This study identified three major zones or units of the Royal Canal depending on its level of restoration. Unit I refers to the navigable section of the Royal Canal; Unit II refers to the watered (but non-navigable) section and Unit III refers to the dry sections. Since this study was carried out, considerable restoration works have been conducted on the canal. However, in general terms, the habitats of the main corridor components remain the same. Dromey *et al.* identified five main components of the canal corridor:

- *Boundary* - defined as the edge of canal property and the area between it and the towpath. The boundary habitats found were hedgerows, woodland, associated habitat of hedge and woodland, scrubland, fens, carr, bog, drains or ditches, nutrient-poor limestone grassland. Hedgerows / Scrub and woodland are the dominant boundary habitats along the canal corridor. Fens, nutrient-poor limestone grassland, bogs and carr occur very infrequently.
- *Towpath* - habitats comprise generally of well-used grass track or meadow. Well-used grass track features species resilient to trampling such as *Plantago major*, *Poa annua*, *P. pratensis*, *Lolium perenne* and *Trifolium repens*.
- *Bank* - habitats on the banksides vary considerably depending on gradient, height, width, management (if any) along the length of the canal. As a result, a wide range of habitats are found. Emergent vegetation can be found at the base of banks with gentle gradients, with plants of drier habitats at the top of the bank. Small grassland habitats (meadow / nutrient-poor limestone) can be found at the top of wide banks. In parts, scrub can encroach substantially on this component of the canal corridor.
- *Channel* - channel habitats in the Royal Canal vary widely from Unit to Unit and even within a Unit type. In the navigable section, the vegetational bands are clearly defined but are not very diverse. In Unit II, a diverse emergent band is clearly evident. Unit III presents dry terrestrial and marshy habitats. The habitats in this component of the Canal Corridor are likely to have changed substantially, especially where the navigable and watered sections have now been extended. Additionally, widespread dredging has occurred along the canal corridor.
- *Stonework Structures* – occurring on the many stonework features such as locks, bridges and harbours along the Royal Canal.

The ecological value of the Royal Canal, a proposed Natural Heritage Area in its entirety, can be attributed to a number of factors:

- Its value as an ecological corridor,

- the diverse range of habitats and species represented, and
- the number of rare and protected plant and animal species it supports.

#### 3.2.4.1 Fauna

The Royal Canal study corridor presents a diverse array of habitats suitable for many mammal species. Several of these such as the otter (*Lutra lutra*), badger (*Meles meles*), hedgehog (*Erinaceus europaeus*), Irish hare (*Lepus timidus hibernicus*), red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*), pine martin (*Martes martes*), pygmy shrew (*Sorex minutus*), stoat (*Mustela erminea*) and bats, lesser horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*), whiskered bat (*Myotis mystacinus*), Natterer's bat (*Myotis nattereri*), Daubenton's bat (*Myotis daubentoni*), Leisler's bat (*Nyctalus leisleri*), common, Nathusius' and soprano pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, *P. nathusii* and *P. pygmaeus*) and brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*), are protected.

Other mammals likely to occur are wood mice (*Apodemus sylvatica*), fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) and grey squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) (Hayden and Harrington, 2000).

The Royal Canal has a low diversity and density of breeding riparian birds, especially in the navigable parts, and also the dewatered sections to the West (Dromey *et al.*, 1991). Riparian species observed or known to frequent the Royal Canal include the mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), mute swan (*Cygnus olor*), moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), which relies on reeds, grasses and aquatic vegetation, grey wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*), which nests in holes or on ledges under bridges or on walls and buildings close to the water, sedge warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*), grey heron, which builds its nests in the tops of trees and bushes (*Ardea cinerea*) and kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) (Dromey *et al.*, 1991).

The passerines do very well in the thick hedges that bound much of the canal's length. The more common species include robins (*Erithacus rubecula*), blackbirds (*Turdus merula*), wrens (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), willow warbler (*Phylloscopus troch*), chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*), song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*), chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*), and wood pigeon (*Columba palumbus*) (Dromey *et al.*, 1991). Blackcap (*Sylvia*

*atricapilla*) was also recorded near Keenagh in 2000 (Cotton, D. pers. comm.).

It is likely that both the common frog (*Rana temporaria*), and smooth newt (*Triturus vulgaris*) occur across the canal corridor, both in drains, and within the channel itself in drier areas.

Intensive fish stock surveys on the Royal Canal have revealed a wide range of angling species including bream (*Abramis brama*), roach (*Rutilus rutilus*), rudd (*Scardinius erythrophthalmus*), hybrids, tench (*Tinca tinca*), carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), pike (*Esox lucius*) and eels (*Anguilla anguilla*) (Dúchas The Heritage Service, 1998).

The canal corridor's diverse array of habitats provide for a rich diversity of invertebrate species including molluscs, dragonflies and damselflies.

#### 3.2.4.2 Fauna of International Importance

The otter is listed as a priority species in the Habitats Directive whose conservation requires the designation of Special Areas of Conservation. Its population in Ireland is of international importance (Hayen and Harrington, 2000). Although no evidence of the otter was found during the field assessment, it is likely that this species utilises the canal corridor for feeding.

Bats, all protected by the Wildlife Act, 1976 and the EU Habitats Directive, probably utilise the Royal Canal Corridor. The habitats along the canal provide suitable feeding, roosting and hibernation sites for a number of bat species.

The kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) is an Annex I species listed in the EU Birds Directive. This species is also an amber listed species of medium conservation concern (Newton *et al.*, 1999).

Desmoulin's whorl snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) lives in calcareous wetlands with high vegetation, such as reedbeds bordering lakes, canals and rivers (Moorkens 1999). This species is an Annex II species under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). A mollusc survey was conducted along the Royal Canal during the summer of 2003.

#### 3.2.4.3 Habitats and Flora

A number of important habitats occur along the canal corridor.

*Dry calcareous and neutral grassland (GS1)*. The Annex I (Habitats Directive) habitat, "grasslands on calcareous substrates" (Festuco-brometalia) is recorded along the length of the canal corridor. The current status and extent of this habitat along the canal needs to be established. The quality and diversity of this habitat type is reliant on management regimes in the area. This habitat is sensitive to inappropriate mowing, and/or application of herbicides, revegetation and dumping of spoil.

*Peatlands (PB1)*. The midlands of Ireland are renowned as being the centre of raised bog distribution in Ireland. Ireland's raised bogs are acknowledged as being of international importance. The best example of raised bog within the study corridor is Brown Bog which is a designated SAC, located approximately 2.5km west of the Longford Branch, midway between Cloondara and Longford. The canal corridor passes through a number of bogs of variable size and condition. Mechanical peat extraction is ongoing at Cloondara Bog (PB4). Some birch regeneration was noted on the canal edge. Natural revegetation appears to be extensive on Cloonbreany Bog, south west of Keenagh. Threats to raised bog habitat include harvesting of peat for fuel and gardening products, and agricultural reclamation. The best examples of peatland are protected via nature conservation designations. However, most areas are still subject to damaging operations.

Whilst active raised bogs can withstand only low levels of recreational activities, the revegetated cutover bogs possess considerable opportunities for both educational and recreational facilities, such as the Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre, located within 1km of Royal Canal southwest of Keenagh.

*Fens and flushes (PF)*. Lough Bawn is a designated proposed Natural Heritage Area, located approximately 300m east of the Royal Canal due west of Keenagh. This is a relatively small site composed of, fen, bog, wet and dry woodland and freshwater marsh habitats. The area of fen/freshwater marsh has developed in a region formerly occupied by the open waters of Lough Bawn. It is this fen area that gives the site its

principal scientific interest (The Heritage Division website, [www.heritagedata.ie](http://www.heritagedata.ie)). Dromey *et al.* (1991) recorded a small number of fen/marsh habitats along the Royal Canal banks. The extent and condition of these areas needs to be established through field survey.

Other areas of ecological significance, reflecting diversity, species rarity and habitat potential were identified by Dromey *et al.* (1991). The following features were selected from their report and from the preliminary field assessment. As a full habitat assessment was not conducted for the purposes of this study, other habitats/features of significance may be omitted.

*Mullawornia Rock.* This exposed limestone rock face is located south of Pake Bridge and supports pockets of species of calcareous grassland. This habitat is classified Exposed Calcareous Rock under Fossitt (2000).

*North of Aghantrah Bridge (Longford Branch).* Hazel woodland was recorded on the boundary. This woodland type is classified as 'Oak-ash-hazel woodland' by Fossitt 2000. Although this habitat type is not an annexed habitat, its extent in Ireland is very limited and as such should be considered to be of conservation importance (Fossitt, 2000).

*Cloonbreany Bog.* Dromey *et al.*, (1991) recorded this bog as being cut at the time of their survey. Natural revegetation appears to have taken place since then. This area, classified as Cutover Bog (PB4) (Fossitt 2000), is worthy of further survey.

*East of Ballybranigan Harbour.* This is a diverse area with calcareous species at the top of the embankment and plants typical of a wetland habitat at the toe of the embankment. Good hedgerow and a stream add to the diversity of the site.

#### 3.2.4.4 Rare Species

A number of nationally rare species have been recorded within the canal corridor. These include:

The green-winged orchid (*Orchis morio*), which occurs in meadows, pastures and sandhills. It occurs occasionally with declining populations in

the centre of Ireland and parts of the East but is rare elsewhere (Webb *et al.*, 1996). This was previously recorded along the Royal Canal (Dromey *et al.*, 1991).

Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*) was recorded by Dromey *et al.* (1991). It was more recently recorded along the canal near Keenagh (D. Cotton, *pers. comm.*). This species grows in ditches, bog-holes, marshes and slow streams, occurring occasionally in the east and centre of Ireland, but very rare elsewhere (Webb *et al.*, 1996).

The rare aquatic mollusc, the False Orb Pea Mussel (*Pisidium pseudosphaerium*) was recently recorded at Molly Wards Bridge and east of Allards Bridge (Moorkens, 2003). It lives in richly vegetated swampy habitats with clean standing water and a muddy substrate.

Desmoulin's Whorl Snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) was observed at Savage Bridge in *Glyceria* and *Carex*-dominated vegetation within the almost dried up canal in a recent study (Moorkens, 2003).

### 3.3 Area 3 – The Royal Canal between Abbeyshrule and Ballina

#### 3.3.1 Landscape

##### 3.3.1.1 Abbeyshrule

The village comprises an inn and pub, several houses and a light industrial (timber) site in a dispersed linear arrangement fronting a local road aligned with the adjacent canal. At the settlement core, the original arched Webb's Bridge crossing the canal has been replaced by a culverted road crossing. This obstruction currently forms the western extent of the Royal Canal navigation (3.3-A).

