

WATERWAYS CORRIDOR STUDY

LANESBOROUGH TO SHANNONBRIDGE

FINAL DRAFT REPORT

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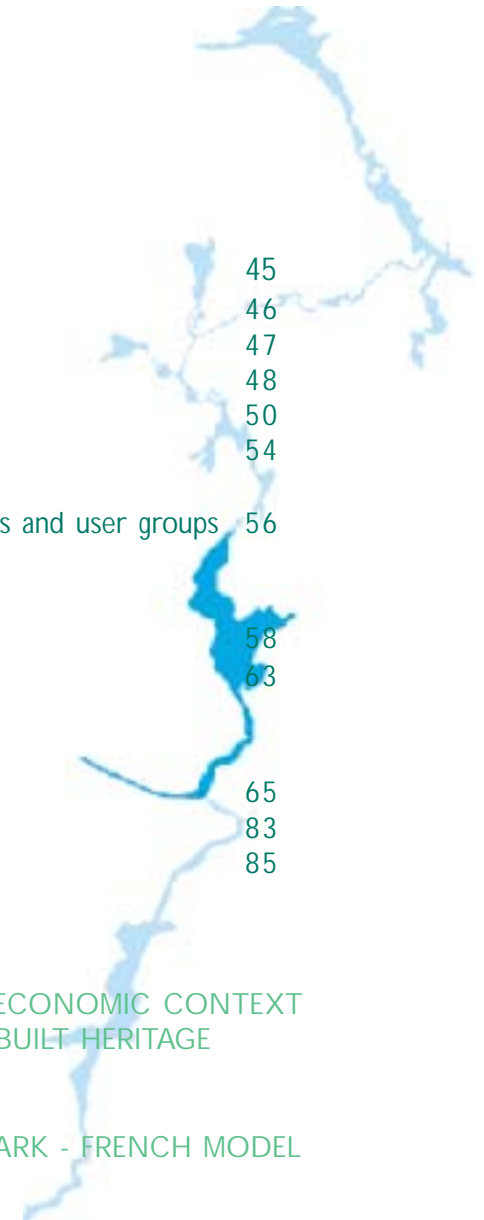
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SECTION ONE 1 INTRODUCTION

The greatest waterway in these islands, the River Shannon attracts thousands of visitors every year. Some are almost permanent inhabitants, others occasional guests; but everyone falls under its spell, determined to return and savour once more its undeniable mystique.

Foreword to "By Shannon Shores" - Ruth Delany, 1987

1.1 Background

1.1.1 In 2001, the Heritage Council commissioned a Pilot Waterways Corridor Study (Pilot Study) to examine opportunities for regeneration within a framework of conservation along a stretch of the Lower Shannon taking in the Grand Canal. The context for this study was to recognise, and seek ways to realise, the potential of the waterways as a heritage, amenity and tourism resource.

1.1.2 Following the successful completion of the Pilot Study, the Heritage Council, in partnership with Waterways Ireland and Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath, Galway and Offaly County Councils, has now commissioned two further waterways studies taking in the mid-Shannon from Shannonbridge to Lanesborough (also Lanesboro and Béal Átha Liag) and part of the upper Shannon from Lanesborough to Roosky including the Royal Canal. Colin Buchanan and Partners, in association with co-consultants John Cronin, Fred Hamond and Dr Amanda Browne have been awarded the study area comprising Shannonbridge to Lanesborough including Lough Ree in its entirety and a further sub-study taking in the River Suck from the Shannon to Ballinasloe and the line of the old Ballinasloe navigation (formerly part of the Grand Canal, but disused since 1961).



Fishing south of the bridge at Shannonbridge



Barley Harbour



Old Lock House, Shannonbridge



Floodplain along River Suck

1.2 The Project Brief

1.2.1 The brief sets out the overall aims of the study as being:

- 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 the area, and by this understanding, ensure retention of the distinctiveness of a place, while allowing for development and evolution of use for the future.

1.2.2 The study seeks to ensure the identification and assessment of the significance of the waterways corridor, and subsequent drafting of policies to retain and enhance such significance whilst enabling identification of type and location of projects for the regeneration of the waterway corridor. Pragmatic actions are required that can be realised over a 10 year time scale.

1.3 Approach and Methodology

1.3.1 This study was advanced through a series of stages, each forming an independent unit within the overall body of the project and enabling the logical progression of the study from inception through to completion.

1.3.2 The purpose of the first stage was to gain a thorough understanding of the Shannon waterways systems and their wider zone of influence through desktop research, consultation and both land and water-based field surveys.

1.3.3 The purpose of the second stage was to assimilate the data gathered in Stage 1 with a view to arriving at a fuller understanding of the history, heritage and dynamics that influence the corridor. Building on the research undertaken in the first stage, a corridor was defined and a notional line drawn on a map. This is described in section 3.

1.3.4 Taking the corridor as three distinct units: Lough Ree, the River Shannon and the River Suck the heritage has been assessed and a Statement of Significance drawn. This led to identifying a vision for the Corridor. The final stage involved discussing the vision for the waterway at public consultation events and building up policies and actions that can link in with existing initiatives within the Waterways Corridor, or alternatively that can be taken forward by the appropriate authorities.

1.4 How to use this document

1.4.1 Section One sets out the project brief and the overall approach to this study.

1.4.2 Section Two gives an overview of the Policy and Planning contexts, the latter will be explained in greater detail in the Planning and Socio-economic context report that forms Appendix One of the electronic appendices to the final study document. This section will also set out the approach to consultation and highlight the key issues raised through the consultative process.

1.4.3 The approach to defining the corridor and an illustration of the corridor area is set out in Section Three. This section also provides a descriptive summary of the entire study area from its past to present day. It sets out the key points in relation to built and natural heritage, which are described in greater detail in the respective Appendices - Two-Four.

1.4.4 Section Four sets out a thorough statement of significance for the waterway and discussion of vulnerabilities/threats to that significance.

1.4.5 The final section, sets out a vision for the waterway corridor and how we can achieve the vision for the corridor through pragmatic policies and actions that can be carried forward by the identified authorities/organisations.

SECTION TWO ¹ PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF INLAND WATERWAYS

Heritage is valued by the people of Ireland not only for its intrinsic value but for its economic benefits through tourism; the educational benefits of studying monuments, archives, flora and fauna; and the cultural and recreational benefits of castles, museums, canals and parks. Foreword to the National Heritage Plan

2.1 Policy Context

2.1.1 There are a number of recent policy documents that afford protection to Ireland's inland waterways, these reflect the volume of statutory bodies that have a remit for protection and/or management of the inland waterways.

2.1.2 As some background to the varying statutory bodies with a measure of jurisdiction over the waterway corridor environment, the riverbed and lake up to mean high water mark are vested in the State, and is the responsibility of the Electricity Supply Board (ESB), who have a statutory right to control water levels. Waterways Ireland are the statutory authority for managing and developing the waterway in terms of navigation. The Shannon Fisheries Acts 1935 and 1938 charged ESB with responsibility for managing and preserving the Shannon Fisheries, however they lease these waters to the Central Fisheries Board and it is managed by the Shannon Regional Fisheries Board. The respective County Councils are then responsible for the landward activities through implementation of planning policy and development control.



Lecarrow Canal



St Brendan's Cathedral, Clonfert



Reed bed, Shannon Callows



Clonfert bridge



The Waterfront at Athlone, including Athlone castle



Residential Development, southwest of Athlone lock



Riverfront development and Athlone Town Marina

2.1.3 Waterways Ireland was established in 1999 as the North/South Implementation body responsible for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of approximately 1,000 km of the inland navigable system, including the Shannon navigation. Whilst the organisation has come under several different names and authorities over the past decades, the powers conferred upon them date back to the *Act for the Improvement of the Navigation of the River Shannon, 1839*, which transferred powers to the Shannon Commissioners to ascertain and carry out necessary works for the improvement of the inland navigation. The subsequent sequence of transfer of power has occurred through the Shannon Navigation Act, 1990; Heritage (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order, 1996 (S.I. No. 62 of 1996); Heritage (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order, 1996 (S.I. No. 332 of 1996); Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht (Alteration of Name of Department and Title of Minister) Order, 1997 (S.I. No. 306 of 1997); Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (Powers and Functions) Act, 1998; and the British-Irish Agreement Act, 1999.

2.1.4 The Central Fisheries Board and its seven regional boards were established by the Fisheries Act 1980. The main objectives of the 1980 Act are the more effective conservation, development and management of every aspect of Ireland's inland fishery resource. As stated in paragraph 2.1.2, the ESB have leased the Shannon fisheries to the Central Fisheries Board who in turn have delegated responsibility for management of the resource and promotion of the waterway for angling to the Shannon Regional Fishery Board.

The responsibilities of the Shannon Regional Fishery Board are to protect, develop and research the fishery resource through administering fishery laws, issuing licenses and participating in the development by promoting angling festivals, the provision of fishing stands etc.

2.1.5 The Heritage Service of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government are responsible under both National and European law for the protection, conservation, management and preservation of Ireland's natural and built heritage. They have prepared Plans for heritage and biodiversity. The **National Heritage Plan 2002** recognises that the conservation of heritage is an integral part of the development of the waterways system. The Plan states that the development of a programme for the conservation and enhancement of the inland waterways requires the creation of a record of all its heritage elements, including architecture, wildlife, and underwater and industrial archaeology, to allow a plan for their future management to be put in place. Similarly, an information and education programme for the waterways can only be effectively developed on the basis of a record of its heritage and its historical context. Therefore it is a priority of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government to undertake a full inventory. Whilst this is outside the remit of this study, the consultant team are undertaking a cursory study of these areas and will highlight significant gaps in knowledge.

2.1.6 Ireland's **National Biodiversity Plan 2002** was prepared in response to the obligation contained in Article 6 of the Convention on

Biological Diversity. The objectives of the convention are:

- The conservation of biological diversity;
- The sustainable use of its components; and
- The fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

The plan includes a section devoted to inland waters and wetlands, including peatlands as it recognises that these are important for biological diversity in Ireland. This section refers to the Water Framework Directive which must be transposed into implementation by the end of 2003 and presents a major opportunity for strengthened protection of aquatic ecosystems. Actions include: establishment by Local Authorities of comprehensive projects for river basin management in relation to all inland and coastal waters; producing guidelines for drainage and wetlands; considering initiatives to enhance conservation of freshwater fish species and communities; drafting a strategy for the use of machine cutaway bogs as wetland or woodland habitats.

2.1.7 County Councils are required to have regard to any policy produced by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. In particular the **National Spatial Strategy** is critical to the future growth of the study area. It is a 20-year framework designed to deliver more balanced social, economic and physical development between the regions. The Corridor area falls within two regions – the Western and the Midlands regions. Athlone, together with Tullamore and Mullingar has been identified as a “linked gateway” to promote economic and social development within the Midlands, the idea being

to promote significant growth centred on Athlone and the other two towns over the next 20 years. The NSS also seeks to strengthen rural communities through diversification of the local economy – developing tourism, enterprise and local services. The potential of the waterways for tourism and recreational activity is specifically referred to, citing opportunities to develop tourism possibilities by linking waterways and creating tourism circuits linking urban settlements and waterways in the Midlands.

2.1.8 The study area falls within an area identified for reinforcing strategic spatial roles. Such areas are characterised by medium to small towns and rural areas where residential development should be encouraged to consolidate the towns and villages so as to support economic provision of infrastructure. Wind power is favoured for cutaway bog areas. Water is viewed as a strong environmental component of the area. The NSS states that the recreational and tourism potential of the waterways can support reinforcement of the area and underpin the attractiveness of the Athlone/Tullamore/Mullingar gateway.

2.1.9 In 1999 the Heritage Council published a Policy Paper on the **Future of Ireland’s Inland Waterways**. Consultation for this document highlighted the importance of a strategic plan for the waterways and their corridors, furthermore emphasis was placed on the importance of heritage aspects, both built and natural, of the waterways in light of their role as recreational and tourist amenities. It is these issues in particular that are being addressed by the Waterways Corridor Study of Shannonbridge to Lanesborough and the River Suck navigation to Ballinasloe. The

overall aim of the policy paper is that the inland waterways and their corridors should be developed in an holistic way, conserving where possible their built and archaeological heritage features and

protecting their unique ecological systems, to enhance the enjoyment and appreciation of that heritage now and for future generations. The Policy Paper covers a broad ambit of topic areas from resource management, development control and heritage conservation through to user management and opportunities for development.

2.1.10 If effective, the Waterway Corridor Studies have the potential to give effect to many of the policy areas highlighted in the paper.

2.2 Planning Context

2.2.1 A full outline of all the relevant Planning Policy documents is set out in Appendix 1 to this document.

2.2.2 Under the Planning and Development Act, 2000, local authorities are required to prepare Development Plans for their functional area. Within these, the Act specifies mandatory objectives for inclusion which include conservation and protection of the environment; preservation of the character of the landscape; the preservation, improvement and extension of amenities and recreational amenities; and the integration of the planning and sustainable development of the area with the social, community and cultural requirements of the area and its population. Further to that, local authorities may include objectives for the purpose of preserving any



Fishing stand, Athlone



Boats moored at Galey Bay



Bord na Mona Peat train, Clonfert

existing public rights of way, including along lakeshores and riverbanks.

2.2.3 All of the local authorities within the study area have now prepared new Development Plans under the Act and most of those within the study area have included policies for protecting inland waterways from inappropriate or unsustainable development. It is a policy of the three County Councils around Lough Ree to improve access to the Lough and the River Shannon. Longford include a policy that land adjacent to the river and lakeshore be reserved for public access provision. Roscommon has identified an objective to investigate the feasibility of a shoreline path from Hodson Bay to Athlone.

2.2.4 The three Councils also include policies to restrict development in the vicinity of the inland waterways so as to protect views and the recreational and ecological integrity of the waterway. Longford has identified broad zones, Westmeath has identified areas of high amenity, including Lough Ree, and Roscommon has also identified two areas of high amenity value. Roscommon include a policy to ensure the non-proliferation of private, individual jetties and moorings along the Shannon, requiring that marinas normally be required to locate in, or close to, existing centres.

2.2.5 All three of the County Councils recognise the largely untapped tourism potential of the Lough and its environs and include policies to promote the area through the undertaking of tourism proposals.

2.2.6 The Athlone Town Plan includes a number

of objectives they seek to implement over the lifetime of the Plan (2002-2008) with respect to amenity, open space and recreation. These include improved access to the Shannon at a number of locations. They also seek to facilitate maintenance of the southern section of the canal below Mick McQuaid's bridge as a fishing area and to improve and enhance the canal as a local amenity feature. The River Shannon and Lough Ree are viewed as integral to the promotion of Athlone as a tourist destination.

2.2.7 The three local authorities with jurisdiction over the River Shannon within our study area are Westmeath, Roscommon and Offaly. The aim of Roscommon is to conserve the environment of the Shannon waterway, including the Suck, and further develop it as a tourism resource. The policies and objectives of Roscommon are set out in paragraphs 2.2.3 to 2.2.5 above and in Appendix 1 to this document. Offaly County Council cite the River Shannon and Clonmacnois as areas of high amenity. The River Shannon is recognised as a major tourist and recreational resource so it is the policy of Offaly County Council to protect the landscape including the Callows and to direct development towards the key settlements, in this case Shannonbridge.

2.2.8 In relation to the River Suck, Galway and Roscommon are the lead authorities with Ballinasloe Town Council having a remit for the town and its immediate hinterland. The policies of Roscommon have already been discussed. Galway County's Development Plan includes a specific reference to the Waterways Corridor Study 2002, namely to have due regard to its aims, policies and objectives. Like the other County



Lanesborough, western bank



Athlone's Leftbank



Rindown

Councils, Galway includes policies to protect and conserve the inland waterways from inappropriate development and to provide access to them, particularly through the development of walking and cycling routes.

2.2.9 Ballinasloe Town Plan was made operative this year. The Development Strategy for the town seeks to promote the town's setting along the River Suck and open up opportunities for waterfront development in the backland areas of the town, and to develop a linear park along the banks of the River Suck (to Pollboy Lock). As with the other local authorities, Ballinasloe Town Council sees the value in protecting the natural environment and landscape from inappropriate development. In relation to tourism, it is a specific objective to explore the feasibility of providing a nature walk, amenity, sculpture or tourism trail as a means of promoting tourism in the town, particularly the area along the disused canal and the River Suck.

The policies of the Councils are set out in more detail in Appendix 1.

2.2.10 It is hoped that the aims, policies and actions set out in this study can be adopted by the respective local authorities for inclusion within their plans (by way of variation where necessary). Further, under the NSS, Regional Planning Guidelines will be prepared for each of the eight regions and will in turn shape the Development Plans of the Counties. It is considered that, in some instances, the policies identified within the study may be able to feed into the relevant Regional Planning Guidelines.

2.3 Consultation

2.3.1 Critical to the success of any plan, strategy or report, is support from the wider community. The Steering Group comprises representatives from the Heritage Council, Waterways Ireland, Galway, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon and Westmeath County Councils all of whom have a direct interest in the study area. Regular meetings between the consultant team and the steering group at key stages in the process have ensured that the group are kept informed of the progress of the study and are able to input into it.

2.3.2 The consultant team have been conscious of ensuring key stakeholder involvement throughout the evolution of the study. Meetings have been held with relevant personnel from each of the five County Councils and the two town Councils within the study area (Athlone and Ballinasloe). Meetings have also been held with Ray Dunne and Niall Moore from Waterways Ireland and Colin Becker, Ruth Delany and Dr John Keane from the Heritage Council to gain a more thorough understanding of key issues and projects underway within the study area.

2.3.3 The first stage of the public consultation process entailed identification of key stakeholders. At the inception meeting, the Steering group gave guidance as to some of the individuals who should be contacted. Others were subsequently identified through various publications, websites and discussions with members of the Steering group and other local authority officers.

2.3.4 Initial contact was made in July/August via

a letter, sent to some 130 different national, regional and local organisations and individuals within the study area, setting out a brief introduction to the Study and inviting comments on issues of significance of the corridor area to the group/organisation/individual. Consultees were offered the opportunity of responding by post, telephone or arranging a meeting. Several follow-up phone calls were made to ensure as wide a representation as possible.

2.3.5 During the month of August and into September, 53 responses were obtained by letter, fax, telephone interviews and meetings. Formal written responses are attached as an Appendix.

2.3.6 During November the team hosted four public consultation events in Athlone, Lanesborough, Shannonbridge and Ballinasloe. The event in Lanesborough was co-hosted by Cunnane Stratton Reynolds. Attendance was varied, but overall a good response was received by those attending.

The key issues raised through consultation are set out below. Where practicable, it is intended that these issues be addressed through pragmatic policies and actions that can be taken forward by the relevant party(ies).

Lough Ree – an important resource that suffers from “layers” of authority and subsequent lack of unity. Emerging through consultation and research is the feeling Lough Ree should receive the status of something akin to a National Park, taking in the wetlands and peatlands surrounding it, to conserve it as a national treasure.

Islands in Lough Ree - the islands in Lough Ree are particularly rich in both natural and built heritage and suffer from neglect. These islands could individually benefit from conservation and management plans. Access to the islands was discussed and is considered to be a double-edged sword, although in some locations this is well managed such as Devonish Island in Lough Erne.

Rural development – with the exception of Athlone, overall the study area is predominantly rural in character. However, the level of development, particularly on western shore of Lough Ree and around Athlone, exceeds the capacity of the current infrastructure (in particular wastewater treatment systems) and the landscape to absorb it. There is a need for design guidance for location of dwellings in highly visible and sensitive locations within the waterway corridor.

Consistency in decision making - it was voiced by many consultees that there is a lack of consistency in planning control, particularly amongst the different Councils adjoining Lough Ree

Intensification of farming - this is viewed as problematic on the islands within Lough Ree and within the Callows as byproducts can impact on sensitive ecosystems. At the same time, farming, in particular grazing is essential to maintenance of the Callows habitat.

Increase in waterway traffic – some consultees consider that high boat usage within corridor is having negative impacts on wildlife due to pollution and wash. There was some comment that fast displacement cruisers increase erosion, no proof of this has been brought forward.

Movement of foreign wildlife – zebra mussels have been a threat in recent years due to movement of boats into and out of area.

Conflicts of use – problems with high-speed craft disturbing wildlife habitat. Impacts on angling, sailing and other lower-impact water-based activities, and also on underwater archaeology. It is considered that

a recognised and enforced code of conduct could help, as would enforcement of speed restrictions.

Overall lack of safe public harbours/mooring places on eastern shore of Lough Ree – where would suitable locations be? This corresponds with a perceived lack of public moorings throughout the study area. Some areas that were suggested for possible harbours/public moorings were Portanure within Inny Bay, Killeenmore and Portlick. Lack of facilities for launching small boats along the Suck has also been highlighted.

Future expansion of Barley Harbour – mixed feelings about expansion of harbour. The place is currently well-used in summer as a local amenity area (for swimming and picnics) and by local fishermen for mooring their boats.

Private unlicensed jetties/harbours – current lack of enforcement and no charge for private encroachments. Particularly problematic around Athlone. Proliferation of jetties is causing habitat fragmentation.

Water quality – it must be highlighted that this affects almost all uses of the waterway and is critical to the continued viability of the waterways for angling in particular. Issues include location and operation of pump-out facilities, sewerage systems, drainage from septic tanks etc. These issues must be addressed through the Water Framework Directive.

Building in floodplain – this is particularly problematic around Athlone where pressure for development is greatest.

Public access to the waterways – most of the Development Plans include an objective to create linear paths adjoining the waterways. This is also emerging as an issue through stakeholder consultation. Fragmentation of land ownership presents a barrier to access for walking and picnicking. However it is felt that passive access along the shoreline could help to control development.

View to the lake - it is felt that there are a number of views to Lough Ree that could be further developed (many of these are mentioned in the Westmeath County Development Plan), in particular it was felt that there should be an effort to create scenic viewing areas, with safe vehicle access and egress, at Kiltoom and Pigeons.

Re-use of old canals - whilst unlikely to be re-used for navigation, the old canals in Athlone and, in the future, Ballinasloe offer opportunities for a multitude of recreational activities including Greenways (joint walking and cycling routes) and self-guided nature and history walks and are also important wildlife corridors.

Access from water - specific issues have been raised about creating access to Glasson and Clonfert. Both would benefit from traffic from the water, through appropriately located mooring facilities and well-signed paths.

Access to and presentation of historical sites – many consultees expressed interest in guided, interpretative tours to historic sites within the Waterways Corridor area. Many sites are poorly presented and would benefit from conservation and management regimes.

Rindoon - the management plan as prepared by the Heritage Council should be updated and the state should be encouraged to investigate taking the monuments into public care.

Visitor interpretation – there is a lack of co-ordinated visitor information available at landing spots along the waterways about both features of interest and local facilities. Harbours, locks and weirs provide the ideal opportunity for local information such as that posted at Barley Harbour and to a lesser extent at Ballinasloe, that could encourage people to explore the area in greater depth.

Tourism/recreational centres – the waterways bring many visitors to the area, however this could be better organised by linking activities to public harbour locations. Hodson Bay is one example of an existing centre that is currently well-used. This is likely to be further exploited with the proposed (albeit contentious) Aquatic Centre.

Heritage education – building on the successful work of locally based education programmes such as the Lough Ree Summer and Winter Schools.

Rehabilitation of cutaway bogs – there is a need to address the future of the peatlands surrounding the waterways, particularly the Suck, in advance of Bord na Mona completing peat extraction at these locations.

Extension of bog rail – residents within County Galway would like to see the bog rail tour extended to take in Clonfert and the surrounding countryside.

Underwater archaeology – potential for sites around Clonmacnois, Rindown, Lanesborough and Athlone and also along the River Suck. It needs to be recognised that the archaeology of lakes and rivers is generally poorly recorded and will require further investigation (in the form of archaeological survey work).

SECTION THREE ¹ DEFINING THE WATERWAY CORRIDOR

One fifth of the land area of Ireland drains inward through various lakes, small streams and rivers, reaching the system known as the Shannon.

3.1 Approach

3.1.1 The approach and methodology adopted for the corridor definition was based on that developed by Cunnane Stratton Reynolds in the Pilot Study. The rivers and the lough are natural features of the landscape, therefore defining the corridor requires a combination of disciplines – taking into consideration landscape character, built and natural heritage and patterns of ownership and settlement.

3.1.2 The waterway corridor is not defined as a set distance on either side of the waterway, but as the area, which impacts on, or is impacted on by, the waterway. In the case of the river this incorporates the permanent natural and constructed channel and the floodplain or callows and any built infrastructure within these components, e.g. locks, bridges, power lines, fortifications, jetties and land-based facilities.

3.1.3 Each of the specialist teams have looked at the corridor in terms of different aspects; e.g. from an ecological perspective the corridor extends as far as the relevant designated area; the landscape assessment looks for distinctive features for a boundary; from a planning perspective, major settlements (towns and villages) that may impact upon or be impacted by their proximity to the waterway are taken in their entirety; in terms of



Hodson Bay



Entry to the Shannon, Athlone



Shannon from Clonmacnois



Ruins of Rindown



River Inny, end of navigation



Boating at Shannonbridge



Infill of old Athlone Canal

archaeology a broad distance of 500m from mean high water has been taken; in terms of industrial archaeology the entire area has been surveyed for features of note, taking in a broader area than the 500m used for archaeology; and built heritage looks at the major influences that have shaped the character and morphology of the key settlements within the study area.

3.1.4 Desktop study of the relevant maps of the area combined with visual survey and analysis study have been used to gain an understanding of the landscape and visual aspects and then used to define the boundary of the area of influence. For the purposes of this study, in general, the outer boundary of the rivers' and lough's area of influence is drawn along the crest of the nearest raised topographical feature. However, because the land is so low-lying, in some instances where there are distinctive ecological, archaeological or architectural features, or villages within the vicinity, these are taken in their entirety and included within the zone of influence of the corridor, which may extend beyond the defined boundary of the corridor.

3.1.5 On two separate days in August, the consultant team undertook a reconnaissance survey of the corridor from the water courtesy of Waveline Cruisers and Quigley's marina at Killinure Point in August 2003. Ordnance Survey Ireland Maps at 1:50,000 (nos 40, 41 and 47) were used as reference and for annotation. A video and photographic survey of the study area were carried out, providing valuable reference at a later stage.

3.1.6 Further survey work was carried out by foot of much of the study area, in particular the old Ballinasloe canal, the Suck from Ballinasloe to Pollboy Lock, the towns and villages within the study area, the end of the navigation on the River Inny, the inner lakes and Barley Harbour and its environs.

3.1.7 Where possible terrain surrounding the waterways has also been surveyed by foot. Due to limited access to large portions of the waterway, much of the land adjoining the rivers and the lough could not be surveyed. However, particular attention was paid to the line of the old canals in Athlone and East Galway, and to the public access points throughout the entire corridor, including all the major settlements.

