Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended
Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended

Part 8

Proposed Development

Offaly County Council

GRAND CANAL CYCLEWAY /WALKWAY

SHARED WALKING AND CYCLING ROUTE FROM

CLONCANNON, EDENDERRY (COUNTY BOUNDARY WITH KILDARE) TO DIGBY BRIDGE (TULLAMORE)
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................................................... 5
  1.1 Background............................................................................................................................................................................. 5
  1.2 The Grand Canal greenway – Phase 1....................................................................................................................................... 6
  1.3 Grand Canal Greenway - Big Picture .................................................................................................................................... 7

2.0 Planning Context ......................................................................................................................................................................... 9

3.0 Description of the Project ............................................................................................................................................................. 14
  3.1 Site Description .......................................................................................................................................................................... 15
  3.2 Scheme Description and Layout .............................................................................................................................................. 15
  3.3 Road Crossings and Access Controls .................................................................................................................................... 18
  3.4 Local Residential and Agricultural Properties ....................................................................................................................... 19
  3.5 Edenderry Coarse Angling Club ............................................................................................................................................... 19
  3.6 Public Lighting ............................................................................................................................................................................. 19
  3.7 Ducting ...................................................................................................................................................................................... 19
  3.8 Amenity ..................................................................................................................................................................................... 19
  3.9 Architectural Heritage .............................................................................................................................................................. 19

4.0 Environmental Assessment ........................................................................................................................................................... 23
  4.1 Flora and Fauna ......................................................................................................................................................................... 23
  4.2 Water ....................................................................................................................................................................................... 24
  4.3 Ecology .................................................................................................................................................................................... 24

5.0 Environmental Mitigation ............................................................................................................................................................. 24

6.0 Public Consultation Process ....................................................................................................................................................... 27

7.0 Project Delivery ............................................................................................................................................................................. 27

8.0 Health and Safety ........................................................................................................................................................................ 27
1.0 Introduction
The mainline of the Canal traverses Leinster from Ringsend in Dublin City to the River Shannon at Shannon Harbour in County Offaly. The Offaly section of the Grand Canal comprises approximately 70 kilometres from Edenderry to Shannon Harbour. There is also a disused Kilbeggan branch line, to Ballycommon which is now used as a recreational route. The canal traverses large tracts of boglands and is bordered by hedgerows dating back 200 years with fringes of wild vegetation along the bank.

Image No. 1: Boats Docked at Campbell’s Bridge, Ballycommon, County Offaly

1.1 Background
The Irish Government policy entitled ‘Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future’, which runs from 2009 to 2020, identifies certain key goals and objectives to be met in order to introduce a national sustainable transport network. A National Cycle Policy (NCP) was implemented to run alongside the main ‘Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future’ document. The NCP mission states that it wants to create a strong cycling culture in Ireland while also encouraging recreational cycling. The NCP also outlines the importance of the National Cycle Network in attracting overseas tourists if the project is implemented.

This Part 8 proposal has been specifically progressed in consultation with Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna, NPWS and Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in order to meet objectives outlined in the Midland Regional Planning Guidelines, 2010 and The Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020.

Image No. 2: Barge at Cavemount, Daingean, Grand Canal, County Offaly
1.2 The Grand Canal Greenway – Phase 1

A Part 8 planning permission was approved by the Members of Offaly County Council in November 2015 for a 23km Shared Cycling and Walking Route from Digby Bridge Cappancur to Turraun connecting to Lough Boora Discovery Park.

During 2017 approximately 4km of greenway was constructed from Srah Road in Tullamore to Ballycowan Bridge, with a further 5.7km (2.2km east of Tullamore & 3.5km west of Ballycowan) expected to be completed in Spring 2018. Offaly County Council are actively pursuing various funding streams in order to continue the development.
1.3 Grand Canal Greenway - Big Picture

Map No. 1: Proposed Phases of Grand Canal Greenway

The current Part 8 Proposal is Phase 2 of the Grand Canal Greenway. Phase 1 (23km) as outlined above is under construction, subject to funding availability. The table below outlines the four phases which will link Edenderry with Tullamore, Lough Boora Discovery Park and the River Shannon, effectively linking the River Shannon to Kildare via the Grand Canal. It is an aspiration that in the future it will be possible to extend the Greenway all the way to Dublin along the Grand Canal towpath in conjunction with Waterways Ireland and relevant stakeholders.