Adjacent to the west of the bridges the canal harbour remains, forming the focus of a landscaped village park (3.3-B). The landscaping extends eastwards along the canal towpath to the rear of the inn and houses, and along the embankment between the towpath and the village road, forming a linear park. The stone-work of a culverted stream beneath the canal is employed as a feature of the park landscape (3.3-C). The elevated canal allows views to the east in particular, towards the River Inny some 100m to 200m from the village, parallel with the canal and road. The ruins of Abbeyshrule Castle, the abbey and adjacent graveyard can also be seen nearby to the south.



3.3-A



3.3-B

The village is to be significantly altered physically and socio-economically, by the imminent construction of an estate of ten houses between the village core and the Inny River (3.3-D).



3.3-C



3.3-D

North east of the village beyond Scally's Bridge and the impressive Whitworth Aqueduct (3.3-E, F) and Quinn's Bridge, the tarred towpath leads to the Abbeyshrule airfield (3.3-G). A farmyard adjacent the canal opposite the airfield, currently employed as a scrap yard (3.3-H) is particularly unsightly.



3.3-E



3.3-F



3.3-G



3.3-H

West of Abbeyshrule and less than 1km south of Draper's Bridge, on the River Inny, the cluster of built heritage including Cloghan Corn Mills and Clynan House in a particularly wooded landscape, is significant.

The area between Abbeyshrule and Ballynacarrigy is characterised by peatlands. Extensive areas of heather-covered bog remain; the only scars are drainage channels for hand-cut plots and the cuts and stooks of drying sods themselves (3.3-I, J). The elevation of the canal in places, along with a general absence of hedgerows in the landscape results in extensive views from the canal. The recent trend towards afforestation of the marginal areas between bogs and hills will dramatically alter the landscape character and views from the canal in time.



3.3-I



3.3-J

### 3.3.1.2 Ballynacarrigy

The village developed as a result of the canal, which is incorporated into the urban structure. The 'new' town was built by Lord Sunderlin, a director of the Royal Canal Company, and developed as a market place for corn and butter. The large, well-maintained harbour area (3.3-K, L) is defined to the east by the 35<sup>th</sup> lock and to the west by a bridge over the canal. The harbour area includes a lock-keepers house, a derelict hotel and administrative building and a derelict linen factory to the south of the harbour. An area of open space adjacent to the north of the harbour separates it from the rear of the buildings fronting Main Street, aligned with the canal some 100m from the harbour.

Harbour Street connecting the harbour to Main Street is fronted by houses along both sides (3.3-M). Two cottages at the end of the street closest to

the canal have been earmarked for the development of navigation-related facilities such as toilets and showers and an adjacent pump-out facility. Harbour Street's junction with Main Street (3.3-N) is given definition by a square that functioned as a market place following the canal's construction but is currently lacking definition in terms of built structure. Main Street leads to a church at the eastern end of the village and is fronted by houses, convenience stores, several pubs and a petrol filling station.



3.3-K



3.3-L



3.3-M



3.3-N

Some 2.5km north of the village, there is a graveyard beside the derelict abbey (Bigseach Church) and a unique lepers' hospital (Bridget's Hospital) on the edge of the extensive Baronstown Demesne on Lough Iron. The graveyard houses the tombs of John Alexander Jones, a canal engineer, and the daughter of John McMahon, a partner in the firm Henry, Mullins and McMahon which undertook the construction of the Royal Canal from Coolnahay to the Shannon.

Between Ballynacarrigy and Coolnahay the canal traverses a rural landscape of particularly high scenic quality (3.3-O), with undulating landform, substantial mature vegetation cover and predominantly vernacular architecture. However, large conifer plantations, bordering on the canal towpaths in places (3.3-P), have become a feature of the landscape and in time will become dominant.



3.3-O



3.3-P

### 3.3.1.3 Coolnahay

Coolnahay Harbour (3.3-Q) at the western end of the long summit level lies roughly half-way between Ballynacarrigy and Mullingar. In 1809 the canal had been completed as far as Coolnahay when a Government enquiry into the affairs of the Royal Canal Company resulted in its dissolution and the decision of Government to complete the project. Thus, in 1813, the Directors General of Inland Navigation commenced work westwards from Coolnahay towards the Shannon. Recent landscape improvements around the harbour and adjacent Lock 26 have created a fitting *genus loci* considering the historic relevance of the place.



3.3-Q

### 3.3.1.4 Ballina

Ballina Bridge is one of only two skew bridges of the entire length of the canal. The canal engineers found it difficult to design and build a hump-backed bridge which crossed the canal at an angle and usually realigned the road to cross the bridge at right angles. At Ballina engineering problems were overcome and the skew bridge is still standing to the east of the new road bridge.

## 3.3.2 Socio-economic Corridor (including Waterways Access, Use and Commerce)

### 3.3.2.1 Abbeyshrule, Co. Longford

No population figures are available for the village, but for the local DED Agharra the population in 2002 was 331, declining (-7.5% from 1996). Due to its location on both the Royal Canal and the River Inny, the village is identified as an important pike and coarse fishing centre. The Rustic Inn

provides facilities for angling as well as a pub and restaurant. Additional visitor attractions / heritage features include the Abbey, the Whitworth Aqueduct and the local airfield, which hosts an annual show. The Goldsmith Summer School is also partly hosted by Abbeyshrule. Accordingly the village is identified as a 'honeypot' location in the Longford CDP.

A village Policy Statement for Abbeyshrule is included in the Longford CDP. Construction has recently begun on a residential development comprising 10 detached houses with a communal entrance off the main road at the core of the village.

### 3.3.2.2 Ballynacarrigy, Co. Westmeath

The population of Ballynacarrigy in 2002 was 260 and stable (-1.1% from 1996). The Westmeath CDP articulates a settlement strategy that includes the identification of a number of Priority Settlements, of which Ballynacarrigy is one, based on the following criteria:

- “(i) the size of the centre and the range of services available;*
- (ii) the availability of water and sewerage facilities;*
- (iii) the level of residential demand;*
- (iv) the availability of suitable building land.”*

Accordingly, the Council will apply planning policy which includes a presumption in favour of housing development. A Ballynacarrigy Village Plan was adopted by Westmeath County Council in August 2003. It is stated in the Plan that... *“The need for this Plan has arisen because of the need to properly plan for future expansion of the village in a co-ordinated and sustainable manner... Such growth would carefully respect the special character of the settlement.”*

Although Ballynacarrigy hosts an annual Royal Canal Rally, its five pubs and three convenience stores derive very limited benefit from waterways tourism at present. There are no accommodation facilities located in the village. It is stated as an Open Space Policy (OS3) of the Village Plan, *“To landscape the open space immediately adjacent to the Royal Canal and to provide additional seating, picnic areas and an appropriate pedestrian lighting scheme encouraging informal access and promoting the area as a*

*visitor attraction.* It is also recognised in Commercial Core Policy CC1 that *“The site bordering the Royal Canal provides excellent opportunity for the development of harbour related uses including tourist related activities.”* An application for Outline Permission has been submitted to the Council for the conversion of the historic hotel building in the Ballynacarrigy harbour for use as a restaurant and ancillary developments including a chandlery.

### 3.3.3 Cultural-historic Corridor

#### 3.3.3.1 Medieval Churches

The Cistercian Abbey of Flumen Dei was founded from Mellifont in the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century. The site, located to the northwest of Abbeyshrule, was chosen for strategic reasons and was protected by the River Inny and Clinnan bog to the east. The archaeological remains consist of a 12<sup>th</sup> century Cistercian Abbey and a later towerhouse. The remains of the abbey church are aligned in an east-west direction at the northern side of a small rectangular enclosure bounded by a modern stone wall. There is a simple two-light window in the west wall and pointed-arched doorway in the western end of the north wall. The remains of a small four-storey tower are located at the southwest corner of the abbey at the junction of the west and south ranges and retains fragmentary remains of a spiral staircase. The remains of a residential towerhouse were at one time attached to the domestic range of the abbey. The towerhouse is four-storeys in height and is constructed of roughly coursed rubble.

### 3.3.4 Ecological Corridor

For an overview of the Royal Canal ecological corridor refer to 3.2.4.

#### 3.3.4.1 Fisheries

Fish stock assessments conducted in the summer of 2003 indicate that the dominant species is roach (*Rutilus rutilus*) west of Mullingar. Roach numbers were particularly high between locks 26 (Coolnahay Harbour) and 30, suggesting that while under used by anglers, this section has good angling potential. Exceptional stocks of tench (*Tinca tinca*) were



recorded at Ballynacarrigy and Abbeyshrule. Abbeyshrule is a prime tench angling destination, regularly used by local and British anglers.

The intersection of the River Inny adds ecological value to the canal, both from botanical and wildlife perspectives.

#### 3.3.4.2 *Rare Species*

The rare aquatic mollusc, False Orb Pea Mussel (*Pisidium pseudosphaerium*) was recorded at the aquaduct over the River Inny and along the stretch between Ballynacarrigy Bridge and Kiddy's Bridge (Moorkens, 2003).

Desmoulin's Whorl Snail (*Vertigo moulinsiana*) was observed in a small swampy *Glyceria*-dominated fen on the south side of the canal at Kildallan Bridge, between Ballynacarrigy and Mullingar.

### 3.4 Area 4 – The Royal Canal between Ballina and Thomastown

#### 3.4.1 Landscape

##### 3.4.1.1 Mullingar

The expansion of Mullingar has incorporated the Royal Canal into the urban structure spatially, but architecturally there remains discrepancy in its acknowledgement of the waterway. Various character areas can be discerned along the canal's passage through the town. West of Mullingar, as far as Kilpatrick Bridge, the canal is used extensively by walkers and anglers. The towpaths provide access from the urban landscape to the attractive rural landscape (3.4-A, B) across an abrupt transition just west of the new bridge across the canal.



3.4-A



3.4-B

Between the new bridge and Green Bridge land use north of the canal is primarily residential. The 20<sup>th</sup> century suburban estates are set back from the canal behind an under-used and neglected linear open space (3.4-C). A new apartment complex under construction adjacent the canal on the site of the former Livestock Mart will alter this character significantly (3.4-D), making use of the canal as an amenity and establishing precedent for positive change.

The railway line runs alongside the canal along this stretch. Beyond the railway to the south of the canal, there are extensive industrial estates (3.4-E) including the attractive but derelict Railway Terrace (3.4-F), separated by the residential areas of Clonmore and Newbrook. The Mullingar train station is a prominent feature adjacent the canal and Green

Bridge. It has been proposed, and a feasibility study has been funded by the Heritage Council, to develop a National Transport Museum at the Mullingar train station. This would enable the three dimensions of road, rail and canal to be demonstrated, as all are present at the site.



3.4-C



3.4-D



3.4-E



3.4-F

East of Green Bridge the landscape character is dominated by the mature vegetation of the cathedral grounds to the south and a linear park adjacent to the north (3.4-G, H). This along with stone walls to both sides of the towpaths encloses the canal and limits visibility from and to the canal. The canal is crossed by both a foot bridge and a railway bridge along this section. Recent improvements in lighting along this stretch will encourage its use as an urban amenity space.