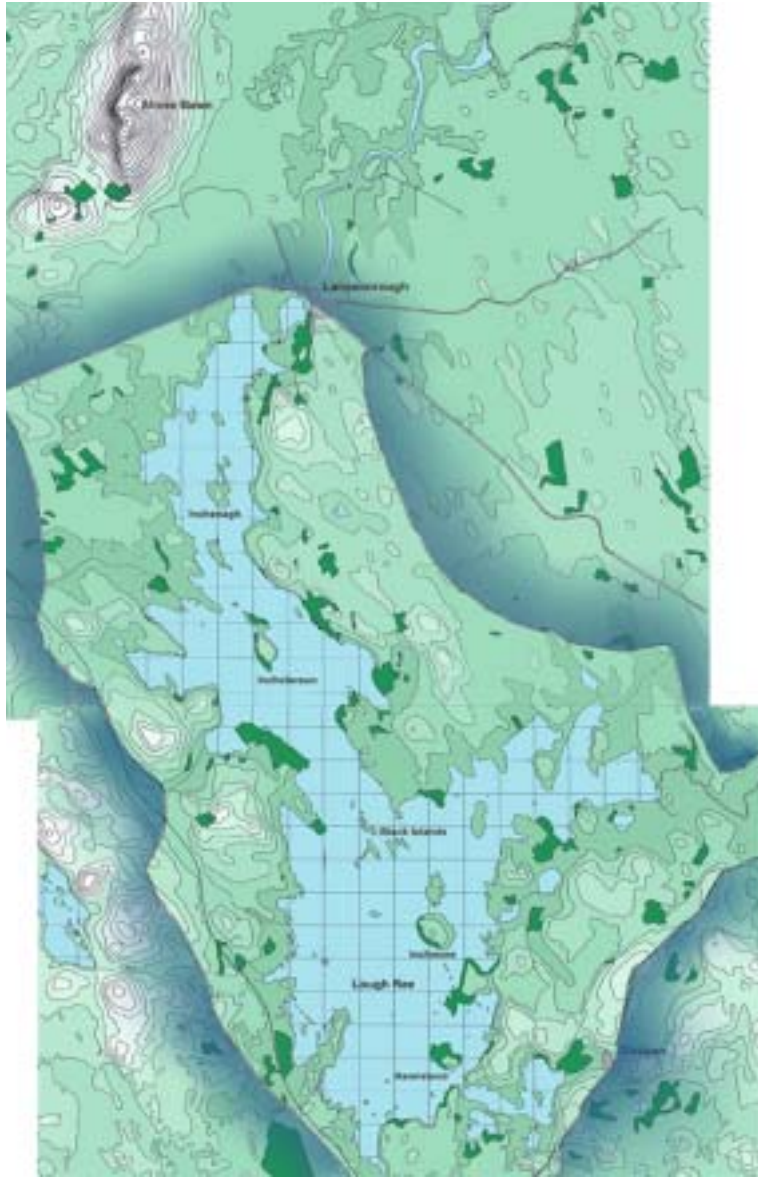
3.1.8 For the purposes of this study the waterways have been divided into three manageable sections - the lough, the river and the Suck:

- Lough Ree, from Lanesborough to Athlone;
- the River Shannon, from Athlone to Shannonbridge.
- the River Suck, from Ballinasloe to its confluence with the Shannon including the former Grand canal to the south

3.1.9 The following section describes, illustrates and assesses the extent of the corridor area with respect to landscape, socio-economic factors, built and natural heritage.

A3 Map of Lough Ree to be inserted





Lough Ree - topography and extent of corridor

3.2 Lough Ree

Environmental setting

3.2.1 The name 'Lough Ree' has been interpreted as meaning 'Lake of the Kings', however to whom the name refers is not known. Despite this it has early origins as the lake was marked Lough 'Ribh' in Ptolemy's second century map of Ireland. Harman Murtagh (pers. comm.) suggests that it probably means lake of the great plain [of water] rather than the former interpretation.

3.2.2 Lough Ree (Loch Ribh) is located in the midlands of Ireland bordered by Counties Roscommon, Longford and Westmeath. It is the second largest of the Shannon lakes with a surface area of around 106 square kilometres. It is approximately 26km long and varies in width between 1.5km at the narrowest point up to 10km at its widest. The bulk of the lough is approximately 5km wide. Indeed its scale and importance is of national significance as it is one of the largest inland water bodies within Ireland. The lake and its surrounding landscape is the result of glacial processes. For its large size Lough Ree is quite shallow being a maximum of 36m deep at its southern end, and as shallow as 2m in some points within the northern portion.

3.2.3 The character and visual value of the lake's amenity is considerably embellished and enhanced by the 52 islands contained within the water body. These islands vary in size from large Islands such as Inchcleraun, Inchmore and Hare Island to smaller islands along the shoreline or groups of small islands such as the Black Islands, which are located more or less centrally in the

lough. The islands are generally well covered by trees and woodland and have a long history of habitation evidenced by the archaeological remains dating to the Early Christian period.

3.2.4 The physical extent of the corridor (as depicted on the illustration to the left) was defined by the study team starting from where the N6 in Athlone joins the N61 and following that route along the western shore of the lough to just north of Knockcroghery, from the townlands of Noewtown the line then heads almost due north following a local road until it meets with the N63 at Emmoo and then it follows that route east to Ballyleague/Lanesborough. The route continues along the N63 then takes the R392 for approximately 2km before heading south along a local road at Tullyarane to incorporate the Commons and Newtowncashel. The line continues along this local road to Ledwithstown and then follows the local road south, crossing the River Inny at Shrule and continuing south to its junction with the N55. The line then follows the N55 through Glassan and Ballykeeran onto Athlone.

Landscape and Visual Corridor

Lanesborough to Ballyclare Islands

3.2.5 Lanesborough is a small town that flanks the river at the head of Lough Ree. The town is strung out east to west along the N63 for a kilometre or so on either side of the river. The road is carried over the river by the low stone arched bridge. A limestone quayside extends along the western side of the river on both sides of the bridge.



Lanesborough



Cashel



Portrunny

3.2.6 The town is visually and physically dominated by the large ESB power station. Mature trees along the eastern riverside partially screen the complex, however, the large buildings and three tall chimneystacks are visually dominant in the landscape for many miles around.

3.2.7 To the south of the town an oval shaped water body approximately half a kilometre in width forms the head of the lake. The waterway narrows around the Ballyclare Island before emerging out into the main body of Lough Ree.

3.2.8 This area and the island are distinctive due to the extensive reed beds which characterise the wetlands. On the eastern side a large area of mixed woodland known as Commons Wood forms an impressive natural backdrop to the wetlands.

Ballyclare Islands to Clawinch

3.2.9 From the northern end of Lough Ree the most dominant topographical feature in the landscape is the distant forested hill, Slieve Bawn to the north. The hill is the highest in the area rising to an elevation of 262m, at a distance of some 6km from the lough. To the south and west of Slieve Bawn another hill at Kilmacuagh (140m) is visible from the lake.

3.2.10 The western shoreline towards the south is characterized by flat terrain that extends to the west for some distance. Indeed the land only starts to rise up again significantly at a distance of over 10km from the water to the west. Views to the west are in places filtered between the islands but in general they are open and panoramic views over a flat and featureless

landscape. Small settlements close to the water such as Gardentown can be seen.

3.2.11 The Clooneigh River emerges into the lake from the west. The eastern shoreline in this area is, by contrast, more dramatic. From the northern end the landscape is characterised by a series of hills that rise up to 60 to 80m. The level of the water in the lake is just below 40m above sea level. The hills and ridges are close to the shoreline presenting an interesting and immediate visual horizon characterised by woodland or distinct field patterns mainly given over to pasture. The occasional farmhouse or large country house can be seen on the hillsides. This part of the lake contains several islands including the wooded Ferrinch Island, Inchenagh and Clawinch.

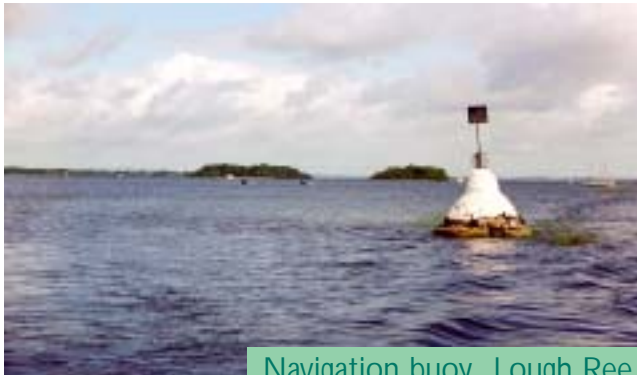
Portrunny, Inchcleraun Island to Elfeet Bay

3.2.12 The next character area to the south again includes both sides of the lake. As before along the western shore the land is relatively flat; a small hill rises up to 79m at Toberreeoge. The shoreline forms two distinct bays: Portrunny Bay and Galey Bay. The Hind River, an important area for wildfowl, flows into Portrunny Bay from the west.

3.2.13 Throughout this stretch of low-lying topography there is little immediate visual containment and distant views are afforded to the west. In the middle of the lake is one of the largest islands, Inchcleraun. This island is partially wooded and contains some monastic and church remains. The eastern shore is heavily wooded on the slopes around Elfeet Bay; Culinagore Wood borders the lakeshore in the bay.



Hare Island, Lough Ree



Navigation buoy, Lough Ree



Hodson Bay, Lough Ree

St John's Bay to Lismagawley Meadow

3.2.14 The shoreline further south is characterised by a series of bays such as Blackbrink Bay (incorporating the Lecarrow canal) and St John's Bay. Here the topography changes, a series of low hills and ridges combine with areas of woodland to bring the visual horizon from the water much closer to the shoreline. St John's Wood is both visually and ecologically of extremely high value. The land extends towards Warren Point in long peninsula that contains some important ruins including Rindoon Castle.

3.2.15 On the eastern side a large promontory around Lismagawley meadow extends from the east restricting the width of the lake to its narrowest point less than 1.5km. The shoreline is indented with many little coves and trees growing along the lakeside obscure distant views. In the lake off Pollagh point lie the Black Islands, a group of eight or so small low islands.

Owenacharra River, Saints Island to Inchbofin

3.2.16 This part of Lough Ree extends off to the east in what could be termed a large bay with Saints Island and Inchbofin in its centre. Saints Island is an island connected by a causeway that extends approximately 2km into the lake from the north.

3.2.17 The Owenacharra and Bilberry Rivers feed into the lake from the east. This is the Inny entering the lake, which is the largest tributary draining lands into the lake from as far north as the Westmeath /Cavan border. This area is relatively flat although the land does climb gently to the south.

Carrownure Bay to Bally Bay

3.2.18 On the west side of the lake this area extends from Carrownure Bay past Kilmore Bay, and Carnagh Bay to Bally Bay. The landform is undulating with significant distant hills to the west. The immediate horizon is created by low hills such as Knockskehan Hill (95m), which rises up immediately behind Carrownure Bay. Trees line much of the shoreline creating visual interest in the middle distance.

Inchmore to Hare Island

3.2.19 Inchturk and Inchmore are two islands to the north of the headland at Whinning. The northern side of the headland encloses Portlick Bay. The shoreline is roughly indented along this stretch with a backdrop of wooded hills.

3.2.20 Hare Island is a large and verdant island situated close to the entrance to Killinure Lough. To the north there is a wooded headland (Whinning) with scattered small islands around the shoreline. The headland forms Rinardoo Bay on its southern side. The woods and the relatively steeply rising land enclose the lake visually.

The Inner Lakes

3.2.21 Killinure Lough is a smaller water body connected to Lough Ree through a narrow strait that flows between Killinure and Coosan Points. To the south two smaller lakes, Coosan Lough and Ballykeeran Bay (Ballaghkeeran Bay or Bealach Caorthainn) are connected to Killinure Lough by narrow waterways approximately two hundred metres long. Killinure Lough itself forms a rough 'L' shape bending around Garnagh Island. Temple Island is situated in the middle of the larger



Ballyleague showing new marina development



ESB power station, Lanesborough



Lanesborough bridge & road to hot water stretch

eastern section of the lake. The village of Glassan is approximately 1.5km to the east of Wineport.

3.2.22 Hills and wooded areas surround most of the lake to the north, east and south. The land around Coosan Lough to the southwest is by comparison relatively flat. The enclosed nature of the lake, the narrow entrance combined with the wooded areas and the landform have created a sheltered area that is a location for marinas, moorings and general boating facilities. The hill, Ballaghkeeran Big, provides a vantage point on the N55 looking to the west. This stopping place offers an excellent panoramic view over this collection of water bodies and Lough Ree beyond. It is also important to note the influence of Lough Funshinagh, a turlough lake connected to Lough Ree which is characteristic of the limestone pavement rock which comprises the western shore of the lake

Hodson Bay to N6 road bridge

3.2.23 This area is the southern most part of Lough Ree. The water area narrows dramatically and is funnelled back into the river corridor as the Shannon flows southwards. The area extends on the western side of the lough down the peninsular that ends at Yew Point southwards to Hodson Bay and down river towards Athlone. On the eastern side this area extends from Hare Island past the tiny Green Island and around the headland at Meehan with the Lough Ree Yacht Club and prominent stone cross on Ballyglass Hill behind. At the southern end of Lough Ree a few small islands mark the re-emergence of the river and the approach to Athlone. The position of the town to the south is marked by the large water tower.

Socio-economic Corridor

Lanesborough/Ballyleague

3.2.24 Although split into two administrative areas, Lanesborough/Ballyleague essentially functions as one settlement. It is intricately linked to the river in proximity, settlement form, employment and land uses. *Béal Átha Liag*, the Irish name for both Lanesborough and Ballyleague, means Ford of the Flagstones, as it was the first crossing of the Shannon north of Athlone leading to settlement in the area. Next to Athlone this is the largest settlement on Lough Ree. The population of Lanesborough/ Ballyleague declined from 984 in 1996 to 943 in 2002, a decrease of 4.2%. This may be due in part to a downscaling in the operations of both the ESB and Bord na Mona, the two major employers in the area.

3.2.25 Within the Longford County Development Plan, Lanesborough is identified as a local growth centre. Both the Longford and Roscommon County Development Plans recognise the tourism and amenity development potential of the area and seek to enhance this.

3.2.26 Development potential on the eastern bank, within Lanesborough, is constrained by its road network and parking is a problem. The Council are hoping to open up backland development to provide for parking. Around Lanesboro, there have been a number of applications for small-scale holiday chalets geared towards fishing enthusiasts. The Lough Ree Arms is seeking to expand. The majority of the applications are on the eastern side of the road – i.e. away from the lake. More recently there has been an increase in applications for housing along

the Rathcline Road, resulting in ribbon development. The County Development Plan identifies a development envelope around Lanesborough in an effort to restrain this.

3.2.27 The new powerstation is currently being completed and will come into operation in 2005, served by the extensive peatlands to the north and east of the settlement. The powerstation has a 15-year permission after which time it will be decommissioned and removed.

3.2.28 In contrast, on the western bank at Ballyleague almost all the land (at the time of writing) between the road and lake, outside the land designated SAC, has been granted permission for development for hotels, over 50 apartments, 24 new houses, a new GAA clubhouse, a private marina and a Waterways Ireland 32 berth harbour. The latter are both currently under construction and will enable a greater number of vessels to moor adjacent to the town, which should have positive spin-offs for the local economy. The villagescape, on both sides of the bridge, but particularly the eastern side, is in need of regeneration and could benefit from more focus on the water.

3.2.29 Lanesborough is renowned for its excellent fishing. The 'Hot Water Stretch' adjacent to the peat fuelled power station (resulting from the coolant used by the power station) attracts fishermen from all over Europe. The riverbank has been completely revamped and now has 60 stands at the bridge, with 4 wheelchair-friendly stands. The town is also home to the Lough Ree rowing club and the Lough Ree sub-aqua club.

3.2.30 The Lough Ree Development Co-operative run a successful summer and winter environmental school from their base in Lanesborough, attracting visitors from far afield. Other festivals co-ordinated by the Development Co-operative are the Bord na Mona Water Festival and the ESB Angling Festival. Both the Development Co-operative, and the Lanesborough Tourism Co-operative (who were responsible for lighting of the bridge) have been active in improving facilities locally. However, they consider that Lanesborough is still lacking in facilities to attract visitors to stay including accommodation, catering and activities. The Lough Ree Development Association Area Action Plan introduces the concept of a water activity centre at Lanesborough / Ballyleague, with training in water sports such as canoeing, sailing and windsurfing (this was subsequently referred to in the Midlands-East Regional Tourism Plan (2000-2006).

Newtowncashel & Barley Harbour, Co Longford

3.2.31 Although physically separated from the water, Newtowncashel (population 259) has strong associations with the Lough. The village is closely linked with both Barley Harbour and Elfeet Bay on the eastern shores of Lough Ree. Due to its isolation, Newtowncashel has remained fairly small. With its recent success in the Tidy Towns competition, there have been some enquiries about development opportunities. There is also some pressure for development within the Elfeet townland and around Barley Harbour, particularly for holiday homes. Generally the Council have been refusing these applications on grounds of high amenity, or inability to prove occupancy. Limited planning permission has been granted to the children of local rural people, many

of which have not been constructed. Longford County Council have designated the village a local service centre and intend to prepare a Village Policy Statement for it to direct development.

3.2.32 There are some access points to Lough Ree in County Longford, the Council owns land at Bleanavoher and Drumnee (between Portanure and Saints Island); Cullentragh and Cashel are commonage open to the public; and Barley Harbour is one of the access points on privately-owned land that local people regularly frequent. Barley Harbour is particularly well-used by local people as a local amenity; it is used by fishermen year round as a mooring point for their dinghys and by recreational swimmers and picnickers in the summer months.

Villages in County Roscommon

3.2.33 From the water, County Roscommon contains the most visible development. There are a variety of reasons why this may be the case, including a more relaxed attitude to development control and shelter from prevailing winds. Outside of Athlone environs (including Kiltoom and Hodson Bay) and Ballyleague, development is predominantly single rural houses, however there are three settlements of substantial size and proximity to the Lough that are currently under pressure for development.

3.2.34 Knockcroghery is located halfway between Ballyleague and Athlone and 1.5 km from Galey Bay. There is considerable pressure for development within Knockcroghery Village due to its proximity to the Lough. There are currently 3 major applications for a total of 125 houses, which, given that the population of the village and its



Castle ruin at Galey Bay



ducks at Lecarrow harbour



houses at Portrunny

surrounding environment (including Galey Bay) is around 600, will have a major impact on the size and structure of the village. At Galey Bay, there is a caravan park, however development has been largely restricted to single rural houses.

3.2.35 Lecarrow currently contains scattered settlement around a pub and a few shops located off the N61. It is located at the base of the Lecarrow canal, which forms part of the navigation channel, and possesses a fine public harbour. Due to its proximity to Athlone and the N61, Lecarrow, has been targeted by developers and auctioneers as a future 'growth point' for upmarket housing and associated facilities over recent years. The Planning Authority is mindful of the fact that ribbon-style development has occurred along the local roads leading to the village, furthermore development has been restricted due to insufficient infrastructure. The Water Services Section of the council have prioritised their projects to include a water-borne sewerage scheme for Lecarrow, which should be implemented during 2004. The opening of such a scheme is likely to increase development pressure.

3.2.36 The harbour at Lecarrow is well-maintained and provides a focal point for the local community, however there were apparently problems with aquatic weed preventing safe access to the village from Lough Ree over the past year. Waterways Ireland together with the Central Fisheries Board are trying to find a solution. Rindown peninsula and St John's Wood, which form an area of high scenic quality, are located on the headland within close proximity to the settlement.

3.2.37 Roscommon County Council is currently promoting Portrunny as an appropriate location for rural tourism based on its scenic location and associated rural activities. The Council have newly invested in upgrading the public amenity area next the harbour, which includes a children's play area and picnic tables. In October of this year, Waterways Ireland submitted an application to extend the existing harbour at Portrunny to provide 24 additional berthing spaces, upgrade the existing breakwater and provide parking and sewage pump-out facilities. The harbour development has encouraged interested developers; consequently an application was lodged for a 2-storey 34 unit Apartment/Hotel together with a bar and restaurant and an on-site waste water treatment plant. This application is currently under consideration, requiring further information, and thus had not been approved at the time of writing. It is located adjacent to the harbour of Portrunny. Approval of this application would be likely to encourage other applications.

3.2.38 Hodson Bay, on the outskirts of Athlone, is being promoted within Roscommon as a tourism centre. Within the Lough Ree environs, it is the most well used amenity area at any time of the year, providing access to the Lough, a beach, picnic area, a harbour for many water-based activities and a hotel and golf course. The 1972 Hodson Bay Study estimated that 1,000 people would spend a typical Sunday afternoon at the Bay, many just parking and enjoying the location by the water. No current estimates have been made, but it is likely that this figure is at least that, if not higher now particularly due to the land Roscommon County Council purchased for public amenity and the construction of the harbour by



Glassan, Village of Roses



Main St, Glassan



Portlick

the OPW (now Waterways Ireland) in the 1980s.

3.2.39 At present Roscommon County Council is involved in a PPP venture for development of an Aquatic Centre and a separate Boat Training School on Council owned land adjacent to the Hodson Bay Hotel. In June 2003, the Council resolved to proceed with the Aquatic Centre and prepare an EIS for the training school. However, funding has been approved for the Training School but not for the Aquatic Centre. The County Council view the Aquatic Centre as a flagship tourism project for Roscommon. There was some local opposition to the project, in particular to its location, as this is viewed as an important amenity area for local people and visitors alike. The Athlone Environs Development Plan 2002-2008, includes an objective to formalise a Lough Ree shoreline path from Hodson Bay to Athlone, however this could be problematic as much of the land adjacent to the shore has been privately developed for high quality housing.

Villages in County Westmeath

3.2.40 Due to limited viable land for future development within the town boundary, the growth of Athlone is impacting on its hinterland, with increasing pressure for development on outlying villages in County Westmeath: Coosan, Ballykeeran and Glassan (also Glasson and *Glasán*), all located on the Inner lakes. At present Westmeath County Council is managing to contain growth within these areas.

3.2.41 Of the three villages, Glassan is the most substantial. Situated 8km north of Athlone, within 20 minutes walk from Killinure Lough, Glassan

“Village of the Roses” is a thriving community with an attractive natural and built environment. The village benefits from its location and setting by the lake. It has a growing population (816 in 2002, an increase of over 9%) with a thriving tourism sector and hosts a number of festivals as well as offering a base for range of land and water-based activities. There is considerable local interest at Glassan to provide a navigable channel from Wineport to Glassan and provide a harbour with berthing facilities to attract more tourism to the village. The Glassan Development Committee have put together a proposal for the harbour, which would require substantial dredging of the Bunown River running through the village. This has raised the concern of the DoEHLG in relation to ecology. This channel is included within Waterways Ireland's programme of works and has received considerable support from the community and local organisations, however, the Heritage Council would oppose such a development on environmental grounds.

3.2.42 Two recent applications in Glassan for developments of over 10 houses were refused on grounds of premature urban-generated rural development. Any new development has been confined to single rural housing, resulting in ribbon development along the length of the road between Ballykeeran and Glassan. A residential development scheme was submitted on the banks of Lough Ree at Ballykeeran. However, due to concern at the impact on the local amenity area, this was never developed. However, both Ballykeeran and Glassan area to be linked to the Athlone sewerage system which could open the way to development if not carefully monitored.

3.2.43 There are a few access locations to the inner lakes, in particular Killinure Lough, where there are three marinas and Wineport Lodge. Furthermore Westmeath County Council own two fine public amenity areas at Portlick and Coosan. At Portlick, the Council developed the Millennium forest in conjunction with Coillte and have an objective within the Development Plan to improve lakeshore amenity. In Coosan, the Council is currently undertaking land-based works to improve access to the point including reconstruction of the existing collapsed pier, providing new and extended boat slip for small craft, extending the existing bathing area, further developing the picnic area, extending the car parking and landscaping the area to create an attractive local amenity on Lough Ree within the Athlone environs.

Cultural and Historic Corridor

Settlement patterns

3.2.44 Along the banks of the Shannon and Lough Ree between Lanesborough and Athlone, 132 monuments of archaeological significance have been identified from the Recorded Monuments and Places (RMP) records. The lands surrounding Lough Ree account for a large ground area of well-drained fertile soils. As such the terrain was exploited in Early Christian times up until the present day. Few prehistoric settlements have come to light on Shannon's shores, probably due to the periodic flooding of the area, which would have prevented permanent occupation. However, many bronze implements and weapons have been found. It is thought that the river and its lakes were venerated by prehistoric peoples and that they deposited valuable possessions as gifts to the gods.

3.2.45 The vernacular settlement patterns of the Early Medieval period (400-1169 AD) in this region are very extensive. This is represented by 19 recorded ringforts and twenty recorded enclosures. Many of these sites are grouped together in certain areas surrounding Lough Ree. On the peninsula located between Galey Bay and Blackbrink Bay in and surrounding the townland of Mountplunkett Co. Roscommon, there is a distinct grouping of at least four ringforts an enclosure and a hut site. They are located in an upland, well-drained area, rising from the western shores of Lough Ree. Similarly there is a large Early Medieval settlement pattern in the area of and surrounding the townlands of Rathcline, Formoyle and Cullenragh, Co. Longford. This is an area located about 2km south of Lanesborough, extending along the eastern shores of Lough Ree as far south as Elfeet Bay. Indeed, this entire area of rising ground, delimited by the shoreline of Lough Ree on the west (Lanesborough through to Coosan Point) and the R392 roadway on the east has extensive evidence of Early Medieval domestic settlement in the form of ringforts and enclosures. Several other Early Medieval remains have been revealed from this region between Athlone town and Lanesborough including crannogs and ecclesiastical remains. There are the early Christian remains of a monastic site on Inchbofin Island in Lough Ree, as such the recorded evidence of Early Medieval activity is abundant in the lands immediately surrounding Lough Ree.

3.2.46 The same can be said of the Late Medieval Period (1169-1600AD). There are four main areas identified as having been extensively inhabited during later medieval times. The deserted medieval settlement at **Rindown** is located on the Warren

peninsula, which is bounded by Carrownure Bay to the southwest and St John's Bay to the northeast, on the western shores of Lough Ree. This settlement consists of a wide range of archaeological monuments, the composite elements of which once created an Anglo-Norman town, defended from landward attack by a town wall and located on a key ferry point on a potentially important trading route along the River Shannon and Lough Ree.

3.2.47 The islands of Lough Ree were favoured by early hermits as places of retreat, many of these were later to become the focus of monastic communities. The Island of Inchbofin has evidence of a monastic settlement and the island of **Inchleraun** located in the central waters of Lough Ree itself, is an important monastic site with many ecclesiastical buildings dating from the early Christian period to the sixteenth century. This was a multi-period, relatively isolated site devoted to monastic activities until early post-medieval times. **Saints Island** in Lough Ree was also a centre of ecclesiastical affairs. This is represented by a collection of monuments that are still extant on the island. There are also the remains of a hall house (a type of medieval castle structure) on Saints Island. The island of **Inchmore** in Lough Ree was also inhabited for ecclesiastical means. Also, on Nun's Island there are the relict remains of a nunnery (which may have links to the nunnery at Bethlehem).

3.2.48 Apart from ecclesiastical activity in this area of Lough Ree, the mainland also saw some vernacular settlement in Corrool, Ballynacliffy, Muckenagh and Portlick, the latter of which contains the remains of a late medieval tower



Saint's Island Priory



Church and graveyard, Cashel



The Clogás, Inchcleraun

house built by the Dillons, this was subsequently added to over the centuries and is still in use to this day. Whilst any areas further inland than 500m from the Lough Ree shoreline were not examined for this study, it is interesting that another collection of ringforts and enclosures exist on the rising ground immediately east/southeast of the castle at Ballynacliffy.

3.2.49 There are several Late Medieval recorded structures in Lanesborough that indicate the functionality of the town in terms of defence mechanisms and religious practice. The history of the town is described in paragraphs 3.2.55 - 3.2.56. Rathcline castle is located on the eastern shores of Lough Ree, adjacent to the bridge and harbour at Lanesborough. This late medieval castle is partly contained by and partly forming a large rectangular enclosure and was built by the Quinn family. It was enlarged and provided with a fortified yard in the early seventeenth century but attacked by Cromwellian forces. However, it was restored by Sir George Lane, patron of Lanesborough c. 1666, but was destroyed again during the Williamite wars. Today, very little remains of the castle, which is in a largely ruinous condition. Only a long eastern wall and a short northern wall survive, with perimeter walls to the south and west.

3.2.50 The Post Medieval Period (1600 - present) is mainly represented by monuments (including some of the great fortified houses) constructed in the vicinity of towns, in this corridor the town of Lanesborough. In the townland of Formoyle, the continuity of settlement in this important area of land which guards the northern limits of Lough Ree as it narrows in its approach to the town of

Lanesborough is displayed by the presence of monuments such as Fermoy House, a fortified dwelling with associated ringworks, which has since been demolished. It was built in the middle of the seventeenth century by the Newcomen family, who were Cromwellian settlers.