Table no. 1: Grand Canal Greenway Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PHASE 1</td>
<td>Tullamore to Lough Boora Discovery Park</td>
<td>23km</td>
<td>Part 8 approved November 2015- under construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHASE 2</td>
<td>Edenderry to Tullamore</td>
<td>33km</td>
<td>Part 8 Proposal - March 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHASE 3</td>
<td>Ballycommon to Kilbeggan</td>
<td>7km</td>
<td>Currently at Pre-design Stage in conjunction with Westmeath County Council and Waterways Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHASE 4</td>
<td>Turraun to Shannon Harbour</td>
<td>18km</td>
<td>Currently at Pre-design Stage Stage in conjunction with Waterways Ireland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase 3 - The Kilbeggan Link in conjunction with Westmeath County Council will provide a strategic National link and would also be a key regional route, linking the Royal Canal Greenway, and the Old Rail Trail, (Dublin – Galway NCN 1 Also a Euro Velo Route) with the Barrow Blueway via the Grand Canal Greenway.

Phase 4 - This will link Lough Boora Discovery Park with the River Shannon and further potential links to Clonmacnoise, Athlone and Banagher.

The Grand Canal Greenway in Offaly will deliver a major component of the Midlands Cycling Destination (Offaly) and on a regional level, an attractive international cycling and walking offer.
Image no. 5: Existing Edenderry Grand Canal Cycling and Walking Path. The Grand Canal Greenway will connect with this at Downshire Bridge.

Image no. 6: Existing Cycle Track Downshire Bridge, Edenderry.
2.0 Planning Context

The following policies, studies, guidelines, plans and schemes are relevant to the Part 8 proposal:

- Project Ireland 2040 - National Planning Framework;
- National Development Plan 2018-2027;
- The Government’s Smarter Travel Initiative;
- The National Cycle Policy Framework;
- The Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010;
- The Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020;
- The Edenderry LAP, 2017-2023;
- Connecting People – Connecting Places – A Strategy for Walking and Cycling in Offaly (2015) and

2.1 Project Ireland 2040

In February 2018 the Government of Ireland launched the National Planning Framework - A vision and development strategy for the country which includes the following overarching objectives in relation to tourism, transport and Greenways:

National Policy Objective 22: Facilitate tourism development and in particular a National Greenways, Blueways and Peatways Strategy, which prioritises projects on the basis of achieving maximum impact and connectivity at national and regional level.

National Policy Objective 46: In co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland, enhanced transport connectivity between Ireland and Northern Ireland, to include cross-border road and rail, cycling and walking routes, as well as blueways, greenways and peatways.

National Strategic Outcome 3 - Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities: Rural Development: Invest in greenways, blueways and peatways as part of a nationally coordinated strategy.

National Strategic Outcome 7 - Enhanced Amenities and Heritage:

‘Implementation of planning and transport strategies for the five cities and other urban areas will be progressed with a major focus on improving walking and cycling routes, including continuous greenway networks and targeted measures to enhance permeability and connectivity.’

2.2 National Development Plan 2018-2027

In February 2018 the National Development Plan was also launched as a companion to the Project Ireland document. This is a ten-year strategy for public capital investment of almost €116 Billion. This document includes the following investment Actions.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund: €1 billion

Rural Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

The Rural Recreation Infrastructure Scheme supports the development and necessary maintenance, enhancement or promotion of recreational infrastructure throughout Ireland in light of the huge potential to develop the economic value of Activity and Recreational Tourism by Local Authorities, State Agencies and communities. Initiatives funded covered a broad spectrum, and range from walking trails to greenways and blueways.

Under the Strategic Investment Priorities 2018–2027:

- Transition to a Low-Carbon and Climate-Resilient Society:
  Sustainable travel measures, including comprehensive Cycling and Walking Network for metropolitan areas of Ireland’s cities, and expanded Greenways.
Part 8 – Grand Canal Greenway – Phase 2

2.3 Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Waters in Ireland, 2017-2021
Under the Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Waters - Operational Programme; The Midlands Cycling Destination Project – National Scale (Offaly) is identified under the theme of Upgrading and Developing of Infrastructure as a key objective; and the Grand Canal Greenway is the central spine of same.

2.4 Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future 2009 – 2020
In 2009, the Department of Transport unveiled Smarter Travel as the new national transport policy document for Ireland. One of the main aims of the policy is to develop walking and cycling as viable commuter modes in the short to medium term with the long term aim of fostering a lasting walking and cycling culture in Ireland.

The government has set a key national target for a reduction in the levels of those commuting by private car from 65% to 45% by 2020 with the remainder of trips made up of sustainable travel modes such as cycling, walking and public transport.

2.5 The National Cycle Policy Framework (NCPF) 2009–2020
The NCPF recognises the potential of cycling to significantly improve various aspects of people’s lives through the obvious personal benefits of improved health and finance but also, in a more communal sense, it benefits society in terms of lower CO2 emissions and also has positive social impacts in that it gets people out walking and cycling together. The overarching objective of the NCPF is that 10% of all trips in Ireland will be made by bike by 2020.

2.5 Midland Regional Planning Guidelines 2010
The guidelines recommend that coordinated promotion and marketing of the inland waterways, walking and cycling trails and historical assets of the area will be essential in this regard in association with tourism. Listed in Table No. 2 overleaf, are the relevant policies and objectives that support the proposed Part 8.

Table no. 2: Midland Regional Planning Guidelines Relevant Policies and Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TI06</th>
<th>Support the development of commuter and leisure cycle routes of regional significance, in particular the following routes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sections of the National Cycle Network that pass through the region i.e. east of Mullingar to Athlone and its spur via Tullamore and Portlaoise to Carlow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The extension and improvements to the Táin Trail cycling route including loop routes around Lough Ennel and Lough Owel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The redistribution of carriageway space on the reclassified Sections of the N4, N6, N7 and N8 routes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The development of cycling routes along the Grand and Royal Canals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T03</td>
<td>Promote, in a sustainable manner, increases in visitor numbers within the Mid Shannon corridor based on a broader range of activities and associated accommodation, including cycling, walking, angling and rowing/canoeing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T04</td>
<td>Promote and explore the designation of Lough Boora Parklands as a hub for eco-tourism in light of the forthcoming Fáilte Ireland Natural Heritage and Eco Tourism Strategy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TP5
Protect access to and support proposals for upgrading inland waterways and associated facilities for recreation use in accordance with relevant management strategies and in cooperation with Waterways Ireland.

Critical Enabling Investment Priority
Targeted investment in key tourism infrastructure developing a network of regional and national scale visitor attractions, including focused investment on the inland waterways within the context of a wider urban/rural renewal and recreational facility aimed at developing the full potential of canal and lake harbour areas throughout the region.

2.7 Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020

Chapters 2 and 7 of the current development plan include specific policies and objectives relating to Green Infrastructure within Offaly, the preparation of a cycle strategy for the County and the provision to examine the feasibility of a cycle route on the Grand Canal.

Listed in Table No. 3 below are the relevant policies and objectives that support the proposed Part 8.

Table no. 3: Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020 Relevant Policies and Objectives

| STAP-06 | It is Council policy to promote walking and cycling, subject to appropriate environmental assessments, including Habitats Directive Assessment, as an alternative mode of transport for travelling to work and for recreational purposes, to require the provision of cycle ways and walkways and associated facilities as part of new development and to support safer walking and cycling routes to schools under the Green Schools Initiative where feasible. |
| STAP-07 | It is Council policy to facilitate and support a cycling route along the canal towpaths in County Offaly (from Edenderry to Shannon Harbour) for recreational purposes and to enhance tourism potential. |
| STAP-08 | It is Council policy to support, subject to appropriate environmental assessments, including Habitats Directive Assessment, the continued development of cycle routes by identifying routes both within the county and at national and regional level. Particular emphasis will be placed on those that link existing cycle routes and tourist destinations. Cycle routes shall adhere to the principles contained within the national policy document Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future 2009-2020, and the National Cycle Policy Framework document or updated/amended guidance document where appropriate. |
| TP-05 | It is Council policy to further investigate the potential of and opportunities for the development of trails in County Offaly to include a mixture of walking, cycling and driving trails, for the provision of appropriate services along these trails, and for the development of linkages between these trails in Offaly and adjoining counties. |
Council will only support such developments where it is demonstrated that no significant environmental effects will arise as a consequence of their construction or operation.

**AHAP-01**

It is Council policy to protect and preserve the county’s primary areas of high amenity namely the Slieve Bloom Mountains, Clonmacnoise Heritage Zone, Durrow High Cross, Abbey and surrounding area, the River Shannon, Lough Boora Parklands, Grand Canal, Croghan Hill, Raheenmore Bog, Pallas Lake, Clara Bog and Eskers, Eiscir Riada and other eskers. These areas are indicated on Map 7.17.

Notwithstanding the location of certain settlements, or parts of, for which there are settlement plans (towns, villages, ‘sráids’), within the Areas of High Amenity, it is not the intention of this policy to hinder appropriate sustainable levels of development (as set out in the plans and subject to proper planning).

Further, it is policy to facilitate the sustainable extension and expansion of existing visitor, tourist related or other rural enterprises within the Areas of High Amenity, where such development is appropriate and where it can be demonstrated that it gives ‘added value’ to the extending activity and to the immediate area which is the subject of the ‘Area of High Amenity’ designation.

Chapter 7 ‘Heritage and Landscape’ of Volume 1 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020 sets out the policies and objectives in relation to the protection of the built and natural heritage of County Offaly.

6 protected structures are considered to be materially affected by the proposal to develop the route. These are:

1. Cartland Bridge,
2. Trimblestown Bridge,
3. Rhode Bridge,
4. Toberdaly Bridge,
5. Killeen Bridge,
6. Ballycommon Bridge

The following policy from the County Development Plan relates to protected structures:

**AAHP-01**

It is Council policy to ensure that the alteration or extensions to protected buildings and structures will only be permitted if the proposals are in keeping with the character of the building and preserve the architectural and historic features of the buildings or structures.

2.8 **The Edenderry Local Area Plan 2017-2023**

Listed in Table No. 4 below are the relevant policies and objectives that support the proposed Part 8.

**Table no. 4: The Edenderry Local Area Plan 2017-2023 - Relevant Policies and Objectives**

EEP7 Secure connectivity between Edenderry with county, regional and national cycle networks via the Grand Canal Greenway and to capture positive economic, social and cultural benefits associated with this connection.
2.9 Connecting People – Connecting Places – A Strategy for Walking and Cycling in Offaly

MTP2 Support the principles and objectives as set out within the Connecting People, Connecting Places Offaly County Walking and Cycling Strategy 2015, (including any updated/superseding document), in particular the attainment of a cycling/walking connection for Edenderry to Tullamore, Lough Boora and the River Shannon via the Grand Canal Towpath, and also to the National Cycle Network via Kilbeggan Branch of the Grand Canal.

The preparation of the walking and cycling strategy was pursued in order to meet objective STAO-01 in Volume 1 of the Offaly County Development Plan 2014-2020:

STAO-01 It is an objective of the Council to carry out and implement:
• A walking and cycling strategy for County Offaly.
• The existing Birr and Edenderry Walking and Cycling Strategies.

2.10 Midlands Cycling Destination (Offaly) - Feasibility Study, 2016.

This Feasibility Study was commissioned by Offaly County Council, in partnership with Bord na Móna and Coillte on the development of a major cycling destination in the midlands of Ireland, and sets the clear ambition of establishing Offaly as a national and international destination for cycling. It identifies over 600km of potential cycle trails in Offaly with the Grand Canal Greenway being a Phase 1 priority, as well as the central spine of same.
3.0 Description of the Project

Offaly County Council proposes to develop a high quality shared cycle way and footway from Cloncannon, Edenderry (County Boundary with Kildare) to Digby Bridge at Cappancur, Tullamore through upgrading the existing towpaths of the Grand Canal (Refer to Image no. 5 & 6 above). This will be an extension to the permitted Part 8 which connects Tullamore to Lough Boora. 2015.

Map no. 1 Grand Canal Greenway Route - Phase 2
3.1 Site Description

The proposed route extends from Digby Bridge in Cappancur, along the southern towpath, eastwards to Ballycommon and onto Daingean where it crosses to the northern towpath at Molesworth Bridge and continues along the public road for just 500 metres to Castlebaragh Golf Club. From here, it continues along the northern towpath all the way to Rathmore Bridge in Edenderry where it connects in with the existing Edenderry shared Cycle and Walkway constructed in 2014 & 2015. From Downshire Bridge it keeps to the northern towpath and follows the Grand Canal Way to the county boundary with Kildare, in the townland of Cloncannon.

The route will connect with the approved Part 8 for the Grand Canal Greenway at Digby Bridge, which extends for 23km through Tullamore, and onto Lough Boora Discovery Park, which is currently under construction (part of).

3.2 Scheme Description and Layout

As outlined in the introduction, the proposal is to locate the cycleway and footway on the towpaths of the Grand Canal between Digby Bridge at Cappancur and the county boundary with Kildare east of Blundell Aqueduct, Edenderry. There is a 2km section at Edenderry which overlaps with the existing Edenderry Cycleway / Walkway.

The proposal entails the upgrading of the existing towpath, the majority of which is also a National Way-marked Trail (The Grand Canal Way) along the Grand Canal. Every effort under route selection was made to achieve as much off-road experience as possible for users. The proposed route uses bridge underpasses where possible to keep users off the public roads.

The proposal will connect in with the approved Part 8 from Digby Bridge to Lough Boora Discovery Park, thus affording the opportunity to cycle on a predominantly traffic free route from Edenderry to Lough Boora via Tullamore encompassing 56km of Grand Canal Greenway, in the future.

The proposed development, which is the subject of this Part 8, will include the following:

1. Improvements to the existing towpath along the Grand Canal through the provision of a suitable surface i.e. Quarry Dust, Surface Dressing or Asphalt (Tarmac) depending on local conditions for pedestrian and cyclists use.

2. Provision of traffic safety measures and signage to facilitate safe pedestrian and cycling crossings at Digby Bridge, Cappancur and Molesworth Bridge, Daingean (all protected structures).

3. Provision of access controls (pedestrian/cycling friendly gates) road makings, traffic calming measures on the proposed cycle/walk way.

4. Provision of safety railings at Cartland Bridge, Trimblestown Bridge, Rhode bridge, Toberdaly Bridge, Killeen Bridge and Ballycommon Bridge. (All protected structures).

Surface Types

Tailored surface finishes shall be employed to ensure a durable and fit for purpose trail in accordance with National Trails Office Guidance. These surfaces will not only improve accessibility, but provide a more robust surface that will be able to withstand increased footfall and traffic. The proposed surface types to be used on the cycleway are as listed below;

Type A: Compacted Stone and Dust (unbound)
Type B: Surface Dressing (bound)
Type C: Asphalt/Tarmac (bound)

Type A which is an unbound surface of compacted stone and dust would be used primarily in rural areas along sections of the route that will be trafficked by pedestrians and cyclists only.

Type B will be a bound surface dressed surface and will be applied to any existing deteriorated bound surfaces. It will also be applied to existing sections of the canal bank that will be used by limited traffic in the future.

Type C will be asphalt/tarmac and will be constructed primarily in urban areas, areas of road widening incorporating shared use surfaces and approximately 15m either side of approaches to road crossings.

Excavation on the towpath will be to a minimum as part of this proposal due to the embanked stretches. It is planned to construct on (build on) the existing surface in consultation with Waterways Ireland. There may be some areas scraping off of initial surface would be required.

Grade

The proposed route will be a flat easy route, showcasing Offalys section of the Grand Canal
Image no. 7: Existing Surface at Castlebarnagh Golf Course approach, Daingean

Image no. 8: Existing Grass towpath at 24th Lock Southern towpath, Cappuncur.
Image no. 9: Existing Gravel towpath at Cappyroe, Daingean.

Image no. 10: Surface Dressing (Edenderry Harbour completed 2014-2015)
3.3 Road Crossings and Access Controls

In order to ensure that current agricultural practices can be carried out and that the residential amenity of those who live along the proposed route is not adversely affected, a number of access controls or gates are to be provided over the length of the route (refer to schedule of drawings for locations). These access controls are specifically designed for cyclist/pedestrian use while still providing sufficient security to the facility. A detail of the proposed access control is shown adjacent in image no. 11 and is provided in the Part 8 Drawings provided with this submission (Ref drawing no. CR/0016). This is an example of gates used at Ballydrohid along the Grand Canal Greenway Phase 1, constructed in 2017.

Signage will be erected at the appropriate junctions and interfaces along the proposed route where a health and safety audit has identified the exact signage requirements. The audit is to take place post construction, ahead of the proposed route being fully operational. There are likely to be a limited number of ‘dismount’ signs erected where it is identified as appropriate and necessary.

The proposed route interacts with the public road in limited cases and albeit in lightly trafficked routes. The route selection prioritised that the route would be as much off-road as possible.

Two exceptions exist;

- 500m from Molesworth Bridge to Castlebarnagh Golf Course;
- 1km of public road from Killeen Bridge Eastwards.

However, subject to an audit, additional measures to ensure the safety of users may be installed.
3.4 Local Residential and Agricultural Properties
The route traverses through the town of Daingean and the northern fringes of Edenderry. For the most part the proposal traverses through the open countryside, and large tracts of bogland, including two areas of operating Bord Na Móna bogs.

The towpath is designated as public road on 2 sections (indicated in the accompanying schedule of drawings) and as a result is currently trafficked by vehicles. In addition, where access to agricultural land is currently only available via the towpath, these sections are trafficked by agricultural machinery and livestock (for the most part on an infrequent basis). Lay-bys/ pull in bays for cyclists/walkers may be required to accommodate Agricultural traffic at certain sections, subject to future design, following a safety audit.

