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Below please find the IWAI's submission regarding repurposing George's Dock, Dublin. This document was previously submitted to Dublin City Council's Draft Dublin City Development Plan 2022-2028. In the recent past, George's Dock was considered by DCC as a location for a white-water kayaking centre. However, IWAI feels there is considerable potential and opportunity to breathe new life into the Dock as a floating liveaboard community and canals tourism hub.

1. Introduction & IWAI History

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

IWAI has a long history of working with statutory agencies, funding groups, and community interests with regards to promoting access to the waterways. In recent years this has taken the form of working

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

2. Liveaboard Boat Communities

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

With only twenty official liveaboard berths in Dublin's Grand Canal Dock demand is exploding and to-date both Waterways Ireland and 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. **Planning sensitively for these growing communities is long overdue.** A vast number of people have applied to Waterways Ireland for a liveaboard berth and have created a long waiting list. Many others have simply bought a barge and had it craned into the canal, moved to a desired location where they have begun their liveaboard lifestyle.

Poor conditions

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

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.

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, it only takes one vessel to continually pump its toilet directly into the canal to pollute the whole area. Dublin urgently needs a fully serviced liveaboard marina where people can live safely and securely in this fast expanding vibrant community.

3. George's Dock – Proposed Marina Location



Artists impression of barges moored in George's Dock

Location location location

The right location is critical to the success of a liveaboard community, Georges Dock is that perfect, ready made location. A sensitive and appropriate blend of a heritage structure with modern use. It is a use totally befitting this heritage structure, this plan will aim to adapt buildings/structures to fit with

modern living standards. We strive to protect the heritage of our old buildings but the built heritage of our canals' and waterways structures are too often excluded from this deserved consideration.

Currently George's Dock is an area of black water surrounded by buildings, but imagine that space brought to life with a vibrant, colourful liveaboard community. Adding to the Reshaping of our Capital City, the plan should allow for Compact Growth. Given the size of these barges/living spaces, they could not be more compact. A community of circa 80-100 berths could fit in the space available at George's Dock's inner and outer docks. Liveaboards are by nature, very close knit quiet communities. This would be well suited to the location, the inner dock is surrounded by residential apartments which would also benefit from this vibrant low rise community to look out upon. The location is very well served by bus, LUAS, DART and rail links, the proximity to public transport will be crucial. Residential boaters living in a tiny home, close to nature, encourages them to reduce, reuse and recycle, thus contributing to **a very low carbon footprint which places liveaboards to the forefront of residential energy savers.**

The situation of a liveaboard marina at George's Dock also fits very well with the principals of Dublin City Council's Water Animation Strategy for the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock SDZ, however the explosion in liveaboard communities is not yet considered in the Water Animation Strategy. A knowledgeable water-based community centred within the SDZ will compliment and help to drive the success of other water-based activities with the zone.

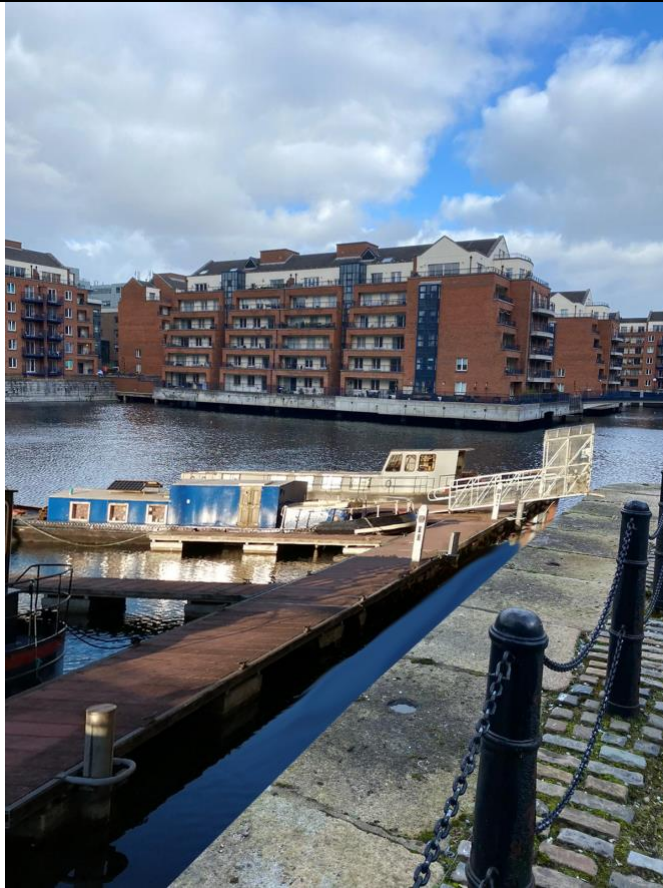


Proposed moorings in George's Dock

Infrastructure

The development of a liveaboard marina in this location would preserve and enhance the existing structure of the Dock in a sensitive marrying of old with new. A network of floating jetties throughout the dock would be required, equipped with bollards supplying each pair of barges with power and water. A broadband link would be essential also. The jetties would be sensitively lit with lights atop the service bollards. A pumpout station at a dedicated berth would allow boats to move there temporarily as required to empty their holding tanks. Holding tanks are fitted to barges to store all sewage/black water. All barges would be required to reach and operate to a given standard. At present the Dock entrance is sealed from the Liffey by a temporary concrete wall. This is not original and would have to be removed. The existing lock would be restored to working with new stop gates installed. The restored lock would then resemble the restored sea lock at Spenser Dock, where the Royal Canal meets the Liffey. The lock allows the water level in the George's Dock to be maintained as boats come

or go out onto the Liffey. As with Spencer Dock, the outer lock gate becomes a part of the city's flood defences. One or two persons would run the marina and operate the Lock when required. **A handful of berths could be reserved for short stay visitors such as hire boats or travelling boaters coming from the Shannon**, this would help encourage and develop much needed tourist links between the Shannon and Dublin. Boats may wish to winter in Dublin before travelling back to the Shannon or Barrow via the canals.



Artists impression of barges moored in George's Dock

Low-carbon Community

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

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

Alongside this, the lifestyle of a liveaboard boater is in general very eco-friendly. There is less often household waste generated due to space restrictions. Water usage is kept to a minimum as the size of the water tank limits daily usage. This focus on renewable energy, low waste and water conservation results in a very low carbon lifestyle.

Rent

These berths would generate income for DCC. In this location in the city centre a berth might be worth circa €3,000 pa. Being city centre berths in a prime location they would command that premium rate while serviced berths on the outskirts of the city should cost less depending on the location and distance from the city centre. It is important to control these prices so the berths don't succumb to market forces and become elitist, thus pricing many people with a genuine need to liveaboard out of the market. Even at reasonable prices, this development can fund itself and raise income for DCC. (Current rates for liveaboards in Waterways Ireland's dedicated berths in GCD are restricted by limits imposed within the current 1980's byelaws.)