3.2.51 Similarly within the townland of Portanure, a post-medieval castle and pigeon house are located and in Creaghduff the site of a castle (now occupied by Killinure House near Killinure Point) is recorded. Ecclesiastical practices in post-medieval times are represented in the form of monuments such as a church and earthwork on the shores of Killinure Lough and a nunnery at Bethlehem said to have been plundered by English soldiers in the seventeenth century.

3.2.52 The prosperity of the 18th and 19th centuries bore the development of country houses. One such example is Waterstown estate in Glassan, constructed in the 1740s, which once included a seven-bay house, extensive gardens, a grotto and pigeon house.

Underwater Archaeology

3.2.53 It is obvious that there was a Viking presence on the river Shannon and Lough Ree. Monastic settlements were regularly attacked and plundered; a Viking hoard was found on Hare Island (just 4.5km north of Athlone). Hence the potential to find a possible Viking boat should not be ruled out. Underwater archaeology associated with the Norman settlement at Rindown was discovered through an underwater survey of Safe Harbour conducted in 1997. This includes evidence of dredging of two channels into the harbour, a stone slipway, the remains of a wet docking area, the

foundations of a stone quay and a series of stone jetties with a wet docking channel between each.

3.2.54 It is likely that further underwater archaeology could be uncovered at major fording points of the Shannon such as Lanesborough.

History of settlement at Lanesborough

3.2.55 Lanesborough, itself a zone of archaeological potential, occupies the site of the medieval borough of Áth Liag, ‘the ford of stone’, and successive bridges were built there connecting Midhe and Connaught. The importance of the river and lough in Early Christian times is attested by the ecclesiastical foundations on Lough Ree’s northern islands, giving further significance to the ford at Lanesborough. Frequent Viking raids from the 9th to the 11th centuries brought about the first recorded bridge here in 1000. Turlough O’Connor, High King of Ireland, was responsible for the erection of the second bridge at Lanesborough in 1140 AD as he wanted to facilitate the movement of his forces from west to east.

3.2.56 The Anglo-Normans quickly realised the strategic importance of Lanesborough and it was subsequently occupied throughout the thirteenth century by the de Lacys, de Mariscos and de Verduns. During later medieval times, Athlone became a more important centre of trade, communication and defence and as such little is known of Lanesborough until the late seventeenth century when it was granted at the Restoration to Sir George Lane. The town name was derived from Sir Lane, whose lands in Ballyleague and other nearby areas in county Longford were erected into the manor of Lanesborough by charter of Charles II. Lane was responsible for much of the

development of the village including a bridge connecting counties Longford and Roscommon, erected in 1667 (rebuilt in 1706).

3.2.57 Other buildings of cultural significance include St John, Rathcline parish church, and Blessed Lady of the Rosary church, Lanesborough parish. Rathcline parish church was built 1856-61 by Joseph Welland. Unfortunately the building’s splendour is eradicated by a great power station located behind it. Lanesborough parish church was built in 1859. It is a mid-Victorian hall and tower church, which has been reworked in the early twentieth century.

Industrial Heritage - the Shannon Navigation

3.2.58 In the 1750s, Thomas Omer was commissioned to improve the navigability of the River Shannon. Work started at Meelick 1755, working upstream to Lanesborough. By 1759 locks had been constructed at Shannonbridge and Lanesborough and a 2.5km canal excavated around Athlone in order to bypass the shallows at the old town bridge; the canal incorporated a full and half loch. Following the Shannon Navigation Act, in 1839, the Shannon Commissioners embarked on an ambitious scheme to upgrade the navigation so that it could be used by steam boats. The locks at Shannonbridge and Lanesborough were subsequently removed and the old bridges at Athlone and Lanesborough replaced.

3.2.59 The 1.5km canal linking Lecarrow with Lough Ree was constructed in the 1840s for the transportation of stone from a nearby quarry to Athlone for use in the new bridge, weir, lock and quay. It eventually fell into disuse, but was

dredged in the 1960s by the OPW and now forms part of the Shannon navigation.

3.2.60 Although both the navigation and canal were refurbished by the OPW in the 1960s, they are essentially the same waterways as those developed by the Shannon Commissioners some 120 years previously. The most significant heritage features are the navigation channel, quays and harbour at Lanesborough, all of which were built by the Shannon Commissioners in the 1840s.

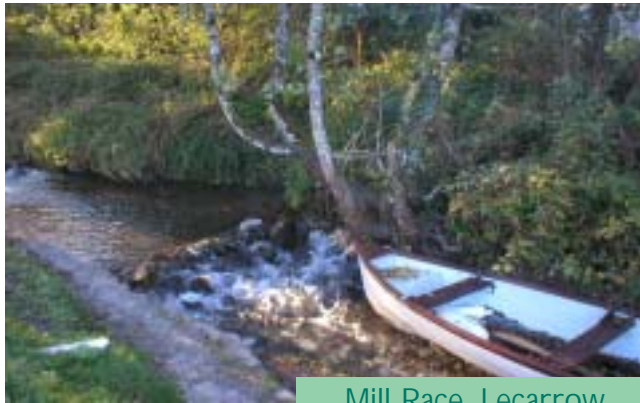
Road and Rail

3.2.61 Four road bridges and a railway station are located within the Lough Ree corridor. The most prominent bridge, and the only one of heritage merit, is that at Lanesborough, built in the 1840s by the Shannon Commissioners to replace the earlier 18th century bridge noted in paragraph 3.2.56 above. Although upgraded in the 1990s by the addition of cantilevered footpaths, its original character is still recognisable.

3.2.62 The railway complex at Knockcroghery, opened in 1860 on the Athlone-Roscommon line encompasses a station house, offices, goods shed and signal box. Although the station has not been functioning for rail and has been in private ownership since the 1960s, its original character has been retained in its adaptive reuse as housing.

Rural Industry

3.2.63 Whilst virtually all the cultivated land within the study area is currently used for animal grazing, at one time cereals played a significant role in the local economy. This is reflected by the 17 mills that were located in the Lough Ree corridor.



Mill Race, Lecarrow



Quay, Lanesborough



Former Station, Knockcroghery

Of these, 9 still have visible remains, albeit disused. Watermills remained in use for longer than windmills, however they are more susceptible to destruction so only 4 of the original 12 survive, whereas all 5 windmill towers are still upstanding. Of the watermills, the corn mill at Lecarrow and the flour mill at Shrulle are the most significant. They are both typical examples of their type and period.

Peat extraction and electricity generation

3.2.64 Whilst Lanesborough power station is very dominant in the landscape, the extensive peat workings which fuel the station, are less obvious. Although the most recent and short-lived industry, its scale and intensity is such that it has, and will continue to, make the greatest impact on the landscape at the northern end of the Lough.

Ecological Corridor

3.2.65 Lough Ree (pNHA, cSAC, SPA) is one of the four main designated sites within the entire study area. It is of international importance, it is rich in habitats and is an important resource for wildlife. The islands, in particular, are important to bird life within the area. Lough Ree's many inlets support aquatic and wetland vegetation and exhibit the successional zonation from aquatic to terrestrial vegetation.

Habitats

3.2.66 Habitats are classified with reference to the 'A guide to the habitats of Ireland' (Fossitt 2000). This guide sets out a scheme for classifying wildlife habitats in Ireland. A total of 22 habitats have been identified within the survey area to date (see over). Eleven of these are Annex

I habitats and are highlighted in italics; 6 of these have "priority" status under the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and are denoted by *. These habitats are described in greater detail in Appendix 4 to this report.

3.2.67 Lough Ree is a eutrophic lake (i.e. enriched by nutrients) that has a long shoreline with many sheltered bays and numerous islands. This habitat type corresponds to the Annex I habitat in the EU Habitats Directive, 'natural eutrophic lakes with Magnopotamion or Hydrochariton-type vegetation (3150)*'. The lake is considered an excellent example of a mesotrophic to moderate-eutrophic system. It is very large in size and has a good diversity of habitat around its margins. There are a number of smaller lakes and ponds within the NHA/cSAC adjacent to Lough Ree. The majority of these are located to the east of the Lough. The lakes of importance include, Ross, Creggan, Doonis and Derrymacar Lough. These Loughs provide important refuges for the wildfowl from Lough Ree during times of disturbance.

Water quality

3.2.68 Water quality monitoring of Lough Ree is carried out by both the Fisheries Board and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In terms of water quality Lough Ree was classed as a moderately eutrophic lake in 1996 by the EPA. This means that there was substantial algal growth. In 1996 the EPA carried out an investigation into the Eutrophication of Lough Ree due to growing concern over the deteriorating water quality of the Lough. This led to the implementation of measures to reduce phosphate levels charged into the lake and have been successful in reducing the levels of algal production. Lough Ree is now classed as

mesotrophic and the decline in production of algae indicates an improvement in water quality (EPA 1998).

Areas of ecological interest

Habitat type	Code
<i>Eutrophic lakes</i>	FL4*
<i>Turloughs</i>	FL6*
<i>Depositing/lowland rivers</i>	FW2
Canals	FW3
Reed and large sedge swamps	FS1
Improved agricultural grassland	GA1
<i>Dry calcareous and neutral grassland</i>	GS1*
<i>Wet grassland</i>	GS4
Marsh	GM1
<i>Raised bog</i>	PB1*
<i>Cutover bog</i>	PB4
<i>Rich fen and flush</i>	PF1*
<i>Oak-birch-holly woodland</i>	WN1
<i>Oak-ash-hazel woodland</i>	WN2
Riparian woodland	WN5
<i>Bog woodland</i>	WN7*
(Mixed) broadleaf woodland	WD1
Mixed broadleaf/conifer woodland	WD2
Scrub	WS1
Hedgerows	WL1
Treelines	WL2
<i>Exposed calcareous rock</i>	ER2*

3.2.69 Within Lough Ree, 46 sites of ecological interest have been identified and include sites supporting interesting habitats and those of importance to birds. These sites have all been numbered and mapped and are described below and in greater detail within Appendix 4. The sites

are set out below according to county beginning with Roscommon.

Ballyclare/Ballyclare Island, Co Roscommon - this site occurs at the narrow point of entry of the River Shannon in to Lough Ree. This extensive wetland exhibits zonation from aquatic to terrestrial vegetation. The aquatic vegetation, composed of water lilies and pond weeds, grades in to reed and tall sedge vegetation dominated by common club rush, common reed and bulrush and tall herb swamp with abundant yellow flag. The wetland subsequently succeeds into scrub woodland composed of rowan, blackthorn, ash, hazel, hawthorn, gorse and willow. This is an important site for wintering wildfowl such as Whooper swan, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Curlew and Wigeon.

Lisnarrigh Bog, Co Roscommon - this site is an NHA. It is a small raised bog situated approximately 1km south-west of Lough Ree. Bog Moss covers about 75% of the understorey. Active bogs with a good cover of growing Bog Moss are a rare habitat in Europe.

Gallagh to Portnahinch, Co Roscommon - important site for wildfowl, in particular Whooper swans.

Ferrinch Island, Co Roscommon - known to be an important nesting site for ducks. This island is also a breeding site for the garden warbler, an uncommon breeding species within Ireland.

Cloncruff/Cloonlarge bog, Co Roscommon - this bog complex was an NHA and is soon to be

included within the Lough Ree SAC boundaries.

The main feature is about 10ha of bog woodland including Birch, Scot's Pine and some Holly.

Rinany point/ Portrunny bay, Co Roscommon - together with the Hind river estuary, this area is important for wildfowl such as Whooper Swan and Golden Plover. Habitats include reed beds, swamp and associated wetland.

River Hind, Co Roscommon - the mouth of the River Hind is an important area for wintering wildfowl.

Kilmore point, Co Roscommon - quite a large area of scrub grading into semi-natural woodland on the sloping bank of the Lough.

Blackbrink bay, Co Roscommon - The Blackbrink bay area is an important site for wildfowl such as Whooper Swan and Golden Plover.

St Johns wood, Co Roscommon - St Johns wood is one of the finest woods in the county and possibly in the whole of the midlands. It covers an extensive area (132 ha) on the shores of Lough Ree. Tree species and ground flora are typical of a wood on limestone. The presence of old woodland (i.e. permanent woodland cover over long period of time), results in the presence of a number of rare plants, such as toothwort and bird's nest orchid. Bird species of interest include the garden warbler, found predominantly in the Shannon catchment (An Foras Forbatha 1974). The wood is bounded on the southwest by an extensive open wetland. The open wetland has well developed fen communities with a rich flora of considerable scientific interest. Adjacent to the open fen is an area of swamp woodland ('carr' on peaty soil

subject to waterlogging. In the main wood, the commonest tree species, is pedunculate oak, followed by ash. In some areas these tree species form a canopy with an understorey of tall shrubs mainly hazel and holly. Of particular interest within the site is the swamp woodland. The tree canopy is dominated by downy birch. The understorey consists of abundant alder buckthorn and bird cherry (two rare species in Ireland) along with common buckthorn. Royal fern is common in the field layer. Pockets of leached, acid soil support calcifuge species such as bilberry, wood rush, and hard fern. 80% of St John's wood is owned by the State (National Parks and Wildlife Service).

Rindown, Co Roscommon - Rindown wood is located on the western shores of Lough Ree. The woodland occupies an area of approximately 12 ha and lies at the tip of Rindown peninsula. The main habitat type present is hazel woodland/scrub. Other habitats include rocky lakeshore and aquatic communities, mostly emergent swamp vegetation. Along the lake edge there is a rather abrupt and well defined zonation from open water with sparse aquatic vegetation to rocky shore. The wetland vegetation along the lakeshore is of particular ecological interest due to its species-richness and the presence of *Teucrium scordium*, a rare plant that is confined in Ireland to the lakeshores of Lough Ree and Lough Derg. The woodland is generally a low growing hazel wood. Other tree species present include ash, whitebeam, oak, hawthorn and poplar, however with the exception of ash these species are generally minor components of the canopy. In common with most semi-natural woodland sites in Ireland, Rindown wood has been modified by grazing.

Carnamissoge point, Co Roscommon - Mature deciduous and scrub woodland occurs at Carnamissoge point.

Yew point wood, Co Roscommon - Yew point is a diverse wood on a low peninsula formed from limestone drift. Hazel and ash dominated woodland occurs with occasional birch. Other species include oak, crab apple, willow and buckthorn. The ground flora contains a diversity of woodland plants.

Bally bay and Marsh, Co Roscommon - This sheltered bay contains several wooded islands and extensive reed beds. It is also important for wildfowl.

Bogganfin, Co Roscommon - Large area of floodplain and callows just north of Athlone. This area is presently outside the designated area boundaries.

Commons wood, Co Longford - The Commons wood (located to the south of Lanesborough), lies on the eastern shore of Lough Ree and consists of a semi-natural woodland adjoining a disused quarry. The species rich, oak-ash-hazel woodland is dominated by ash, hazel, oak, hawthorn, blackthorn and Scots pine. Buckthorn also occurs here. This species occurs in rocky places and lakeshores; it is occasional in the West and Centre but very rare elsewhere. The woodland is interspersed with patches limestone pavement and calcareous grassland. The calcareous dry grassland is composed of hare bell *Campanula rotundifolia*, common sedge *Carex nigra*, glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, crested

dogstail *Cynosurus cristatus* and marjoram *Origanum vulgare*. This is also a site for the rare, blue fleabane. This species usually occurs on eskers, in dry grassland, sandy pastures and on walls, especially on calcium rich substrates. This is a rare and local species confined to mostly central and south-eastern Ireland. Scrub composed of hawthorn and willow is encroaching the grassland in places.

Rathcline wood, Co Longford - Rathcline wood and nearby woods are predominantly mixed broadleaved woods. Beech dominates the canopy in places along with oak, ash, sycamore, elm, hazel, elder, blackthorn, spindle, hawthorn and holly. Ash is the dominant canopy species in the northern section.

Incharmacdermot island, Co Longford - This small island supports scrub vegetation dominated hawthorn. There is a thick band of wetland vegetation dominated by common reed around the periphery of the island.

Bleanavoher, Co Longford - This area contains some limestone pavement supporting patches of species-rich calcareous grassland similar to that found in the Burren as well as a limestone shore.

Tureen turlough, Co Longford - this is an important wildfowl site and IWeBS count site. Species recorded include the following and Whooper swan, Tufted duck, Wigeon, Coot and Mallard.

Cordaragh Turlough, Co Longford - This is a fairly large turlough in the carboniferous limestone area on the east shore of Lough Ree, situated about 7km south west of Lanesborough. The vegetation



Inchamacdermot



limestone quarry at Commons



Mouth of River Inny

is mainly pasture with occasional drainage ditches, which are often flooded. The main interest of the site now lies in the large numbers of wildfowl and waters that the area can support when wet. This site is an NHA. Wildfowl recorded here include the following, Tufted duck, Coot, Mallard, Wigeon, Pochard, Shoveler, Little Grebe, Lapwing, mute swan, curlew, Whooper swan and Golden plover.

Aghakeel, Co Longford- This is an important bird area and is a site for the garden warbler *Sylvia borin*.

Fortwilliam Turlough, Co Longford - Fortwilliam Turlough is situated close to the eastern shore of Lough Ree, 6 km south of Lanesborough, in County Longford. This site is a cSAC and an IWeBS count site. Fortwilliam is the only extant large turlough in Longford and one of only two east of the Shannon. It has a high diversity caused by a semi-permanent water body, abundant marl precipitation, a relative lack of grazing and small outcrops of limestone, so it is a very representative example of the habitat. This is an important wildfowl site. Species recorded here include Whooper swan, Tufted duck, Mute swan, Great crested grebe, Pochard, Curlew, Lapwing, Coot, Golden plover, Pintail duck, Wigeon, Redshank, Mallard, Moorhen and Teal.

Cashel wood, Co Longford- This wood is dominated by ash and hazel and runs close to the shore and harbour. Other species include hawthorn, blackthorn and gorse.

Inchecleraun island, Co Longford

Inchecleraun island is partially wooded on the western side. This wood is dominated by ash and hazel. Managed grassland, grazed by cattle occurs almost to the waters edge.

Culnagore wood, Co Longford - Culnagore wood is an extensive area of hazel wood bordering Elfeet bay. Occasional mature trees such as oak, beech and ash occur throughout.

Lough Slawn, Co Longford - This small lake adjacent to Culnagore wood supports a wide diversity of species-rich wetland habitats. This site is a NHA. The lough is fringed by Common Reed which merges into a grassland. Old Peat cuttings surround the basin. The underlying geology is Carboniferous limestone, and influence of calcium enrichment is evident with species such as Grass-of-parnassus and Great Fen-sedge in the marsh and swamp areas.

Lisnagawley, Co Longford- this supports species-rich semi-natural habitats ranging from meadow to bog.

Black islands, Co Longford - The Black Islands consist of a wooded series of small islands with occasional mature trees. Scrub is the predominant woodland type. Cormorants are frequent. This is an important site for common scoter and common tern.

Derrynagease, Co Longford - Derrynagease is an important bird site, especially for Greenland White Fronted geese. Lizard hibernates in Derrynagease castle.

Saints Island, Co Longford - this is an important bird site. Regular wildfowl species include, Lapwing, Golden plover and Mute swan.

Arnee point and mouth of the River Inny, Co Longford - this is an extensive site with wide expanses of reed beds and an important bird site. Wildfowl species commonly occurring at this site include Coot, Tufted Duck, Wigeon, Whooper swan, Great crested grebes, Lapwing, Pochard, Mute swan. Greenland White Fronted Geese once frequented this area.

Doonis Lough Co Westmeath - this is an important area for birds. There is a large area of *Cladium* Fen (Annex I habitat) connecting this Lough with Lough Ree.

Muckanagh, Co Westmeath - This is an important site a site for the Greenland white fronted geese.

Nuns island, Co Westmeath - this is a small island consisting of woodland and scrub composed of ash and hazel, with large area along the shoreline dominated by common reed.

Creggan Lough, Co Westmeath - This Lough is an important Whooper swan *Cygnus cygnus* site.

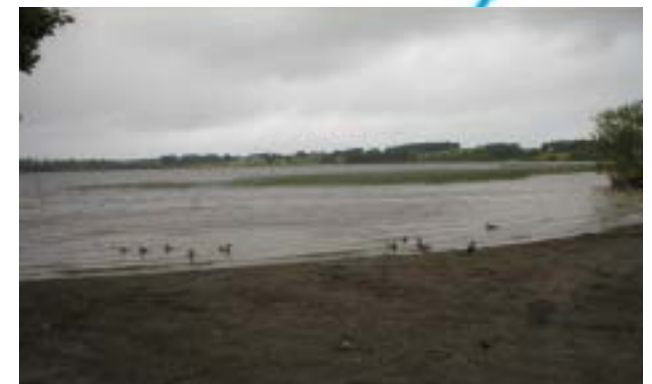
Ross Lough, Co Westmeath - This is a shallow Lough bordered by reed beds, cutover bog and willow scrub. Nearby there is a small area of cut-away bog. There is also a small area of grassland that is cut for hay and a meadow, which is lightly grazed by cattle. This site is favoured as a breeding site for waders, wildfowl and riparian passerines. The area is particularly noted for, and supports a wide diversity of wetland and bog

vegetation. This Lough is an important Whooper Swan site.

Portlick wood, Co Westmeath - Portlick wood is owned by Coillte and is a Peoples Millennium Forest. This is also a site for the Garden warbler.

Hare Island, Co Westmeath - has a thick fringe of semi-natural woodland composed of beech, ash, sycamore, oak and hazel. The red data book species, long-leaved helleborine and betony have been recorded here. This wood provides a habitat for the garden warbler, a species confined to the Shannon lakes in Ireland.

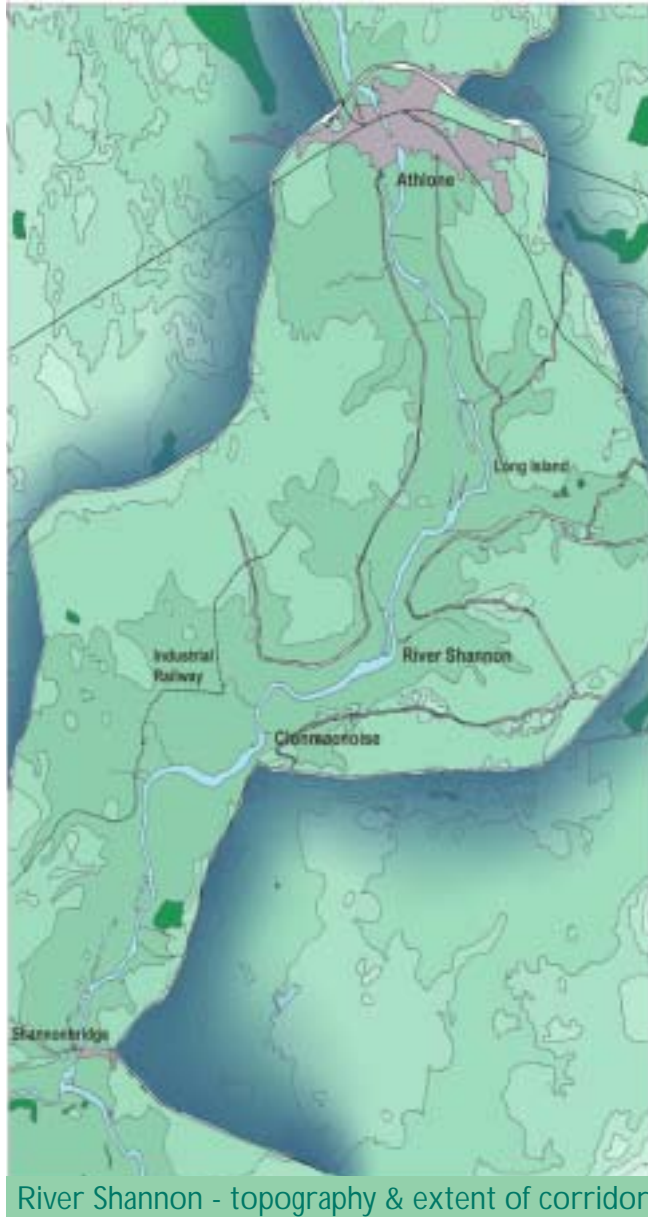
Meehan wood, Co Westmeath - This wood is approximately 12ha and is dominated by scrub and hazel wood. Other woodland species include oak, ash, hawthorn, blackthorn, whitebeam, and holly. Large numbers of Whooper swan winter here.



ducks at beach near Wineport, Killinure Lough

A4 Map of River Shannon to be inserted





3.3 River Shannon

Environmental setting

3.3.1 In this section the River Shannon or *An tSionainn* flows in a south, southwesterly direction from the town of Athlone to the village of Shannonbridge over a distance of approximately 21km. The waterway having emerged from the expanse of Lough Ree is generally between 80 up to 200m wide. It flows around four significant islands, two with the name of Long Island, as well as Inchinallee and Devenish Island. The actual navigation passes each island through on the eastern wider channel.

3.3.2 Due to the low-lying terrain, the corridor is defined for the most part by the extent of the callows (or floodplain). Exceptions occur at Clonmacnois, where the heritage zone is included in its entirety; at Shannonbridge which takes in the extent of the village commercial core; and Athlone, where the visual corridor is quite tight, but it is appropriate to include the old canal to the west of the river and major developments that may impact on the river itself, such as the Golden Island Shopping Centre.

3.3.3 The town of Athlone is included in the river corridor which is appropriate as it is a town that in recent years has exploited the riverfront for new development. Whilst from a planning perspective the town is examined in its broader context, in terms of built heritage and archaeology, the study is confined to those structures immediately impacting on river, or impacted by their location

in relation to the river. Thus the corridor is taken to be that area visible from the river; i.e. the river frontage itself and the streets within view from the river. The old canal has also been examined as part of the waterway corridor. From the southern edge of the town the corridor follows the R446 to the outer edge of Golden Island, there it follows the local road to the south. Where this road ends, the route continues south-east to take in the extent of the winter flood-level, until it meets with the end of the old Pilgrim's Road at Bishop's Hill. At Bishop's Hill the line follows the local road to the south-west taking in Pilgrim's Road Esker in its entirety, Fin Lough and Mongon bog. At Clonmacnois, the edge of the corridor follows the R444 to Shannonbridge, which marks the southern most point of the River Shannon Corridor for the purposes of this study. Crossing the bridge the line continues past the fortifications. In order to take in the Callows and extent of the floodplain, the notional line extends just to the east of the peat railway around the townlands of Cloonshask then follows the western extent of the Callows back up to Athlone.

Landscape and Visual corridor

Athlone

3.3.4 On the on the western riverbank close to the road bridge the old canal can be seen. The canal ceased to be used long ago and is now partially overgrown. The alignment of the canal is straight and angled to the south east as it passes through Athlone cutting off a bend in the river.

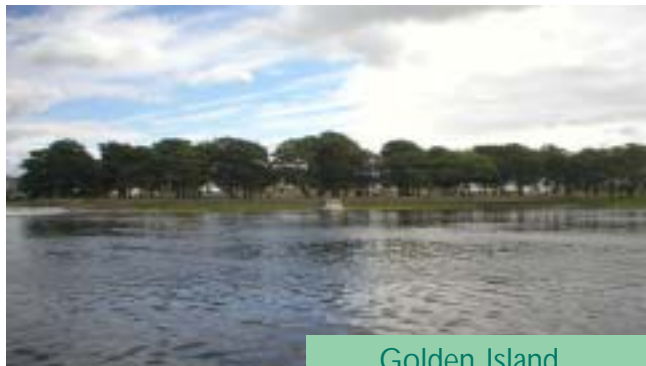
3.3.5 From the river the railway bridge with its white painted steel trestles makes an attractive feature spanning the water. Tree lines and new



Northern entrance to old Athlone canal



St Peter & Paul's Church and Old Town Bridge



Golden Island

development along the riverside largely contain views of the town on the approach.

3.3.6 An arched stone bridge (town bridge) provides the main crossing within the town, after which the river widens in the area of the weir. The profile of the town is defined by the tightly grouped buildings of differing style, age and proportions that line the river. There are some fine buildings such as St Peter and Paul's Church and Athlone castle. The weir, which incorporates a large hydraulic lock, spans the river across this wide section creating an interesting and attractive feature which offsets the built form of the town behind.

