

RECREATION ACTIVATION AND ANIMATION

The Grand Canal

Portobello to Kylemore Road

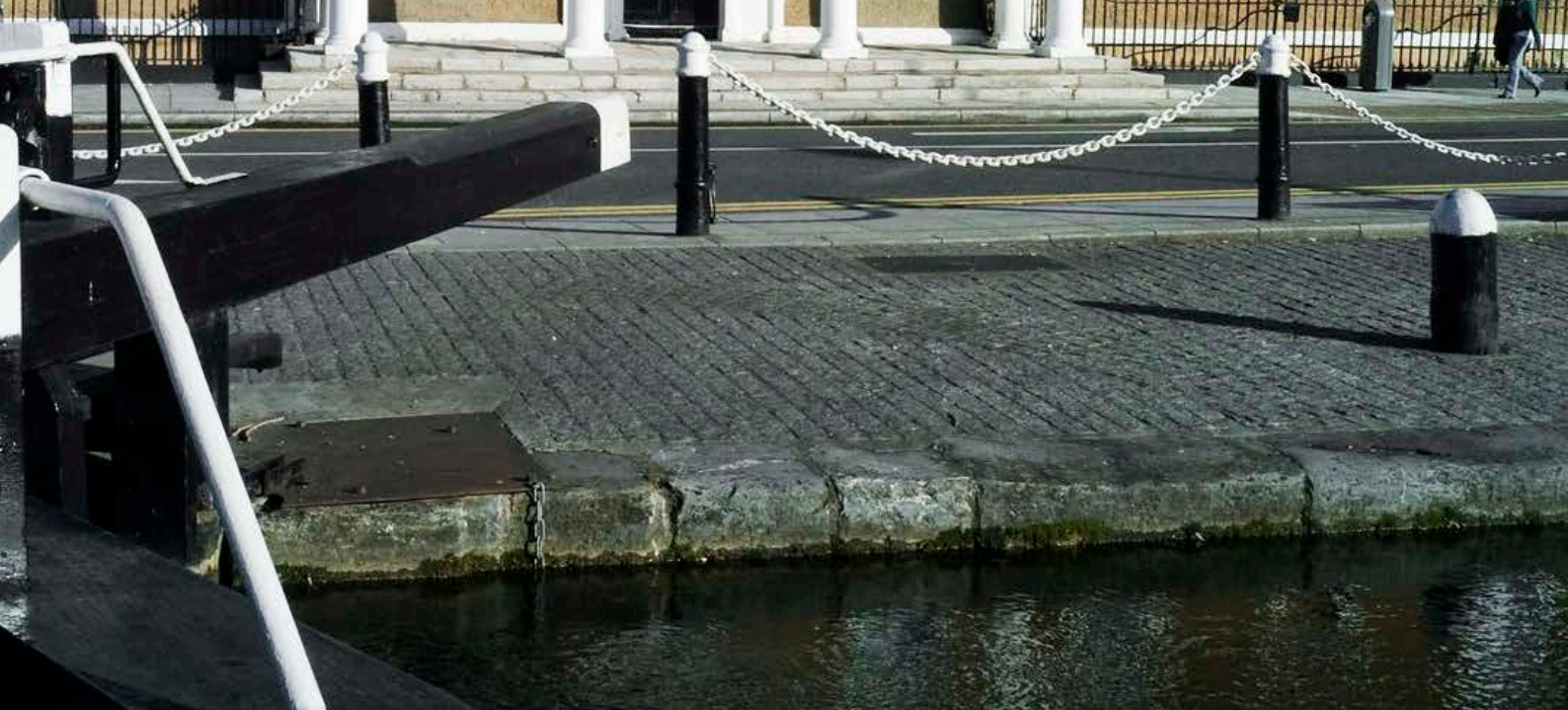


Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council





PORTOBELLO COLLEGE





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Street Art Under Suir Road Bridge

Recreation Activation and Animation of the Grand Canal: Kylemore Road to Portobello

ILC was tasked by Waterways Ireland and Dublin City Council to analyse the on-water recreational activation and animation potential of the Grand Canal Circular Line between Portobello and Kylemore Road.

This analysis set out to identify the measures that Waterways Ireland and Dublin City Council could put in place to increase the recreational value of the Grand Canal's Green and Blue spaces (canal banks and watercourse), along the Portobello La Touche Bridge to Kylemore Road / New Bridge section of the canal.

Discussion and consultation informed the analysis and outcomes of this process. This consultation was undertaken primarily with representatives from the local communities and relevant agencies.

The consultation process included canal-side walking meetings, questionnaires and online meetings with residents and organisations over the January to May period of 2022. A number of key themes relating to the recreational use of the canal emerged from this process.

OUTCOMES

The consultation process identified the sense of place amongst local residents, the recreation use and value of the canal corridor, as well as insights regarding the potential, pressures, purpose, participants and priorities for this section of the Grand Canal. **The environment, recreation, active travel and heritage roles** were noted as particular priorities. The challenge is now to balance these priorities with a set of guiding values and a development process that includes:

- **Developing Perceptions:** honouring the environment, celebrating the legacy, presenting the personality and addressing safety and accessibility .
- **Creating the Places:** the habitats and species, recreation structures, places for rest and connecting with the place.
- **Underpinning the opportunities:** recreation programmes, and events for the community.

The creation of **Links, Nodes and Zones** are the practical means through which recreation infrastructure can be realised. **An activation process** will expand the diversity of recreation participation while a supporting structure can sustain this.

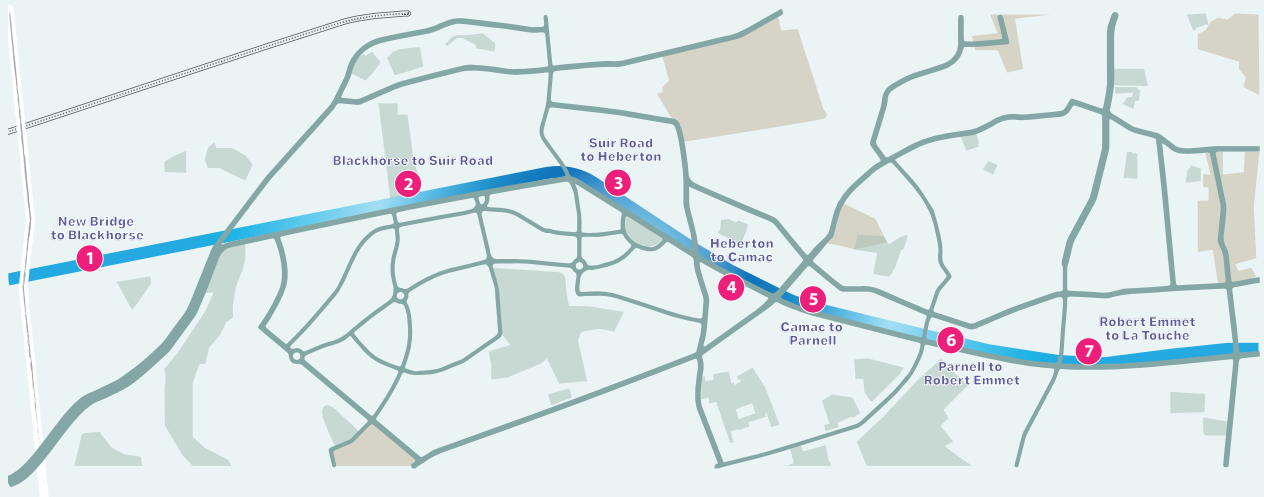


Image 1: Grand Canal Route and Sections

The portion of the Grand Canal considered by this report is between the New Bridge / Kylemore Road bridge and the La Touche bridge/Portobello. This includes seven bridge to bridge sub-sections as indicated above.