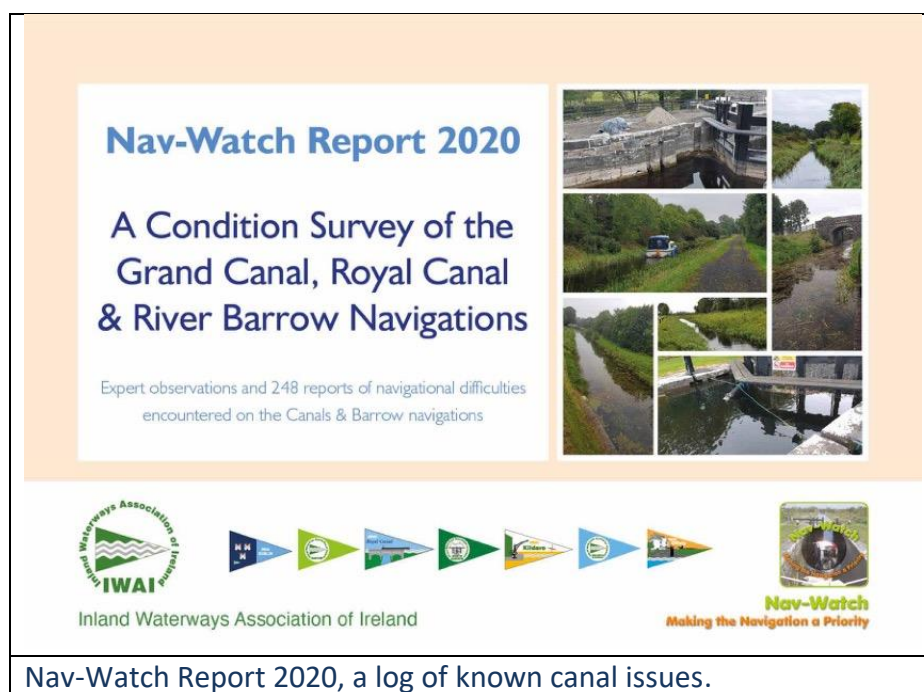
4. Year Round Boat Tourism Potential

Reading through the draft material for the Dublin City DP, the Royal and Grand Canals are only occasionally mentioned other than for their Greenway associations, this is the same currently in most CDP's for the counties through which these canals run.

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 six month season, April to September. The

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



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

Neglect

Looking at other capital cities around Europe we can see how much tourism has developed around their canals and waterway facilities. Water draws people to it, boats moving on that water have an

even greater draw. **Everywhere in Europe that there are canals traversing a city there are thriving communities and vibrant tourism attractions built upon the back of that draw to water... except in Dublin where it has been neglected.**

Future-proofing the canals network

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

Services and planning

As already mentioned in 3. above, barges need services. As one answer to our lack of housing stock this growing community is struggling without services and safe places to berth their homes. One of the more essential services is the availability of a dry dock in the city. Dry docks in the Dublin region on both canals have long since been demolished or filled in. There remains still the two Graving Docks in Grand Canal Dock. These heritage structures appear to be absent from the Dublin List of Protected Structures yet the adjacent three locks, the lockkeepers cottage and the surrounds of GCD are all listed. They may appear unkept and derelict, but only so because they are not being maintained and are being kept out of use. They are not defunct and are still viable. Currently if you have a barge in Dublin and discover a leak or require maintenance to the hull your only options are:

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

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

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

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

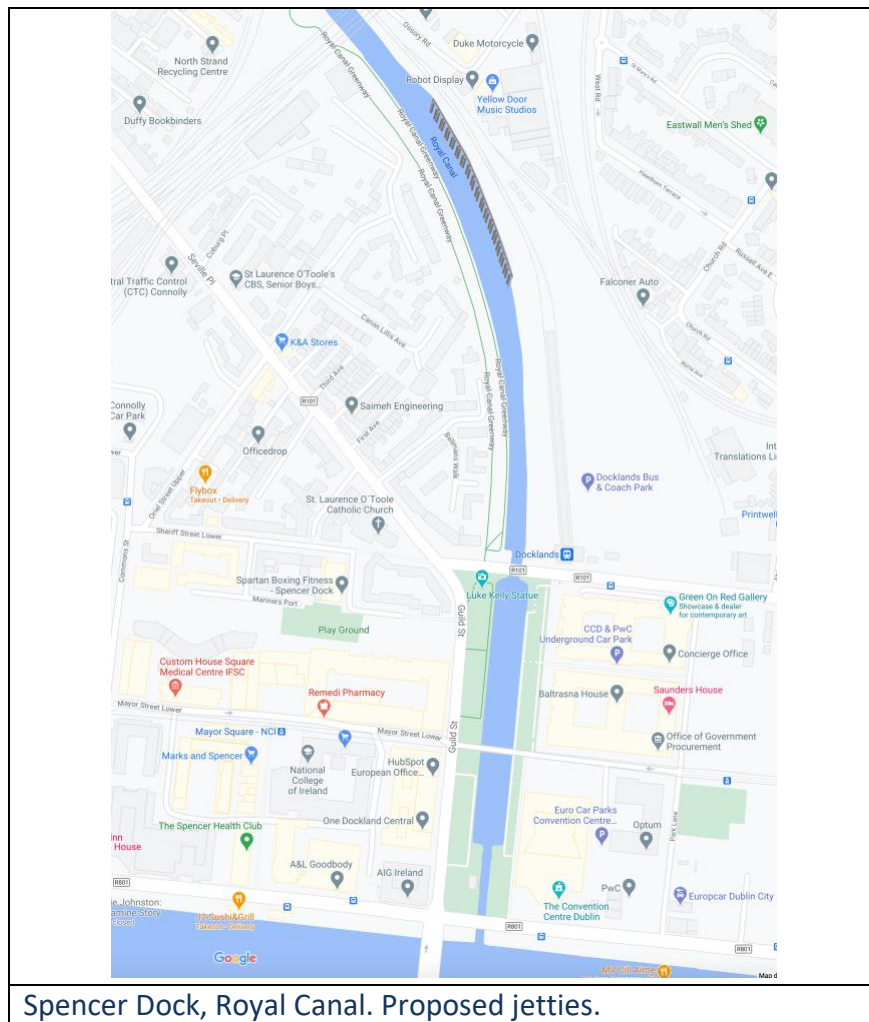
Potential and Opportunity

Now that plans for a white water rafting centre at George's Dock have been dropped by Dublin City Council there is a real opportunity to create something truly special here. As the city evolves and grows we are accustomed to losing familiar structures to the march of progress, small buildings give way to tall structures capitalising on location and higher densities. The suitability for this location would appear to tick every suitability box in Dublin City Council's recent Development Plan.

- a. The heritage structure would remain and be sensitively repurposed
- b. A close knit, vibrant community would be developed, offering well serviced locations to people who work in Dublin but who cannot afford to live there
- c. A canals quarter, which Dublin has been missing, would finally blossom
- d. This will become a vibrant tourist attraction alongside the EPIC Museum

5. Spencer Dock

Recent improvements including landscaping, canalside greenway upgrade and the provision of a pontoon/jetty in the northern end of Spencer Dock have been hugely successful in opening up the site and drawing the public in. The Dock features a very wide stretch of canal on the bend between the rail bridge and Sheriff Street Bridge. The eastern bank is inaccessible as it borders a rail line to the Docklands Station. This bank would be an ideal location for another small liveaboard community. The installation of floating jetties and services would transform the vista from the greenway opposite. A new arched pedestrian bridge across the dock would give safe access to those living there. Where there are liveaboards present and people constantly about, other water based activities will more easily flourish within the dock making it a safer more viable location for businesses, walkers, cyclists and tourists alike.



Spencer Dock, Royal Canal. Proposed jetties.

Newcomen Rail Bridge, Spencer Dock (aka The Effin' Bridge)

The Newcomen Rail Bridge in Spencer Dock is a short section of track which crosses the Royal Canal just below Lock No. 1. The Bridge sits at water level across the canal, completely blocking it. Five or six times per year, by arrangement, Iarnród Éireann raise the bridge on its four jacking posts at the corners to allow boat traffic to pass under. The bridge was installed prior to the reopening of the canal in 2010 and was adequate for the time. Since the canal's reopening the bridge has stifled any potential for casual traffic, tourist boats and easy access to the 146km length of the canal from the Dublin end.



Newcomen Rail 'Lifting' Bridge. In its usual position at water level, nothing can pass the obstruction. It effectively closes the canal entrance to Dublin traffic on 359 days of the year. It is lifted usually 6 times per year, for an hour or two each time.

The existence of this impass on the Royal Canal has deservedly earned it the nickname The Effin' Bridge! So named by the many people who have cursed its existence having been prevented from passing through Spencer Dock. Most boaters and canal enthusiasts know it by no other name.