3.3.7 Mature trees line the eastern bank, at Golden Island, providing the last element of visual enclosure before the river emerges back into open countryside. A kilometre below the town, the southern end of the old canal is marked by a footbridge. From this position looking north there is a wide and impressive panoramic view of Athlone.

The Old Athlone Canal mouth to Long Island

3.3.8 From Athlone the river flows south through a broad mostly flat landscape. Visually long distant and panoramic views are characteristic of this stretch of the river. The visual limits tend to be distant trees / hedgerows on either side of the river. In places bank side tree growth narrows the field of vision to more contained views along the river.

Long Island to Inchinalee

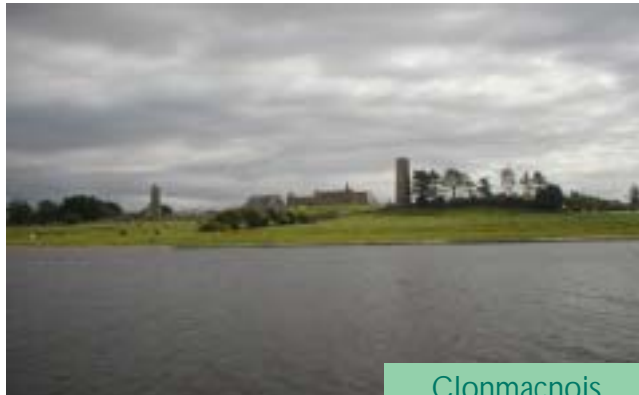
3.3.9 The river braids around Long Island, a large

low area of pastureland edged with scattered trees and reed beds. The course of the river is to the south west past Hall's Point. There are a number of small rivers or streams that serve as minor tributaries to the Shannon. The most significant of these is the Cross River. This small river joins the Shannon adjacent to the island called Inchinalee midway some 10km south of Athlone.

River Shannon: Inchinalee to Clonmacnois

3.3.10 South of the island of Inchinalee the river turns almost directly to the west. Along this first section the river is up to 200m wide and flanked by reed beds. On the north and western bank of the river the land is relatively flat affording distant views to trees and hedgerows. Looking to the south across the other bank visual containment is provided closer to the river by elevated glacial deposits or esker rising up to over 90m at Clonascra. This esker and a further one to the south form ridges that run approximately east to west. The seasonal flooding of the river has led to local roads and small settlements or hamlets being built along the top of the esker.

3.3.11 As the river narrows it meanders around a broad flood plain to the south to a river bend at the monastic site of Clonmacnois where the esker forms high ground immediately along the riverbank. At this point the ancient churches, high crosses, a stone tower and castle remains are grouped within scattered trees on the riverside slope of the esker forming an attractive heritage feature in the landscape. There is a small jetty and mooring facilities for boats, which provides access to the Clonmacnois site from the river.



Clonmacnois



New harbour at Shannonbridge



Shannonbridge powerstation

Clonmacnois to Shannonbridge

3.3.12 From Clonmacnois the river again turns towards the west through a wide, open stretch for approximately 2km. The esker continues to form a low ridge running south west providing visual containment along the southern and western side of the Shannon.

3.3.13 The river narrows again and turns in a wide bend to the south for 2km to reach Devenish Island. On the east side the esker terminates to the east of the island approximately 1km away. The river flows south at a width of approximately 100m towards Long Island (the second river island of that name in the stretch of river from Athlone) and then on to Shannonbridge.

Shannonbridge

3.3.14 Shannonbridge is a small village that extends in a linear fashion for a kilometre or so to the east away from the river along the R357. This particular pattern means that most of the village is visually remote from the river. For the purpose of this study the river waterway corridor takes in the extent of the village commercial core. In the main attractive two-storey buildings line the road in a series of terraces.

3.3.15 The most prominent and attractive features of the village are the sixteen arches of the stone bridge (and the navigation arch) and the adjacent Napoleonic fort situated on the west bank of the river. West of the fort, the batteries are visible from the river and the village. The stone quayside is well preserved and attractive. Historical artifacts such as loading cranes and the old iron swing bridge, which has been relocated to the quayside from the main bridge, add to the attractiveness of the pier.

3.3.16 Despite the visibility of the power station in the background, there is an interesting view of the riverboat moorings set against the backdrop of the village buildings from the north side of the bridge. South of village the low-lying floodplain is dominated by the extensive peat-fuelled power station. The large bulk of the buildings and the tall red striped chimney are high visible for miles around. The two main structures, chimneys and associated industrial paraphernalia of power lines, industrial railway tracks, fences and peat stockpiles make an incongruous image in the surrounding landscape. The striped red and white painting of the chimney only serves to draw further attention to the complex.

Socio-economic corridor

Athlone

3.3.17 With the exception of Athlone, the study area is predominantly rural and fairly under-populated. The population in other settlements, typical of rural Ireland, is in decline. Although urbanisation of Athlone is prevalent, recent CSO census figures suggest that there has been some migration from the urban area of Athlone to its hinterland, resulting in an overall decline in population in Athlone town since 1996, and a significant increase in Athlone East Rural over the same period (towards the inner loughs).

3.3.18 Athlone is the largest settlement within the study area, and in fact is the largest urban centre within the Midlands region; with a total population of 15,936 (and a substantial rural catchment bringing the population base up to over 23,000). It is identified as a Gateway within the National Spatial Strategy and is strategically placed in the centre of Ireland with good rail and

road links to Dublin and the rest of Ireland. As stated in “The Shell Guide to the River Shannon”, Athlone owes its existence to its situation on the principal crossing point on the middle Shannon. It is particularly important to the study area for both its cultural heritage and because it marks the southern entrance to Lough Ree. Athlone has a rich history, as is evidenced by the layers that comprise the built environment and its name which derives from Ath Luain (the ford of Luan). The town administrative boundary was officially defined in 1899. This has subsequently expanded into neighbouring counties Westmeath and Roscommon.

3.3.19 Tourism is an important asset to the economy of Athlone and in particular water-based activities including cruising. It is acknowledged that the river Shannon and the historic town, including the Castle, are the principal amenities of Athlone. It is anticipated that there is further scope for the development of water-based tourism. In fact one of the strategies of the “Action Plan for the Midlands Region” by the Midland Regional Authority recommends the development of water-based leisure along the Shannon.

3.3.20 Being the largest town within the study area, Athlone and its environs is the focus of much of the development within the corridor area. Certainly the Settlement Strategy of Westmeath County is to focus development around key settlements such as Athlone. The Athlone Town Council is encouraging higher densities within the town centre as there are few opportunities for greenfield development within the boundary of Athlone itself.

3.3.21 In relation to the river, the Town Council are committed to bringing a focus back to the river, with varying degrees of success. Athlone Town Council own three substantial landbanks adjacent to the Shannon. There are all zoned for either open space or sporting recreation in the Development Plan and contain some fishing stands. The southern most is the Golden Island Parkland, the northern part of which has been landscaped as a formal park.

3.3.22 Two of the town’s significant employers: Custume Barracks and the Ranelagh Industrial Estate present barriers to development of the western bank of the river. Therefore, along this stretch of the western side of the Shannon, the best that can be achieved is enhancement of the linear walkway along the river. That said, there are significant tracts of the river frontage that have been developed in recent times for a range of uses, particularly prominent are the new apartments and Radisson Hotel on the eastern side of the river adjacent to the town marina and the two residential developments on the western side of the river, one to the north and the other to the south of the lock.

3.3.23 There is pressure to develop the land to the south of the weir on the western banks for 70 houses. Whilst the Council recognise the need to protect the Callows, they would allow limited development within this floodplain on the proviso that they acquire land for open space adjacent to the river. To the north of the town (at the time of writing), along the banks of the Shannon, an application had been lodged for 83 apartments and 7 houses to the rear of the Jolly Mariner Marina.

3.3.24 There is a lot of demand for retail space in and around Athlone, with Golden Island Shopping Centre and other potential retail developments being the focus of significant activity over recent years. To the south of the Golden Island Recreational Parkland and Shopping Centre there is a large area subject to the Loughandonning/Bunavalley Action Area Plan. There is significant pressure for residential development of this land. The Action Area Plan was developed to identify the extent of flooding and facilitate development of this centrally located prime development land on the southern edge of the town. Due to flooding and drainage issues highlighted, development of this land has been halted and zoned to prevent development.

3.3.25 There is significant residential and commercial development adjacent to the old Athlone Canal; the Council itself has developed housing behind the former Lock Mills. The Council owns a large stretch of the land adjoining the old canal between the old Galway Road and Lock Mills. Use of the canal for navigation ceased in the 1840s and part of it, within the ownership of Athlone Town Council, is now infilled, therefore it is unlikely that it would be reopened for navigation. The canal is identified as open space in the Town Plan. To the south of Lock Mills the Shannon Regional Fisheries Board put in a road to enable better access for angling.

3.3.26 In terms of the navigation, Waterways Ireland are planning the installation of 60 m of waiting jetty just below the lock at Athlone for 2004.

Clonmacnois, County Offaly

3.3.27 Whilst supporting only a scattered population (316 in the Clonmacnoise DED), Clonmacnois is one of Ireland's foremost national monuments, designated a heritage zone in the Offaly County Development Plan and attracts considerable visitor numbers throughout the year. There is a sizeable tourist and visitor information centre located opposite the entrance to the Monastic site. In addition to the Monastic site, the area exudes a unique atmosphere and attractiveness that derives from its relationship to the river and the callows together with the sense of enclosure provided by the eskers.



Riverfront development, Athlone

3.3.28 Clonmacnois possesses the first original floating mooring on the Shannon (dating back to the 80s). It currently has space for 15 boats, but is getting old and worn. In recognition that it is a popular stopping point for craft, Waterways Ireland are intending to replace it with a new floating mooring that may accommodate up to 24 boats.

Shannonbridge, Co Offaly

3.3.29 Located within West Offaly, the village is bordered by Counties Galway and Roscommon. Shannonbridge is situated at the rise of the esker riada at which the Shannon bisects it. Similar to Lanesborough, Shannonbridge has historically been important as a fording point of the Shannon and is dependent on Bord na Mona and the ESB as the dominant employers, both operations have downscaled considerably since they first started operating in the middle of the 20th century. Consequently the population is declining. The new powerstation is currently being completed and will be served by the extensive peatlands that surround the rivers Shannon and Suck. The powerstation has a 15-year permission after which time it will be decommissioned and removed.

3.3.30 Tourism, based on the water is also vital to the economy of the town. The village offers considerable mooring space both to the north and south of the bridge and further downstream at a cutaway where the Shannon meets the Suck. Waterways Ireland opened a new floating jetty upstream of the bridge in June 2003, providing an additional 180m of boat mooring space, upgrading the waterfront and providing picnic tables. Already this has had positive impact on the local community as more boats are comfortably able to moor at the village.

3.3.31 Again, similar to Lanesborough, Shannonbridge benefits from the powerstation's coolant and possesses a hot water stretch. Unfortunately, there is very poor access to this stretch. The ESB have provided funds for developing floating fishing stands, however it is

generally felt that access and facilities for anglers around the village are poor, so they go elsewhere.

3.3.32 Whilst there are pump-out facilities at the harbour, the waste water infrastructure in general is inadequate with raw sewage being pumped into the river downstream of the bridge, with no current plans to upgrade the system. Clearly this also has a significant adverse effect on fisheries.

3.3.33 With the exception of the existing and new powerstation at Shannonbridge, there is very little pressure for development along the western edge of County Offaly within the study area. As no development is allowed within the defined Shannon callows and it is a known floodplain, there is very little development that is visible from the water. Whilst there is some interest from local people in constructing single dwellinghouses between Shannonbridge and Clonmacnois, the Council are cautious with these due to potential visual impacts. In general, development is confined to the eastern side of the road, rather than the riverside.

A4 MAP OF ATHLONE TO BE INSERTED





High Cross at Clonmacnois



Athlone Castle



St Peter & Paul's Church and Old Town Bridge

Cultural and Historic Corridor

Settlement patterns

3.3.34 Whilst there is some evidence of prehistoric activity on the banks of the River Shannon in the form of a fulacht fiadh and a standing stone, it is during the Golden Age of the early Christian period that the role and use of the river Shannon come to the fore with the dawn of the historical era in the fifth century. Early monastic settlements such as that witnessed on the riverbanks at Clonmacnois and Clonfert, were centres of trade and exchange, learning, and religious pilgrimage, aided by the ease of access of the river Shannon. Clonmacnois, which accounts for 68 of the 93 archaeological monuments recorded within the Shannon corridor, was founded by St Ciarán c. 545 AD and his choice of location was purposeful in that it was at the very crossroads of Ireland, where the Shannon – the country's main north-south traffic artery – was crossed by the 'Slí Mhór', 'the great road', which crossed Ireland's central bogs and wetlands from east to west, running along one of the country's greatest esker ridges, the Eiscir Riada. There are records of trade with Frankish merchants who navigated the Shannon waterways during the early historic period and although Clonmacnois was already a well-known centre before the monastery was set up, the latter served to develop it into one of the most important centres of pilgrimage, with a large secular community of craftsmen, metalworkers and farmers from the seventh to the nineteenth century.

3.3.35 The Normans arrived on the Shannon having conquered Ireland in the decades after their first arrival in 1169. From their bases east of the

river, they crossed the Shannon and established bridgeheads on the other side in their campaign to conquer the western province of Connaught in 1235. One such bridgehead is that located at Athlone, where remains of a 13th century Norman castle survive by the quayside. It is possible that the establishment of this castle, around 1210, caused the gradual decline in use of the ford located at Clonmacnois. Although the Normans had also built a castle at the latter, it seems that Athlone became the main crossing point along the middle reaches of the Shannon, and has remained so to the present day.

3.3.36 The concept of the river as a barrier between opposing armies came to the fore during the Jacobite war when, in 1690-91 the Irish army struggled to defend Connaught and Clare from behind the line of the Shannon. Athlone was besieged twice and smaller centres such as Lanesborough were also the scenes of military confrontation. The reverse strategy was adopted during the conflict with Revolutionary France, 1793-1815, when Royal defences strongly fortified the middle-Shannon crossings, with the idea of confining any French attackers in the west until defence forces could be gathered from the numerous garrisons east of the river. Town wall fortifications can be seen in locations such as Athlone, and the extensive defences of the Napoleonic era are still substantially intact in places such as Shannonbridge.

Underwater Archaeology

3.3.37 There are a number of sites between Athlone and Shannonbridge that have revealed underwater archaeological remains including Clonmacnois Archaeological Complex.

Underwater excavations at Clonmacnois in 1994 and 1995 revealed a wooden bridge dating back to 786-804AD as well as six log boats, two of which contained medieval iron axes. The bridge originally spanned the Shannon connecting the ecclesiastical centre of Clonmacnois with Coolumber in County Roscommon. Furthermore there is an associated togher, now obscured by peat growth, which originally led to Clonmacnois, presumably over the wooden bridge.

History of settlement at Athlone

3.3.38 The strategic location of the bridge at Athlone has influenced the development of the town throughout history. The word *áth*, the Irish word for ford is the root of the initial portion of Athlone's name. Subsequently, the bridge greatly facilitated the river crossing and hence the strategic and military importance of the site. The streets leading to the bridge followed the course of the straggling settlements that grew up on the ancient routes. The earliest evidence for a settlement at the site of Athlone dates to around the mid 8th - early 10th century. The first documented ford was constructed in around 1000AD as a joint project by the Kings of Mide and Connacht. The first documented bridge was built at the site in 1120 by the King of Connacht. Between 1132 and 1159 the bridge was replaced five times. All of these bridges were wooden structures.

3.3.39 The Anglo-Normans were established at Athlone by 1200 and the first stone bridge and castle (on the west bank) date to the early 13th century. Parts of this castle appear to be incorporated in the polygonal keep (donjon) but

much altered by later fortifications. The curtain walls and corner towers were added in the late 13th century. The castle provided the impetus and security that fostered the development of Anglo-Norman Athlone in the 13th century. By 1230 the town of Athlone had developed on both sides of the water. A town wall may have been commenced by the mid 13th century. The east town is likely to have developed its linear street pattern at this time and contemporary references record the east side as 'the town'. Between 1218 and 1315 the 'town' was attacked at least six times by the O' Connors of Connacht. On one raid in 1272 the bridge was broken down. The bridge was repaired but was eventually destroyed in 1306, and there is no further mention of a bridge at Athlone until the 16th century.

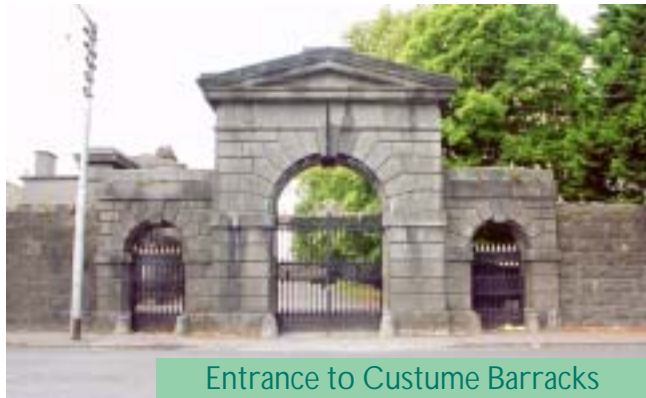
3.3.40 The castle, the religious houses and parish church evidently continued in use for all underwent rebuilding in the 15th century. The castle became the residence of the Connaught president in 1569. A new Elizabethan stone bridge was constructed in 1566-7 and this revived Athlone's role as the focus of east/west traffic and consequently its administrative, strategic and economic importance recovered. Athlone secured a town charter in 1599 & 1606 establishing the area within a radius of a mile and a half of the bridge centre as a borough. In the 1606 charter a thosel, or town hall, was erected and later repaired in 1753.

3.3.41 In the 17th century, a new curtain wall and bastions were built around the east town and earthen ramparts around the western town. Thomas Philips' map of Athlone shows the fortifications; the approach roads to the town from

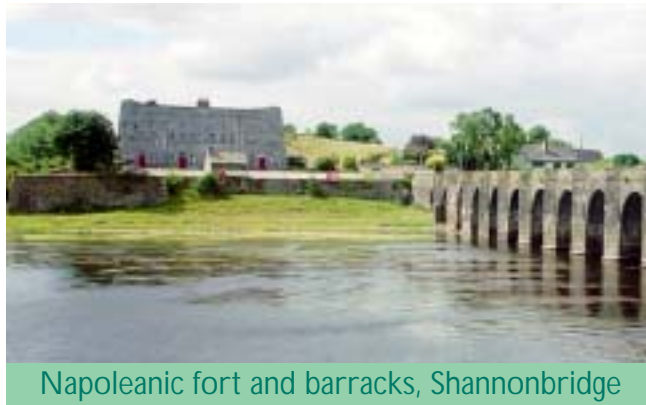
both the east and west are lined with dwellings, indicating the spread of the urban area beyond the ramparts.

3.3.42 Athlone figured prominently in the Jacobite war of 1690-91. The strength of the west town arose from the natural barrier of the River Shannon following the destruction of the bridge (several arches were broken down). The east town was burnt in 1690 and the west town, including the castle was reduced to rubble by De Ginkell's Williamite artillery in 1691. By 1709 much of the town had been re-built, much of the impetus being provided by the new military barracks of around 1700. The present day St. Mary's church (built 1827) is located on the original site of a 17th century church of Oliver St. John. The base of a tower (built 1622) and its later additions (c. 1790) are still extant.

3.3.43 Athlone declined again in the 18th century, falling from prominence in the top ten Irish towns in 1690 to not being included in the top twenty-three in 1798. This was largely due to its location that precluded it from any benefit on the 18th century rise in foreign trade. The main function of the town centred on the military barracks, Athlone had become headquarters of the new western military district in 1796. Athlone also benefited from improved navigation on the River Shannon in the 18th century. A canal was cut on the west side of the town to by-pass obstacles to navigation in the river channel. The Elizabethan bridge was replaced by the present-day structure in 1844. The abutment of the old Elizabethan bridge remains on the eastern bank at Bridge Street and that the canal while partially filled in still retains its locks.



Entrance to Custume Barracks



Napoleonic fort and barracks, Shannonbridge



Former railway station, Athlone

History of settlement at Shannonbridge

3.3.44 *Rachra Cluain na Fearna*, which translates to “the little wet meadows of the alder trees” is considered to be the original name for the village. However, Shannonbridge was adopted following the building of a 16 arch stone bridge by the Shannon Commissioners in 1757. The townland of Rachra, lay in the McCoghlan’s ancient territory of Delvin Eathra which eventually became the Barony of Garrycastle. Apparently the McCoghlan’s had a castle at Rachra, which was destroyed by a chieftain named O’Melaghlin of Clonlonan (southern Westmeath) along with the English forces from Athlone in 1557. This castle was rebuilt by Sir Thomas Rotherham, a Commissioner in the plantation of Devlin Eathra, ‘sometime before 1624’, however by 1838 the castle no longer existed.

3.3.45 Shannonbridge is home to some important Napoleonic fortifications. The possibility of war with France was recognised at the end of the 18th century and plans for the fortification of Irish coastal regions were made at this time. With the threat of French troops landing at Galway Bay, the crossing points on the River Shannon were of strategic importance. From 1803 to 1814 inland fortifications were established at a number of locations including Shannonbridge and Athlone. At Shannonbridge, the remains of the tetes-de-pont or bridgehead fortifications dominate the western side of the river and are considered to be some of the most important fortifications of this period left in Britain and Ireland. The whole site was protected by a glacis or artificial slope, which protected the defences from direct artillery fire and was separated from the redoubt by a dry moat. The redoubt functioned as a powder magazine

and barrack accommodation and was protected by four gun emplacements set on traversing carriages and a vaulted caponnier, which allowed them 90°-180° coverage. This enabled the garrison to fire on troops both upriver and downriver and also approaching along the Ballinasloe road, which passes over the river at this point. The fortifications are in need of conservation and management.

3.3.46 The western end of the bridge was protected by a small arms barracks to the north and a large bombproof barracks to the south. The latter, a three storey building, was constructed of squared rubble masonry. It was protected by three gun emplacements mounted on the roof and a series of loopholes in the north and west walls. The east façade of the building faces the river, generally unprotected; it is typical of a Georgian domestic building in design. On the east side of the river, a little downstream from the main fortifications was another ditch and rampart which was originally defended by a timber palisade. The three storey barracks has recently been renovated and converted into a restaurant.

3.3.47 Other structures, listed as ‘protected structures’ in terms of the planning acts, include a house located at the eastern end on the northern side of Main Street. It is a three-bay; two-storey gable ended building dating from the late eighteenth century. Also, the former Catholic Church, a T-plan barn-style building built in 1818 and currently used as a Community Hall, is a recorded protected structure.



Old Athlone canal from Galway Road



Former lock house, Shannonbridge



Athlone lock, looking south

3.3.48 The main street is typical of many of the smaller villages in the area. The architecture is generally traditional with some modern intervention such as new uPVC windows in Georgian era buildings. The church is at the first main junction with the main street coming from the bridge. Beyond the junction are residential buildings only as all the retail outlets are located one stretch of the main street from the harbour

Industrial heritage - Shannon navigation

3.3.49 Features relating to the Shannon Navigation are to be found at Athlone and Shannonbridge. The Athlone canal survives intact, albeit mostly dewatered and partly infilled. However, its only visible related features are the side walls of the full- and half-locks the former refurbished by the Grand Canal Company in the early 1800s; neither the lock house nor either of the two original canal bridges survives. A lock house does, however, survive at Shannonbridge, in a good state of preservation as a seasonal tourist information office.

3.3.50 The Shannon Commissioners' works, carried out in the 1840s, are especially evident at Athlone where the weir, lock, quays and town bridge with navigable channel at its west end are all in active use. The Commissioners' quay and navigable channel are also still in use at the east end of the bridge at Shannonbridge.

Road and Rail

3.3.51 The Athlone town bypass marks the transition from Lough Ree to the River Shannon and is a fine example of modern bridge

construction. In Athlone itself, the riverscape is dominated by its railway and road bridges. The Shannon railway bridge, opened in 1851, is an impressive structure of bowstring girder construction and is of national significance. The railway also has significant related features in the form of the former Great Southern and Western Railway (GSWR) and the Midlands and Great Western Railway (MGWR) stations, and composite masonry/girder bridge over Omer's canal. Although the town's mid-16th century road bridge was demolished in the 1840s, the original medieval street pattern is still evident on both sides of the river. The replacement bridge, just upstream, is a fine example of mid-19th century bridge architecture.

3.3.52 At Shannonbridge, Thomas Rhodes added a cast-iron navigation span onto the 1759 road bridge in 1845. The bridge, constructed of randomly coursed limestone rubble, was strengthened and a pre-cast concrete span was added in 1983-84. It survives virtually unaltered to this day.

Athlone industries

3.3.53 Although Athlone was the focus of this region's industry, virtually all traces of this heritage has been obliterated by modern development. Most of the buildings, particularly the distillery south-west of the lock and woollen mill north-east of the town bridge have been demolished to make way for new housing developments. The only surviving site is the 1930s Gentex factory. This is primarily of historical interest in reflecting the drive towards greater economic self-sufficiency by the government of the fledgling Republic.



Preserved swing bridge, Shannonbridge



Swamp habitat, Shannon callows



Shannon callows at Clonmacnois

Peat Extraction and Power Generation

3.3.54 The landscape around Shannonbridge is dominated by the power station. Although there are extensive peat extraction operations on the east side of the river, these are more apparent from the road than the river.

Ecological Corridor

3.3.55 The River Shannon corridor comprises two of the four main designated sites: Middle Shannon Callows (SPA) and the River Shannon Callows (pNHA and cSAC). A number of designated areas occur adjacent to these within County Offaly and include remnants of the Eiscir Riada, namely Pilgrims road and Lough Nanag eskers. The River Shannon is typical of a FW2 habitat type (refer to page 27 and Appendix 4). Tributaries of the Shannon within the callows section include the Cross River, Boor River and the Curraghboy River.

Shannon Callows

3.3.56 The Shannon Callows, the floodplains of the River Shannon, are a unique wetland resource in the Irish midlands. The fields are flooded through the winter, and farmed as meadow and pasture when the flood retreats in spring. The flooding ensures that the ground on the callows remains soft, even in the summer, and the farming has remained relatively extensive. This combination of seasonal flooding and largely traditional agriculture has helped preserve a unique ecosystem and a distinct wildlife assemblage, with a wealth of birds, mammals, insects and plant life. If agriculture ceased on the callows, the variety of plant and bird life would diminish. The breeding bird life would be the first to be affected.

Areas of Ecological Interest

3.3.57 The callows begin immediately south of Athlone and include several distinct areas. Within the River Shannon section of this study area, 15 sites of ecological interest have been identified. These sites have all been numbered and mapped and are described below and in greater detail within Appendix 4. The sites are set out below from north to south.

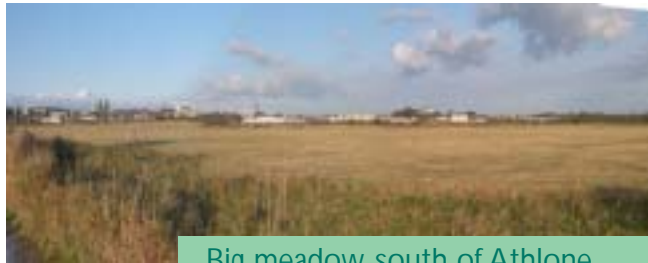
Big meadow, County Westmeath - this is a large area of callows grassland just south of Athlone. Corncrakes occur here as do breeding Lapwing. This area is under strong development pressure. A fisheries access road through the site has facilitated access, and consequent disturbance to the site.

Bunnaribba, County Roscommon - A family of six Whooper swans winter here.

Wren's island, County Westmeath - Reeds cover most of Wrens Island. There is some good aquatic zonation from pondweed to woodland composed of ash, willow and occasional crab apple.