Frame & Route

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

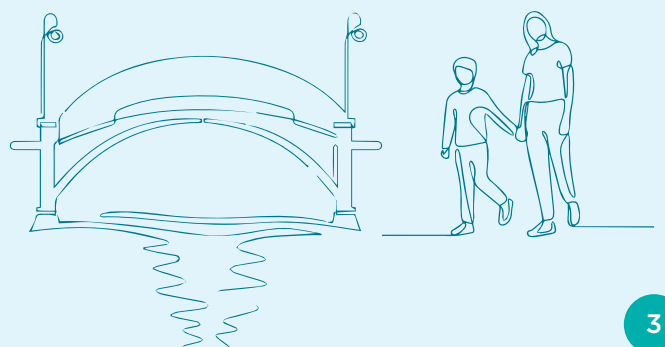
The ambition of improved recreation along the Grand Canal is informed by the voices of the Grand Canal communities and residents as well as the ambitions of numerous national and local strategies and plans*.

Where appropriate this plan integrates these voices and ambitions regarding the recreational needs of the neighbouring population, while safeguarding the environment, and cherishing Dublin’s canal-side cultural and built heritage.

This plan is guided by the Draft Dublin City Development Plan (2022-2028) which identifies over-lapping ambitions such as providing a compact city, with a distinct character, and vibrant culture as well as sustainable community facilities and amenities.

The principle of the 15-minute city and the role of foot, bike or public transport inform this plan as do the priorities of the neighbouring Strategic Development and Regeneration Areas (SDRAs).

**For example Project Ireland 2040, the Healthy Ireland Framework 2019-2025, the National Physical Activity Plan, Heritage Ireland 2030, National Sports Policy 2018-2027, The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Culture 2025, National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021, Draft Dublin City Development Plan (2022-2028), Biodiversity Action Plan for Dublin City, Dublin City Heritage Plan, DCC Strategic Development Regeneration Areas, the St. James’s Linear Park, Mapping of Dublin urban green spaces, and the Cultural Audit and Map. The WHO Healthy City Initiative also informs this ambition “continually creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources which enable people to mutually support each other to their maximum potential.”*



Summary of Perceptions Per Route Section

No	Section	North Bank	South Bank
1	New Bridge/ Kylemore to Blackhorse. (1.2 km)	Rare walking use, natural surface. Concerns regarding antisocial behaviour. Used for angling. Good range of habitats.	High cycling commuter and jogging use. Greenway type surface. Aside from the Bluebell Community Centre there is low permeability*.
2	Blackhorse to Suir Road Bridge. (1.45 km)	High Recreation use for walking and leisure cycling, very low traffic and a green setting. Some personal safety concerns and graffiti. Rich in habitats and bird life.	Frequent use for commuter cycling and electric scooters. High recreational walking use. Urban, a key transport link with walker/cycling conflict. 2 Pedestrian bridges.
3	Suir Road Bridge to Herberton Road Bridge. (606 meters)	Short grassy bank section, cul de sac. Used during good weather. Suir Road bridge area connects with St James park. This area is popular for recreation and is a sustainable transport link. Blocked access to Grand Canal Court.	Very popular walking, dog walking, jogging and recreational cycling route. Has a low roadside concrete track and a raised canal-side desire-line** trail. Extensive trees and a raised canal bank.
4	Herberton Road Bridge to Camac Bridge/Crumlin Road. (373 meters)	Wide grassy bank with established wide footpath, used mainly for recreational walking and some recreational cycling, low permeability for residents.	Recessed canal-side narrow rough path, tree-lined, good habitat corridor and canal access. Some personal safety concerns. Limited recreational walking.
5	Camac Bridge/ Crumlin Road to Parnell Bridge. (620 meters)	No public access aside from Lullymore Terrace road.	Recessed canal-side narrow (<1m) rough path, tree lined, good habitat corridor and canal access. Some personal safety concerns. Limited recreational walking.
6	Parnell Bridge to Robert Emmet (561 meters)	Public access for 120 meters along a large grassy bank.	Initially recessed canal-side narrow (<1m) rough path, some safety concerns. Ramped re-join to the public roadside footpath to Emmet Bridge. Limited recreational walking.
7	Robert Emmet Bridge to La Touche Bridge/ Portobello. (735 meters)	Tree-lined grassy bank, with a formal walking path, some benches, popular for walking, cycling discouraged.	Public roadside footpath.

* *Permeability refers to the ease and number of access points onto and away from the canal. Low permeability is typically due to unpassable fencing and walls alongside the canal.*

** *A 'desire-line' trail is typically formed due to the passage of feet and its surface is more likely compacted soil rather than a formal dressing of stone or tar.*

Consultation Insights

These insights arose from the consultation process that took place with local communities, their representatives and with agency representatives.

VALUE

The recreational value attributes of the Grand Canal identified by respondents were:

- **Sensory:** peaceful, tranquil.
- **Setting:** natural, habitats, being outdoors, scenic.
- **Activity:** exercise, social interaction, where activity happens.
- **History:** times past, retaining and living heritage.

POTENTIAL

The most common term used to describe the Grand Canal was 'potential'.

'Potential' was interpreted as meaning that there was more recreational value to be realised along this section of the canal. Respondents perceived a deficit regarding the recreational and environmental opportunities that are currently available, and they voiced a desire for these opportunities to be enhanced.

INFRASTRUCTURE

While acknowledging the recreational value of the canal, and the many positive infrastructure developments, respondents were very aware of its infrastructure deficits.

Deficits included:

- Paths with uneven surfaces and waterlogging.
- Limited seating, bins and dog waste bins.
- Poor lighting and CCTV at some places.
- Unwelcoming bridge underpasses and the challenge of bridge road crossings.
- Lack of water access infrastructure for water activities.
- Difficult access in some places along the canal for individuals with a disability.
- Lack of information panels to increase awareness and appreciation of the heritage and environment.
- Conflict between commuting cyclists and recreation users.
- Unpleasant odours (Goldenbridge/Herberton road area).

