

BRENDAN WYSE (SECRETARY, ALLENWOOD TIDY TOWNS)

GRAND CANAL GREENWAY

FEEDBACK FROM CLANE LOCAL ELECTORAL AREA



Introduction

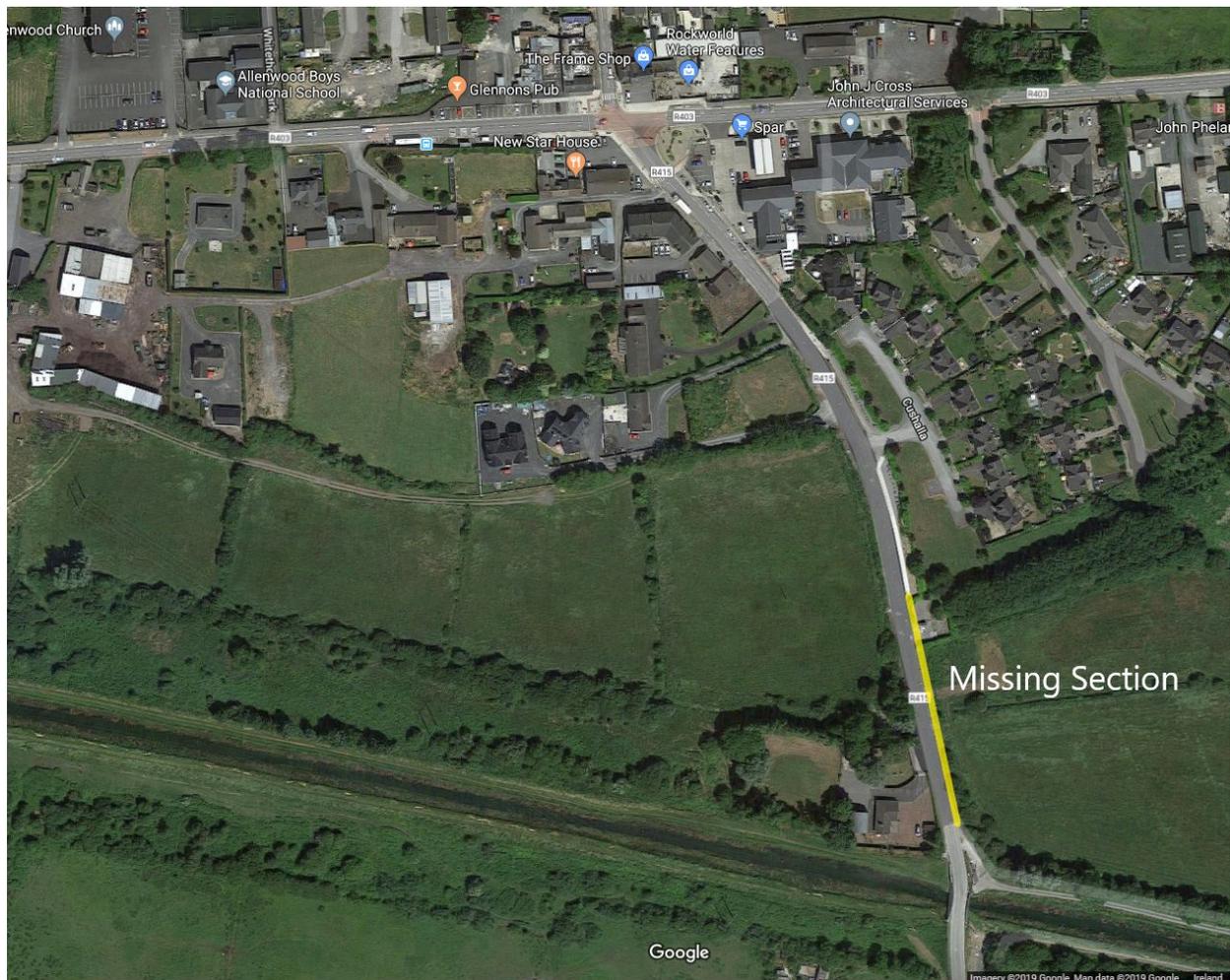
Since the announcement by Kildare County Council of the Part 8 Planning Application for the Grand Canal Greenway and a request for feedback from local communities, Brendan Wyse, secretary of Allenwood Tidy Towns has been gathering the thoughts of members of the communities living adjacent to the Grand Canal. This report contains the details of the feedback that was received.

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Linking Allenwood Cross to the Greenway

For many years now, Allenwood Tidy Towns and several individual members of the community have requested the completion of the footpath from the end of Cushalla estate on the Newbridge Road (R415) to Bond (Derrymullen) Bridge.

Our requests have been consistently refused, for a variety of reasons, but mainly due to lack of funding. This section of pathway, marked in the map shown below, must now be put in place to safely link the Greenway with Allenwood village, and should be included in the project costings for the Greenway.