Carrickobreen, County Westmeath - There is a small strip of mixed woodland with ash, sycamore and hawthorn. Reed bed vegetation along the rivers edge consists of common club rush, purple loosestrife, common reed and common bulrush.

Carrickynaghtan, County Roscommon - Carrickynaghtan Bog is located 3km. south of Athlone town on the western side of the River Shannon. The region of intact bog conforms to



Big meadow, south of Athlone



Mongon Bog - nature reserve



Lapwing at Clonmacnois

raised bog habitat (Annex I habitat). This site is a pNHA site with a more detailed description provided within Appendix 4 to this report.

Long island, County Roscommon - Corncrakes nest on Long island.

Boor River, County Westmeath - Hen harrier (female or young male) hunting in extensive reed bed and marsh.

Bunua cunna/Goravinch, Co Roscommon - This large area of callows is of some importance to both over-wintering and breeding wildfowl.

Mongan Bog, County Offaly - this is a midland raised bog of medium size situated immediately east of the monastic site of Clonmacnois, and 12km south of Athlone. Most of the bog is a Statutory Nature Reserve, established in 1987. The bog has been the subject of on-going intensive research since 1972. This site is a pSAC.

Crevagh, County Offaly - The callows area in between Crevagh and Pipers Rock is frequented by wintering wildfowl. Greenland white fronted geese fly over and graze occasionally.

Lough Nanag Esker, County Offaly - Lough Nanag esker is situated about 2 km south-west of Clonmacnois, between the River Shannon callows and a raised bog undergoing commercial peat extraction. The site comprises, for the most part, an esker ridge composed of glacial gravels. A small lake occurs in the south-eastern section of the site.

Clorhane Wood, County Offaly - Area of species-rich, hazel dominated woodland with occasional stands of Yew. The wood is on limestone pavement, an unusual feature in the region. This site is a NHA. Signs of pine marten are frequently seen at this wood.

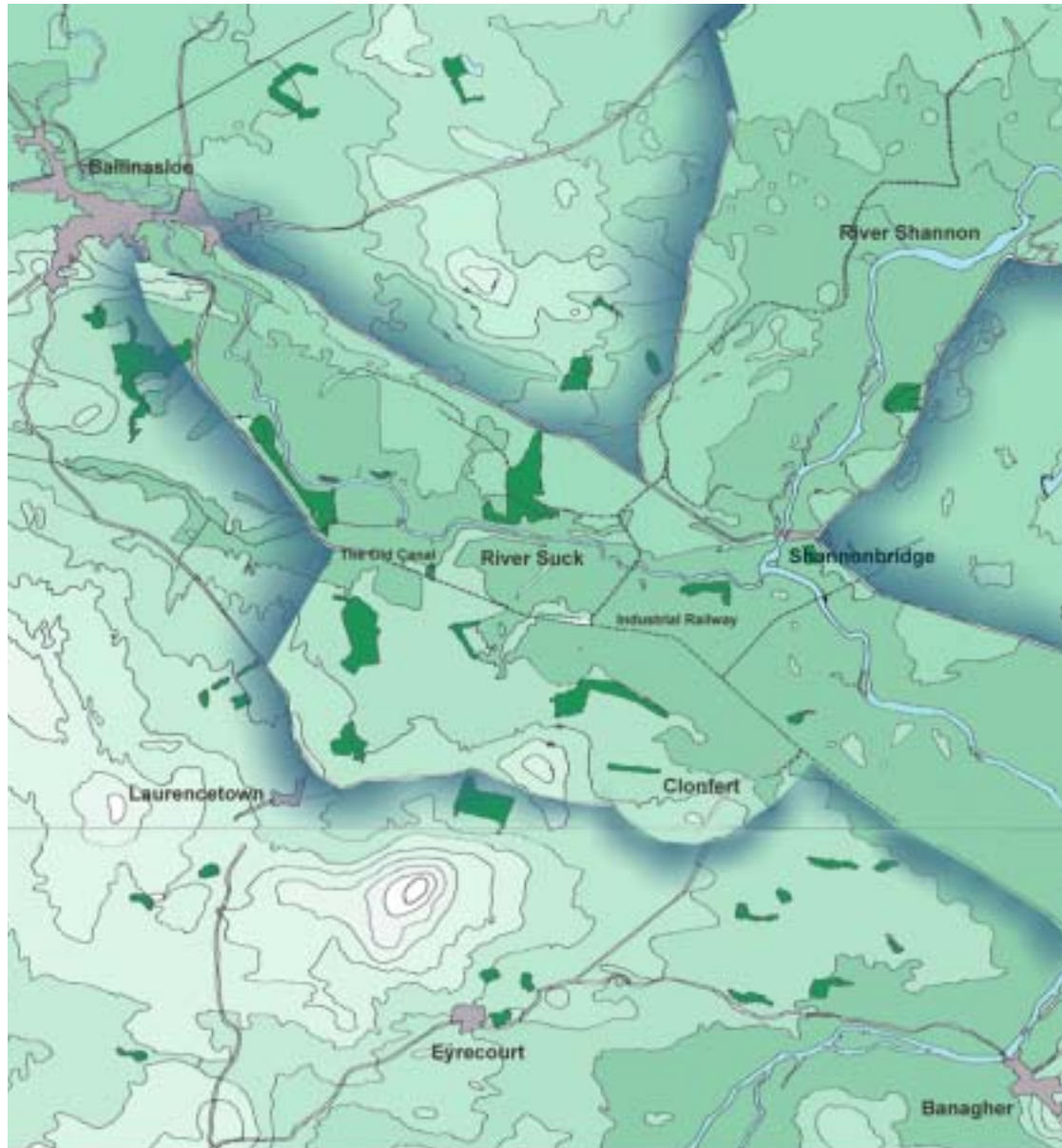
Cloniff, County Offaly - An area of cutover bog grades in to bog of reasonable quality at Cloniff.

Pilgrim's Road Esker, County Offaly - Pilgrim's Road Esker, consists of three areas occurring along 2km of the impressive steep-sided esker ridge which approaches Clonmacnois and the River Shannon from the east, said to be the route of pilgrims to the settlement in monastic days. The western area lies adjacent to the River Shannon Callows and includes Bunthulla Hill (north of the road) and Hanging Hill (south of the road). The eastern area is centred on the site of an old ring-fort, while the central area runs along the southern side of the summit road and is adjacent to Mongan Bog. The main habitat is a species-rich unimproved and semi-improved grassland, with a small area of woodland. This site is a pSAC.

Clonmacnois, County Roscommon - An extensive area of callows grades into reed beds occurs just north of Clonmacnois. This is a very important area for wintering and breeding wildfowl as well as being a core area for Corncrakes (more is written about the Corncrake in Appendix 4).

A4 MAP OF RIVER SUCK TO BE INSERTED





River Suck - topography and extent of corridor

3.4 River Suck

Environmental setting

3.4.1 The River Suck or *An tSuca* is a tributary of the River Shannon. The river's head waters are to the north of Ballyforan from where it meanders south to the town of Ballinasloe and then south and east to its confluence with the River Shannon just below the settlement of Shannonbridge.

3.4.2 For the purposes of this study, the extent of the River Suck corridor is bounded by the R357, incorporating the extent of the floodplain to the north of the river, and the line of the old Ballinasloe stretch of the Grand Canal to the south. This southern boundary deviates to take in the important monastic settlement of Clonfert in its entirety.

3.4.3 Ballinasloe marks the western limit of the corridor and the eastern limit is delineated by the western bank of the River Shannon. This section of the waterway is 16km in length and as one would expect from a tributary watercourse the river is narrower than the Shannon being in general about 30m wide.

3.4.4 The landform of the river's valley is not readily perceptible, there is a gradual rise in level to distant high points some 4 to 5km away both to the north and the south of the river. These hills rise up to over 90m in elevation, only some 50m above the river level. The existing blocks of woodland, hedgerows and scattered trees generally obscure the topography. There is a sense of a gently flowing navigation along the river that meanders through a landscape of broad flood meadows or 'callows' with the tree cover providing a sense of visual containment, which varies along the length of the river on both sides.

3.4.5 The large peat extraction fields that provide fuel for the power station flank the river on both sides up to Ballinasloe. However these workings are generally obscured from the river by trees and the landform.



Railway bridge over Suck



Fishing dinghy on the Suck



Fishing and grazing, Suck callows

3.4.6 Along the broader sections there are some scattered farmhouses and agricultural buildings. Other elements placed in the landscape by man include power lines which spread out to the west from the large and imposing power station at Shannonbridge, these cross the river in two places.

3.4.7 In general this section of the River Suck has a distinctly rural, peaceful and quiet character with the pastoral and arable use of the fields in the callows combined with the visual enclosure provided by the woods, plantations and hedgerows. The use of the river for pleasure boating and angling adds to the relaxed and sedate atmosphere.

Landscape and Visual Corridor *Confluence with the Shannon to the Railway Bridge*

3.4.8 A directional sign on the edge of the waterway announces the entrance to the River Suck. Traveling up river the direction is initially to the south for some 200m then the river turns sharply to the west. Along this section the callows are broad and defined by large fields with a tree-lined backdrop. To the north at a distance of half a kilometre the visual horizon is formed by Sugarloaf Hill a long low tree covered ridge. On the southern side trees and woods provide visual containment close to the riverbank. These woods mark the northern edge of one of the main large peat workings that characterise the local landscape.

3.4.9 Some 2 to 3 km from the mouth of the river a narrow gauge industrial railway bridges the river running roughly north to south. The embankment

of the railway forms a tree clad visual obstruction across the callows.

Railway Bridge to Cloonescragh River

3.4.10 Up river from the rail bridge the river meanders back and forth in the vicinity of Creggan Hill, power lines crossing the river are a visual intrusion. The course is then relatively straight for a long stretch. The tree cover governs the extent of the views along this part of the river, in places the horizon is distant and elsewhere the visual corridor is restricted by presence of woodland close to the riverbank. Again power lines cross the river in this location and present something of a visual intrusion.

3.4.11 The river then loops to the south and west through a broad flat area. Distant views, occasional trees along the riverbank, clusters of trees in the callows and by a single farmhouse mark the landscape along this section.

Cloonescragh River to Ballinasloe

3.4.12 The river continues to narrow by a small island where the small Cloonescragh River flows into the Suck from the west. The navigation passes round the island through a considerably restricted channel that causes boating traffic to slow down. The course of the river upstream is then to the west before turning northwest to the Ardcam Islands. In general, along this stretch natural tree growth along the riverbank and tree plantations close to the river reduce the visual horizon to a narrow corridor along the river.

3.4.13 The river then meanders north and west towards Ballinasloe, passing through Pollboy Lock, which was constructed to open navigation



Clonfert bridge



Bord na Mona rail on former Grand Canal



Woodland masking peat extraction

into the Suck. Here the rivers enclosure within its valley is more pronounced. The flat valley floodplain narrows considerably with low ridges visible on either side of the river. The river then passes around Ballinasloe. A short section of canal provides boating access to the newly completed harbour on the edge of the town.

The Old Canal

3.4.14 The canal, originally built in 1822 to 1828 runs in a south-east direction from Ballinasloe roughly following the line of the River Suck on its southern side. The canal has long since fallen into disuse and is no longer a watercourse. The course of the canal has been reused in part to contain the narrow gauge industrial railway that supplies peat to the power station at Shannonbridge. In the main the other sections of the canal course are very overgrown and obscured with the towpath still visible as an embankment and occasional stone bridges marking the old alignment.

3.4.15 Closer to the confluence of the River Suck with the Shannon the industrial railway has been built along the original course of the canal. The peat has been mechanically cut from these areas over the last few decades creating extensive flat open areas of exposed peat, which now dominate the landscape.

3.4.16 In terms of the visual quality of the rural landscape it is fortunate that the vast areas of peat extraction are low-lying and therefore not generally visible either from the River Suck or from the local roads that lead to Ballinasloe. The areas are accessible but only from minor roads and

lanes. Aerial photography is much more revealing showing the full extent of the extraction along the both sides of the River Suck and the Shannon in the vicinity of Shannonbridge. Careful consideration needs to be given in the future to the restoration and management of the landscape after the peat field extraction has been exhausted.

Socio-economic Corridor Ballinasloe

3.4.17 Ballinasloe is the second largest settlement in the study area, with a resident population of 5,984 (6,219 including the town and environs in Counties Galway and Roscommon). The town is situated on the river Suck, which divides it into two unequal portions, the smaller of which is in County Roscommon. The river played a pivotal role in the development of the town, the earliest known settlement being a Norman castle constructed on its western banks. The most intensive period of expansion was during the mid-19th century due to the extension of the Grand Canal to the town in 1828. The town's population has remained relatively static since that time, although has shown a small increase in the most recent census period.

3.4.18 Following the opening of the Ballinasloe Harbour in 2001, the Town Council have come under increasing pressure to open up land between the Canal Road and the river for development. At a Council meeting on Tuesday 2nd September 2003, the Council agreed a Variation to the Ballinasloe Development Plan that will zone a further 30 acres of land for commercial, mixed use and a mix of medium and low-medium density residential development on the northern side of



Ballinasloe Harbour



Ballinasloe Town Council and St Michaels



View north from old bridge at Pollboy

the old canal road. This does not include lands designated as proposed NHA. The Council already have an application for a hotel within these lands, and are discussing further applications for a multi-storey carpark and a cinema complex.

3.4.19 Further downstream at Portnick, there is an application for a marina, hotel and other activities. The remainder of the applications are for scattered developments around the town centre. Development pressure is greatest in the area that is adjacent to the old canal, including a significant area of residential development south of the Suck at Pollboy.

3.4.20 Whilst the Council have an objective within the Development Plan to implement a linear park along the line of the old Ballinasloe navigation, they are restricted by both limited available financial resources and by fragmented land ownership.

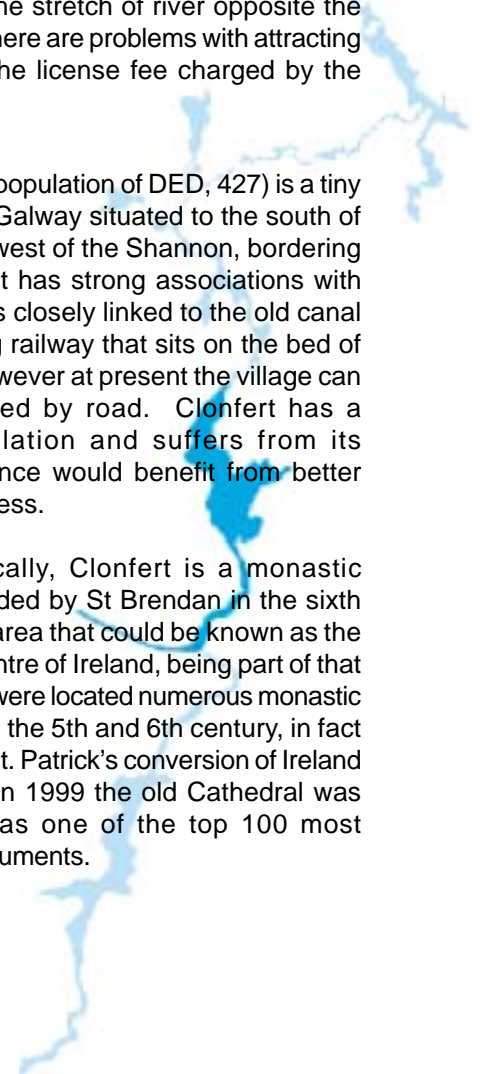
3.4.21 With the recent closing of A.T Cross and Square D factories, a significant employer, tourism is increasingly important to the town. To this end, the opening of the River Suck and the Ballinasloe Harbour in 2001 has created an important water-based tourism focal point for the town, attracting well over one thousand visitors annually. In fact, since the opening of the Suck to navigation, there has been an annual average of over 2,000 passages through Pollboy lock. Whilst a land-based arts festival, the Ballinasloe River Festival uses the harbour as its base and attracts many visitors. The town are also hoping to host an angling festival in 2004.

3.4.22 The Suck has always been known as an excellent fishing river and has a few formal and informal fishing stands along its banks, in particular at Correen and Culliagh. The installation of the lock at Pollboy enabled the rehabilitation of fisheries along the stretch of river opposite the lock. However, there are problems with attracting anglers due to the license fee charged by the Fisheries Board.

Clonfert

3.4.23 Clonfert (population of DED, 427) is a tiny village in South Galway situated to the south of the River Suck, west of the Shannon, bordering County Offaly. It has strong associations with both rivers and is closely linked to the old canal and the light bog railway that sits on the bed of the old canal, however at present the village can only be accessed by road. Clonfert has a declining population and suffers from its peripherality, hence would benefit from better water-based access.

3.4.24 Historically, Clonfert is a monastic settlement, founded by St Brendan in the sixth century. It is an area that could be known as the ecclesiastical centre of Ireland, being part of that territory in which were located numerous monastic settlements from the 5th and 6th century, in fact from the time of St. Patrick's conversion of Ireland to Christianity. In 1999 the old Cathedral was officially listed as one of the top 100 most endangered monuments.



Cultural and Historic Corridor

Settlement patterns

3.4.25 Along the area extending from Shannonbridge town, the banks of the River Shannon and towards Ballinasloe town, including the route of the Ballinasloe Canal, 43 monuments of archaeological significance have been identified from the Recorded Monuments and Places (RMP) records.

3.4.26 In the environs of the ecclesiastical complex of Clonfert, south of the Ballinasloe Canal there are the possible remains of a fulacht fiadh, a monument type which is traditionally associated with originating in the prehistoric Bronze Age but probably was still in use during medieval times. Interestingly there is also a fulacht fiadh associated with the other important ecclesiastical site of Clonmacnois.

3.4.27 St Brendan's Cathedral, Clonfert (*Cluain Feartha*, meaning the meadow of the grave), is erected on the site of an early sixth century monastery (c. 558-564AD) founded by St Brendan the Navigator. None of the original foundations of the early church at Clonfert remain. The monastery was destroyed by fire in 744, 748 and 749. In 839 it was attacked by Viking raiders who burned the monastery, while in 841 Clonfert was reduced to ashes in another Viking raid, and a famous Viking hero, Turgesius, raided it in 844 and 845. The site is located on an elevated area of land protected in its immediate vicinity to the north and south by low lying callowlands. Within a larger context, the site is located within a large sweeping curve of the Shannon so that the river lies to the north, east and south. The Shannon

waterway provided access at a time when the countryside was generally tree-covered and badly drained. As such, the site is quite typical of those locations chosen as monastic centres during the early Christian period. Although there is no physical evidence of the original church foundations dating to c. 560AD, there is a rich documentary resource due to the role of the cathedral and the association of the site with St Brendan. The monastic settlement was located at a strategic point on the border of two provinces and close to the Shannon waterway, which made it very vulnerable to attack (indeed it is recorded in the Annals of Clonmacnois that it was attacked by Vikings ten times over a few years). Also, its cathedral is not of very large proportions. However, despite its siting and small size, Clonfert has been regarded as a place of great significance since it was first established, regardless of the relatively limited settlement, infrastructure and wealth associated with it.

3.4.28 The present cathedral is the latest in a series of ecclesiastical buildings that would have occupied the site since Early Christian times, however it is surrounded by a complex of buildings, structures and archaeological remains relating to the occupation of the site from the early medieval period to the present. The oldest surviving feature of the present cathedral is the western doorway, the largest and most elaborate Romanesque doorway in Ireland.

3.4.29 Aside from Clonfert, Early Medieval activity within this corridor is confined to Ballinasloe town and its immediate townlands, extant monuments include an ecclesiastical church and enclosure,

ringfort and a medieval church. The latter is known locally as the 'Teampoilin' and is said to have been a cell of Clontuskert Abbey, which is located about 6km south.

3.4.30 The Later Medieval period (1169-1600AD) in this defined region between Shannonbridge and Ballinasloe town is only represented by a castle, which is strategically located on the eastern bank of River Suck in Ballinasloe town commanding an ancient crossing point where Ballinasloe bridge is now situated. The present ruins, dating from late medieval times, possibly stand on or close to the 'castle' built by Turlough O'Connor in 1124 and the 'castle of Suicin' built by the Anglo-Normans in 1245. It seems that the present castle was built by 'Tadhg O'Kelly, chief of Hy Many' in the fourteenth century.

3.4.31 By contrast, the Post-Medieval period (1600-1900AD) in the area between Shannonbridge and Ballinasloe is highly represented by a range of archaeological sites and monuments. These include a pump, three churches and graveyards, a canal, a children's burial ground, a flour mill, a metal working stone, a stone sculpture, two bridges, two batteries, two fords and a rectangular enclosure/gun platform. Located along the central section of the defined area between Ballinasloe and Shannonbridge, in the townland of Correenbeg, Co. Roscommon, there are the remains of a ford and a rectangular enclosure. Little is known of the ford except that Correen ford is associated with the Battle of Aughrim which took place in 1690. The rectangular enclosure (CH 227) is located on a flat floodplain and is thought to have been a gun platform set up to defend the ford. The

three churches and graveyards are located in the townland of Creagh Co. Galway in the northern limits of Ballinasloe town. One, is a Protestant church of 18th century date, though it probably stands on the site of an earlier medieval parish church. The children's burial ground is located within the eastern grounds of the Teampoilin, a burial practice which took place during the nineteenth century.

3.4.32 Within the environs of Clonfert there was also some Post Medieval activity. This is represented by the alterations to the Bishop's Palace renamed a mansion, a folly, a private burial ground probably associated with the mansion, a small canal and a mass rock utilised during the repression of Catholicism in Ireland during Post Medieval times. It appears that the cathedral at Clonfert, located within the vicinity of the Ballinasloe Canal waterway, fell into disrepair during the eighteenth century. Major restoration works were carried out on the cathedral by Canon Robert McLarney, rector of Clonfert in 1882, over a period of around 20 years. Apart from the re-roofing of the nave and chancel in 1986 no major works appear to have been carried out since 1882. Over the last number of years there has been an increased awareness of the historical importance of Clonfert. Although it facilitates only a small congregation today, the local community is actively working towards preserving and maintaining the historical continuity of Clonfert.

3.4.33 Although there is not a large volume of archaeological monuments located along both routeways of the River Shannon from Ballinasloe to Shannonbridge and the Ballinsloe Canal, it is

worth noting that beyond the 500m parameter used for this study on both waterways there is a vast amount of settlement evidence, especially in Co. Galway. In the more upland region, southwest of the main R355 road that connects Ballinasloe and Laurencetown, and southwest of the Ballinasloe canal line, there is a large range of barrows, fulachta fiadh, ringforts, enclosures, earthworks, mounds, moated sites, holy wells and cillíns. This area is indicative of prehistoric settlement in the region, an aspect notably missing along the banks of the River Shannon in general. This area is well-drained and conducive to farming needs and is largely populated even to the present day.

Underwater Archaeology

3.4.34 An Early Medieval togher was encountered during excavation works for the Ballinasloe Canal in the 19th century which is associated with Clonfert and similar to the togher at Clonmacnois, it would have been an important means of traversing and accessing the poorly drained environs of the site from a landward approach. Furthermore, a north-south running togher is located in bogland northeast of Clontuskert priory and it is thought that it originally extended towards Pollboy church to the north.

3.4.35 According to the Underwater Archaeology Unit at the DoEHLG, dredging works on the Suck have produced significant quantities of artefactual material, some of which was found at fording points. The River Suck is likely to reveal more underwater archaeological remains as it serves as one of the main tributaries from the Shannon, connecting the historical towns of Ballinasloe and Shannonbridge.

Historical Settlement at Ballinasloe

3.4.36 Ballinasloe derives its name from *Béal Átha na Sluaighe*, the 'Mouth of the Ford of the Hostings'. The name suggests the town was recognised in antiquity due to its location, as well as a gathering place. Ballinasloe is located, chiefly, in the old civil parish of Kilcloony, and, partly in the county Roscommon parish of Creagh. The major portion of the town is in the barony of Clonmacowen but an area also extends into the Roscommon barony of Moycarnon.

3.4.37 The county Galway part of Ballinasloe was built in the townland of Dunlo, which derives its name from *Dúnloedha*, the fort of Leodha. This was probably a ringfort, which predated the castle built by Turlough O'Connor in 1124. In 1130 Turlough became king of Connaught and shortly afterwards he built a bridge across the river at Dunlo. His castle was destroyed by fire in 1131. St. Micheal's Catholic Church, a protected structure of international significance, now occupies this site. Little evidence of the castle survives however it is suggested that remnants of it were still visible at the beginning of the nineteenth century, prior to the erection of a previous Catholic Church in 1807. The small urban settlement that developed around the castle and bridge appears to have been of little importance until the latter half of the 16th century.

3.4.38 It was only in the 18th century, after the Battle of Aughrim, that the town began to develop with the fortune of local families, especially the Trench family, later the Earls of Clancarty who backed the winning side in the Williamite war of 1690.



Kylemore Lock



Kylemore Bridge

3.4.39 During the 18th and 19th centuries the town started to develop under the patronage of the local landlords from their estate in Garbally Park. According to tradition, Main Street became the first built up area. In the first half of the 19th century the broad straight street pattern, Fair Green and many substantial buildings in Ballinasloe town were created at the expense of the Trench family. By seeking royal permission to hold fairs on their land, the Trench's gave official recognition to what was to become the Ballinasloe Fair, still held annually in October. The Trench family were not only responsible for the construction, alteration and landscaping of the Garbally estate but also for building Brackernagh school, various gate lodges and the Le Poer Trench monument. Buildings such as the parochial hall, the town hall and a number of large houses built within and surrounding the town mark the period of prosperity in Ballinasloe.

3.4.40 The urban form of the town today is easily recognised from the 19th century development. It has maintained the broad pattern of streets with substantial three-storey buildings defining the street layout with their scale and form creating a strong unity and composition. The town displays a notable skyline, punctuated by the Churches of St. Michael's and St. John's. In addition to the wide streets, other significant public spaces include St. Michael's Square and the Fair Green.

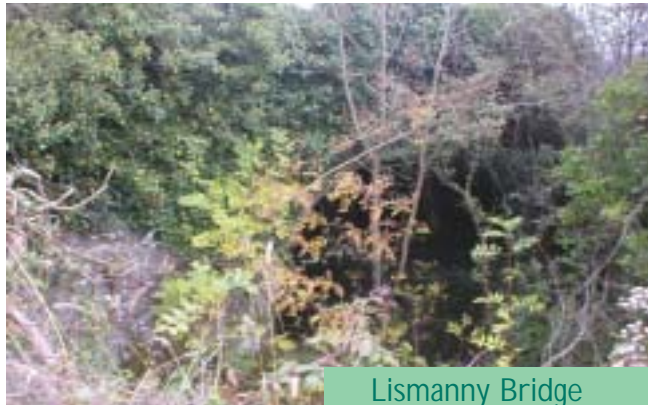
3.4.41 Interspersed between groups and blocks of buildings, archways and lanes give access to the rich variety of outbuildings to the rear of street frontage buildings. In contrast to the principal streets, the lanes and entrances contain

remnants of some older eighteenth century buildings and surfaces. Evidence of local materials can still be seen in the street frontages of some of the finer buildings, which were constructed from locally cut carboniferous limestone. Many of these buildings date from the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century.

Industrial Archaeology - navigation

3.4.42 In 1822, the government gave approval for the construction of a 23km canal from the River Shannon to Ballinasloe. Although a towpath up the Shannon and along the Suck had been mooted, the canal route was adopted as being the cheaper option. The land being relatively flat, only two locks were necessary, the first being a short distance upstream from the Shannon, opposite to where the Dublin line entered. The canal opened in 1828 and was physically linked to the Dublin line by a timber bridge over the Shannon (for tracer horses). With the upgrading of the river in the 1840s, the bridge was replaced by a cable-operated ferry so as not to impede river traffic. Although the railway, which arrived in Ballinasloe in 1851, robbed the canal of trade, it continued to function until its closure in 1961.