SAFETY

Several respondents noted safety concerns.

These concerns were associated with drug dealing, muggings, poor lighting, dense foliage, being below the eyeline of the road, feeling uncomfortable, having limited canal path exit options.

This points to a lack of sufficient prospect refuge for example some respondents noted that:

- There is a lack of visibility of other people in some sections of the canal.
- They wished to be more visible to the public on the nearby roads or to CCTV.
- There needs to be more canal bank route choices / permeability so that walkers can opt-out from the canal side if they feel unsafe.

SOCIAL

There are conflicting perceptions regarding acceptable recreation.

"French friends with picnics and wine is cool; local friends with beer and crisps is anti-social."

"The drinkers put their empties in bags, they aren't doing any harm."

"Rough sleeping is not anti-social behaviour; it is a necessity."

A lack of a catch-and-release culture amongst some anglers.

Consultation Insights

COVID

The recreation load on the canal increased significantly during the lockdown periods of COVID. This makes it difficult to tell the difference between the COVID effect and the 'normal' recreation use of the canal. Some respondents noted that the COVID lockdowns increased recreation-related erosion, noise, litter and the inappropriate use of the Grand Canal.

The legacies of these exceptional circumstances include trail braiding/desire lines and some community sensitivity regarding future recreation use.

- **The Herberton Road:** canal-side trail width doubled.
- **Portobello:** trail braiding, noise, litter and anti-social behaviour.
- Significant recreational swimming in the Goldenbridge area.

While the recreational pressure arising from the COVID lockdowns has passed, the local resident population is expanding, and more people are aware of the canal's recreational value. Hence, the peak recreational

load the Grand Canal experienced during COVID may indicate future recreation demand by local communities.

BALANCING

The narrow corridor of the Grand Canal has to balance a number of sometimes conflicting recreation, active travel and environmental responsibilities.

"It is great that this canal area is hidden, and the traffic is less visible."

"I should feel safe; safety is more important than trees or habitats."

"Their gardens have 'stretched' into the canal area."

"I see the trees from my window, don't cut them down for paths."

"The cyclists whiz past you; it's scary."

"Artificial lighting disturbs habitats."

"Great to see the canoeists, but they are disturbing the birds in the reeds."

Multigenerational residents of the canal area appear to value the historic legacy of the canal. More recent or 'new' residents are more likely to value the canal in terms of its current potential rather than its past legacies.

Care is required so that these legacies and future possibilities are balanced.

OPPORTUNITY

While there are easy-to-access opportunities for land activities, such as walking and cycling along the canal, on-water activities are less accessible.

Activities such as canoeing, Stand Up Paddle Boarding, and rowing require expensive equipment and acquired skills. Water access is insufficient; instruction, activity structures and events are also required if a culture of on-water activities is to arrive, survive and thrive.

HERITAGE

The built, natural and social heritage of the canal is an important backdrop and a way to animate or develop the personality of the canal.

"People don't realise that this was an M50 of barges."

"That is where me dad brought us fishing."

"We all learned to swim there."

"Back in the day that is where the bricks were made."

"The wildlife and biodiversity is incredible."

Context

It is apparent from the strategic framework and from the consultation process that while the Grand Canal is part of what makes Dublin a liveable and attractive city, it exists within multiple contexts:

PRESSURE: canal area populations are expanding significantly and the resulting housing and transport infrastructure can encroach and intensify the load on the canal's precious and fragile green and blue resources.

PURPOSE: previously a part of an industry supply chain, the Grand Canal is now a more complex space. The canal is a venue for social interaction, green and blue recreation, a delicate ecosystem, a repository of heritage and culture, and a transport corridor.

PARTICIPANTS: there are many types of participants along the canal corridor and the principles of universal design, multiple affordances and social justice are central to making it an equitable and inclusive resource.

PRIORITIES: canal participants perceive different roles for the canal. For some, it is their glimpse of urban nature, a recreation venue or a commuting route, for others, it is a heritage legacy, a cultural reference or an environmental resource to be protected and nurtured.

Any recreational development along the canal must consider these contexts.



Context

ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITY

The green and blue environment of the canal is a key part of its attractiveness and value. The sustainable use of these 'nearby nature' spaces for recreation requires an awareness and a respect for the canal's ecosystem.

"Protecting and enhancing the quality of Dublin City's natural assets and ensuring green, sustainable and climate resilient development will be central to ensuring the liveability of the city and its attractiveness as a place to live, work and visit into the future."

Draft Dublin City Development Plan (2022-2028)

"Increasing, restoring and connecting habitats rich in biodiversity that provide valuable ecosystem services is essential to increasing the city's resilience to climate change and improving quality of life."

Draft Dublin City Development Plan (2022-2028)

"There has to be a culture of care and trust."

(Environmental group consultation representative)

ACTIVE TRAVEL PRIORITY

The Grand Canal is an important multi-modal transport link and the existing cycling infrastructure along the canal is to be further expanded and integrated within a planned Grand Canal Premium Cycling Route. This Premium route will primarily support commuter cycling rather than the recreational cycling opportunities that have been identified within this Activation and Animation plan.

While both commuting and recreational cycling will grow the culture and realise the benefits of cycling, they require distinct spaces, and some canal-side areas will have to be structured to host separate commuter and recreational cycling activities.

HERITAGE & CULTURE PRIORITY

The Grand Canal is part of the area's industrial, social and cultural heritage. Care is required to evolve its role while also honouring its legacy.



RECREATION VIA THE BLUE & GREEN

The water and land resources along the canal provide the backdrop and the host for any recreation process. These Green and Blue spaces must work within the pressures, purposes and priorities of the Grand Canal while adhering to best practices. Sport Ireland's Trail Standards and Classifications, Water Trails Guidelines and the Blueway Partnership's Blueway concept and process provide templates for recreational best practice. Recreational trails are defined in the Irish Trails Strategy as being *"a corridor, route or pathway; generally, land or water-based, primarily intended for recreational purposes"*.

