

**Working Together Better for the Shannon-
Waterway Corridor Studies as a Tool for Everyone**

**An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council**



**A Heritage Council Seminar
Held November 27th 2008
at the Radisson SAS, Athlone Co. Westmeath**

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Introduction

On November 27th 2008 the heritage Council held a seminar entitled “Working Together Better for the Shannon-Waterway Corridor Studies as a Tool for Everyone”. The goal of the seminar was to progress the work of the five Waterway Corridor Studies (WCS) published by the Heritage Council and to explore ways for all agencies involved in management of the Shannon to work together for the benefit of the river and its communities. The entire River Shannon and sections of the Grand and Royal Canals have been studied and recommendations have been made to ensure that the natural and cultural heritage associated with these waterbodies and the communities on the banks remains central to future development.

This document contains the summaries of most of the presentations made on the day. Three presentations were not available namely those of Parks Canada, Shannon Development and Waterways Ireland. However, the presentations from these entities are available on Inland Waterways section of the Heritage Council website, www.heritagecouncil.ie (except for Waterways Ireland which was too large to upload).

These studies and the natural and cultural heritage surveys of the waterbodies can be found in PDF format on the website along with a leaflet which introduces the Studies. In addition, on the website you can access an interactive map which allows users to view the Corridor Study recommendations per location.

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council
2009

WORKING TOGETHER BETTER FOR THE SHANNON

Waterway Corridor Studies as a tool for everyone.

PROGRAMME

10.15-10.20 Welcome and Introduction: Michael Starrett, Chief Executive, Heritage Council

PART ONE: DEFINITION OF THE WATERWAY CORRIDOR STUDIES

10.20-10.30 A Vision for the Shannon: Ruth Delany, Author of *The Shannon Navigation*

10.30-11.00 Waterway Corridor Studies in Canada: The Rideau Canal World Heritage Site.
Heather Thomson, Heritage Planner, Parks Canada

11.00-11.10 Waterway Corridor Studies an Overview: Beatrice Kelly, Head of Policy and Research, The Heritage Council

PART TWO: MANAGEMENT OF THE SHANNON WATERWAY

11.40-11.50 A Local and Scientific Perspective on Lough Derg: Dan Minchin, Lough Derg Science Group

11.55-12.05 The Shannon as an Economic Resource: John Crowe/Shannon Development.

12.05-12.15 Designated Areas and the Work of NPWS: Pdraig O'Donnell, Deputy Regional Manager, North Midlands Region, National Parks and Wildlife

12.20-12.30 The Future for Fisheries on the Shannon: Mike Fitzsimons, Shannon Regional Fisheries Board

12.35-12.55 Water Framework Directive: a process for water management: Enda Thompson, Shannon International River Basin District

PART THREE: WATERWAY CORRIDOR STUDIES IN PRACTICE

2.30- 2.45 Waterway Corridor Studies as a Resource for Planning and Development-
Mide Gerrard, Planning Consultant

- 2.45- 2.55 Local Authorities Working Together: Congella McGuire, Heritage Officer, Clare County Council
- 2.55- 3.05 Waterway Corridor Studies on the ground: Donall Mac An Bheatha, Senior Planner, Longford County Council
- 3.10-3.20 The Shannon as a Tourism and Recreation Resource: Éanna Rowe, Head of Marketing and Communications, Waterways Ireland
- 3.20 –3.30 The Way Forward, a Summary: Paddy Mathews, Inland Waterways Committee of the Heritage Council
- 3.35-4.15 AUDIENCE AND PANEL DISCUSSION OF ISSUES PRESENTED

‘A Vision of the Shannon’

Ruth Delany, Author of The Shannon Navigation and Former Heritage Council Inland Waterways Committee Member

Having spent many years delving into the history of Ireland’s inland waterways, two things stand out clearly. The first is that Ireland achieved a much more extensive waterway system than was warranted by the economic position at the time, to a large extent brought about for political considerations, and for this reason the waterways never lived up to expectations. The second point is that our waterways today are being used for an entirely different purpose than the one they were constructed for and in many ways could be said to be now showing a return on all the public funding which went into their construction in the past. They are achieving a potential never anticipated by those who built them. Because of this change from commercial waterways to recreational and tourism uses, they needed a different strategic approach. There had to be a change from the former narrow emphasis on maintaining the navigation to a wider view extending to the importance of what was happening along their corridors and the development of facilities to cater for this new demand.

Initially the Board of Works, who had traditionally looked after the navigational needs, was slow to widen its approach. This led to increasing calls for more co-ordination in the management of the waterways and in particular the Shannon. As long ago as 1974 consultants, Brady Shipman Martin, drew attention for the need for an interdepartmental committee to manage the waterways because of the large number of departments and agencies involved and the IWAI suggested the need for a Waterways Advisory Board to work with OPW to match the Lough Erne Advisory Committee which had been established in 1985.

In 1989 an Editorial in the IWAI newsletter posed the question whether there should be a Shannon Navigation Authority and that year saw the establishment of the Shannon Forum. This was, however, set up by the government directly in response to more severe than usual flooding and was administered by the Irish Farmers Association focusing particularly on the issue of tackling flooding.

The debate continued over the years and in 1999 the Heritage Council produced a policy paper on the Future of Ireland’s Inland Waterways. Significantly this paper stressed the fact that the waterways were an important part of our national heritage with particular emphasis on the significance of their natural heritage aspects and called for strategic planning for the waterways and their corridors.

In the following year I attended the World Canals Conference in Rochester, USA, and met Dave Ballinger who told me about a study of the Rideau Canal which had been carried out in the 1990s leading to a document entitled “Working towards a Shared Future, a Rideau Canal Management

Plan". He explained how they had looked at the waterway and its corridor and consulted widely with communities and other relevant agencies. It immediately struck me that this was an approach which could be extremely useful to follow in Ireland. In Northern Ireland a Fermanagh Area Plan had been produced for the corridor around Upper and Lower Lough Erne. This identified thirteen clearly defined areas assigned to one of three Zones: Conservation zones (in which small scale development would be acceptable), Sensitive zones (in which sympathetic development might be acceptable) and Opportunity Zones (in which opportunities existed for suitable development). The Waterways Committee of the Heritage Council decided to run with a Pilot Corridor Study of a section of the Grand Canal and Shannon which was completed in 2001. We sent a copy to Dave Ballinger to continue the link with what they were doing in Canada.