The missing section of footpath is less than 150 metres long and there are several reasons why it is essential that it is built, as outlined below.

Justification for Completion of Footpath to Bond Bridge

Traffic Safety

Even with the present usage of the Grand Canal by locals and tourists alike, there is heavy pedestrian traffic from Allenwood Cross to the canal by the R415. It is not unusual to see walkers and runners on the road just before the bridge, sometimes with dogs, and even on dark winter evenings. The author has regularly seen people trying to reach the canal bank with streams of motor traffic, including many heavy haulage vehicles, coming over the bridge unaware that they are there. It should also be noted that the area is unlit.

Circular Walking Route

In 2018, Allenwood Tidy Towns identified a project to work with Kildare County Council and housing developers in the area to establish a circular walking route around the village. This section of roadway is part of that walking route and providing the missing section of footpath will also serve to complete the section of the route from Allenwood Cross to Derrymullen Bridge. The Greenway itself will now form part of the second stretch of the route. (See Appendix A).

Accessibility for Buggies, Wheelchairs & Mobility Scooters

It will be incredibly difficult, if not impossible, for the buggy, wheelchair and mobility scooter users of Allenwood to reach the Greenway without this pathway being made available. It would be unacceptable that certain groups are excluded from using the Greenway due to our village lacking the final 150 metres of infrastructure that is necessary.

Access to village services from Greenway

Whilst we believe that the three reasons given above in themselves justify the pathway, it is now imperative that in order to safely allow Greenway users to reach the services of Allenwood village, that a safe footpath is put in place. The village offers food, drink and toilet facilities. Such services are in short supply along the Greenway.

It should be noted that planning permission has been granted for a pub and cafe on the western side of the R415 opposite Cushalla and that the existing pub and shops are often used by walkers and cyclists as it stands.

Linking Allenwood Village with Allenwood South, Killina and Lullymore

The section of the Greenway from Bond Bridge (known locally as Derrymullen Bridge) and Shee Bridge (known locally as the Skew Bridge) deserves special attention. This segment of the Greenway will be strongly welcomed by locals in this area as it provides a safe link to Allenwood Village that the people of Allenwood South, Lullymore and Killina have been without for several years.

It was not uncommon at the end of the last century to find children cycling to Allenwood National School from the Shee Bridge. It was also quite safe to walk the main R403 road, as traffic was light.

In recent decades, traffic has increased in volume and in size and has made the road unsafe for cycling and walking. This has been exacerbated by the opening of the Drehid Waste Management facility which has caused a massive increase in large haulage vehicles using the road. As a result, it is no longer possible for residents of Lullymore, Killina and Allenwood South to walk or cycle to the nearest post office, schools, church and shops, which are all located at Allenwood Cross.



The new link to Allenwood Cross will be welcomed by the families of Allenwood South, Lullymore and Killina but in order to maximise the value of this particular leg of the

Greenway, we ask that the council treat the section as a special case and consider the following points:

Considerations for the pathway from Shee Bridge to Bond Bridge

Public Lighting on the Pathway

We ask Kildare County Council to make an exception to the decision not to install any lighting along the Greenway, for this particular leg of the Greenway. Because this section will be used regularly by locals to reach the main village, it will be used on dark evenings, as well as during daylight hours.

Consider the installation of solar powered LED street lamps along the stretch to keep the route lit at all times. This would also serve the purpose of reducing any anti-social behaviour on the route.



The company that supplies solar powered LED lighting, such as that in the image shown, lists the Great Western Greenway as one of its clients (see <https://electricsskyline.ie>). This would indicate that it is not unusual to have sections of a greenway lit up, where appropriate.

Public Lighting on the Bridges

We request that Kildare County Council collaborate with Airtricity SSE to have public lighting installed on both sides of Shee Bridge and Bond Bridge as part of the Greenway project. As previously mentioned, the Greenway will be utilised by the wider Allenwood community outside of daylight hours, given the important link it will provide. It is crucial that the bridges are well lit to ensure the access points to the Greenway are safe for pedestrians and cyclists entering and exiting near both bridges.

Prioritisation

When the project planning for the Greenway commences, and consideration is being given as to which sections of the Greenway should be completed in what order, it is asked that the segment referred to be completed in the first stage of development.

The reason for this being that this particular section, as outlined previously, can serve an immediate benefit to a large population of people in advance of the entire Greenway being completed. Not only by providing the link from Allenwood South to Allenwood Cross, but by also extending the already popular walking route from Robertstown to Derrymullen up to Allenwood South.

There are health benefits as people walk to the village rather than using the car. There are also environmental benefits, as the use of motor vehicles to bring children to school, attend mass, go to the post office and visit the local shops will be reduced, resulting in less carbon emissions.