Mullingar harbour is divided into two sections by Scanlan's Bridge. The harbour has substantial potential for amenity use and development but the visual enclosure and associated lack of public policing cause security

concerns. East of Scanlan's Bridge (3.4-I, J) the harbour is less enclosed, and enhanced by the remaining canal stores and dry dock. Ample open space beside the harbour to both sides of the bridge suggests significant development potential.



3.4-G



3.4-H



3.4-I



3.4-J

Between the harbour and the newly built Moran's Bridge the landscape immediately to south comprises commercial / office buildings, a shopping centre, GAA stadium and residential areas (3.4-K, L). To the north adjacent the bridges, several recently developed apartment complexes take some account of the presence of the canal in their orientation. Between these the canal is elevated above large, boggy fields to the north (3.4-M), offering extensive views towards forested uplands in the distance. The canal feeder from Lough Owel enters the canal from the north along this stretch (3.4-N).



3.4-K



3.4-L



3.4-M



3.4-N

Between Moran's Bridge (3.4-O) and Saunder's Bridge at the eastern extent of the town centre, the landscape to the south is dominated by detached, suburban houses in mature gardens and to the north by agricultural lands. Nearby Moran's Bridge the somewhat derelict greenhouses of the Bellavista nursery are conspicuous (3.4-P), as is the littered, unkempt north towpath.

Nearby Saunder's Bridge the mooring point on the south bank is well-maintained (3.4-Q). The hedgerow between the south towpath and adjacent gardens is occasionally broken by garden walls and ornamental planting (3.4-R).



3.4-O



3.4-P



3.4-Q



3.4-R

East of Saunders Bridge (3.4-S) for approximately one kilometre the landscape is characterised by modern suburban residential estates to the south beyond the railway line (3.4-T), and to the north by agricultural lands.



3.4-S



3.4-T

East of Mullingar, for approximately 1.5km to either side of Baltrasna Bridge, the canal passes through a rock cutting, which encloses the canal and obstructs lateral views completely. The canal is very narrow along this section (3.4-U).



3.4-U

Further east at the Downs some 5km east of Mullingar, the N4 Dublin Road runs alongside to the north of the canal. The landscape here, dominated by the road, its lighting, signage, traffic etc., is unique in character within the study area (3.4-V, W).



3.4-V



3.4-W

#### 3.4.1.2 Killucan / Thomastown

At Thomastown near Killucan, Leisureways Holidays, a barge hire company has its base. The immediate landscape is greatly enriched by the presence of the barges in the harbour, the degree of maintenance of the landscape, and the evidence of navigation-related activity (3.4-X, Y).



3.4-X



3.4-Y

### 3.4.2 Socio-economic Corridor (including Waterways Access, Use and Commerce)

#### 3.4.2.1 Mullingar, Co. Westmeath

The County Town of Westmeath is designated in the National Spatial Strategy as one part of the three-town gateway of the Midlands Region in conjunction with Athlone and Tullamore. The population of Mullingar Town in 2002 was 8,824, growing (+9.8% from 1996) and of the town environs, 6,797, growing rapidly (+52.7%).

Being an important population centre and a major regional centre, the commercial and retail sectors in Mullingar are strong. Mullingar also functions as a commuter town for Dublin, which adds to the town's housing requirement.

The County Council recognises its responsibility to facilitate the integration of the canal into the urban framework. The Town Plan states in reference to Urban Renewal, that three sites have been selected for the active encouragement of suitable development. Significantly, two of these sites namely the Railway Station and the Cattle Market are adjacent the Royal Canal. Accordingly, the development of a mixed use complex at the Cattle Market including 247 residential units and 1,421 m<sup>2</sup> commercial space is underway, creating a precedent for proper interface of the canal and adjacent development.

The Town Plan identifies the Royal Canal, occupying 40 acres within the town boundaries, as the largest public open space in Mullingar. Usage is however not proportional. Certain improvements such as the provision of lighting have improved its profile but further action, specifically at the under-used harbour is required. There is a need for attention to be given to the numerous unsightly elements along the canal including inappropriate boundary treatment (warehouse and workshop facades, rear garden screen planting, walls, security fencing, etc.), derelict buildings and car parking. The Council also recognises the many canal-side sites that have the potential to be opened up to address the towpaths not only for the benefit of the developers / residents in terms of amenity, but also in terms of improving passive surveillance to deter anti-social behaviour along the canal. In terms of recreation / amenity, the County

Council recognises the Canal's potential as a cycling route, bringing residents rapidly from the town centre into the adjacent rural environment, as significant.

Mullingar is an important angling centre. The Royal Canal is considered particularly valuable due to its ease of access for wheelchairs. O'Malley's Tackle Shop caters specifically for the angling market.

#### 3.4.2.2 *Killucan and Thomastown, Co. Westmeath*

Situated nearby the Royal Canal (2km) and some 10km east of Mullingar with good access to the town and the N4, Killucan is designated a Priority Settlement in the Westmeath CDP. Its population in 2002 was 575, growing rapidly (+61.1% from 1996). The village is considered to have capacity for significant growth in accommodation / population. As with many of Westmeath's accessible towns and villages to the east of the County, Killucan is the subject of substantial pressure for the development of housing to serve the Dublin commuter market.

The Westmeath CDP includes a Village Plan for Killucan / Rathwire and a statement of intent to have the Killucan railway station re-opened. The Council recently granted planning permission for a 264m<sup>2</sup> single storey office building and a 344m<sup>2</sup> single storey maintenance building with associated car parking at the 18<sup>th</sup> lock in Thomastown, Killucan.

#### 3.4.3 Cultural-historic Corridor

##### 3.4.3.1 *Settlement*

Human activity in the vicinity of Mullingar began as early as the Neolithic period of prehistory and is evidenced by the discovery of five stone axeheads and a flint spearhead. Other discoveries of Bronze Age artefacts and three bronze horse pendants extend the record of activity into the Bronze Age and Iron Age.

Permanent settlement in the area is likely to have developed in the early historic period and a story of the life of St. Colman mac Luachain records a church there by the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The name of the town derives from "Muilleán Cearn meaning the "Wry or Left-Handed Mill" and it is often

prefixed by "Ath" as it was the location of a significant fording point. During the medieval period Mullingar functioned as the chief manor of William le Petit who was granted the manor of Magheradernon by Hugh de Lacy. He consolidated his holdings there with the construction of a motte and bailey castle which survived till the early nineteenth century. The settlement benefited from the granting of a four-day fair in 1207 and the construction of the Augustinian Priory of St. Mary in 1227 and the Dominican Priory in 1237. The town experienced difficulties in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was plundered and burned in 1572 and devastated by plague five years later. The town, castle and monasteries were granted to Sir Arthur Forbes in 1661 leading to a period of renewed prosperity.

The presence of the Royal Canal encouraged the development of agricultural markets and trade in the vicinity of its line especially at significant harbours along its route. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Mullingar was already a large market and assizes town (seat of court) with a population of over 4000. The rich countryside surrounding the town supported a large wool market, cattle and horse fairs, breweries and a tannery. The completion of the canal to Mullingar and the construction of the large harbours meant that excess production could be traded on the canal to Dublin and other large urban centres.

##### 3.4.3.2 *Industrial Heritage - The Midland Great Western Railway*

The Midland Great Western Railway Company was formed in 1844 with the purpose of constructing a railway route from Dublin to the west coast serving the midlands. The Company was incorporated in 1845 with powers to construct a railway adjacent the canal from Dublin to Mullingar and Longford and to purchase the Royal Canal for that purpose. The Company was however required to maintain navigation and toll collection on the canal (Shepherd 1994, 9). Construction began in Dublin in 1846 and was finally opened to Mullingar in October 1848. The terminus at Mullingar was temporary; by the end of 1855 the line was completed to Longford, although the route west of Mullingar did not follow the Canal. There are three railway stations along the Royal Canal corridor, namely Killucan (opened in 1848 and closed in 1963), Mullingar (opened in 1848) and Longford (opened in 1855).

#### 3.4.4 Ecological Corridor

For an overview of the Royal Canal ecological corridor refer to 3.2.4.

Dromey *et al.*, (1991) identified a wide range of features of interest along the canal corridor, reflecting diversity, species rarity and habitat potential. The following features were selected from their report and preliminary field assessment based on their diversity, uniqueness, or on fauna potential. As a full habitat assessment was not conducted for the purposes of this study, other habitats/features of significance may be omitted.

##### *Baltrasna Bridge to Saunders Bridge*

Dromey *et al.* (1991) highlighted this section as high conservation value and a valuable wildlife resource. The banks comprise of species-rich meadow and mixed scrub vegetation. Feeder streams add to the diversity of the section. Green-winged orchid (*Orchis morio*), bee orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) and carline thistle (*Carlina vulgaris*) were all recorded on the south bank. At present, the section appears to be more managed and less diverse closer to Saunders Bridge.

##### *Footy's Bridge*

A well-drained calcareous grassland was recorded between the canal and the railway. The protected species green-winged orchid (*Orchis morio*) was previously recorded here (Dromey *et al.*, 1991).

Mount Hevey bog (SAC) is located 2km southeast of Thomastown.

##### 3.4.4.1 Fisheries

The Royal Canal at Mullingar supports an excellent coarse fishery. In addition to large shoals of suitable roach (*Rutilus rutilus*) and rudd (*Scardinius erythrophthalmus*), the canal also provides excellent year-round angling for pike (*Esox lucius*) in the winter and tench (*Tinca tinca*) in the summer.

## SECTION FOUR PROPOSED POLICY AND PROJECTS

The emerging vision for the waterways is one of *a natural and cultural-historic corridor of uncompromised quality, allowing access for residents and visitors to a range of activities and experiences sympathetic to the heritage value of the resource, thus contributing to the stability and prosperity of its adjacent communities.*

The previous sections have defined the resource and the responsibilities of the bodies charged with its management, development and promotion. This section identifies *issues* arising from the study and proposes *policies* and *actions* to realise the vision for the resource.

### 4.1 Area 1 The Shannon River between Roosky and Lanesborough

#### 4.1.1 – 4.1.6 Landscape and Socio-economic Corridor

The Shannon River and Royal Canal are addressed separately, as well as the component corridors, i.e. socio-economic, cultural-historic and ecological, where appropriate. The bodies responsible for implementation of the proposals, indicative timeframes for their implementation and indicators for assessment of their effectiveness are provided as appropriate.