In the meantime a number of things happened in the years 1999- 2000. Waterways Ireland, the North South Implementation body was set up as part of the Good Friday agreement with a statutory remit "to manage, maintain, develop and restore the inland waterways of the island of Ireland". Severe flooding in the Shannon Basin again caused the government to consider this issue and a Shannon Authority Bill was proposed with a joint committee of the Dail set up to consider it. While a Shannon Authority might have made sense some years earlier, there was no logic in proceeding with one now to take away the Shannon Navigation from the newly established Waterways Ireland, so this bill was not proceeded with.

This still leaves us with the same large number of departments, agencies and NGOs involved in one way or another with what happens on the Shannon: the departments of Rural Affairs, Natural Resources, Environment & Heritage, the ESB, Fisheries, Bord na Mona, Failte Ireland, Shannon Development, Farming interests, the Shannon River Basin District Management Committee set up under the Water Framework Directive, the relevant Local Authorities, responsible for Regional and County Development Planning, and NGOs like the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland, Irish Wildbird Conservancy, Save our Lough Derg and others including the newly established groups to protest against Dublin City Council taking water from the Shannon.

This is why the Corridor Studies, which have now been completed for the entire length of the Shannon, have become so important, because they call for a coming together of all these stakeholders to promote sustainable development and integrated and co-ordinated planning. They have brought together much of the information needed to bring about this integrated thinking and the recent assessment of the studies charts the recommended actions which have been achieved and which still remain to be followed up. Waterways Ireland, who were represented on the Working groups for the corridor studies, have completely altered the way in which the Shannon is administered and have done

much to address the issue of integrated planning. The Heritage Council hopes that the studies help and offer the basis of a vision for the future.

Dave Ballinger has since retired but the link with Parks Canada and the Rideau Canal has continued and we look forward to hearing what has been happening there and in particular its recent designation as a World Heritage Site. Maybe it is a vision-too-far to expect that the Shannon might achieve such a designation in the future although it does share many similarities with the Rideau? However, I see no reason why we cannot all “Work Together Better for the Shannon”, as the title of today’s seminar suggests, to produce a detailed management plan which is the major requirement of such a designation. This would direct the way forward, assess progress and guarantee that the future of this important resource is not compromised. For example, there was a piece in the Irish Times recently headed “Climate Change Catches Australia off guard” about water shortages in the Murray-Darling basin. Even at this early stage should we be factoring climate change into any such detailed management plan?

End

“The Shannon Waterway Corridor Studies”

Beatrice Kelly, Head of Policy and Research, The Heritage Council

The Shannon

The River Shannon is central to Ireland’s heritage. The river is also a focus of different interests to many people – angling, cruising, generating electricity, natural environment and unspoilt landscapes, water supply, tourism attractions, and attractive development sites.

Slide 2

Since 2002 the Heritage Council has carried out 5 studies covering the entire Shannon from its source down to Limerick and also along parts of the royal and Grand Canals. The local authorities along the river, Waterways Ireland and Shannon Development also took part in guiding and financing these studies

The five studies along the Shannon from north to south are:

2006 Lower Shannon from Meelick to Limerick City

2005 Upper Shannon to Roosky including Boyle River, Lough Key, Lough Allen and Carnadoe Waters

2004 Roosky to Lanesborough and the Royal Canal

2004 Lanesborough to Shannonbridge, including Lough Ree

2002 Shannonbridge to Meelick and Grand Canal

Waterway Corridors

A waterway corridor is wider than the waterway, taking in the physical landscape, the towns and villages and their associated activities from farming, factories, tourism etc.

The aim is manage a waterway in an integrated way, linking the water with economic and social activities which take place in its vicinity as well as the people and heritage through which it passes.

Of particular relevance to the Shannon, where there are over 30 bodies with responsibility for managing some aspect of it. It is obviously hard to co-ordinate action among them

How can we conserve its heritage while allowing for economic and social development? To do this successfully we need to base decisions and future plans on a detailed knowledge of the current status and the environmental and heritage value of the Shannon's shores and hinterland.

The corridor concept has evolved from the idea of a single corridor along the waterways containing all these aspects, to a series of overlapping corridors, each layer dealing with a particular aspect of activity, like tourism or heritage such as archaeology.

How were the Shannon studies carried out?

The archaeology, natural heritage, landscape, planning and development, tourism were examined in detail through desk and field work. Particular emphasis was placed on carrying out survey work on boats. Local communities were consulted through public meetings, and wider consultation through requests for written submissions, and meetings with relevant bodies.

A series of policies and recommendations were then drafted. The opinions of local inhabitants and users of the waterway are very important in framing the recommendations, which work at two levels – some are general and overarching, for example proposing a management structure for the Shannon Lakes. Others refer to places such as towns and villages along the waterway. Some refer to a particular part of heritage like underwater archaeology, or the potential effects of boat wash on nesting birds.

Main linking objective of all the studies

The recognition of the Shannon as a national asset which should be managed as an attractive place to live and work. This should be balanced with the need to preserve the waterway, its landscapes and heritage and for future generations.

Specific recommendations include:

- A recreational and interpretation strategy for the lower Shannon area
- Strategies to conserve the heritage on the islands on the Shannon Lakes
- Protection of floodplains from inappropriate development
- An assessment of the carrying capacity of the Upper Shannon for additional recreational boating
- Linking the waterways to existing and new walking and cycling trails
- Identification of the waterway corridor area within County Development Plans
- Development of framework plans for local areas

The studies have been published on CDs and in book format and are on the HC web site. The data on the heritage including industrial heritage, archaeological sites, natural heritage sites and species are available in detailed appendices. However, from the Evaluation carried out in 2007, it is clear that they are not as well known as they could be, and that the current manner of presenting the information and recommendations could be greatly improved to allow ease of access.

