

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

Mar 2022

Contents

Main Headings	Page Number
• Remit	P2
• River Landscape Description	P3
• Bodies with legal responsibilities for River Blackwater	P7
• Consultation and feedback from with all relevant tourism stakeholders	P17
• Boating Infrastructure Needs	P18
• Current Tourism Sites and Experiences	P25
• Connectivity between River Blackwater and Ulster Canal and Lough Neagh	P33
• Economic Costs and Benefits	P40
• Recommendations and Funding	P45
• Appendices	P48

Remit

In October 2021 Mid Ulster District Council commissioned a Feasibility Study to undertake and produce a feasibility study with recommendations and indicative costs. displaying the potential of opening the Blackwater River and extending and developing its navigation remit. The main requirements of this study are to include:

The consultant(s)/company will be required to prepare a comprehensive Feasibility Study to include the following main areas, but not exclusive to:

- Identification of river boundary on relevant map/s
- Identification of any special environmental and landscape features, character and designations associated with the
- Identification of the main legal responsibilities the river in terms of planning, boating, tourism development, planning, navigation, water quality, flooding, dredging, waste disposal, and funding.
- Context of previous River Blackwater Studies and Recommendations
- Details of current tourism and community activity along the River Blackwater
- Consultation and feedback from with all relevant tourism stakeholders.
- Consult with stakeholders and identify technical requirements and cost estimates for the dredging of the mouth of the river and repeat maintenance costs. Requirements for Planning, NIEA, HED and dredged waste disposal permissions to be identified.
- Assessment of connectivity between River Blackwater and Ulster Canal, Lough Neagh Main Towns along river and Lough Neagh.
- Provide recommendations for potential development projects along the river.
- Identify potential funding sources and lobbying opportunities for all potential river project work.
- Complete project by Apr 2022 and provide a full presentation to Council elected representatives May 2022.
- The consultant(s)/company will attend an initial briefing meeting, and thereafter progress meetings as and when required, until the final completion of the study

Blackwater River Landscape Description

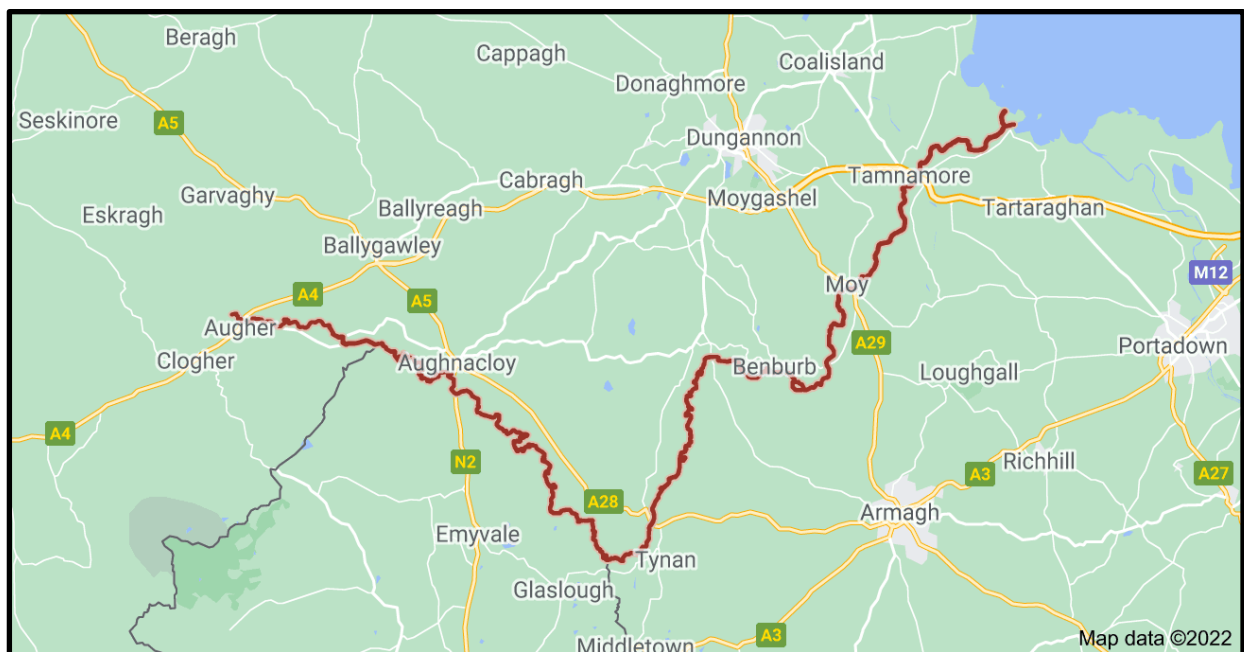
Landscape Description

The River Blackwater is 91.3 km (56.75 mi) long and rises north of Fivemiletown flowing into County Monaghan and then mainly through County Armagh and County Tyrone. It also forms part of the border between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The river also divides County Armagh from County Tyrone.

It is interesting to note that if the Blackwater's flow is measured on through its path via Lough Neagh 30 km (19 mi) and onwards to the sea via the 64.4 km (40mi) Lower Bann, the total length is 186.3 km (115.75 mi). This makes the Blackwater–Neagh–Bann the longest natural stream flow in Northern Ireland.

The Blackwater River Valley is described as a wet semi-improved and improved pasture landscape. There are two historic wooded designed sites, with large estate houses, at Caledon and the Argory. It is a peaceful, undisturbed, and unspoilt river valley with outstanding scenic qualities.

Map of Blackwater River

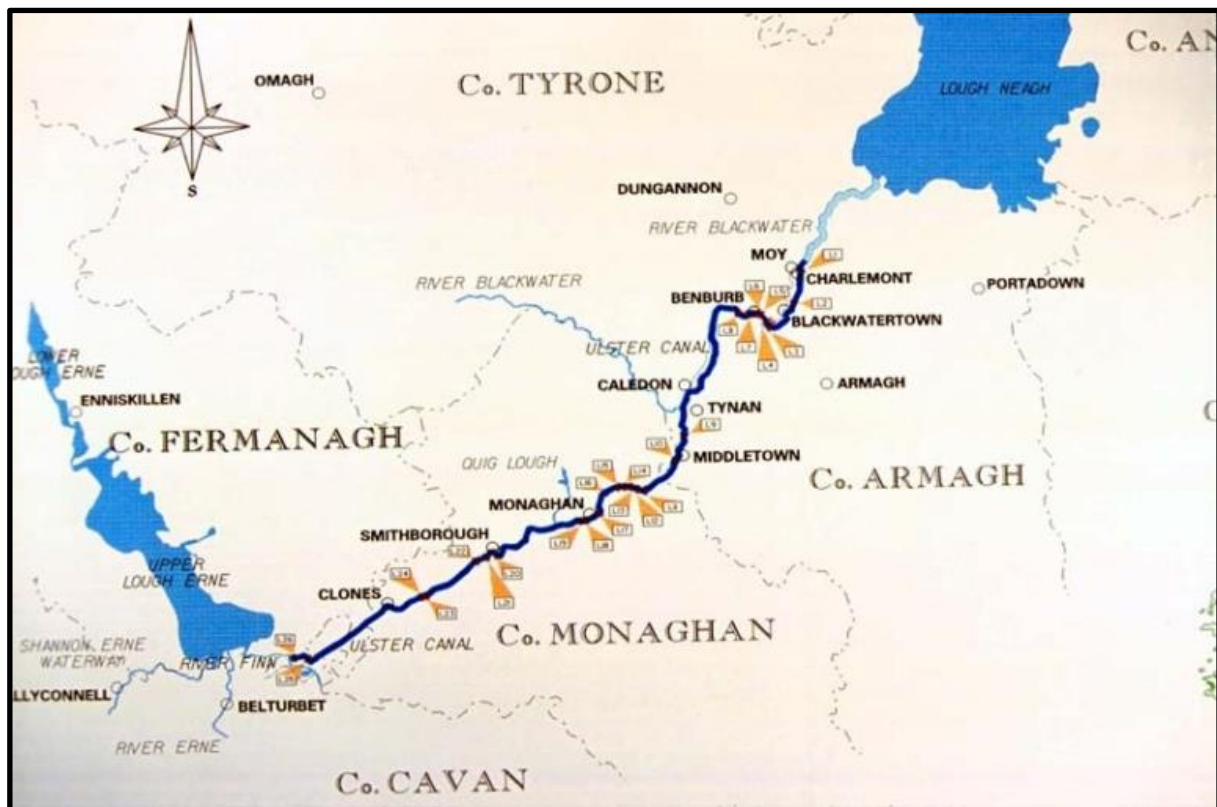


The Blackwater River and the Ulster Canal

The Ulster Canal was built between 1825 and 1842 and was 74 km (46 mi) long with 26 locks. It ran from the mouth of the navigable River Blackwater entering the constructed Canal at just below Charlemont to near Wattlebridge on the Finn River, south-east of Upper Lough Erne. The last boat used the waterway in 1931.