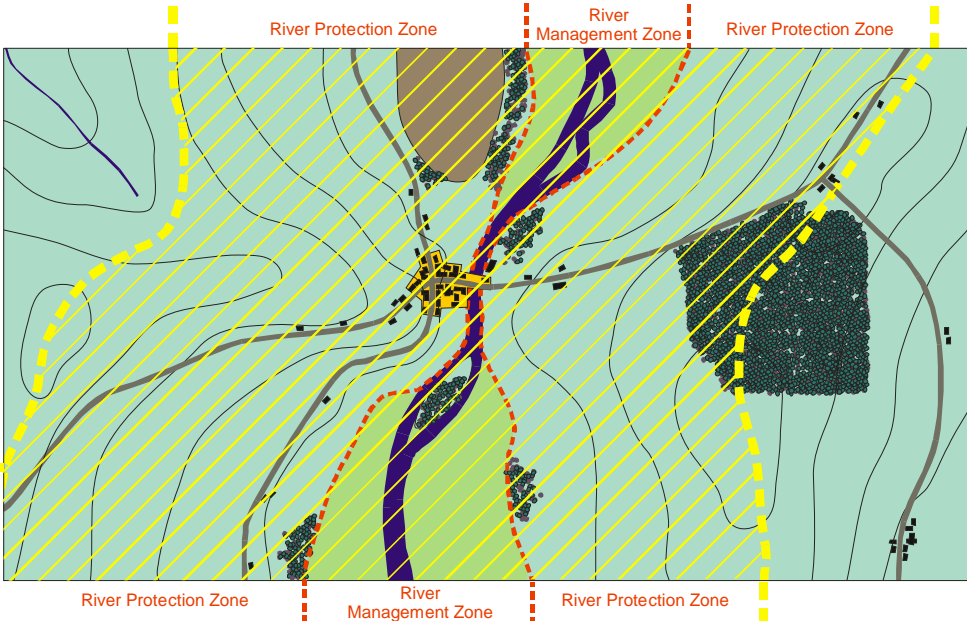
No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.1.1	<p>The water quality of the Shannon River is critical to its value as a habitat and as a recreational and tourism resource. While the local authorities enforce legislation concerning water pollution / quality, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Central Fisheries Board (CFB) are responsible for monitoring the water quality of the Shannon system. Indications are that water quality is on an upward trend but numerous stakeholders have expressed concern and Browne Dunne Roche (2002) cites habitat loss or fragmentation and water quality deterioration as serious consequences of development within the Shannon corridor. The number of authorities acting independently in decisions and actions affecting the water quality of the river is damaging to the system.</p> <p>The National Biodiversity Plan states that there is a requirement to <i>“Maintain and expand the catchment-based national strategy for the protection and improvement of water quality in rivers and lakes by the establishment by Local Authorities of comprehensive projects for river basin management in relation to all inland and coastal waters, and groundwaters.”</i> This is in accordance with the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), a key component of which is the management of water resources based on catchments or river basin districts. Accordingly, a Shannon River Basin District has been defined and a Shannon River Basin District Management Project initiated, for delivering the objectives of</p>	<p>In acknowledgement of the importance of water quality and their roles in maintaining / improving it, Waterways Ireland, the CFB and Shannon Regional Fisheries Board (SRFB) and County Councils to participate in and support the Shannon River Basin Management Project and any subsequent structure put in place to co-ordinate the Shannon River Basin Management Plan.</p>	<p>Waterways Ireland, CFB / SRFB, EPA, County Councils.</p>	<p>Shannon River Basin Management Project already operational. Subsequent Shannon River Basin Management Plan to be operational by end-2009.</p>



	the WFD between January 2003 and December 2006. Thereafter, the local authorities and other appropriate public authorities will be required by the WFD to cooperatively compile, implement and monitor a Shannon River Basin Management Plan, to be operational by end-2009.			
--	--	--	--	--

No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.1.2	Communication and cooperation between non-statutory stakeholders and the authorities charged with management / development of the Shannon system is perceived by the interested and affected parties to be lacking. "There is no-one to talk to" and "Nobody listens" is a common sentiment among well-intentioned individuals and community groups.	The authorities, i.e. Waterways Ireland, CFB, SRFB, EPA and County Councils to designate individuals within their organisations to actively open channels of communication between the Bodies and non-statutory stakeholders. The Shannon River Basin Management Project to provide through its public awareness and consultation programme a forum for the queries, requests, advice, etc. of interested and affected parties to be addressed. Stakeholders / interested and affected parties to be regularly informed of the authorities' priorities, activities and progress through elected representatives, the media and consultation, to ensure their cooperation and support.	Waterways Ireland, CFB / SRFB, EPA, County Councils, Heritage Council.	To be operational in 2004. Improved communication between authorities and stakeholders to indicate progress.

No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.1.3	The Shannon River corridor affords access to a relatively undeveloped and ecologically uncompromised rural landscape. There is currently limited development between settlements (other than peat harvesting industry), but generic rural development pressures e.g. housing, farm intensification, forestry, etc. could result in the loss or compromise of these values.	<p>The planning authorities to put in place a Waterway Corridor Zone as part of their development control process. This would require that any development visible from the river, based on topographic assessment, is automatically assessed in terms of its potential impact on the water quality and amenity value of the river. (The broad zone of the major rivers and lakes, Map 5A-B, of the Longford County Development Plan already fulfils this policy.)</p> <p>There would be a presumption against development within the Waterway Corridor Zone (or broad zone) unless it can be shown that the project enhances the landscape, based on a character assessment approach. This would apply to development proposals within and outside of existing settlements. Strict design guidelines, defining development that enhances the corridor landscape, are to be developed by the Local Authorities. Assessment criteria of development in these zones should include location, siting, form and scale, design style / language and appropriateness / relevance to landscape character including type of use. Assessment would interpret the landscape character of the immediate environment of the proposed development, with specific reference to the waterway, and would</p>	County Councils.	Introduction of Waterway Corridor Zone to the development control process within 1 year (Except Co. Longford – already in place). Development / alteration of County Landscape Character Assessments

<p>The continued viability and prosperity of settlements and communities within the Shannon corridor are dependent on the maintenance of the water and landscape quality.</p> <p>Since the river functions as a corridor of movement, all impacts, from ecological to perceptible, are transferred along the corridor to (in geographic terms) a disproportionately large area.</p>	<p>take account of the County Landscape Character Assessment as soon as this becomes available.</p> <p>Any planning applications for development within the Waterway Corridor Zone (Co. Longford broad zones) must meet with the objectives and programme of measures of the Shannon River Basin Management Plan once it is adopted.</p>	 <p>The map illustrates the Shannon River Basin with various management zones. The River Protection Zones are indicated by yellow dashed lines, and the River Management Zones are indicated by red dashed lines. The river is shown in blue, and the surrounding landscape is depicted with green and brown tones. The map also shows some buildings and infrastructure along the riverbank.</p>	<p>as appropriate. Reduced occurrence of inappropriate development within the River Corridor to indicate progress.</p>
---	--	--	--

No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.1.4	Concern is regularly expressed by navigation users and local residents over issues of overcrowding in places, speeding, noise and other unsociable behaviour on the river. However, Waterways Ireland reports that recreational use of the navigation is only 10 – 15% of predicted capacity.	A common strategy for the development of the navigation is required, with the ecological integrity of the system the primary consideration in planning decisions. Strategic decisions relating to the development of the navigation must meet with the objectives and programme of measures of the Shannon River Basin Management Plan once this is adopted.	Waterways Ireland and the County Councils initially, followed, when a Shannon River Basin Management	To occur in parallel with the on-going development of the Shannon River Basin Management

	Whereas Waterways Ireland is required to allocate encroachment licenses for harbour / marina developments, etc. (taking into account the potential impact on the navigational aspect of the river only), the planning authorities currently act independently in relation to development of the navigation. There is thus potential for unbalanced development of the river corridor.	There is an associated requirement for the determination of the system's capacity to accommodate recreational use without excessive impact on its natural and cultural (e.g. archaeological) heritage. The issues of appropriate number, design, power and speed of craft should be addressed by a study to inform the delineation of appropriate activity areas on the river. This should be a consultative process, including Waterways Ireland, the IWAI, CFB, EPA, etc. Planning decisions regarding all developments relating to the navigation (marinas, etc.) should be informed by this study.	Plan is adopted, by the project partners.	Plan. Development / adoption of a common strategy for management of the navigation by the Shannon River Basin Management Plan partners to indicate progress.
4.1.4.1	In relation to policing of behaviour on the navigation, the presence of Waterways Ireland (with power to prosecute for breaches of the bylaws) and the Gardai (for breaches of the law) on the river is currently inadequate and monitoring by users, without authority, is ineffective.  Waterways Ireland's policing capability is to be imminently enhanced by the expansion of the Inspectorate structure to include and Inspector of Navigation, two Assistant Inspectors and eight wardens with a total of six craft.	A code of conduct detailing the relevant laws and guidelines for navigation users needs to be formalised. All individuals responsible for the piloting of craft should be required to sign a statement of acceptance of the code.	Waterways Ireland, supported by the IWAI.	Ongoing. Progress to be indicated by level of compliance among navigation-users.

No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.1.5	The realisation of the Shannon's recreation and tourism potential is being curtailed by the issue of limited access, both from the waterway to the adjacent villages, towns and attractions, and (for non boat-owners / users)	Waterways Ireland, Roscommon and Longford County Councils, private developers and local communities should cooperatively ensure the provision and maintenance of additional and / or upgraded mooring at all waterway centres. All mooring sites should be complemented by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lighting (security and aesthetic);</li> <li>• CCTV cameras where necessary (i.e. where public surveillance is lacking);</li> <li>• Toilet, shower and washing facilities;</li> </ul>	Waterways Ireland, County Councils, Shannon River Basin Management Plan partners.	Short term. All actions to be initiated within two years. Increased access and information provision,

	<p>from these places to the waterway. An associated issue is that of information provision, which is lacking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adequate and regular waste disposal facilities and services (including provision for recycling);</li> <li>• pump-out facilities;</li> <li>• water points (of specification appropriate to use by boats);</li> <li>• power points;</li> <li>• multi-lingual signage / information highlighting local facilities, services and attractions. This should be located so as to benefit both waterways users and visitors on land;</li> <li>• Signposted, surfaced and lit pedestrian and disabled access to local facilities, services and attractions from all berthing sites;</li> <li>• Car parking and picnic facilities (tables and seating).</li> </ul> <p>In addition, the following improvements are required in the study corridor:</p> <p>Roosky</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mooring to the north of the bridge for boats waiting for the bridge to be lifted. Pedestrian access should be provided from the mooring points to the village.</li> <li>• Refurbishment and re-opening of the toilet facility at the harbour (with consideration of potential for further vandalism).</li> <li>• Widening of the bridge to allow for safe passage of pedestrians and the disabled. Maintenance of the bridge (removal of moss, etc.).</li> <li>• Clearance of the historic canal and development of a pedestrian and disabled route as part of a circuit through / around the village. Provision of picnic facilities adjacent to the historic canal lock (west of the river at the current lock).</li> </ul> <p>Termonbarry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional mooring points to the north of the bridge for boats waiting for the bridge to be lifted. Pedestrian access should be provided from the berths to the village, with a traffic light and zebra crossing over the road.</li> <li>• Development / improvement of mooring points between the bridge and the lock.</li> <li>• Installation of the mooring points delivered but as yet un-installed by Waterways Ireland.</li> <li>• Development / improvement of the amenity area adjacent to the lock, followed by regular maintenance of the site including the swimming pool.</li> </ul> <p>Following a survey by Waterways Ireland of road traffic over Termonbarry bridge, as well as consideration of the safety implications for river traffic, the lifting of the bridge will continue to occur as dictated by river traffic and not according to a predetermined</p>	<p>with associated use of the waterways, to indicate progress.</p>
--	---	--	--