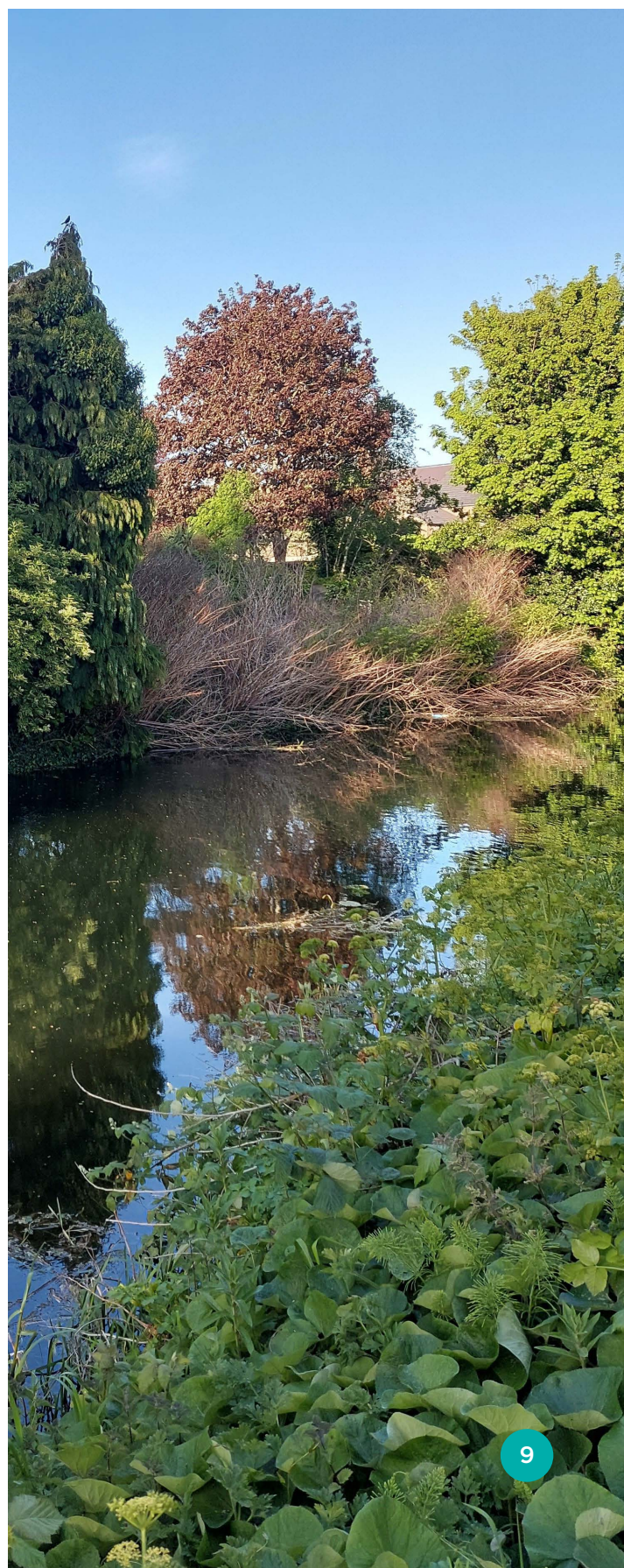
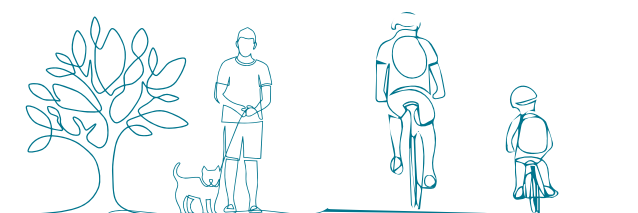
The Trail Classification System provides a means of classifying land trails (walking and cycling), according to their width, gradient and the nature of the trail surface.

The Water Trails Guidelines from Sport Ireland provide additional guidelines which outline good practice for developing and managing water trails.

Blueways are approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites based on and closely linked with the water, together with providers facilitating access to activities and experiences.

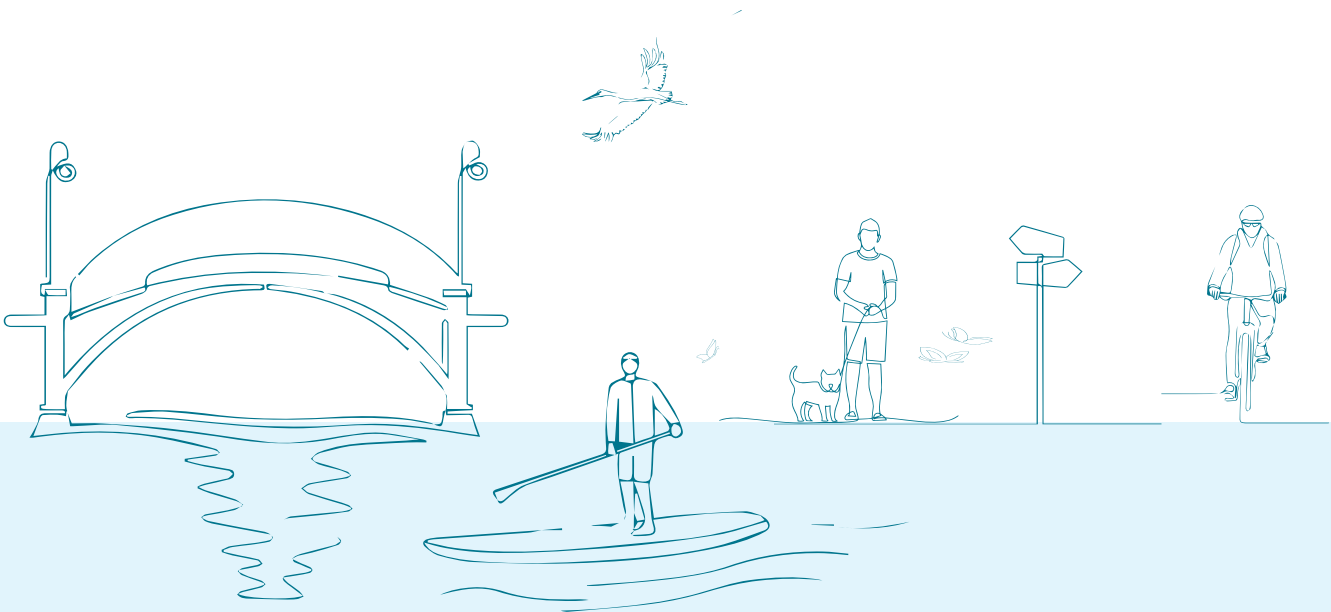
Community Blueways promote the engagement of the local community with their water resources by providing appropriate animation activities and sustainable structures.

These land and water trail development standards provide a handrail to guide the proposed land and water recreation infrastructure development along the Grand Canal.