3.4.43 Although the canal is infilled at its northern end and partly used by a peat extraction railway, much of it is still open (albeit dry) and its entire course can still be traced between the Shannon and Ballinasloe. Of the 24 features along it, 17 survive. The survivals include both lock chambers and their associated lock keeper's houses, all 4 canal bridges, and 4 canal-related stores/offices. 4 of the 7 aqueducts, which carried the canal over existing watercourses also survive. Although



Lismanny Bridge



Pollboy Lock



Span and pier of peat railway bridge over Suck

small, they are nonetheless of high quality construction.

3.4.44 The River Suck (*An tSuca*) is interesting, as it was only opened for navigation in 2001. Up until 2001, following the closure of the Ballinasloe branch of the Grand Canal in 1961, there had been no opportunity to navigate this stretch for 40 years. The purpose of opening the Suck was to extend the Shannon navigation from the main channel at Shannonbridge along the Suck river to Ballinasloe for a distance of 16km. In opening this section of navigation two fords at Correen and Creggan were removed, a new lock was installed at Pollboy and a terminal harbour providing 24 berths was constructed on the defunct west channel of the river at the east end of the town. Although these features are obviously of high amenity value for waterways users, they are of no particular heritage merit.

Roads

3.4.45 Two road bridges cross the Suck at Ballinasloe, just above the new harbour. There were formerly two main channels, each served by a multi-arched stone bridge. The east bridge was rebuilt in the 1880s in connection with a drainage scheme; it is likely that this stands either on or close to the ancient fording point from which Ballinasloe partly takes its name. Although both structures are of landscape interest, they are also of historical interest as they encompass much narrower bridges, possibly of mid-16th century date.

Peat Extraction

3.4.46 Since the 1960s, peat extraction has been

a major feature of this area, with bogs being worked throughout this area of the Suck catchment to supply Shannonbridge power station. Just over half of the former Ballinasloe canal now lies within a peat extraction zone. The area to the north of the Suck is also worked for peat. A network of narrow gauge railway line, part of which is laid along about 13km of the canal bed (and through Kylemore lock), conveys the peat over the Suck and Shannon on multi-span concrete bridges to Shannonbridge power station. The bridge which carries a minor road over the former canal at Kylemore Lock bears the date 1966.

Ballinasloe Industries

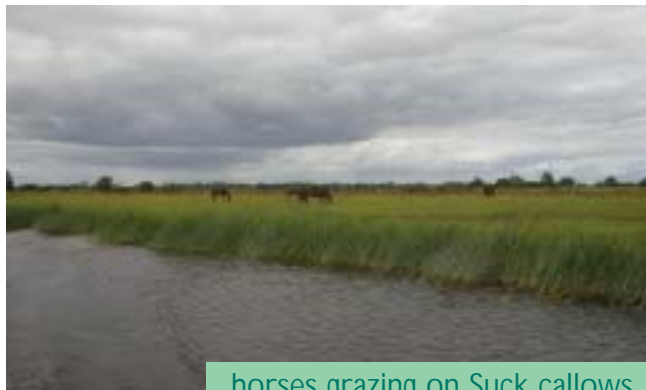
3.4.47 Ballinasloe developed as a market town for its surrounding agricultural community and its industries were geared to the processing of agricultural products. In the 1830s, the town boasted two breweries and two corn mills in the immediate vicinity of the Suck. The opening of the canal from the River Shannon undoubtedly facilitated the town's role as a distribution centre. It also made the importation of coal economically viable to such an extent that it became feasible to open a gasworks beside the canal basin in 1840. However, the town's industries were also increasingly exposed to outside competition and more so after the opening of the railway from Athlone in 1851. Few traces now remain of Ballinasloe's 19th century industries apart from a former brewery on the west bank of the east channel of the Suck and a building associated with the former gasworks near the terminus of the canal.



canal overgrown at Lismanny



Creggan



horses grazing on Suck callows

Rural Industries

3.4.48 Apart from a derelict lime kiln near the canal and the ruinous shell of a water-powered corn mill, there are no industrial sites in this zone.

Ecological corridor

3.4.49 The Suck is a river with flooding callow along its banks, like the Shannon into which it flows. The Callows of the River Suck form an important extension of the Shannon callows.

Areas of ecological interest

3.4.50 Within the River Shannon section of this study area, 15 sites of ecological interest have been identified. These sites have all been numbered and mapped and are described below and in greater detail within Appendix 4. The sites are set out below from north to south.

Garryduff, County Galway - A narrow strip of woodland with birch surrounds the edge of an adjacent bog. This wood grades in to a mixed woodland dominated by ash and willow closer to the rivers edge.

Borannagh point, County Roscommon - A significant area of callows occurs at this site.

Sugarloaf hill, County Roscommon - Scrub woodland composed of ash and hawthorn.

Creggan, County Roscommon - A narrow fringe of willow dominated woodland with hawthorn and ash. Woodland grades in to reed vegetation along the bank composed of common club rush and yellow flag.

Lismanny, County Galway - Long strip of scrub on the interface between bog and river, extending approximately 2km. The main species include birch, willow, gorse, holly, rowan. Occasional mature oak also occur. Wetland close to the rivers edge consists of Angelica, yellow flag, canary reed grass, common reed, purple loosestrife and common club rush. A significant area of callows and/or Hay meadows occurs at this site. Greenland white-fronted geese occasionally occur here.

Correenbeg, County Galway - A significant area of callows occurs at this site.

Clonescragh, County Galway - A tree lined section of the river is composed of mature ash with hawthorn dominated shrub layer. The substrate is poached and made bare by heavy grazing.

Cullaghmore, County Galway - Mixed broadleaved woodland dominated by ash, beech and oak. The wood edge is dominated by hawthorn.

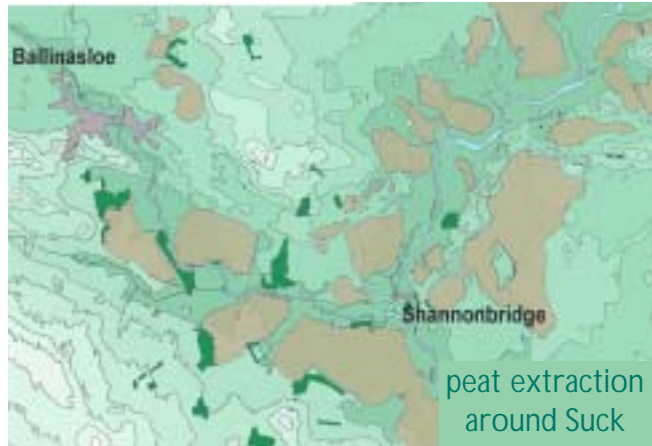
Ardcarn, County Roscommon - A significant area of callows occurs at this site.

Cutover bogs

3.4.51 Cut over bogs owned by Bord na Móna are frequent in the hinterland surrounding the survey area. While not easily observed on the ground the extent of these areas is clearly visible on aerial photographs and some occur directly adjacent to the river corridor north of Shannonbridge (Cornaveagh/ Cappaleitrim) and along the River Suck (Garryduff).



Cloonescragh River



peat extraction around Suck



peat extraction at Garryduff

3.4.52 In compliance with Integrated Pollution Control (IPC) licensing, a rehabilitation plan must be prepared for all areas of bog where peat production has ceased, i.e. cutaway bog. The primary aim of the rehabilitation programme for cutaway bog is the development of sustainable after-uses. Where possible, these uses will be of a commercial nature, such as forestry and grassland. In other areas the appropriate after-use will be the creation of wetland and/or wildlife habitats, which will enhance the national biodiversity resource through the provision of habitat for flora and fauna. A number of factors affect the choice of potential after-use including accessibility, adjacent land-use, proximity to Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), archaeological interest and community needs.

3.4.53 In 2002, Bord na Móna commissioned the Department of Engineering Hydrology at NUIG to undertake a study on future uses of Garryduff bog. According to the report, once peat removal has ceased the resulting cutaway bog will exist in a sealed basin separated from the surrounding arterial drainage system and underlying aquifer. Future conditions at Garryduff bog are likely to involve a large permanent lake with some additional seasonal flooding. Ultimately a hydrologic connection between the bog and the river will be established and water levels in the bog will then be controlled by the river. In the instance of any of the following conditions (a) drainage by gravity is unsuccessful, (b) winter flood inundation, (c) highly humified reed peat underlain by silty clay/shell marl; the main option for rehabilitation is the creation of a wetland.

3.4.54 The Lough Boora Parklands project was a pilot development, which provides a model of how sanctuaries for wildlife can be created from Bord na Móna's emerging cutaway bogs. The parklands comprise two thousand hectares of post industrial peatlands in West Offaly. They have been developed by Bord na Móna since 1990 into a mosaic of forestry, intensive grassland, wetlands and naturally regenerating scrub and grassland. A similar newly created wetland site occurs at Blackwater Works east of Shannonbridge. One or both of these sites have attracted a number of notable records of the following waders on passage:

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------|
| Oystercatcher | Ringed Plover |
| American Golden Plover | Grey Plover |
| Knot | Sanderling |
| Temminck's Stint | Little Stint |
| Dunlin | Ruff |
| Black-tailed Godwit | Whimbrel |
| Spotted Redshank | Greenshank |
| Green Sandpiper | |
| Wood Sandpiper | |
| Common Sandpiper | |



3.5 Waterways corridor - Access and User groups

3.5.1 Whilst access and user groups have been addressed in previous paragraphs to a degree, it is considered that the uses of the entire corridor area warrant a separate section to afford greater detail and understanding. Current uses of the waterways include: angling, cruising, sailing, canoeing, powerboating, and other water sports, wildfowling, walking, cycling, horse riding, appreciation of the local environment and heritage such as bird watching and the Summer Schools, and tourist trails which may involve travel by car to various sites around the river/lough.

3.5.2 The use of the Shannon waterway for navigation has escalated since its development in the 18th and 19th centuries. Consultation with user groups leads us to understand that there are some 5,000 cruisers based on the waterways. Many of these are privately owned, however there are a number of cruiser hire companies dotted along the Shannon. Waterways Ireland's lock-keepers maintain monthly records of the number of lock passages throughout the Shannon navigation, which provides some indication of boat traffic in the study area. Over the past 3 years there has been an average of around 27% of the boat users on the Shannon were moving into or out of the study area (approximately 7,000 passages through Termonbarry Lock, around 10,000 passages through Athlone Lock and 2,000 passages through Pollboy Lock). The data is broken into private and hire boats. From these records it is apparent that hire boats account for approximately 75% of boat traffic and that private

boats account for 25%. This could simply indicate that hire boats take longer voyages that require passing through locks whilst private boat users do not move as far from their cruising base.

3.5.3 There are just two boat rental companies, registered with the Irish Boat Rental Association (IBRA), based in the study area: Athlone Cruisers based at Jolly Mariner Marina in Athlone and Waveline Cruisers operating from Quigley's Marina at Killinure Point. Interestingly, there is no hire fleet based in Lanesborough/Ballyleague although there are local people who hire out single boats.

3.5.4 The use of the waterways for recreation is recorded as early as 1731, when there is a reference to a regatta at Athlone. The Lough Ree Yacht Club, which has its base on the lower end of Lough Ree, was founded in 1770 making it the second oldest in the world. The club provides recreation and training for its members. Rowing is popular particularly around Athlone where Athlone Boat Club has its base. The club hosts an annual regatta in June in the Inner Lakes. Lanesborough supports the Lough Ree Rowing Club. There are at least 3 sub-aqua clubs located around the study area – 2 in Athlone and one in Lanesborough. There is also the Lough Ree Power Boat School that unofficially operates from Hodson Bay. One of the biggest issues in terms of navigation is conflict of use presented by the increase in motorised craft (in particular jet skis).

3.5.5 Swimming, particularly around the Lough, is widespread during the summer months, although more recently signs have been placed

to warn bathers of algal bloom. There have been cases of skin rashes suffered by swimmers in both lake and river sections but swimming is widely practised which would suggest that these are isolated cases. Popular public bathing locations are found at Lanesborough/Ballyleague, Barley Harbour, Elfeet Bay, Portrunny, Hodson Bay, Coosan Point, Wineport and around Athlone. It should be noted that there are currently no dedicated swimming spots at Shannonbridge, to the consternation of local people. Continued enjoyment of the waterway for bathing is dependent on water quality.

3.5.6 The Shannon and its tributaries contain some game and an abundance of coarse fish. Lough Ree is a large reservoir of fish. The inner lakes, particularly Coosan Lough, hold tench along with rudd, bream and perch in the reeded waters. Angling is one of the most popular sports along the waterway, from both the water and the shore. This is well-developed, particularly around the famous "hot water stretches" at Lanesborough and Shannonbridge and generates a significant volume of commerce in settlements adjacent to the waterways, including accommodation, pubs, specialist bait and tackle suppliers. The Shannon Regional Fisheries Board is responsible for maintaining the angling interests of this waterway, including construction of infrastructure for anglers, such as boardwalks or access roadways. Like swimming, angling is dependant on good water quality within the waterways.

3.5.7 The waterway provides an important habitat for birdlife, particularly the Callows, Lough Ree and its islands and the Inner Lakes. These



Bona Spes Barge, Lanesborough



Fishing boats at Athlone



Lough Ree Yacht Club in front of Ballyglass Hill

are popular areas for bird watching, although this is relatively informal, and could be promoted by provision of low-impact, ecologically sensitive hides for bird-watchers.

3.5.8 Wildfowling is also a popular sport, particularly around Lough Ree. The Wildlife Act 1976, Chapter IV sets out the requirements for issue of permits for hunting; Regional Game Councils through their local gun clubs regulate game shooting. The umbrella organisation, the National Association of Regional Game Councils (NARGC) provides information on hunting seasons, regulating hunting so that it does not impact on wildfowl breeding seasons. Like Angling Associations, Game Councils are concerned about protection of wildlife habitat, including water quality.

3.5.9 As aforementioned, access to Lough Ree is limited, and is apparently the poorest of all the Shannon Lakes. There are a variety of contributing factors: the area is prone to flooding so historically few people would have settled there, leading to a sparse population scattered around the shoreline; this is compounded by the poor road network along the lakeshore. Public access to the foreshore, for the most part, is confined to public or private harbour/marina development at Athlone, along the inner lakes (at Coosan, Killinure, Ballykeeran and Wineport), Portlick, Hodson Bay, Lecarrow, Portrunny, Galey Bay, Lanesborough/Ballyleague and Barley Harbour. Hodson Bay is the most accessible, and consequently the best utilised. Other public access areas along the Roscommon and Longford shores of the Lough are more difficult to reach due to poor road networks.

3.5.10 Similarly there are few public access points along either the Suck or the stretch of Shannon being studied outside of the main settlements - Athlone, Clonmacnois, Shannonbridge and Ballinasloe. Again this is largely due to the extent of the callows along the edges of the rivers giving way to limited development, poor road access, and the location of drains and culverts that inhibit opportunities for safe provision of paths.

3.5.11 There are a number of Waterway walks identified on the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWA) website. These take in heritage sites of interest. However, many are more accessible by boat than by land. There is potential to further develop walks, however fragmented landownership, particularly along the shores of the Lough, may be an issue.

3.5.12 Cycling is generally not promoted along the waterways, although there are bicycle hire places in Athlone and Lanesborough. However, there is potential to develop designated cycle routes, or greenways that can be used by both walkers and cyclists as part of a future development strategy. Similarly, whilst there are opportunities for horse trekking in various locations along the waterway, this is fairly underdeveloped. As matters presently stand there are generally poor access facilities for cyclists and horses within the study area and obvious conflicts with walkers.

SECTION FOUR **1** ROBUSTNESS AND SENSITIVITY

4.1 Statement of Heritage Significance

4.1.1 This Statement of Significance sets out the nature of significance of the entire waterway corridor extending from Lough Ree, to the River Shannon and through to the River Suck. This relies on an understanding of the physical attributes, uses, relationships and associations of the area from past remains up to and including the present. It attempts to quantify the importance of heritage within the waterway corridor.

Due to the wealth and range of associative, cultural, aesthetic and economic values that the waterway possesses, it is considered to be of immense local, regional and national significance.

Aesthetic Significance

As one of the largest inland water bodies within Ireland, the size, scale and inherent natural beauty of the lough and the rivers and their surrounds combine to create a magnificent place of local, regional and national significance.

The rural setting of much of the waterway is of high aesthetic significance and allows the modern visitor to contemplate the past.

Archaeological Value

A landward approach to the waterway corridor is of visual and amenity significance and for many archaeological sites studied for this project it is critical to providing a visual backdrop thus creating a unique sense of place.



Pilgrim's Road Esker, Clonmacnois



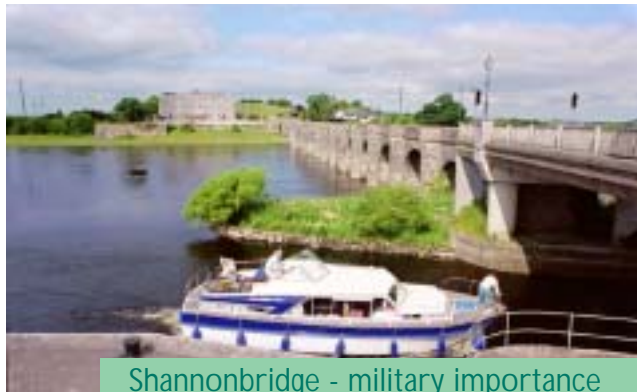
Loughs Oura and Ree



Shannon railway bridge, Athlone



River Suck Callows



Shannonbridge - military importance



Northern end of Athlone canal



The Shannon at Athlone

All archaeological sites located within the immediate environs (500m) of the waterway corridor, although some may be in derelict condition, are of architectural, historic and social significance. They are important visitor attractions in their own right and consequently are of significance to the respective local communities.

The significance of the archaeological remains of the waterway corridor and the tangible evidence of social, economic and technological development since prehistoric times (including the canals, navigation and related infrastructure) is apparent and made vivid by its continued usage to the present day.

Although specific elements of the cultural heritage of the waterway corridor are of special interest it has an intrinsic value as a *diachronic landscape* i.e. an area containing clusters of archaeological sites documenting different periods throughout history. Development of the landscape since prehistoric times can be traced by means of the archaeological evidence from prehistoric, to medieval and post-medieval times thus providing a sense of continuity and stability attested to the never-ending presence of the waterway itself.

The waterway corridor includes 5 National Monuments namely Athlone Castle, Inchbofin, Inchcleraun, Clonmacnois and the Norman motte at Portlick. It also includes a series of archaeological sites which have been deemed protected structures in terms of their national and regional importance by local government authorities:

- Military fortifications (site of) Athlone;
- 16th/17th century houses (de Ginketts) Athlone;

- Church, Ashford, Galway;
- Ecclesiastical enclosure, Ashford, Galway;
- Church and graveyard, Creagh, Galway;
- Ballinasloe canal;
- Children's burial ground, Pollboy, Galway;
- *Watermill, Pollboy, Galway (demolished during the establishment of the Suck navigation);*
- Ringfort, Portnick, Galway;
- Earthwork, Townparks (Clonmacowen By.), Ballinasloe, Galway;
- Metalworking stone, Townparks, Ballinasloe, Galway;
- Stone sculpture, Townparks, Ballinasloe, Galway;
- Castle, Townparks, Ballinasloe, Galway;
- Bridge, Townparks, Ballinasloe, Galway;
- Mansion, Clonfert Demesne, Galway;
- Cathedral, Glebe, Clonfert, Galway;
- Battery, Ranelagh, Athlone, Westmeath

Although not a significantly high number have been accorded this status, the sheer volume of archaeological sites (248) located along a limited parameter on the banks of the waterway serves as testimony to the extent of utilisation of the waterway since prehistoric times.

Architectural Significance

The crossing points on the Shannon (and Suck) at Shannonbridge, Athlone, Lanesborough and Ballinasloe were of strategic importance to British forces in Medieval Ireland. As such, the corridor played a significant role in the construction of permanent inland defences such as those located in Athlone and Shannonbridge, which are considered to be some of the most important fortifications of the Napoleonic period remaining in Britain and Ireland.



Cottage, Priest's Island



Maker's plaque on cover of Athlone sluice gate



Shannon railway bridge, Athlone

Individual elements within church and graveyard sites as well as monastic settlements within the environs of the waterway corridor; generally ranging from architectural features to individual gravestones are of cultural significance in their own right. Such aspects serve as inherently attractive features.

Also of significance are the many sites of industrial interest associated with industry, navigation, road and rail. Of particular note is the rail bridge over the Shannon in Athlone (pictured on page 57), which is deemed to be of national significance. Sites of regional importance include the following:

- The navigation channel, quay and harbour, Lanesborough
- Lanesborough bridge
- Lecarrow Harbour
- Lecarrow corn mill
- Lecarrow quarry
- Knockcroghery station
- Knock windmill
- Elfeet windmill
- Shrute flour mill
- Pigeons windmill
- St John's windmill
- Rindown windmill
- Athlone canal, including lock remains
- Athlone weir, lock, quays and navigation channel
- Quay/slip at Athlone barracks (The 'Watergate')
- Athlone town bridge
- Rail bridge over canal, Athlone
- MGWR rail station, Athlone
- GSWR rail station, Athlone
- Shannonbridge navigation channel, quay and lock house
- Bridge, Shannonbridge

- Ballinasloe canal and its surviving associated buildings and structures
- Ballinasloe bridge west
- Ballinasloe bridge east
- Ballinasloe gasworks

Natural Significance

The corridor supports the Shannon and Suck callows, a habitat of international importance that supports a diversity of plant life.

The entire corridor, but in particular the river corridors affords a very important habitat for wildfowl.

Lough Ree is of international importance for its habitats and the wildlife they support.

The shores of Lough Ree support woodlands of high conservation interest including St John's Wood, the Commons and Cashel wood.

The islands within Lough Ree are an important ecological resource and are of particular importance to bird life within the Lake.

The many inlets in the Lough support aquatic and wetland vegetation and exhibit the successional zonation from aquatic to terrestrial vegetation.

Historic Value

The corridor has a rich evidence of early ecclesiastical settlement with an impressive density of architectural and artefactual remains in particular within Clonmacnois, Clonfert, Inchcleraun and other islands within Lough Ree. Its resilience, its adaptability and its endless



Clonmacnois heritage centre



townscape of Athlone



Peter's Port, Athlone contemporary townscape

manifestations make the waterway corridor a brilliant palimpsest of Irish religious history.

Each ecclesiastical settlement located along the corridor is inextricably linked to the natural presence of the waters. They combine to form a large proportion of the most important pilgrimage sites in Ireland, again particularly Clonmacnois and Clonfert. The continued tradition of people/pilgrims visiting these sites in turn heightens the cultural significance of the waterway. Not only do the sites provide a place for worship and prayer but the waterway is also a platform for meditation and quiet contemplation.

There is evidence of prehistoric activity in the environs of the waterway. The area shows evidence of ritual and religious veneration stretching back to the Neolithic period and was therefore an important geographical landmark prior to the coming of Christianity to this area of Ireland.

The surviving fabric of the structures and features on the monastic sites located along the waterway reflect the fundamental changes and developments in Irish ecclesiastical history; the historic sites also demonstrate many aspects of Christian tradition as practised in Ireland over the course of 1500 years.

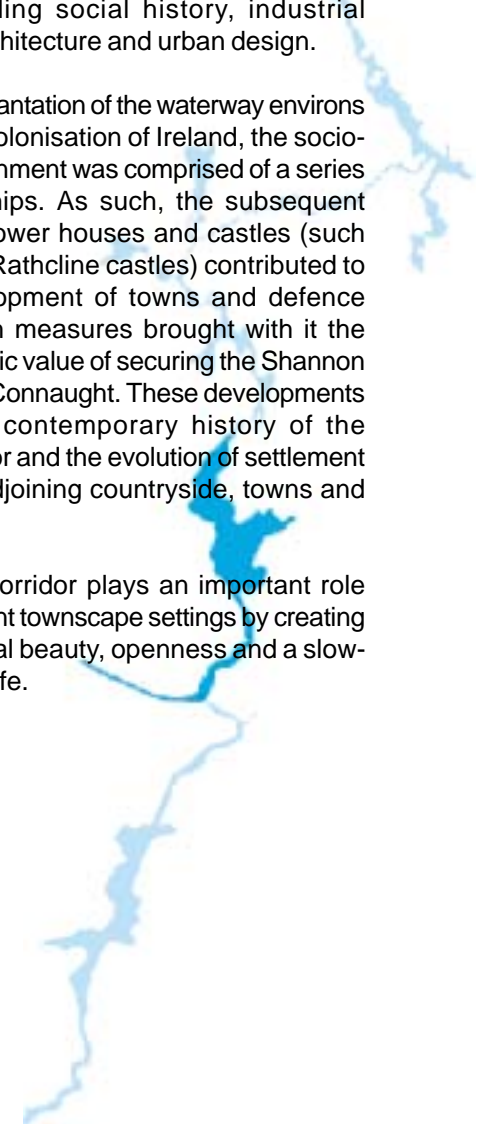
Contribution to townscape

The waterway corridor has the potential to reveal much more about Irish life throughout history particularly at locations such as Rindown and on the islands of Lough Ree such as Hare Island. While much of the evidence has been uncovered, more undoubtedly remains to be explored. In particular, the towns that developed along the

waterways retain a significant amount of dwellings, urban plan and original buildings that can be considered as cultural amenities as well as a source for academic study in a wide range of areas including social history, industrial archaeology, architecture and urban design.

Previous to the plantation of the waterway environs during English colonisation of Ireland, the socio-economic environment was comprised of a series of Gaelic lordships. As such, the subsequent reallocation of tower houses and castles (such as Athlone and Rathcline castles) contributed to the early development of towns and defence measures. Such measures brought with it the important strategic value of securing the Shannon as a gateway to Connaught. These developments influenced the contemporary history of the waterway corridor and the evolution of settlement patterns in its adjoining countryside, towns and villages.

The waterway corridor plays an important role within the adjacent townscape settings by creating a sense of natural beauty, openness and a slow-moving pace of life.





lock gate emplacement at Shannonbridge



rail bridge over Athlone canal



Clorhane wood, Co Offaly

Scientific Value

The creative and technical architectural accomplishments of many of the buildings and structures (including those associated with navigation such as locks, weirs, bridges etc) adjacent to the waterway corridor (particularly within the river corridors) serve to enhance an idea of survival and authenticity of the very fabric of past Irish society.

Social Value

The study area encompasses a large proportion of the River Shannon, which has a catchment area of over 15,000 square kilometers, representing a fifth of the whole area of Ireland. It has many myths and legends attached to it and is a major source of national identity in Ireland.

The Shannon (in particular Lough Ree) would have functioned as an imposing boundary to prehistoric peoples, especially when in flood. However, use was made of its important fording points and bridges dating to the Early Christian period have been discovered at various locations including Clonmacnois, with historic records of bridges at Lanesborough and Athlone, a testimony to the communication and transport significance of the waterway.

The significance of the waterway is clear in terms of its geographical location as the main navigable route through the centre of Ireland from northern to southern regions. Not only this but it also creates the boundary between the ancient province of Mide, Munster, Leinster and Connaught. The social-geographical status of the waterway during medieval times is attested to by

the siting of several ecclesiastical sites in proximity to the valuable resources of travel and communication which it provides.

The social values of local communities are enhanced by the presence of the waterway and its inextricable links to the past, thus creating a symbolic focus for identity.

Educational value

The museum and archive collections directly linked to the waterway and its associated townlands (e.g. Clonmacnois heritage site and Athlone Castle) create a medium to inform about the past and also to serve as an educational resource.

The waterway is significant within the realms of tourism, education and presentation. It contributes to our understanding of the past and the present and acts as a focal point for educational, leisure and pleasure activities.

Public value

The waterway has acted as a significant sustainable resource for its adjacent communities. The navigable features were originally developed as economic development activities creating valuable financial resources through navigation related tourism.

4.2 Threats to Heritage Significance

4.2.1 Areas and sites of heritage significance (as identified through 4.1) are vulnerable to the loss and degradation of those attributes which make them special. Threats include destruction or demolition; inappropriate use, development or redevelopment; and neglect. Such threats are exacerbated by a general lack of public awareness of the area or sites' role in characterising the region's natural and cultural heritage and shedding light on its environmental, social and economic development.

Archaeology

4.2.2 Archaeological sites and monuments are widespread throughout the study area and beyond. During the course of this study it was discovered that many of these features have been destroyed without any visible surface trace remaining or are in a poor state of preservation. Throughout Ireland archaeological monuments are vulnerable to damage and destruction due to development pressures and land improvements associated with intensive farming practices. Archaeological monuments set in pasture, such as some of those on the islands within Lough Ree, are the most vulnerable.

4.2.3 Access to sites within the waterway corridor, particularly the islands, needs to be approached with care to avoid damage to sites and monuments.

4.2.4 Lack of public awareness and out of date information contained within the County Archeological Inventories and Surveys are two of the biggest threats to archaeology as they hinder effective protection and monitoring of

archaeological sites and monuments. Lesser known sites are particularly vulnerable in this regard as all too often they remain anonymous in the consciousness of local communities.

Underwater Archaeology

4.2.5 Many areas within the waterway corridor offer the potential to reveal underwater archaeology, and perhaps, because it is so poorly recorded, the threats are many and various. In particular underwater archaeology is vulnerable to disturbance, damage or destruction through dredging or drainage works when new harbours, marinas or jetties are constructed.

4.2.6 The speed of boats and their consequent wake, can potentially impact on underwater archaeology in the form of exposing and dislodging logboats or artefacts which may have been buried *in situ*, or it could accelerate erosion on vulnerable materials and structures such as quays or landing slips associated with defensive sites on the lake (such as those at Rindown).

4.2.7 As with upstanding archaeology, access to sites needs to be addressed carefully to avoid unintentional damage to delicate sites and structures.

Built Heritage

4.2.8 Many of the buildings within the waterways corridor that have played a role in the history of settlement within the area are in a poor state of preservation and are vulnerable to further decay and dereliction. Furthermore, for many, they are poorly presented and not well-documented. In most cases the Records of Protected Structures within County and Town development plans do

not sufficiently reflect the wealth of built heritage within the area.

Industrial Heritage

4.2.9 Most of the significant industrial heritage sites within the study area which are still in use - notably the waterways structures, road and railway bridges - have been sympathetically upgraded to take account of modern usage requirements; those attributes which make them special are still clearly evident. The fact that they remain in use, even though many are over 150 years old, is testimony to their robust design and quality of construction.

4.2.10 In terms of redevelopment, industrial sites are particularly vulnerable to loss due to the difficulty of adapting them to new uses. Those in urban are most threat because of their generally derelict state and fact that they lie on prime development land. Within the study area, redevelopment pressure has been especially acute in Athlone, particularly along the Shannon which is now regarded as a prime housing location. In the very recent past, two major industrial complexes - the Shannon Saw Mills and Athlone Woollen Mills - have been replaced with apartment blocks, the designs of which take no cognisance of their historical antecedents. Pollboy Mill was also demolished to make way for a new lock on the Suck Navigation. It is important to realise that defunct industrial sites can have a future, as has been demonstrated at Knockcroghery railway station and Ballymahon Mill (just outside the study area); these buildings have been converted into a house and apartments respectively.

4.2.11 Whilst large scale peat extraction is a significant threat to natural heritage, it poses little threat to the region's industrial heritage save along the Ballinasloe canal, part of which now runs through Bord na Mona's Garryduff Bog. Although the banks have largely been removed along this section of canal, its course is still discernible as it is followed by an industrial railway along its bed.

4.2.12 In many instances, defunct sites lie neglected and a significant number of mills have already disappeared for this reason. The surviving ones are difficult to adapt to new uses due to their inaccessible location, derelict state and/or function-specific design. Moreover, most owners of these sites can ill-afford to preserve them as archaeological monuments, a situation which is exacerbated by the lack of any financial return.

Landscape

4.2.13 The landscape of the study area is very much a product of human intervention over the centuries and is in a constant state of flux, however the greatest threat to the landscape in terms of visual impact and fragmentation is development pressure for construction of single rural houses and the location of these in relation to the waterway. Whereas in the past people looked to using natural shelter when locating a house, the building materials of today allow us to construct a dwelling virtually anywhere.

4.2.14 The urban sprawl created by Athlone is putting increasing pressure on its sensitive waterside environment to both the north and south of the town. The lakeshore, in particular around Athlone, is vulnerable to development both in terms

of an increase in the number of harbours and marinas and in the highly visible dwellings particularly around Barrymore and Kiltoom within the Athlone environs on the western shores of Lough Ree.

4.2.15 Decommissioning and subsequent demolition of the power stations at Lanesborough and Shannonbridge will have an impact on the local landscape. However, this is going to occur beyond the 10-year timescale of this particular study. What will have a greater impact on the landscape, is the uses that the Bord na Móna peat bogs are put to.

Natural Heritage

4.2.16 Natural heritage within sensitive environments such as the waterway is particularly vulnerable to loss or damage due to human activity. In spite of the nature conservation designations within the survey area, a number of threats to natural heritage have been identified.

4.2.17 In order to maintain the diversity of waterfowl and wetland plants in the Callows, it is essential that annual winter and spring flooding is maintained from damage posed by over-fertilising and over-stocking, the biggest threat to the meadows is drainage. It is generally accepted that draining the Shannon on a regional scale is not a viable project, however the floodplain adjacent to Athlone is under severe pressure for development. In fact development pressure around Athlone, in particular around Barrymore and Hodson Bay, poses a great threat to natural heritage as it potentially increases pollution and causes fragmentation of semi-natural habitats.

4.2.18 The volume and speed of boat traffic within the waterway, particularly high-speed craft such as jet-skis and fast displacement cruisers, can be highly damaging to wildlife especially during the breeding season.

4.2.19 Water quality was probably the most frequently raised issue throughout the consultation process. Within Lough Ree and indeed the wider study area, the greatest threat to water quality is artificial enrichment from both diffuse and point sources - agricultural run-off and municipal wastewater respectively. Pollution can also be derived from boats.

4.2.20 Zebra mussel is the only bivalve of fresh water systems that causes fouling of boat hulls and the clogging of water pipes. The zebra mussel was first found in 1997 by researchers working with the ESB in Lough Derg. Its principal mode of transport is via ships' ballast water. Zebra mussels can be expected to virtually eliminate the existing populations of swan mussels in lakes they colonise. When zebra mussels occur in large numbers they can dramatically alter lake ecosystem processes causing a shift of energy flow from pelagic to benthic ecosystem compartments. Lakes tend to contain denser populations of zebra mussels than flowing waters such as the river corridor. It is known that Lough Ree is infected with the zebra mussel.

SECTION FIVE 1 ACHIEVING THE VISION

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 last 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 an important potential for nature conservation and the industrial archaeology of the waterways is gaining appreciation from an ever-wider public. The Heritage Council Policy Paper on the Future of Ireland's Inland Waterways

5.1 A Vision for the Waterway

To conserve and manage the waterway corridor in the heart of Ireland and to promote it's awareness as a resource of national and international heritage significance, whilst recognising its function as part of a wider navigation system and as a living working environment which contributes to the social and economic status of the region.

5.2 Policy Areas

The policies set out below range from corridor-wide to very localised policies. Each contains a recommended action or several actions with a suggested timescale for achieving the action. Where it is felt to add to the understanding of the policy, an explanation has been provided.



Athlone sluices and weir



Public art, Ballinasloe Harbour



Elfeet Windmill



Shannon Callows, Clonfert

Whilst the majority of the recommended actions identify the agencies responsible for undertaking specific works, this does not preclude individual community organisations - tidy town committees, youth groups etc, from undertaking or initiating specific projects. This document operates as a blueprint for not only local authorities, semi-state bodies and other organisations, but also for the community at large.

Promote the integrated management of the waterways as a resource of national and international significance

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
1: Recognise the wealth and range of associative, cultural, natural, aesthetic and economic values that Lough Ree presents, and conserve its integrity through integrated/ partnership management for future generations.	That the potential and feasibility for Lough Ree and its environs to become Ireland's first non-statutory regional park is examined. A feasibility study for the park should look at models of collaborative management from abroad and those proposed by the IUCN. The study should look at the extent of the environs area that should be included within the Park.	Establishment of the Lough Ree regional park by 2007.	Heritage Council; Local Authorities; Waterways Ireland; East Coast and Midlands Tourism; DOEHLG.	Through establishment of Steering Group and preparation of Action Plan with identified stages.

Explanation

The landscape of Lough Ree has long been recognised as worthy of protection and preservation. In 1977, the entire lake area of Lough Ree was listed as one of Ireland's outstanding landscapes within An Foras Forbatha's Inventory of Outstanding Landscapes.

The designation of Lough Ree as a National Park has been mooted by a number of consultees throughout the study area. The Midlands-East Regional Tourism Plan 2000-2006 includes an objective that Lough Ree, including the wetlands and peatlands of Roscommon, Longford and Westmeath should be developed as a National Park. The rationale is that it could be described as one of Ireland's last great wilderness areas. Although already designated a cSAC, SPA and NHA, designation of the Lake as a National Park would enable conservation of an important part of our ecosystem, history and heritage, ensure consistent management throughout the Lake, facilitate monitoring and ensure effective communication between government agencies and local authorities.

However, there is one critical obstacle to the designation of the Lake and its environs as a National Park; at present there is no specific legislative base for National Parks in Ireland. To create a new National Park would require the State to purchase the land surrounding the lake and the islands within it, which, given its extent, is highly improbable. What this illustrates is that there is a substantial gap in our national legislation to enable the provision of parks outside the conventional state ownership model. There is no recognised statutory or other mechanism by which agencies in partnership can come together to instigate the integrated management of an area for common conservation and socio-economic goals. At present, the Government are considering review of legislation to provide a legal basis for National Parks. The development of Lough Ree as a regional park under a new model could pioneer new ground in Ireland and pave the way for a new kind of park focused on humanised landscapes, community involvement, socio and economic development of eco-tourism, conservation and integrated management. Recent developments in the Wicklow Hills and in respect of the emerging proposal for a 'National Wetlands Wilderness Park' in Longford/Roscommon, are evolving this concept further.

In order to stimulate debate, a possible model for a park, which takes a form similar to the Regional Nature Parks in France, is discussed in more detail in Appendix 5. The underlying principles of the park would be: non-state ownership; collaborative management; community involvement; international promotion in eco-tourism; fixed-term programmes for the park development plan, followed by a review of the approach at the end of the term; and a single development plan setting out appropriate and prohibited uses/activities.

Manage the waterways for the benefit of all users

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale
2: Protect and enhance water quality throughout the waterway corridor	That the EPA, DoEHLG, local authorities and local landowners liaise to put measures in place, as required by the water framework directive, to prevent artificial enrichment from both diffuse and point sources (agricultural run-off and municipal wastewater respectively).	Immediate and ongoing
	That, in line with the Shannon Navigation bye-laws, facilities, working practices and licensing conditions be put in place to reduce and eradicate the disposal of effluent from boat users. That all new and existing marinas and harbours be required to provide modern, functioning pump-out facilities.	Ongoing

Explanation

Water quality affects all uses and users of the waterway corridor. There has been growing concern over the deterioration in water quality throughout the study area and its impacts on fish stock in particular. Although this will be largely addressed through the water framework directive, there are some actions that could be instigated from this study that could improve the existing situation. Many local authorities will need to invest in upgrading existing wastewater treatment plants.

3: Recognise the historic and natural importance of the islands within Lough Ree and their potential as an educational resource whilst protecting them from inappropriate development	That the relevant local authority and/or landowner instigates the preparation of Conservation/Management Plans for each of the islands (these may be part funded by the Heritage Council). Issues addressed should include access (including access by boat via swinging buoys), protection of archaeological monuments and grazing.	To be rolled out over next 5 years.
	That the DoEHLG include all islands within the nature conservation designations.	By 2008.

Explanation

The islands within Lough Ree are an important wildlife resource and are particularly favoured by nesting birds and flocks of Greenland White Fronted Geese. Parts of the larger islands have been excluded from the cSAC boundaries. These areas should be included to ensure limited access and the implementation of management strategies that are conducive to promoting the natural heritage. Grazing needs to be controlled to protect the grassland habitats for nesting birds. The islands are also important in terms of their human habitation over the centuries from the Early Christian period through until recent times.

Promote the integrated management of the waterways as a resource of national and international significance

Policy		Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
4: Maintain and preserve the aesthetic value of the lake and its shoreline from the impacts of dispersed and highly visible development, whilst discouraging speculative development and protecting water quality.	Prepare local area plans/village envelopes to encourage consolidated development within existing settlements, similar to those prepared by both Longford and Westmeath County Councils.	2005	Local Authorities;	Number of Local Area Plans Village envelopes prepared by Local Authorities.
	That design guidelines for siting of rural buildings in visible landscapes be prepared and adopted and that regard be given to the Design Guidelines for Rural Housing as prepared by DOEHLG (to be published)	Commissioned by end 2004 Adopted by end 2005	Local Authorities;	Number of Design Guidelines prepared. Number of Design Guidelines adopted and in use.

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
5: Protect the shoreline of Lough Ree from proliferation of private jetties and harbours.	That resources are dedicated to enforcement of unlicensed private jetties and harbours.	Ongoing	Waterways Ireland; Local Authorities;	Number of warning and enforcement notices issued. Number of retention applications received for harbours and jetties.
	That greater correspondence is undertaken with planning authorities before private encroachment licenses are issued and that consideration of the procedures associated with felling licenses	Immediate	Waterways Ireland; Local Authorities; DOEHLG;	Number of encroachment licenses issued, where planning permission has not been granted.
	That an information pack be prepared for distribution with encroachment licenses highlighting the need for planning permission before a harbour can be constructed.	Immediate	Waterways Ireland;	Preparation of information pack and number of packs distributed. Number of harbours constructed with an encroachment licence but no planning permission.

Explanation

As well as being visually intrusive, the increasing number of private jetties and water-related shoreline development causes fragmentation of wildlife habitat. Planning permission must be sought for creation of jetties that encroach on the navigation channel, however, all too frequently these are unlawfully constructed. Furthermore, although the County Development Plans all contain policies to prevent proliferation of private jetties, there is a lack of enforcement of these policies. The character of the whole of Lough Ree and particularly the Athlone environs is vulnerable to inappropriate development. Currently there is little communication between Waterways Ireland and Local Authorities. This results in encroachment licenses being assessed with regard only being had to the physical impact of the development on the navigation, whilst local authorities assess the wider impact on the waterways and general locality.

6: Seek a balance between differing water-based and land-based recreational activities and the local environment.	That due to a gap in our knowledge a study be commissioned investigating the impacts of various crafts and speeds on local wildlife and on habitats and on sensitive archaeological sites including underwater archaeology. Regard should be had to existing Department of Marine and local authority by-laws. This study should identify the characteristics of and parameters for areas of high speed craft and semi-displacement craft, with a view to designating a dedicated area that will have the least impacts on other users of the waterway, including wildlife.	Commissioned by mid-2004	Heritage Council;	Populations of Annex 1 bird species including green land white fronted goose, whooper swan, Berwick's swan, golden plover, kingfisher, Merlin, peregrine falcon and the hen harrier. Condition of Shannon Callows and has the area area been reduced or maintained.
	Establish a good practice guide reflecting no-wake zones, speeding, access and noise/disturbance controls to protect the value and quality of the amenity and its ecology.	Immediate	Waterways Ireland;	Condition of ecology - number of species. Condition of Callows

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
7: Support the growth and development of local communities within the waterway corridor whilst maintaining their distinctive character.	Prepare a combined Local Area Plan for Lanesboro/Ballyleague to direct development and regeneration in the village. The plan must address access to the waterway, recreation and tourism, and the provision of suitable infrastructure to enable development.	To commence by mid-2004	Roscommon County Council; Longford County Council;	Status of Local Area Plan and has preparation begun
	Instigate the preparation of a Village Design Statements (followed by Village Plans) for Glassan and Ballykeeran.	Roll out as part of VDS programme	Westmeath County Council;	Status of VDS and have they been prepared
	Prepare Village Design Statements/Village Plans for Knockcroghery, Portrunny and Lecarrow to address issues of design, managed growth and associated infrastructure.	To commence by mid-2004	Roscommon County Council;	Status of VDS and have they been prepared
	Instigate the preparation of Village Design Statements for Shannonbridge taking in the principle for a Waterway Protection zone recommended in the Pilot Waterway Study 2002.	To commence by 2005	Offaly County Council;	Status of VDS and have they been prepared

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
8: Sustain and diversify the local economic base, in line with the quality of the environment and international profile of the waterway.	In recognition of the impact that the downscaling and decommissioning of ESB will have on local communities in terms of employment, that the County Development Boards build in programmes for economic development in advance of cessation of operations of both ESB and Bord na Mona	To be instigated by 2010.	ESB; Bord Na Mona; County Development Boards;	Number of strategies containing economic development addressing the downscaling and cessation of both the ESB and Bord na Mona
	Promote the locality for eco-tourism.	To commence by 2005	Regional Tourism Boards; Local Tourism Agencies; County Development Boards; Waterways Ireland;	Number of eco-tourism projects/ attractions established in the

Explanation: The two new ESB power stations at Lanesborough and Shanonbridge both have a 15 year permission after which time they are required to be decommissioned and demolished.

9: Investigate the long-term options for use of the extensive cutover bogs within the study area	Commission a feasibility study in relation to cutover bogs adjacent to the waterways to assess the potential for wetland creation. Suitable areas should be defined now, well in advance of cessation of peat harvesting activity. The study should incorporate industrial heritage expertise to identify any buildings and structures of merit, assess the resources required to make detailed records of selected examples and the feasibility of preserving some of these.	Commission by mid-2008	Relative Local Authorities; DOEHLG; National Parks & Wildlife Service	Identification of Wetland creation areas over time.
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Explanation

By the time the power stations are decommissioned, many of the region's raised bogs will have been worked out. Nonetheless the potential for these to become local wetland environments, such as the Lough Boora wetland, and include elements of their industrial past needs to be explored. Other exciting examples of reclaimed projects include the Martin Nere project in Lancashire which was undertaken by the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust and is the biggest example in the UK. The Peatlands Park in Dungannon have also carried out experimental projects on wetlands.

The industries of peat extraction and power generation are associated with a diverse range of structures - power stations, engineering workshops, industrial railways and bridges. However, the rapidity with which they could disappear with little or no trace is evident at the recently decommissioned peat-fired stations at Allenwood

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
10: Strengthen the relationship between Athlone and the river Shannon	Instigate the preparation of a Riverfront Strategy to include guidelines for design and height of buildings fronting the river, maintenance of protected structures and built heritage, and access along the banks of the river for pedestrians and water users.	To commence by 2004	Athlone Town Council; Westmeath County Council;	Number of permissions granted for development and which make provision for public access along the banks of the river. Number of permissions in Athlone that refurbish protected structures.

Explanation

As has been mentioned throughout this report, Athlone is under significant pressure for development and expansion. The Town Council has been encouraging regeneration of the riverfront which is leading to a more vibrant river, however this has a cost - to both cultural and natural heritage. Much of Athlone's built heritage has been lost, giving way to apartments and hotels. The floodplain is also under pressure, which can lead to loss of habitat as well as a greater cost to emergency services.

Promote access to and enjoyment of the waterways

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
11: Enhance passive access to the shore of Lough Ree	Examine opportunities to open up access to the shoreline for walking, horse-riding and cycling and explore issues of insurance and public safety.	To commence by 2005	Local Landowners County Councils ; Waterways Ireland; DOEHLG; National Waymarked Ways; Advisory Committee of the Irish Sports Council;	Number of additional access points provided for along the lake-shore. Number of landowners prepared to enter into dialogue on issue.
	Examine opportunities for installation of isolated floating jetties at Portlick, Killeenmore, Portanure and other locations to some of the islands with the consent of the owners.	To be included within the NDP programme	Waterways Ireland;	Number of additional mooring/berthing facilities provided over time.

Explanation

Access to Lough Ree was highlighted as one of the key issues throughout consultation. This was separated into a lack of safe access and mooring facilities for boats, particularly on the eastern shore of Lough Ree, and poor access to the lake for pedestrians. The location of access to the lake for pedestrians was addressed in section 3.5. Both Roscommon and Westmeath County Councils include objectives to improve access to Lough Ree and the inner lakes, however constraints exist due to fragmentation of land ownership along the shores of the lakes. Furthermore, in some locations it may be appropriate to limit access to protect sensitive habitats and cultural heritage. For the most part, it is considered that suitable safe landing facilities, linked with existing settlements or services such as a pub or identified walking route and accompanied by appropriate signage can greatly enhance appreciation of the waterways environment.

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
12: Enhance access to the banks of the Rivers Shannon and Suck for land-based users (i.e. walkers and anglers)	Explore the possibility of creating signed access along the banks of the two rivers.	To commence by 2005	Local Landowners; County Councils; Waterways Ireland; DOEHLG; NWWAC; LEADER;	Number of additional directional signs erected highlighting access to River Shannon
	Provide angling stands at Shannonbridge and wheelchair access and associated infrastructure such as lighting along the river both upstream and downstream of the bridge, particularly at the hot water stretch and upstream of the new jetty.	To commence by summer 2004	Waterways Ireland; ESB; Regional Fisheries Board; Local Community;	Level of new infrastructure being provided on the banks of the river

Explanation

Access to the waterway in general was an issue. In creating any designated walking route, public safety will need to be addressed, in particular in relation to maintenance of stiles over water courses, drains and culverts and the extensive reed beds in many places. The Suck Valley Way is a good example of a successful walkway.. Facilities for anglers at Shannonbridge was highlighted as a gap by local people. Apparently the provision of angling stands has been

13: Enable access to the waterway for swimming and encourage links with water safety programmes	Maintain existing swimming access areas, develop new areas along the Shannon, such as the cutaway at Shannonbridge and link local communities with water safety courses to encourage safe swimming in the waterway.	Immediate and ongoing	Waterways Ireland; Local Authorities; IWA; Irish Water Safety (IWS);	No. of participants on water safety courses. No. of additional swimming areas.
14: Recognise and protect the local environment at Barley Harbour	Reconsider the proposal for a breakwater and berthing facilities at Barley Harbour in recognition of its significance to local people for recreation and amenity and look for alternative locations for safe harbours and mooring facilities on the eastern shores of Lough Ree.	Immediate	Waterways Ireland;	Areas identified as safe harbours on eastern shore of the lake. Status of Barley Harbour

Explanation

Barley Harbour is a privately owned harbour, leased to Longford County Council, that was constructed in the 1960s from local limestone. It is one of the few accessible amenity areas adjacent to Lough Ree within County Longford. It is well-used as a swimming and picnic spot by local people during the summer months and local fishermen moor their boats there. It is a peaceful spot, about 6km from Newtowncashel. At present, hire boats are prohibited to enter the harbour as there are unmarked rocks and shallow areas. However, it is one of the few existing harbours on the eastern shore of Lough Ree. Recognising a lack of safe harbours on Lough Ree, Waterways Ireland wish to 'formalise' the harbour putting in place a floating breakwater, navigation markers, floating moorings and associated access ramps, lighting, public seating, footpaths and upgrading of the existing toilet block. The development is of some concern to local people who currently enjoy the tranquillity of the location. Therefore it is the recommendation of this study that alternative locations for safe harbours and mooring facilities be examined.

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
15: Enhance access to Glassan from the water, linked into Waterston Estate to explore the many interesting features, whilst protecting its natural environment.	Identify a signed greenway route along or adjacent to the Killinure Lough road that could link boating facilities on the inner loughs at Wineport with the village of Glassan.	To commence in 2004	Westmeath County Council; Glassun Community; DOEHLG; NWWAC; Waterways Ireland;	Assess progress of development signed greenway route.

Explanation

The community at Glassan are anxious to gain access to the waterways. The Glasson Development Committee identified a possible option for access to be the widening and deepening of the Bunown river, which runs through Glasson and enter Killinure Lough at Wineport, to create a navigable channel ending in a harbour at the village. This scheme including a harbour with berthing facilities has been proposed and is included within Waterways Ireland's NDP programme. However, the river is ecologically sensitive and such a proposal is unlikely to gain support from the DoEHLG and the Heritage Council. Therefore another approach to improve access between Glassan and the lakes has been proposed, via provision of a signed greenway.

16: Recognise the potential of Athlone canal as a recreational amenity for the local community and visitors, whilst ensuring that industrial heritage is preserved.	Dedicate resources to the upgrading and maintenance of the old canal for fishing, walking and recreational use (e.g. rowing dinghys). This should include appropriate interpretative signage along the footpath which follows much of its length.	To commence in 2004	Athlone Town Council; Waterways Ireland; Shannon Regional; Fisheries Board;	Assess progress of canal development. Number of industrial heritage sites added to Development Plan of Athlone Town Council
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Explanation

Although part of the old canal has been filled in, and it is badly in need of maintenance, it presents a fantastic opportunity to become a local amenity area.

17: Strengthen the relationship between Clonfert and the Shannon	Establish formal access, with agreement of the landowner, to the settlement off the River Shannon to the south of Shannonbridge linking to the existing road into the village. <i>See diagram for national route.</i>	To commence in 2004	Clonfert Local Community; Galway County Council; DOEHLG; Waterways Ireland; Bord Na Mona;	Assess progress of canal development. Number of industrial heritage sites added to Development Plan of Athlone Town Council
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**Explanation**

Although close in proximity to both the Shannon and the Suck, Clonfert is currently only accessible by road. The monastic centre would benefit from improved accessibility. The Clonfert North road has a natural extension to the River Shannon just to the south of Costello's Island. Mooring is difficult at this part as it is an exposed place and the holding is bad for anchoring so some form of mooring is needed. There was a short length of artificial canal made to the west of the downstream island off the Bishops Islands as part of the original navigational works which was subsequently bypassed by the dredging of the river in the 1840's and this could be investigated as a possible mooring location.

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
18: Enhance access to the natural and cultural environment for land-based users, along the waterway adjoining Ballinasloe	Identify and provide a dedicated greenway along the Suck to Pollboy lock which could link with the old canal towpath and features of historic significance.	To commence in 2004	Landowners; Galway County Council; Ballinasloe County Council; Ballinasloe Community; Galway East Tourism; Ballinasloe Chamber of Commerce; DOEHLG; NWWAC; Waterways;	Assess progress of development of Greenway and other access routes
	Establish a dedicated greenway along the old canal towpath from Clonfert to Ballinasloe.	To commence by 2005	Galway County Council; Ballinasloe Town Council; Local Community; LEADER; Heritage Council; NWWAC; Bord na Mona;	Assess progress of development of Greenway and other possible access routes.
19: Strengthen the relationship between the monastic settlements of Clonfert and the World Heritage Site of Clonmacnoise	Extend the existing bog rail tour in the longer term to link Clonfert with Shannonbridge and Clonmacnois.	Long term - post-extraction	Galway County Council; Offaly County Council; Heritage Council; Bord Na Mona; IWWAI;	Assess progress in achieving bog rail extension
	Utilise the network of peat railways as greenways to connect the monastic settlements of Clonfert and Clonmacnoise.	Long term - after peat extraction ceases	Galway County Council; Offaly County Council; Heritage Council; Bord Na Mona; IWWAI;	Assess progress in achieving connections between Clonfert and Clonmacnoise
Explanation Although the network of peat railways was never intended to be permanent, there are substantial concrete bridges across the Shannon and the Suck. These have potential, following the cessation of peat harvesting, to become vital links on any walking/cycling tracks which may eventually be created through abandoned cutaways. The entire course of the Ballinasloe canal also has enormous potential in this respect (refer to policy 17).				
20: Enhance visitor access to Clonmacnois	Promote the Slí Mhór pilgrims path as a walking route from and to Clonmacnois to take in the numerous cultural and natural heritage sites within the vicinity.	Immediate and ongoing	Offaly County Council; Heritage Council; Clonmacnoise Visitor Centre;	Number of additional people using the pilgrim's path.