	<p>schedule, as had been mooted.</p> <p>Lanesborough - Ballyleague</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional mooring points to the north of the bridge.</li> <li>• Development / improvement of the western quay north of the entrance to the historic harbour.</li> <li>• Specific attention should be given to options for improving the interface between the town of Lanesborough and the river. Consideration should be given to the removal of the conifer hedge and trees separating the large open space east of the river from the river frontage.</li> <li>• Opportunities for the refurbishment and reuse of vacant / derelict sites fronting the river and the main streets should be actively sought.</li> </ul> <p>Rinn River Navigation</p> <p>Along with the proposed increase in air draft below the N4 where it crosses the Rinn River in future realignment works, other measures required to extend the navigation to Lough Rinn should be pursued (taking account of potential environmental impacts). This would complement and enhance the development potential of the village of Mohill in Co. Leitrim.</p> <p>In response to the requirement for development of access to the waterways for non boat-owner / users, Waterways Ireland and the planning authorities to investigate the use of all waterside properties under their control, as well as seek partnerships with private landowners, for the provision of parking, walking / cycling routes, recreation and picnic areas, etc.</p>	Waterways Ireland, County Councils, Shannon River Basin Management Plan partners.	
--	--	---	--

No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.1.6	Concern has been expressed over the shallowness of the Shannon River between Roosky and Lanesborough. This phenomenon is generally attributed to siltation emanating from the Bord na Móna work on the surrounding Mountdillon group of bogs.	<p>Waterways Ireland, in partnership with Bord na Móna and the EPA to determine conclusively the cause of siltation of the river bed and / or, in partnership with the IWAI, whether the craft now using the navigation exceed in draught the capacity of the river.</p> <p>Should it be determined that Bord na Móna works on the peatlands are the cause of siltation, then measures are to be implemented by Bord na Móna to control the impact to the satisfaction of Waterways Ireland.</p>	Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna.	Short term. Conclusion regarding cause of shallowness within 1 year. Thereafter, periodic measurement to indicate progress.

4.1.7 Cultural-historic Corridor				
No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.1.7.1	Underwater archaeology is not protected by inclusion on any record of protected sites and monuments and is thus at risk of disturbance / removal as a result of development.	<p>The County Councils and Waterways Ireland should ensure that regard is given to the protection of sites where underwater archaeology might be encountered. This is especially important at the three main fording / bridging points within the study area namely Roosky, Termonbarry and Lanesborough. Major developments along the banks of the River Shannon at these points may impact on areas of unrecorded archaeology and should be referred to the Underwater Unit of the National Monuments Section of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government for comment.</p> <p>As further areas of archaeological potential are recorded through underwater survey or assessment they should be added to the Record of Monuments and Places.</p>	County Councils, Waterways Ireland.	Ongoing. Increased information on underwater archaeology to indicate progress.
4.1.7.2	The Shannon River corridor is rich in sites of cultural-historic significance, both navigation-related and unrelated but accessible by foot (within 1 km or 10 minutes' walk).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The list of navigation (industrial) archaeological sites included in Appendix 2 of this report should be assessed with a view to their inclusion in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) and following processes set out in the Planning and Development Act, 2000 their possible inclusion in the Local Authorities Record of Protected Structures. The Local Authorities should consult with Waterways Ireland and the Heritage Committee of the IWAI to ensure these lists are comprehensive.</li> <li>The recorded sites and monuments within 1 km or 10 minutes' walk from all settlement cores, harbours and locks along the navigation should be investigated to determine potential for development / promotion of visitor access (taking into account site sensitivity, visibility, accessibility, safety, etc.). Groupings or clusters of sites should receive particular attention.</li> </ul>	County Councils.	Short term. Within 1 year. Improved statutory protection of cultural-historic sites to indicate progress.

4.1.8 Ecological Corridor					
No.	Issue	Policy & Actions		Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.1.8.1	<p>Bord na Móna is harvesting peat on extensive Moundillon group of peatlands to west and east of the Shannon in the study area, defining the landscape to a large extent. Incrementally, over the next 30 years, the peatlands will become cut-away and available for alternative / after use. Current Bord na Móna policy indicates that the cut-away peatlands below the level of the water table will be allowed to revert to wetlands, and those above the water table will be afforested.</p> <p>The National Wetlands Wilderness Park is an initiative of local residents (Strokestown) with support of the Department of Environmental Studies at the University College of Dublin. The project aims to create of the Moundillon group of bogs, by facilitating natural regeneration, a wilderness park comprising lakes, swamps, heaths and woods, for local amenity value and tourism alike.</p>	<p>There is a requirement for the eventual after-use of the Bord na Móna peatlands to be investigated thoroughly prior to their becoming cut-away. The ecological integrity of the Shannon River should be the singular priority in determining after-use of the peatlands and all opportunities for the realisation of this aim should be considered. No land use that may result in an increase in chemical or nutrient run-off into the Shannon should be considered.</p> <p>Decisions regarding the after-use of the peatlands should be taken cooperatively or at least informed by all stakeholders including the public, Waterways Ireland, the Fisheries Boards, EPA and the planning authorities. The process should therefore be driven by the SRBMP. Investigations and decisions are to be finalised prior to any substantial area of peatland becoming cut-away.</p> <p>All parties to actively support the National Wetlands Wilderness Park initiative.</p>		<p>Bord na Móna, SRBMP (including County and Town Councils, Waterways Ireland, CFB, SRFB, EPA).</p>	<p>Short term and ongoing, determined by the duration of industrial activity on the peatlands. Adoption of a comprehensive strategy for after use of the Moundillon peatlands, or establishment of a project / study to inform such strategy, to indicate progress.</p>
4.1.8.2	<p>Regular EPA testing indicates an upward trend in water quality in recent years. However, during the course of the study, individuals and groups expressed concern regarding pollution of the river by agricultural practices, industry and individual developments. The Lough Ree and Lough Derg Catchment Monitoring and Management System Executive Report, 2001 confirms these concerns.</p>	<p>The Lough Ree and Lough Derg Catchment Monitoring and Management System identified conclusively the sources of pollution of the Shannon and recommended management / mitigation measures to address the problems. The SRBMP to implement and facilitate the implementation of the proposals immediately.</p>		<p>SRBMP including EPA, Waterways Ireland, CFB / SRFB, County Councils.</p>	<p>Ongoing. Improved EPA water quality test results to indicate progress.</p>
4.1.8.3	<p>Browne Dunne Roche (2002) suggests that the impact of increased boating traffic along the Shannon and its lakes could have a two-fold effect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potentially cause disturbance to sensitive species such as Greenland White-fronted geese, and</li> <li>• Assist in the spread of the invasive species the zebra mussel.</li> </ul>	<p>There is a requirement to determine the system's capacity to accommodate recreational use without compromise of its ecological</p>	<p>SRBMP including the EPA, Waterways Ireland, CFB</p>	<p>To be initiated within 1 year. Application of conclusive understanding of</p>	

	<p>The Lough Ree and Lough Derg Catchment Monitoring and Management System Executive Report, 2001 additionally identifies the cruisers on the Shannon as a source of nutrient pollution, albeit a relatively limited source.</p> <p>The zebra mussel (<i>Dreissena polymorpha</i>) is present in the Shannon. This introduced species, when present in large numbers can dramatically alter lake ecosystems from pelagic to benthic. This can have serious impacts on native populations of invertebrates and on fisheries. There appears to be a growing acceptance of the presence of the species in the system, and no universally adopted response to the problem has been forthcoming. Moorkens (2003) cites that research is currently underway to examine methods of controlling this invasive species.</p>	<p>integrity, as well as the likely impacts of the zebra mussel on the river. The issues of appropriate number, design, power and speed of craft should be addressed by a study, to be driven by the SRBMP, to inform the delineation of appropriate activity areas on the river. This should be a consultative process, including the EPA, CFB and SRFB, Waterways Ireland, IWAI, etc.</p>	<p>/ SRFB, affected County Councils.</p>	<p>effects of recreational craft and activities in decisions affecting the river to indicate progress.</p>
4.1.8.4	<p>The introduced species rhododendron (<i>Rhododendron ponticum</i>) poses a threat to woodland and cutaway bog in the waterways corridor, particularly around the Castleforbes demesne (Browne Dunne Roche, 2002). Japanese Knotweed (<i>Polygonum cuspidatum</i>) was recorded during this study in a number of locations in the study area. This garden escape can spread quickly forming dense thickets that excludes native vegetation. It particularly favours riparian habitats.</p>	<p>County Councils to implement measures to identify problem areas and encourage landowners to take appropriate action against the invasive species.</p>	<p>County Councils.</p>	<p>Short term. Within 1 year. Reduced occurrence of species in the study area to indicate progress.</p>
4.1.8.5	<p>Brown et al. (2003) recommend the following sites along the Shannon Corridor be surveyed in more detail to ascertain whether they warrant NHA designation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ballinphuill (near Termonbarry)</li> <li>• Highstreet (west of Cloondara)</li> <li>• Cloontuskert to Ballyleague</li> <li>• Site at Kilnacarrow</li> </ul> <p>Brown et al. (2003) recommend detailed surveys on the EU protected species, greenland white-fronted geese, white-clawed crayfish and the pearl mussel.</p>	<p>County Councils to drive the implementation of the Brown et al. recommendations.</p>	<p>National Parks and Wildlife Service.</p>	<p>Short term. Within 1 year. Decision regarding designation of identified sites to indicate progress.</p>



## 4.2 The Royal Canal between Cloondara and Thomastown

### 4.2.1 – 4.2.7 Landscape and Socio-economic Corridor

No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.2.1	More and / or improved facilities and services would attract users to the Royal Canal, and more users would generate improved facilities and services. One of these two aspects requires a 'kick-start' to break the status quo. Ideally this would happen in advance of the canal's complete restoration, so that the initial wave of visitors might be sustained through positive experience. It is crucial that users of the canal have 'somewhere to go' along the way once the corridor between the Shannon and Dublin is opened. Such attractions, facilities and services will require financial support to be in place in preparation for the anticipated visitors, since the development period will be taking place during the 'dormancy' of the canal.	<p>There is a requirement for a 'Royal Canal Development Council', cooperatively managed by Waterways Ireland, the County Councils, RCAG, IWAI and possibly FÁS. The Council should provide an information gateway on the canal in general, on development opportunities and on sources of funding for private small-scale developers / concerns. Such direct access to the property owners, planning authorities and funding agents could catalyse key projects that would contribute to the realisation of the canal's amenity potential in time for its opening.</p> <p>The provision of hostel accommodation and camping facilities (ideally in one or more of the village harbours, e.g. Abbeyshrule) should be actively pursued, to complement the Royal Canal Waymarked Way. Consideration should be given to the availability of complementary activities at the location/s (e.g. angling on the River Inny, etc.) to ensure sustainability. The accommodation should be marketed in conjunction with the walking / angling / cycling, and vice versa.</p>	Waterways Ireland, County Councils, Failte Ireland, FÁS, Heritage Council.	Within 1 year. Increased public awareness of, and associated commercial interest in development of facilities and services along the canal to indicate progress.