This consultation process and analysis were guided by several evidence-based approaches to design including:

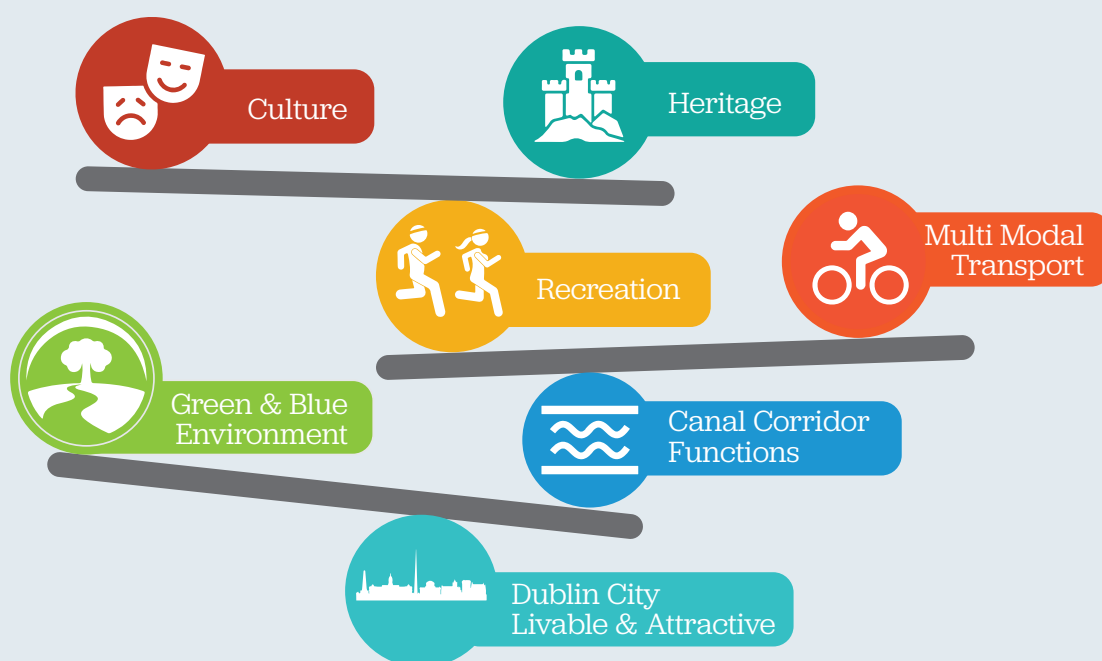
- **Genius Loci:** a sense of place, the unique and valued characteristics of the area.
- **Salutogenic Design:** Great Places which are proactive in the pursuit of good health for all people.
- **Biophilic Design:** supports occupant connectivity to the natural environment through the use of direct/indirect nature, space and place.
- **Affordances:** easily understood, flexible and inclusive health-promoting cues and opportunities at a location.
- **Prospect Refuge:** views that help us to connect, understand and comprehend our environment while feeling refuge / safe.
- **Place Attachment:** connections with a place leading to increased use, greater social capital and growing personal / community resilience.
- **Personal Space Theory:** allowing for the spatial needs of individuals in a public area.





Balancing

The development plans, user perspectives and insights identified in the research process, indicate a potential for further green and blue recreation along this Kylemore/Newbridge to Portobello section of the Grand Canal. However, the pressures, purposes, priorities and the limited resources within the finite space of the canal's 'footprint' require balancing if there is to be an effective and sustainable realisation of the Grand Canal's recreational potential.



The natural environment, as the main host, is key to striking this balance between the canal's recreation potential. Further balancing is also required with respect to the transport, culture and heritage expectations for this section of the Grand Canal. The following values support this process of balancing competing interests.

Recreation development values:

- Recreation must be understood as a part of a complex urban system.
- A long-term environmental stewardship approach is required.
- Realising the recreation opportunity of the canal requires innovative attitudes, and adaptable green and blue infrastructure.
- There are limitations, no one space can accommodate everything, some activities are not compatible, some user loads are not sustainable.

Development Themes

The following three recreation themes support the application of these development values. The recreation development of the Grand Canal will include:



Honouring the blue and green environment, celebrating the heritage and cultural legacy, presenting the personality, and addressing safety and accessibility.



Nurturing and protecting habitats and species, improving recreation structures, providing poignant places for rest and reflection, and supporting insight via information and creativity. Links, Nodes and Zones are the practical means through which this theme can be realised.



Developing, supporting and embedding recreation programmes and events for all of the community.

These three recreation themes are expanded further in the following pages.

Development Themes



DEVELOPING PERCEPTIONS

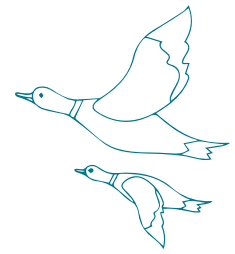
The challenges are to:

- Integrate the Kylemore to Portobello Canal Corridor so that it is perceived and used as a linear green and blue recreation park.
- Gather the heritage and cultural properties of the canal corridor and its communities. Present these properties via an engaging and positive personality/brand through story, signage and imagery.
- Reduce the safety concerns and conflicts of recreation participants by increasing participant visibility and reducing the hiddenness of some places.
- Continue to develop structural responses to anti-social behaviour and crime via the community policing process and other initiatives.

Approach

Currently, some local organisations are capturing the heritage and memories of the canal via 'placemaking' activities. These social, cultural and arts projects can be used to capture the legacy, the lived experiences and the personality of the canal and its people. This personality can then be represented via a brand and communicated via distinctive infrastructure, signage and activities along the canal corridor. *See the example of the 'Blue Loop' in the following Case Studies section.*

Recreation participants along the canal have the reasonable expectation to be safe and to feel safe. Concerns regarding personal safety and anti-social behaviour undermine the experience and the potential of the Grand Canal as a recreational venue. The visibility of canal-side locations, the reduction in hiding places, the separation of recreation from commuting bikes and scooters, reduced vegetation in some places, enhanced smart lighting and community policing initiatives can all form parts of the solution around safety. Similarly, continued creative actions are required to increase seating and congregating spaces while preventing focal points for anti-social behaviour.



CREATING THE PLACES

More than remembering it is also about reclaiming.

The canal is a shared space. Shared between residents and visitors, between commuters and recreationists, and shared by humans and wildlife.

Sensitivity is required to support the canal's natural habitats and settings while also addressing recreational, commuter and safety concerns. This sensitive approach includes specific recreation, environmental, and commuter zones and separations.

A 'shared spaces' awareness-raising and code of conduct is required and this might be promoted via local engagement as well as discrete and engaging signage.

Recreation infrastructure such as seating, signage and information panels should be distinct and reflect local placemaking and the canal's personality.

Approach

- Enhance the recreation movement of participants along and between the canal sections. Improving access to the canal side through the application of inclusive design for all the community.
- Link the canal's bridge to bridge sections more cohesively through improved signage and enhanced connections across bridges and roadways.
- Incorporate innovative recreation infrastructure such as traversing climbing walls, canoe steps, and canoe-polo/slalom within local recreational nodes.
- Apply specific trail classification standards where possible along the tow path so that there are consistently good quality trail surfaces, seating areas, vegetation management, and lighting.
- Support environmental or recreational agendas at specific locations or zones, for example, environmental appreciation sites with interactive and interpretive information, recreation nodes with appropriate supporting infrastructure, and converting graffiti areas into street art sites.

The following Links, Nodes and Zones section expands on these elements.



Underpinning Opportunities

UNDERPINNING THE OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to improved perceptions and enhanced infrastructure, ongoing animation supports are required to energise and sustain a recreation culture. A phased animation process in parallel with infrastructure development is proposed.