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

River Blackwater as part of Ulster Canal



Present Ulster Canal Development

In 2007 following a meeting of the North South Ministerial Council, the Ulster Canal Restoration project was added to Waterways Ireland remit. The organisation is now tasked with restoring the section from Lough Erne in Co Fermanagh to Clones in Co Monaghan. This is a stretch of approx. 13.5 kilometres.

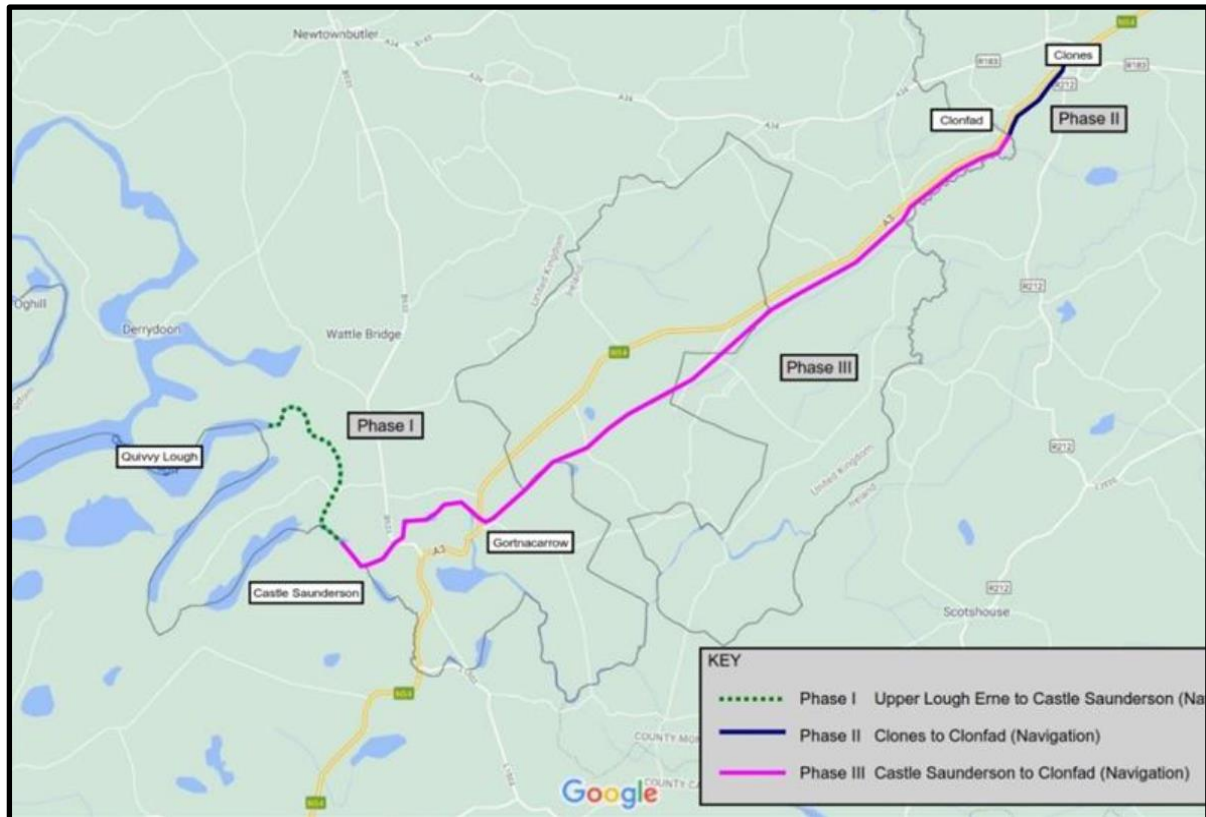
The restoration is being delivered in three phases due to planning and availability of capital. Phase 1 was completed in 2019 and is open to the public. It included c.2.5 kilometres of new river navigation along the River Finn between Quivvy Lough and Castle Saunderson. The work programme involved the dredging of the River Finn, construction of a new lateral canal and navigation arch at Derrykerrib bridge and the installation of new floating jetty at Castle Saunderson. This element of the project cost €3m.

Phase two of the Ulster Canal restoration focuses on the restoration of the canal between Clones and Clonfad in County Monaghan, including a canal basin marina and amenity area in Clones. In November 2020 Waterways Ireland submitted an application for the €12m funding for Phase 2 to the Rural Regeneration & Development Fund. In December 2020 the Shared Island team within the Department of the Taoiseach announced it would contribute €6m of the €12m with the Balance provided by Department of Rural and Community Development.

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

The Phase 2 work programme will include a sustainable water source, a new 40 berth marina, 2 new access bridges, repairs to an existing masonry arch bridge, c.1km of restored canal and towpath with a looped walk and an amenity area. The amenity area will have 40 car parking spaces, 8 bus/trailer spaces, a service block and picnic area and will be connected to Clones town.

Present Ulster Canal Development Proposals



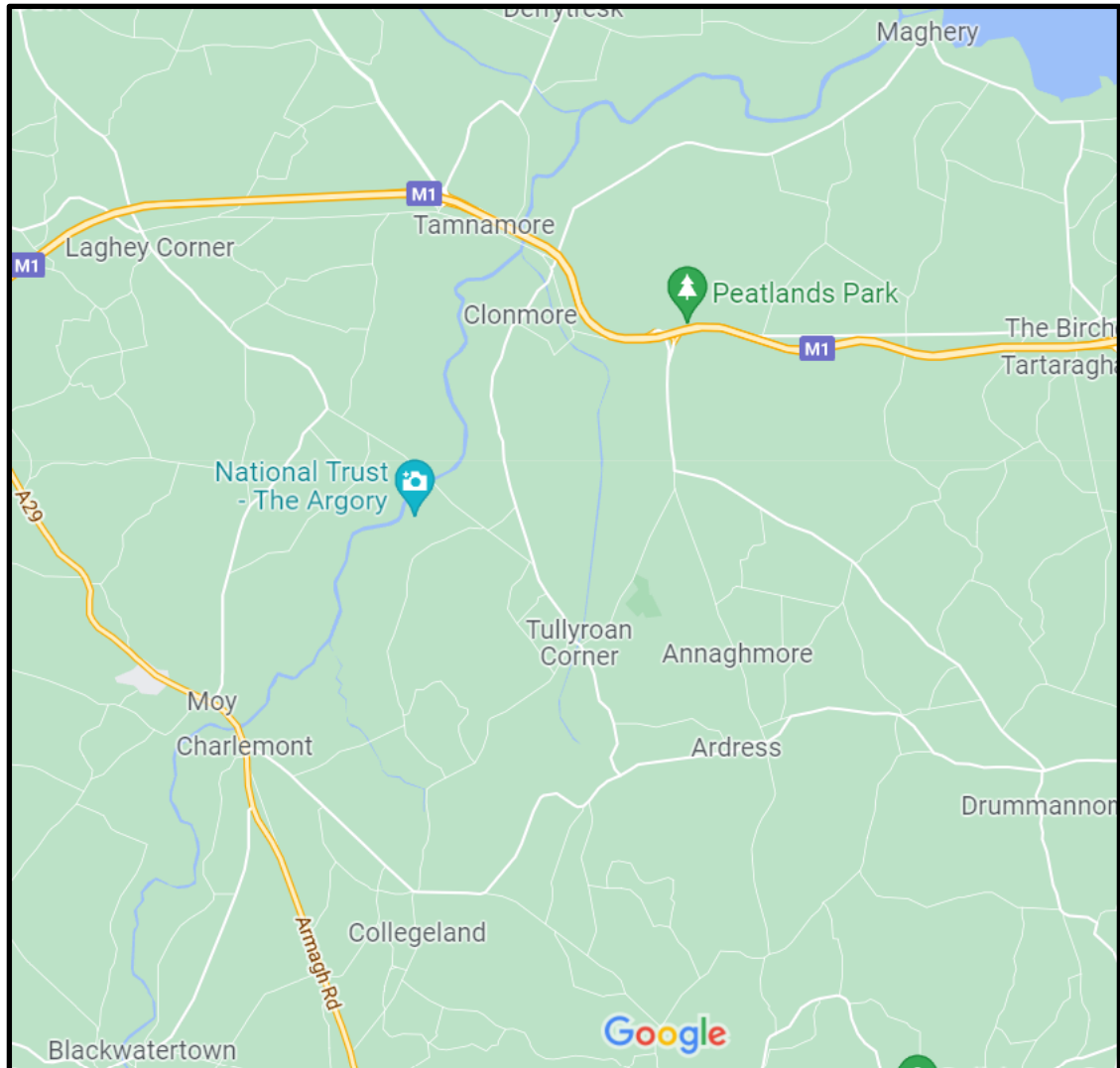
At present there are no plans to develop the Northern Armagh and Tyrone side of the Canal or navigable part of the Blackwater River. But it is important to note that Minister Mallon in her Ministerial Statements on Inland Waterways in the Northern Ireland Assembly at 10:45 am on 30th November 2021 stated that:

“Waterways Ireland has NSMC approval to explore the potential restoration of the stretch of the Ulster canal from Clones to Lough Neagh. It remains a clear commitment in the Stormont House Agreement, the Fresh Start Agreement and in New Decade, New Approach. I am very keen, funding permitting, to see that progressed.”