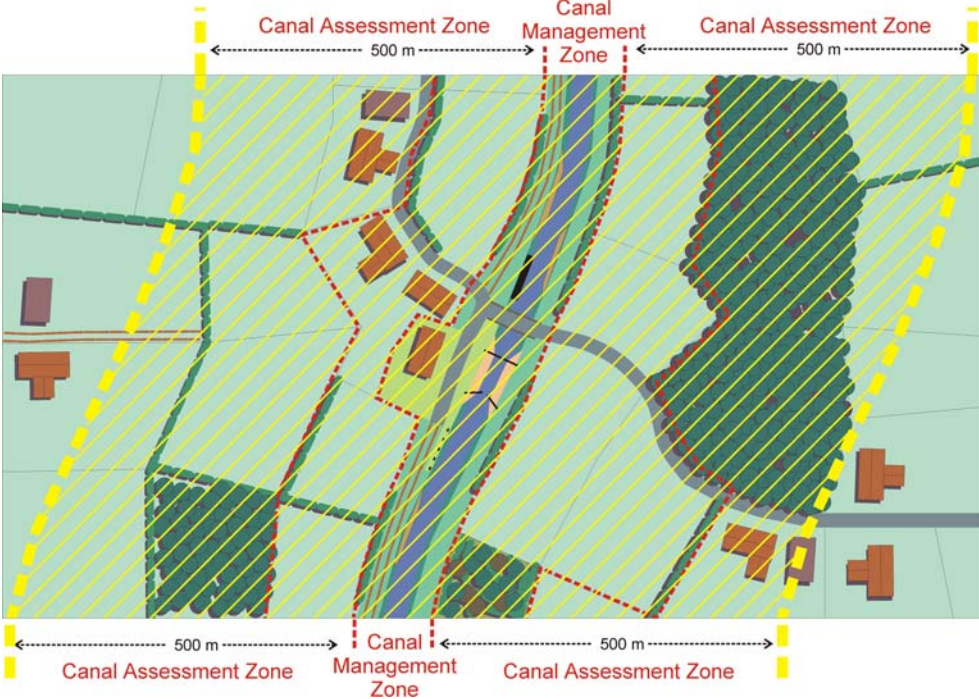
No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.2.2	Numerous vacant lands and built features associated with the Royal Canal have potential for redevelopment and reuse in its revival. It is vital that all such features, e.g. the lock-keeper's cottages, the stores at Mullingar Harbour, Archie's Bridge quay, Ballybrannigan Harbour, Ballynacarrigy, various buildings at Longford Harbour, etc. be	The proposed 'Royal Canal Development Council' to compile an inventory of canal-related properties (including ownership, usage, condition, etc) and encourage and assist in their refurbishment and reuse. The properties that remain in ownership of the statutory bodies such as Waterways Ireland and the County and Town Councils and which will not be required for operation of the restored canal, could be made available (through the forum described in 4.2.1) for appropriate development. This is in keeping with Waterways Ireland policy: "to manage the property portfolio for the benefit of the inland waterways... The property asset portfolio has considerable potential for development of projects which would be sustainable and which would enhance, be sympathetic to and benefit the inland waterways. This could be through direct development, joint	Waterways Ireland, County Councils, Failte Ireland, FAS.	As above.

	developed in a way that is sympathetic to the heritage value of the resource.	venture, disposal or lease arrangements...” Incentives for appropriate development of those properties in private ownership should be considered. The ‘Royal Canal Development Council’ would have controlling influence in the type, appearance and quality of redevelopment of any property. Opportunities for display and interpretation of waterways history in these buildings should be sought (e.g. at Cloondara).		
--	---	---	--	--

No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.2.3	Communication and cooperation between non-statutory stakeholders and the authorities charged with management / development of the Royal Canal is perceived by the stakeholders to be lacking. “There is no-one to talk to” and “Nobody listens” is a common sentiment among well-intentioned individuals and community groups, generally unaware of the Authorities priorities, activities and progress.	<p>The Authorities, i.e. Waterways Ireland, CFB and Shannon Regional Fisheries Board and EPA, etc. to designate individuals within their organisations to actively open channels of communication between the Bodies and non-statutory stakeholders. Waterways Ireland in particular would benefit from a forum through which stakeholders could be regularly informed of issues such as progress with restoration. This is in keeping with current Waterways Ireland Outreach and Communications Policy.</p> <p>The development of a dedicated Royal Canal forum, possibly in conjunction with the ‘Royal Canal Development Council’ (See 4.2.1), could contribute to the awareness of and interest in the Royal Canal as an amenity / heritage resource.</p>	Waterways Ireland, County Councils, CFB, SRFB, EPA.	Short term. Within 1 year.

No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.2.4	Awareness of the heritage, amenity and tourism value of the Royal Canal is crucial to its long-term success as a catalyst for positive change within the corridor. Education, of the youth in particular to guarantee long term effect, is important. Several schools, e.g. at Cloondara, Ballina and Mullingar about the waterway boundary. There is potential here to ‘employ’ the youth in awareness creation and promotion of the canal, as well as a need to educate them concerning the safety aspects of living beside a canal.	A youth education programme, possibly linked to existing programmes such as the Heritage in Schools Scheme and ESB Environment Schools, is to be initiated and sustained by Waterways Ireland prior to the canal's full restoration. All schools within 1km or 10 minutes walk from the canal, or with a significant number of scholars living nearby, or with any other association to the canal, should be engaged. This is in keeping with current Waterways Ireland Outreach and Communications Policy. Future Waterways Ireland Policy should include the articulation of a Programme of Education.	Waterways Ireland.	Short to medium term, then ongoing. All schools should be engaged prior to final restoration of the Royal Canal. A basic questionnaire assessing awareness of canal history, heritage value (cultural-historic, ecological), amenity uses, etc should be distributed to the schools for sample testing prior to launch of the programme. Thereafter, every two years to indicate effectiveness.

No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.2.5	<p>The Royal Canal affords access to a particularly undeveloped, unspoiled and attractive rural landscape. Retention of this landscape character is important to its continued value as a heritage and amenity resource. This is reflected in the canal's designation as a proposed Natural Heritage Area.</p> <p>There is currently limited development between settlements, but generic pressures for rural development, for housing, farm intensification and forestry in particular, could result in the loss or compromise of these values. Since the canal functions as a corridor of movement, all impacts, from ecological to perceptible, are transferred along the corridor to (in geographic terms) a disproportionately large area.</p>	<p>The planning authorities (County and Town Councils) should put in place a Waterway Corridor Zone as part of their development control process. This would require that any development within 500m of the canal is automatically assessed in terms of its potential impact on the canal. (The broad zone of the canal, Map 5A-B, of the Longford County Development Plan already fulfils this policy.)</p> <p>There would be a presumption against development within the Waterway Corridor Zone (or broad zone) unless it can be shown that the project enhances the landscape, based on a character assessment approach. This would apply to development proposals within and outside of existing settlements. Strict design guidelines, defining development that enhances the corridor landscape, are to be developed by the Planning Authorities. Assessment criteria of development in these zones should include location, siting, form and scale, design style / language and appropriateness / relevance to landscape character including type of use. Assessment would interpret the landscape character of the immediate environment of the proposed development, with specific reference to the waterway, and would take account of the County Landscape Character Assessment as soon as this becomes available.</p> <p>The proposed Royal Canal Development Council to have an advisory role in response to planning applications for development within the Waterway Corridor Zone.</p>	County and Town Councils.	Short term for introduction of Waterway Corridor Zone to the development control process. Development / alteration of County Landscape Character Assessments as appropriate. Reduced occurrence of inappropriate development within the Canal Corridor to indicate progress.

		 <p>The Landscape Character Assessments of the affected counties to be developed or altered to include, in mapping and text, a linear Waterway (Canal) Corridor area that traverses the other geomorphologically and culturally defined character areas.</p>		
--	--	--	--	--

No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.2.6	Substantial resources are being allocated to the maintenance and restoration of the Royal Canal. However, the level of use of the resource, by local communities and visitors, is disappointing.	Waterways Ireland to assume the responsibility of ensuring that optimal benefit is derived from its expenditure of resources, as signified in the published objectives of its Marketing, Promotions and Communications Policy. There is opportunity for Waterways Ireland and the County and Town Councils to actively pursue the strategic development of additional, alternative and complementary uses to the traditional boating, angling, walking uses, as well as maximise the take-up of these amongst local communities and visitors through the provision of access and information.	Waterways Ireland, County and Town Councils, with support from the RCAG,	Short term. All actions to be initiated within two years. Increased access and information

	<p>The realisation of the Royal Canal's recreation and tourism potential is constrained by the issue of limited access, both from the waterway to the adjacent villages, towns and attractions, and (for non boat-owners / users) from these places to the waterway. An associated issue is that of information provision, which is lacking.</p> <p>It is not certain that the anticipated post-restoration boat traffic will be sufficient to sustain fledgling tourism-driven concerns (facilities and services).</p>	<p>Waterways Ireland, Longford and Westmeath County Councils, private developers and local communities to cooperatively ensure upon reopening of the canal, that the ample mooring in the canal harbours is complemented by the following, based on a strategic assessment of the canal facilities as a comprehensive product:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lighting (security and aesthetic);</li> <li>• CCTV cameras where necessary (i.e. where public surveillance is lacking);</li> <li>• Toilet, shower and washing facilities;</li> <li>• adequate and regular waste disposal facilities and services (including provision for recycling);</li> <li>• pump-out facilities;</li> <li>• water points;</li> <li>• power points;</li> <li>• multi-lingual signage / information highlighting local facilities, services and attractions. This should be located so as to benefit both waterways users and visitors on land;</li> <li>• signposted, surfaced and lit pedestrian and disabled access to local facilities, services and attractions from all mooring sites;</li> <li>• car parking.</li> </ul> <p>In addition to the above, the following actions are required:</p> <p><b>Area 2</b> The Royal Canal between Cloondara and Ballymahon, including the Longford Branch</p> <p>Cloondara. With the restoration of the Royal Canal, Cloondara as the access point from the Shannon Navigation is likely to experience a dramatic increase in visitor numbers and development pressure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once Cloondara becomes a more integrated part of the Shannon Navigation there will be an expectation for appropriate facilities. Longford County Council should ensure in good time that services (roads, including parking, water, sewage, etc.) are of a standard to accommodate this.</li> <li>• Investigate the feasibility of a waterways heritage centre in Cloondara, in one of the various village centre buildings.</li> <li>• Investigate the provision of walking and cycling routes from the village to the numerous natural heritage features in the locality, including Cloondara Bog and the Shannon and Camlin Rivers. Identify locations for rest / picnic sites along the routes.</li> </ul>	<p>IWAI, Failte Ireland, etc.</p>	<p>provision, with associated use of the waterways, to indicate progress.</p>
--	---	--	-----------------------------------	---