Animation Phase 1:

- Community challenge supports for seasonal water activity programmes provided by external instructors, including an introduction to water sports competitions such as canoe-polo, slalom and dragon boating.
- Continued programme supports for land-based activities such as couch to 5 km type initiatives.
- A living environment/biophilic audit to identify and communicate the canal's environmental resources, support its biodiversity and manage invasive species.
- A heritage and Placemaking process centred on the Grand Canal to capture its legacy, stories and culture.
- Encouraging the increased passage of cruiser and barge recreation watercraft along this section of the canal.

Animation Phase 2:

- Seasonal watersports participation programmes for adult and youth residents along the corridor, including inter-community paddle leagues and an annual watersports flagship event.
- A Grand Canal environment advocate process that further supports volunteer stewardship of the canal environment and heritage.

Animation Phase 3:

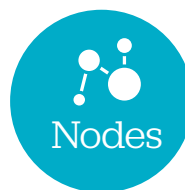
- Training programmes to increase community water sports instruction/leadership capacity.
- Supports for watersports club structures within a Sports National Governing Body such as Canoeing Ireland.
- Pride of place celebration activities that acknowledge the work and improvements to the natural environment along the canal.
- An annual community-delivered canal festival.

These elements are further expanded in this report's Action Plan section.

Links, Nodes & Zones



Links



Nodes



Zones

Recreational links, nodes and zones are central to creating the places for land and water recreation along the Grand Canal:

Links: connecting the resources and supporting recreation movement along the Grand Canal.

Nodes: specific canal-side sites hosting equipment and recreation facilities.

Zones: areas with a targeted environmental, recreation or commuting role.



Links

Walking, dog walking, pram pushing, and walking to and through scenic locations is the most popular canal landside recreational activity. Jogging appears to be the second most popular activity, while recreational cycling, not including commuter cycling, is significantly less common and is more localised. These three activities are supported by most of the canal-side towpaths and pavements. However, trail surfaces, road crossings and unappealing passageways under road bridges need to be improved if the potential of these activities is to be realised.

There are also challenges in linking the community to the canal. Stone stairways down to the towpath are challenging for some, while narrow and undulating towpath surfaces are less welcoming for those with children or using wheeled conveyance (prams, wheelchairs, cycling).

An 'On and Along' approach is recommended to audit and enhance these canal-side links.

On

The start and end points of at least one side of each canal section should facilitate access to the canal area for as many community members as possible. For example, installing ramps to and from the towpaths to augment the existing stairs will provide access for those with ambulatory disabilities.

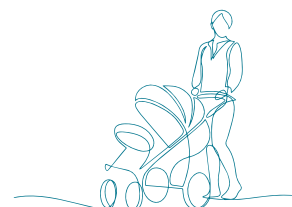
Along

The 'Challenging Access' standard and, ideally a 'Multi-access' trail surface and width standard¹ is required throughout at least one side of the canal. Such standards will support the use of canal banks by all levels of ability.

The addition of environmentally appropriate boardwalks, creative pedestrian bridges and heritage artworks may form part of the solution.

A consistent and creative local branding of canal-side recreation signage will direct usage and link these canal sections effectively.

¹As per the 'Great Outdoors a guide for accessibility' publication from Sport Ireland.





Nodes

Recreation nodes are locations that have been designed and equipped to support sustainable water and land-based outdoor recreation participation. A series of up to seven nodes is possible along this canal section.

The nature of the host site and the nearby community opportunities will determine the design and fit-out of the node.

The following are sample water node components:

- Vehicle access and parking for a mid-size van and trailer at the node or safely close by is required to move watersports equipment.
- Ease of water access to be available via an existing canal bank at the appropriate height above water, a hardened canal bank surface, a jetty at an appropriate height, a canoe step, or if trailered watercraft are to be used, a slipway.
- Slalom course posts, typically ground-level openings capable of holding an upright pole. These poles are typically in pairs, one on each side of the canal, with a cord extended between them from which slalom poles can be suspended.
- Canoe polo goal posts, either floating, anchored to the canal bed, suspended using slalom structures, or from a bridge parapet.

Examples of these infrastructural elements are provided in the Supporting Document.

Sample Land Node Components

- Vehicle parking at the node or close by is ideal but not essential.
- Linear play and climbing features, low wall sections or low ropes.
- Outdoor gym elements.
- Art features: steel cutouts, street art/graffiti wall, seating or discovery points.

Additional details and examples of both land and water node components are provided in the Supporting Document.



Zones

Significant sections of the canal are hosts to a range of habitats and species. Supporting the canal's role as a wildlife corridor while also encouraging its use as a recreation facility requires the effective delineation of these recreational and environmental resources.

Two zoning approaches are suggested:

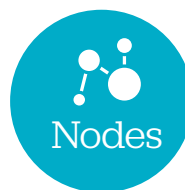
- Celebrating: identifying the areas that currently provide valuable and relatively undisturbed habitats and avoiding intrusion into these.
- Integrating: respecting and strengthening areas of environmental value and active recreation.

Actions include, increasing awareness regarding the sensitive use of these areas for recreation, appropriate recreation operating procedures, planting to support and delineate habitats, and removing invasive species.

Links, Nodes & Zones



Links

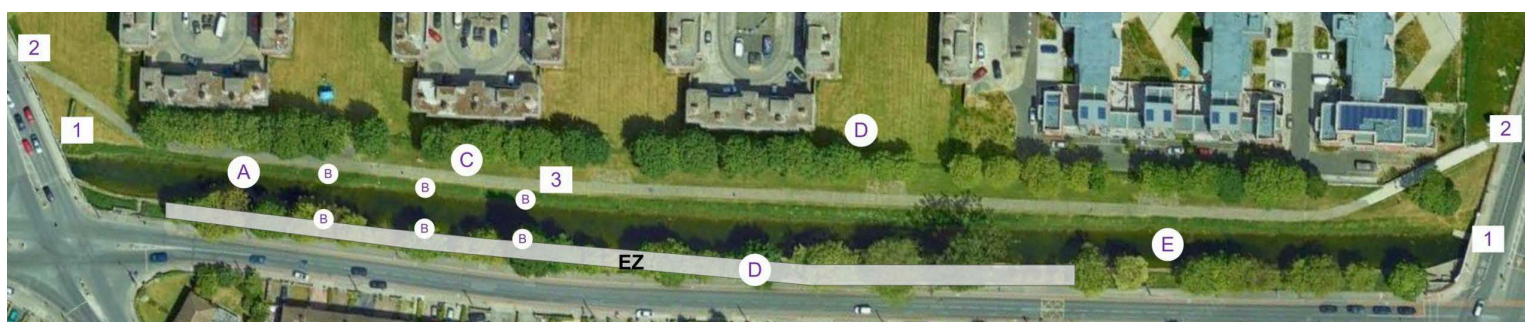


Nodes



Zones

The following is a practical example of the Link, Node and Zone components in place in the Dolphin's Barn section of the canal. For the purpose of this example, we have included a density of provision that is more likely to be realised along multiple sections of the canal rather than entirely at one location.