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

Navigable part of Blackwater River

The river blackwater is navigable for 19.5km from its mouth at Maghery Cut to Blackwatertown.



Bodies with Legal Responsibilities

The River Blackwater and its potential development could be complex and involve a number of players and bodies on the ground. It is important to identify and clarify the roles and legal responsibilities of these bodies to examine how they could all contribute to helping develop the river.

The following is a summary of the statutory remits of bodies and organisations that may relate in some way to the requirements of this study and any possible recommendations and proposals from it.

A) DFI Rivers

The legislative basis for the management of river flood risk and water levels in the River Blackwater and Lough Neagh is primarily through DFI Rivers, as determined by the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973 the Drainage (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 2005. The Drainage Order is focused on land drainage and flood alleviation and provides little scope for the delivery of the wider navigation safety and biodiversity objectives. DFI Rivers has also been identified as the Competent Authority for the delivery of the EU Floods Directive in Northern Ireland and has responsibility for NI Flood Risk Management Plans 2015-21,

Water levels in Lough Neagh are prescribed through Lough Neagh (Levels) Schemes made under section 1 of the Lough Neagh & Lower Bann Drainage and Navigation Act (NI) 1955. The current Lough Neagh (Levels) Scheme 1955 specifies that the water levels of Lough Neagh should be maintained between 12.45 metres and 12.60 metres above sea level as far as conditions of rainfall, wind and other natural causes allow.

The water levels and sluice gates are managed by DFI Rivers with the aim of always maintaining the level of Lough Neagh within the 15 centimetres control range whilst maintaining an adequate flow in the Lower Bann (when the sluice gates are closed a minimum flow to the Lower Bann is constantly discharged through a fish pass beside the sluice gates). Previous discussions with DFI Rivers officials indicate that they had no statutory responsibility to dredge the mouths of the Upper River Bann or the Blackwater River.

Following a period of severe rain and subsequent flooding in the period from November 2015 to January 2016 particularly on Lough Neagh and Lough Erne, the 'Review of Winter Flooding 2015-16' was commissioned by Michelle O'Neill MLA the then (Minister of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in March 2016. Because of this major flood, the Strong Report "Review of Winter Flooding" (Northern Ireland) 2015-2016 was drawn up with a number of recommendations. One of the main recommendations in relation to the River Blackwater and Lough Neagh was "Procurement of a Hydraulic Model of Lough Neagh flows, leading to a review of the statutory water levels in Lough Neagh".

B) Department For Infrastructure

The Department for Infrastructure (DFI) exercises no functions in relation to the Blackwater River, although it does have ownership of and custodial responsibility for those remaining sections of the Lagan and Coalisland Canal and is also the sponsor department in Northern Ireland for Waterways Ireland.

Its only statutory remit in relation to the River Blackwater and Lough Neagh is to maintain the entrance to the Six Mile Water River. It does have discretionary powers under part 3 of the Water Order 1999 (Northern Ireland) article 41 and under this legislation it maintains 47 navigation markers on the Lough as a public service. The previous Department with this responsibility, the Department for Culture Arts and Leisure, did work more strongly and in partnership with local authorities and others to develop its water-based leisure potential, including grant aiding a number of projects along the river including e.g., Maghery Bridge, Coalisland Canal tow path, and River Blackwater Canoe Trail and “Review of Aids for Navigation on Lough Neagh.”

However, recently the Department for Infrastructure has taken on the challenge of its limited discretionary remit and engaged positively with the Lough Neagh Partnership and the two main Councils, Mid Ulster District Council and Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council to examine the opportunity of funding through the DFI Blue Green Programme, for the dredging of the river mouth. All parties are in the process of examining this option. The Lough Neagh Partnership has also started early discussions regarding the DFI regarding the improvement of the existing markers on Lough Neagh and at the entrance to marinas and rivers including the Blackwater River.

C) Boat Safety and Navigation

The River Blackwater and Lough Neagh do not come under the remit of the Waterways Ireland and as such they are not part of a navigation authority. Under the terms of the Good Friday agreement six joint implementing bodies were set up one for cross border Inland waterway development. Within Northern Ireland Lough Erne and the Lower Bann were included but Lough Neagh and its navigable rivers of the River Blackwater and the Upper Bann were excluded.

The remit of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), is co-ordinating search and rescue, however, it extends to Lough Neagh and its navigable rivers and the Agency also has a role in emergency planning issues. Lough Neagh Rescue (LNR) is a voluntary, charitable organisation which operates as a declared Lifeboat facility for the MCA on Lough Neagh and its navigable tributary rivers. The presence of LNR as a first response emergency service has positively influenced the development and sustainability of water-based tourism and recreation. Advice and feedback have been given by Lough Neagh Rescue and they have been very helpful in assisting with the facilitation of this feasibility study. In Nov 2021 stakeholders including Lough Neagh Rescue, Local fishermen representatives and the Lough Neagh Partnership invited the head of the Maritime Coastguard Agency (MCA) to visit the mouth of the Blackwater River and there was general consensus about the lack of safety of the River and Lough in relation to marker systems and entry into the river

systems in the event of an emergency. A letter from MCA concerning safety was sent to Minister Mallon. (See Appendix Six)

D) Northern Ireland Environment Agency

ASSI Consent

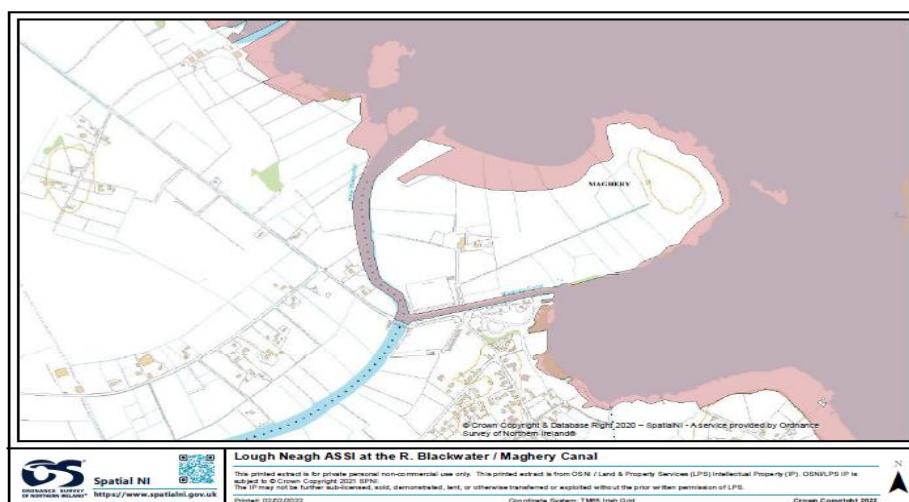
There are a variety of legislative requirements with regard to any potential dredging work on the mouth of the River Blackwater, due to its designated status as an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI)

If any dredging work was to be carried out at the river and canal mouth, then ASSI assent can be applied for by the Competent Authority and this must be provided within 28 days.

Any Public Body or Competent Authority intending to carry out or permit any operation listed in the ASSI citation schedule, is obliged to notify NIEA. Notice must be given of any operations likely to damage any of the flora, fauna or geological, physiographical, or other features by reason of which an ASSI is of special scientific interest before carrying out or permitting any such operation, even if the operations would not take place on land included in an ASSI. In practice, this means applying to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), Conservation Designations and Protection (CDP). This process is referred to as the Public Body applying to the Department for “Assent”.

ASSI Boundary Canal Cut and River Mouth

An ASSI assent form must be filled in, notifying NIEA of any potential dredging works to be carried. It should be noted that sand extraction is identified on the list of notifiable operations which appear on the ASSI citation.