Protect and conserve natural, built and cultural heritage

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
21: Protect the Shannon and Suck Callows and broader floodplain from inappropriate development whilst allowing landowners to continue existing agricultural activities and providing access for land-based users of the waterway (e.g. anglers).	Have regard to the report being prepared on Flooding in the Shannon by the OPW and to continue the on-going study in the floodplains so that the floodplain boundaries can be defined and the area designated for protection.	Commission by 2005	DOEHLG; OPW; Local Authorities;	Establishing the floodplain area Mapping the floodplain area Designating the floodplain Adopting the designation into relevant Development Plans. Increase in SAC, NHA, SPA designation.
	Set up a dialogue with local landowners and prepare a Management Plan to ensure protection of the Callows and their extensive wetland habitat. The Plan should set out the types and level of activities that would be deemed acceptable within this unique environment, for example traditional grazing regimes, cutting of hay and low intensity agriculture.	To commence immediately	DOEHLG; Relevant Local Authority; Waterways Ireland;	Condition of the callows and wetland habitat over time. Percentage of farms within the area participating within the Rural Environment Protection Scheme.
	That all applications for development within and adjacent to designated boundaries and the defined floodplain be referred to the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the DoEHLG.	Ongoing	Local Authorities National Parks and Wildlife Service; DOEHLG; OPW	Number of applications within and adjacent to the floodplain referred to National Parks and Wildlife Service and number of responses received.

Explanation

The Shannon callows, the floodplains of the River Shannon, are a unique wetland resource in the Irish midlands. The Suck callows are an important extension of the callows system. The callows represent a substantial wetlands of international importance. The continuation of this habitat is dependent on seasonal flooding, low intensity agriculture and the cutting of hay over silage production. The River Shannon Callows, the Middle Shannon Callows and the Suck River Callows are all designated sites. Most of the local authorities within the study area recognise that development should not take place within this area, but it is considered that this needs to be formalised through open dialogue between the interested/affected parties. Greater communication is required to mitigate against development that conflicts with wildlife protection.

Although the callows occurs within the floodplain, the area of flooding is not always contiguous with the callows. As aforementioned, the floodplain is vulnerable to development in some locations, particularly around the Athlone environs. Definition of the floodplain, based on previous major flood events will help to identify locations where development is inappropriate.

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
22: Protect designated areas and prevent habitat fragmentation.	That any application for development within and/or adjacent to designated boundaries be referred to the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the DoEHLG.	Ongoing	Relevant Local Authorities DOEHLG; National Parks and Wildlife Service;	Number of Applications referred to the National Parks and Wildlife Service Number of responses received.

Explanation

Much of the study area is already designated, implying the entire area is of significant conservation importance. Areas outside the designated boundaries may also have an influence on the waterway corridor and are of considerable ecological importance. It is important that the National Parks and Wildlife Service respond with a submission so that the local planning authority can make an informed decision.

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
23: Update baseline information regarding the status of natural heritage within the corridor	Undertake further research to update the baseline information regarding species and habitats on an annual basis from the annual monitoring programmes.	Ongoing	National Parks and Wildlife Service ;	Increase/Decrease in area (hectares) of designations SAC; SPA; NNA over time. Five year mean populations of Annex 1 bird species.

Explanation

Ongoing monitoring and updating of information can help to ascertain the threats to natural heritage within the study area. This waterways study collates all existing information on natural heritage within a defined boundary and observes sites of ecological importance both designated and otherwise. What it does not do is go into detail on the areas designated or the current state of these. Therefore this is considered to be a gap in information.

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
24: Update current lists of protected structures adjacent to the waterway corridor to afford greater statutory protection to built and cultural heritage.	Refer to the extensive lists of sites and structures within the Appendix 2 to this report and update Local Authority records accordingly by way of a variation. Rindown is one of several sites that should be afforded state care.	Review to commence 2004.	Respective Local Authorities and Town Councils;	Number of protected structures in each country - should be increasing
	Update the RPS and the RMP in relation to industrial heritage and the following sites should be included	Review to commence 2004		Number of additional protected structures and number of additions to the record of monuments and places nationally
	Lanesborough bridge - RPS Lanesborough harbour - RPS Shrle flour mill - RMP Pigeons windmill - RMP Lecarrow harbour - RMP Lecarrow quarry - RMP Gentex factory, Athlone - RPS Weir and lock, Athlone - RPS Quay, Shannonbridge - RPS Kylemore bridge - RPS Lismanny bridge - RPS Pollboy bridge - RPS Athlone canal, including locks and bridges - RMP Railway bridge over Athlone canal - RPS Quay/slip adjoining Athlone barracks - RPS	Lanesborough quay - RPS Ballinasloe gasworks - RPS Shrle corn mill - RMP St John's windmill - RMP Lecarrow corn mill - RMP and RPS Knockcroghery station - RPS Town bridge, Athlone - RPS Quay, Athlone - RPS Fanning's lock house - RPS Kylemore lock house - RPS Lime kiln, Cloonascragh - RMP	Review to commence 2004	Respective Local Authorities -RPS Duchas; The Heritage Service -RMP;

Explanation

It is the policy of all local authorities within the study area to conserve sites of special heritage significance and these are listed in their respective County or Town Development Plans. As a result of the fieldwork for this project, it is evident that there are significant gaps within these lists. Field surveys for archaeological sites and monuments and for built structures are out-of-date. In some instances features have been destroyed or are in a poor state of preservation. In other cases newly identified sites of special merit are not included within the lists.

In general, the *Record of Monuments and Places* (RMP) is appropriate for buried sites of archaeological interest and those upstanding sites which are unlikely to be reused or which should be preserved in their existing state. The *Record of Protected Structures* is more suited to those sites which are still in use, or which have the potential for reuse. Where a site has an 'archaeological' and 'architectural' dimension, both types of protection may be appropriate.


Whilst statutory protection cannot guarantee a site's future well-being or prevent unauthorised destruction, it at least improves the chances of future development proposals giving cognisance to features of a site which are of special character.

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
25: Formulate a consistent basis of approach throughout the waterway corridor regarding conservation of the archaeological resource	That the future conservation and development of the archaeological resource within the study area be guided by the principles of the Australia ICOMOS charter for the conservation of places of cultural significance (the Burra Charter) as per revised version 1988. Conservation plans should be prepared for sites/structures prior to any reuse/development.	Ongoing	Landowners; Duchas - The Heritage Service; Local Authorities; Heritage Service; Waterways Ireland;	Condition of monuments on land in ownership of Council and other landowners. Number of Conservation Plans prepared
	That sites/structures be cared for via a planned maintenance and repair programme based on sound knowledge of the place and its building materials, regular inspection and prompt preventative maintenance and repair.	Ongoing	Duchas - The Heritage Service; Local Authorities; Landowners;	Condition of monuments on land in ownership of Council and other landowners.
	Where any ground disturbance or excavation works are required in an area of archaeological interest, these should be referred to the National Monuments Service of the DoEHLG.	Ongoing	Local Authorities; Landowners; National Monuments Service;	Number of referrals to National Monuments Service

Explanation

Given that there are over 200 sites and monuments of archaeological interest within 500m of the waterway, a consistent approach needs to be adopted by all the governing bodies within the study area to the conservation of the archaeological resource. Some recommendations have been outlined above, more are provided within Appendix 2 to this report. Ultimately a systematic approach for maintenance and management needs to be adopted via the Conservation Plan process. As a minimum, Conservation Plans should address the significance of the place/site/structure, the integrity of its setting, access and visitor management.

Raise awareness and appreciation of the waterways and their associated heritage

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
26: Raise the profile of natural and cultural heritage by making information available on the heritage of the waterway corridor.  Information board at Barley Harbour	Fund and provide detailed visitor information boards (such as that located at Barley Harbour) located at the public harbours and access points throughout the waterway corridor including Lanesborough, Portrunny, Lecarrow and Hodson Bay, Athlone Lock, Shannonbridge and Ballinasloe. These should include information on all heritage issues including potential for underwater archaeology	Immediate	Local Authorities; Local Tourism Agencies; Local Chamber of Commerce; LEADER; Waterways Ireland;	Number of visitor boards erected on site
	That detailed information on the heritage of the waterways be made available in the form of leaflets from the tourist information centres throughout the corridor; the lock houses at Athlone and Pollboy, cruiser hire operators and council offices.	Ongoing	Local Authorities; Local Tourism Agencies; Local Chamber of Commerce; LEADER;	Number of leaflets made available and number of different locations
	That the websites of Waterways Ireland, The Heritage Council, IWAI, boat hire companies and the respective local authorities provide information on the heritage of the waterways.	Ongoing	Waterways Ireland; Heritage Council; IWAI; Boat Hire Companies; Local Authorities	Number of websites with information on the heritage of the Waterways
	Establish links with local tertiary institutions to provide heritage training for tour guides leading to development of both land and water-based archaeological and ecological site visits geared towards the local community and tourist industry.	To be set up by 2006	County Development Boards; Educational Institutions;	Number of trained tourist guides
	That the Underwater Archaeology unit of the DoEHLG engage in dialogue with local sub-aqua clubs so that when underwater archaeology is discovered by local divers they will report it to the unit to enable them to take the appropriate action.	Immediate and ongoing	Underwater Archaeology Unit of DOEHLG;	Number of additional underwater archaeological features discovered and number reported

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
27: Conserve and enhance the substantial military heritage associated with Shannonbridge and recognise its links with the Shannon and Suck callows	Instigate the preparation of a Conservation/Management Plan that will address presentation and access to the site of the Shannon bridge fortifications and explore the potential for use of the building for tourism purposes.	Commence by mid-2004	Offaly County Council; Roscommon County Council; Owners of the Shannonbridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Has dialogue commenced •Has a Conservation Management Plan been prepared
28: Utilise existing structures and mechanisms within the study area to provide interpretation on the history of the waterway	Whilst there is limited scope to extend the Blackwater rail network, the interpretative display at the Blackwater Depot could be greatly enhanced by additional displays on the archaeological, historical, social and technical dimensions of peat working	Establish by 2006	Bord Na Mona; Local Tourism Agency;	Number of additional displays on peat -working
	The ESB at Shannonbridge has begun to create a depot for the storage and presentation of artifacts used since the company's inception in 1927. This depot is to become a visitor centre in 2005. This facility is ideally located to narrate the story of peat-fired electricity in the midlands.	Established for the opening of the depot in 2005	ESB;	Number of displays relating to other historical events on the waterways.
	Athlone Museum, located within Athlone Castle, is well situated both in terms of its central location on the Shannon and in proximity to the quay, for a major interpretative display on all aspects of the waterway.	Establish by 2006	OPW; Local Authority; Local Tourism Agency;	Number of displays relating to other historical events on the waterways.

Policy	Recommended Action	Timescale	Responsible Bodies	Monitoring
<p>29: Enable controlled access to islands within Lough Ree for educational purposes</p>	<p>Hare Island which is privately owned provides a snapshot of the history of the islands of Lough Ree, it possesses a lodge and other structures recently proposed for listing within the RPS by Westmeath County Council, a meadow and a substantial woodland. With the consent of the landowner the Island could be promoted as an educational tool for schools and for visitors through provision of sensitive access. Access would need to be addressed via a Conservation Management Plan as recommended in Policy 3, but options for access such as isolated floating moorings or a dedicated shuttle service would be considered favourably.</p>	<p>Establish by 2006</p>	<p>Private Landowner Westmeath County Council Waterways Ireland</p>	<p>Level of Dialogue between landowner and others. Status of Conservation Plan Preparation Level of controlled access available</p>



Lanesborough harbour



Shrule flour mill



Ballinasloe east bridge

5.3 Indicators and Monitoring

5.3.1 The brief for this study called for the selection of indicators for baseline sites against which future change can be measured. Due to the extent of the study area and sheer volume of heritage items of significance, the team have been unable to identify specific baseline sites. The following paragraphs set out suggested indicators, targets and methods for monitoring change. Some of these have been lifted from the indicators suggested by the Heritage Council for appraisals.

Indicator	Target
Number of monuments in the RMP/ other monuments, the fabric or setting of which has been damaged or diminished by development granted planning permission	Reduce the number affected annually.
Number of grants/refusals of planning permission for development that may have had an affect on the fabric or setting of a monument or an Area of Archaeological Potential or a site in the RMP.	Check trends, monitor permission for mitigation and check proportion of refusals to see if more consents are being given.
Number of monuments, or cases in Areas of Archaeological Potential in the RMP, which have been recorded or otherwise subject to physical/ geophysical exploration/excavation as a result of an application for planning permission.	Check trends in areas of development pressure, the number should be increasing to protect the resource.
Condition of monuments on land in ownership/control of local authority.	Improve condition of these monuments on an annual basis.
Number of archaeological objects and heritage objects catalogued/ registered/described/classified and under local authority safekeeping in museums, etc.	Trend of increasing numbers over time or 20% increase per 5 year period.
Number of heritage sites open to, or accessible by the public with meaningful interpretation of their value/importance/interest.	Trend of increasing number over time.
Number of structures included in RPS.	Increase in number of structures afforded statutory protection over period of time.
Number of structures within RPS damaged or demolished as a result of development.	No demolition of protected structures. Greater number restored/ reused.

Number, or area in hectares, or proportion of the designated area (NHA, SAC or SPA) damaged or lost as a result of development.	No reduction in the area and a possible increase to include floodplain areas.
Changes in the area of Annex I habitats as a result of development.	Habitats should show favourable conservation status as defined in EU Habitats Directive.
Five year mean populations of Annex I bird species including greenland white-fronted goose, whooper swan, Berwick's swan, golden plover, kingfisher, merlin, peregrine falcon and hen harrier.	Populations should show favourable conservation status as defined in the EU Habitats Directive.
Changes in the water quality, illustrating both increases and decreases in quality.	Water quality should meet with relevant EU and National water quality standards.
Percentage of farms (expressed as a % of total farmland) within the area participating in the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme (REPS).	Increase in the area of land managed under the scheme.
Percentage of farms (expressed as a % of total farmland) within the area participating in the Corncrake Protection Scheme.	Increase in the area of land managed under the scheme.
Area in hectares of hay meadows.	Increase in the area of land managed as hay meadows.

5.3.2 In relation to monitoring of archaeological features, the following recommendations should be applied to the waterway corridor:

- A system for monitoring archaeological monuments should be established.
- Provisions should be made for the protection of archaeological monuments on farmland.
- Publicity and education, especially on issues of preservation, should become integral parts of any monument protection programme.

From the list of archaeological sites and monuments contained within Appendix A to Appendix 2 of this study, it is clear that there is a vast range of types from those with a lesser degree of significance to those that are of high significance by virtue that they form part of a greater complex that has been intensively utilised over time (such as Rindown, the islands within Lough Ree, Clonmacnois, Clonfert etc). Lesser known sites/monuments have remained largely anonymous in the consciousness of local communities and as such, steps should be taken to undertake detailed field surveys thus providing a public record and also to assess whether the site is favourable to future development in terms of recreation and tourism.

5.4 Lough Ree: A New Model Regional Park?

The Irish landscape will be a dynamic, living landscape, one which accommodates the physical and spiritual needs of people with the needs of nature in a harmonious manner, and as a result brings long term benefits to both.

Vision statement of the Heritage Council- Policy Paper on Ireland's Landscape and National Heritage

5.4.1 This study's leading recommendation is for the recognition of Lough Ree as a heritage resource of national and international significance. As stated on page 66 some commentators have advocated its designation as a National Park, yet there is no mechanism in Irish legislation for this to happen outside of the traditional State ownership model which is considered, in this instance, singularly inappropriate given the nature of the place as a humanised landscape with its related socio and economic dynamic. What it does expose is the absence of any kind of partnership model in Ireland for the creation of a new breed of nature or heritage park, founded on collaborative management principles, partnership working and community involvement.

5.4.2 This section of the report is aimed at stimulating a debate amongst the project stakeholders on what the future might hold for Lough Ree, and in particular what steps might be taken to evolve a new model of 'national park' for Ireland that could be pioneered at the core of its inland waterway system. Any new model would of course, seek to build on and be inclusive of, the existing system.

5.4.3 It is beyond the remit of this study to canvas

the options for a new model of national/regional park in Ireland, but the study team would defer to the highly acclaimed international example of the French Regional Nature Parks (Parcs Naturels Regionaux) as presenting one possible model that has been designed to serve a range of functions and at the same time protecting natural and cultural heritage. The French parks are also concerned with social and economic development, welcoming, educating, and informing local people and visitors, and carrying out research and monitoring. One of the founding intentions of the parks was to encourage local involvement in management and planning rather than adopting a rigid top down approach. In this respect their designation and structure differ markedly from other forms of protected area in France or indeed elsewhere in Europe. (Bishop Green & Philips 1998). One of the key issues for Lough Ree will be the perception on the part of the landowners, that such a designation would impact on the value of their land, which is a valid concern. The process of collaborative management with the community, which should form part of any model developed could help address these concerns quite positively.

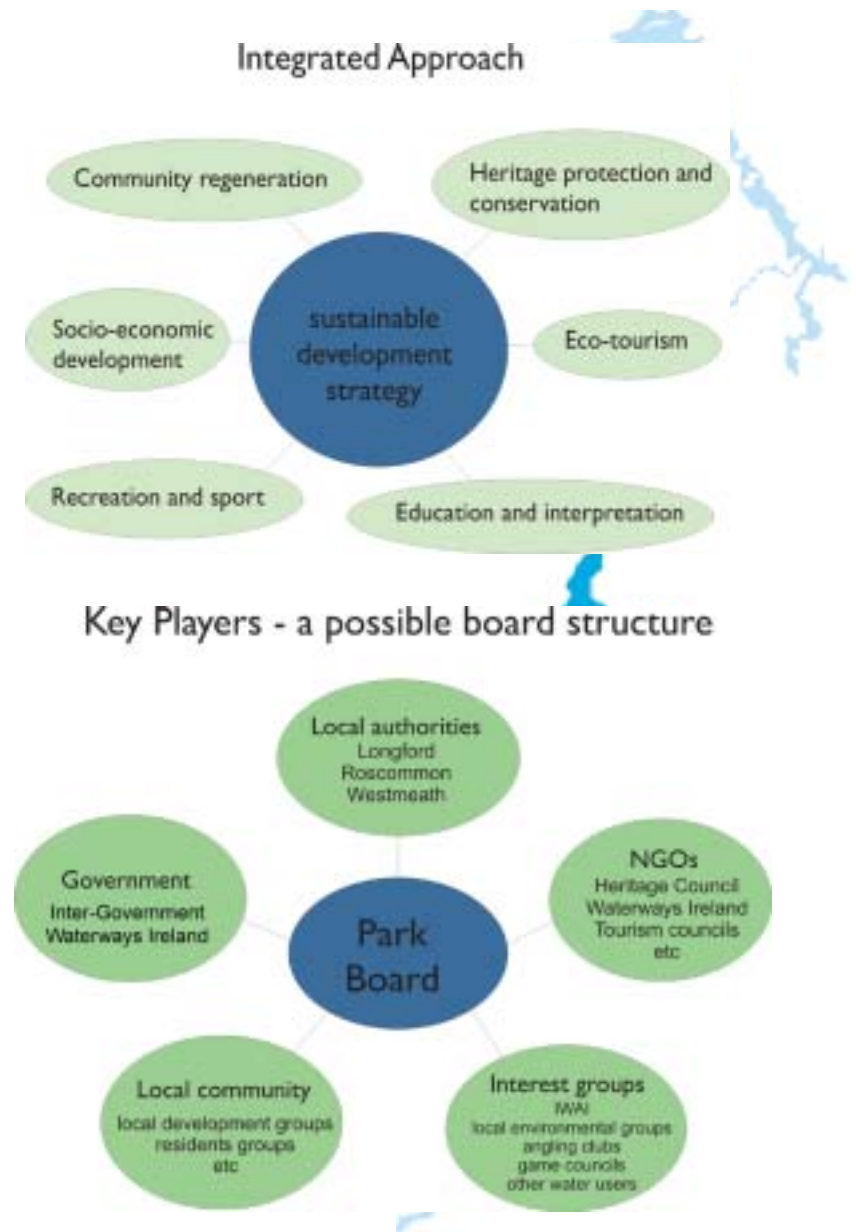
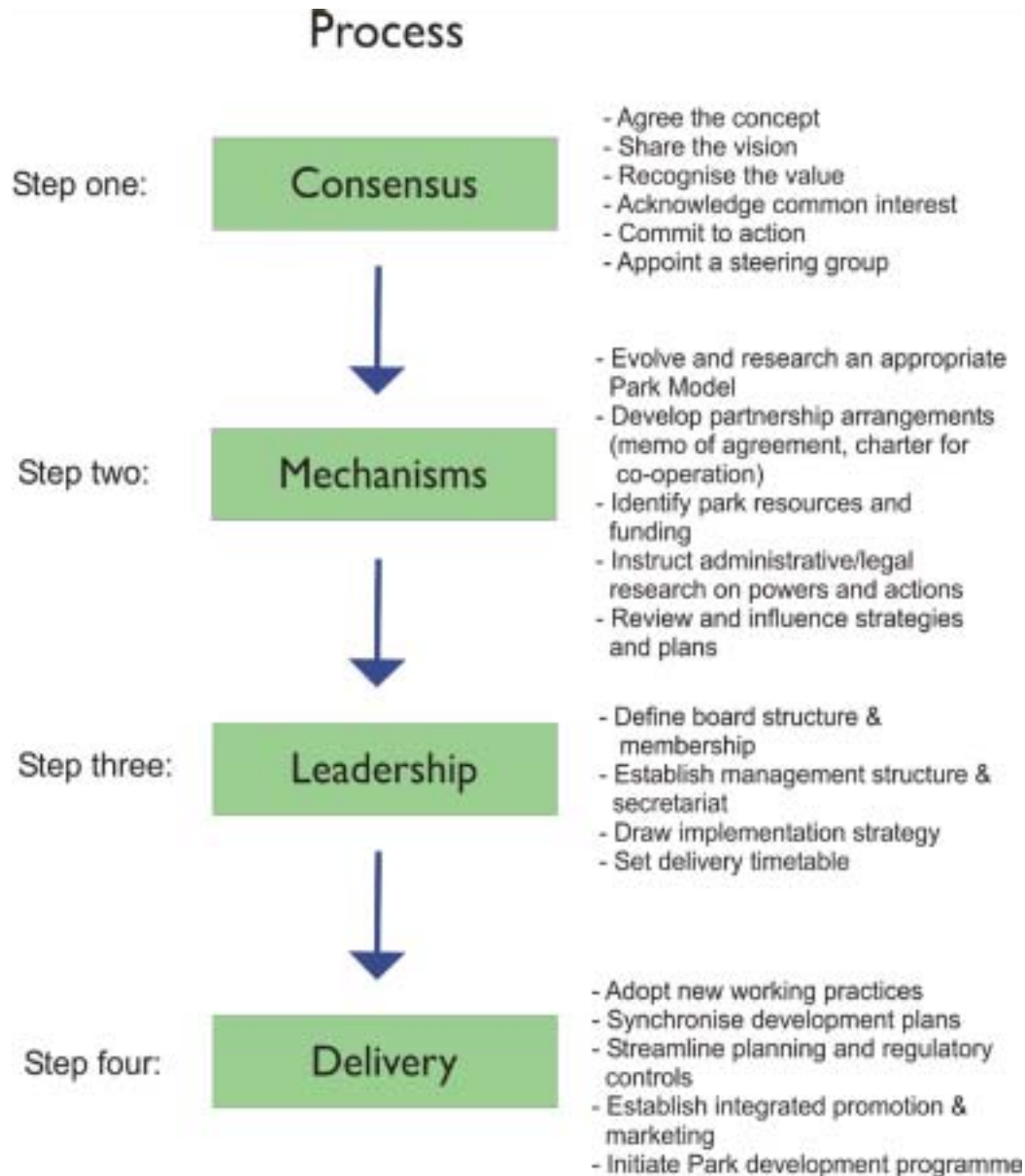
5.4.4 As with most parks throughout Europe the role of the land use planning system will be critical. The Planning and Development Act 2000 offers the only legislative hook in Ireland, from which to hang a statutory instrument focused on heritage conservation. Section 10(2)(e) of the Act sets out the following mandatory objective that shall be included in development plans :

"The preservation of the character of the landscape, where, and to the extent that, in the opinion of the planning authority, the proper planning and sustainable planning of

an area requires it, including the the preservation of views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest."

5.4.5 The recent establishment of the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond National Parks in Scotland show the importance of the development plan system in setting the basis for the integrated management of these areas. In the Cairngorms Park for example, the four original local authorities retain development control powers, (albeit with 'call in powers' granted to the Park Board) but cooperate, together with the park board, to put in place a single development plan for the park area. This example of collaborative development planning has obvious similarities to the Lough Ree situation where the potential exists for the Councils of Roscommon, Longford, West Meath and Athlone to synchronise their planning functions in a similar way and thereby establish a firm foundation for the integrated and streamlined land use management of the of the Lough and its environs.

5.4.6 There is a wealth of international experience to draw from, particularly from the IUCN and the Europarc Federation (www.iucn.org and www.europarc.org), but whatever route is taken, a process of engagement is critical to moving the debate from words into action and some thoughts are offered on initial steps that could be taken to build consensus on the vision for Lough Ree and how this can be achieved. If the project is to succeed, it must be firmly anchored in a truly sustainable development strategy embracing heritage and conservation, socio-economic development, recreation and sport, eco-tourism, education and interpretation and community regeneration.



Lough Ree Regional Park ?



List of verbal consultees

Mr	Joe	Bruen	Roscommon Tourism	Ms	Sue	Moles	NPWS
Ms	Eileen	Fahey	Kilteevan Community Development Group	Mr	Noel	Bugler	NPWS
Mr	James	Naughton	Save Our Lough Ree (SOLR)	Mr	Pat	Warner	NPWS
	Niamh	Herraghty	IWAI Athlone Branch	Mr	Christy	Cunniffe	South East Galway IRD
	Mary	McCormack	East Coast & Midlands Tourism	Mr	Sean	Gavin	Newbridge Residents Group
	Rhona	Rogers	Westmeath Tourism Office	Mr	Harry	Waterstone	SOLR
	Maura	Flynn	Longford Tourism	Mr	Noel	Sharkey	SOLR
Mr	Brian	Quinn	Ireland West Tourism	Ms	Mary	Molloy	Ballinasloe Town Council
Sven & Anita	Neubert		Waveline Cruisers Ltd	Mr	Tom	Kavanagh	Galway County Council
Mr	Kerry	Sloane	Athlone Cruisers Ltd	Ms	Karen	Smith	Galway East Tourism
Dr	Harman	Murtagh		Mr	Derry	Killeen	Killeens
Mr	Hugh	Hanley	Lough Ree Conservation Society	Ms	Laura	Clessy	National Monuments Service
Mr	Peter	Quigley	Quigley's Marina	Ms	Rita	McNulty	Roscommon County Development Board
Mr	Joe	Caffrey	Central Fisheries Board				
Cllr	Sean	Farrell	Newtowncashel Tidy Towns Committee				
Mr	Michael	Casey	An Taisce				
Mr	Peter	Foss	Irish Peatland Conservation Council				
	Rosaleen	Miller	Inland Waterways Association Ireland				
Cllr	Kevin	Boxer Moran	Ballykeeran Anglers Association				
Mr	Brian	McManus	Shannon Regional Fisheries Board				
Mr	Stuart	McNamara	Lough Ree Power Boat School				
Mr	Tony	Dawson	Ireland West Tourism				
Mr	Gerry	McNally	Bord na Mona plc				
Dr	Julie	Fossitt	NPWS				
Mr	Padraig	O'Donnell	NPWS				
Dr	Judit	Keleman	NPWS				
Ms	Heather	King	National Monuments Service				
Mr	Niall	Harmey	NPWS				
Mr	Skip	Heineke	Eyrecourt Community Development Group				
Mr	Ray	Hogan	Lough Ree Conservation Society				
Mr	Derek	Dann	Irish Boat Rental Association				
Dr	Linda	Patton	NPWS				
Ms	Cathryn	Hannon	NPWS				
Mr	William	Cormacan	NPWS				