Links *(see examples in pages 1 to 3 in the supporting document)*

Ref.	Item	Detail	Comment
1	Bridge Passageway	Enhanced accessibility and attractiveness of pedestrian passage under the bridge arch.	Appropriate painting/murals and lighting required. In some locations improved underfoot surfaces are required.
2	Street link access and crossing	Visible and easily accessible passage between the street and the canal bank.	May require vehicle access at some nodes to facilitate water-sports equipment movement. Defined road crossings immediately adjacent to these canal-side access points.
3	Canal-side linking route	Defined hardened walking and recreation cycling surface.	Link route and surface must support walking, jogging, pram and recreational cycling. Ideally with accompanying rest stops and seating and where appropriate with art/interpretive elements. May need to be an indirect route design to limit its use as a commuting space.



Nodes *(see pages 4 to 19 in the supporting document)*

Ref.	Item	Detail	Comment
A	Kayak Steps	<p>A series of double width and height steps with the lower step set approx. 500 mm below the typical water levels.</p> <p>Can be constructed in wood or concrete.</p> <p>Waterways Ireland have experience in this construction.</p>	<p>Steps typically recessed back into the bank and facing the water (align parallel with the bank), but can also be U shaped . A dropped height boardwalk is an appropriate and less expensive alternative where the bank height is relatively low.</p> <p>Each step is a double height of standard steps but can also include standard height steps to one side. Can be installed in combination with a slipway. Words, phrases or graphics may be pressed into the concrete walls as a quasi-arts piece.</p>
B	Slalom/Canoe Polo pole bases	<p>Concrete ground level slot for an upright from which wire cable can span the canal. Slalom poles or a canoe polo net suspended from this wire.</p>	<p>Ideally left in-situ however they may need to be installed and removed for each water session.</p>
C	Active and Passive Recreation Resources	<p>Selection from various active challenge activities and passive recreation and arts resources.</p>	<p>Includes traversing walls, outdoor gym, plonk spots (see pages 4-7 in the supporting document).</p>
D	Storage	<p>Indoor facility for the storage of water recreation craft and supporting resources.</p>	<p>Capable of storing kayaks, Stand Up Paddle Boards and possibly dragon boats. Must be easy to access the river by hand carry from this site.</p>



Nodes (see pages 20 to 22 in the supporting document)

Ref.	Item	Detail	Comment
E	Floating Canoe Polo goal	Wide floating base with net set to regulation height.	Can be floated on and off the water easily, requires nearby storage space.
EZ	Environmental Zone	A delineated area with limited direct public access. Discrete interpretive signage also included.	The example site might be separated or defined by a raised boardwalk and railing and inaccessible ground level shrubbery. Low level smart lighting on a timer or user activated to reduce habitat disruption.



Sustainability

The following six nodes are suggested:

1	Bluebell South adjacent to the community centre	4	Dolphin House area
2	Golden Bridge on the North bank of the Canal	5	Parnell Bridge, North bank adjacent to the bridge
3	Suir Bridge adjacent to the Luas bridge	6	Portobello adjacent to the lock.



COMMON SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGE

While the provision of physical infrastructure via the Links, Nodes and Zones, is important, ongoing activation is re- quired if each Node is to be a centre of sustained outdoor recreation. In particular the successful realisation of a recreation node is dependent on the following sustainability factors:

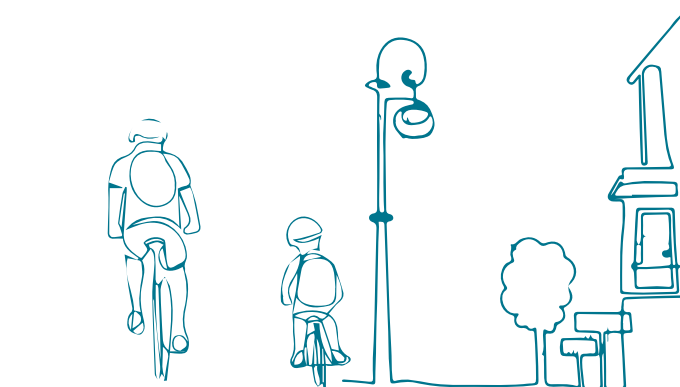
- an organised programme of activities over a 2-3 year period;
- a local community organisation as an active partner;
- a participant base that includes local children, and that has the potential to include local adults as participants and leaders;
- the local development of qualified instructors in the relevant sports and in the 'soft skills' around the future management of the resource/concept.

For these sustainability mechanisms to emerge, an initial period of resourcing and capacity building is required to grow recreational interest, develop local participant competence and increase community capacity to independently operate the node.



ACKNOWLEDGING DIFFERENCE

Each Node must identify its role and expectations in line with the structure and culture of its community and host environment. For example, Nodes adjacent to older or more settled populations are likely to require different activities and higher levels of promotion and support than those with a significant youth population. Nodes that host sensitive water habitats may be restricted to tow-path activities rather than on-water ones. Hence, while some outdoor recreation activities may gain traction across all Nodes, other activities may be less universally relevant. As a consequence a 'similar but different' programming approach is required across the various Nodes.



COMMERCIAL AND TOURISM

Ideally, a subsequent commercial or tourism offering may emerge at a node; however, this is not essential, and this opportunity is only likely to evolve at one or two nodes, most likely where there is a cluster of other supporting services such as accommodation and dining.

SUSTAINING MOTIVATION

To sustain interest in a water-focused recreation culture along the canal, the following experience elements are required:

- Advancement opportunities in the sports for participants, e.g. the ongoing development of sports skills, competition opportunities in these sports, using these sports as a means of experiencing other locations, such as kayaking on the Liffey or the nearby coast.
- Intercommunity cooperation through celebration events (flotilla event, couch to one km, raft race, cardboard kayaks), and competitions (slalom, racing, canoe polo, Dragon Boat).

SUSTAINABLE STRUCTURES

There needs to be a structure for communities to increase their involvement and level of control over these nodes and canal-side recreation and environment in general, hence:

- Existing community organisations should be used as the link between the nodes/animation activities and the communities. This type of approach strengthens the role of these organisations and prevents the duplication of effort.
- These existing organisations should also be provided with the opportunity to grow their capacity so that they can integrate the operation of the node within their remit or so that they can support the emergence of a separate club structure. See the Cabra Kayak Club Case Study at the end of this document.
- A Community Blueway* structure can link the various nodes/communities, promote land and water recreation facilities and support the nodes' collective animation and the combined pursuit and sharing of resources.