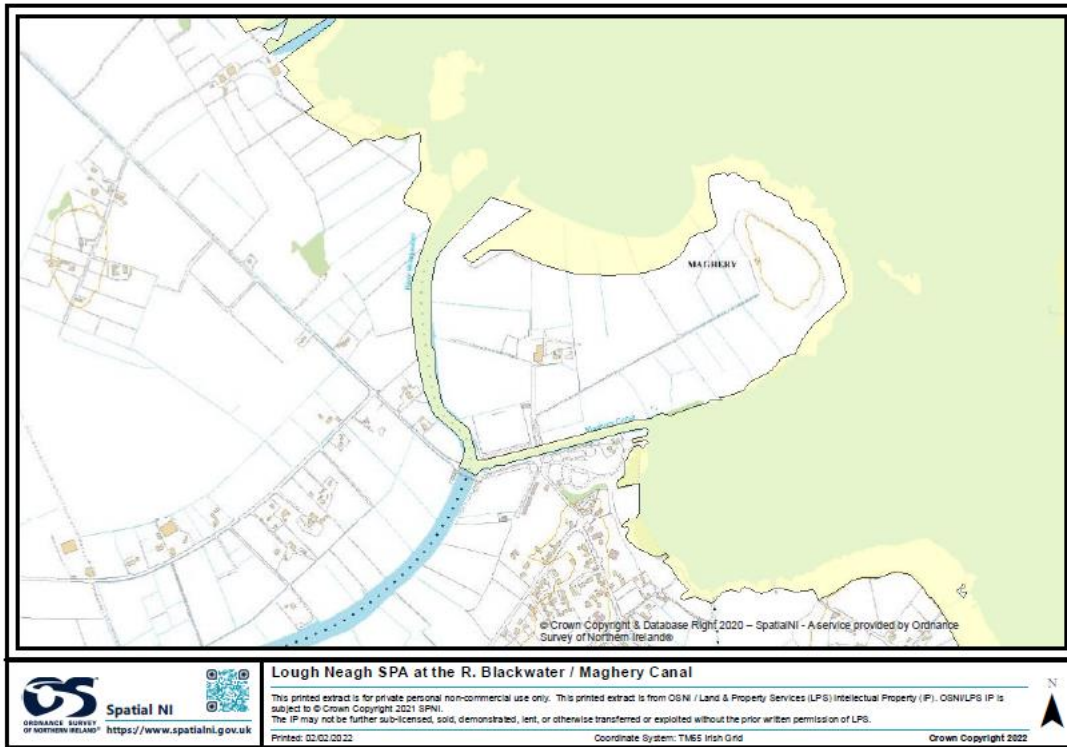
Habitats Regulations Assessment and Assent

If dredging at the mouth of the River Blackwater is agreed in principle by stakeholders concerned then a “competent authority, or an agent”, must carry out a Habitats Regulations Assessment, to consider potential effects on any Natura 2000 (SAC or SPA) features. Lough Neagh is identified as a Special Protected Area, (SPA) following the same boundary as the ASSI. It qualifies for Special protected area status under Article 4.1 of EC Directive 79/409 and then follow up post Brexit legislation.

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

The Habitats Regulations Assessments and post Brexit legislation requires that a Test of Significance is carried out in relation to any proposed work and a specific template is provided by NIEA. If the work is deemed to be significant then a further appropriate assessment must be carried out.

Special Protection Area Map for Maghery Canal Cut and River Mouth



Waste Legislation

One other important statutory factor in relation to the dredging of the mouth of the River Blackwater is what will happen to any potential extracted sand or silt material. A fundamental factor is if it is regarded as a by-product or waste.

Under the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 all activities involving the treatment, keeping or disposal of waste must be authorised by NIEA and must be carried out in accordance with that authorisation. The Hazardous Waste Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 provides a system to assess and control what is regarded as waste and to make sure that they are soundly managed from their point of production to their final destination for disposal or recovery. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has produced a detailed technical guidance document called 'Technical Guidance WM3, Waste Classification - Guidance on the classification and assessment of waste' and this should be used in the assessment of any waste status including any sand and silt that may be extracted from the mouth of the river

Under the above legislation some activities involving waste materials are exempt from licensing if they meet the requirements detailed in Regulation 17 of the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003. Paragraph 25 allows

for an exemption of “The deposit of waste arising from dredging inland waters or from clearing plant matter from inland waters”

A paragraph 25 exemption allows the deposit and, treatment by screening or de-watering of waste arising from dredging or from clearing plant matter from inland waters. The total amount of waste deposited along the bank or towpath on any day must not exceed 50 tonnes for each metre of the bank or towpath along which it is deposited or along the bank or towpath of any inland waters so as to result in benefit to agriculture or ecological improvement.

It is important to note that NIEA cannot issue a waste management licence or exemption unless the applicant demonstrates at the time of application that they hold the required planning permission. It is important to therefore look at any planning requirements for the extraction of sand and silt.

E) Planning

Planning Policy Statements (PPSs)

Planning Policy Statements are important in that they set out the policies on land-use planning in Northern Ireland and have a strong influence on the development of the Local Plan. The main PPS's that are relevant to this proposal include:

- PPS 2: Natural Heritage - specifically related to environmental designations
- PPS 4: Planning and Economic Development – development in the countryside, should benefit economic activity while protecting or enhancing the environment
- PPS 6: Planning, Archaeology, and the Built Heritage – Identified the importance of landscape quality or buildings and monuments of local significance are therefore worthy of protection
- PPS 8: Open Space, Sport and Outdoor Recreation – where Policy OS 6 will permit the development of facilities ancillary to water sports adjacent to inland lakes, reservoirs, and waterways where a number of criteria are met (as specified in the document)
- PPS 16: Tourism – gives guidance on the development of tourist accommodation

However, while the PPSs support economic tourism and recreational development, outdoor recreation, and tourism, they also set policy for landscapes and habitats and buildings that need protection and set the agenda for what is in the Local development Plan.

The River Blackwater is split between two local authorities Mid Ulster District Council and Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. In accordance with Section 10 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and Regulation 20 of the Planning (Local Development Plan) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 both Council are responsible for developing a Local Area Plan. Based on the plans below it is

important that planning permission for any infrastructure development on the river is provide by each relevant Council.

Mid Ulster District Council Local Development Plan: Mid Ulster District Council submitted its Local Development Plan Draft Plan Strategy (DPS) to the Department for Infrastructure on 28 May 2021. The submission of the documents to the Department for Infrastructure is the first step of the Independent Examination stage for the Local Development Plan process.

Points of Interest Relevant to the Blackwater River:

1) Conservation Areas: Of the five conservation areas located in MUDC two of them are situated along the banks of the River Blackwater, Caledon and Moy.

2) Protection Of River Corridors Policy. Proposals on sites adjacent to a main river will conflict with the plan unless it has been demonstrated that all the following criteria are met: a) a biodiversity strip of at least 10 metres from the edge of the river is provided and accompanied with an appropriate landscaping management proposal; b) public access and recreation provision is provided where appropriate; c) there is no unacceptable adverse impact on nature conservation; d) the proposal will not compromise or impact on the natural flooding regime of the main river and complies with the requirements Flood Risk Policy; and e) any development would not prejudice an existing or future opportunity to provide a riverside walk.

3) Development of Facilities ancillary to Water Sports: Development of facilities ancillary to water sport uses, such as slipways, jetties, boat houses, toilet and changing facilities, parking areas and accesses can be facilitated depending upon the environmental and heritage sensitivities of the area, landscape, and general amenity considerations. A number of our water bodies are located in areas of national and international environmental designations and within these areas special attention should be given to ensuring the proposals do not impact on the sensitivities and integrity of these areas.

4) Outdoor Tourism Attractions: Proposals for outdoor tourism facilities, amenities, or attractions, such as golf courses, fishing lakes, outdoor activity centres and picnic sites, interpretation, and visitor centres, will accord with the plan where they are located within a settlement or a Tourist Opportunity Zone or in the open countryside outside of a Tourism Conservation Zone.

5) Artificial Modification of Watercourses: Development proposals which require the artificial modification of a watercourse will conflict with the plan. Exceptions are where: Culverting of a short length of a watercourse less than 10 metres is necessary, or operations are necessary for engineering reasons, as accepted by DfI Rivers. Planning permission may therefore be needed to carry out any dredging work at the mouth of the river.

Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ABCBC)

The ABCBC local development Plan is still in the process of being drawn up. The Preferred Options Paper and Preparation Papers has been drawn up and the Council is in the process of publishing a Draft Plan Strategy.

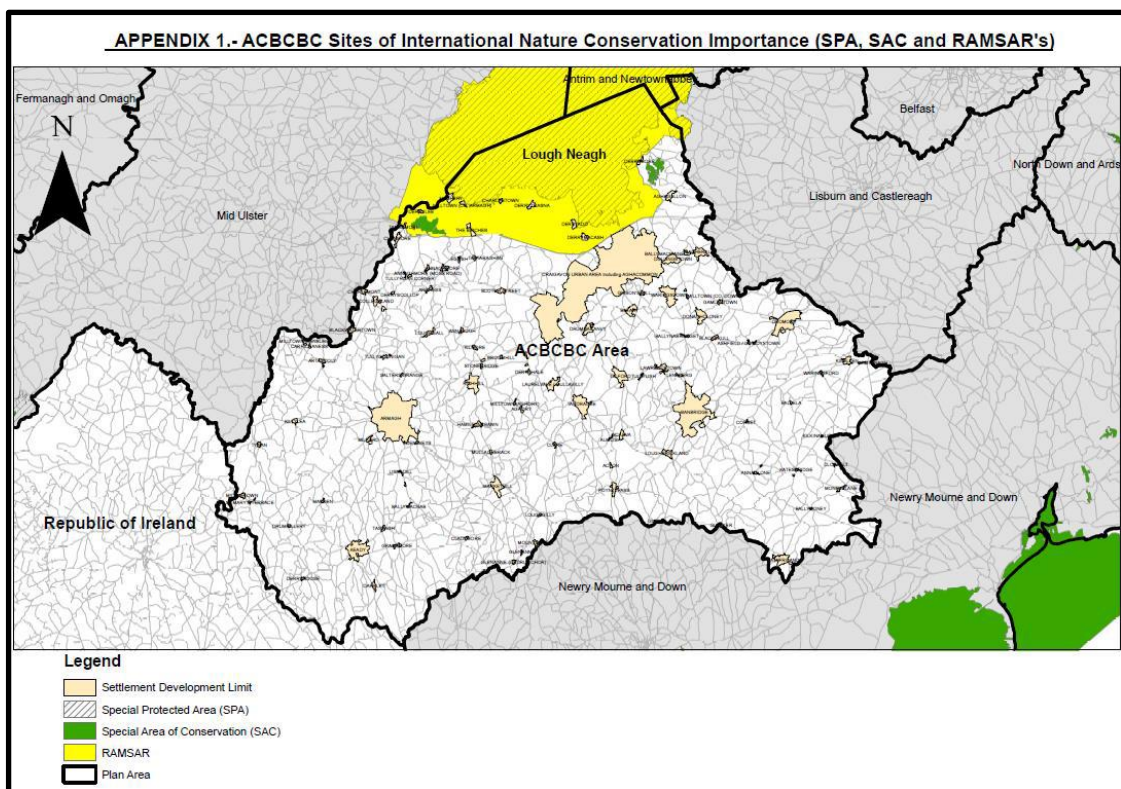
Relevant Preparation Paper Comments

1) Tourism Assets: The following Tourism assets have been identified as a priority and are based near to and along to the River Blackwater: The Argory, Peatlands Park, Coney Island, Maghera Country Park

2) Water sport activities: Water Sports Activity including that based on connections to Lough Neagh, have important tourist potential; Oxford Island was the most popular visitor attraction in ABC.

3) Ulster Canal: The Plan noted that planning permission was granted for the Canal in 2010 to restore part of the historic Ulster Canal that has been disused since 1929. This involves two stretches: 5.5kms of river navigation from Quivvy Lough on the Erne System to Gortnacarrow in Co Fermanagh and 8.5kms of canal from Gortnacarrow to Clones in Co Monaghan. To date, no official proposals have come forward along the ABCBC stretch of canal

4) Ramsar: The main navigable part of the Blackwater River is designated as a Ramsar wetland landscape. This is very important status in relation to the preservation of peatland and wetlands. **NB Ramsar Area in Yellow**



F) Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland Promotion

In order to achieve the vision outlined in the Department for Economy's Draft Tourism Strategy to 2020, Tourism NI has placed a focus on moving from a tourism sector which emphasizes the attributes of the landscape or the standalone infrastructure assets on offer, to one which focuses on the emotions, feelings and sensations that visitors will have on their journey, the stories they will learn and the connections they will make i.e. experiential tourism. To do this, Tourism NI has developed a set of five core experience themes that are unique and authentic to Northern Ireland. Of these themes the development of the River Blackwater has the potential to contribute to the 'Unique Outdoors' core experience theme.

Tourism Ireland and Tourism NI have also developed a segmented approach to marketing and promoting tourism products. This focusses on people's preferences and motivations looking at why people take holidays and what they want to do. The main segments that could relate to the River Blackwater would include the "Aspirating Families, and the Natural Quality Seekers".

In developing the Blackwater as a tourism product, it is important to therefore focus on developing targeting and promoting quality experiential tourism products.

G) Shaftesbury Estates

Ownership of the bed and soil of Lough Neagh resides with Shaftesbury Estates of Lough Neagh Ltd. Therefore, express permission of the owners is required to undertake any activity impacting on ownership rights over the bed and soil of the Lough. This includes dredging of channels and positioning of navigation markers to facilitate safe navigation as well as any wider development impacting on the bed and soil. Furthermore, the positioning of navigational markers fixed to the bed of the Lough would also require charges to be paid to Shaftesbury Estates.

H) Councils and Tourism Development

Mid Ulster District Council Tourism Strategy

The Mid Ulster Tourism Strategy and Action Plan was drawn up by Mid Ulster Council in 2016 and provides a framework to guide destination development, planning, management, and marketing over the period 2016 - 2021. The strategy recognises that tourism performance is largely based on rural and outdoor activities and tied into the area's natural attributes and the region is a developing destination that in recent years has not fulfilled its potential to contribute to economic growth.

It identified several important tourism issues in relation to Mid Ulster and a number of these are specifically relevant to the Blackwater area. These include:

- The poor visibility of Mid Ulster's natural heritage, outdoor activity, and historic and archaeological heritage.
- Lough Neagh and its Waterways suffers from a lack of developed product, with difficult access to the water and a complex shared decision making amongst 5 local authorities.

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

•The very high concentration of Neolithic, and Bronze age sites across Mid Ulster, offer a unique tourism and the study area contains a significant amount of built heritage sites.

In conclusion the strategy identifies two out of its three main strategic pillars on which the Blackwater River, including “History, and Heritage” and “Outdoor Recreational Activities such as walking and cycling.” However, there is a need for any future Tourism Strategy to identify and demarcate the River Blackwater for greater Tourism focus and development.

Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough District Council Tourism Strategy

The existing Tourism Strategy for Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough District Council “Transform” 2017 – 2022 has identified a layer of priority tiers in terms of developing and promoting the Council area as a Tourism destination. The three main tiers are detailed below

TIER 1: These initiatives are capable of assisting the destination to stand out in a crowded market and will respond to the requirements of international travellers and will reinforce the brand proposition for the destination.

TIER 2 These initiatives will support the Tier 1 products and initiatives by broadening the overall appeal of the destination through exposure to new market opportunities.

TIER 3 These are research and development initiatives which with further investigation may be suitable as tourism products beyond 2022.

Unfortunately, Lough Neagh was included in tier 3 with the following areas identified as tier 1 priorities.

- Redevelopment of former Armagh Gaol
- Reposition Navan Centre & Fort
- Pursue a Heritage-led Regeneration approach
- Reinforce the City’s association with Saint Patrick
- Consider the future potential of our museums
- Support proposals at the Observatory/ Planetarium
- Develop the Apple Orchards/Cider into an International Visitor Experience
- Package visitor experiences based on the destination’s unique stories including the Orange Cultural Product, Linen and Artisan Food & Drink.
- Focus the destination’s events programme and develop associated event development frameworks for Signature events.

As a result, Lough Neagh and the River Blackwater has received little promotion and relatively less tourism investment over the last 5 years, although it must be noted that in the last year this approach seems to have shifted with elected representatives passing a motion to highlight the importance of Lough Neagh. improving major investment in new jetty and parking facilities at Verners Bridge on the Blackwater River and the Council is now working closely with MUDC to examine the option of dredging the mouth of the river. A joint working group is in the process of being set

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

up to look at this option and both Councils are working closely with the Department of Infrastructure.

The River Blackwater still remains a major underdeveloped tourism and economic development opportunity and there now the need for ABC Council to draw up its new post 2022 tourism strategy providing Lough Neagh and the River Blackwater with greater strategic priority.

Consultation

One to One Interviews

A number of local tourism stakeholders were interviewed to gain feedback and input into the study and its recommendations. The interview lasted on average 20 minutes although some were longer. It took the format of a short questionnaire. Appendix 3 provides a template of the questionnaire but the main purpose of it was to gather important relevant information. Appendix 4 provides a list of stakeholders engaged in one-to-one interviews. It is very important to note that this was not an exhaustive list due to COVID restrictions, regarding gathering in public spaces. Consultation took place on an individual basis. The following is a summary of the feedback from the questionnaires.

- Addressing the dredging of the mouth of the river and keeping it open is the number one priority
- Need a joint Council approach to create momentum to develop the river
- Need for a co ordinator to work on river and keep mouth open and remove any obstacles
- Need a new jetty and boat berthing facilities at main stopping off hubs
- Protection of rich built natural and cultural heritage is important
- Need to engage with and help the private sector through clustering, skills and capital grant development.
- DFI should have an integral part to play in the river's development
- Long term the connection with the Ulster Canal, Motorway Bridge, and the development of the Coalisland Canal is a priority
- In long term Waterways Ireland to take responsibility but in meantime an interim arrangement must be examined and agreed.

Word Cloud

A list of common words and phrases used throughout each of the one-to-one interviews was noted and a word cloud produced. This will give a visual summary of the recurring themes and issues that were raised by stakeholders. This will allow us to shape and form the study recommendations.

Word Cloud of Main Themes



Boating Infrastructure Needs on the River Blackwater

1) Coney Island

There are landing, berthing and jetty facilities at Coney Island on the southwest and southeast side of the Island. Both are in need of replacement. There is also the need to develop a safe entrance marker system to the Island itself between Coney and Maghery.