So we have set up a searchable database on our website with an interactive map which will allow people to search all the studies at once for recommendations referring to places, organisations, aspects

of heritage or economic activity. The local authorities will also be given the data in a format to be included in their GIS.

End

“The Need for a Management Plan for Lough Derg”

Dan Minchin, Lough Derg Science Group

The Lough Derg Science Group (LDSG) undertakes investigations in Lough Derg to improve the knowledge of this ecosystem. It operates two research vessels, a meteorological station and collects hydrographic and biological data. The lower Shannon provides a unique landscape with varied habitats and etched in its surrounds is a cultural history that could be developed. Iconic projects could include the role of steamships from the early 1800s that carried passengers, agricultural products and the famed Killaloe slate. Most of this infrastructure survives intact and still supports the expanding boating industry of to-day. The linear berthage from the steam ship days has expanded from 1km to over 10km and there are now >7,000 registered craft on the Shannon Navigation. More boats require more servicing and have a dependency on fully working marinas distributed throughout the navigation. Unfortunately several recent waterside developments on the Shannon tend to be apartment based with berthage without supplying a full boating service. The reduction of areas for hardstanding overwinter may have a limiting effect on the further development of this industry. Marketing of Lough Derg as a ‘waterpark’, and ‘Ireland's pleasure lake’, send out the wrong signals for a special environment. It would be more appropriate to advertise and develop this area as one of the world's landscapes as has been suggested in the Corridor Study.

There have been recent changes in water quality as a result of the efficient filtration of zebra mussels. Increase in water transparency has encouraged weeds to grow in deeper water and choke shallows. These conditions have also provided opportunities for alien plants. Toxic blue-green algal events respond to nutrients and specific weather conditions and the LDSG provides warnings when such events occur. The LDSG have recently completed a study on the filamentous weed that drifts onto beaches and causes unsightly masses and unpleasant smells. Good beach management with imported coarse sands could do much to improve tourism.

Projects such as the Lough Derg Native Fish Biodiversity project is a community response to improving the knowledge of particular fish such as the endemic pollan. The LDSG support this project with data collections on the lake thermal structure and dynamics. This year for the first time in Lough Derg a shrimp like creature from the Caspian Sea was found. This species may have the capability of altering trophic flow within the lake ecosystem. Unfortunately the environmental knowledge base for Lough Derg is incomplete and the impact of lakeside developments that result in habitat fragmentation and sediment and other plumes may compromise what may be a much more sensitive ecosystem than has been previously acknowledged. The LDSG have concerns about future issues that relate to Dublin City Council plan to abstract water from the Shannon. There could be large changes should abstraction take place during droughts. Lough Derg and the Shannon is a natural

resources of immense beauty with a strong cultural history and should be marketed in this way.

End

“Habitat Management on the Shannon”

Padraig O'Donnell, DRM, National Parks and Wildlife Service

National Parks and Wildlife Service is an integral section of the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government. NPWS is the state agency for nature conservation .Part of our wider range of work and responsibilities includes the responsibility to identify, to designate and help protect areas of ecological importance.

There are three primary designation types;

NHA-Natural Heritage Areas,

SPA-Special Protected Areas and

SAC- Special Area of Conservation.

NHA is a national designation. . SAC and SPA are EU designations and form part of the EU wide Natura 2000 network of protected sites.

Challenges to protected sites and species are many e.g. recreational useage, invasive species, pollution, urbanisation and forestry

Not all of the Shannon Corridor is designated and consideration is given to landowners as part of the partnership process. For a site to be designated SAC and or SPA, it must meet certain criteria. Not all of the Shannon corridor area meets the qualifying interests for designation status. However there is a commitment in the National Biodiversity Plan to designate more sites, in particular the proposed NHAs and sites of geological interest.

The involvement of NPWS in the planning process as a statutory consultee will help protect sites from development pressure. Conservation management plans for all designated sites are also required. Monitoring, enforcement, education coupled with closer co-operation and consultation between other agencies and Departments should also help to protect habitats and species of ecological importance.

The Corridor studies are useful and contain much useful information. Consultation with NPWS in a more formal way is suggested however as some personal subjectivity rather than national policy can result in confusion. There seems to be an impression in that a better approach (to managing the Shannon) may deliver better for the Shannon. Every system can be improved. If the suggestion exists - that one or fewer agencies should have overriding, all encompassing responsibility, then this model may have other problems relating to self regulation and accountability.

Serious consideration for a National Park in an area of the Shannon corridor is worthy of discussion. The cultural and economic significance of the area would be enhanced and should not be curtailed by a IUCN, Category V type National Park -one where various stakeholders have representation on a park authority. This observation is compatible with the aspirations outlined in the Corridor Study.

The Future for Fisheries on the Shannon,

Mike Fitzsimons, Senior Fisheries Environment Officer, Shannon Regional Fisheries Board.

In the context of the future of Inland Fisheries the river Shannon and its catchment is of major importance to Ireland. The catchment contains 47 sub catchments and this has facilitated the development of a diverse fish and equally diverse aquatic habitats. Currently there are 25 freshwater fish species and approximately 78 estuarine fish species. Genetic studies in some of the fish species for example trout have now found that within the catchment there may be at least four varieties of trout e.g. Croneen trout which spawns in the Camcor river near Birr. Perhaps more importantly we also have the Irish Pollan which genetic studies have now conclusively confirmed is a fish unique to Ireland. Research work supervised by the Shannon Board, found that the population of this important species has dropped to dangerously low levels. It is extremely important that further conservation efforts are continued for this and other species in the catchment.

For both fish and the invertebrates which are the food of fish, habitat is the single most critical factor that allows them to survive and prosper. Damage to the habitat by drainage, pollution, putting rivers and streams into culverts, and even water abstraction all seriously damage and impact on the habitat. The general public are often not aware how these activities are impinging on the quality of our aquatic habitats and the fish species that live in them.