The proposal has been designed to minimise impact on residential amenity and agricultural practices.

3.5 Coarse Angling Clubs
A no. of Coarse Angling Clubs use the Grand Canal towpath on a regular basis for competitions and recreational purposes. The Edenderry Coarse Angling Club hosts a series of annual competitions for circa 15 days of the year usually around the summer holiday period and bank holiday weekends. There are 3 sections along the proposed route where this occurs.

- Ballybrittan to Rhode
- Rhode Bridge to Toberdaly Bridge
- Toberdaly bridge to Killeen Bridge

In order to facilitate the Anglers and future Greenway Users, on competition days, in consultation with Waterways Ireland, it is proposed to accommodate appropriate car parking provision at suitable locations along to the towpath to allow both Anglers and other users to enjoy the Grand Canal Towpath at these 3 locations. Exact location and details to be finalised at construction stage in consultation with Waterways Ireland and the Angling Clubs.

3.6 Public Lighting
No lighting is proposed under the current scheme.

3.7 Ducting
Appropriate ducting may be provided for at construction stage subject to agreement with Waterways Ireland and relevant stakeholders.

3.8 Amenity
Any future proposals for amenity areas along the canal, including jetties / marina facilities for boat users, car parking, landscaping, or barge facilities etc. will require planning permission.

3.9 Architectural Heritage
There are a number of protected structures located within or adjacent to the proposed route. The proposed development will materially affect the character of the following protected structures: Proposed works the 6 Bridges listed in Table no. 5 below, relate to safety rails being installed as the width of the towpath is not wide enough to accommodate a 3m track. Signage advising users of the narrow width at this location is also likely to be put in place on both approaches to the bridge.
The proposed development will be within or adjoining the curtilage of the following protected structures, listed in table no. 5.

Table No. 5: Structures on RPS materially affected by proposed works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offaly RPS Ref</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Townland Name</th>
<th>NIAH Ref</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-009</td>
<td>Cartland Bridge</td>
<td>Monasteroris</td>
<td>14911007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-010</td>
<td>Trimblestown Bridge</td>
<td>Rogerstown</td>
<td>14911008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-012</td>
<td>Rhode Bridge</td>
<td>Rathcobican</td>
<td>14911011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-016</td>
<td>Toberdaly Bridge</td>
<td>Toberdaly</td>
<td>14911016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-030</td>
<td>Killeen Bridge</td>
<td>Castlebarnagh Little</td>
<td>14911012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24-015</td>
<td>Ballycommon Bridge</td>
<td>Ballycommon</td>
<td>14911004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A number of the structures listed in the table No. 6 above are located on the opposite towpath i.e. not directly adjacent to the route. The installation of signage and the upgrading of the surface are the main works to be undertaken as part of this proposal.
There are no proposals to carry out works to any of the structures listed above, Table no. 6. The proposed route is located adjacent to the structures. The installation of signage and the upgrading of the surface are the main works to be undertaken as part of this proposal.
4.0 Environmental Assessment

An EIA Screening has been undertaken as part of this proposal and accompanies this report. The EIA Screening Report identified that, due to the design of the project, there is no potential for significant impact on the following environmental categories:

- Human beings;
- Fauna and flora;
- Soil;
- Water;
- Air/climatic factors;
- Landscape;
- Cultural heritage, including the architectural and archaeological heritage and cultural heritage, and
- The inter-relationship between the above factors.

Please refer to the accompanying EIA Screening Report for full information.

4.1 Flora and Fauna

An Ecological Cumulative Impact Assessment (ECIA) undertaken by Roughan O Donavan and commissioned by Waterways Ireland, was published in March 2016, and includes an ecological survey of the full corridor of the Grand Canal. This is inclusive of the section between Digby Bridge at Cappancur and the County Boundary with Kildare.

A Habitats Screening Report was produced to fulfil the requirements of EU Habitats Directive (92/34/EEC). The screening document provides the information required in order to establish whether or not the proposed development is likely to have a significant impact on the Natura 2000 sites in the context of their conservation objectives and specifically on the habitats and species for which the Natura 2000 sites have been designated.

The habitats identified along the section of the Grand Canal between Digby Bridge and Co. Boundary with Kildare at Cloncannon, Edenderry, are as follows:

- TPM: Towpath Mosaic
- FW3: Canals
- WN2: Oak-ash-hazel woodland
- WN6: Wet willow-alder-ash woodland
- WN7: Bog Woodland
- WS1: Scrub
- WL2: Treelines
- GA2: Amenity grassland
- GS1: Dry calcareous grassland
- GS2: Dry meadows and grassy verge
- HD1: Dense Bracken
- PB1: Raised Bog

TPM (Towpath Mosaic): bespoke habitat category devised between Waterways Ireland and ecologists in consultation with NPWS to describe the vegetation along the towpath from the canal edge to either the built/gravel road or the hedgerow/treeline/tree boundary (if there is no built road). The TPM comprises several habitats changing in quick succession moving away from the canal. It includes reed bed, marsh, wet grassland and drier grasslands. This habitat was devised as each of the level 3 habitats occurring within the TPM are linear and grade into each other over such a short distance the habitats cannot be delineated separately on a habitat map.

The full suite of Habitat Maps identifying 4 Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESAs) is available in the EIS Screening report accompanying this proposal.

The AA Screening concluded that the project will not have a significant negative effect on European Sites and will not negatively affect their conservation objectives or Integrity.
4.2 Water
The proposed shared walking and cycling route is located along the Grand Canal. As a result, a number of mitigation measures have been identified within this report to ensure that water quality is maintained within the canal and adjoining rivers and streams (See Section 5 of this report for further information).

4.3 Ecology
As outlined in section 4.1 above an Ecological Cumulative Impact Assessment (ECIA) of the full length of the Grand Canal has been undertaken by Waterways Ireland, in 2015. The results of this assessment inform both the AA screening documents and EIA screening documents. The ECIA is available for inspection on request.

5.0 Environmental Mitigation
As a result of the EIA and AA screening reports and in order to ensure the proposed cycleway and footway does not significantly impact on the environment, the following mitigation measures will be included within the Works Contract to ensure protection of the environment, in particular flora and fauna, landscape and visual and cultural heritage.

All construction works, relating to the activities and construction sequence outlined in Section 2.1.1 of the EIA Screening Report will be undertaken in accordance with the following:

- Inland Fisheries Ireland’s Requirements for the Protection of Fisheries Habitat during Construction and Development Works.
- CIRIA (Construction Industry Research and Information Association) Guidance Documents:
  - Control of water pollution from construction sites (C532)
  - Control of water pollution from linear construction projects: Technical Guidance (C648).
- NRA Guidance Documents:
  - Guidelines for the Crossing of Watercourses during the Construction of National Road Schemes.
  - Guidelines for the Protection and Preservation of Trees, Hedgerows and Scrub Prior to, during and Post Construction of National Road Schemes.

Measures for Ecologically Sensitive Areas
Four Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESAs) have been identified, by Roughan O Donavan Ecological Cumulative Impact Assessment (ECIA) commissioned by Waterways Ireland, 2016) close to or adjoining the Grand Canal Towpath.

- ESA 8: an area on the southern canal verge between Locks 26 to 25 which corresponds to the annex 1 habitat ‘orchid rich-calcareous grassland’;
- ESA9 Ballycommon Woodland and Bog: the second ESA is located adjacent to the northern towpath and comprises a mature woodland and recovering bog habitat;
- ESA 10 Daingean Fen: the third ESA is located close by to the southern bank of the canal and comprises species rich grassland, grading into poor fen.
- ESA 11 Toberdaly Bog. This comprises raised bog with an area of cutover bog south of the Grand Canal.
Part 8 – Grand Canal Greenway – Phase 2

Measures to protect these areas are as follows:

- Any stripped topsoil from the species rich grassland areas should be stockpiled, covered and stored (outside species-rich areas, ESAs, areas prone to flooding or areas with tall herb vegetation). This topsoil may contain a species-rich seed bank and should be utilised, where possible, as backfill or landscaping material and allowed to regenerate naturally (ECIA pg. 45)
- Prior to works commencing these shall be identified from the maps and fenced off to restrict access of construction staff, machinery and other equipment/material from these areas.
- Prior to the commencement of construction, a briefing outlining the sensitivity of this ESA and the requirement to adhere to measures intended to safeguard the status of this ESA will be provided to all construction staff.

Non-Native Invasive Species

The presence or otherwise of non-native invasive species has been identified along the proposed Greenway Route during habitat surveys undertaken in July and August 2015. Any vegetation clearance or construction works to be undertaken in the vicinity of areas identified as supporting non-native species will be undertaken in accordance with the Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) (formerly the National Roads Authority (NRA)) guidance measures for the control and management of noxious weeds and non-native invasive species (see NRA, 2010).