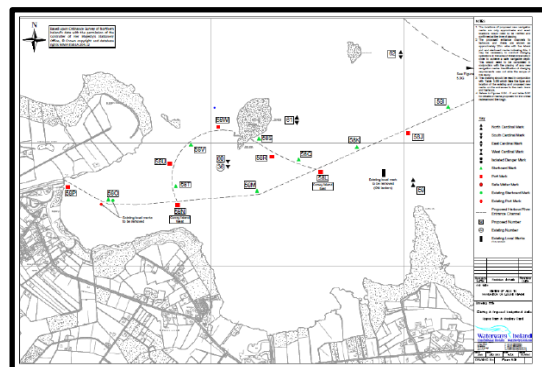
The Island is owned by the National Trust and has been managed by ABC. The National Trust have recently improved the House and lease it to a private individual. There are no formal tourism facilities but there is an informal camp site with outdoor toilet facilities beside the house and there is also an outdoor water supply. There is the possibility of trying to develop the camping facilities with pod facilities to be run by the private sector or the Blackwater Community Barge body.

The “Review of Aids to Navigation on Lough Neagh” study 2017 carried out by Waterways Ireland on behalf of the Department for Culture Arts and Leisure

(The body responsible for Inland Waterways prior to the Department for Infrastructure) identified specific improvements to the navigational aids on Lough Neagh and there were recommendations for the navigation aids around Coney and the entrance into Maghery Canal Cut and the River Blackwater.

New Marker Recommendations for Coney Island and Maghery Cut

Maghery Canal	58H	New Mark	Port Mark	364,343	295,397
	58I	New Mark	Starboard Mark	364,222	295,087
	58J	New Mark	Port Mark	364,075	294,815
	58K	New Mark	Starboard Mark	363,962	294,519
	58L	New Mark	Port Mark	363,824	294,270
	58M	New Mark	Starboard Mark	363,678	293,898
	58N	New Mark	Port Mark	363,607	293,393
Coney Island West	58O	New Mark	Starboard Mark	363,623	292,950
		Existing Mark (to be removed)	Starboard Mark	363,626	292,990
			Port Mark	363,602	292,918
	58P	New Mark	Port Mark	363,725	292,722
Coney Island East	58Q	New Mark	Starboard Mark	363,882	294,134
	58R	New Mark	Port Mark	363,922	293,991
	58S	New Mark	Starboard Mark	364,016	293,888
	58T	New Mark	Starboard Mark	363,708	293,337
	58U	New Mark	Port Mark	363,854	293,355
	58V	New Mark	Starboard Mark	364,000	293,477
	58W	New Mark	Port Mark	364,090	293,656



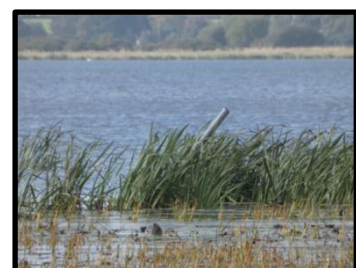
2) Maghery Canal Cut Entrance, Jetty and Slipway



Maghery is the main water entrance into the River Blackwater. Entrance by boats has often traditionally been through the Canal Cut and not the mouth of the river which is very silted up and has a rocky bottom. The adjoining Country Park has a car park play area, turning circle, slipway together with berthing jetties. To develop the river and increase boating and recreational traffic on the river this first site must be given priority in terms of needed infrastructure. The surrounding Canal Cut entrance site is fully silted up. Full extensive dredging needs to be carried out to allow the River Blackwater to be accessed via the Canal Cut and boats to have safe passage in and out.

- An entrance marker system needs to be put in place after any dredging is carried out with a possible new lighted entrance marker or transit put in place.
- The jetties along the entrance to the canal area is also in need of repair and over 50 metres of reedbed and vegetation within the canal entrance need to be extracted
- The road through the Maghery Country Park is in need of repair to allow boats to be brought in on a trailer safely.
- The slipway into the Lough is very silted up and also needs dredged.
- There are no toilet facilities at the site and there is potential to work with the local GAA Club to develop a shared disabled Toilet facility on the site.

Silting up of River Blackwater Entrance

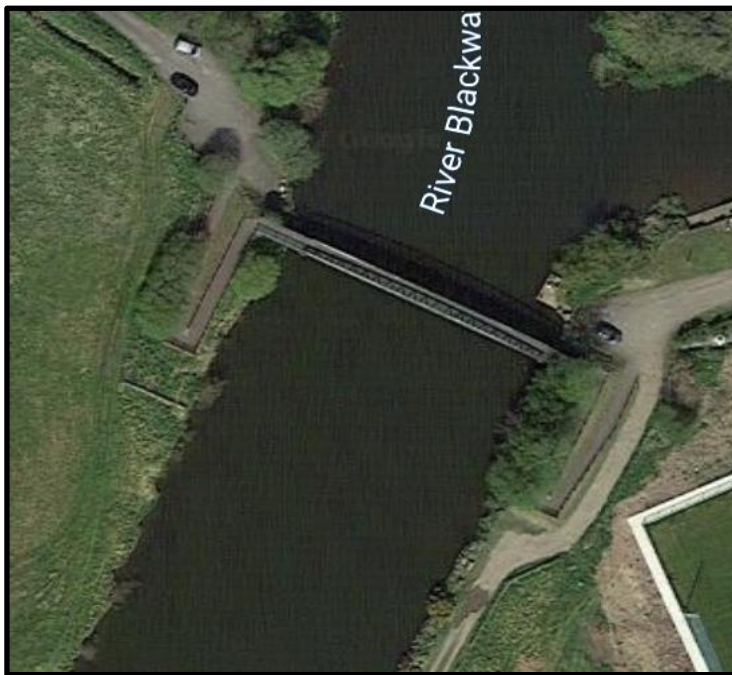


3) Ferry Bridge

Ferry Bridge is a foot bridge that connects Maghery in Co Armagh with Derrylaughlen in Co Tyrone. Up to the 1960s there used to be a ferry for cars to cross the river. The bridge can get very slippery if not cleaned in the spring and it is in need of a repaint. There may also be some improvements needed to the small car parking facilities on either side.

The bridge may be important in the future to connect the Peatlands Park to the new proposed access developments in Derrylaughlen Bog.

Ferry Bridge



4) Coalisland Canal Point.

The first point of interest on the Blackwater River is the entrance to the Coalisland Canal. The Canal itself is navigable for about 200 m although caution must be taken and although there is no jetty, it is possible to berth along the bank. Whilst the majority of the Canal does not hold any water and a lot of it has been covered over, there is still a great walking path along its entire length into Coalisland itself. This is used extensively and has proved very popular. So much so that a new private mobile café has opened along it. There is no access path at the very end of the canal, and this is a development opportunity. Likewise, there is also the possibility of providing a new jetty at the end of the canal point so that people can link in with the Canal walk.



5) Tamnamore and Verners Bridge

Tamnamore and Verners Bridge



The main obstruction upstream of Maghery and the Coalisland Canal Point is the M1 Tamnamore Motorway Bridge which has inadequate navigational headroom for some boats. A new channel could be constructed adjacent to the river under the motorway with increased headroom to meet navigational standards.

This would obviously be a huge engineering undertaking and out with the remit of this study. Although it is important to note that the Blackwater IWAIs are presently involved in an updated assessment of the costs and specification options for improving the headroom of the bridge.

Waterways Ireland recommend that all bridges should provide for a

minimum navigation clearance of 3.5m over a 3m width. The Tamnamore bridge has a head with of about 2.5 – 3.0 metres depending on the level of the river but even with this, it would allow for the passage of most non-sailing boats on the Lough.

The second main mooring facility on the Blackwater is just below Verners Bridge. This mooring facility has three public berths along a jetty and the site also includes a picnic area. It has recently just been fully upgraded with new floating jetty facilities and improvements of the carparking facilities have been carried out on the ABC side of the river.

Feedback from the River Blackwater IWAIs and the Blackwater Community Barge Group is that the slipway needs extended as there is a significant drop at its present end. The group are also carrying out a feasibility study into the potential to increase the size of boats entering under the Motorway Bridge. The study is being carried out by AECOM.

6) Argory Carpark and Slipway

Argory Slipway and Car Park



The next formal mooring infrastructure facilities can be found at the Argory Estate just at and up from Bonds Bridge. There is small jetty, carpark, and slipway at Bonds Bridge with a larger jetty and 2 public berth facilities at the Argory itself.

This is on the ABC side of the river. The smaller jetty, slipway and parking facilities could also be improved There

is immediate access to the Argory Country House, cafe, and Estate. The jetty is in very poor condition and needs replaced. The site which belongs to the National Trust, offers a real day out and a quality destination for any boats wishing to navigate the Blackwater. Whilst there are no formal camping facilities this can be arranged with the Estates Manager of the Property. The Argory also has a large number of fishing stand facilities that are well used.

Argory Jetty



7) Start of Ulster Canal

Lock 1 of Ulster Canal



River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

Just below the Moy is the original entrance into the first constructed lock into the old Ulster Canal. Whilst there is no navigation benefit in restoring this site there is the potential to carry out a basic lock restoration project with the local IWA group and the Blackwater Community Barge Group. Early discussions have already taken place with the Landowner.

9) Moy Slipway and Jetty

The first main town to be encountered on the navigation of the Blackwater River is the Moy village with its neighbouring village of Charlemont. Both Villages are well worth a visit and have a charming atmosphere with plenty of good pubs and restaurants and interesting antiques shops. There is a concrete jetty and slipway situated on the Moy side of the river with two public berths available. The slipway offers spaces for two boats and is quite dangerous with objects and bolts sticking out of the jetty wall. There are no buffer guards in place to protect any berthing.