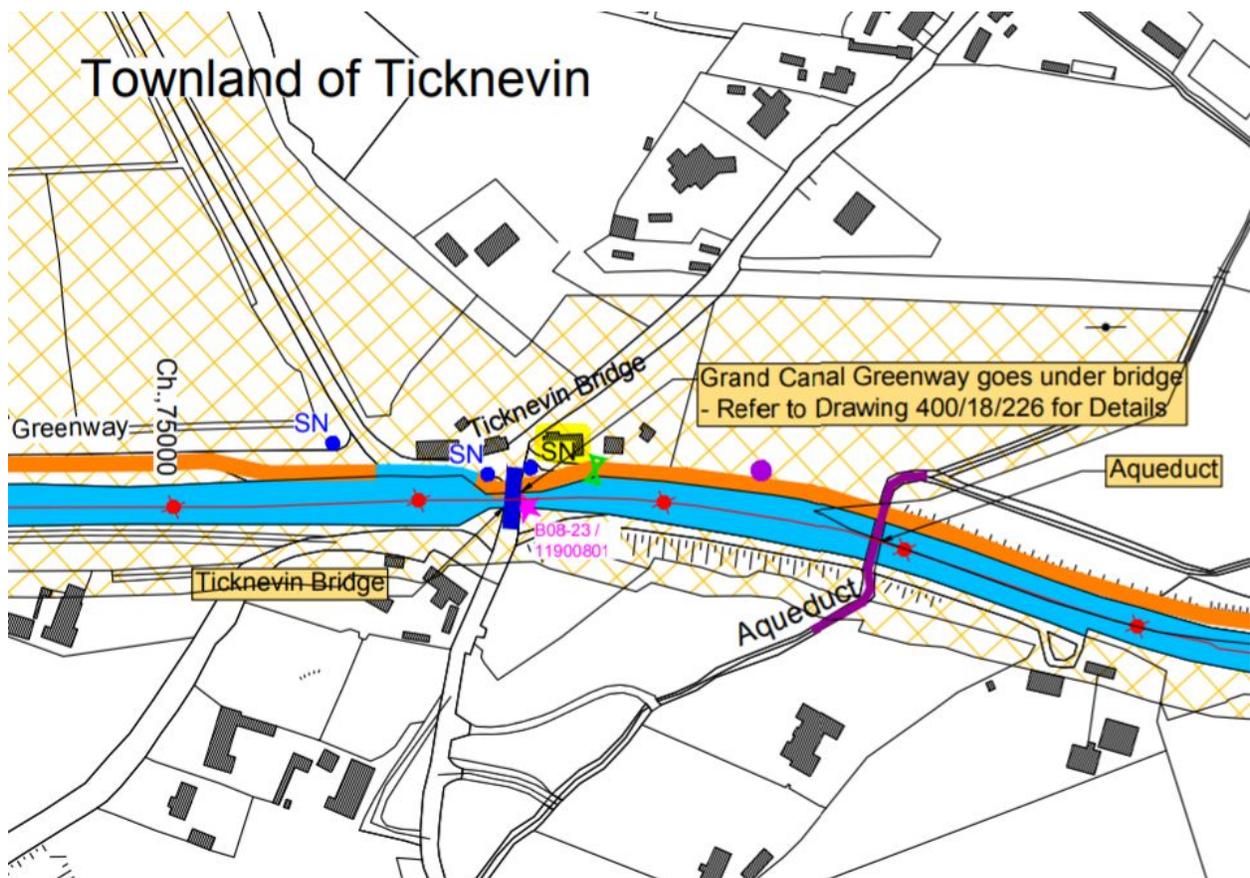
It can be argued that no other section of the Greenway will provide such an immediate positive impact.

Controlled Access Gates

Just to the east of Ticknevin Bridge a controlled access gate is to be installed. There is a residence further eastwards that will have need to use this gate on a regular basis (Eircode W91 N70A). Kildare County Council should consult with residents whose access will be somehow restricted, before proceeding with installing any such gates.

Flood prevention at Ticknevin Bridge

It is noted from the plans (Drawing No. 400/18/212) that the Greenway will pass under Ticknevin bridge. At this point, the existing towpath outside the dwelling highlighted in yellow on the image below (Eircode W91 W0D2), is substantially higher than the base of the dwelling itself. Water will naturally flow from the towpath down into the entrance of this house.



Before work commences on this section of towpath, Kildare County Council should consult with the owners of this property and agree the necessary works to eliminate any possibility of flooding of this residence due to a raised surface or the replacement of the existing surface with one that is less permeable. Some makeshift drainage exists at this location at present and at the very least a proper drainage system will be required.