	<p>Longford Town currently does not benefit from its proximity to the Shannon River system. Restoration of the Longford Branch would restore the town's status as integral to the Royal Canal and Shannon River corridors.</p> <p>The Royal Canal harbour in Longford Market Square presents an opportunity for development of a destination within one day's travel by cruiser from the Shannon River. The quality / desirability of the destination will depend largely on the harbour itself. The historic harbour offers greater potential for the establishment of an authentic waterways theme in the town, and a tangible link to the Shannon River system, than would a new location outside of the town centre. The character of the town and townscape could be dramatically enhanced by the restoration of the harbour. Its consignment to history would be an equally important loss.</p>	<p>Keenagh, Killashee, Ballymahon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate the provision of appropriately surfaced, lit and signposted walking and cycling routes between the Royal Canal and these settlements, considering also the provision of 'round trips' and access to heritage features in the locality.</li> </ul> <p>Longford Town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively promote and facilitate the reopening of the Longford Branch through, preferably, the restoration of Longford Town harbour in Market Square or alternatively if restoration of the historic harbour proves unfeasible, another suitable site in close proximity to the town (ease of access to the urban amenities is critical).</li> <li>Investigate the provision of a walking and cycleway to link Longford Town to the Camlin and Shannon Rivers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Area 3</b> The Royal Canal between Abbeyshrule and Ballina</p> <p>Abbeyshrule</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate the possibility of developing the harbour area as a small camp site, including toilet, shower and washing facilities, water and electricity points, dustbins and waste removal, etc. These facilities would also service waterways boat traffic.</li> <li>Investigate the potential for development of a picnic and angling area adjacent to the Whitworth Aqueduct. This would require the acquisition of land and the provision of basic facilities such as tables, seating and dustbins, etc.</li> <li>Provide signage to and car parking at appropriate locations on both the canal and the River Inny to cater for the growing angling market.</li> </ul> <p>Ballynacarrigy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design and implement streetscape improvements (surfaces, lighting, furniture, sculpture) at the square formed by the junction of Main and Harbour Streets. Extend the streetscape improvements along Harbour Street from the square to the harbour to further integrate the canal with the village.</li> <li>Facilitate the development of the harbour buildings as a restaurant and chandlery in time for the re-opening of the canal.</li> <li>Investigate the possibility of developing the harbour area as a small camp site, including toilet, shower and washing facilities, water and electricity points, dustbins and waste removal, etc. These facilities would also service waterways boat traffic.</li> <li>Provide signage to and car parking at appropriate locations on the canal to cater for the growing angling market (specifically to draw anglers from Mullingar).</li> </ul>	<p>Waterways Ireland, County and Town Councils, with support from the RCAG, IWAI, Failte Ireland, etc.</p>	
--	---	--	--	--

	<p>It is an objective of Westmeath County Council to “<i>implement a County-wide rambling/cycle route network and investigate the use of the Royal canal towpath as part of such a scheme.</i>” The <i>Mullingar Town Plan</i> identifies the canal area is a major contributor to open space in the town encompassing roughly 40 acres. The Plan highlights the increasing importance of the canal in creating “<i>an integrated system of amenity and recreational open space which offers potential for further extending the urban pedestrian networks along the banks and integrating this network with the town open space system.</i>”</p>	<p><b>Area 4</b> The Royal Canal between Ballina and Thomastown</p> <p>Mullingar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In order to develop a formal public amenity for the growing town, the Town and County Councils to investigate the feasibility of development / improvement of the towpaths between Bellmount Bridge to the west of Mullingar and Baltrasna Bridge to the east (approximately 10.5km) to cater for pedestrian, disabled and cycle access. This will require specific path width and surface requirements, as well as safety measures such as lighting and guard rail, where necessary. Consideration should be given to existing angling locations and particularly (ecologically) sensitive areas, ensuring that these are not compromised in any way;</li> <li>• Access nodes from adjacent residential and commercial neighbourhoods, as well as from other amenities (locations and routes) should be identified. These locations should be selected and treated with landscape improvements and signage (highlighting natural and cultural-historic heritage, features, uses, etc.) to inspire and facilitate non-boating use of the waterway.</li> <li>• Lighting of both harbours should be installed along with the removal of screening vegetation to improve visibility from and to the public realm. These measures should be complemented by CCTV cameras.</li> <li>• All parties to support and facilitate the development of an appropriately located and designed National Transport Museum at the Mullingar railway station.</li> </ul> <p>There is a requirement for Waterways Ireland, the County Councils and East Coast and Midlands Tourism to raise the profile of the Royal Canal among non boat-owner / users. Promotional signage to be installed at all junctions of the canal and other transport routes (e.g. road bridges over the canal), illustrating natural and cultural-historic heritage, features, uses, etc.</p>	<p>Waterways Ireland, County and Town Councils, with support from the RCAG, IWAI, Failte Ireland, etc.</p>	
--	---	--	--	--

No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.2.7	<p>Waterways Ireland does not encourage cycling on canal towpaths unless a hard surface is installed, citing the activity’s perceived conflict with other uses (walking and angling) and the need for additional insurance to cover the activity. In addition, the Body argues that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towpaths are generally too narrow to accommodate walkers and cyclists;</li> <li>• Safety measures such as railings and / or lighting may be required;</li> <li>• Certain motorbike types would be automatically facilitated, giving rise to</li> </ul>	<p>To ensure the realisation of the canal’s potential as an amenity resource with tangible benefits to local communities, the use of the canal needs to be maximised.</p>	<p>Waterways Ireland, County and Town Councils, Heritage Council.</p>	<p>Investigations to be initiated in the short term, to ascertain the feasibility of the canal as</p>

	<p>public safety issues in relation to speed and noise;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towpath ecology would be affected negatively;</li> <li>• Visual amenity of the towpath would be affected negatively.</li> <li>• The Royal Canal is presently a National Waymarked Way between Dublin and Abbeysrule, and will eventually be extended to Cloondara following full restoration. National Waymarked Ways' policy is to provide / maintain routes exclusively for walkers.</li> </ul> <p>Representatives of cycling argue that there is historic precedent for cycling on towpaths (waterways employees, boatmen in particular) and that it is not necessarily in conflict with other uses. Cyclists argue that towpaths provide a safe and traffic free environment, accessible in their current un-surfaced condition to mountain and hybrid bicycles for much of the year. Cycling allows greater coverage of distance than walking and boating, and might thus appeal to holidaymakers with limited time. Waterways elsewhere, e.g. in the UK, Belgium, Norway and Sweden amongst others, are recognised as a cycling resource and promote responsible cycling accordingly.</p> <p>Greenways in Ireland are defined as a network of multi-user routes, primarily free from motorised traffic, for recreational, health and daily use, and for the benefit of communities along the route socially and economically. Greenways provide for public access to and enhancement of built and natural heritage, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greenways provide alternative transportation routes to connect people, communities and the countryside.</li> <li>• Greenways provide recreational opportunities for all.</li> <li>• Greenways provide safe, alternative routes for non-motorised transportation.</li> <li>• Greenways are often major tourist attractions, which generate expenditures on accommodation, food and recreation services.</li> <li>• Greenways help improve the overall appeal of a community to existing and new residents as well as to prospective tourists.</li> <li>• Greenways aid the promotion of exercise and activity.</li> <li>• Greenways help reduce dependence on motor vehicles.</li> <li>• Greenways promote outdoor education</li> <li>• Greenways promote the appreciation and protection of cultural and historic resources.</li> <li>• Greenways can act as outdoor classrooms for all ages.</li> </ul>	<p>There is a requirement for the appropriate bodies including Waterways Ireland, National Waymarked Ways, etc. to re-assess their approach to cycling along the canal towpaths, taking cognisance of the County and Town Councils', Heritage Council's and other stakeholders' objectives for the canal.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to development of the canal as a Greenway, allowing cycling on the towpaths where it can be accommodated and linking to local roads where conditions are not suitable. A detailed study of the towpaths is required to identify suitable stretches, based on the actual width of dedicated path required for safe parallel passage of a cyclist and walker (2m minimum), the actual safety requirements in terms of surfacing and railings (not deemed necessary or desirable by the cycling lobby), and on actual area-specific ecological and visual sensitivity.</p> <p>Planning, development and promotion of the canal as a Greenway would contribute to the heightened profile and increased usage required for the canal to realise its potential as a tourism / recreation product.</p>		<p>a Greenway and allow for subsequent development and promotion in conjunction with the restoration of the navigation (should feasibility be determined).</p>
--	---	--	--	--



4.2.8 Cultural-historic Corridor				
No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.2.8.1	The Royal Canal corridor is rich in sites of cultural-historic significance, both navigation-related and unrelated and accessible by foot (within 1 km or 10 minutes' walk) from the waterway.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The list of navigation (industrial) archaeological sites included in Appendix 2 of this report should be assessed with a view to their inclusion in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) and following processes set out in the Planning and Development Act, 2000 their possible inclusion in the Local Authorities Record of Protected Structures. The Local Authorities should consult with Waterways Ireland and the Heritage Committee of the IWAI to ensure these lists are comprehensive.</li> <li>The recorded sites and monuments within 1 km or 10 minutes' walk from all settlement cores, harbours and locks along the canal should be investigated to determine potential for development / promotion of visitor access (taking into account site sensitivity, visibility, accessibility, safety, etc.). Groupings or clusters of sites should receive particular attention, such as at Cloondara, Keenagh, etc.</li> </ul>	Longford and Westmeath County Councils.	Short term, within 1 year. Degree of statutory protection afforded to architectural and industrial heritage, and compilation of an inventory of sites suitable for development of visitor access to indicate progress.
4.2.8.2	Cloondara is unique in its association with three waterways and its resulting concentration of as yet largely uncompromised built heritage. These characteristics present opportunities for potentially conflicting forms of exploitation namely, conservation / interpretation and commercial development. The residents of Cloondara are resolute in their intention to preserve the village from unsympathetic development. However, it should be acknowledged that commercial development does present a means of conserving aspects of the built heritage that might otherwise fall into dereliction.	There is a requirement for recognition by the planning authorities of Cloondara's particular heritage value (not only as a tourism 'honeypot') and sensitivity. The compilation of a detailed village plan to guide its conservation and development as it comes to prominence with the restoration of the Royal Canal is critical. The Plan should list protected structures and places and identify sites and importantly, types of development, which would maintain the integrity of the village's form and function.	Longford County Council.	Short term. Within 1 year. Finalisation of a village statement to Cloondara residents' satisfaction to indicate progress.

