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To: **Kildare Co.Co. & Meath Co.Co.**

Title: Draft Maynooth & Environs Joint AP 2025-2031 – Submission

Date: 31.7.24

Below please find the IWAI's submission regarding the Maynooth & Environs Joint LAP 2025-2031. IWAI welcomes the opportunity to submit to Kildare & Meath Co Co's Draft Development Plan for Maynooth & it's Environs. We feel there is considerable potential and opportunity to breathe new life into the Harbour and Canal in Maynooth by developing essential Greenway and Waterway services in the town. These facilities would serve the public as well as the two above named user groups and would bring an additional tourism opportunities along the Royal Canal where currently there are none. Given that funding streams may deride from the Urban Regeneration Fund, opportunities to develop and improve services for both Greenway and Waterways users have unfortunately been completely overlooked.

1. Introduction & IWAI History

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI) was established in 1954. It has 24 branches across the 32 counties of Ireland, with some two thousand members. It represents the navigable waterways with its vast heritage, a wide range of members interests regarding inland waterways use and

activities, community interests, navigation issues, waterways tourism development, all in relation to the socio and economic benefits of the waterways. Our national membership spans both boat owning and non-boat owning members of the public.

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 the inland waterways and working with Fáilte Ireland to develop tourism experiences on the waterways.

IWAI also undertakes 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.

In response to this LAP we are compelled to highlight the apparent lack of understanding of waterways needs, services, demands and trends by council planners generally. This Draft Maynooth & Environs Joint AP 2025-2031 document makes only a couple of references to the Royal Canal but does briefly mention Water-Based Tourism on P.111. The map on P.39 clearly shows the rail line and also the Greenway running through the town but does not feature the canal. It states to the viewer that the canal's heritage and tourism potential are neither appreciated nor understood.

Kildare Co Co are currently taking strides to develop a Canal Quarter in Naas, we support this and wonder why a similar detail has not been suggested for Maynooth. Recreational and tourism opportunities are otherwise being missed. For too long the canal(s) were dirty places at the backs of premises, scorned upon and ignored. The development of the Greenways has awoken Government and Council's eyes to the opportunities there for recreational havens and places which promote a healthy lifestyle and general wellbeing. We hope that both councils will take onboard our suggestions which will breathe life back into Maynooth Harbour and make it the inviting, vibrant, colourful harbour that this heritage structure deserves to be.

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.

There needs to be greater communication with stakeholders and shared understanding of the current demands for facilities and services. IWAI has extensive knowledge and experience and will welcome the opportunity to meet with council to discuss these and other waterways opportunities and requirements.

2. Height Restrictions

To preserve and further enhance these wonderful green and watery places it is vital that they are not deprived of direct sunlight. It is the icing on the cake for these places and the reason so many people are now drawn to the towpaths of the canals, the Greenways. For that reason we suggest that any proposed buildings abutting or closely located to the canal should be stepped with their lower floors closest to the canal environment. Buildings on the south side of the canal should be height controlled more carefully to assure that they don't shade the canal(s).

3. Harbour Field – Facilities for Greenway, Waterway & Tourism

Our IWAI Royal Canal branch has in the recent past made a submission to the Harbour Field Plan. Those observations still stand.

Maynooth Harbour has wonderful potential but is currently an unwelcoming destination for visiting or tourist boats. In order to install the current handrails around the harbour, all mooring bollards were removed. This immediately excluded all visiting boats from mooring in the harbour. **It is a dead harbour awaiting considered reimagination with a clear understanding of waterways users needs.** The observant boater may notice a solitary remaining water tap between the railings on the west of the slipway. Experienced barge owners understand the limitations of the offending railings. None would risk mooring a forty ton barge to railings for fear of pulling them down. Square edges to the railings would quickly fray mooring lines on a windy day. If you do make a quick stop in the harbour and moor by the railings you are unable to step onto the quayside since the railings obstruct your exit path. This is a health and safety nightmare and I can only presume they were installed before the establishment of Waterways Ireland (WI).

Mooring bollards are simple structures, perfectly designed for their function and should be returned to the harbour quayside to allow boats to moor. The successful Jenny Wren tour boats could well have a base in the harbour to cater for those '*Great Escaper*' tourists (see in 6.5 on P.107).

Steps to Revive the Harbour and Encourage boat traffic and Tourism

- Install a WI style service block by the harbour at Harbour Field. These facilities are essential for many Greenway and Waterway users. And will be well used by walkers, runners, cyclists, kayakers, boaters and many more together with the people of the town when visiting Harbour Field. These facilities include showers and washing machines. The showers will be much used by the more serious distance cyclists and runners on the Greenway. Boaters too will use them as only larger boats will have shower facilities onboard.
- A black water pump-out station is essential to allow all boats, tourist or private, to empty holding tanks. **WI's pending Byelaws will oblige all boats to install some type of holding tank.**
- Water taps and dringing stations should be available in the harbour to allow boats to fill tanks, cyclists and walkers to refill bottles.
- Lighting should be good yet sensitive around the Harbour.
- Railings which obstruct quaysides should be removed and mooring bollards returned.
- The harbour has become silted as a result of not being used, it requires dredging. The size of the harbour makes it particularly attractive to larger barges (60-70') since they have space to turn around. The 'Island' needs to be removed, it obstructs movement in the harbour. At the time of restoration, cash strapped volunteers simply dredged the larger part of the harbour and created a spoil heap of silt rather than remove and transport the silt away. The island is actually a spoil heap and was not present during trading days on the Royal.
- Moorings should be available for visiting touring boats.
- Bike Stands should be installed, allowing cyclists to secure their bikes while they use facilities and explore the town.
- A series of Serviced Liveaboard Berths should be installed at the outer edge of the harbour.
- Refuse bins should be provided at the harbour. Siting bins within the service block ensures they are available for those who need them rather than the otherwise fly-tipper who refuses to pay for waste removal.