Side Roads

The Greenway, when completed, will bring a large number of visitors to our county. It is important that we leave a lasting impression on those visitors. When they return home to tell their friends and family about County Kildare, we would want their message to be overwhelmingly positive. Therefore, it is important that the areas in the vicinity of the Greenway look well and are properly maintained.

Without doubt, the various community groups and Tidy Towns associations will play their part in achieving this, but we must also ask that Kildare County Council now place the same level of focus on the adjacent areas to the canal. Priority must now be given by the Roads Department to upgrading and repairing all side roads off the main roads along the canal.

In the Killina area, many of the side roads are in a dreadful state. Some are so-called “private roads”, but the residents living on these roads pay property tax and have paid hefty levies (e.g. one paid almost €15,000 in 2006) when building their homes. See the roads highlighted in yellow, near Hamilton’s Bridge, which are an example of this.



The road highlighted in yellow in the image below, lies just east of the Cock Bridge near Donore. It is apparently a public road which has also been neglected. It is another example of an area that will require prioritisation if we want visitors to leave Kildare with a positive impression.



Consultation with Canal Residents

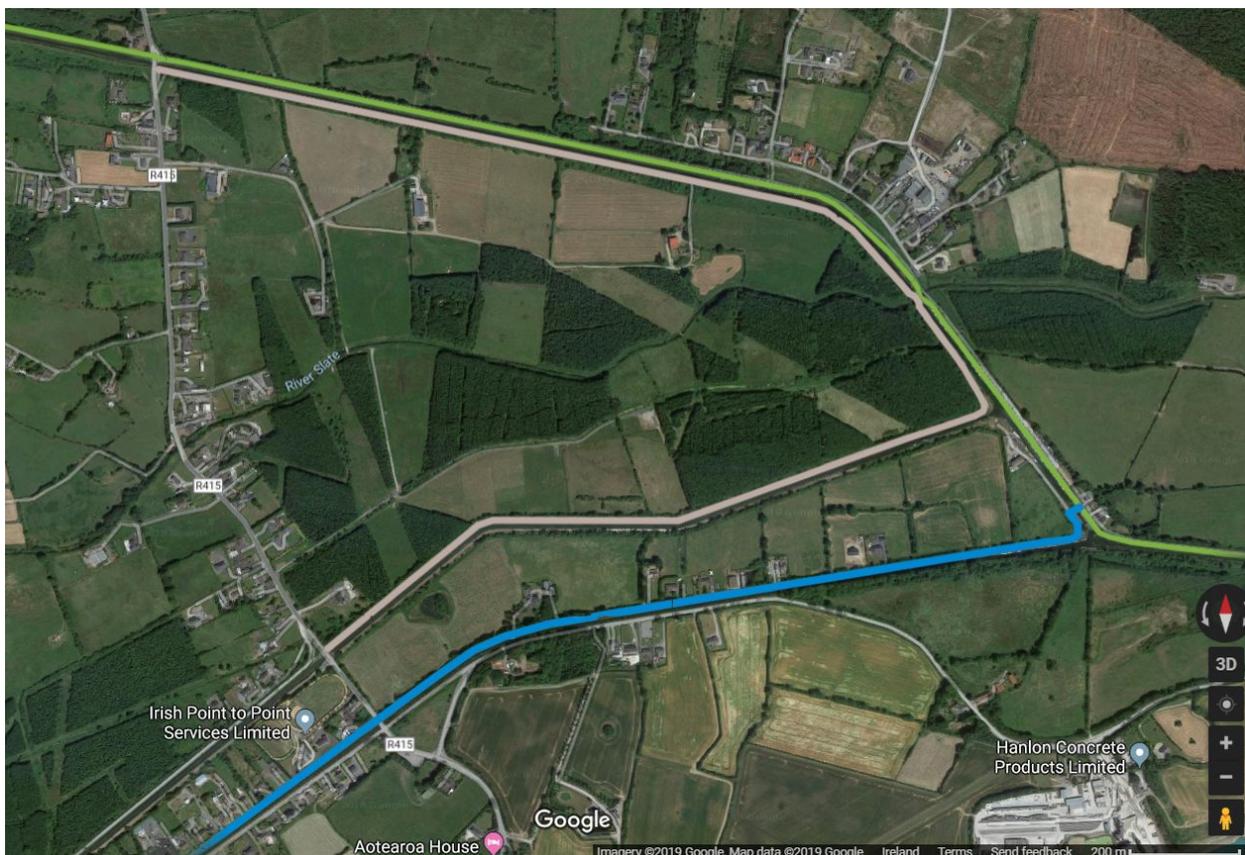
Many of the residents living right beside the Grand Canal are disappointed that they were not consulted in advance of the preparation of the plans. Kildare County Council should reach out and engage with the small number of residents living on the canal banks as soon as possible. Most appear to be strongly in favour of the Greenway but would appreciate it if the council would work with them on the project.

Bridleways

The author was contacted by a substantial number of horse riders in relation to the planned Greenway. Whilst none strongly objected to the Greenway, all were concerned that the canal towpaths are becoming increasingly inaccessible to horse riders and that the Greenway will only exacerbate the situation.

Horse riders regularly use the towpaths, in a safe manner, alongside walkers and cyclists. Given the prevalence of equine related businesses all over Kildare, and the fact that we are known globally as “The Thoroughbred County”, it would be amiss of us to not give any consideration to equine tourism and equine related amenities.

Possibly, in conjunction with the proposed Greenway, a plan for bridleways could also be devised. Some of the banks opposite the established towpaths are already used by horse riders and could be designated as bridleways. An example is the route shown in brown below. The Greenway is marked in Green and the Barrow Blueway is marked in Blue.



Horse riders already use this route and if it were designated as a bridleway and extended even further westwards then it could become, in itself, a tourist attraction.

We ask that Kildare County Council and Waterways Ireland give some serious thought to bridleways. Particularly in relation to the placement of gates on the towpaths. Whilst it is completely necessary to prevent motor vehicles from accessing sections of the towpaths, regardless of whether these towpaths are part of the Greenway or not, the question should be asked if this could be done without blocking the way to horse riders also.

In many cases, removable bollards or pillars would serve the purpose of blocking cars but still allowing horses to pass through.

Noise & Privacy

Some of the residents living beside the canal already have many people passing by their homes on a daily basis. With the expected increase in numbers, some residents are concerned with the expected increase in noise and lack of privacy.

Kildare County Council must propose a means to address the concerns around noise and privacy. It has been suggested that trees or hedges could be used in some places. Signage notifying visitors that they are entering residential areas and should be respectful of that will be necessary in some areas.

By consulting directly with the small number of homeowners living beside the Grand Canal, the council would be able to come to an agreeable resolution to these concerns. Again, it should be noted that residents are strongly in favour of the Greenway but would want some action taken to reduce the negative impact of an increased volume of visitors.

Camping Facilities / Bicycle Hire

A couple of individuals have pointed out the opportunities for enterprises such as Camping Facilities and Bicycle Hire Centres along the Greenway. If Kildare County Council would use its expertise to make recommendations on locations for such services and provide support to people willing to start up such businesses, then that would be welcomed.

Opportunities at Lowtown Marina

Lowtown Marina will become a hub for tourist activity now, as the starting point for the Barrow Blueway, and a main point of interest on the Grand Canal Greenway. A development plan does not exist for the marina and it is certainly now time that such a plan should be created, possibly as part of the Robertstown development plan.

A number of interesting opportunities for new tourism enterprises exist at Lowtown Marina and surrounds. A local boat owner sees the possibility of boat trips being available on the canal again. Many locals will remember fondly the barge trips that once ran from Robertstown to Lowtown Marina.

One of the barges used for those trips, The Eustace (Registration No. 52M), is now moored at Lowtown Marina. Robertstown Community Amenities Association (RCAA) has initiated a project to restore The Eustace. Even moored and non-mobile, the barge could serve as a small museum with displays about the history of the barges of the Grand Canal. It could also serve as a tea room.



The author is currently seeking to add support to RCAA from Allenwood Tidy Towns and Robertstown Tidy Towns to complete this restoration project. Appropriate grants may also be available, and will be sought. We would appreciate the support of Kildare County Council with this undertaking, given that it would be an excellent point of interest on the Greenway.

Grass Verges

One older resident contacted the author to ask that consideration is given to those who would prefer to walk on grass as it is more comfortable for them. If the upgraded surface can be installed so as to maximise the remaining grass verge then that should be done. Some pedestrians would prefer to use that surface where it is available.

Toilet Facilities

Consideration should be given to making toilet facilities available at points along the Greenway. Such facilities should be clearly indicated by appropriate signage. There are toilet facilities available at Robertstown and Allenwood and some private toilets at Lowtown Marina but there are none on the stretch from Sallins to Robertstown and from Allenwood to Ballyhagan / Edenderry.

The council should consider installing public toilets at other locations on the Greenway.

Pump Track

A cycling enthusiast pointed out the potential for a mountain bike / BMX Pump Track as an amenity somewhere off the main Greenway. The author has noticed that the sloped bank just west of Lowtown Marina seems to be used for this purpose to some degree already.

It might be an interesting tourist attraction for the council to consider.

Bond Bridge Path Width

It is proposed that the Greenway will pass underneath the north side of Bond Bridge (known locally as Derrymullen Bridge). The ledge under Bond Bridge is much narrower than at other bridges at just over 1 metre.

It is so narrow that it will be difficult for families with young children and bicycles or pets to safely bring their travelling party underneath. It is noted that the use of safety rails was considered but was decided against in order to safeguard the protected structure that is the bridge itself.

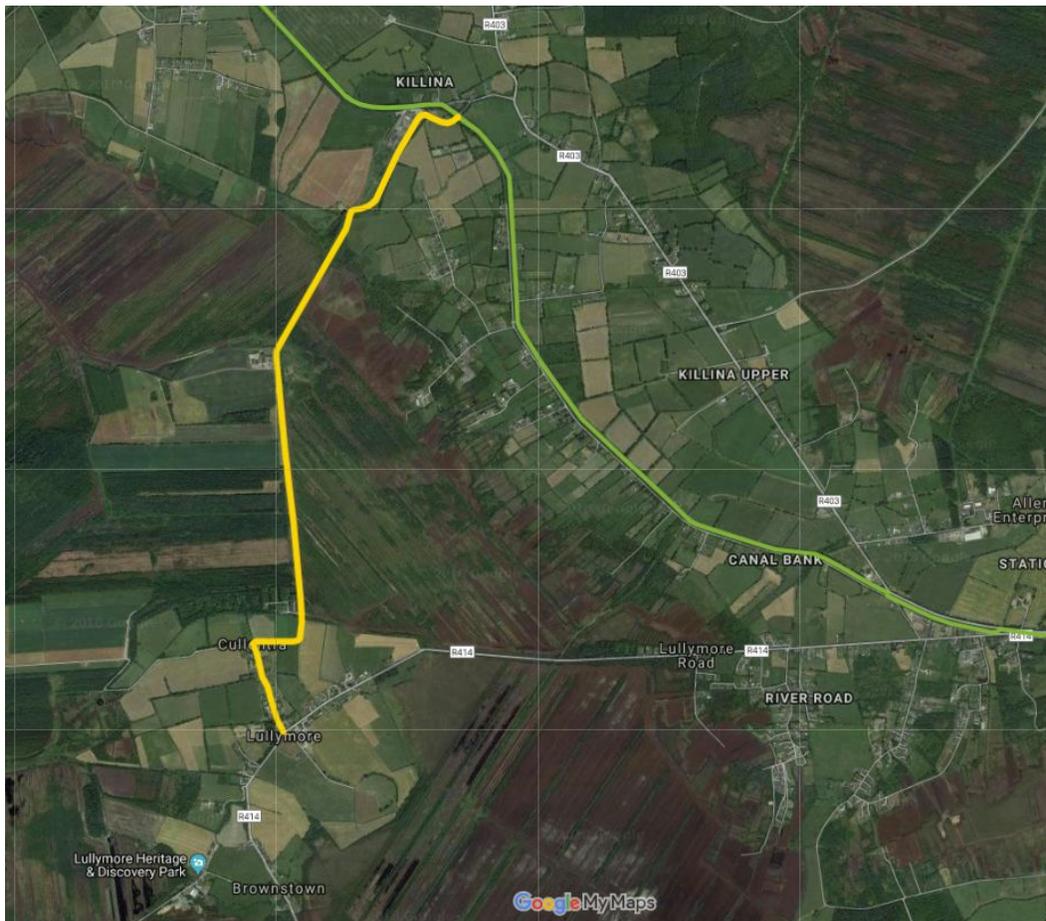
Some action must be taken to make the crossing under Bond Bridge safer. It is simply too narrow to use as it is. We ask Kildare County Council to revisit this bridge and reconsider the safety at this point. Safety rails seem to be unavoidable if it is insisted that the Greenway will pass under the bridge here. An exception may need to be made in the case of this particular protected structure.



Link to Lullymore

Nuala Madigan, Education Officer of the Irish Peatland Conservation Council (IPCC) proposed a walking route from Allenwood to Lullymore a few years ago. Nuala wrote a report on the subject and has been discussing it with Allenwood Tidy Towns. Her report is attached with this submission.

The Grand Canal Greenway will now mean this route has become a very serious possibility. The most difficult section of the plan was enabling a safe path from Allenwood to Lullymore Bridge near the Briquette Factory. Once at this point, a lane exists from Lullymore Bridge to the Bog of Allen Nature Centre in Lullymore, which is regularly used by locals. This lane does, however, pass through the Lullymore Briquette Factory and it is private property owned by Bord na Mona. It would also need to be agreed in consultation with the residents living on the lane. It is just one suggested option though, there may be others.



Kildare County Council must give some consideration to this potential link to the Bog of Allen Nature Centre and Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park and work with the IPCC and Bord na Mona to provide a proper and signed pathway to Lullymore.

Car Parks

There are currently several makeshift “car parks” at various points along the canal and generally these locations are used in a way that does not impede on the residents living beside the canal.

Occasionally however, some residents are finding that the entrance to their home is partially blocked by cars and quad bikes. The author reported one such case, near Lowtown Marina, to Waterways Ireland recently.

At present, there is a car park at Lowtown Marina and there is adequate parking at Ticknevin Bridge. Cars can also be seen parked at Cock Bridge and Digby Bridge on a regular basis.

None of the parking spots are officially designated car parks and are therefore not properly surfaced and clearly marked. There is no signage to indicate where visitors should park and where they should not park. Waterways Ireland and Kildare County Council need to increase awareness of the available car park in Lowtown Marina.

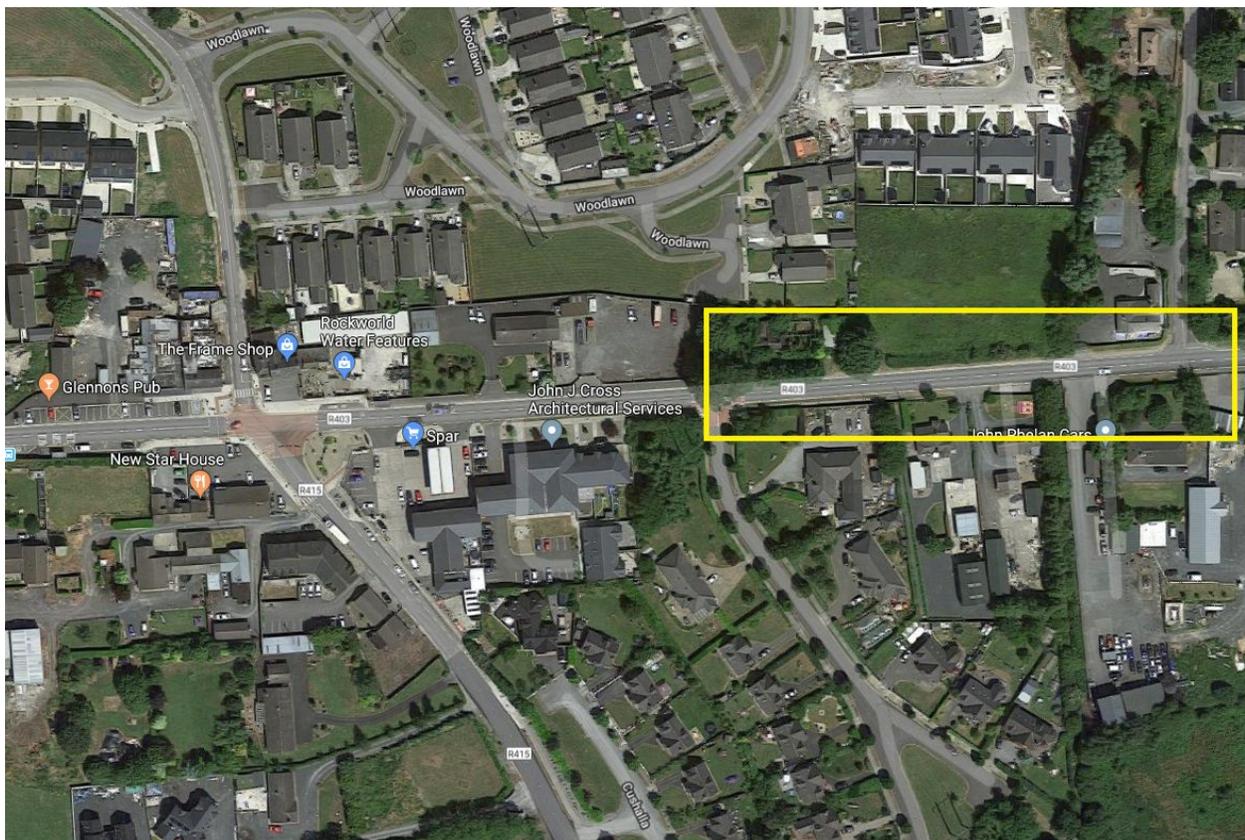
The plan makes reference to potential passing points for agricultural vehicles but makes no reference to potential car parks. With the expected increase in visitors it is now time to begin to properly manage the various parking locations along the canal.

We ask that Kildare County Council identify the makeshift parking spots and upgrade them to a good standard and we ask that Kildare County Council and Waterways Ireland work with residents to prevent illegal parking that will impede access to their homes.

Improving Accessibility from Allenwood

The local area plan for Allenwood (2017 - 2023) mentions under paragraph T1 that tactile paving and new footpaths will be provided along the main Edenderry to Clane road (R403). An absence of such a footpath on particular part of the R403 means that accessibility is currently limited from Allenwood North to Allenwood Cross and consequently the Greenway.

We ask that the council now review the area marked by a yellow box on the map below with a view to implementing that particular task that is mentioned in the local development plan. There is at least one elderly gentleman using a mobility scooter in the Allenwood North area who cannot safely access the local shops, never mind the Greenway.