When one considers the aquatic habitat you must include the riparian zone which can extend for at least 30 to 40 metres on either side of the waterway, depending on it's the size. The importance of boglands and wetlands close to waterways as extensions of riparian zones also need consideration. The riparian zone contributes hugely to fish food by providing insects and detritus. Riparian vegetation is hugely important as a pollution interceptor as it acts as a buffer to prevent nutrients getting into the river and when properly planted it often prevents erosion of soils and riverbanks. One of the main areas which impacts heavily on the riparian zone and its integrity is inappropriate development, the result of poor planning, along or adjacent to watercourses and lakes.

Fish are the most critical component when one talks about the health, quality and biodiversity of our natural waters. It is well known that fish are sensitive to changes in water quality especially if pollution causes a significant de-oxygenation or has toxic effects. The usual end result of either of these only comes to the public attention when a fish kill incident occurs. However, what is less often considered is the damage that can be done to the physical habitat of fish, for example through dredging, which can have catastrophic effects on populations and can be so damaging as to prevent a recovery in the fish populations for many years. Water abstraction is also increasingly having a major

impact on the habitat, reducing spawning areas and the food of fish. A careful balance to ensure environmental sustainability and the preservation of aquatic habitats must be pursued vigorously.

In terms of pollution, eutrophication is arguably the process which has the most sustained negative impact on the fishery and aquatic biodiversity. Loss of swim room, food and reproduction areas are significant and most importantly the loss of oxygen at night is a critical issue arising when one considers eutrophication. Essentially the habitat is destroyed and few fish species will survive when oxygen levels drop at night.

Among the other serious threats to our native fish species are the types of new invasive species which we have experienced over the last number of years. Zebra mussels, fish species such as chubb and dace are but some of the animal introductions that we have seen. Serious disruption of the habitat has occurred where these introductions have taken place. However, perhaps the greatest impacts that we are now facing comes from the careless introduction of plant species. For example *Lagarosiphon major* can start from very small cuttings and end up completely covering and choking an entire lake in under 10 years. Currently there is little legislative control on the importation of any of these plants which are posing such a serious threat to aquatic habitats. Whether these introductions have either been deliberate or perhaps as in the case of a zebra mussels the result of careless procedures which allowed this species to be imported, they must be addressed. Urgent and comprehensive measures need to be introduced. Enforcement of these measures should be available to all the relevant statutory agencies. At the moment we currently have insufficient legislation, powers and personnel to prevent continued introductions from taking place.

Scientific research must be advanced throughout the catchment so that we can facilitate restoration works and limit the damage where possible. But most of all we must document what we have and develop the necessary measures which will enable us to protect our fisheries resource and aquatic habitats. Cooperation with local stakeholders as in the Lough Derg Native Fish Biodiversity Project is one way in which important information about local stocks can be gathered with the help of local people. We have already lost Charr and possibly the Gillaroo trout. Our stocks of wild salmon in the main Shannon are extremely low above Athlone and the population in the lower Shannon is also of concern. The loss of fish stocks as in the Salmon highlights the importance of work such as the “Shannon Salmon Restoration Project” which is currently being implemented by the Board. It is important that restoration and research projects are brought to the fore and additional measures, if necessary enshrined in legislation, are put in place. It is vital that resources are available to implement the necessary conservation, protection, development and management of our fish and their habitats.

We have a lot of existing legislation which is enormously helpful. We will continue to apply and enforce this legislation in as far as resources will allow. Given the requirements of existing national legislation, the stringent requirements of the Water Framework , Birds and Habitats Directives and other new legislation a new look must be taken at how we manage our waters and coordinate the policies necessary to protect water and aquatic habitats. Enforcement measures, where they are required, need to be fully supported and implemented so that individual incidents can continue to be dealt with in an unbiased and vigorous manner. Without such a vigorous and determined approach the long-term future for the fisheries resource in Ireland could be grim.

Water Framework Directive: A Process for Water Management

Enda Thompson, Project Coordinator, Shannon International River Basin District

The Water Framework Directive requires the publication of draft river basin management plans for each of the eight river basin districts (RBD) in Ireland (see map) by 22nd December 2008. One of these RBDs lies wholly in Northern Ireland, four lie wholly in Ireland and three are International RBDs as they cross the border between North and South.

The WFD requires the management of all surface (i.e. rivers, canals, lakes, reservoirs, estuaries and coastal) and ground waters by Member States to ensure that these waters achieve at least good status by 2015 and that their status doesn't deteriorate. In order to achieve this objective Member States are required to prepare and publish a management plan for each RBD setting out a programme of works as to how Good Status will be achieved. The River Basin Management Plans will cover the six-year period from 2009 until 2015; any remaining issues or new problems will be tackled in two further six-year plans, 2015–2021 and 2021–2027.

A crucial aspect in the development of the plans is seeking the views of key stakeholder groups and the wider public on the various measures proposed in the plans to ensure that good water status is achieved by 2015. For this reason each draft plan is open for public consultation for a six month period until 22nd June 2009. There will be then be a further period of reviewing the consultation and making amendments to the Plans as required before they are finally adopted and published by 22nd December 2009. Stakeholder involvement in the development of the plans is outlined, including that of the River Basin District Advisory Council (RBDAC) as a means of providing structured public participation. The role of the RBDAC, in conjunction with the public authorities and the wider public consultation as a model for integrated decision-making is discussed. An overview of the draft plan is outlined. The plan will be set out in a number of tiers (or volumes). Tier 1 relates to the international (or cross-border RBDs) and sets out the arrangements for co-operation between the authorities to achieve good status. Tier 2 is the main plan which will be adopted by the local authorities. Tier 3 is a web-based map which contains details of the current status of each individual water body and the measures required to maintain or restore good status. Tier 4 is a series of background documents providing scientific and technical information in relation to the development of the plan.

A structured approach was followed in developing the plan: find out the issues, decide what action to take and make a plan. This work is set out in the Tier 2 document in a step-wise process as set out below.

STEP 1 - What are our key water issues?

- STEP 2 - What is the status of our waters
- STEP 3 - What do we plan to achieve?
- STEP 4 - What actions must we take?
- STEP 5 - What will basic measures achieve?
- STEP 6 - What further actions can we take?
- STEP 7 - What will supplementary measures achieve?
- STEP 8 - Our objectives in the Shannon District
- STEP 9 - Our plan for the Shannon District

The measures (actions) to improve our waters fall into two categories – Basic measures and Supplementary measures.