The Harbour together with it's slipway has so much potential worth developing. In the past the Royal Canal has supported a successful barge hire business. With the right conditions in place it can do so again and Maynooth, as both an Historic and Metropolitan Key Town, could be the base for this tourist venture.

These suggested upgrades to the harbour's facilities all meet Kildare/Meath Co Co's Tourism Objectives EDO 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 & 2.5, as stated on P.111 of the Draft Plan and is appropriate for Harbour Field which is a Priority Intervention Area.

4. 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 around Dublin and it's surrounding townlands.

With only twenty official liveaboard berths in Dublin's Grand Canal Dock demand is exploding and to-date both Waterways Ireland and Dublin City Council 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 County. Congested, unplanned communities are now beginning to move out of Dublin and look for locations in satellite towns with good transport links. **Planning sensitively for these growing communities is long overdue.** The many people who have applied to Waterways Ireland for a liveaboard berth in Dublin have created a waiting list in excess of two hundred and fifty applications. 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. This though is all unplanned and leads to squalid conditions in some areas. WI is beginning a program of planning and installing services for people living aboard.

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 WI 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 Kildare CoCo/Meath CoCo 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, no sewage pump-out facilities (bar one in GCD), no lighting, no jetties and crucially 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. 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. Dublin, Kildare & Meath urgently need fully serviced liveaboard locations where people can live safely, healthily and securely in this fast expanding vibrant community.

Low-carbon Community

By their nature, boating communities are low-carbon communities. Shore power is used sparingly if 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 small wind turbines to meet the electricity needs of their boat. 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 of demand on the electricity grid. With recent advances in the efficiency of solar panels, there are 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 an exceptionally low carbon lifestyle.**

5. Inland Marinas – An Essential Component for Growth

Maynooth Marina

While there is demand and an urgent need for a small number of serviced Liveaboard berths on the canal in Maynooth (located outside the immediate harbour area), there is also scope for the creation of a marina adjoining the canal. Such a facility will bring regular boat traffic to the town, animating the waterway and completing an expected vision for all Greenway users. A marina could house 30-40 barges but would also be a perfect base for the tourism development of a holiday barge hire business. This would bring additional adventure tourist numbers to the heritage town of Maynooth and we must remember the heritage of the canals is a huge draw for these people too.

The development of a marina on the outskirts of Maynooth would be the provision of a facility which will help secure the future of the Royal Canal. The canal has great potential for hire boat rental, so far, services are not adequate to support this.

Sample Marina

This is an aerial view of a **very** large Marina located in Wiltshire. The entrance from the canal is to the right. It is not possible to tell which are the residential moorings but they are probably in the upper left corner, where they will not be disturbed by visiting boats. Most rural marinas start small but are designed with expansion in mind.

The boats shown are a mixture of wide and narrow beam barges of different lengths, but mostly within a 45 to 60 ft range. These measurements are similar to canal barges in Ireland on the Grand Canal which are up to 60ft long, requiring 60ft jetties. The Royal Canal can actually accommodate 70ft long barges as it's locks are longer than those on the Grand Canal, however most people opt for a max of 60ft so that they can travel the network fully. Note how few cars there are. Liveaboard communities, as well as being very low carbon users, are also very green. Most will have no car and opt for using the available public transport, hence the location of any marina close to a town is essential.



Photo courtesy of Beth O'Loughlin

Maynooth is a Decarbonising Zone (DZ) – a Liveaboards development housing an ultra-low carbon community fits this requirement perfectly. Table 2.2 on P.16 of the Draft Plan refers to Identification of Development Opportunities and Servicing Infrastructure for Maynooth in the RSES Regeneration Maynooth Town Centre and Environs. This concept fits well with that ideal too. A marina sited in the region of the proposed new railway station to the west of the town would offer excellent rail and transport links to the community of liveaboards. This also fits well with the Principles of Placemaking and the 10-minute settlement principle.

Historically, WI and previous custodians of the canals would not allow private developments to join or break into the canal. However we believe that the current demands for services and floating accommodation in the form of liveaboard berths is changing that mindset. Demand is certainly there and a marina in Maynooth could be operated by WI, Council or PPP. If developed by WI this facility

would be bound by their charges (currently being set in the forthcoming byelaws). If it were a privately developed marina it would be free to set it's own charges and sell use of it's services and facilities to all boat traffic. Either way there is the potential for profit here and the development of this facility will generate far more in terms of tourist revenue and expansion for Maynooth.

6. Year Round Boat Tourism Potential on Our Canals

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. George's Dock, next-door to the wonderful EPIC Museum, has huge potential both as a liveaboard community and as a canal's quarter tourism hub.

Boat tourism on the Shannon is basically restricted to a seven month season, April to October. 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.



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 cities and towns, there are thriving communities and vibrant tourism attractions built upon the back of that draw to water, except in Ireland 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.

7. The Importance of Through Traffic

The potential here for developing a thriving boat tourism business is as great as it is in any other European country 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 must travel to other countries to gain a true understanding of the value of this living history heritage. There are only a couple of holiday 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, https://branch.iwai.ie/nav-watch/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2024/06/Nav-Watch_Report_2020_WEB.pdf)

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 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 Offaly and this harbour redevelopment provides an ideal opportunity to make Tullamore a significant stop-off point on the Grand 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**

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

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; 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.

8. Conclusion

IWAI proposes that Kildare and Meath County Councils develop facilities and services at Maynooth Harbour for the betterment of Greenway and Waterway users/tourists together with the people of the town. The provision for a marina on the edge of town would grow a low carbon community and develop conditions for a thriving barge hire and adventure tourism business which would further expand the town's tourism potential.