

# **Waterways Corridor Study**

**River Shannon: Shannonbridge to Lanesborough**

**River Suck: Ballinasloe to the Shannon**

**Planning and Socio-economic context**

**Final Report**

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# 1 Policy and Planning Context

## 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 From the inception of the Waterways Corridor Study, the team has been collating all relevant information relating to the social, economic and development activities within our study area. This preliminary report presents an overview of the pertinent strategic and statutory documentation and highlights particular issues, which will have an influence on our overall understanding of the study.

1.1.2 The first section of this report is devoted to policy that will influence decisions in the waterway corridor. The second section outlines the social and economic data for the key towns and villages falling within the wider study area, this leads to a brief overview of development pressures experienced by the towns and villages and the final section gives a broad inventory of the activities and facilities within the corridor. It should be noted that it would not be appropriate for the study team to carry out an audit of on-shore boating facilities as this work is currently being undertaken by Waterways Ireland.

1.1.3 To fully understand the context of this study and the factors influencing policy decisions, it is necessary to examine the overall hierarchy of policy guidance through European, national, regional and local levels. Several documents have been referred to in order to gain a thorough understanding of the wider policy context within which this study falls. The relevant documents that should be considered for the sustainable development of the waterway corridor are set out below.

## 1.2 European Policy

### 1.2.1 European Spatial Development Perspective

**Aims:** To achieve balanced and sustainable development, in particular by strengthening economic and social cohesion. The aim is to resolve the social and economic claims for spatial development with the area's ecological and cultural functions and hence, contributing to a sustainable, balanced territorial development<sup>1</sup>.

*Relevance to the Study Area:* European policy intends to amalgamate economic and social cohesion; conserve natural resources and cultural heritage; and attain a more balanced competitiveness within the European Territory. This will advocate a more equal and fair quality of life for residents in Europe.

### 1.2.2 The Cork Declaration: A Living Countryside

**Aim:** To raise public awareness on the importance of starting new rural development policy, making rural areas more attractive to live and work in for all people, to support the programme devised to achieve the desired goals and to promote sustainable rural development in an international context<sup>2</sup>.

*Relevance to the Study Area:*

The 10-point programme is pertinent to the Study Area as it intends to promote sustainable rural development based on private and community based initiatives that are integrated with international markets.

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<sup>1</sup> EU, European Spatial Development Perspective, 1999, pp 10

<sup>2</sup> EU, The Cork Declaration, 1996

The 10 points are:

*Rural Preference* - Sustainable rural development to become the fundamental principle of all rural policy. This would lead to a much fairer, equal and more balanced environment.

*Integrated Approach* – rural development policy must be multi-disciplinary in concept, multi-sectoral in application and with a clear territorial dimension. An integrated approach based on agricultural adjustment and development, economic diversification – small and medium scale industries and rural services – management of natural resources, enhancement of environmental functions and the promotion of culture, tourism and recreation.

*Diversification*: more focus on providing the framework for self-sustaining private and community based initiatives i.e. investment, technical assistance, education etc. and promoting the development of viable rural communities.

*Sustainability* – policies should sustain the quality and amenity of Europe's rural landscapes so that their use by today's generation will not prejudice the options for future generations.

*Subsidiarity* – Policy must be decentralised and based on partnership and co-operation between all levels concerned. The emphasis must be on a "bottom up" approach. Rural development must be community-driven within a coherent European framework.

*Simplification*: policy must be more simplified with greater coherence of what is presently done through many separate channels, a limitation of EU law on general rules and procedures, more subsidiarity in decisions, decentralisation of policy implementation and more flexibility overall.

*Programming*: application must be based on coherent and transparent procedures, and integrated into one single programme for rural development for each region with a single mechanism for sustainable and rural development.

*Finance*: Use of local resources must be advocated for local rural projects which diversify rural economies.

*Management*: enhancing capacity and effectiveness of regional and local governments and community based groups through provision of training, assistance, sharing of information and experience between regions and rural communities throughout Europe.

*Evaluation and Research*: more transparency of procedures is required to guarantee the good utilisation of public money, stimulate research and innovation, an enable an informed public debate. Stakeholders must be consulted on monitoring and evaluation also.

## **1.3 National Policy**

### **1.3.1 Local Authorities and Sustainable Development Guidelines on Local Agenda 21**

*Aims*: to provide Local authorities with guidelines in preparing Local Agenda 21s.

*Relevance to Study Area*: The recommendations within the Study will need to follow an agenda of sustainable development. Therefore, the principles set out in the Guidelines should be adhered to and should provide guidance when developing objectives and proposals within the study.

### 1.3.2 National Development Plan

*Aims:* to achieve a more balanced regional development in order to reduce the disparities between and within the two Regions and to develop the potential of both to contribute to the greatest possible extent to the continuing prosperity of the country. The purpose is to give effect to the National Spatial Strategy, by prioritising and funding infrastructure.

*Relevance to the Study Area:* The study area is within the Border, Midland and Western (BMW) Regional Operational Programme. The total allocation for expenditure under the Regional Operational Programme for 2000-2006 is €2,645.6million.

The Inter-Regional Operational Programme will have most relevance to the Study Area. Within this programme is the Local Infrastructure Sub-Programme which consists of measures in respect of Non-national roads, Rural Water, Waste Management, Urban and Village Renewal, E-Commerce, Seaports, Regional Airports and Culture, Recreation and Sports.

Under the Culture, Recreation and Sports Measure, funding will be available to “Further develop the Shannon navigation and the Shannon/Erne waterway by improving facilities at existing locations and adding new destinations to cater for increased usage of the system” and “provide for improvements in recreational angling facilities including stock and habitat improvements”

The Productive Investment Sub-Programme also consists of measures, which includes Tourism. The relevancy here is the acknowledgement that areas such as East-Connaught and the Midlands and Border counties are still undeveloped. Against this background, €57.1million will be expended on developing major tourist attractions, developing special interest products and supporting tourism and the environment. There will also be an amount of €1.87 million set aside for marine and water based tourism facilities and €12.7 million for ongoing development of development of angling and related tourism.

### 1.3.3 National Spatial Strategy

*Aims:* a 20-year framework designed to deliver more balanced social, economic and physical development between the regions by changing the spatial structure of Ireland through promotion of regional centres outside of the Greater Dublin Area. The Strategy demands a certain critical mass of population, skills base, and business and transportation links to strengthen regional areas.

*Relevance to the Study Area:* The Corridor area falls within two regions – the Western and the Midlands regions. Athlone, together with Tullamore and Mullingar has been identified as a “linked gateway” to promote economic and social development within the Midlands, the idea being to promote significant growth around the town over the next 20 years. The volume of development that is likely to occur in and around the town will have significant impacts on the local environment (including people). Although within the Western region, Ballinasloe and the villages of Roscommon have strong links with the Midlands so it is considered that they will benefit from the Midlands gateway.

The NSS also seeks to strengthen rural communities through diversification of the local economy – developing tourism, enterprise and local services. The potential of the waterways for tourism and recreational activity is specifically referred to, citing opportunities to develop tourism possibilities by linking waterways and creating tourism circuits linking urban settlements and waterways in the Midlands.

The study area falls within an area identified for reinforcing strategic spatial roles. Such areas are characterised by medium to small towns and rural areas where residential development should

be encouraged to consolidate the towns and villages so as to support economic provision of infrastructure. Wind power is favoured for cutaway bog areas. Water is viewed as a strong environmental component of the area. The NSS states that the recreational and tourism potential of the waterways can support reinforcement of the area and underpin the attractiveness of the Athlone/Tullamore/Mullingar gateway.

Under the NSS, Regional Planning Guidelines will be prepared for each of the eight regions and will in turn shape the Development Plans of the Counties. This could have implications for the ability to achieve the policies and actions drafted in this study. It is considered that the policies identified within the study could feed into the relevant Regional Planning Guidelines.

#### **1.3.4 Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland**

*Aims:* to provide a comprehensive analysis and framework which will allow sustainable development to be undertaken more systematically in Ireland.

*Relevance to the Study Area:* The Strategy intends to guide development throughout the country in a sustainable fashion, which will ensure that present resources are available for future generations to enjoy. Guidance is provided on all strategic sectors such as agriculture, forestry, marine resources, industry, energy, transport and trade. Therefore, this Strategy will guide any objectives or proposals that will be developed for the study area to ensure that the effects of the same will not impair the ability of future generations to enjoy the waterways.

#### **1.3.5 Government White Paper on Rural development – Ensuring the Future: A strategy for Rural Development in Ireland**

*Aims:* The White Paper sets out a vision and a framework for the development of rural communities in Ireland into the next millennium. The ultimate objective of the strategy is to ensure the maintenance of vibrant, sustainable rural communities.

*Relevance to the Study Area:* The White Paper defines the rural development policy agenda as all Government policies and interventions which are directed towards improving the physical, economic and social conditions of people living in the open countryside, in coastal areas, towns and villages and in smaller urban centres outside of the major urban areas. Policies will aim to create balanced and sustainable regional development while tackling the issues of poverty and social inclusion.

As much of the study area is rural, this paper is pertinent, in particular to ensure that policy makers are aware of the likely impact of policy proposals on the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being of rural communities.

### **1.4 Regional Policy**

#### **1.4.1 Border, Midland and Western Region Development Strategy 2000-2006**

*Aims:* to enhance the economy's productive potential, contribute to continuing growth in sustainable employment and to the re-integration of the long term unemployed, and those at risk of becoming so, into the economic mainstream and to contribute to a balanced geographic distribution of economic activity that will make best use of national economic growth.

*Relevance to the Study Area:* The Strategy identified strengths and weaknesses within the Region which included a lack of highly skilled personnel, varied quality of infrastructure, high

quality natural environment, both land and coastal, high endowment of natural resources and low urban structure. It is proposed that expenditure in the region to tackle these issues will include £3,360 million for transport infrastructure, £396.5 million for economic infrastructure and £141.1 million on environmental infrastructure. An “integrated package” approach will be required using innovative planning and delivery mechanisms for the Strategy implementation.

#### 1.4.2 The West Regional Report 2000-2006

*Aims:* to implement a vision for the Region’s communities and its quality of life focused by the people. The plan seeks to retain rural communities and its quality of life through a strategy of balanced regional development building upon its comparative advantages and strengths.

*Relevance to Study Area:* Some of the Study Area is situated within the western region and a number of the strategic issues facing the Region also exist in this edge. These include tackling problems of decline and lack of development in rural areas and promoting sustainable development that meets the needs of people living in the west.

#### 1.4.3 Western Development Commission - The State of the West - Recent Trends and Future Prospects

*Aims:* The Western Development Commission (WDC) has responsibility for promoting and fostering economic and social development in the seven western counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare. The report highlights the very limited progress in achieving balanced development in the Western Region. While there has been population and employment growth in the region, it is unevenly spread and concentrated in Galway and to a lesser extent Clare, with the remaining five counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo and Roscommon exhibiting characteristics of low growth and underdevelopment.

*Relevance to the Study Area:* The report is relevant as it provides data on the infrastructural and socio-economic situation of the western region and states that there is potential for tourism to make an increased economic contribution to the West’s rural areas but this requires the creation of a driving force for change which can give a clear strategic direction and deliver integration of support to deliver it.

#### 1.4.4 Midland Regional Development Organisation – Lough Ree Integrated Plan 1987

*Aims:* The purpose of this plan was to develop the tourism and recreation potential of Lough Ree. The study area included the Lough and its islands, existing towns and villages (including Lecarrow and the harbour) and was bounded by the road network. Improved access to the lakeshore provided the principal impetus for the study as this is vital for development of tourism and recreation.

*Relevant to the Study Area:* The report sets out a comprehensive background to Lough Ree and includes information on local history and built heritage, ecology, landscape, geology, recreation and tourism. Whilst the study is primarily aimed at tourism, it points to facilities that have been developed and makes recommendations for future developments – some of which could be transposed into the current Waterway Corridor Study.

## 1.5 Local Policy

1.5.1 It is really at the local level, through the relevant County and Town Development Plans that physical development along the corridor is identified and implemented. The following section summarises the local policies and objectives that will impact on the study area. In some instances this is general policy, applicable throughout the respective Plan area and in others it is specific to the waterways themselves and the wider zone of influence.

### 1.5.2 Longford County Development Plan 2003-2009

Lanesborough has been identified as a "Local growth centre". The function of Lanesborough is to provide local level goods and services. The Council has recognised the potential for tourism and amenity development at Lanesborough and wishes to promote and encourage this where appropriate in the Local Area Plan, which will be prepared for this area<sup>3</sup>.

Newtowncashel has been identified as an area to provide limited local level services such as post offices, neighbourhood shops, schools etc. A Village Policy Statement is to be produced for Newtowncashel to provide a framework for development within the village<sup>4</sup>.

#### Policy and Objectives for these designated settlements

##### General:

3.3.1 The Council, where feasible and appropriate, will acquire suitable land banks in towns and villages for the purposes of facilitating suitable and desirable development in these areas.

3.3.2.1 Planning permission in zoned areas will normally be granted for the appropriate zoning subject to compliance with technical, legislative, environmental, design policy and/ or criteria contained within the development plan or any local area plan, the functional area of which the settlement forms a part.

The usual standards will apply unless otherwise stated in individual Local Area Plans/Village Policy Statements.

##### Specific Policies

##### Tourism

3.4.3.2 It is the policy of the Council to advance the development of tourism through the provision, and extension, where appropriate, of existing amenities, particularly water based activities and walking route. The Council will choose settlements which will act as a base from which features in close proximity to them may be used and enjoyed in a managed way without having a negative impact to the features themselves and will bring benefits to the towns.

These settlements include:

- Lanesborough – River Shannon and Lough Ree. In particular with a view to developing the amenity area to the south of the town adjoining Lough Ree for commercial/ tourism/ amenity development.
- Ballymahon – Lough Ree.

3.4.3.3 The Council recognises the importance of the lakes and the other waterways within the County and will strive to maximise their tourism potential. This includes the promotion of water based activities and provision of access where possible to lakeshores, river and canal banks.

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<sup>3</sup> Longford County Council, Longford County Development Plan 2003-2009, pp29

<sup>4</sup> Longford County Council, Longford County Development Plan 2003-2009, pp30

3.4.3.5 Applications for tourism development will be considered in line with usual planning criteria and will be subject to high standards of design and materials due to their sensitive locations.

3.4.3.6 The Planning Authority will control development in protected areas which have the potential to negatively impact on the scenic, heritage and cultural assets of the County.

**Environment:**

5.1.1.7 It is the policy of Longford County Council to encourage and promote compliance with the recommendations contained in the Upper Shannon Catchment Study.

**Conservation and Protection of Heritage:**

5.2.4 The Planning Authority will promote the protection and conservation of heritage sites, monuments, artefacts and monuments and the integrity of their settings, as listed in the Record of Monuments and Places.

5.2.5 The council will try to identify important landscapes and habitats and the importance of local character, identity and distinctiveness, in both the natural and built heritage of the County.

5.2.7 It is the policy of the Council to prepare a Heritage Plan and Landscape Assessment for the County over the lifetime of the Development Plan.

5.2.2.5 Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) include:  
Lough Ree

Candidate Special Areas of Conservation (cSACs) include:  
Lough Ree

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) include:  
Lough Ree

5.2.2.7 The Council shall seek to cooperate with statutory and other relevant agencies to identify and protect a representative sample of the County's wildlife habitats, of local or regional importance, not otherwise protected by legislation. In addition it Council policy to protect and enhance important landscape features and their setting including rivers, streams, canals, lakes and associated wetlands such as reedbeds and swamps, ponds, springs, bogs, fens, trees, woodlands and scrub; hedgerows and other field boundary types such as ditches and stone walls.

**Inland Waterways, Lakes and rivers:**

5.2.3.1 The River Shannon and Lough Ree and the County's other rivers and lakes are recognised as important amenity and recreational resources and, as such, it is the policy of the Council to preserve, protect and enhance these features.

5.2.3.2 The Council shall encourage and promote the enhancement, management, protection and the promotion of access to and understanding of the inland waterways of the County.

5.2.3.3 The Council shall, where possible and where resources permit, provide additional accesses to lake shores, river and canal banks, through the acquisition of land for public rights of way and parking and lay-by facilities, where appropriate. In areas adjacent to inland waterways, lakes, canals and rivers where planning permission requiring the retention or creation of public access to the waterway in order to facilitate the creation or expansion of walking/ cycling routes.

- 5.2.3.4 It is the policy of the Council to protect, enhance and improve existing public rights of way where appropriate and where resources permit. This is to be done in agreement with existing landowners and through development control.
- 5.2.3.5 It is policy of the Council to require that land adjacent to the river and canal banks and lakeshores in the county be reserved for public access provision.
- 5.2.3.6 Development will be strictly controlled in the vicinity of the inland waterways of the County and will not normally be permitted. Applications will be assessed in addition to normal planning criteria and on its potential impact on visual, recreational, ecological and environmental integrity of the area.
- 5.2.3.7 The broad zones of the lakes, rivers, canals and deciduous woodlands shall be protected from inappropriate development – development which will have an adverse effect on the amenity and landscape quality in relation to their setting.
- 5.2.3.12 The Council recognises the historical, cultural and scenic importance of the Islands on the lakes and rivers within the County. These shall be protected from inappropriate development, whether on the Islands themselves or at locations that interfere with their integrity and setting.

***Views and prospects and places and features of natural beauty and interest:***

- 5.2.4.5 The Council recognises the diverse and unique landscape character of the County, and as such, landscape conservation areas may be designated. Physical development shall not adversely impact on areas designated as visually important/ sensitive under this section.

***Tourism***

- 5.3.1.3 It is the policy of the Council to provide, where feasible and appropriate, car-parking, lay-by facilities and access point in scenic and/or amenity areas which includes:  
Saints Island – to secure land for public access provision.

***Public Rights of Way:***

- 5.3.2.1 It is the policy of the Council to protect existing rights of way and investigate further provision particularly in relation to access to the County's lakes, rivers and forests and areas of historical, archaeological, architectural and cultural importance. To this end, the Council shall investigate the compilation of a Register of Rights of Way within the County.

**1.5.3 Roscommon County Development Plan 2002 – 2008**

The County Development Plan has a number of policies relating to the study area as much of the west of the county adjoins Lough Ree. The settlement strategy is to facilitate social and economic growth in the towns and villages and support rural diversification. The Shannon waterway system is viewed as an under-utilised resource for the east of the county and is recognised as having potential to be further developed for tourism and recreation. With the exception of Athlone environs (which includes Hodson Bay), there are no major settlements within the study area.

**Strategic Objectives (of relevance)**

- The support and facilitation of tourism throughout the county, including the Shannon waterway
- The conservation and protection of the natural environment

**Chapter 6: Development Policy**

**6.1: Housing Policies and Objectives**

Whilst the housing section only peripherally relates to this study, it is worth noting that one of the development objectives is:

- To prepare a Local Area Plan to guide the development of additional housing and other land uses along the N6 Athlone to Ballinasloe road corridor, in the event that the route is redesignated following the opening of the proposed dual carriageway/motorway linking Athlone to Ballinasloe.

**6.6 The Environment**

It is an objective of the Council to designate Special Policy Areas in rural areas that are recognised as possessing outstanding natural beauty and amenity, or are subject to pressure for urban generated rural housing. Special Policy Areas are set out within section 8.7 Development control. Rindown, St John’s Wood and Hodson Bay are included as Areas of High Amenity Value within Schedule 10, Appendix 2 of the Plan.

*Areas of high Amenity Value (Special Policy Areas)<sup>5</sup>:*

| <b>Description</b>                                    | <b>Features of Interest</b>  | <b>Intended Action</b>                                     |
|---|--|--|
| The Rindown Peninsula at Lough Ree and St John’s Wood | High quality scenic landscape  | To conserve and protect the amenity value of the area      |
| Hodson Bay  | High general scenic value overlooking Lough Ree. Berthing Facilities available | To follow the recommendations in the Athlone Environs Plan |

*Views and Prospects<sup>6</sup>*

View 5: Over Lough Ree at Ballyleague, Killeenrevagh, and Carrigan  
 View 6: Views east and west over central plain.

**6.10 The Shannon**

Aim:

- To conserve the environment of the Shannon waterway, which includes the River Suck, and to further develop it as a tourism resource.

Policies:

- To support the appropriate further development and conservation of the Shannon waterway and environs as a tourism and environmental resource.
- To facilitate the development of appropriate tourism initiatives along the Shannon waterway.
- To recognise the Shannon, the loughs and the Shannon Callows as habitats for a rich variety of flora and fauna.
- To facilitate with adjacent local authorities the establishment of a sustainable development and planning strategy for the future development of the Shannon waterway during the period of the development plan.
- To ensure the non-proliferation of private individual jetties and moorings along the Shannon system and especially within areas of conservation such as NHAs.

<sup>5</sup> Roscommon County Council, Roscommon County Development Plan 2002, Schedule 10, Appendix 2

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, Schedule 11, Appendix 2

Objectives:

- To prepare a planning and development strategy in conjunction with Dúchas Waterway Services (*now Waterways Ireland*) and other relevant local authorities for the Shannon Waterway system in the County.
- To ensure that development proposals in the area of the Shannon are generally located within existing centres, and to prohibit development proposals where it would be detrimental to visual and environmental amenity.
- To seek to locate appropriate development proposals in existing centres within the Shannon corridor.
- To support the maintenance, upgrading and development of the Shannon waterway system<sup>7</sup>.

In terms of development of the Shannon waterway, the Council will, where appropriate and in accordance with sustainable development principles, support the development of harbours, jetties and quays, the upgrading of locks, extension of the river system and environmental works along the Shannon. The Council will also support the development of additional facilities for tourism and recreational purposes in order to increase the attractiveness of the Shannon as a resource and amenity for use by the local population and visitors to the area.

**8: Development Control**

Within the development control section of the Plan, there is specific reference to marinas as follows:

New commercial marinas will normally be required to locate in, or close to existing centres, such as ...Ballyleague, Portrunny, Lecarrow, Athlone and Shannonbridge. This will facilitate the economic provision of onshore facilities and contribute to the expansion of nearby towns and villages. Of note the Plan states that the development of single jetties and moorings may be acceptable at some locations, such as picnic or landing areas where their siting and design is appropriate. However, the Council will monitor the number of such jetties and moorings to ensure that there is not an undue proliferation of these facilities.<sup>8</sup>

**1.5.4 Athlone Environs Development Plan 2002 – Roscommon County Council**

The Athlone Environs Plan 2002 sets out the development strategy for Athlone Environs within Roscommon (the Plan area) and all requirements will be assessed against the requirements of that Plan. The County Development Plan (set out above) covers any the policy areas that are not addressed in the Environs Plan.

**Characteristics of the urban and rural areas**

***Roscommon Road and Hodson Bay area***

(land to the east and west of the Roscommon Road, N61 National Secondary Route as well as Hodson Bay area)

- Area is characterised by urban generated detached housing and ribbon development along the N61 and side roads.
- One of the land issues included is conservation of the natural and built environment.

It is the aim of the plan to consolidate residential development in this area.

***Monksland area***

(land located in the south of the Plan area and includes the residential areas of Monksland and Summerhill)

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<sup>7</sup> Roscommon County Council, Roscommon County Development Plan 2002, pp 39

<sup>8</sup> Roscommon County Development Plan 2002-2008, p 47

- Housing is more urban in character with local authority housing and ribbon development along the roads. There is a large industrial estate within the area and also a school and a community centre in Summerhill.
- Land use issues include residential and industrial development;
- Ribbon development and urban generated housing
- The environment and the development of a sense of place and focus for the Monksland area.

## **SO2 - Special Objective 2**

To prepare a Local Area Plan for the Hodson Bay/ Barrymore Area

The proposed Local Area Plan will address the potential for the re-organisation of land uses, the further development of the hotel and golf course, improved public access to the lake shore (including the routing of the proposed shoreline path and its impact on residential amenity), the improvement of public amenities, the provision of additional housing and other relevant issues in the context of water quality and the sustainable development of the wider Athlone Environs area<sup>9</sup>.

### **Relevant Policies and Objectives**

#### ***Tourism***

Policies:

- To facilitate the development of tourism in the Plan area

Objectives:

- To undertake or support, where funds permit, the carrying out of a feasibility study into the development of the Hodson Bay area as an amenity area.
- To protect the environment of Lough Ree and its shores from inappropriate tourism and recreation based development.
- To facilitate the development of a shoreline path along Lough Ree.

#### ***Open Space and Amenity***

Policies:

- To implement a network of amenity pedestrian walkways in the Plan Area

Objectives:

- To investigate the feasibility of establishing a path from the Hodson Bay area to the town centre of Athlone along the Shoreline of Lough Ree.
- To prepare an Amenity Plan for the Hodson Bay area

#### ***Environment and Conservation***

General Policies:

- To conserve and protect the natural and built environment in the Plan Area

Objectives:

- To conserve the Lough Ree proposed Natural Heritage Area and Candidate Special Areas of Conservation and other nature conservation designations in the Plan area.

### **1.5.5 Athlone Town Plan 2002 - 2008**

#### ***Environmental Protection and Public services***

It is the council's aim to maximise the quality of Athlone's water resources, air, and landscape, in addition to an efficient and coordinated use of energy and waste minimisation.

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<sup>9</sup> Roscommon County Council, Athlone Environs Development Plan 2002, p 8

General:

- To improve and protect all elements of the environment, and consider the energy and environmental implications of development proposals.

### **Transport**

The Council acknowledges that accessibility and mobility for all sections of the community is vital for the future development of Athlone and therefore advocates the development of an integrated transport policy, which is considered to be one of the most important aspects of the development plan.

General:

- To promote the use of public transport

Specific:

- To implement a Athlone-wide rambling/cycle route network that connects the town's community services and green spaces and the River Shannon

### **Amenity, Open Space and Recreation**

The main amenity areas identified in the Plan are Ranelagh, Burgess Park, Wansboro field, the Canal Banks and the River Shannon shoreline<sup>10</sup>. The people of Athlone have high regard for the River Shannon, Lough Ree and the Inner Lakes and use them regularly for recreation. Other amenity areas close to the town include Hodson Bay, developed by Roscommon County Council, a shoreline at Wineport and extensive shoreline and woodlands at Portlick, both developed by Westmeath County Council.

General:

- Develop a network of Greenways and create opportunities for more active and sustainable lifestyles by linking with sporting facilities, creating networks of community green-linkages, developing cycle and pedestrian networks; facilitating access to cultural amenities which contribute to the quality of life; and provide opportunities to maintain and enhance bio-diversity.

Specific objectives – OS14-28. The following objectives are those that the council will seek to implement over the lifetime of the plan, subject to available resources:

- Protect, upgrade and extend access to the River Shannon
- Promote the provision of a pedestrian bridge/ walkway across the River Shannon in the vicinity of the weir.
- Upgrade the riverside public park along the west bank to the White Bridge.
- Develop a riverside walk and access for angling, on the west bank as the mouth of the canal to join with the canal park walk which includes a pedestrian bridge across the canal mouth with sufficient clearance for small pleasure craft.
- Facilitate the maintenance of the southern section of the canal below Mick McQuaid's bridge as a fishing area by improving access, tree planting and dredging in conjunction with the Central Fisheries Board.
- Extend Burgess Park by landscaping the derelict site at Golden Island and develop as a major urban park.
- Continue the development of Wansboro Field as a river based public amenity.
- Improve and enhance the Canal as an amenity feature by identifying and implementing best options.
- Undertake a survey of heritage gardens and parks, natural open areas and waterways.
- To assist the development of tourism and amenities, the provision of a promenade on lands abutting the Shannon will be facilitated.

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<sup>10</sup> Athlone Town Council, Athlone Town Development Plan 2002, 2002, pp 36

### **Conservation**

The Council recognise the importance of protecting and enhancing the natural and built environment for the economic, social and recreational benefit of Athlone and so endeavour to preserve its unique character.

#### *Natural Heritage Areas*

##### General:

- The council are to preserve the proposed NHAs as set out in the schedule, which will free them from adverse development and will retain them for their natural and unmodified state having regard to their natural beauty and scientific interest.
- Protect the natural environment of the River Shannon including its wetlands, aquatic habitats and fish life, the Canal and the Eskers.

##### Specific:

- The riverside and canal, walking and cycling routes. The Council recognises the particular role that these linear route ways and their settings/ margins have as wildlife zones and corridors. It will ensure that these roles are not threatened by development and where possible will seek to enhance their bio-diversity capabilities.

#### *Historical/ archaeological heritage*

##### General:

- Protect and realise the historical/ archaeological heritage of the town

##### Detailed:

- Protect monuments listed under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1994 or other designated areas under the National Monuments Acts.

#### *Conservation of the built Environment*

- To protect, preserve and promote the town's built heritage
- To establish Architectural Conservation Areas

##### Detailed:

- Preserve the features of listed buildings and consider designating groups of buildings and structures and streetscapes as conservation areas.
- Implement procedures as set down in law for the protection of protected structures and sites and monuments of archaeological interest.

### **Tourism**

The Council acknowledges that to increase the number of visitors to Athlone, the development of "quality" products will be required to prove to be the most sustainable and have long-term returns<sup>11</sup>. The Council recognises that the strengths of Athlone in tourism terms include: accessibility, the River Shannon and Lough Ree culture and heritage attractions including historic and archaeological sites. Weaknesses to be addressed include the improvement of image, increased marketing and increased tourism infrastructure and facilities.

##### General:

- To promote Athlone as a tourist destination

##### Specific:

- Encourage the development of the high quality angling facilities and the establishment of Athlone as a major base for visiting fishermen.

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<sup>11</sup> Athlone Town Council, Athlone Town Development Plan 2002, 2002, pp 47

### **Arts, Culture & Entertainment (ACE)**

The Council, through the Development Plan, has identified the relevance and importance of a wide range of ACE facilities. In addition to these, commercial facilities such as public houses, sports and social clubs as well as public and private leisure and recreation facilities were also recognised for their importance.

General:

- To enhance, protect and encourage the provision of existing and new ACE facilities and assets.
- To ensure that ACE activities are accessible to all in both physical and economic terms.

#### **1.5.6 Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 – 2008**

Part 2 of the Plan sets out the Settlement Strategy and supporting development policies and objectives. The Settlement policy of the County is to channel housing and other development into existing settlements so as to preserve the quality and character of the rural environment. The plan includes Town Plan for Athlone, Mullingar and Moate. Priority settlements for growth have been identified; village plans will be prepared for these. Of note Glassan has not been included as a priority settlement.

It is a General Objective 2.2.2 (v)

- To preserve and enhance areas of recognised character and where appropriate – historic landscapes, protected structures, townscapes, streetscapes, fine views, open land, canals and other recognised heritage and amenity assets, along with their attendant settings.

Whilst the **Transportation section**, 2.6, does not address inland waterways, it does include as a General Objective 2.6.7:

- To support the retention and improvement of pedestrian/cycle facilities including public rights of way and accessibility/movement for mobility impaired people. To implement a County-wide rambling/cycle route network ...

### **Conservation and Heritage**

Arguably the most relevant chapter to this study is 2.9: Conservation and Heritage. This section includes policies for natural heritage areas, landscape, mining, bogs, built heritage including archaeology.

2.9.2.5 Views and Prospects sets out the objective to preserve, improve and open up places or areas from which views or prospects of high amenity value may be enjoyed. There are 13 views identified within the study area for preservation or improvement. The Council intend to provide car parks, viewing points and picnic areas for enjoyment of views over Killinure Bay from R308 and views to the east and north-east off the N55 at Auburn Crossroads. The remainder, the Council seek to preserve through planning control.

Within 2.9.2.6, Lough Ree is designated an Area of High Amenity.

(iii) The aims for such areas are:

- To conserve the natural resources of each area in terms of scenic value, natural rural character, wildlife and water quality;
- To provide for the use of each area for recreational purposes by the local communities; and
- To provide for the development of tourism.

(iv) The existing land use of the designated Areas of High Amenity is mainly agriculture and forestry. Development not related to these land uses or to the recreational and amenity function of these areas will normally be excluded.

2.9.2.8 identifies canals, walking and cycling routes as liner route ways that have significance as wildlife corridors that should be enhanced.

In relation to **Tourism** (2.10), as a contribution to the development of the tourism industry within County Westmeath, the Council have identified a number of Tourist Schemes they will undertake (2.10.6). These include:

- (ii) Major improvements to the Council's lakeshore amenity at Portlick and Coosan, Lough Ree to include signposting, toilets and walkways;
- (ix) Promotion of ...Athlone, and other ...villages as tourism centers;
- (xi) Ensure access and signposting is sufficient to realize the potential of lakes;
- (xiii) Develop and promote the Millennium Forest at Portlick;
- (xv) Develop a dedicated Angling Centre at Portlick;
- (xvi) See to have further Blue Flag Beaches for the County e.g. at Coosan
- (xix) Develop a walk around Lough Ree in co-operation with Longford and Roscommon County Councils and other relevant bodies;
- (xx) Develop a link between the inner Lakes and Glassan.

**Amenity, Open Space and Recreation** includes an array of policy objectives within 2.11 including the following:

- To ensure that new open space areas and recreation facilities are convenient, accessible for all sections of society, particularly children, the elderly and those with disabilities;
- To protect and seek to extend existing public rights of way where desirable;
- To improve public access to the lakeshores;
- To protect the landscape setting of lakes, major rivers and canals;
- To safeguard and further develop in a sustainable manner the County's amenity assets, such as its canals, walk and cycleways, in order to maximise the recreational and tourism capacity of the County;
- To safeguard the ecological importance of open spaces, river and canal corridors.

As a key objective, the plan states that "there will be a presumption against development which significantly prejudices the form, character or setting of any recreational and amenity open space, walk and cycle way, or any other identifiable or scheduled amenity asset."<sup>12</sup>

### **Athlone Environs Town Plan – Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 - 2008**

The Athlone Environs Town Plan is set out in Part 3 of the County Development Plan.

#### **Conservation of the Built Environment**

At present there are no Protected Structures identified in the Athlone Environs<sup>13</sup>.

#### **Tourism**

The main tourist amenities for the area include the River Shannon and the historic town. Tourism is considered to be an important contributor to the economy and has potential for further development. All weather leisure facilities are acknowledged as significant for tourism development and the Regional Sports Centre will be an important addition to the town's amenities.

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<sup>12</sup> Westmeath Co. Council, Westmeath County Development Plan 2002-2008, pp54

<sup>13</sup> Westmeath Co. Council, Westmeath County Development Plan 2002-2008, pp116

### **Open Space/ Amenity/ Recreation**

The river Shannon again is regarded as a necessary amenity for water based activities and riverside walks. It is a goal of the Council to safeguard public access to the shoreline<sup>14</sup>.

### **Built and Natural Heritage**

Policy HP8

- To protect the natural environment of Athlone Environs especially the River Shannon, the remains of the Esker and the wilderness corridor provided by the railway lines.

Specific Objective G1

- To protect and preserve the heritage of Athlone Environs.

### **Tourism**

Policy TP3:

- To facilitate and encourage the provision of a range of accommodation and ancillary tourist services.

Specific Objective H1:

- To promote and facilitate the development of Athlone as a tourism centre.

### **Open Space/ Amenity/ Recreation**

Policy OS2:

- To retain the open space use of lands with established recreational open space and facilities.

Specific Objective I5:

- Protect and improve access to the River Shannon

## **1.5.7 Westmeath County Heritage Plan 2003-2007**

The County Heritage Plan was published earlier this year and includes a several objectives and actions for the waterways and identifies the appropriate partners to carry forward those actions. These include the following:

### *Objective 5: Improve Access to Heritage for All*

Actions include identification of suitable sites for provision and/or improvement of access to the waterways and interpretation at those sites.

### *Objective 6: To Protect and Enhance Natural Heritage, Landscape and Waterways*

Actions include introduction of bye-laws to regulate the use of jet-skis and powerboats within the County's waterways, and other actions to improve and maintain water quality. The Plan also supports development of a partnership including Waterways Ireland, local authorities, the DoEHLG, the local community and heritage groups to develop and maintain the network of waterways.

## **1.5.8 Offaly County Development Plan Draft 2002 - 2008**

### **Smaller Towns and Villages**

General: The Plan proposes to promote the smaller towns and villages within the County and to encourage developments of an appropriate scale that will enhance the towns and villages concerned and sustain the viability of services within these centres. The village of Shannonbridge is included within this category<sup>15</sup>.

### **Areas of high amenity (Location)**

General: It is the policy of the Council to protect and preserve the County's primary areas of high amenity, which include Clonmacnois Heritage Zone and the River Shannon<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Westmeath Co Council, Westmeath County Development Plan 2002-2008, pp116

<sup>15</sup> Offaly County Council, Offaly County Development Plan draft, 2002, pp 63 Vol 1, Sect 2

<sup>16</sup> Offaly County Council, Offaly County Development Plan draft, 2002, pp 69 Vol 1, Sect 2

**Specific Policies:**

Clonmacnois

The area is recognised as being one of Ireland's foremost national monuments and is acknowledged internationally as a spiritual, historic, archaeological and cultural centre. The Council has derived that the originality of the atmosphere and attractiveness of the area has deduced not only from the Monastic site itself but its relationship to the river and the callows together with the sense of enclosure provided by the eskers. The approaches to the river from any of the roads are heightened by the unfolding of the site. The Council has taken these factors into consideration and has deemed it necessary to preserve and protect these fully in order to retain the unique and special character of Clonmacnois. The area surrounding the site including Mongans Bog, Fin Lough and Clonmacnois Callows are also acknowledged as areas of international importance<sup>17</sup>.

Clonmacnois Heritage Zone

The Council's policy will be to retain the nominated status of the "Clonmacnois Heritage Zone" which will comprise the National Monument, enclosing Eskers, Mongans Bog, Clonmacnois Callows, Fin Lough and the limestone pavement at Clorhane. Development in the primary control zone around the National Monument will be strictly curtailed, so as to preserve and protect the unique character and distinctive quality of this area. The boundaries of the secondary control area correspond with that of the Shannon Areas of Special Control. Control policies within these areas of special control will apply together with a further requirement that the Planning Authority must be satisfied that the particular purpose of the proposal justifies the location proposed<sup>18</sup>.

River Shannon

The value of the River Shannon has been recognised by the Council as a major tourist resource and recreational asset. It will be the policy of the Council to protect the landscape including the Callows and views of special interest and also to encourage the development of Shannonbridge, Banagher and Shannonharbour as focal points. Any commercial development which would be in competition with these centres will, where feasible, be directed towards the centres.

**1.5.9 Galway County Development Plan 2002 - 2008**

*Some General Policies*

**Heritage:**

Ensure that heritage protection is an integral part of coherent policies of economic and social development and of urban and rural planning.

**Archaeology:**

Policy 131: Support the preservation, conservation and maintenance of archaeological sites, together with the integrity of the setting of these monuments and sites. Development, which would destroy, alter or damage monuments or archaeological sites, or cause inappropriate change to their settings and character will be prohibited.

Policy 147: Protect and conserve habitats, which have been identified in the Habitats directive, Birds Directive, Wildlife Act 2000 and the Flora Protection Order nature reserves, Connemara National Park, Ramsar sites and any other Directives, Acts or Policies which may be issued during the lifetime of this Plan.

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<sup>17</sup> Offaly County Council, Offaly County Development Plan draft, 2002, pp 74 Vol 1, Sect 2

<sup>18</sup> Offaly County Council, Offaly County Development Plan draft, 2002, pp 74 Vol 1, Sect 2

Policy 148: Protect and conserve their quality character and features by controlling developments close to navigable and non-navigable waterways.

Policy 149: Protect and provide access to inland waterways

*Specific Policies*

Policy 150: Have due regard to the aims, objectives and policies of the Waterways Corridor Study 2002 – A study of the area surrounding - the Grand Canal from Ballycommon to Shannon Harbour – The Shannon from Shannonbridge to Meelick

*General Policies:*

Tourism

Policy 176: Promote tourism related developments in the countryside

Policy 177: Consider Tourism Infrastructure development related to sailing, boating, angling, walking and pony trekking routes, pier or marina development, golf courses, adventure centres, theme parks, interpretative centres.

Policy 178: Some tourism related developments involve the interaction of a number of the above listed activities with accommodation facilities. As not all can be located on one site, facilitate such proposals where integration and linkage between tourism facilities is promoted.

Policy 179: Support the provision of tourism related developments that promote the redevelopment of existing derelict sites. However, such development, as with all tourism proposals must be capable of being satisfactorily screened and assimilated into the landscape. It shall not be located in areas, or close to areas, where an unsatisfactory level of visually unsympathetic development has already taken place or has otherwise been permitted.

Policy 180: Key rural assets must be protected and the local potential of rural areas developed. This will be achieved through identifying, conserving and developing on a sustainable basis.

Tourism Specific Objective 67: Prepare an Action Plan for the Rivers Shannon, Lough Derg and Environs and Suck basins.

*General Policies*

Lakes and Beaches

Policy 197: Restrict development, including agricultural or forestry practices, which would significantly diminish the amenity and or economic value of lakes or beaches or any of their assets or amenities.

Policy 201: Have regard to recommendations, which may result from the west region River Basin District management plan.

Recreation Amenity

Policy 218: Support cycling and walking groups in promoting their disciplines and developing routes and facilities.

Policy 222: Protect the amenity of scenic and environmentally sensitive areas and promote the knowledge and appreciation of the natural amenities of the County.

Policy 223: Encourage and promote the development of walking routes.

Policy 224: Discourage the intrusion of development along walking routes in scenic areas and along inland waterways.

Recreation Amenity Objective 73: A systematic survey of the various settlements will be carried out to determine local aspirations and assess their viability.

#### 1.5.10 Ballinasloe Town Plan 2003 - 2009

The Plan acknowledges that the River, largely ignored for several years, played a key role in the development of the town, its first development being a Norman castle, the remains of which still survive. Ballinasloe derives its name from Ford on the River Suck.<sup>19</sup>

The Development Strategy identifies the role of Ballinasloe as a self-sufficient center capable of social and economic interaction with both the Galway Region and Athlone. In relation to the River, the strategy refers to promoting the town's distinctive setting along the River Suck and opening up opportunities for waterfront development in the backland areas of the town centre. The strategy for the town is to consolidate development and developing a linear park along the River Suck (utilising the existing floodplain)<sup>20</sup>

#### Transportation

##### *Policy*

- Explore the possibility of an off street cycle/pedestrian route adjacent to the river from the railway station area to the proposed linear park, and continuing a link to the neighbourhood centre in Creagh

##### *Specific Objective*

T4.1 Provide a cycling/pedestrian network to include a route along the proposed River Suck Linear Park that will connect to Station Road and Hill O'Back

#### The Town Centre

##### *Policy*

- Encourage a growth in amenities and activities associated with the River Suck so as to harness its potential as a generator of economic activity in the town.

#### Natural Environment and Amenity

The River Suck and its floodplain are a proposed NHA.

##### *Open space strategy*

2. The protection and promotion of the River Suck and associated floodplain for reasons of flood control, protection of the callows (for reasons of ecological and wildlife interest) and tourism – both fishing and cruising are important activities dependent on high natural landscape quality uninterrupted by development
3. The provision of a linear park along the River Suck on the backlands of Main Street and Society Street, to serve passive recreational needs for the town.

##### *Policy*

- Ensure that all areas within the floodplain are protected from development, so as to maintain rivers natural course, the callows, associated wetlands and preserve the wildlife and habitats found within this area;
- Protect, restore and where necessary enhance features of the landscape and, in particular riverbanks, in the interests of heritage and amenity;

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<sup>19</sup> Ballinasloe Town Plan, p.1

<sup>20</sup> Ballinasloe Town Plan, Recommended Strategy p.20

- Protect, manage and/or enhance access to and an understanding of archaeological monuments, architectural heritage, natural heritage and inland waterways as appropriate and where resources permit;
- Liaise with landowners to protect and retain the Esker Riada, its ridgeline, including trees from development in the interests of amenity.

#### Objectives

- A1 Provide a linear park along the river banks in the backland areas of the town (to the rear of Main St and Society St and including lands associated with the Hill O' the Back and to connect with the old disused canal network southwards to the Theampelean (old church ruin) in Poolboy.
- A2 Ensure the provision of a public walkway including cycle path in association with any development of objective A1.
- A4 Consider tree preservation orders, subject to detailed site surveys (at time of planning application) for the following tree groups:  
*A.4.7 Trees lining the western edge of the relief road park*  
*A.4.8 Trees adjacent to the bridge on Bridge Street*
- A5 Protect the floodplain, associated callows and wetlands from development, below the 40 metre contour level downstream from the Dublin Rd and below the 41m contour level from the railway to the Dublin Road bridge
- A7 Reserve, where practical, a system of linear parks along all river and stream courses, in particular the Deerpark River and the Suck.
- A13 Encourage the retention and incorporation of raths, ringforts and other archaeological features into open space plans and development layouts. Ensure that where such features are retained, that access, linkages and connections will be maintained in the interests of promoting heritage awareness, especially at the following features:  
*A13.3 The old canal and ecclesiastical remains*
- A20 Have regard to the general protection of, and liaise with, Duchas, in relation to the proposed National Heritage Areas (NHAs), proposed Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the Esker Riada, the River Suck and associated callows.

#### Tourism and Economic Development

##### Objectives

- EE1 Explore the feasibility of providing a nature walk, amenity, sculpture or tourism trail as a means of promoting tourism in the town, particularly the area along the disused canal and River Suck.
- EE2 Promote Ballinasloe and its amenities, such as the River Suck for activities such as canoeing, river cruising, fishing, horse fairs and other tourism activities.

#### Environmental Management

##### Policy

- In general, no development shall be permitted in the floodplain below the 40 metre contour level, except in certain circumstances in the following areas:
  1. Where the town has already been developed in the floodplain;
  2. Where significant public benefit may arise from a specific development in the flood plain;
  3. Public infrastructural projects which are deemed to be necessary;
  4. Lands that lie beyond the river side of a public road and where the floodplain or specified contour levels cross a public road that runs almost parallel to the river, development will be permitted on the opposite side of the road, in accordance with the zoning provisions, subject to a requirement that stormwater can run off the site and non-return valve systems are placed to prevent stormwater run-off from re-entering the site;

5. Specifically in the backlands of the town centre (in particular Society St and Main St), where limited development may be permitted in the interests of specific urban design and amenity objectives contained within the plan. Outside these areas the Town Council will prohibit the infill of wetlands in the plan area. In areas where infill is deemed necessary, the same capacity should be extracted elsewhere on the river. This will ensure that the overall volume of water capable of being accommodated by the river will not be reduced.

## **2 Tourism Strategies within the Area**

### **2.1 Waterways Ireland**

- 2.1.1 Waterways Ireland, as it is now, was established in 1999 as the North/South Implementation body responsible for the management, maintenance, development and restoration of approximately 1,000 km of the inland navigable system, including the Shannon navigation.
- 2.1.2 Whilst the organisation has come under several different names and authorities over the past decades, the powers conferred upon them date back to the Act for the Improvement of the Navigation of the River Shannon, 1839 and subsequent sequence of transfer of power through the Shannon Navigation Act, 1990; Heritage (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order, 1996 (S.I. No. 62 of 1996); Heritage (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order, 1996 (S.I. No. 332 of 1996); Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht (Alteration of Name of Department and Title of Minister) Order, 1997 (S.I. No. 306 of 1997); Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands (Powers and Functions) Act, 1998; and the British-Irish Agreement Act, 1999.
- 2.1.3 The aim of Waterways Ireland is to develop the potential of the inland waterways to kickstart local development that will complement the boating industry and general tourism industry. Waterways Ireland aims to maximise the potential of the waterways by attracting visitors to local areas and thus enhancing local development opportunities. Up until the establishment of their Marketing and Communications department, promotion of the waterways was largely left to interest groups such as the IWAI and national, regional and local tourism bodies. At the time of writing, Waterways Ireland's Marketing department have been contacted with a view to obtaining a copy of their Marketing Strategy for Inland Cruising. However, this has yet to be published.

### **2.2 Fáilte and Tourism Ireland**

- 2.2.1 Through discussion with Paddy O'Mahony and Bernie Morris from Fáilte Ireland (formerly Bord Fáilte) it was established that in 2002 cruising attracted 14,000 overseas visitors and 23,000 domestic visitors. This was not broken down into areas. The focus is very much on attracting overseas visitors to holiday in Ireland rather than domestic tourism.
- 2.2.2 Paddy O'Mahony is responsible for Marketing of Waterways Holidays. The main aim is to try to attract self-drive pleasure cruisers to Ireland's waterways. Also promoted in conjunction with these are coarse angling, canoeing, sailing and land-based activities such as walking, cycling and horse-riding. However, there are no figures on revenue from such holidays nor is there a breakdown of numbers on a regional or area basis.

### **2.3 East Coast and Midlands Tourism: Regional Tourism Plan 2000-2006**

- 2.3.1 Whilst tourism revenues grew by 110% between 1989 and 1997, the Midlands-East region, which encompasses the counties of Kildare, Laois, Longford, Louth, Meath, North Offaly, Westmeath and Wicklow, still lags behind Dublin and Ireland West in terms of its share of Ireland's tourism industry. The Plan sets out the priorities for development and marketing of the tourism industry in the Midlands-East Region up to 2006 (which is relevant to our study timeframe).

- 2.3.2 The region is heavily reliant on the tourism product provided by the waterways and its immediate environs including: coarse angling, cruising, Clonmacnois, Athlone castle and to a lesser extent the peatlands of Offaly and the various equestrian centres and golf courses located within the corridor.
- 2.3.3 The report presents data on visitor numbers by main markets (i.e. North America, Continental Europe, Britain etc.) between 1992 and 1997. During that period the number of overseas visitors increased by 58% from 497,000 in 1992 to 783,000 in 1997 corresponding to a growth in revenue by 90% from 79.2m in 1992 to 150.7m in 1997. During the same period there was a 25% increase in employment in the tourism industry in the Midlands-East region; continuing a strong upward trend in tourism related employment.
- 2.3.4 The Tourism Strategy for the Midlands-East Region for 2001-2006 is to develop and promote a sustainable tourism industry based on stronger tourism centres, improved accommodation, expansion of special interest tourism and extension of the tourist season.
- 2.3.5 The tourism product development strategy is divided into 4 key areas: tourism centres, touring areas (all of which fall outside the study area), special interest areas, and rural tourism areas.
- 2.3.6 Tourism centres are defined as areas within a radius of some 15km within which there is a substantial body of approved and registered tourism accommodation. They have the critical mass, which can generate and support a wide range of tourism facilities. They must also contain a mix of accommodation, quality food and dining, activity and special interest facilities, night entertainment, good transport services and linkages and visitor services. Athlone is defined as a regional centre, as it has 492 registered and approved rooms available for the tourist market (250 is cut-off point).
- 2.3.7 The Midlands-East prides itself on being strong in the range and quality of special interest tourism products. Lough Ree and the River Shannon Valley is identified as a special interest area for the variety of activities it offers including: angling, cruising, boating and other water-based activities, ecology, rural tourism, golf and heritage. The Inny Basin is also identified for angling and rural tourism.
- 2.3.8 Rural Tourism Areas need accommodation and recreation facilities to attract visitors. The development priorities are for the expansion of tourism in line with visitor demand, development and upgrading of special interest activities, appropriate sign-posting and visitor information, waymarked walks and cycle routes and developing farm visits/farm tours.
- 2.3.9 The Midlands-East Regional Tourism Authority (MERTA) have identified five flagship projects that they consider would make a significant contribution to the tourism infrastructure of the Region. Of relevance to this study is that they consider that Lough Ree, including the wetlands and peatlands of Roscommon, Longford and Westmeath should be developed as a National Park<sup>21</sup>. The rationale is that it could be described as one of Ireland's last great wilderness areas. The Plan sets out the extent of the area and

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<sup>21</sup> Midlands-East Regional Tourism Plan p.33

- activities and facilities that should be provided including angling signposts and information maps, upgrade of existing amenity areas and walks to be developed.
- 2.3.10 Lough Ree is considered to be the last stretch of fresh water that is undeveloped from a fishery point of view. MERTA recommends that a Fishery Development Plan be drawn up for Lough Ree to improve signposting, access (shoreline, slipways and competition stretches), stream enhancements, hatcheries and competition stretches.
- 2.3.11 The plan suggests the development of 'green routes' for the tourist, as a substitute to the National Primary routes. As auto-touring is quite popular, the plan suggests that auto-tours and cycle routes should follow a theme e.g. the Tain Trail, a River Shannon trail, Monastic Trail etc.
- 2.3.12 It is considered that Lanesborough would be an attractive location for a water based leisure and recreation centre. However, it is also recognised that the town needs new hotel development to attract visitors.
- 2.3.13 As has been highlighted elsewhere, access and infrastructure are critical to tourism development within the area. Furthermore water quality in the inland waterways is highlighted as a growing concern.<sup>22</sup>

## **2.4 Ireland West Regional Tourism Authority: Regional Tourism Plan 1999-2006**

- 2.4.1 Roscommon and East Galway fall within the remit of Ireland West Regional Tourism Authority (IWRTA). The largest flow of visitors to the West Region between 1997 and 2002 has been from Britain, North America and the domestic market. Ireland West's share of the tourism revenues are consistently the third highest, falling below Dublin and the South-West (Cork/Kerry), to capture around 14.5% of national tourism revenue.
- 2.4.2 The overall aim of the Regional Tourism Strategy is to promote the development of the tourism industry throughout the region. The Plan is underpinned by nine strategic objectives, which include spreading the benefits of the tourism sector throughout the region through development of new tourism centres and product clusters, encouraging private sector investment and increasing visitor numbers outside the peak season.
- 2.4.3 Provision of adequate infrastructure, in particular access and environmental services is perceived to be a critical factor in attracting visitor numbers. To this end the IWRTA state they will lobby for the provision of these.
- 2.4.4 The Plan does not break down the region into the same level of detail as the Midlands-East Regional Tourism Plan. It refers to prioritising the Shannon Corridor as a developing tourism centre for investment in on-shore infrastructure including adequate waste treatment facilities. It also refers to the provision of additional tourist accommodation of all types in Co Roscommon. No reference is made to the River Suck or Suck valley.

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<sup>22</sup> Midlands-East Regional Tourism Plan 2000-2006, p.46

## **2.5 County Roscommon Tourism Strategy 2002-2007**

- 2.5.1 In spite of possessing some fine assets for tourism, County Roscommon experienced a loss of overseas tourists of –4% between 1993 and 1998. In terms of overseas bed nights, the County scored the second lowest performance nationally with an average of 397,000 between 1996 and 1998. There is no regional centre in Roscommon (i.e. no centre with 250 rooms).
- 2.5.2 Within the County there are:
- 520 charter boats on Shannon
  - 3,200 privately owned boats on the Shannon
  - 800 person capacity in caravan parks
  - 600 bedrooms in registered/listed accommodation
- 2.5.3 An Aquatic Centre for Athlone has been identified under the BMW Support Package for the county. The idea is that this will encourage private investment through clustering of tourism facilities. Hodson Bay, more specifically the lands owned by Roscommon County Council, has been identified as a suitable location on the banks of Lough Ree. The concept is for a cluster of public and private water-based project investments supported by the anchor project of a freshwater aquarium.
- 2.5.4 The Strategy sets out key areas for potential development including reinforcement of touring routes. While Athlone is viewed as a regional tourism cluster, Ballyleague has been identified as a smaller centre suitable for water sports and cruising. The Suck Valley has been identified as a Rural Tourism Centre.

## **2.6 Developing Sustainable Tourism in Galway – A Framework for Action: 2003-2012**

- 2.6.1 Galway East area is underdeveloped in terms of tourism due to a lack of awareness, insufficient tourism products, poor infrastructural base and lack of marketing funds and expertise. There are currently approximately 119 accommodation providers registered with Fáilte Ireland from Galway East. Furthermore whilst Fáilte Ireland funded the establishment of Galway East Tourism, the future funding of the operation is uncertain.
- 2.6.2 To promote tourism in the east of the County, the strategy refers to clusters designed to increase the stay of visitors in an area. The ideas mooted for east Galway include capitalising on the ecclesiastical history of the area, the relationship to the Shannon, and links to the O’Sullivan Beara Walking route and the Beara Breifne Greenways. One of the key actions identified is to create a Galway East coach tour package, focussing on the natural, built and cultural assets of the area.

## **2.7 Athlone Chamber of Commerce: Lough Ree, King of Lakes 1999**

- 2.7.1 Whilst not a tourism strategy per se, this document was produced to promote Lough Ree as a key driver for the economic development of the region (the three Counties of Longford, Roscommon and Westmeath). The now defunct Lough Ree Taskforce was set up following the publication of the report in 1999. The last three chapters of the report set out the tourism product, how it can be marketed and strategic planning for the area. The

Strategy sets out a series of recommendations, many of which can be adapted for inclusion within this study.

## **2.8 Lough Ree Development Association: Area Action Plan 1999**

- 2.8.1 This Plan was commissioned to act as a catalyst for economic and community development for Lanesborough/Ballyleague (the main centre within the Parishes of Rathcline and Kilgefin). Béal Átha Liag, the Irish name for both Lanesborough and Ballyleague, means Ford of the Flagstones, which was the first crossing of the Shannon north of Athlone leading to settlement in the area. The town requires strengthening as many of its residents moved to the area as a direct result of employment opportunities created by Bord na Mona and the ESB, furthermore it is split between two administrative areas.
- 2.8.2 Pollution of Lough Ree is cited as a significant issue, requiring an education campaign to make people aware of what they can do to reduce the eutrophication of the Shannon waters. In particular there is a need to upgrade the waste water treatment plant in Lanesborough.
- 2.8.3 The Action Plan views tourism as a growth industry based on Lanesborough/Ballyleague's location on the Shannon and its natural environment, particularly with uncertainty that shrouds the future of ESB and Bord na Mona. The town has always attracted tourists who arrive predominantly to avail of the excellent angling facilities afforded by the famous 'hot water stretch' or on hire cruisers. However, again the town is split into two - Lanesborough is governed by the Midlands East Regional Tourism Authority and Ballyleague by the Ireland West Regional Tourism Authority.
- 2.8.4 The Action Plan introduces the concept of a water activity centre at Lanesborough / Ballyleague, with training in water sports such as canoeing, sailing and windsurfing (this was subsequently referred to in the Midlands-East Regional Tourism Plan). At present Lanesborough has limited tourism infrastructure to offer potential visitors, in particular quality accommodation; catering; a variety of activities such as boat hire, horse riding, bicycle hire etc to supplement the existing festivals ESB Lough Ree Environmental Summer School, Lanesborough Horse Fair and ESB Lanesborough Angling Festival. Many of the tourism products on offer or proposed are dependent on the quality of the environment and particularly Lough Ree and the Shannon. The potential for eco-tourism has been explored by the summer school as a possibility; this is also dependent on a high quality natural and built environment.
- 2.8.5 Access to the shores of the river, the bogs, historical sites such as Rathcline castle etc, is a major issue and requires improvement. Priority for tourism development needs to be in developing the tourism infrastructure, more particularly accommodation and catering facilities.

### 3 Area Profiles

#### 3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 With the exception of Athlone, the study area is predominantly rural and fairly under-populated. Although urbanisation is prevalent, recent Central Statistics Office (CSO) census 2002 figures suggest that there has been some migration from the urban area of Athlone to its hinterland, resulting in an overall decline in population in Athlone town since 1996, and a significant increase in the environs of Athlone over the same period and subsequent pressure for urban generated rural housing.

3.1.2 Shannonbridge, Lanesborough and Clonfert have all witnessed some decline within the same period. It is likely that this is linked to downscaling of operations by Bord na Mona, as these areas would rely heavily on peat-extraction and the peat-fuelled power stations as the dominant source of local employment.

| 3.1.3 Area  | Population 1996 | Population 2002 | % change |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|----------|
| Lanesborough/Ballyleague (Longford & Roscommon)   | 984             | 943             | -4.2     |
| Rathcline DED (incl Lanesborough & Newtowncashel) | 1,248           | 1,268           | +1.6     |
| Kilteevan DED (includes Portrunny)                | 319             | 333             | +4.4     |
| Lecarrow DED (includes Lecarrow)                  | 278             | 266             | -4.3     |
| Mote DED (includes Knockcroghery and Galey Bay)   | 587             | 610             | +3.9     |
| Athlone Town                                      | 7,691           | 7,354           | -4.4     |
| Athlone Environs (Westmeath & Roscommon)          | 7,853           | 8,582           | +9.3     |
| Glassan DED                                       | 745             | 816             | +9.5     |
| Glassan village                                   | 198             | 216             | +9.1     |
| Shannonbridge village                             | 266             | 248             | -6.8     |
| Clonmacnois DED                                   | 325             | 316             | -2.8     |
| Ballinasloe Town                                  | 5634            | 5984            | +6.2     |
| Ballinasloe Environs (Galway & Roscommon)         | 89              | 235             | +164.0   |
| Clonfert DED                                      | 465             | 427             | -8.2     |

**Table 1 – Overall population figures for study area**

3.1.4 Over half the population of the Midlands region are employed in the Service Sector e.g. approximately 600 people are employed in the Golden Island shopping centre in Athlone. Traditional industry comes second; with agriculture still a significant employer, but declining in third place. The young age profile (45% less than 24 years), high birth rate and increased female participation support the future person-power needs of companies<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> www.athlone.ie

## 3.2 LANESBOROUGH

3.2.1 Lanesborough is located towards the top of Lough Ree, one of the lakes of the River Shannon. Its original name 'Ath Liag' translates as 'Ford of the Flagstone' as it was a crossing point on the river<sup>24</sup>. The land to the east of the river became known as Lanesborough following the granting of the castle (now in ruins) and the lands to Lord Lane on 24 August 1664 by King Charles II, as a reward for his support to him during his years in exile.

### Population

3.2.2 The population of Lanesborough and Ballyleague, has declined from 984 in 1996 to 943 in 2002. This represents a decrease of 4.2%. Lanesborough alone has a population of 596<sup>25</sup>. However, the population of Rathcline, the DED within which Lanesborough is located experienced an increase in population over the same period from 1,248 to 1,275 (2.2%). This may indicate a migration from the centre of Lanesborough to its hinterland.

### Employment and Workforce

3.2.3 According to CSO data from 1996, there were 412 employed in some form of industry in the Rathcline DED. Of these the dominant sectors were Commerce, Professional Services and Manufacturing, employing 17.7%, 16.9% and 13.8% of the workforce respectively. Not surprisingly agriculture was also a dominant sector, representing 13.1%.

3.2.4 Bord na Mona and the ESB are the two main employers in Lanesborough<sup>26</sup>. The original power station was built in 1958 and used turf from the local bogs owned by Bord na Mona. A second station was completed in 1966 and was designed to use milled peat, which could be produced more economically. A third station came into production in 1983. This is due to be decommissioned and demolished in the next 2 years. The latest powerstation will be opened in 2005 and has a 15-year permission, after which it will be decommissioned. This is likely to have significant negative effects for employment within the town and its hinterland.

3.2.5 Within the County Development Plan<sup>27</sup> Lanesborough is identified as a local growth centre. It will continue to provide settlement centres for the population and local level goods and services provision. Lanesborough is recognised for its tourism and amenity development potential and shall be promoted and encouraged where appropriate in the Local Area Plan which is to be prepared for this location.

3.2.6 Lanesborough is renowned for its excellent fishing. The 'Hot Water Stretch' adjacent to the peat fuelled power station attracts fishermen from all over Europe. The riverbank has been completely revamped and now has 60 stands at the bridge, with 4 stands for the disabled.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.longfordtourism.com/areas/Lanesborough.html>

<sup>25</sup> Longford County Development Board, The Way Forward 2002-2011

<sup>26</sup> [www.longfordtourism.com](http://www.longfordtourism.com)

<sup>27</sup> Longford County Council, Longford County Development Plan 2003-2009, pp 29

### 3.3 NEWTOWNCASHEL

- 3.3.1 Newtowncashel is located in south Longford, between Lanesborough and Ballymahon, and is on the North Eastern Shore of Lough Ree on the River Shannon. It is renowned for being a picturesque village near the shores of Lough Ree and could also be described as an island parish for it boasts of fertile farmland surrounded by bogland to the North and East. There are two important historical sites in the Newtowncashel area which are Inis Clearaun or Quakers Island where St Diarmuid founded an abbey in the year 540 AD and Saints' Island where St Kevin founded a monastery in 544 AD<sup>28</sup>. The ruins of the old parish church, St Catherine's and the burial grounds are on the side of Cashel Hill overlooking Lough Ree. The village also hosts the Folk Museum. Both Elfeet Bay and Barley Harbour near Newtowncashel provide a pleasant amenity for walking, boating, picnicking and fishing along the Lough Ree shoreline and are well-utilised by local people throughout the summer months.
- 3.3.2 In addition, the village has achieved a high mark in the National Tidy Towns Competition, being national winner in 1980<sup>29</sup>. The village however is designated in the County Development Plan for the primary purpose of fulfilling local housing need. It is envisaged that it will provide limited local level services such as post office, neighbourhood shop, schools etc<sup>30</sup>.

#### Population

- 3.3.3 The present population of the village and its catchment is 259. Like Lanesborough, Newtowncashel is within the DED of Rathcline, which experienced an overall increase in population from 1996.

#### Employment and Workforce

- 3.3.4 The majority of residents either work in Lanesborough or Ballymahon, with a small number employed in the agriculture, education and tourism sectors<sup>31</sup>.

### 3.4 KNOCKCROGHERY

- 3.4.1 Outside of Athlone environs (including Kiltoom and Hodson Bay) and Ballyleague, Knockcroghery is the only settlement of significant size within the County Roscommon portion of the study area. The village is located on the N61 approximately 11/2 km from Galey Bay on the shores of Lough Ree. Its predominant industry in the past was the manufacture of clay pipes. When the village was burned down by the Black and Tans, the pipe clay industry was ended. This practice has recently been revived on a small scale and pipes are available at the Knockcroghery Heritage Centre.

#### Population

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.longfordtourism.com/areas/cashel.html>

<sup>29</sup> <http://longford.local.ie/newtowncashel/>

<sup>30</sup> Longford County Council, Longford County Development Plan 2003-2009, pp 30

<sup>31</sup> Head of Tourism, Longford Tourism, 14/08/03

- 3.4.2 The present population of the Mote DED, which includes the hinterland of Knockcroghery and Galey Bay is 610. The DED experienced an overall increase in population from 587 in 1996. It was not possible to obtain a breakdown for the actual population of the village.

### Employment and Workforce

- 3.4.3 The main industry in Knockcroghery is agriculture.<sup>32</sup>

## 3.5 LECARROW

- 3.5.1 Lecarrow is a small village located at the base of the Lecarrow canal just off the N61 between Knockcroghery and Hodson Bay. In spite of a well-maintained amenity area and harbour at the end of the canal, very few boats are able to use the navigation due to poor maintenance. The village has been suffering as a consequence.

## 3.6 GLASSAN

- 3.6.1 Glassan, (*'the village of the roses'*) is situated approximately 8 km north of Athlone in the heart of Ireland. The village is midway between Dublin and Galway and an ideal base for a touring, golfing, or a quiet vacation. It has a thriving community based on the shores of Lough Ree.

### Population

- 3.6.2 The population of Glassan village increased from 198 in 1996 to 216 in 2002; an increase of 9.1%. Within the broader electoral area, the population has increased from 745 to 816. Some of the increase could include commuters from Athlone seeking a quieter location within easy commuting distance of the town.

### Employment and Workforce

- 3.6.3 According to the Westmeath County Development Plan 2002 there were between 12.5 and 22.6% employed in *agriculture, forestry and fishing* in 1996 in Glassan. This relatively small percentage is due mainly to the majority being economically dependent on Athlone. The percentage of those employed in *manufacturing* was estimated to be between 18.9 and 25.8% in 1996. In the *commerce, insurance, finance and business services*, the percentage was between 13.2 and 17.9% during the same period. And in the *professional* sector there was between 14.8 and 21.9% employed in the area<sup>33</sup>.
- 3.6.4 Major tourism attractions to the area are golfing and sailing. There is a great choice for golfers selecting where to play, while prospective sailors can hire boats locally and sail down the River Shannon.

## 3.7 ATHLONE

- 3.7.1 Athlone is the largest settlement within the study area, and in fact is the largest urban centre within the Midlands region; with a total population of 23,670<sup>34</sup>. It is identified as a Gateway within the *National Spatial Strategy* and is strategically placed in the centre of

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<sup>32</sup> Roscommon tourism

<sup>33</sup> [www.westmeathcoco.ie/docs/cdb/profile.pdf](http://www.westmeathcoco.ie/docs/cdb/profile.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> CSO Census 2002

Ireland with good rail and road links to Dublin and the rest of Ireland. As stated in “The Shell Guide to the River Shannon”, Athlone owes its existence to its situation on the principal crossing point on the middle Shannon. It is particularly important to the study area for both its cultural heritage and because it marks the southern entrance to Lough Ree.

- 3.7.2 Athlone is divided into three administrative districts: the Urban district area; Athlone Environs within Westmeath Council area; and Athlone Environs (Monksland Environs) within Roscommon County Council area.

| Area                      | Population 1996 | Population 2002 | % Change    |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| <b>Westmeath County</b>   |                 |                 |             |
| <b>Athlone Urban area</b> | <b>7691</b>     | <b>7354</b>     | <b>-4.4</b> |
| <b>Athlone Rural</b>      | <b>14671</b>    | <b>16191</b>    | <b>10.4</b> |
| Athlone East Rural        | 5,728           | 6,445           | 12.5        |
| <b>Roscommon County</b>   |                 |                 |             |
| Athlone No. 2 rural       | 11,482          | 12,469          | 8.6         |
| Athlone West Rural        | 1,794           | 2,262           | 26.1        |

**Table 2 – Population Profile** \*Source – CSO Census 2002

- 3.7.3 From the CSO 2002 figures, the greatest increase over the last 6 years in population occurred in Athlone West rural: 26.1%. Conversely the greatest decline was experienced in Athlone Urban area, with an overall loss in population of 4.4% since 1996.

| Year        | Athlone Town | Environs | Westmeath Environs | Roscommon Environs | Town and Environs |
|-------------|--------------|----------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| <b>1971</b> | 9825         | 1997     | 1673               | 324                | 11,822            |
| <b>1979</b> | 9778         | 4350     | 4023               | 327                | 14,128            |
| <b>1981</b> | 9444         | 4982     | 4634               | 348                | 14,426            |
| <b>1986</b> | 8815         | 6756     | 5982               | 774                | 15,571            |
| <b>1991</b> | 8170         | 7188     | 6381               | 807                | 15,358            |
| <b>1996</b> | 7691         | 7853     | 6639               | 1214               | 15,544            |

**Table 3 – Population of Athlone and Environs 1971-1996<sup>35</sup>**

- 3.7.4 As aforementioned, the population in Athlone Town, or urban area, has been decreasing and certainly this has been occurring since 1971 whilst over the same period the population within the environs has been significantly increasing.

## Housing

- 3.7.5 It should be noted that the projected increase of 406 persons to 2001 is far exceeded by the projected increase in the number of households of 802, reflecting a trend similar at National level for higher headship rates and lower household sizes<sup>36</sup>. The number of households is expected to be greater than the number of persons as they will be coming from the already resident population. The expected 802 new households are anticipated to comprise: 32% married, 22% separated and 46% single households<sup>37</sup>. These figures include the Environs area. Although detailed census data is not available yet, it is

<sup>35</sup> Westmeath County Council, Westmeath County Development Plan 2002-2008, pp 110

<sup>36</sup> Athlone Town Council, Athlone Town Development Plan 2002, pp 13

<sup>37</sup> Westmeath Co. Council, Westmeath County Development Plan 2002-2008, pp 111

expected that the number of households within the Urban area will have risen to 2,975<sup>38</sup> which may have impacts on the Corridor Area, depending on where development is directed to.

### Employment and Workforce

- 3.7.6 The only available economic profile statistics date back to 1996. Then employment in the **Agriculture and mining industry** (2.2%) was well below the national average while **Manufacturing** (23%) and **Public Administration** (13.9%) were above the national average, the latter possibly due to the significant employment base of Custume Barracks. Other dominant sectors were **Commerce** (19.8%) and **Professional Services** (17.5%). The Athone Institute of Technology is another major employer.
- 3.7.7 It is believed that because of higher incentives available to County Roscommon than to Westmeath in the past, inward mobile industrial investment located in the Roscommon Environs in the Monksland industrial estate rather than elsewhere. However, local industries and warehouses have located in the Blyry industrial estate in the Westmeath Environs.
- 3.7.8 Tourism is an important asset to the economy and in particular water-based activities including cruising. It is anticipated that there is further scope for the development of water-based tourism. In fact one of the strategies of the "Action Plan for the Midlands Region" by the Midland Regional Authority recommends the development of water-based leisure along the Shannon. It is acknowledged that the river Shannon and the historic town, including the Castle, are the principal amenities of Athlone. Equally it could be said that the success of the Town Council in promoting water-based tourism and revitalising the riverfront of Athlone, for predominantly residential development, has been to the detriment of much of the town's built and natural heritage.
- 3.7.9 Unemployment records within the Town Plan<sup>39</sup> date back to 1997 thus are 6 years out of date. In 1996 the percentage of persons unemployed was 12.2%, which was below the national average of 13%. As Census 2002 does not contain this detail to date, statistics have been taken from the Live Register Analysis. Regard must be had for the inclusion of part-time workers, seasonal and casual workers who are also entitled to unemployment assistance/ benefit.

|                | July 2002 | June 2003 | July 2003 |
|----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <b>Athlone</b> | 1601      | 1650      | 1793      |

**Table 4 - Live register analysis**

- 3.7.10 There has been an increase in those registering on the live register over the last 12 months. This figure, although inclusive of part-time/ casual workers, supports recent national economic trends of increasing unemployment.

<sup>38</sup> Athlone Town Council, Athlone Town Development Plan 2002, pp 13

<sup>39</sup> Athlone Town Council, Athlone Town Development Plan 2002

### Projected Workforce

|                         | 1999   | 2004   | 2009   | 2014   | 2019   |
|-------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| <b>Total population</b> | 17,443 | 18,008 | 18,609 | 19,080 | 19,352 |
| <b>Workforce</b>        | 7,155  | 7,472  | 7,601  | 7,552  | 7,455  |
| <b>Households</b>       | 5,824  | 6,435  | 6,826  | 7,090  | 7,285  |

**Table 5 – population projections for Athlone and Environs and adjacent DED's (using 2999 as a base<sup>40</sup>)**

3.7.11 The projected increase in the workforce indicates that there is a targeted employment figure to be achieved however; the catchment workforce projection does not take into account Athlone's role as the largest town in the region and the main centre for economic growth, with an expanding workforce within its hinterland.

3.7.12 Realisation of Athlone's Gateway status is likely to generate significant pressure for development and employment opportunities. The consequences of Gateway status will need to be taken into account in the policies and actions within the Study.

## 3.8 SHANNONBRIDGE

3.8.1 Shannonbridge, which takes its name from its bridge connecting county Offaly and county Roscommon, is politically situated straddling the borders of counties Offaly, Galway and Roscommon, with the majority of the population living east of the bridge in county Offaly. It is situated on the rise of an esker at the point at which the Shannon bisects it.

3.8.2 Rachra is generally considered the old name for Shannonbridge, but 'Shannonbridge' was adopted after the building of the bridge in 1757. It is said that the military initially constructed a village, the 'first Shannonbridge', in the vicinity of Temple Duff graveyard just south of the power station.<sup>41</sup>

3.8.3 At Curleys Island between Shannonbridge and Clonmacnois, we encounter the legendary ford of Snamh da Ean (swim two Birds). It was here that a proselytising St. Patrick crossed the Shannon into Connacht and much later the Anglo-Normans considered the ford important enough to be guarded by one of their campaign forts.<sup>42</sup>

3.8.4 Apparently the new jetty to the north of the bridge has assisted in maintaining boating visitors to the village over the summer months, however it is generally considered by the local community that they would benefit from an enhanced jetty to the south of the bridge and from dedicated fishing stands.

### Population

3.8.5 The population at of the village of Shannonbridge in 2002 was 248 down from 266 in 1996, a decrease of 6.8%. Within the broader DED of Shannonbridge there was a similar decline in population during that timeframe from 387 in 1996 to 353 in 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Westmeath Co. Council, Westmeath County Development Plan 2002-2008, pp 113

<sup>41</sup> [www.shannonbridge.net/](http://www.shannonbridge.net/)

<sup>42</sup> [www.shannonbridge.net/](http://www.shannonbridge.net/)

## Employment and Workforce

- 3.8.6 Similar to Lanesborough, the principal employers in Shannonbridge are the ESB and Bord na Mona with a large farming community also present. In 1996, those employed in manual skilled work was 25% while those employed in agriculture work was 20% and those in semi-skilled was 17%<sup>43</sup>. In addition, many industries in Shannonbridge are dependent on its location on the Shannon for attracting tourists e.g. cruisers and anglers.

## 3.9 CLONMACNOIS

- 3.9.1 Clonmacnois is an ancient ecclesiastical site, to the south of Athlone. It has a large collection of grave-slabs dating from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, as well as one of Ireland's finest surviving High Crosses. The monastery also contains many religious buildings. In addition to the Monastic site, the area exudes a unique atmosphere and attractiveness that derives from its relationship to the river and the callows together with the sense of enclosure provided by the eskers.

### Population

- 3.9.2 The population of the DED within which the settlement lies is 316. This indicates a decline of 2.8% from 325 in 1996.

### Workforce and Employment

- 3.9.3 Offaly is predominantly rural in character with almost two thirds of the population (64%) of the population residing in rural areas<sup>44</sup>, therefore farming is still a major sector in the County economy and would be a principal employer in the area. As Clonmacnois is classed as an Area of High Amenity<sup>45</sup> there would be little development within the area and so tourism would also be a major employer.

## 3.10 BALLINASLOE

- 3.10.1 Ballinasloe is the second urban area in County Galway, after Galway city. It has been identified within the National Spatial Strategy as an "Urban Strengthening Opportunity". The town acts as a service hub for East Galway where it serves a substantial catchment<sup>46</sup>.

### Population

- 3.10.2 The population residing in Ballinasloe is 5,977. The area has experienced an increase of 6.1% since 1996 when the population was 5,634. It is worth noting that this increase was considerably lower than the 6,447 forecast in the Development Plan.

### Employment and Workforce

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<sup>43</sup> Central Statistics Office, Census 1996 – [www.eirestat.cso.ie/census](http://www.eirestat.cso.ie/census)

<sup>44</sup> Offaly County Council, Offaly County Development Plan (Draft), 2002, pp 42

<sup>45</sup> Offaly County Council, Offaly County Development Plan (Draft), 2002, pp 41

<sup>46</sup> Galway County Council, County Development plan

- 3.10.3 Agriculture, fishing and tourism have traditionally been the main economic activities in rural areas of Galway. Ballinasloe, being a town surrounded by a rural hinterland is a slight exception. In 1996, the dominant sectors were Commerce, Manufacturing and Professional Services, employing 20.8%, 19.1% and 18.5% of the working population respectively. Of the remaining 41.6%, 10.2% were employed in the Agricultural sector.
- 3.10.4 Ballinasloe is the main commercial/industrial centre for East Galway. Ballinasloe town has a newly developed IDA and Business Park. It is expected that Ballinasloe will benefit from its close proximity to Athlone also and its status as a Regional Gateway within the County Development Plan, however recent factory closures may have negative impacts on the future growth of the town.
- 3.10.5 Tourism is increasingly important to the town. To that end, the opening of the River Suck and the Ballinasloe Harbour in 2001 has created an important water-based tourism focal point for the town. The River Festival is an annual Arts Festival (now in its second) located at the town harbour. This attracts a lot of outsiders to the town as does the October Fair. There is talk of reviving a Coarse Angling festival to link in with the River Festival.

### **3.11 CLONFERT**

- 3.11.1 Clonfert is a tiny settlement in South Galway bordering County Offaly, situated to the south of the River Suck, west of the Shannon. It has strong associations with both rivers and is closely linked to the old canal and the light bog railway that sits on the bed of the old canal. It suffers from lack of access by boat, an issue that could be relatively easily addressed.
- 3.11.2 Historically, Clonfert is a monastic settlement, founded by St Brendan in the sixth century. It is an area that could be known as the ecclesiastical centre of Ireland, being part of that territory in which were located numerous monastic settlements from the 5th and 6th century, in fact from the time of St. Patrick's conversion of Ireland to Christianity. In 1999 the old Cathedral was officially listed as one of the top 100 most endangered monuments.
- 3.11.3 In the sixteenth century the College of St Brendan in Clonfert was a celebrated centre of learning. There were as many as 3,000 students there at one time; a striking difference to the declining population of today. The last census (2002) showed a decline in the DED of Clonfert of 8% since 1996 (from 465 to 428). It should be noted that this population covers a much broader area than the settlement core, including much of the surrounding countryside.

## 4 Development Pressure

- 4.1.1 Discussions were had with the Planners and, where applicable, Heritage and Conservation Officers of the County Councils to establish both areas of concern and also an indication of demand for development within the zone of influence of the waterways. Whilst much of the study area is rural, it also contains Athlone – a significant hub within the midlands, and Ballinasloe, which is the second County town of Galway.
- 4.1.2 In contrast, the western side of County Longford has remained fairly undeveloped over the years, due to a number of contributing factors including that much of the area adjoining the Lough is fairly inaccessible, with poor quality roads, and therefore not appropriate for significant development. Combined with the inaccessibility issue is that planners and members at County Longford have fought long and hard to get the conservation of Lough Ree on the agenda. The settlement strategy within the recently published Development Plan affords a degree of protection to the Lough. Thus the north-eastern shore of the Lough is one of the last stretches of the Shannon that remains relatively pristine.
- 4.1.3 Lanesborough is the largest town in County Longford within this study area and is identified as a local growth centre in the County Development Plan in recognition of its potential for tourism and amenity development. It is also an important settlement due to its location on the confluence of the Lough and the River Shannon. Development potential within Lanesborough is constrained by its road network and parking is a problem. The Council are hoping to open up backland development to provide for parking. Around Lanesborough, there have been a number of applications for small-scale holiday chalets geared towards fishing enthusiasts. The Lough Ree Arms has applied for expansion; the Council have requested further information. The majority of the applications are on the eastern side of the road – i.e. away from the Lough. The new powerstation is currently being completed and will come into operation in 2005. It has a 15-year permission after which time it will be decommissioned and removed.
- 4.1.4 Recently there have been a number of applications for housing along the Rathcline Road, between Rathcline and Lanesborough resulting in ribbon development. The new Development Plan should contain this, as it defines a development envelope.
- 4.1.5 The village of Newtowncashel, due to its isolation has remained fairly small. With its recent success in the Tidy Towns competition, there have been some enquiries about development opportunities. There is also some pressure for development within the Elfeet townland and around Barley Harbour, particularly for holiday homes. Generally the Council have been turning down these applications on grounds of high amenity, or inability to prove occupancy. Limited planning permission has been granted to the children of local rural people, many of which have not been constructed.
- 4.1.6 As part of their policy to improve/retain public access, the Council has acquired land adjoining the Lough including 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> acres at Bleanavoher opposite Inchenagh (they also own 90% of Inchenagh) and 2 acres at Portanure near Saints Island.
- 4.1.7 From the water, County Roscommon contains the most visible development. There are a variety of reasons why this may be the case, these include a more relaxed attitude to development control and shelter from prevailing winds. Development is predominantly scattered one-off rural houses. The principal settlements within the study area are

- Ballyleague (the Roscommon side of Lanesborough), Knockcroghery, Lecarrow, and Hodson Bay, with scattered settlement at Portrunny and Galey Bays.
- 4.1.8 Ballyleague is the other major growth area within the corridor. Almost all the land between the road and lake, outside the land designated SAC, has permission for development for hotels, apartments, 24 new houses, a new GAA clubhouse, a private marina and a harbour. The latter are both currently under construction.
- 4.1.9 Knockcroghery is located halfway between Ballyleague and Athlone. There is considerable pressure for development within Knockcroghery Village due to its proximity to the Lough. There are currently 3 major applications for a total of 125 houses, which, given that the population of the village and its surrounding environment (including Galey Bay) is around 600, will have a major impact on the size and structure of the village. Galey Bay is located on the Lough, within close proximity to Knockcroghery. At Galey Bay development has been largely restricted to single rural houses, although there was talk of a 34-bedroom Hotel.
- 4.1.10 Due to its proximity to Athlone and the N61, Lecarrow, has been targeted by developers and auctioneers as a future 'growth point' for upmarket housing. There has been increased pressure for development within the townlands surrounding the village over the past 3 years. The Planning Authority is mindful of the fact that ribbon-style development has occurred along the local roads leading to the village. Two pre-planning meetings were held in May and July 2003, concerning the lands within the village; the first was in relation to a field opposite the harbour, between the local road and the N61. The developer intends to submit an application for at least 24 houses, a shop and a crèche facility. It was also suggested that 6-8 terrace units, facing the local road that runs through the village, could be included in the development. The second meeting related to the vacant lands behind the Y-junction in the road running through the village. The developer wishes to build approximately 8-12 'up-market' detached houses. No application has been lodged to-date, however, the Water Services Section of the council have prioritised their projects to include a water-borne sewerage scheme for Lecarrow, which should be implemented during 2004. The opening of such a scheme is likely to increase development pressure which has currently been abated due to a restriction on development requiring septic tanks, located so close to the waterway.
- 4.1.11 Roscommon County Council is currently promoting Portrunny as an appropriate location for tourism-type development. The Council have newly invested in upgrading the public amenity area opposite the harbour. An Application was recently lodged for an Apartment/Hotel complex comprising of 5 two bedroom and 1 one-bedroomed apartments and 28 2-storey, 3-bedroom semi-detached units together with a bar and restaurant. This application is currently under consideration, requiring further information, and thus had not been approved at the time of writing. It is strategically located adjacent to the harbour of Portrunny. A former applicant for a 12-bedroom Guesthouse, tearoom, carpark, and picnic area was refused permission by third party appeal, which was upheld by An Bord Pleanála. The Applicant has engaged in further pre-planning discussions with the Planning Authority and wishes to submit a revised proposal for a scaled-down version of this development. He is likely to re-submit for a 6-8 bedroom B& B/ guesthouse, restaurant and shop.
- 4.1.12 Not surprisingly, within County Roscommon, there is a lot of pressure for development around Athlone. Hodson Bay, on the outskirts of Athlone environs, is something of a focus for tourism. At present the Council is involved in a PPP venture for development of

an Aquatic Centre and a separate Boat Training School on Council owned land adjacent to the Hodson Bay Hotel. In June 2003, the Council resolved to proceed with the Aquatic Centre and prepare an EIS for the training school. However, funding has been approved for the Training School but not for the Aquatic Centre. The County Council view the Aquatic Centre as a flagship tourism project for Roscommon. However, there is much local opposition to the project, in particular to its location. In the Athlone Environs Development Plan 2002-2008, the Council are proposing a Lough Ree shoreline path, however this could be problematic as much of the land adjacent to the shore has already been developed for high quality housing in recent years.

- 4.1.13 Being the largest town within the study area, Athlone and its environs is the focus of much of the development within the corridor area. Certainly the Settlement Strategy of Westmeath County is to focus development around key settlements such as Athlone. The Athlone Town Council is encouraging higher densities within the town centre as there are few opportunities for greenfield development within the boundary of Athlone itself.
- 4.1.14 In relation to the river, the Town Council are committed to bringing a focus back to the river, with varying degrees of success. Athlone Town Council own three substantial landbanks adjacent to the Shannon. There are all zoned for either open space or sporting recreation in the Development Plan and contain some fishing stands. The southern most is the Golden Island Parkland, the northern part of which has been landscaped as a formal park. Two of the town's significant employers: Custume Barracks and the Ranelagh Industrial Estate present barriers to development of the western bank of the river. Therefore, along this stretch of the western side of the Shannon, the best that can be achieved is enhancement of the linear walkway along the river. That said, there are significant tracts of the river frontage that have been developed in recent times for a range of uses, particularly prominent are the new apartments and Radisson Hotel on the eastern side of the river adjacent to the Town marina and the two residential developments on the western side of the river, one to the north and the other to the south of the lock. There is pressure from one of the landowners to develop the land to the south of the weir on the western banks for 70 houses. Whilst the Council recognise the need to protect the Callows, they would allow limited development within this floodplain on the proviso that they acquire land for open space adjacent to the river. To the north of the town, along the banks of the Shannon, an application has been lodged for 83 apartments and 7 houses to the rear of the Jolly Mariner Marina.
- 4.1.15 There is a lot of demand for retail space in and around Athlone, with Golden Island Shopping Centre and other potential retail developments being the focus of significant activity over recent years. To the south of the Golden Island Recreational Parkland and Shopping Centre there is a large area subject to the Loughandonning/Bunavalley Action Area Plan. There is significant pressure for residential development of this land. The Action Area Plan was developed to identify the extent of flooding and facilitate development of this centrally located prime development land on the southern edge of the town. Due to flooding and drainage issues highlighted, development of this land has been halted.
- 4.1.16 There is significant residential and commercial development adjacent to the old Athlone Canal; the Council itself has developed housing behind the former Lock Mills. The Council owns a large stretch of the land adjoining the old canal between the old Galway Road and Lock Mills. The canal itself is identified as open space in the Town Plan. To

- the south of Lock Mills the Shannon Fisheries Board put in a road to enable better access for angling.
- 4.1.17 Due to limited viable land for future development within the town boundary, the growth of Athlone is impacting on its hinterland, with increasing pressure for development on outlying villages in County Westmeath: Coosan, Ballykeeran and Glassan, all located on the Inner lakes. At present Westmeath County Council is managing to contain growth within these areas. Two recent applications in Glassan for developments of over 10 houses have been refused on grounds of premature urban-generated rural development. Consequently any new development has been confined to single rural housing, resulting in ribbon development along the length of the road between Ballykeeran and Glassan.
- 4.1.18 There is considerable local interest at Glassan to provide a navigable channel from Wineport to Glassan and provide a harbour with berthing facilities to attract more tourism to the village. The Glassan Development Committee have put together a proposal for the harbour, which would require substantial dredging of the Bunown River running through the village. Whilst there is considerable support from the community and local organisations, the Heritage Council would oppose such a development on environmental grounds.
- 4.1.19 In Coosan, Westmeath County Council is currently undertaking land-based works to improve access to the point including reconstruction of the existing collapsed pier, providing new and extended boat slip for small craft, extending the existing bathing area, further developing the picnic area, extending the car parking and landscaping the area to create an attractive local amenity on Lough Ree within the Athlone environs.
- 4.1.20 A residential development scheme was submitted on the banks of Lough Ree at Ballykeeran. However, due to concern at the impact on the local amenity area, this was never developed. However, both Ballykeeran and Glassan area to be linked to the Athlone sewerage system which could open the way to development if not carefully monitored.
- 4.1.21 With the exception of the existing and new powerstation at Shannonbridge (which has a 15-year permission), there is very little pressure for development along the western edge of Co Offaly within the study area. A floating mooring upstream of the bridge at Shannonbridge was recently completed. This is 90m long and provides access for boats at both ends, therefore providing 180m of additional jetty space. As no development is allowed within the defined Shannon callows and it is a known floodplain, there is very little that is visible from the water. There is some interest in single dwellinghouses, mainly from local people, between Shannonbridge and Clonmacnois, however the Council are cautious with these due to potential visual impacts. In general, development is confined to the hillside of the road, rather than the riverside.
- 4.1.22 In relation to the River Suck, following the opening of the Ballinasloe Harbour in 2001, the Town Council have come under increasing pressure to open up land between the line of the old canal (now a road) and the river for development. At a Council meeting on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2003, the Council agreed a Variation to the Ballinasloe Development Plan that will zone a some 30 acres of land for commercial, mixed use and a mix of medium and low-medium density residential development on the northern side of the old canal road. This does not include lands designated as proposed NHA. The Council already have an application for a hotel within these lands, and are discussing further applications for a multi-storey carpark and a cinema complex.

- 4.1.23 Further downstream at Portnick, there is an application for a marina, hotel and other activities. The remainder of the applications are for scattered developments around the town centre. Development pressure is greatest in the area that is adjacent to the old canal, including a significant area of residential development south of the Suck at Pollboy. This may be increased when the N6 Ballinasloe bypass is constructed as this will reroute traffic to the south of the town and cross the Suck at the Pollboy lock.
- 4.1.24 Whilst the Council have an objective to implement a linear park along the line of the old Ballinasloe navigation, they are restricted by both limited available financial resources and by fragmented land ownership. However, there may be opportunities to link in with the Greenways project which is superimposing itself on a large section of the old canal towpath to connect Clonfert to Ballinasloe.

### **Waterways Infrastructure Projects - Completion of Works/Works in Progress**

- 4.1.25 The River Suck Navigation is viewed as an extension to the Shannon. The project took around 12 years to complete from start to finish and opened up a further 16km of navigation along the Shannon system. Preliminary work, consisting of the removal of two fords at Coreen and Creggan was carried out in 1989, opening up an additional 11km of navigation towards Ballinasloe. The major part of the work began in 1997 with the construction of a reinforced concrete lock chamber at Pollboy and the dredging of a navigation channel, and fitting of the upper lock gates. In 1999 the lower lock gates were fitted. Following fishery rehabilitation, the fishery was opened in May. Planning permission was obtained for the harbour and moorings at Ballinasloe. The Harbour was opened in May 2001. This Harbour contains approximately 24 moorings.
- 4.1.26 On 25<sup>th</sup> June 2003 a floating mooring was opened upstream of the bridge at Shannonbridge. This is 90m long with access for boats at both sides, thus providing 180m of jetty space.
- 4.1.27 Clonmacnois contains the first original floating mooring on the Shannon (dating back to the 80s). It currently has space for 15 boats. It is getting old and worn. In recognition that it is a popular stopping point for craft, Waterways Ireland are intending to replace it with a new floating mooring that may accommodate up to 24 boats. This is scheduled for October 2003.
- 4.1.28 At Athlone an installation of 60 m of waiting jetty just below the lock is anticipated for 2004. The Old Athlone canal, part of which falls within the ownership of Waterways Ireland was discussed. Use of the canal for navigation ceased in the 1840s and part of it, within the ownership of Athlone Town Council, is now infilled, therefore it is unlikely that it would be reopened for navigation. However, there is potential to revive the area for pedestrians and anglers. Apparently the Fisheries Board are eager to upgrade the towpath for angling and providing fishing stands.
- 4.1.29 Creation of a harbour at Glassan canal was initially part of the NDP programme. The intention was to widen and deepen a drain to create a harbour. This is an ecologically sensitive area; therefore there is a high probability of this project not being pursued.
- 4.1.30 Barley Harbour on the eastern shore of Lough Ree is a privately owned harbour. Waterways Ireland have engaged in discussions with the owner (Eben Hamilton) for replacement of floating breakwaters to protect the inner harbour and installation of

floating moorings at the end of the existing pier. The idea is to provide safe access for boats on the eastern side of Lough Ree, whilst not interfering with the widely used local swimming area. However, they have yet to reach an agreement.

- 4.1.31 At Portrunny on the western shore of Lough Ree, there is an existing pier and breakwater. Waterways Ireland is intending to go for planning permission in September 2003 to revise the breakwater and install floating finger jetties for an additional 24 boats. The original intention was to construct a facilities block, however this has not been progressed due to the Council considering an application for a hotel opposite the new harbour.
- 4.1.32 At Ballyleague, west of the bridge, a harbour to provide moorings for 32 vessels is currently under construction. This should be opened for the 2004 boating season. There is also a private marina being created to the north of the bridge at Lanesborough (outside the remit of our study).

## 5 User Groups and Water-related Commerce

### 5.1 Recreation

- 5.1.1 Current uses of the waterways include: angling, cruising, sailing, canoeing, powerboating, and other water sports, wildfowling, walking, cycling, horse riding, appreciation of the local environment and heritage such as bird watching and the Summer Schools, and tourist trails which may involve travel by car to various sites around the river/lough.
- 5.1.2 The Shannon is well-used for navigation, with some 5,000 cruisers based on the waterways. Many of these are privately owned, however there are a number of cruiser hire companies dotted along the Shannon. Waterways Ireland's lock-keepers maintain monthly records of the number of lock passages throughout the Shannon navigation, which provides some indication of boat traffic in the study area. In 2001, of a total of 79,186 lock passages, there were 7,430 passages through Tarmonbarry Lock, 10,783 passages through Athlone Lock and 2,632 through Pollboy Lock indicating that around 27% of the boat users on the Shannon were moving into or out of the study area. In 2002 these numbers decreased slightly to 7,365 passages through Tarmonbarry Lock, 10,699 passages through Athlone Lock and 2,337 passages through Pollboy Lock. However, the percentage of passages in relation to the total remained at around 27%. Although for 2003 the data has only been received for the months preceeding September, there have already been 16,937 passages through the three locks in question, again representing 27% of the total passages. The data is broken into private and hire boats. From these records it is apparent that hire boats account for approximately 75% of boat traffic and that private boats account for 25%. This could simply indicate that hire boats take longer voyages that require passing through locks whilst private boat users do not move far from their cruising base.
- 5.1.3 There are just two boat rental companies, registered with the Irish Boat Rental Association (IBRA), based in the study area: Athlone Cruisers based at Jolly Mariner Marina in Athlone and Waveline Cruisers operating from Quigley's Marina at Killinure Point. Interestingly, there is no hire fleet based in Lanesborough/Ballyleague although there are local people who hire out single boats.
- 5.1.4 The waterways are well used for other water-based sports. The Lough Ree Yacht Club is well-established on the lower end of Lough Ree and provides training for its members. Rowing is popular particularly around Athlone where Athlone Boat Club has its base. The club hosts an annual regatta in June in the Inner Lakes. Lanesborough supports the Lough Ree Rowing Club. There are at least 3 sub-aqua clubs located around the study area – 2 in Athlone and one in Lanesborough. There is also the Lough Ree Power Boat School that unofficially operates from Hodson Bay. One of the biggest issues in terms of navigation is conflict of use presented by the increase in motorised craft (in particular jet skis).
- 5.1.5 Swimming, particularly around the Lough, is widespread during the summer months, although more recently signs have been placed to warn bathers of algal bloom. Popular public bathing locations are found at Lanesborough/Ballyleague, Barley Harbour, Elfeet Bay, Portrunny, Hodson Bay, Coosan Point, Wineport and around Athlone. It should be noted that there are currently no dedicated swimming spots at Shannonbridge, to the

- consternation of local people. Continued enjoyment of the waterway for bathing is dependent on water quality.
- 5.1.6 Angling is one of the most popular sports along the waterway, from both the water and the shore. This is well-developed, particularly around the famous "hot water stretches" at Lanesborough and Shannonbridge and generates a significant volume of commerce in settlements adjacent to the waterways, including accommodation, pubs, specialist bait and tackle suppliers. The recent opening of the River Suck has had a positive benefit for fishing. The installation of the lock at Pollboy, enabled the rehabilitation of fisheries along the stretch of river opposite the lock. However, due to fees associated with angling on the Suck, it is not as popular as the Shannon. Angling is dependant on good water quality within the waterways.
- 5.1.7 The waterway provides an important habitat for birdlife, particularly the Callows, Lough Ree and its islands and the Inner Lakes. These are popular areas for bird watching, although this is relatively informal, and could be promoted particularly in the breeding season.
- 5.1.8 Wildfowling is also a popular sport, particularly around Lough Ree. The Wildlife Act 1976, Chapter IV sets out the requirements for issue of permits for hunting; Regional Game Councils through their local gun clubs regulate game shooting. The umbrella organisation, the National Association of Regional Game Councils (NARGC) provides information on hunting seasons, regulating hunting so that it does not impact on wildfowl breeding seasons. Like Angling Associations, Game Councils are concerned about protection of wildlife habitat, including water quality.
- 5.1.9 Access to Lough Ree is limited, and is apparently the poorest of all the Shannon Lakes. There are a variety of contributing factors: the area is prone to flooding so historically few people would have settled there, leading to a sparse population scattered around the shoreline; this is compounded by the poor road network along the lakeshore. Public access to the foreshore, for the most part, is confined to public or private harbour/marina development at Athlone, along the inner lakes (at Coosan, Killinure, Ballykeeran and Wineport), Hodson Bay, Lecarrow, Portrunny, Galey Bay, Lanesborough/Ballyleague and Barley Harbour. Westmeath County Council own two fine public amenity areas at Coosan Point and Portlick. Other public access areas along the Roscommon and Longford shores of the Lough are more difficult to reach due to poor road networks.
- 5.1.10 Hodson Bay deserves a special mention as it is one of the most well used amenity areas at any time of the year. The 1972 Hodson Bay Study estimated that 1,000 people would spend a typical Sunday afternoon at the Bay, many just parking and enjoying the location by the water. No current estimates have been made, but it is likely that this figure is at least that, if not higher now particularly due to the land Roscommon Council purchased for public amenity and the construction of the harbour in the 1980s.
- 5.1.11 Similarly there are few public access points along either the Suck or the stretch of Shannon being studied outside of the main settlements - Athlone, Clonmacnois, Shannonbridge and Ballinasloe. Again this is largely due to the extent of the callows along the edges of the rivers giving way to limited development, poor road access, and the location of drains and culverts that inhibit opportunities for paths.

- 5.1.12 There are a number of Waterway walks identified on the IWA website. These take in heritage sites of interest. However, many are more accessible by boat than by land. There is potential to further develop walks, however fragmented landownership, particularly along the shores of the Lough, may be an issue.
- 5.1.13 Cycling is generally not promoted along the waterways, although there are bicycle hire places in Athlone and Lanesborough. However, there is potential to develop designated cycle routes, or greenways that can be used by both walkers and cyclists. Similarly, whilst there are opportunities for horse trekking in various locations along the waterway, this is fairly underdeveloped.

## 6 Inventory of Tourism and Recreational Facilities in the Waterway Corridor Area

6.1.1 It should be noted that this list was accurate at the time of writing, however it is recognised that it is not exhaustive and any omissions are unintentional.

### 6.2 CO LONGFORD

#### 6.2.1 LANESBOROUGH/BALLYLEAGUE

##### EATING OUT

Samantha's Restaurant, Main Street, Lanesborough, 043-21558  
The Shannon Grill, Main Street, Lanesborough (breakfast all day)  
The Lough Ree Arms Hotel, Main Street, Lanesborough, 043 21124

##### ACCOMMODATION

###### Hotels

Sliabh Ban Hotel, Lanesborough, 043 21790  
The Lough Ree Arms, Main Street, Lanesborough, 043 21124

###### Pub Accommodation

Life Belt Bar, Ballyleague, Lanesborough, Mr. Michael Sorohan 043 21185

###### Guesthouses

Avondale, Lanesborough, Ms Nancy Kelly, 043 21271  
Cumiskeys Farmhouse, Ennybegs, Drumlish Post Office, Mrs Patricia Cumiskey  
043 23320 [www.longfordcountryhouse.com](http://www.longfordcountryhouse.com)  
Dunamase, Rathline Road, Lanesborough, E.Watts, 043 21201  
Eden House, Newtownforbes, Mrs. Eileen Prunty, 043 41160  
Guesthouse, Upper Leher, Lanesborough, Ms Mae Casey, 043 21176  
Guesthouse, Cloonadra, Lanesborough, Ms Nuala Malone, 043 21331  
Guesthouse, Strokestown Road, Ballyleague, Ms. Maura McLoughlin, 043 21816  
Guesthouse, Rathcline Road, Lanesborough, Ms. Patricia Heneghan, 043 21756  
Guesthouse, Ballyleague, Lanesborough, Ms. Philis O'Shaughnessy, 043 21190  
Sam's B&B, Lanesborough, Aidan & Betty Glynn, 043 21558  
Shannon View, Lanesborough, Ms. Detta Cox, 043 21642

###### Self Catering Accommodation

Chez Nous, Drumlish, J.Pascal 043 24368  
Ennybegs, Ennybegs, Drumlish Post Office, Mrs Patricia Cumiskey, 043 23320,  
[www.longfordcountryhouse.com](http://www.longfordcountryhouse.com)  
The Gatehouse, Rathcline, Lanesboro David & Joan Johnston  
Kilroy's, Main St, Lanesborough, Longford, M.Kilroy  
Knock, Lanesborough, Mary O'Flaherty 043 21136  
Lime Tree House, Rathcline, Lanesborough, Albert and Mairead Gill, 043 21295  
Lough Ree House, Main Street, Lanesborough, Mr. Frank Regan, 043 27000  
Lough Ree Park, Lanesborough, Ms. Claire Tucker, 043 21309  
Riverside House, Blenavoher, Lanesborough, Mr Eamon Kenny, 043 21399  
Saint Judes, St. Judes, Ennybegs, Drumlish Post Office, Ms. Ann Hughes, 043 23134

Wood View, Lanesborough, T.J. and Philomena Walsh

## **SPORTS AND LEISURE**

### **Fishing**

Lanesborough is renowned for its excellent fishing, in particular the 'Hot Water Stretch' adjacent to the power station. The riverbank has 60 stands at the bridge, with 4 stands for the disabled.

### **Boat Hire**

Mark Shields, Lanesborough, 086 2525375

### **Other activities**

Lough Ree Rowing Club, Claire Brennan, 043 21211 or 086 3493985 [brennanacha@eircom.net](mailto:brennanacha@eircom.net)

Lough Ree Sub-Aqua Club, Frank Casey, 043 21804, <http://www.lough-ree-sub-aqua.com>  
[thomas@lough-ree-sub-aqua.com](mailto:thomas@lough-ree-sub-aqua.com)

Lanesborough also has a number of sports clubs.

## **VISITOR ATTRACTIONS**

### **Shannon Valley - Lough Ree Tour**

Distance 80km - 50 miles) - Longford - Newtownforbes - Clondra – Killashee – Lanesborough – Newtowncashel - Barley Harbour - Elfeet Bay - Saints Island - Corlea - Kenagh – Longford

**The South Ring of Longford Tour** is from Longford to Tarmonbarry, back to Clondra, on to Lanesborough via Killashee. Then taking the Rathcline road down along the Shannon to Barley Harbour. From here to Saints Island via Newtowncashel, back to Corela Interpretive centre, Moydow and Ardagh.

### **Heritage**

- Lough Ree
- Saints Island
- The River Shannon
- The Commons
- St John's Church of Ireland
- Rathcline Church

### **Local Events/Festivals**

Bord na Mona Water Festival, Lanesborough  
May

Contact: Pat Collum, 043 270070  
e-mail: [loughree@esatclear.ie](mailto:loughree@esatclear.ie)  
[www.lough-ree.com](http://www.lough-ree.com)

ESB Lough Ree Environmental Summer School  
July  
ESB Angling Festival  
August

Contact: Pat Collum  
(details as above)  
Contact: Pat Collum  
(details as above)

or ESB Fisheries 043 21990

Johnny Keenan Banjo Festival  
September

Contact: Chris Keenan 087 2187825  
e-mail: [festival@johnnykeen.com](mailto:festival@johnnykeen.com)

ESB Lough Ree Environmental Winter School  
December

Contact: Pat Collum  
(details as above)

## 6.2.2 NEWTOWNCASHEL

### ACCOMMODATION

#### Self Catering Accommodation

Ballina, Newtowncashel, Carmel Farrell 043 25123

Fortwilliam, Newtowncashel, Ms. Maureen Dowd, 043 25157

Lakesbreeze, Cullentra, Newtowncashel, John and Mary Fayne, 043 25203

### VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

#### Boat Hire

Bona Spes Hotel Barge, Newtowncashel, Mr. Liam Finnegan, 043 25250

#### Bogwood Sculpture Artists

Barley Harbour, Newtowncashel, Michael and Kevin Casey, 043-25297

#### Newtowncashel Heritage Centre

Newtowncashel, 043-25306, Open 1 June-30 September

Other Attractions include:

- Culnagore Wood
- Lough Slawn and Meadows
- Carrowmore Wood
- Lady Well and Mass Rock
- Bogs
- Barley Harbour
- The Islands - the Black Islands; Clawinch, Priests' Island and Inchcleraun (or Quaker Island).
- John Keegan Casey (Leo) 1836 – 1870)
- Cashel Commons (The Ranch)
- Castles - Elfeet, Caltramore, Corool, Portanure and the castle of Baile Nui (Newtown).

## 6.3 CO WESTMEATH/CO ROSCOMMON

### 6.3.1 KNOCKCROGHERY/GALEY BAY

#### ACCOMMODATION

Lough Ree Farmhouse, Gailey, Knockcroghery, 0903 61907

Gailey Bay Caravan & Camping Park, Knockcroghery, 0903 61058

### VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

#### Heritage

Claypipe Visitors Centre, Knockcroghery Village, Open May - Sept 0903 61923,

[www.irishclaypipes.com](http://www.irishclaypipes.com)

#### Cycling

Green Heartlands Cycle Route is a fully marked cycling tour taking in a large portion of southern Roscommon, contact The Visitor Centre, Athleague for further details, 0903 63602;

e-mail: [tench@indigo.ie](mailto:tench@indigo.ie); web: <http://suckvalley.firebird.net>

### Local Events

Beara Breifne Greenway Festival  
Athleague & Ballygar  
late June

For further details contact: 0903-63602  
or e-mail: [info@suckvalley.com](mailto:info@suckvalley.com)

Knockcroghery Festival and Fair  
September

For further details contact  
090 66 61110

### 6.3.2 ATHLONE and ENVIRONS (including Hodson Bay, Coosan and Ballykeeran)

#### EATING OUT

##### Licensed Restaurants and Cafés

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Chez Nini's                        | Athlone Shopping Centre, Irishtown, Athlone          |
| Hatters Lane Bistro                | Custume Place, Athlone                               |
| Jacobites                          | The Docks, Athlone                                   |
| Jia Jia Chinese Restaurant         | 12 McCormack Centre, Dublin Road, Athlone            |
| Left Bank Bistro                   | Fry Place, Athlone                                   |
| Lemon Tree Restaurant              | The Creggan Court Hotel, Dublin Road, Athlone        |
| Manifesto                          | Custume Place, Athlone                               |
| Pavarottis                         | Fry Place, Athlone                                   |
| Pudding Lane Restaurant            | Connolly Street, Athlone                             |
| Restaurant Le Chateau              | St. Peter's Port, Athlone                            |
| Row Inn Row Chinese Restaurant     | The Bawn, Mardyke Street, Athlone                    |
| Shamrock Lodge Country House Hotel | Clonown Road, Athlone                                |
| The Grannery                       | Creggan Court Hotel, N6 Center, Dublin Road, Athlone |
| The High Stool Restaurant          | Daly's Tavern, Kiltoom, Athlone                      |
| The Olive Grove                    | Custume Place, Athlone                               |

##### Pub Grub

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Hodson Bay Hotel                   | Hodson Bay, Athlone                           |
| Palace Bar                         | Castle Street, Athlone                        |
| Sean's Bar                         | Main Street, Athlone                          |
| The Grannery Bar                   | The Creggan Court Hotel, Dublin Road, Athlone |
| The Riverside Inn                  | Castle Street, Athlone                        |
| The Shack                          | Dublin Road, Athlone                          |
| Shamrock Lodge Country House Hotel | Clonown Road, Athlone                         |

##### Sandwich Bars/Delis

|                                  |                                   |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| A Slice of Life                  | Bastion Street, Athlone           |
| Club Sandwich                    | Auburn, Dublin Road, Athlone      |
| Gallery Coffee House             | 14 Inis Oir Irishtown, Athlone    |
| O' Briens Sandwiche Bar          | R.B.K. House, Irishtown, Athlone  |
| Reubens Sandwich Bar/Ruben's Ltd | 100 Sean Costello Street, Athlone |
| Savoury Fare                     | 3 Irishtown Central, Athlone      |

##### Fast Food

|   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Supermac's Fast Food Family<br>Restaurant | Athlone, Irishtown, Athlone |
|---|-----------------------------|

### Unlicensed Restaurants

Tribeca Restaurant Abbey Lane, Athlone

### ACCOMMODATION

#### Hotels

|  |         |              |
|--|---------|--------------|
| Creggan Court Hotel                          | Athlone | 090 64 77777 |
| Hodson Bay Hotel Conference & Leisure Centre | Athlone | 0902 80500   |
| Lakeside Hotel                               | Athlone | 0902 85163   |
| Prince of Wales Hotel                        | Athlone | 0902 72626   |
| Shamrock Lodge Country House Hotel           | Athlone | 0902 92601   |
| The Auburn House Hotel                       | Athlone | 0902 72070   |
| The Royal Hoey Hotel                         | Athlone | 0902 72924   |
| Usit NOW                                     | Athlone | 0902 78974   |
| Wineport Lodge                               | Athlone | 0902 85466   |

#### Bed & Breakfast

|                                   |         |                  |
|-----------------------------------|---------|------------------|
| Alverna House B&B                 | Athlone | 0902 94016       |
| Arch House B&B                    | Athlone | 0902 78311       |
| Avonree House B&B                 | Athlone | 0902 75485       |
| Bayview B&B                       | Athlone | 0902 94019       |
| Burren Lodge B&B                  | Athlone | 0902 75157       |
| Bushfield House B&B               | Athlone | 0902 75979       |
| Carrick View B&B                  | Athlone | 0902 88294       |
| Castleside House B&B              | Athlone | 090 648 9195     |
| Cluain-Inis B&B                   | Athlone | 0902 94202       |
| Coolamon B&B                      | Athlone | 0902 94323       |
| Cornamagh House B&B               | Athlone | 0902 74171       |
| De Porres B&B                     | Athlone | 0902 75759       |
| De Vere House B&B                 | Athlone | 0902 75376       |
| Dun Mhuire House B&B              | Athlone | 0902 75360       |
| Esker Lodge B&B                   | Athlone | 0902 72944       |
| Fairways B&B                      | Athlone | 0902 94492       |
| Four Seasons B&B                  | Athlone | 0902 74470       |
| Glassan Stone Lodge B&B           | Athlone | 0902 85004       |
| Grove House B&B                   | Athlone | 0902 92786       |
| Harbour House B&B                 | Athlone | 0902 85063       |
| Heather View B&B                  | Athlone | 0902 72710       |
| Higgins B&B                       | Athlone | 0902 92519       |
| Lackagh House B&B                 | Athlone | 0902 30156       |
| Lough Ree Lodge                   | Athlone | 090 6476738      |
| Lough Ree Lodge B&B               | Athlone | 0902 89214       |
| Melvin B&B                        | Athlone | 0902 74333       |
| Reeside B&B                       | Athlone | 0902 92051       |
| Riverdale House B&B               | Athlone | 0902 92480       |
| Riverview House B&B               | Athlone | 0902 94532       |
| Shannonside House B&B             | Athlone | 0902 94773       |
| Shelmalier House B&B              | Athlone | 0902 72245/72145 |
| St Ruths Farm House B&B           | Athlone | 0902 88090       |
| St. Mark's Lakeshore Accomodation | Athlone | 0902 85125       |
| The Mill Bar & B&B                | Athlone | 0902 92927       |
| The Old Academy B&B               | Athlone | 0902 92884       |

|                    |         |             |
|--------------------|---------|-------------|
| The Riverside Inn  | Athlone | 0902 94981  |
| Villa St. John B&B | Athlone | 0902 92490  |
| Woodville B&B      | Athlone | 090 6494595 |

### **Hostels**

|                 |         |             |
|-----------------|---------|-------------|
| Lough Ree Lodge | Athlone | 090 6476738 |
| Usit NOW        | Athlone | 0902 78974  |

### **Self-Catering Accommodation**

|                                    |         |             |
|------------------------------------|---------|-------------|
| Arch House Self Catering           | Athlone | 0902 78311  |
| Bernie's Cottage                   | Athlone | 087 2770857 |
| Charlie Couper                     | Athlone | 0902 75891  |
| Eileen Dillon                      | Moate   | 0506 35138  |
| Glendeer Open Farm & Accommodation | Athlone | 0902 37147  |
| Harney                             | Athlone | 0902 92051  |
| Heritage Cottage                   | Athlone | 091 573333  |
| Joan Daly                          | Athlone | 0902 75716  |
| Mary Gillanders                    | Athlone | 01 4923307  |
| Michael & Ann Hopkins              | Athlone | 0902 85125  |
| Michael Flynn                      | Athlone | 0902 74033  |
| Mrs Marian O'Brien                 | Athlone | 0902 30184  |
| Pat & Nora Seery                   | Athlone | 0902 85171  |
| Self Catering Accommodation        | Athlone | 087 2025398 |
| Willow Apartments                  | Athlone | 0902 75716  |
| Willow Park                        | Athlone | 087 2321548 |

### **Camping and caravanning**

|                         |         |            |
|-------------------------|---------|------------|
| Hodson Bay Caravan Park | Athlone | 0902 92448 |
| Lough Ree East          | Athlone | 0902 78561 |

### **SPORTS AND LEISURE**

#### **Walking and orienteering**

Costume Orienteering, Athlone, contact: P.J. Harris, 090 64 92631

#### **Cycling**

Shannon Side C.C. Patricia Fox, Garnafallagh, Cornamagh, Athlone

#### **Clay pigeon shooting**

Athlone CPS, John O'Brien, 090 64 72915

#### **Golf**

Hodson Bay Golf Course, Athlone 090 64 92073

#### **Fishing**

Local Anglers' Association, Athlone Contact: Stephen McManus, 23 Beechlawn Drive, Monksland  
Midland Fly Fishing School  
The Strand Fishing Tackle Shop, (Ghillie Service), The Strand, Athlone, 090 64 79277,  
powell@iol.ie

#### **Boating – Boat Rental Companies**

Athlone Cruisers Ltd, Jolly Mariner Marina, Athlone 090 64 72892 acl@wmeathtc.iol.ie  
Foxes Boat Hire, Annagh, Athlone 090 64 85055 foxed@eircom.net

Left Bank Boat Hire, The Docks, Athlone 090 64 92358  
OFKA Holdkamp Boat Hire, Barrymore, Lough Ree, Athlone 090 64 92724

**Boating – day trips**

MV Ross, Jolly Mariner Marina, Athlone, 0902 72892  
Viking Tours, 7 St. Mary's Place, Athlone, 0902 73383

**Diving – Sub Aqua Clubs**

Athlone SAC, Ann-Marie McMahon, 087 2211654  
Dolphin SAC, Colin Brockington, 090 66 63592, colinbrockington@eircom.net

**Rowing**

Athlone Boat Club, Joe Pyke, 087 839 1236, joepyke@eircom.net

**Sailing**

Lough Ree Yacht Club, Andrew Mannion, 090 6475975

**Swimming**

Athlone Regional Sports Centre, Ballymahon Rd, Athlone, Co. Westmeath. 090 6470975

**Power Boating**

Lough Ree Power Boat School, Hodson Bay Athlone, Co. Roscommon, 090 6493992

**Horse Riding**

Derwin's, Auburn, Moate Rd, Athlone, Francie Derwin, 090 64 74460  
Kiltoom Stables, Kiltoom, Paul or Jan Morris, 090 64 89511 or 086 869 9823  
Thomastown Riding School, Thomastown, 090 96 73474

**Other Activities**

Golf, Hockey, Cricket, Petanque, Pitch and Putt, Tennis, Horse racing etc.

**Visitor attractions**

Athlone Castle, St Peter's Square, Athlone 0902 92192 (also houses the Tourist Information Office 0902 94630)  
An Dun Transport & Heritage, Ballinahown, Athlone  
Glender Open Farm, Galway Rd, Athlone 0902 37147

**Tours**

Irish Tour Management

**Tourist Trails**

Athlone Town Trail, Tourist Office, Athlone, 0902 94630

**Local Events**

Athlone Literary Festival  
late May

For further details contact  
090 64 94555 ext 205/299  
E-mail: [info@athlone.ie](mailto:info@athlone.ie)  
Website: [www.athlone.ie/literaryfestival](http://www.athlone.ie/literaryfestival)

Athlone Boat Regatta  
June

For further details contact the IWAI  
1890 924991

Athlone Angling Festival  
Early July

Olaf Scabbyhead Viking Festival  
early July

For Further details contact  
Michael McDonnell on 087 262 1136  
or James Behan on 086 8225 250

Athlone Youth Festival  
mid July

For further details contact  
Tel: 090 64 73358

St. John's Theatre & Arts Centre  
August

For further details contact  
090 68 22566  
e-mail:[stjohnstheatre@eircom.net](mailto:stjohnstheatre@eircom.net)

### **6.3.3 GLASSAN**

#### **EATING OUT**

##### **Licensed Restaurants**

Wineport Lodge, Glassan, Athlone, 0902 85466  
Grogan's Pub, Glassan, Athlone, 090 6485158  
Glassan Village Restaurant, Glassan, Athlone, 0902 85001

##### **Pub Grub**

Grogan's Pub, Glassan, Athlone, 090 6485158

#### **ACCOMMODATION**

##### **Hotel**

Glassan Golf & Country Club Hotel, Athlone, 0902 85120

##### **B&B**

Carnivan House B&B, Athlone, 0902 94486  
Benown House B&B, Athlone, 0902 85406

##### **Self Catering**

St. Mark's Lakeshore Accomodation, Athlone, 0902 85125  
Owen Egan, Glassan, 0902 85389  
Anne Walsh, Athlone, 0902 85388

#### **SPORTS AND LEISURE**

##### **Angling**

Killinure Anglers, Glassan, Liam Walsh, Killeenmore, Glassan

##### **Boating – Boat Hire**

Lough Ree Cruisers, Mucknagh Point, Glassan, Athlone, 090 64 85256,  
[loughreecruisers@eircom.net](mailto:loughreecruisers@eircom.net)  
Michael Barrett Boat Hire, Lakeside Hotel, Glassan, Athlone, 090 64 85163  
Quigley Boat Hire J.J., Killinure, Glassan, Athlone, 090 64 85424  
Waveline Cruisers Ltd, Quigley's Marina Killinure Point Glassan, Athlone, 090 64 85711  
[waveline@iol.ie](mailto:waveline@iol.ie)  
Pat Seery, Teach Carraig, Glassan, Athlone, 0902 85171

##### **Cycling**

The Glassan Trail taking in Athlone, Glassan village and Goldsmith Country

##### **Golf Clubs**

Glassan Golf and Country Club, Glassan, 090 64 85120 [info@Glassangolf.ie](mailto:info@Glassangolf.ie)

### **Horse Riding**

Mannion's, Kilkenny West, Glassan, Mary Mulville, 090 64 85781

### **Ballooning**

*Irish Balloon Flights (Glassan)*, 80 Cypress Grove Road Templeogue, Dublin 6W, 01 406 4777

### **Heritage**

Glassan Heritage Centre and Tourist Office, Glassan, 0902 85677  
Portlick Castle and Medieval Tower, Portlick, Athlone

### **Walking**

Lake shore walks at Portlick – millennium forest

### **Local events/festivals**

Goldsmith Summer School  
Annually during summer  
Rose of Glassan Festival  
mid-August

Contact: Mr John O'Donnell 0902 32374 or  
Ann Tully 043 71448/ 087 9236983  
Contact: Bartle Spollen 087 2584819

## **6.4 CO OFFALY**

### **6.4.1 SHANNONBRIDGE**

#### **EATING OUT**

##### **Restaurants**

The Bog Oak, Shannonbridge  
The Old Fort, Shannonbridge, 0905 74973  
Shannonside Diner, Shannonbridge

##### **Pubs**

Bridge Bar, Shannonbridge  
Killeens, Main St, Shannonbridge, 0905 74006  
Lukers, Shannonbridge  
Maisies, Shannonbridge

#### **ACCOMMODATION**

##### **Caravan Sites**

Holmes, Shannonbridge

##### **Guesthouses**

Ashbrook Farm, Ashbrook, Shannonbridge, Ms McCarthy: 090 9674166  
Ashbrookfarmhouse@eircom.net

Rachra House, Shannon View, Shannonbridge, 0905 74249  
rachrahouse@eircom.net

##### **Self-Catering Accommodation**

Claffeys  
Creggs  
Kellys  
Killeens           0905 74006

McManuses 0905 74189  
Murrays  
St. Ciarans Lodge

### **SPORTS AND LEISURE**

#### **Boat Hire**

Eamon McManus, 0905 74189  
Pat Corbett, 0905 74249

#### **Tackle Shops**

Killeens, Main St, Shannonbridge, 0905 74006  
Morans, Main St Shannonbridge, 0905 74124

#### **Fishing**

Coarse fishing Season - Year Round in both Shannon and Suck (River in flood from November - March)

Popular spots: - Hot Water Stretch, Coreen Ford and Culliagh on the Suck

Whilst there are no dedicated fishing stands along the Callows; the banks are well suited to angling and generally landowners welcome the fishermen.

#### **Outdoor pursuits**

Bog skiing – [colinkilleen@yahoo.com](mailto:colinkilleen@yahoo.com), Walking, Rugby, Tennis and GAA

#### **Natural Attractions**

The River Shannon (and its flora and fauna)

The Shannon Callows (and the flora and fauna of the callowland)

The Bogland and its flora

The Esker Riada

#### **Other visitor attractions**

- Bog rail tour (Clonmacnois and West Offaly Railway to Blackwater bog), 0905 74114
- Clonmacnois (see below)
- Ely O' Carroll
- The Battlements – the bridge and fortifications
- Birr Castle

### **6.4.2 CLONMACNOIS**

#### **ACCOMMODATION**

The Glebe Caravan Park, Clonmacnois, 0902 30277

There appears to be no other accommodation or tourist facilities within the area, indicating that most visitors to the monastic site would come as part of a tour or a day trip from nearby towns.

#### **Main Tourist Attractions**

The Monastery and associated buildings and artefacts including:

1. The South Cross
2. Temple Doolin, originally called Temple Hurpain.
3. Temple Hurpain
4. Temple Ri, the king s church
5. Temple Ciaran
6. Temple Kelly
7. The North Cross

8. The Cathedral
9. The Cross of the Scriptures.
10. O'Rourke's Tower.
11. Temple Conor
12. Temple Finian
13. Commemorative slabs
14. The Nun's Church

## **6.5 Co Galway**

### **6.5.1 BALLINASLOE**

#### **EATING OUT**

Brehon Park Restaurant & Wards of Lerhin Pub, Lerhin, Clonbern, Ballinasloe, 093 45044, Fax: 093 45677

Lynch Haydens Gateway Hotel, Dunlo St, Ballinasloe, 090 964 2347

#### **Pubs**

Ramble Inn, Ballinasloe

Phoenix Inn Ltd, Ballinasloe

Punch Bowl, Ballinasloe,

Grattan Club, Mountbellew,

Scruffy Browns Pub, Bridge Street, 0905 44697

The Pillar House, Society Street, 0905 43939

Joes Bar, Society Street, 0905 43165

The Dunlo Tavern, Dunlo Street, 0905 43603

The Duck Inn, Dunlo Street, 0905 42179

Dooleys Lounge, Dunlo Street, 0905 42291

An Tain Bar

St. Micheals Square, 0905 45157

Gibbons Pillar House Bar

Society Street, 0905 43939

Downeys Bar

Society Street

#### **ACCOMMODATION**

##### **B&Bs and Guesthouses**

Cois Cuan B&B, Harbour Road, Beech Haven, Ballinasloe, 0905 - 43800

Beach Haven, Ballinasloe, 0905 42460

Kitty Slatter, Bridge St, Ballinasloe, 0905 42691, slatteryfamily@eircom.net

Clooncummer B&B, Beagh, Creagh, Ballinasloe, 0905 043983, [clooncummer@ireland.com](mailto:clooncummer@ireland.com)

[www.clooncummer.com](http://www.clooncummer.com)

Gibbons Pillar House Bar, Ballinasloe, 0905 43939

Haydens Gateway Hotel, Dunlo St., Ballinasloe, 0905 - 42375

Grove House, Ballinasloe, 0905 44201

Nephin, Ballinasloe 0905 42865

Gullane's Hotel, Main Street, Ballinasloe, 0905 42220

#### **SPORTS AND LEISURE**

##### **Fishing**

Fishing permits - Salmons Department Store, Main Street, Ballinasloe, 0905 42120

River Suck – coarse and pike angling

River Shannon – well-stocked fishing facilities

**Cruising and watersports**

Up River Kayaking and Canoeing Centre, 14 River St., Ballinasloe, 0905 44196/ 087 9219700 or  
e-mail: [upriver@ireland.com](mailto:upriver@ireland.com)

**Horse Riding**

Equestrian activities nearby INCLUDING Flowerhill House, Killmor, Ballinasloe

**Walking**

7km “Slí na Sláinte” walking route

Proposal for continuation of O’Sullivan Beara walking route along line of old Grand Canal,  
Ballinasloe

**Visitor Attractions**

Battle of Aghrim Visitor Centre, Aghrim, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway  
Clonfert Cathedral - Off the Ballinasloe/Portumna road, Co. Galway  
Clontuskert Abbey, Off the Ballinasloe/Portumna road, Co. Galway  
Kilconnell Friary, Kilconnell, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway

**Local Events**

|  |                                |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Ballinasloe Coarse Angling Festival    | steve-fishfinder@oceanfree.net |
| May                                    |                                |
| An tSuca Fiain River and Arts Festival | www.ballinasloe-arts.com       |
| July                                   |                                |
| National Heritage Week                 |                                |
| September                              |                                |
| International Fair and Festival        | Contact: Mary Phelan           |
| October                                | e-mail: info@ballinasloe.com   |

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