Community Blueways structure and encourage local recreation engagement in their water resources by providing taster and ongoing participation opportunities and developing local structures to diversify and strengthen a local water recreation culture. This Community Blueway approach targets the 'dabbler' or beginner as a water and land-based recreation participant by:

- ensuring easy access to the water and alongside land trails;
- identifying supporting services such as activity programmes and equipment;
- clustering other recreation resources such as heritage, land trails, play areas and interpretation.

The formal Community Blueway accreditation process will guide the emergence of a sustainable land and water outdoor recreation structure. The outdoor recreation development and animation process outlined for the Grand Canal is consistent with this Community Blueway development process.

** Blueways are a network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites based on or closely linked with the water and providers facilitating access to activities and experiences.*



Conclusion

The consultation process identified positive, strong, and diverse connections among residents with this section of the Grand Canal. These diverse connections include outdoor recreation, environmental engagement and stewardship, active travel and a sense of place often connected with local heritage. These positive connections shine through the difficulties that respondents identified, such as anti-social behaviour, traffic pressures, personal safety and litter/graffiti. Indeed, there is a shared understanding that the canal has more to offer.

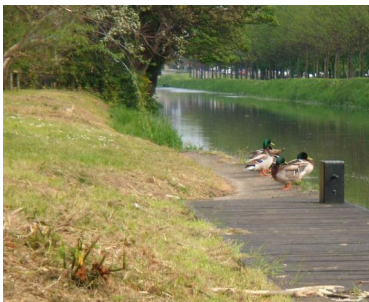
This report considers the outdoor recreation opportunities of the canal's land and water resources and the challenge of realising the potential of this section of the canal while also balancing the, at times, conflicting expectations and pressures of recreation, environmental stewardship, heritage, and active travel. Furthermore, this challenge is occurring against the backdrop of a growing resident population and the associated land and recreation pressures.

Ultimately, any recreation development along the canal must increase the quality of life for its residents while balancing responsibilities for corridor wildlife, commuters, and visitors to the area. Significant affordances are required so that recreation development provides various activity opportunities to a diverse range of residents.

A three-theme perspective is proposed to support this balancing of opportunities and responsibilities:

1. Developing Perceptions around the canal's legacy, environment, and personality.
2. Creating Places to cue and connect users with activities.
3. Underpinning opportunities through recreation programmes and events.

At a practical level, this requires the physical development of various Links, Nodes, and Zones along the canal and a community-based activation programme of activities and leadership training.



Case Studies

The following are brief examples of other locations and their approaches to outdoor recreation in similar environments.

Sheffield & Tinsley Canal

Several recreation developments took place along this canal, such as the development and branding of a walking trail loop, volunteer outreach to local schools, increased environmental appreciation locally, replacement of graffiti with street art, an annual canal festival and the emergence of a charity structured community barge.



The Blue Loop walking trail is an 8-mile stretch of waterway, including the River Don and the Tinsley Canal, with numerous activities such as bird watching, nature walks, mini-beasting, treasure hunting and removing invasive plant species. Blue Loop also works with schools to encourage young children to look after and appreciate the local watercourses. One of Blue Loop’s major contributions to local communities is to increase local people’s knowledge of the variety of wildlife that is accessible to the public.



images:

<https://www.the-rsc.co.uk/project/the-blue-loop>

<https://www.familiesonline.co.uk/local/sheffield/whats-on/sheffield-waterfront-festival-154229>

<https://etheltrust.co.uk/about/>

Waterfront Festival Sheffield is a family fun day free event including on-water activities and arts and crafts, Stonemasonry workshops, storytelling, arts and creature walking tours.



The Ethel Trust Community Barge is a registered charity that provides subsidised day trips or residential experiences for the benefit of community groups and organisations on a purpose-built, fully wheelchair-accessible barge. The barge is operated by volunteer skippers and crew, who have undertaken nationally accredited training.

The ‘Unlocking Confidence’ programme on the barge improves young people’s self-confidence in tackling challenges and developing teamwork and social skills through steering the boat, preparing food for each other, ‘housekeeping’ and operating the locks and bridges on single or multiday residential trips.



Wildlife Enhancement Projects

On the Main Line Canal in Urban Birmingham, a series of Urban Park Wildlife Sites were developed to make it easier for wildlife to move freely. Canal-side habitats were improved for birds, butterflies, and bees to forage. For example, a 100 m stretch of marginal vegetation was created at a once hard-edged section of the canal by installing coir rolls planted with native species such as yellow iris, purple-loosestrife, and water mint. 500 meters of coir roll was installed, 35 trees were planted to create a nectar-rich linear orchard and 500 heather plants were placed in neglected beds.



In Glasgow, the Clay Pits Nature Reserve was developed along the urban area of the Glasgow Canal to develop and promote The Claypits' ecosystems and critical green spaces.



Inclusiveness and Accessibility

In Birmingham, the Ackers Trust, a charitable organisation, provides a range of accessible water activities along the Main Line Canal, including community group canoeing programmes.



Honouring Local Heritage and Culture

The Digital Youth Artist in Residence on the Glasgow Canal engaged with the community, particularly youth, in art-led activities, such as a photo exhibition, art-led workshops with local primary schools, a short video with school pupils and an Instagram account to showcase this content.

A Dialect Program of the Claypits was a participatory artwork that blends comics, maps and ethnography. This process collected the industrial heritage and the social history of the canal via a collection of stories from those who have lived around and used the Claypits.

images:

- <https://friendsofglasgowlnrs.wordpress.com/local-nature-reserves/hamiltonhill-claypits-lnr/#jp-carousel-3103>
- <https://claypitslnr.co.uk/2021/07/28/announcing-the-official-opening-of-the-claypits/>
- <https://www.ackers-adventure.co.uk/activities/canoeing-and-kayaking/>

Cabra Kayak Club



Based on the banks of the Royal Canal, the club has an active membership of about 50 and works with the local community and other partners to increase participation in paddle sports in the Cabra area. The club provides open days for potential new members, introduction and certified training courses, weekly training sessions and family events. They meet weekly on Saturdays between May and September and run river trips throughout the year. They also take part in competitions such as the Liffey Descent and have gone on to explore rivers in Slovenia.



The club began in June 2016 after a series of come-and-try-it-type kayaking activities were organised by the community-based youth project Cabra for Youth via a commercial kayaking company. Cabra for Youth then built up the resources required for their own canoeing activities and assisted in the formation of the Cabra Kayak Club, a voluntary club affiliated to Canoeing Ireland. This club structure also enabled the club to extend its activities to the wider community and the involvement of adults from the community made the club self-sustaining.



Cabra Kayak Club Trip to Slovenia

Waterways Ireland, Transdev, Dublin City Council, Iarnród Éireann and funding from the Sports Capital Grant Scheme have enabled the club to buy two forty-foot containers for canoe storage and a changing area and to rebuild the Lock Keepers Cottage at Lock 6 on the Royal Canal as the club base. The club remains closely linked with and shares equipment and facilities with the community organisation Cabra for Youth.



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