Basic measures simply refer to actions taken under existing water-related legislation, such as urban wastewater treatment, bathing waters, drinking waters, sewage sludge, nitrates and habitats directives. Supplementary measures refer to additional measures which may need to be taken in areas where the basic measures will not be sufficient to address the problem. Supplementary measures range from reducing the pressure at source through remediation by technical or engineering solutions to relocation of the pressure. They have to be technically feasible and the most cost-effective solution. The impacts of the supplementary measures on the wider environment have to be considered, under the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, to ensure that they are sustainable. Thus an Environmental Report setting out how these actions may impact on other aspects of the environment will also be published.

Another key aspect of the river basin management planning process is the linkage between it and various other plans and programmes, such as land-use plans, flood risk management plans and heritage plans. Under the WFD, River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) are required to include ‘*a register of any more detailed programmes and management plans for the RBD dealing with particular sub-basins, sectors, issues or water types, together with a summary of their contents*’. All of the plans and programmes identified must be co-ordinated with RBMPs to ensure that water objectives can be achieved.

End

“The Water Corridor Studies as a resource for Planning and Sustainable Development”

Mide Gerrard, Spatial Planning Consultant

Brief for this talk.

The Water Corridor Studies are a resource and reference guide for planners. They present recommendations on the sustainable development of the Shannon waterway corridor. The studies allow the planners to meet objectives in terms of heritage and planning for sustainable communities.

How are the Water Corridor Studies relevant to planning policy? Regional planning guidelines? Local development plans?

Give examples at each level of linkage between the Water Corridor Studies and national, regional and local planning policy.

(1) Introduction: How are the Water Corridor Studies relevant to planning policy?

The Heritage Council was established as a statutory body under the Heritage act 1995. Its role is to propose policies and priorities for the identification, protection, preservation and enhancement of the national heritage. In view of this, Government departments must have regard to policy proposed by Statutory bodies.

Planning in Ireland is organised on the basis of a series of documents. They all have a relationship to each other. First there is the Law Irish and European - Planning and Development 2000 and regulations, and the Local Government Act 2001 which sets out the functions of the local authority.

Then we have two interrelated documents the current National Development Plan, a 7 year plan and the National Spatial Strategy (up to 2021).

Main Development Issues for National Regional and Local Planning are driven by these policies, and the key issues relevant to strategic planning and socio-economic and physical planning in terms of broad trends, housing, employment, provision of services, accessibility, environmental issues, social and cultural development.

After this come the Regional Planning Guidelines, dealing with -

- How to implement the NSS (working through the National Development Plan)
- How to develop the strengths of the regions. Balanced regional development
- How other towns and villages and rural areas will fit with the NSS

These are followed up by the current County Development Plans each with a possible suite of Local Area Plans and Strategic Development Zones, Heritage, Landscape and Biodiversity Plans. This is all backed up by Ministerial guidance, and policy proposed by the statutory bodies.

The system is “policy and licence” based rather than the US ‘zoning ordinance’ based system. This means that the policies adopted are decided by Planning Authorities for their areas, and these policies allow decision making on specific planning applications for development at this level.

Into this mix The Heritage Council has introduced a series of Studies, the suite of Water Corridor Studies focused on the Shannon Navigation and written between 2002 and 2006. Quite apart from their value as individual background research report documents focusing on specific areas of the navigation the studies are intended to be a resource for Planning and Development. How do they fit in with the model laid out above? **In two ways: As information documents and as policy documents.**

The Water Corridor Studies are relevant to planning policy because:

1. They have been published and are available as research reports.
2. They propose policy backed by the statutory status of the Heritage Council to which all Government bodies must have regard.
3. The Heritage Council submissions to the NDP while not specifically mentioning the Water Corridor Studies by name have proposed relevant policy based on the studies recommendations. For example -

Recommendation 1:

The National Development Plan should take account of the Heritage Council’s existing and emerging Evidence-Based Policy and Research Papers.

4 They differ from section 64 Local Government Act 2001 research reports because they can’t be ignored.

5 They could also be adopted by the Local Authorities under this same legislation, if this was seen to be in the interest of the communities represented by the Local Authorities, which they clearly are.

(2) What kind of planning do we do in Ireland and how do the Water Corridor Studies fit in with National planning policy Regional planning guidelines and Local development plans?

The National Spatial Strategy is big picture Blue Print Planning. The NSS sets out the policies on spatial planning adopted by the Government at national level. The Planning and Development Act 2000 makes no reference to the National Spatial Strategy, however, by way of the Regulations, in accordance with powers under section 23(4)(a) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, the Minister has specified that the National Spatial Strategy is of relevance to the determination of

strategic planning policies.

So here we have a national level strategic planning framework for the country over the next twenty years in some way dependent for its implementation on the regional authorities taking notice of it. The Minister might wish that he had the Danish model where their National Spatial Strategy is the law.

We have eight Regional Authorities and by 2004 all of them had written regional plans in place. As I said Regional planning guidelines work within the national framework of gateways, hubs, other towns and rural areas, and give more detailed regional level guidance to help planning authorities frame county and city development plans. Not much notice has been taken by the Regional Authorities of the Water Corridor Studies though four of the Regional Authorities are within the area of the navigation. The RPG's have some policies dealing with the resource and its protection though they lean more towards water based tourism development and its economic benefits to their regions.

For example:- <http://www.border.ie/>

Marine Tourism and Recreation

Consideration needs to be given to the development potential of marine resources of the Border Region in the context of marine tourism, marine sports and recreational activities. Development of water based tourism and the leisure sector will promote economic development at regional level. The sector is biased towards parts of the country which are relatively underdeveloped in economic terms and where alternative opportunities for development are few. The Marine Institutes Development Strategy for Marine Leisure Infrastructure identified 19 indicative locations with potential for developing clusters of marine leisure activity and infrastructure in the Border Region.

In 2007, the Midland Regional Authority concluded their work on a number of EU Initiatives. The main output for the Watertour Interreg IIIC project was the development of a Tourism Guide and Map for the Region, "Watertourism" available on <http://www.midlands.ie/>. The document was not informed by the water corridor study.

Policy is, in the end what determines decisions on any specific proposal and the County/City Development Plan is the key policy document. Ciaran Lynch says in his recent book *Integrated Area Planning A collaborative approach to decision making*, "The model of policy making in Ireland for land-use planning has tended to be prescriptive and expert led, while lodged within a structure that emphasises participation and democratic control"

I think we have an interesting mixture of the legal and the political, the economic, the national, regional and the local, the people and Ireland. But as Ciaran emphasises, “Though little research has been done on the matter, it is clear from anecdotal evidence, the comments of elected members, the media, that land-use planning in Ireland is a highly conflicted activity.”

However there is much to understand and yet the legislation and the procedures are complex, experts use jargon, and guidelines are often not clearly or briefly written. Background research report documents and studies are often not available, they may sometimes be purchased from Government Publications or planning authorities, if they are available, and not everybody can research on the internet. For the average person trying to understand and participate in this, it is nearly as bad as the Lisbon treaty and the citizens voted against this.

(3) Discussion in relation to Water Corridor Studies.

Do the studies allow the planners to meet objectives in terms of heritage and planning for sustainable communities?

The Water Corridor Studies as a resource for Planning and Development have had to take their chance within the system. The Studies are hybrid documents, they are made up of two different elements, they are research report documents and they make development policy recommendations.

It became clear as the evaluation of the studies progressed, and especially from the consultations, that the studies are not well known outside the local authorities and the partners who participated in the steering committees. We know from our evaluation of the studies that “planning authorities have acknowledged the significance of the studies”– to their plan making and have incorporated some policies in their CDP’s derived from the studies. (Evaluation of WCS 2007). For example North Tipperary CDP “it is the policy of the Council to conserve and enhance the amenity of the shoreline and county river corridors, including the landscape, water environment, and wildlife habitats, where consistent with this to encourage increased public access and water related recreation opportunities.(4.2.3 Water Corridor Policy ENV 7 Water Corridor Amenity)

Part of the problem in thinking about planning decision-making at any level within our planning system is the perceived complexity of the planning issues. In fact it is the lack of comprehensive information on planning available to citizens and practitioners, **in the one place** that makes the matter seem complex.

Background documents especially hybrid documents like the Water Corridor Studies enabling policy

making are generally not alluded to, either in indexes (usually none in CDPs) or Bibliographies (equally none in RPGs or CDPs). Available research reports as background documents are National Spatial Strategy background documents, with no attribution as to who wrote them, they are on the NSS web site.

No background document references are shown for Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities April 2005, (Why and how were the policy changes made in this document?) or for Development Management, Guidelines for Planning Authorities June 2007. Or of particular note is Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas Consultation draft guidelines for planning authorities February 2008.

The most recent NDP 2007 – 2013 in General Goals refers to -

“ integrate regional development within the National Spatial Strategy framework of Gateway cities and Hub towns to achieve goals of economic growth in the regions and provide for major investment in the rural economy.” But again no reference to background documents, studies, only lists of those who made submissions.

Heritage Council submissions at this level are very important, because they cannot be ignored, but research documents at county level can be ignored and policy can be “lost in translation” as it filters down each of the levels, down to planners work and decision making.

Did the policy recommendations on corridor delineation, on village development, village design, or the impact of over development on villages in the WCS Upper Shannon areas have an influence on thinking and decision making at Department level? Did the 2006 Study of the Lower Shannon influence the new Tax Incentive Scheme? I think so, but this needs more research.

One could say that in the citizen’s view the whole planning system is driven by the National Development Plan – which is the economic driver for development, and not the County Development Plan, and they are far more likely to involve themselves in the planning control side of planning than in the policy development side, where the democratic process of planning is supposed to take place.

Section 34 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 requires the planning authority to “have regard to the provisions of the development plan” but by this stage the policies are set.

Therefore to be in with a chance of influencing policy and helping planners “to meet objectives in terms of heritage and planning for sustainable communities” we recommended that the Water Corridor Studies policy recommendations are used to make comprehensive submissions to all the

relevant Regional Planning Guidelines and County Development Plan reviews individually and a budget should be put in place to carry out this work. This should be done especially to incorporate the Corridor concept into the sections on Environment, Heritage and Conservation, Tourism Recreation and Culture, Natural Environment and Rural Development and Tourism, and inclusion in Landscape characterisation plans, Heritage Plans and Biodiversity Plans.

Also since considerable effort was expended by the Water Corridor Studies in developing recommendations on LAPs, submissions should be made to each LAP review or new LAP. I do not think the adoption of Heritage Plans by Councils has had sufficient impact on planning policy making at National, Regional or Local Level. The best way the Planning Authorities and An Bord Pleanala will be encouraged to use the Water Corridor Studies policy recommendations and to make the Studies speak will be to incorporate their specific wording in the CDPs and RPG's. I do not think that Heritage appraisals of the County Development Plans are sufficient to make sure that specific policies to protect the Water Corridors are strongly worded enough to stand up in the case of refusals of permission. The Danish model where all environmental economic and social information is held in one place and available as "PAGIweb in Denmark" could be a goal to aim for.

http://www.salzburgresearch.at/research/gfx/krek_paperUDMS06.pdf.

(4) In conclusion.

Regional Planning is based on consensus decision making, County Development Plans are made by majority vote of the Planning Authority. They need more and not less *independent information* to make these decisions properly. These Authorities can commission their own background research reports, these have been historically, economic analysis, retail studies, wastewater and infrastructure studies, they could "adopt" the Water Corridor Studies under section 64 of the LGA 2001 and draw on this evidence based independent information to aid decision making.

The National Development Plan is written in political language, it is not surprising therefore that citizens think economically led development plans are the only way. The National Development plan growth model is the main influencer on planning in Ireland.