It is hoped that the DART+West electrification and upgrade to the line will bring a permanent solution to this problem. An automated lifting bridge or drop lock beneath the track would resolve the issue. It requires that the agencies involved, Waterways Ireland and Iarnród Éireann cooperate to successfully resolve the issue. Pressure also from DCC, who have a vested interest in seeing the Royal Canal flourish, will help to advance the situation. This will positively contribute to DCC's Water Animation Strategy for the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock SDZ.



The Effin' Bridge! A barge finally makes its way past the bridge during one of the handful of arranged lifts each year. Travel between the Royal and Grand Canals should be accessible to boat traffic all year round.

6. The Importance of Through Traffic

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

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

The Spectacular *Green & Silver* Route

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

This Green & Silver waterways route between Dublin and the midlands², which is of huge potential for economic benefit and social activity for the regions it passes through. It comprises a waterways triangular route of the Royal Canal, a section of the River Shannon, Grand Canal and into Dublin (crossing the Liffey to get back to the Royal to complete the journey). This navigation route is of international significance, ignored by our tourism organisations, **it is the only circular boating route in Ireland and needs to be elevated to national planning status level to flourish**. This route runs right through Westmeath and the beautiful harbour in Mullingar, a significant stop-off point on the Royal Canal leg of the journey. **This is a spectacularly beautiful route and a bucket-list goal for many boaters. It's potential for development as a tourist route has yet to be realized**. To-date it has been the goal of the private boat tourist to complete this special route but the potential for commercial boat rental tourism remains untapped.

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



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 IWAI have been the main drivers behind the promotion of this route and administer the registration, log book and plaque allocations. However it is also the users of the Green & Silver route who have contributed to it becoming known in the boating community over the last decade (only possible since the reopening of the Royal Canal) and it is an excellent example of ‘ground up’ grassroots user based perspective being able to contribute to regional development, once the relevant support and resources to push it on further are considered and applied. It is 70 years since the publication of the original book so it is timely that in 2024 it gains more exposure.

	
Green & Silver Log Book	Green & Silver Certificate

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

The canals network in Ireland is some 200 years old, and still functioning in much the same way as it is in the early 1800’s. Manually operated lock are still operated the same way, the canal banks ensure the immediate natural environment is available and local history and heritage is on its doorstep in the

many towns and villages through which the Green & Silver route passes. We are very good at presenting our nation's history through documentaries, drama, theatre and so on, but there is nothing that can evoke the actual real experience of canal boating except to undertake it. We constantly hear said by German and British tourists on our waterways ***"You have the best waterways in Europe, why don't you use them more!"*** In the case of the canals, this could not be more true. We have failed to invest in their tourist potential so far.

The Green & Silver route runs through large and small towns such as Longford, Mullingar, Enfield, Kilcock, Leixlip, Maynooth, Naas, Edenderry, Tullamore and Athlone. These can offer local boating route points e.g. weekend hire boats, to use the local areas of the Green & Silver from those locations. Small businesses in this area are starting up and indeed somewhat established - notably Royal Canal Boat Trips operating trips between Clonsilla and Kilcock on the Royal Canal (ref <https://royalcanalgreenway.ie/listing/royal-canal-boat-trips/>); on the Grand Canal bargetrip.ie based in Sallins and more recently boattrips.ie on the Barrow adding to the long established Barrowline cruisers in Vicarstown. Also, as mentioned earlier, there are several hire companies on the Shannon that would be willing to send their tourist hire boaters into the midlands if they could be confident of access and reliability of use.

7. Expansion of the Record of Protected Structures

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

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

8. Conclusion

The Royal, Grand and Barrow have much more to offer tourists, be they travelling by boat or along the Greenways and Blueways. George's Dock has the potential to become a vital link for liveaboards on Dublin's canals and an addition toward the development of a Canals Quarter Tourism Hub in Dublin. It is an essential facility, urgently needed to serve a growing community which have been overlooked by Councils, Planners and the Land Development Agency thus far.