Measures to Protect Water Quality & Surface Water Bodies

- A no. of aqueducts occurs along the Greenway Route - These aqueduct cross over watercourses associated with the catchment area of the Shannon, Barrow and Boyne. To prevent the ingress of any surface water or dust emissions to these watercourses during the construction phase temporary silt trap and impermeable barrier will be placed along the edge of the aqueduct while dust screens will be placed over the aqueduct guardrails.
- Suitable prevention measures should be put in place at all times to prevent the release of sediment to the Grand Canal and other drainage channels associated with construction areas and migration to adjacent watercourses. To reduce erosion and silt-laden runoff, where possible, natural vegetation buffers between the construction footprint and the Grand Canal and other drainage channels and divert runoff from exposed excavated areas shall be created.
- Disturbance to natural drainage features should be avoided during the construction and/or maintenance of routes.
- Excavated material will not be stored immediately adjacent to watercourses.
- During route maintenance no construction activities should be undertaken at watercourse crossing in wet weather conditions.
- Any refuelling or lubrication of machinery will not be undertaken within 50m of a watercourse.
Other Measures to Minimise Disturbance during Construction

Any excavations and/or vegetation removal will be minimised during construction and/or maintenance works.

Construction machinery should be restricted to public and/or site roads. As a general rule, machinery should not be allowed to access, park or travel over areas outside the footprint of proposed walking/cycling routes.

Where necessary drainage waters from construction areas should be managed through a series of treatment stages that may include swales, check dams and detention ponds along with other pollution control measures such as silt fences and silt mats.

Where vegetation associated with treelines, hedgerows, individual mature trees, scrub or woodland is required, this shall only be undertaken outside the breeding bird season, between March and August inclusive.

Where extensive areas of ground are to be exposed during route construction or maintenance, dust suppression should be undertaken during periods of dry weather.

All chemical substances required during construction and/or maintenance works will be stored in sealed containers.

Spill kits will be required on site during construction and/or maintenance works.

Disseminate information on sensitive ecological receptors, such as sensitive habitats, reeding upland birds etc. occurring adjacent to or in the wider area surrounding routes. This information will aim to educate recreational users on the conservation status and sensitivities of such receptors to encourage responsible usage of routes.

Where necessary provide landscaping to minimise potential disturbance to sensitive species.

Planting of vegetation screens and the management of existing hedgerows and treelines to screen sensitive species habitat i.e. nesting sites, from routes will be undertaken.

Provide route facilities, such as trail-heads in areas away from sensitive habitats and species.

Architectural Heritage and Landscape

All design features will be sympathetic to the protected structures identified as being materially affected: Cartland Bridge, Trimblestown Bridge, Rhode Bridge, Toberdaly Bridge, Killeen Bridge, Ballycommon Bridge.

Further consultation will be undertaken with the Architect and Heritage Officer from Offaly County Council at detailed design stage.
6.0 Public Consultation Process
From Thursday 29th March 2018 to 30th April (both dates inclusive), plans and particulars of the proposed development will be available for inspection or purchase at a fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of making a copy during office hours at the following locations:

1) Offaly County Council, Planning Section, Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road, County Offaly.
2) Tullamore Municipal District, Acres Hall, Cormac Street, Tullamore, County Offaly.
3) Birr Municipal District Office, Wilmer Road, Birr, County Offaly.
4) Edenderry Municipal District Office, Town Hall, Edenderry, County Offaly.
5) Tullamore Library, O’Connor Square, Tullamore, County Offaly.
6) Daingean Library, Main Street, Daingean, County Offaly.
7) Ferbane Library, Ferbane, County Offaly.
8) Kilcormac Library, Kilcormac, County Offaly.

The plans and particulars are also available to view online at [www.offaly.ie](http://www.offaly.ie). From Thursday 29th March 2018 to 30th of April. Submissions or observations with respect to the proposed development dealing with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area in which the development would be situated, may be made in writing to The Director of Services, Planning Department, Offaly County Council, Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road, County Offaly, up until and including the 15th May, 2018.

7.0 Project Delivery
It is estimated that the proposed scheme will cost in the region of € 2.2 million. It is anticipated that construction would take a period of approximately 2 years. The delivery of the project is largely dependent on funding from public streams. Offaly County Council is actively pursuing various funding streams such as Government Departments and Fáilte Ireland, and has made a strong submission to the National Greenway Strategy to have the Grand Canal Greenway identified as a major regional route.

8.0 Health and Safety
An audit of the route will be undertaken post construction to determine the exact requirements relating to the shared walking and cycling route.

Image no. 19. Grand Canal Towpath adjacent to Molesworth Bridge, Daingean.