Economic development within the context of the NDP/ NSS should mean balanced regional development, but the iron law of competition precludes this. Global cities and global regions compete **with each other**, at their own level, like in football leagues, not within the regions, as Saskia Sasson has shown, in her book *Global Cities*. Balanced regional development has eluded us. I don't see another scheme of public works like the Tennessee Valley Authority coming up soon here?

The Water Corridor Studies in themselves have broken new ground in forming partnerships with the local authorities and other agencies involved with the waterways. They have shown that evidenced based research information is vital for drafting and analysis teams and to planners in the CDP process and spatial planning. They have been an antidote to the research information documents which are commissioned by developers to support planning applications and which planners must read.

I leave you with a quote from George Orwell writing in 1946 in “Politics and the English Language” Remember this was 1946: “Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful, murder respectable and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind”.

End

Local Authorities Working Together

Congella Maguire, Heritage Officer, Clare County Council

Lough Derg is the 3rd largest lake in Ireland at 118 kilometres square and with an 80-kilometre length of waterway corridor. The landscape diversity, cultural heritage and nature conservation value of the lake is of international significance.

There is a history of Clare, Galway and North Tipperary County Councils working together on initiatives for Lough Derg. There is now an opportunity for the Local Authorities to bring forward the recommendations from the Lough Derg Waterways Corridor Study, 2006.

Several recent studies and strategies for Lough Derg point towards the need for specific initiatives to be under taken. These include the following: -

- Lough Derg Study, 2001
- Lough Derg International Water Park Guide, 2003
- Waterway Corridor Study, 2006
- Lough Derg Marketing Strategy, Discover Lough Derg
- Lough Derg Sustainable Marina, Recreational and Tourism Development Study, 2008

The Vision being promoted is that the area is a well-managed activity destination with an international reputation for its natural beauty. There is a recognised need to create the Lough Derg experience and to develop a co-ordinated, integrated and strategic management structure for the lake. The Lough Derg marketing group have been progressing initiatives such as a promotional map, website and plan to produce a mood brochure.

There are a large number of local government, public and private interest groups and agencies and a wide network of stakeholders, at regional, national and local levels, involved in the lakes development and promotion. Stakeholder participation in the resource management is fundamental to the advancement of initiatives in the area. One of the challenges is to consult in a meaning full way with all the groups and organisations involved.

A high level of management is required to manage the navigation resource, promote ecotourism (boating, walking, fishing, bird watching initiatives etc), while at the same time protecting the natural resource. Much of the lake and shore is designated to protect the natural heritage including the bird life, rare plants, Alder Carr, Yew and Juniper woodlands etc. There is huge value in the more common

ordinary habitats surrounding the lake, the deciduous woodlands, reed beds and species rich grasslands that provide the natural beauty and amenity of the lake. There is an opportunity to integrate new developments with these habitats and retain the existing or plant indigenous native trees in landscaping schemes.

A large volume of data and habitat mapping exists for the area. This level of habitat mapping provides good quality baseline data, which can be used to monitor change, in climate change studies and inform farm plans etc. The Clare Coastal and Inland Waterways Architectural Heritage Survey 2007/08 identified and recorded many historic piers, boathouses, harbours and canals along the system. The Clare Traditional Boat and Curragh Project, 2008 describe the many racing dinghies, sailing and motor yachts including the iron paddle steamer the Lady Landsdowne.

Historically the River Shannon has provided access to the heart of the country. Lough Derg and Killaloe are on a major route to the midlands from and to the west of the country from Neolithic times and was home to the high kings of Ireland.

There is huge potential to further enhance the lakeside settlements all around the lake, some of which have detailed plans already developed. There is a need to develop facilities for the navigation and water based activities and allow for greater public access to the lake, marina, pump out facilities etc.

There are several long distance walks in the area, the Lough Derg Way, East Clare Way, O' Briens Bridge network of walks. However there is scope to develop a more comprehensive system of looped visitor trails and a diversity of activities and activity trails (water based, kayaking, cycling, equestrian etc)

In order to increase visitor awareness of the heritage, interpretation and information hubs could be developed at the various centres and settlements around the lake. There is a need for easily accessible, good quality and co-ordinated information for the visitor. Best practice guidelines, a code of practice for visitors and a co-ordinated signage plan could be developed.

While there are many issues to consider such as the dichotomy that some areas are subject to urban generated development for Limerick, while other areas on the northern shores are subject to population decline leading to land abandonment and many associated problems.

There are opportunities to develop the visual amenity of the area and open up views of the lake. There is potential for greater public access to the many special heritage sites (islands, archaeological, natural and cultural sites) in the area.

The challenges are many, how to realise the vision and promote an integrated, diverse range of visitor facilities. How to capitalise on the resource, how to ensure the protection of the water quality and prevent the further spread of invasive species, for example. How to address proposals such as the one to extract water from the lake for the Dublin area?

A Lough Derg Forum could allow for joined up thinking and ensure stakeholder participation for the future. A Forum would be in a position to identify the gaps and maintain the standards and develop the experience, it could set priorities for action, under take eco-tourism initiatives, tourism research and among other things, assess need and attitudes of visitors to the area.

End

“Waterway Corridor Studies on the Ground (and on the water?)”

Donall Mac An Bheatha, Senior Planner, Longford County Council

‘Come away O Human child to the waters and the wild’, W.B.Yeats.

I believe there is a spiritual connection between Irish people and the land and water. This is seen by the desire to live beside, recreate and protect the inland water ways and the sea. This desire to live and recreate on or by water and the need to protect the natural environment brings people into dealings with the Planning System in Ireland. I will try giving you a flavor as to how we manage and how we have used the Waterways Studies in the planning process in Longford.

‘And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:’

W.B.Yeats, Lake Isle of Innisfree.

The Shannon and Royal canal represent the Water, Land, Human Interface.

So what are we trying to protect?

The Natural Environment V Peoples Dreams, Desires, and Development Pressures.

How do we PROTECT it?

Need Public, Political and Policy Support.

This last point is of critical importance. The public must want to protect the water ways from indiscriminate development. To do this they must be presented with the information to allow them understand the inland waterways. This would encourage the political system both local, regional and national to follow through in putting mechanisms in place to protect the waterways while allowing sustainable development. With political support, policies will be put in place to achieve this protection. In Longford I believe we have this tri-partite support for protecting and developing the Shannon and Royal Canal.

How do we protect it?

There are substantial development pressures on the waterways from various types of development. These include the one of house with a view of the water, the individual harbour, the marina, the golf club, hotels, residential and apartment developments etc. How do we protect the waterways from inappropriate development?

We are assisted by the following documents:

Waterways Corridor Study 2004 – Shannon River Lanesboro to Shannonbridge.

Waterways Corridor Study 2004 – Shannon River between Rossky to Lanesboro and the Royal Canal Cloondra to Thomastown.

Longford County Development Plan 2003- 2009
Draft Longford County Development Plan 2009- 2015 .

In both of the Longford County Development Plans there are policies for both protecting and allowing for the sustainable development of the waterways in the county. The main protection policies are contained in the Broad Zone Protection Areas of the waterways which are mapped in the Plans. These are available for viewing on line.

Longford Broad Zone Protection Areas Policies.

It is policy to preserve, protect and enhance these areas,
Development will be strictly controlled and will not normally be permitted,
Impact on visual, recreational, ecological and environment shall be considered,
Natural settings, views and prospects will be protected,
Provide access and walkways

The Longford County Development Plans also have identified two Honey Pot locations on the Shannon and Royal Canal to allow for substantial waterways based development. These are located at Clondra and Ballybranigan, Co. Longford. A draft Clondra Local Area Plan has been prepared and will be the subject of public consultation in 2009

Future

- I strongly believe that we need a co-ordination body or group to pull all the various bodies and organisations with responsibility for the waterways together.
- Even just to meet once a year and share information and initiatives.
- A process should be put in place for informing and educating people as to the importance of the inland waterways and all the excellent work that is being done by various people and organisations in this regard.

*'I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;*

*While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.'*

W.B.Yeats, the Lake Isle of Innisfree.

End

The Way Forward: A Summary of Presentations

Paddy Mathews, Heritage Council Inland Waterways Committee

Ruth Delany stated that canals originally did not meet expectation when they were first built but they are now beginning to do so with their new recreational use. Waterway Corridor Studies (WCS) offer the basis of a vision for the future. However, there is the lack of a driver or champion for them.

Heather Thomson outlined features of Rideau Canal and mentioned the zoned approach to development and conservation.

Beatrice Kelly gave an overview of process to prepare the WCSs. This process has originally considered whether the WCSs should be statutory or advisory documents. There is ongoing discussion about how they should be incorporated into County Development Plans (CPD).

Dan Minchin covered environmental issues affecting Lough Derg and described the threats to the ecological status of Lough Derg which will have implications for the future viability of the recreational use of the lake.

John Crowe outlined the process and findings of Lough Derg Marina, Recreational and Tourism Strategy. Proposed that this study could be seen as a way forward for WCS, in that they bring the WCSs together with development objectives and attempts to reconcile conservation and development objectives. Focus needed on sustainable development potential. Advocated the need for the economic development of Lough Derg.

Padraig O'Donnell

Outlined the various designations along the Shannon. Highlighted the need to protect habitats and species. Pre-planning discussions are essential with NPWS in advance of any development being proposed. Provided an overview of current habitat status and quality along the river.

Mike Fitzsimons highlighted the threats to fisheries along the Shannon. He described the threats to habitats and the threat from invasive species. Development can result in the loss of riparian zones. Existing legislation must be used in protecting the fisheries along the river.

Enda Thompson outlined the Water Framework Directive, the structure of the River Basin Districts and the challenges facing them. The primary challenge is restoring the waters to 'good' status by 2015.

Mide Gerrard outlined the high level planning framework in place within which the WCSs have to operate and highlighted opportunities for the WCSs to influence this planning framework.

Congella McGuire highlighted the rich heritage that exists along a stretch of the Shannon and the involvement that local community groups can have in restoration projects. She stressed the importance of engaging local communities and providing information to visitors.

Donal Mac An Bheatha provided the Local Authority perspective, particularly in relation to the protection of the character and quality of the waterway. It is the role of the Local Authority to strike the right balance between the various interests along the river. He highlighted the role of the river as a ‘spiritual battery re-charger’ and outlined the new designation – Broad Zone Protection Areas – which have been introduced into the new CDP.

Éanna Rowe outlined the role and functions of Waterways Ireland, highlighting its recreational role and stressed that the priority of the organisation is to promote greater use of the waterways.

The Way Forward – A Summary (notes)

The word ‘vision’ was used by practically all the speakers. Perhaps a vision for the Shannon does not have to be static and defined. ‘Sustainability’ is very difficult to achieve – at best we can only expect to work towards it.

The key issue appears to be how to facilitate greater recreational use of the Shannon without compromising the quality of the environment. We need to get beyond the issues to the ‘how’ of addressing them. Some solutions may lie in focusing on areas of low sensitivity for development. The proposal for water abstraction will bring a lot of wider issue onto the table.

Do the WCSs provide a shared vision for the future sustainable of the Shannon and the canals? Are they too protectionist in nature? Do they need to be more development focussed?

Can studies such as the Lough Derg Marina, Recreational and Tourism Strategy provide an opportunity to build on the WCSs to provide a sustainable development platform? Have we adequately identified the beneficiaries of the WCSs?

More feedback from Donal Mac An Bheatha needed to determine how useful the WCSs were in developing Longford County Council’s new zoned approach to protecting the quality of the waterways in the CDP. There are lots of owners and stakeholders with a variety of interest all along the waterways.

A key question is ‘how do we work together going forward for the good of the waterways and the communities along them’? Is a shared vision a necessary pre-requisite to positive co-operation? Can we work together without a shared vision? Mutual respect, a willingness to listen to each other and understanding of others’ points of view is certainly a pre-requisite to a shared vision.

Suggestion: That there is a need for the relevant bodies to meet in 3 or 6 months time to discuss their policies, objectives and aspirations for the waterways, and how they can start to realise a shared vision and more importantly how to put this into practice. A Shannon Forum, which would build on this seminar, would be very useful to simply enhance mutual understanding.

End of Document