4.2.9 Ecological Corridor				
No.	Issue	Policy & Actions	Responsible Bodies	Timeframe & Indicators
4.2.9.1	In order to assess all areas of significance, and threats along the Royal Canal corridor, it is recommended that a detailed habitat assessment be conducted. This assessment should be carried out as part of a baseline survey conducted before dredging and other restoration works are completed. A habitat assessment should be conducted on a five yearly basis to monitor habitat change.	Waterways Ireland in partnership with National Parks and Wildlife to initiate a programme of five-yearly habitat assessments.	National Parks and Wildlife Division / Waterways Ireland.	Short term. Within one year, during the summer season. Once programme is initiated, previous five-yearly habitat studies to indicate trends in habitat status.
4.2.9.2	The reed fringe provides an important habitat for a number of bird, invertebrate and fish species. The Annex II snail <i>Vertigo moulinsiana</i> is closely associated with this habitat. The reed fringe also plays a role in reducing bank erosion associated with boat traffic and as such needs to be maintained for navigation purposes. However, it was noted during site visits that the reed fringe was severely cut back in places.	It is recommended that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The reed fringe should be maintained along both banks of the canal at all times wherever possible, taking account of navigation requirements, i.e. avoiding the restriction of boat movement.</li> <li>• A floating dredger, rather than a hedgerow cutter should be used to cut reed fringe so as to avoid damage to the adjacent bankside vegetation. Waterways Ireland is increasing its floating plant fleet accordingly.</li> </ul>	Waterways Ireland.	Ongoing. Increased reed fringe habitat and associated faunal diversity to indicate progress.
4.2.9.3	Hedgerows are an important ecological corridor along the length of the canal. The method and timing of hedgerow cutting is vital to maintain their ecological value. The protection of hedgerow trees and re-planting of appropriate species is also important.	It is recommended that guidelines on hedgerow management presented in The Heritage Council's "Conserving Hedgerows" and in Dromey et al. (1991) be adopted by Waterways Ireland.	Waterways Ireland.	Ongoing. Improved hedgerow diversity and structure to indicate progress.
4.2.9.4	The diversity and quality of the species rich limestone grasslands which are common along the Royal Canal can be maintained by the appropriate use of grazing and mowing techniques as outlined in Dromey et al. (1991). Threats to grassland habitats along the canal	Waterways Ireland to adopt the techniques outlined in Dromey et al. (1991) where appropriate.	Waterways Ireland.	Ongoing. Increased occurrence of good limestone grassland to indicate progress.

	corridor include dumping of spoil over grassland, excessive mowing, scrub encroachment and inappropriate weed control.			
4.2.9.5	Locks, bridges and derelict buildings along the canal provide a suitable habitat for a range of species of flora and fauna. Dromey et al. (1991) presents a number of guidelines regarding the removal of vegetation from and cleaning of bridges.	It is recommended that all stone bridges and any suitable stone buildings along the canal be surveyed by qualified personnel for the presence of bat species, and that Waterways Ireland adopt the techniques outlined in Dromey et al. (1991) in the maintenance of these structures.	Waterways Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service.	Short term. To be completed within 2 years. Continued or increased presence of desired flora and fauna to be indicated by five-yearly habitat study programme.
4.2.9.6	The management of the navigable part of the Royal Canal includes the control of vegetative growth, dredging and water quality. Vegetative growth on the canal is controlled using both physical and chemical means to allow for navigation and to prevent infilling of the canal with vegetation.	It is recommended that guidelines presented in Dromey et al. (1991) be implemented by Waterways Ireland.	Waterways Ireland.	Ongoing.
4.2.9.7	The zebra mussel ( <i>Dreissena polymorpha</i> ) has been recorded on the canal walls at Cloondara (Moorkens, 2003). This species spreads easily in slow rivers, canals, docks, reservoirs etc. and its distribution in the Royal Canal is limited only by the dried sections of the canal east of Cloondara. When these sections are rewatered, it is expected that <i>Dreissena</i> will spread rapidly into the canal, further facilitated by the passage of leisure boats from the Shannon. Moorkens (2003) cites that research is currently underway to examine methods of controlling the invasive species.  Japanese knotweed ( <i>Polygonum cuspidatum</i> ) was noted in several places along the Royal Canal (Begnagh Bridge, south of Pake Bridge and north of Cloonbreany Bridge) but is probably widespread. This garden escape can spread	The control and management of invasive exotics should be among priority management issues along the canal corridor.  It is required that Waterways Ireland and the National Parks and Wildlife Service cooperate to ensure the best available methods for control of the zebra mussel are used when the canal is rewatered and made navigable.  An ecologist should be employed if Japanese knotweed is encountered during restoration / maintenance works to ensure the most appropriate method for its removal is employed.	Waterways Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service.	Medium term, prior to the complete restoration of the canal. Species distribution, recorded as part of the programme of five-yearly habitat studies, to indicate progress.

	quickly forming dense thickets, excluding native vegetation. It particularly favours riparian habitats. Its removal and control poses major difficulties.			
4.2.9.8	Coarse fish species found in the canal include bream ( <i>Abramis brama</i> ), roach ( <i>Rutilus rutilus</i> ), rudd ( <i>Scardinius erythrophthalmus</i> ), hybrids, tench ( <i>Tinca tinca</i> ), carp ( <i>Cyprinus carpio</i> ), pike ( <i>Esox lucius</i> ) and eels ( <i>Anguilla anguilla</i> ). The National Biodiversity Plan objectives include that “waters are primarily stocked with indigenous species, including by reviewing the situation in regard to the translocation of fish between catchments and producing appropriate guidelines or other necessary regulations.”	In accordance with the National Biodiversity Plan, the Royal Canal should be primarily stocked with indigenous species.	Waterways Ireland / Central Fisheries Board / National Parks and Wildlife Service.	Ongoing fish stock surveys.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

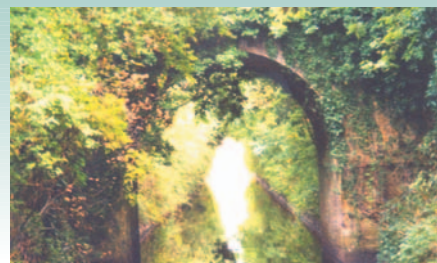
- Aalen, F H A, Whelan K, Stout M, *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*. Cork University Press, 1997.
- Brady Shipman Martin, *Grand Canal, Royal Canal, Barrow Navigation Management and Development Strategy*. Office of Public works Waterways Service, 1987.
- Brady Shipman Martin, *Royal Canal Corridor Study Spencer Dock to Allen Bridge Strategy and Proposals*. Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht, 1995.
- Brady Shipman Martin, Mallachi Cullen & Partners, *Lough Rynn Navigation Pre-feasibility Study*. 1997.
- Clarke, P, *The Royal Canal The Complete Story*. ELO Publication, 1992.
- Cunnane Stratton Reynolds, *Waterways Corridor Study 2002*. The Heritage Council, 2002.
- Delany, R in association with Waterways Ireland, *The Shell Guide to the River Shannon*. ERA Maptec Ltd, 2000.
- Delany, R, *Ireland's Royal Canal 1789 - 1992*. The Lilliput Press, 1992.
- Delany, R, *A Celebration of 250 Years of Ireland's Inland Waterways*. Appletree Press, 1992 Revised Edition.
- Dunne, J, *Extract from Towpath Tours – Exploring Ireland's Waterways*. Unpublished, 2003.
- Gilmore D, *The Irish Countryside, Landscape, Wildlife, History, People*. Wolfhound Press, 1989.
- Lafferty S, Commins P, Walsh, J, *Irish Agriculture in Transition – A Census Atlas of Agriculture in the Republic of Ireland*. Teagasc, 1999.
- Coarse Angling Guide to the Grand and Royal Canals of Ireland*. Duchas The Heritage Service, 1998.
- Draft Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities*. Department of Arts, Heritage Gaeltacht and the Islands, 2001.
- Guide to the Royal Canal of Ireland*. Waterways Service 1997 4<sup>th</sup> Edition.
- Guidelines for the Developing and Marking of Waymarked Ways*. The Heritage Council, The Irish Sports Council, NWWAC, 2002.
- Landscape and Landscape Assessment Consultation Draft of Guidelines for Planning Authorities*. Department of the Environment and Local Government, 2000.
- Leitrim County Development Plan 2003 – 2009*. Leitrim County Council, 2003.
- Longford County Development Plan 2003 – 2009*. Longford County Council, 2003.
- Longford Town Council Development Plan 2004 – 2010*. Longford Town Council, 2004.
- National Biodiversity Plan*. Department of Arts, Heritage Gaeltacht and the Islands, 2002.
- National Spatial Strategy for Ireland 2002 – 2020*. Government Publications, 2002.
- Policy Paper on Ireland's Landscape and the National Heritage*. The Heritage Council, 2002.
- Roscommon County Development Plan 2002*. Roscommon County Council, 2002.
- Shannon Navigation Charts*. OPW, IWAI & ERA Maptec, 1994.
- Waterways Ireland Corporate and Business Plan 2002 – 2004*. Waterways Ireland 2002.
- Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008*. Westmeath County Council, 2002.



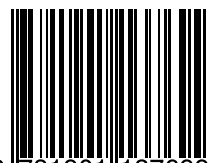
# Waterways Corridor Study 2004

The Shannon River  
between Roosky and Lanesborough

The Royal Canal  
between Cloondara and Thomastown



ISBN 1901137694



9 781901 137699

€20

AN  
CHOMHAIRLE  
OIDHREACHTA



THE  
HERITAGE  
COUNCIL

KILKENNY, IRELAND. TELEPHONE: +353 56 7770777. FAX: +353 56 7770788. E-MAIL: [heritage@heritagecouncil.com](mailto:heritage@heritagecouncil.com)  
CILL CHAINNIGH, ÉIRE. TEILEAFÓN: +353 56 7770777. FAICS: +353 56 7770788. E-MAIL: [heritage@heritagecouncil.com](mailto:heritage@heritagecouncil.com)

[www.heritagecouncil.ie](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie)