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Pre-draft Consultation Monasterevin Local Area Plan 2025 - 2031
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Below please find the IWAI's submission regarding the proposed Monasterevin LAP. The recent extensive restoration of Bell Harbour by Waterways Ireland could mark the redevelopment of Monasterevin as a vibrant Canals' town. The categories of REGENERATION, TOURISM and SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES outlined in the Monasterevin LAP Draft Issues Papers could all benefit positively from considered development of canal facilities and links.

1. Introduction & IWAI History

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI) was established in 1954. It has 24 branches across the island of Ireland. It has 2000 members. It represents a wide range of members interests regarding inland waterways use and activities, community interests, navigation issues, tourism development, all in relation to the socio and economic benefits of the waterways. Many members are not boat owners.

IWAI has a long history of working with statutory agencies, funding groups, and community interests with regards to promoting access to the waterways. In recent years this has taken the form of working with Waterways Ireland – the navigation authority, government Departments in relation to legislative reform regarding byelaws on boating use on the canals and Barrow sections of the waterways and

undertaking large infrastructural refurbishment projects such as the regeneration of the Boyne Canal in Co. Meath. IWAi also supports Special Interest Groups such as the CSIG which has undertaken a digital national mapping and charting project of much of the Shannon, Erne, Royal Canal, Grand Canal and Barrow Navigation. In late 2018, as a response to the severe difficulties encountered by boating users of the Grand Canal and Royal Canal, which collectively along with a partial route on the River Shannon form the **Green and Silver Route**, a special interest Nav-Watch¹ group was established within the Canal branches of IWAi. The purpose of this group is to constructively contribute to the knowledge base regarding access to waterways, their navigational maintenance, development and use from a boating perspective. Sharing this information with the relevant agencies for the betterment of these navigations.

2. Regeneration

Monasterevin, with its excellent transport links, is an ideal location to install facilities and berths for liveaboard boats. Though the installation of facilities is generally the responsibility of Waterways Ireland, there is an urgent and growing need for appropriate facilities for people living on boats which Kildare Co Co should plan for.

The current explosion of interest in living on the water stems from our national housing crisis, working people can't afford homes. This is particularly the case in Dublin and its neighbouring counties. A barge is considerably less expensive than a house or apartment and is within the financial reach of many. Serviced berths give these liveaboard communities a safer, cleaner location with a standard of living comparable with land dwelling folk. To-date, councils have failed to plan for these growing communities which have overwhelmed other areas. Small, well planned communities should be encouraged in multiple locations throughout the canals network. The outskirts of Bell Harbour, with a railway station in the immediate vicinity, is just such an ideal location.

These small, quiet and brightly coloured communities bring their spend value to their nearest town and they contribute hugely in bringing life back to the canal. The benefits of bringing facilities such as a toilet/service block to a canal town will grow and grow. These facilities can be used by liveaboard people, touring boats, hire boats, walkers, cyclists, kayakers, local sports clubs and all greenway users.

¹ Nav-Watch – comprising expert members of Canals & Barrow branches of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland from the Royal Canal, Kildare, Dublin, North Barrow, Barrow, Offaly, and Shannon Harbour IWAi areas.

3. Tourism

Waterways Ireland's restoration of Bell Harbour is just one of a number of improvement projects along the Grand Canal/Barrow Line. Recognising and supporting these improvements can stimulate and unlock the great tourism potential of this waterway linking Dublin with the midlands and the south-east. The Shannon and Shannon-Erne are well established tourism products but the Grand Canal and Barrow Line have yet to be expanded. The Barrow navigation which runs through an SAC is particularly spectacular, though currently, can be difficult to navigate. Better facilities and greater support for Waterways Ireland in its endeavours to maintain the navigation can open the enormous tourism potential of this region.

The Pre Draft Issues Paper makes reference to Umeras Bog and suggests links to the railway station. Indeed those links should be made, allowing walkers and cyclists to easily access the area and explore Umeras Boglands.

Bord na Móna

It should also be noted that the Grand Canal line runs adjacent to Umeras on its route to Monasterevin. Links between the bog(s) and the canals should be developed and expanded. Currently when hire barges from Sallins and the Barrow travel this canal they run past Umeras unwittingly. Since B na M are now flooding/regenerating many bogs and developing green tourism products there, they should be taking the opportunity of connecting with the canals and drawing further tourists from them. There is a need for mooring jetties and signage with information boards at locations where canals can link with the bogs. Additional trails should be added at these points if none exist. These simple facilities will serve all who use the greenways, canals and blueways.

4. Sports & Recreational Facilities

Better facilities such as a toilet/service block lend themselves to the development of canal tourism. Boat rentals, Bike rentals, Kayak and Paddleboard Hire are all more likely and possible when there are supporting facilities to lean on. **The enormous success of the Greenways has emphasized the need for public toilet facilities along the greenways.** These facilities are maintained by waterways Ireland and are accessed free by way of a smart card. They are generally well maintained and are unlocked in daylight hours. Access to showers or other facilities are by smart card which protects facilities against vandalism.

5. Liveaboard Boat Communities

For a variety of reasons, many people are choosing to make their home on a barge, a lifestyle more aligned with the rhythm of nature, anywhere they can in and around Dublin.

With only twenty official liveaboard berths in Dublin's Grand Canal Dock demand is exploding and to-date both Waterways Ireland and Councils have been slow to respond to the increased interest in this seemingly idyllic and low stress way of life. We estimate in the region of 1000 liveaboards in various pockets throughout the country, the main concentration being in Dublin City and Kildare. **Planning sensitively for these growing communities is long overdue.** A vast number of people have applied to Waterways Ireland for a liveaboard berth and have created a long waiting list. Many others have simply bought a barge and had it craned into the canal, moved to a desired location where they have begun their liveaboard lifestyle.

Poor conditions

An ancient system is currently straining under the pressure, minimal services cannot cope with the new level of demand. New byelaws are pending which will give Waterways Ireland the power to deal better with the growth and introduce revised charges which will aid the delivery of better services for those liveaboards. At the same time there is much that DCC & KCC can do to improve the situation.

Currently boats are congregating in groups on both the Royal and Grand on a 200 year old beautiful heritage canal system which still operates but has little in the way of essential services. There is generally no drinking water available, very limited sewage pump-out facilities (one in GCD, one in Lowtown and one in Sallins), little lighting, few jetties and crucially almost no electricity.

Blanchardstown Harbour at Lock 12 on the Royal is an example of all of these issues, barges crammed into a wonderful cut-stone, heritage harbour but with no facilities. Hazelhatch has a large liveaboard population surviving with almost no facilities or services.

While most barge owners are proud to be off the grid - using solar panels, large batteries and LEDs to generate power for their homes and offices, it only takes one vessel to continually pump its toilet directly into the canal to pollute the whole area. Dublin and Kildare urgently need fully serviced liveaboard berths where people can live safely and securely in this fast expanding vibrant communities.

6. Monasterevin's Bell Harbour – Expand Facilities



Extensive restoration of canal harbour walls

Location location location

The right location is critical to the success of a liveaboard community, Monasterevin's Bell Harbour is that perfect, ready made location. A sensitive and appropriate blend of a heritage structure with modern use. It is a use totally befitting this heritage structure, this plan should aim to expand facilities here to promote canal living and expand tourism.

Infrastructure

The development of liveaboard facilities in this location would preserve and enhance the existing structure of the harbour in a sensitive marrying of old with new. The inclusion of jetties or quayside moorings on the edge of the harbour would be required, equipped with bollards supplying barges with power and water, a broadband link would be essential also. The berths would be sensitively lit with lights atop the service bollards. A pumpout station at a dedicated berth would allow boats to move there temporarily as required to empty their holding tanks. Holding tanks are fitted to barges to store all sewage/black water. **A handful of berths could be reserved for short stay visitors such as hire boats or travelling boaters coming from the Shannon, Grand Canal Main Line or Barrow.** This would help encourage and develop much needed tourist links between the Shannon, Dublin and the South East.



The restored walls highlight details of earlier canals in the town. The canal history of the town should be displayed on panels at these locations.

Low-carbon Community

By their nature, boating communities are low-carbon communities. Shore power is not always available. When disconnected from any communal electricity grid, each boat is responsible for its own electricity and heat generation. Boats commonly use off-grid electricity production methods such as solar panels and wind turbines to meet the electricity needs of the boatowner. Every electrical appliance is carefully chosen in order to reduce the electrical demand. Most boats run on a 12 volt system similar to that used in cars.

Every decision to switch on an application is a calculated decision for the boatowner, based on an assessment on whether there has been enough electrical power generated that day and whether the use of electricity is necessary. In comparison with conventional housing, there is a much greater awareness of energy usage and no demand on the electricity grid. With recent advances in the efficiency solar panels, there is a growing number of liveaboards boaters who are completely off grid with their electricity usage.

Alongside this, the lifestyle of a liveaboard boater is in general very eco-friendly. There is less often household waste generated due to space restrictions. Water usage is kept to a minimum as the size of

the water tank limits daily usage. This focus on renewable energy, low waste and water conservation results in a very low carbon lifestyle.

Rent

These serviced berths would generate income for WI. WI is currently proposing revised mooring fees which will in turn help to fund improved facilities along the canals. (Rates for liveaboards in Waterways Ireland's berths are restricted by limits imposed within the current 1980's byelaws, which are currently being revised.)

7. Year Round Boat Tourism Potential

Reading through the draft material in the Monasterevin LAP Draft Issues Papers, the Grand Canal is mentioned considerably more than in most CDP's for the counties through which the canal runs.

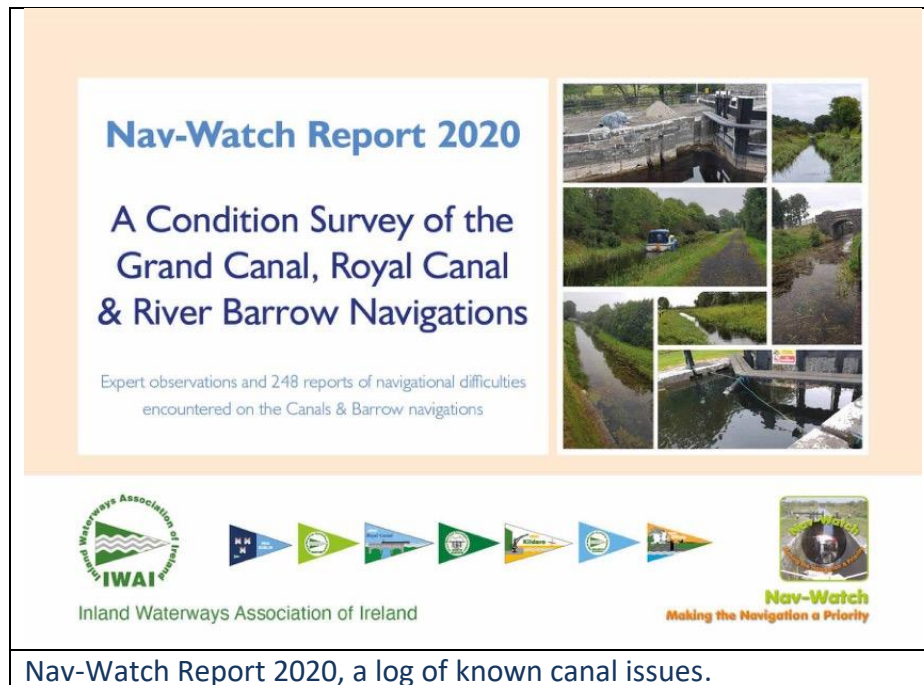
Since the downturn in 2008 a cash strapped Waterways Ireland has focused it's attention on areas where funding was available, i.e. the development of Greenways. These have been very well received by the general public. Now, there is considerable scope to develop boat tourism on both Canals culminating with a boat tourism hub in the city centre linking the canals.

Boat tourism on the Shannon is basically restricted to a six month season, April to September. The canals offer the opportunity for year round boat tourism, cruising the canals is possible all year round (the winter months are termed Maintenance Season when works can result in localised closures, but generally the canals are open). Our warmer climate in recent years makes winter cruising on the canals all the more viable. The days are gone when the canal could be expected to freeze over for a period each winter. The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland's Nav-Watch group have recently surveyed the canals and documented areas where dredging or maintenance needs are greater (see/download Nav-Watch Report 2020: www.iwai.ie/nav-watch/surveyreport). It is hoped that this focus on critical maintenance will improve the navigation and leave it better able to cope with a variety of vessels travelling between Dublin and the Shannon.

Potential and Opportunity

There is a real opportunity to create something truly special here. As the number of liveaboard boats and barges grows ever larger, the demand for facilities to service and repair these vessels grows too. Dublin has long closed access to the valuable Graving Docks site at Grand Canal Docks. With liveaboard communities growing around Kildare there is a need for more servicing facilities. There is no dry dock in Monasterevin but the inclusion of one would add enormously to the attractiveness of Monasterevin

as a canals town. Alternatively or complementing that, a service yard adjacent to the canal, where boats can be craned out to be worked on would be a huge advantage. There is a need for a maintenance hub on the Grand Canal, where boats can be lifted or dry docked, welded, painted and refitted. All of these industries could operate from one location, providing valuable employment opportunities for the town. Currently, boats needing a dry dock have to travel from Dublin to Athy or from Dublin to Shannon Harbour. A dedicated facility with the complete range of skills does not exist, yet.



Nav-Watch Report 2020, a log of known canal issues.

We take our canals very much for granted, they are just there, people are very surprised and always attracted and intrigued when they see a boat or barge pass by. The built heritage of these tremendous assets is largely overlooked. **Much of this 200 year old system still functions well today, it is working living history.** The longest hand-made structure in this country is the 146km length of the Royal Canal, yet few people are aware of this. We find original bridges, locks and some buildings are added to each counties' List of Protected Structures. Yet none have taken the obvious step and listed the structure of the canal cut which is arguably the greater achievement of our early 19th century canal builders.

Neglect

Looking at other capital cities around Europe we can see how much tourism has developed around their canals and waterway facilities. Water draws people to it, boats moving on that water have an even greater draw. **Everywhere in Europe that there are canals traversing a city there are thriving**

communities and vibrant tourism attractions built upon the back of that draw to water... except in Dublin where it has been neglected.

Future-proofing the canals network

To fail to plan for the future life of the canals is to begin the process of decline and ultimately closure. IWAI's Nav-Watch was established to document problems and focus essential maintenance on critical issues by bringing them to the attention of WI. It is also a means to lobby Government for increased funding to allow WI to reinstate necessary programmes of maintenance and bring the state of the navigation back to where it should be, reversing the state of gradual neglect which had set in during years of budgetary reduction. Specific project funding and pressure from councils will help to drive this appreciation and development of our heritage waterways network.

Services and planning

As mentioned earlier in our submission, barges need services. As one answer to our lack of housing stock this growing community is struggling without services and safe places to berth their homes. One of the more essential services is the availability of a dry dock in the city. Dry docks in the Dublin region on both canals have long since been demolished or filled in. There remains still the two Graving Docks in Grand Canal Dock. These heritage structures appear to be absent from the Dublin List of Protected Structures yet the adjacent three locks, the lockkeepers cottage and the surrounds of GCD are all listed. They may appear unkept and derelict, but only so because they are not being maintained and are being kept out of use. They are not defunct and are still viable. Currently if you have a barge in Dublin and discover a leak or require maintenance to the hull your only options are:

- a. If it is urgent, hire a crane at great expense and lift it out. But that's difficult in the confines of a congested city, cranes block roads, and where do you lift it out to?
- b. The second option is you take a journey of several days to Athy Dry Dock; the other end of the Grand Canal to Shannon Harbour in Banagher; or to Mullingar on the Royal, where there are functioning dry docks.

These facilities were originally built at regular intervals on the canals, the builders understood their essential nature.

In short, a dry dock in Dublin was never more important or essential as we sit on the cusp of an explosion in vessel numbers on the city's waterways. Any future development of the Graving Docks site should incorporate the retention of at least one functioning dry dock in its plan. They still work and are needed more than ever. Buildings can be put above them, it would give shelter to the users, and would highlight the city's respect for its heritage. To consider any alternative plan where one Dock is retained simply to use as an entertainment space is to fall far short of the heritage principles set out in the Strategic Issues Paper on the Draft DCC Plan. Taking a working dry dock out of commission when it is now needed again more than ever would be a very short sighted decision and an insult to the city's

forefathers and builders of the canals. If we do learn from the past then we should remember that back in the 1970s CIE planned to level a couple blocks of Georgian Dublin to replace it with a bus station close to the quays in the heart of the city. Had this gone ahead we would not have the thriving, buzzing, tourist filled quarter of Temple Bar where now there is a community of people living and bringing life to the city. **We urgently need to begin the process of future proofing our canals and waterways to ensure their relevance and usability well into the future, for the next two hundred years.**

8. The Importance of Through Traffic

The Water Animation Strategy (for the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock SDZ) as yet does not identify the importance of ‘through traffic’ on the two canals in Dublin, it focuses on water-based activities primarily on the Liffey. By through traffic we mean the ability for boats to easily travel through one canal, out onto the Liffey and onward into the other canal, in either direction.

The potential here for developing a thriving boat tourism business is as great as it is in any other European capital with a canal network. We have a canals network which is still operational in its original state, nothing has been automated, simplified, or plasticized. One has to travel to other countries to gain a true understanding of the value of this living history heritage. There are only a couple of barge hire companies operating on the canals and Barrow Line at present. Poor maintenance of the navigation hampers their clients and businesses struggle accordingly. There is great demand for these hire services and tourists who do come will frequently take a boat for a week, spending heavily on food and drink in the towns they pass through. The Nav-Watch group through their Report 2020 are lobbying government for an increased maintenance budget for Waterways Ireland so they may better maintain the canals navigation in the future. (see Nav-Watch Report 2020, attached with this submission)

The Spectacular *Green & Silver* Route

The ‘*Green and Silver*’ route is based on the route taken on a documented triangular journey undertaken by L.T.C. Rolt in 1946. His subsequent publication of ‘*The Green & Silver*’ book in 1949, is now its 7th edition and as a boating ‘classic’ has become a bible for canals navigation enthusiasts in Ireland and many visitors from overseas. Rolt was one of the founders of the Inland Waterways Association (UK) in 1946.

This Green & Silver waterways route between Dublin and the midlands², which is of huge potential for economic benefit and social activity for the regions it passes through. It comprises a waterways

² Green & Silver Route - Dublin, Royal Canal, River Shannon, Grand Canal triangular navigation route.

triangular route of the Royal Canal, a section of the River Shannon, Grand Canal and into Dublin (crossing the Liffey to get back to the Royal to complete the journey). This navigation route is of international significance, ignored by our tourism organisations, **it is the only circular boating route in Ireland and needs to be elevated to national planning status level to flourish**. This route runs right through Westmeath and the beautiful harbour in Mullingar, a significant stop-off point on the Royal Canal leg of the journey. **This is a spectacularly beautiful route and a bucket-list goal for many boaters. It's potential for development as a tourist route has yet to be realized**. To-date it has been the goal of the private boat tourist to complete this special route but the potential for commercial boat rental tourism remains untapped.



Green & Silver route – the Royal Canal, The Grand Canal (crossing the Liffey in Dublin) and the Mid Shannon region. As yet this is an unexplored route for major heritage value/boating tourism.



Green and Silver book cover – comprised of the Royal Canal, the Grand Canal and the mid-Shannon. The route is approx. 320 km and can be completed in 10-12 days of continuous travel by boat, however it is preferable to take as long as you can.

Boaters who currently do this route in Ireland can register to take part in the Green & Silver logbook challenge, by which they get various passport style stamps on an old fashioned log book format; a certificate; and a polished metal plaque to mark their achievement. The Dublin branch of the IWA have been the main drivers behind the promotion of this route and administer the registration, log book and plaque allocations. However it is also the users of the Green & Silver route who have contributed to it becoming known in the boating community over the last decade (only possible since the reopening of the Royal Canal) and it is an excellent example of 'ground up' grassroots user based perspective being able to contribute to regional development, once the relevant support and resources to push it on further are considered and applied. It is 70 years since the publication of the original book so it is timely that in 2024 it gains more exposure.

	
Green & Silver Log Book	Green & Silver Certificate

The Green & Silver route runs through nine of the twelve local authority areas – from Dublin City Council out the Royal Canal through Fingal, Meath, Kildare, Westmeath and Longford to the River Shannon (with access from the Shannon to the Camlin River – a particularly tranquil and secret spot on the overall navigation), back in the Grand Canal through Offaly, Kildare and South Dublin, with a spur line off in into Laois to access the River Barrow system. This route has the potential to be a major international level boating destination servicing both the city and the wider region and should be viewed as a collective resource with regard to its navigable future.

The canals network in Ireland is some 200 years old, and still functioning in much the same way as it is in the early 1800's. Manually operated lock are still operated the same way, the canal banks ensure the immediate natural environment is available and local history and heritage is on its doorstep in the many towns and villages through which the Green & Silver route passes. We are very good at presenting our nation's history through documentaries, drama, theatre and so on, but there is nothing that can evoke the actual real experience of canal boating except to undertake it. We constantly hear said by German and British tourists on our waterways ***"You have the best waterways in Europe, why don't you use them more!"*** In the case of the canals, this could not be more true. We have failed to invest in their tourist potential so far.

The Green & Silver route runs through large and small towns such as Longford, Mullingar, Enfield, Kilcock, Leixlip, Maynooth, Naas, Edenderry, Tullamore and Athlone. These can offer local boating route points e.g. weekend hire boats, to use the local areas of the Green & Silver from those locations. Small businesses in this area are starting up and indeed somewhat established - notably Royal Canal Boat Trips operating trips between Clonsilla and Kilcock on the Royal Canal (ref

<https://royalcanalgreenway.ie/listing/royal-canal-boat-trips/>); on the Grand Canal bargetrip.ie based in Sallins and more recently boattrips.ie on the Barrow adding to the long established Barrowline cruisers in Vicarstown. Also, as mentioned earlier, there are several hire companies on the Shannon that would be willing to send their tourist hire boaters into the midlands if they could be confident of access and reliability of use.

9. Expansion of the Record of Protected Structures

While the bridges, locks and some buildings associated with the canals are 'Listed' on the Record of Protected Structures in the counties through which the canal passes, the NIAH (National Inventory of Architectural Heritage) through their www.buildingsofireland.ie website fails to list the original 200 year old structure of the canals as 'Listed' structures. Built in the days before mechanization, our canals were built entirely by hand. **They are, collectively or individually, the largest man-made structures on our island and should be recognised as such with 'Listed' status for the entire structure as a whole** (Bridges, Locks, the Navigation, Banks, Bed and Cut). They are national routes, too often compromised by infringement through poor planning at county level. They need to be considered at a national level to insure their working future. They were built to operate commercially, with trading boats that hauled goods to and from Dublin, Limerick and Carrick, most notably Guinness. Many of these boats are still around today, lovingly re-purposed by their owners as residential or recreation barges. It is important to re-evaluate that importance at County level. Although they are over two hundred years old and considered affectionately in terms of heritage, it must be recognised that these structures have a unique place within our national heritage and should be promoted and explored more as offering a **Living History** experience. Though 200 years old, they still function and can be used in the same way that seven generations of boatmen experienced.

Awarding 'Listed' status to selective elements of the Royal Canal (and Grand and Barrow Navigations) seems somewhat pointless, these items are interesting and individually contribute somewhat to our national heritage. But as parts of the whole, the entire canal, they come into their own and fully display their importance and function as essential parts of the canal's heritage. The greater part of the Royal Canal, its channel or 'cut' remains unlisted by some councils though it is a massive handbuilt construction which is often elevated far above the surrounding landscape which required the labour of thousands of Navvies each moving thousands of barrows of clay and soil. It forms our largest national hand built structure being uninterrupted for 146km in length. It now also forms the main part of the Famine Way, a national pilgrimage route which commemorates the suffering of famine victims being transported to Dublin docks and onward to North America.

10. Conclusion

Monasterevin has much more to offer canal users and tourists, be they travelling by boat or along the Greenways and Blueways. Bell Harbour has the potential to become a vital facility and link for liveaboards on the Grand Canal. The addition of maintenance services would add to the development potential of a Canals Quarter Tourism Hub in Monasterevin. These are essential facilities, urgently needed to serve a growing community which have been overlooked by Councils, Planners and the Land Development Agency thus far.

The canals network represent the living history of our industrial development. There are opportunities here to copper-fasten their future as ‘working’ and ‘living’ structures which can be reimagined in a modern and useful way. Demand is pushing for supply and communities need essential services. Allowing life to grow on our canals assures their future but will also become the driving attraction in a tourism sector which we have only sampled so far on the canals.

The IWAI will be available to offer experience or guidance on any area of canal development, we warmly welcome opportunities to ensure the future of these heritage navigations and their infrastructure.