Barriers

Whilst the canal is a beautiful amenity to have in our part of the county, it can also be dangerous. From time to time, the canal has been the cause of fatalities in the local community. Many of these fatalities have been caused by road traffic accidents.

Some barriers exist at various locations on the Grand Canal but we ask that an assessment of barriers is done with regard to the Greenway project. The council might identify locations where new barriers are required to protect both pedestrians and motorists alike.

Biodiversity

Allenwood Tidy Towns hosted a walk and talk on the subject of biodiversity by the Grand Canal last year. The talk was given by Nuala Madigan, Education Officer of the Irish Peatland Conservation Council. If there is one downside to the Greenway, it is the possible negative impact that it will have on the flora and fauna living on the canal and its banks.

We presume that Kildare County Council and Waterways Ireland have expertise in this area among their staff and we ask them to seek out and work closely with local experts, such as Nuala Madigan to limit any negative impact on biodiversity.

Conclusion

We thank Kildare County Council for taking the time to invite public submissions on the plans for this exciting project. There is overwhelming public support for the project and everyone wishes the council and Waterways Ireland every success in implementing it.

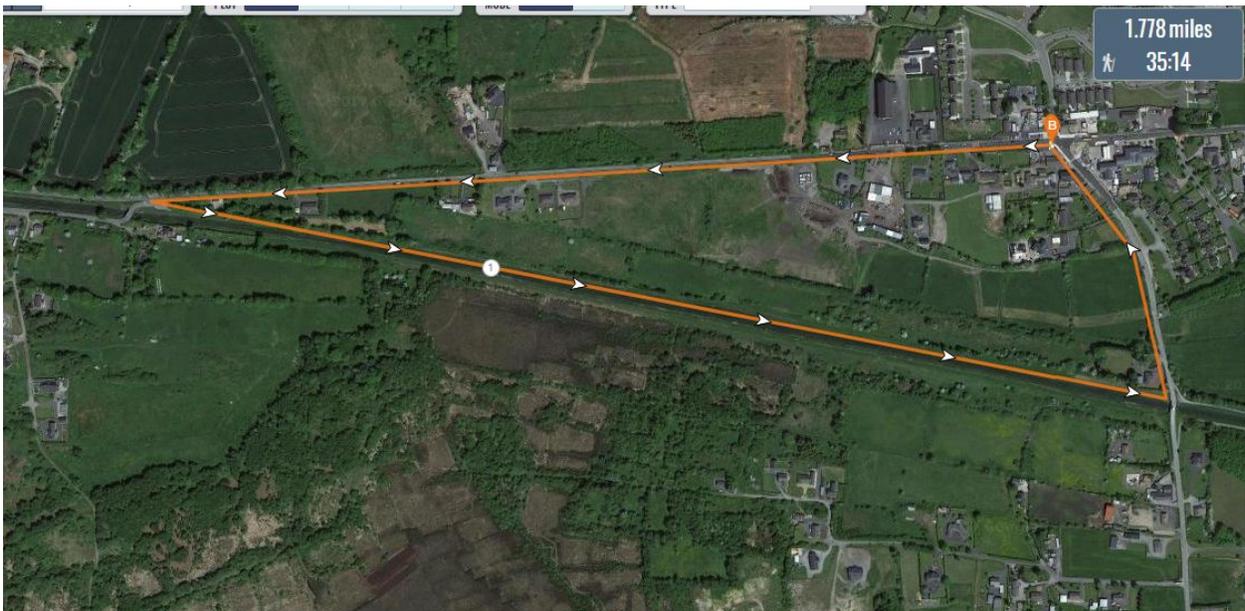
We hope that our ideas and suggestions will go some way towards making the Grand Canal Greenway one of the most popular in Ireland.

Appendix A

Allenwood Circular Walking Route

The proposed walking route for Allenwood was identified by Allenwood Tidy Towns as a key long term project for the village and was a prominent entry on our strategic plan in last year's submission to the Tidy Towns competition.

The announcement of the Grand Canal Greenway was very well received by Allenwood Tidy Towns, as it was immediately recognised that the Greenway would be running along one of the segments of the proposed route and would deliver the entire segment of the walking route along the canal.



The complete route will run from Allenwood Cross to Bond Bridge to Shee Bridge and back by the R403. A new housing development on the R403, just west of Allenwood Church, will provide some of the footpath from Allenwood Cross to Shee Bridge. It will be some time before this section will be completed to reach the Shee Bridge but Allenwood Tidy Towns will be pursuing this over the coming years.

The importance of the missing section of footpath from Cushalla to Bond Bridge can be seen when the walking route is viewed as a whole. Together with the Greenway, that 150 metre section of footpath delivers most of the walking route for the project.