The gradient of the path into the village from the jetty is too steep for disabled wheelchairs and so additional berthing sites with a gentler gradient into the town needs to be examined. These could be developed beside the existing berth space (option 1) or on up the river on the other side of the bridge (option 2)

Moy Jetty carpark and slipway with possible 2 options for a new jetty facility



10) Blackwatertown Slipway, Jetty and Carpark

The last navigable place to visit by boat on the Blackwater is Blackwater town.

Again, it is a pretty town well worth a visit with shops, pubs, and restaurants. There are 4 berths and a jetty available on the east bank. Navigation beyond Blackwatertown is too shallow for a boat but it can still be accessed by canoe. The jetty is in need of repair.

Blackwatertown slipway and jetty



Tourism Sites and Experiences along the River Blackwater

As well as actual boating infrastructure along the riverbank there are also other tourism infrastructure products which could be developed future. The focus of Tourism NI is to develop experiences and there is a need for both of the Councils to work hand in hand to develop and promote existing experiences and develop future working tourism clusters and partnerships

Blackwater Community Barge



The Blackwater Community Barge presently operates a disabled friendly V20 boat on the Blackwater River. Over 12 volunteers have been trained up to operate the service. The boat holds regular trips up the navigable part of the blackwater River. They are keen to work with the Council bodies to develop the river as a quality tourism destination and so far, they have been very popular and have significantly increased the number of people travelling along the river

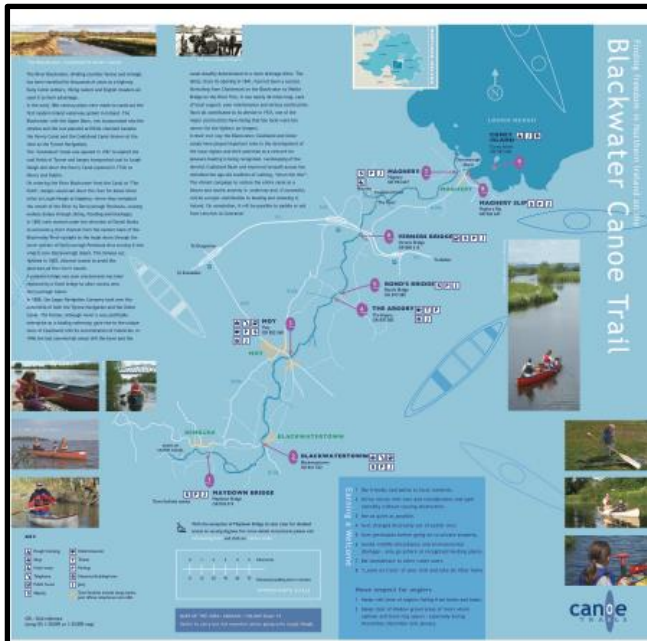
Blackwater Canoe Trail

CanoeNI are responsible for promoting 6 canoe trails along the

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

- Lough Erne Canoe Trail
- River Blackwater Canoe Trail
- Lough Neagh Canoe Trail
- Strangford Lough Canoe Trail
- Lower Bann Canoe Trail
- Southeast
- Foyle

Blackwater Canoe Trail



The River Blackwater has its own 20 km Canoe Trail stretching from Maydown Bridge to the mouth of the river and Coney Island. There are nine access points that all need upgraded. It is marketed and promoted by the Canoe Association of Northern Ireland and outdoor recreation Northern Ireland and there are numerous canoe events held on the river. This could be co-ordinated and promoted better. There is also the opportunity to promote the longest canoe adventure in Ireland which combines the Blackwater Lough Neagh and the Lower Bann.

Blackwatertown

Blackwatertown is a small village on the banks of the Blackwater and is very significant in relation to the history of Ireland. It was an important river crossing and fundamental in the nine years war between Elizabethan England and Hugh O'Neill. This historic element along with the Battle of Yellow ford and the Battle of Benburb could be developed as a heritage tourism experience. There is a quality restaurant in the main street called the Portmor which offers quality food for people wanting to stay overnight at the jetty.

The Moy Village

Tomneys Bar the Moy



Moy village is the largest population centre that sits on the river. A smaller village known as Charlemont is on the east bank and the two are joined by Charlemont Bridge. The river is also the boundary between County Tyrone and County Armagh. It is a conservation village with a fine 18th century square. It has a famous traditional Irish pub Tomneys Bar together with one of the biggest Antique shops in

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

Northern Ireland, Moy Antiques. Both would already attract large numbers of visitors. New tourism attractions have also recently been set up including the Woodlab Distillery home of award-winning Symphonia Spirits which is one of Tourism Northern Ireland's "Embrace the Giant Spirit Brand Experience". Also in the area is "Wee Buns Cookery School, another "Embrace the Giant Spirit Brand Experience". "An Apple a Day" experience has also been developed between the Council and some of these tourism businesses. This particular unique experience starts with picking your own apples at a local orchard, before heading to the Woodlab Distillery to extract your apple's essence. This is followed by learning how to create Apple Gin followed by a light lunch before moving on to Wee Buns Cookery School to create an Apple inspired afternoon tea with an Apple Gin Cocktail. Overall a great experience that could be better connected to the boating sector on the river

The village is also home to quality tourist accommodation including the Ryandale Guesthouse, Spice Cottages, self-catered accommodation and Charlemont House. There are also quality cafes restaurants including the Moy Larder and the Chapter V Restaurant and retail shops that would be able to supply any boats with provisions for an overnight stay. A Eurospar

Woodlab Distillery



Supermarket with Toilet facilities is within walking distance to the jetty. As previous noted there are two berthing facilities to allow two boats to berth overnight. This should be expanded to four and the existing jetty improved and made safer. MUDC work closely with a number of businesses in the town and in the process of developing Tourism Northern Ireland brand aligned experiences and tourism clusters

Argory House

The Argory is a fine historic house that was built in the 1820s on the banks of the River Blackwater with over 320 acres of woodland with guided tours of the house woodlands and riverside walk. There is also an award-winning café and tearoom serving traditional scones within a traditional Victorian setting. This quality visitor attraction can be accessed by boat at two berth slipway and there is a car park and slipway for launching boats also. The launching and slipway facilities could be improved, and larger jetty replaced and developed further to improve the boating experience and attract more visitors by water.

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

Argory House



Angling on the Blackwater River

A small stretch of the River Blackwater, which lies upstream of Blackwatertown Bridge, is available to DAERA permit holders. This short stretch provides good game fishing for salmon, brown trout and dollaghan in season. Whilst salmon numbers in the river have decreased significantly over the last 20 years the number of brown and unique Lough Neagh trout known as Dollaghan are still significant. There is therefore an opportunity to promote and brand fishing for Dollaghan and for the Department of Infrastructure Inland fisheries to brand and promote fishing for Dollaghan trout to international Tourists. Course fishing on the stretch of river from the mouth to the Blackwatertown is very common. The shore of the Argory estate has comprehensive coarse fishing stand facilities. Indeed, it is so common that many fish from the jetty facilities available for berthing boats and sometimes there a conflict of interest. There may therefore be a need for a new code of conduct with signage be provided at each jetty. There could be opportunity to develop a “Catch and Cook” experience on the Blackwater.

Angling On River Blackwater



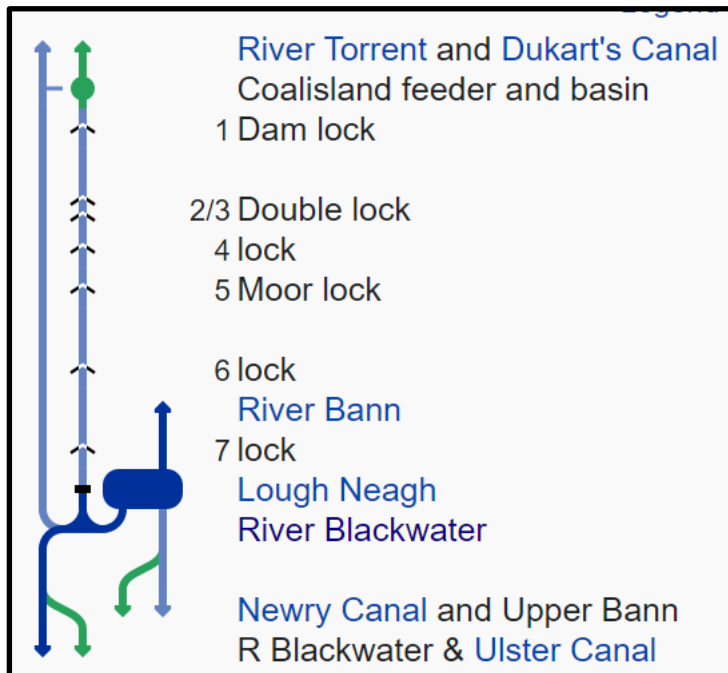
Coalisland Canal Walk

Coalisland Canal Walk



The Coalisland canal opened in 1789 for the transportation of coal from Coalisland to Dublin making it a very important industrial heritage site. It linked the centre of Coalisland to the River blackwater and then onto Dublin via Lough Neagh via the Newry Canal.

Main Lock system of Coalisland Canal



In 1954 the Tyrone Navigation, or Coalisland Canal, was officially abandoned and relegated to the status of a drainage ditch. In 1961 the Basin was drained and filled in. At present you therefore cannot take a boat from the river Blackwater deep into the Canal.

MUDC has carried out extensive work along the Coalisland Canal pathway and also intend to carry out future work to improve the canal and the town's centre as part of a £1.8million investment in the

Mid Ulster area.

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

However, there are two important issues associated with the remains of the Canal that provide future opportunities.

- The entire canal are now the property of a government Department and the local council. This is a fundamental advantage if at some time in the future the Council wanted to develop the Canal.
- The Canal pathway and walk has been fully restored and is a very popular and active walk.

If there were berthing facilities at the bottom of the Canal at “the Point” where it meets the River Blackwater, then the Coalisland Canal Walk could link with a good tourism and walking visitor experience linking the Blackwater Canal. The biodiversity and wildlife corridor along the Canal pathway is also of high value and there are also opportunities to create a wild food corridor and pathway improvement along the Canal.

Finally, there is also an opportunity to upgrade previous technical and costing studies into the restoration of the Canal linked with a full economic appraisal. There is an opportunity to put a barge restaurant on the Canal and develop a food experience.

Riverside Cabins

At present there are private log cabins accommodation facilities on the bank of the river itself. The cabins are marketed through AirBnB, and both have 2 bedrooms with kitchen, w/c, and shower, and for larger families there is also a 4-berth cabin available. There is also a hot tub available with a large garden and kids play area. This is the most recent private sector tourist accommodation development actually on the banks of the river and is a good indicator of the potential growth of tourism on the river.

Maghery Country Park

Maghery Country Park



Maghery Country Park is located at the mouth of the River Blackwater and on the ABC Council side of the river and acts as a gateway and holding base for boats

entering the system. Navigation by boat is through the Cut and not the mouth of the river itself, The Park is based on the outskirts the village of Maghery itself and contains an area of 30 acres comprising 5km of woodland walks and picnic areas in natural surroundings.

The Park is excellent for birdwatching, fishing, and walking. Coney Island lies 1km offshore and is the only remaining inhabited island on Lough Neagh. There is no accommodation at the site and while berthing of facilities for boats is adequate there are opportunities to expand spaces and provide lighting and water facilities. The slipway and turning facilities in the carpark could also be upgraded. There are opportunities to work with the private or social enterprise sector to examine providing pod accommodation here and at Coney.

Coney Island

Coney Island lies just 1km offshore from Maghery Country Park and is really the hidden gem associated with any visit near to the Blackwater, although it is important to note that it is not along the shores of the river but in Lough Neagh itself, the island has a rich history spanning many centuries, with evidence of human occupation dating back 8000 years BC. It is in ABC Council area. The island is owned by the National Trust. Regular Boat Trips are no longer available due to passenger boats being unable to dock at Maghery Country Park and this is one of the main benefits that will come from the dredging of the facility.

Coney Island main Jetty



The Lough Neagh Partnership has been working with the National Trust to improve the biodiversity of the Island; however, the two jetties are in a state of disrepair and need to be replaced. Another recommendation is to facilitate the Blackwater Community Barge to organise formal boat trips to the Island.

Ulster Canal Greenway

At a meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in 2015, it was agreed that Waterways Ireland would lead on progressing the development of a greenway along a corridor of the Ulster canal in association with relevant councils and stakeholders. That has resulted in the establishment of a regional greenway advisory group with local authorities in both jurisdictions. The East Border Region and Waterways Ireland have led the group on delivering the project which lays out a 190-kilometre network of off-road greenways across the centre border area and anchored to the Ulster canal route. It also builds on work by Monaghan County Council in accessing Department of Transport funds to deliver a previous phase in 2013 that runs for 4.2 kilometres through Monaghan town.

Waterways Ireland continues to collaborate with its project partners, Monaghan County Council, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and East Border Region to develop phase 2 of the greenway from Smithborough in County

Monaghan to Middletown in County Armagh. This is funded through the INTERREG Va sustainable transport measure. A formal request for additional funding to develop the greenway was submitted to the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) in April 2020. An integrated consultant team has been appointed to progress the route selection and design. The preferred route for the greenway was made public in July 2020, following a thorough route selection process, and planning applications have been submitted for the section in County Armagh and the section from the border to Monaghan. The design and planning permission phase for the section from Monaghan to Smithborough will be progressed in the not-too-distant future.

The Battle of Yellow Ford

One of the main tributaries of the Blackwater is the River Callan. The Callan rises beyond Darkley in South Armagh, flows through Keady, skirting Armagh city and eventually joins the Blackwater. Along the banks of the Callan, just this side of Armagh, is the site of the Battle of the Yellow Ford where the English army under the control of Marshall Bagnal, engaged two of the most famous Irish chieftains: O'Neill and O'Donnell. It is recorded that the waters of the Callan ran red with the blood of those who fell. Bagnal was taken prisoner and what remained of his army was forced to retreat south. This battle, coupled with the Battle of nearby Benburb, is of huge historical significance and dramatically changed the course of Irish history. There would be therefore be opportunities to develop the site and negotiate access via the river.

Connecting the River Blackwater with Lough Neagh and the Ulster Canal

The Canal Cut Entrance

Traditionally boats and barges did not enter the mouth of the Blackwater through its mouth but through a small navigation canal cut to the southeast of the mouth. The entrance to this “Canal Cut” is presently silted up and has not been dredged since 2006 so no boats can access. Depth at the entrance is only 0.9 metres so only canoes can access.

The approach to the remnants of the old Canal Cut channel encounters depth problems at approximately 250 - 500 metres out from the mouth of Blackwater Canal

Redundant Marker System at Blackwater River



metres.

There is no formal marker system at the entrance to the mouth of the Maghery Canal Cut. The only marker system is an informal system installed by local people that has become deteriorated and redundant.

There is a need to install a new entrance marker system as well as the dredging of silted material.

Cut. Depth begins to drop to 1.8 metres on approaching the initial channel and lowers to 1 metre beside the first remnants of the existing markers and then just 0.8 of a metre at the immediate mouth/entrance to the Cut. The width of the existing Channel was very small at approximately 3 - 5

Redundant Marker in Silted up Channel at Blackwater River



Fishermen Protest

In the summer of 2021, the local fishermen and boat users in the river Blackwater held a protest at the mouth of the river highlighting the huge silting that has occurred at the river mouth and the inability of working and recreational boats to enter the Blackwater River system. The rally was reported on by the BBC and may local papers also highlight the safety concerns of the silting and the general lack of interest shown by the Department of Infrastructure who has overall responsibility of developing Inland Waterways in Northern Ireland.

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

Gerard Mc Court Local Fisherman Highlighting Problem of Silting Up of River Mouth



DFI Meetings and Business Plan Development

The summer of 2021 fishermen's protest was followed up by lobbying from local politicians and the Lough Neagh Partnership. Two main meetings were held between the Department for Infrastructure. Officials and the relevant stakeholders from NIEA, Shaftesbury Estates, National Trust, the two main Councils. It was agreed in Jan 2022 that MUDC and ABC would examine a business proposal to examine a business proposal to dredge the mouth of the river. The following steps were identified as the main stages that were needed to move the project forward.

Project Management Process

1. Agree in Principle funding Source from DFI Blue Green Source
2. Carry out sampling of dredge material
3. Prepare Business Plan and Cost Estimate and Funding source
4. Agree Specification of tender
5. ABC to link with MUDC and form joint working party as there is joint jurisdiction all the way up the river.
6. Prepare permissions including, EIA and Natura 2000 consent, ASSI, and waste licence disposal and argue for section 25 waste exception
7. Shaftesbury Notification, HED archaeological permission
8. Identify marker and transit needs between Canal Cut and Coney Island
9. Long Term sustainable approach

Two Council Approach

Need for Two Council Approach



As can be seen from the aerial photograph below, attempting to dredge the Canal Cut entrance to the river is made logistically complicated by the nature of the river being a Council and County boundary. As such, there is a strong need for the two councils of Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Mid Ulster District Council to set up a joint working group to not only oversee the implementation of the dredging of the mouth of the Canal Cut but the implementation of the follow-on recommendations of this report. It is important for the two Councils to use this report as a working tool to develop what is an underdeveloped tourism products in both Councils.

Technical requirements

Appendix Two provides a technical note on any Bathymetric survey of the project area to determine substrate depth and to quantify the volume of material to be removed (dredged) and a sediment and surface sampling collection protocol. These are required to quantify potential contaminant levels and to inform how the dredged material will be disposed. Requirements of Phase 1 habitat survey requirements are also provided. It is fundamental that the issue of what to do with the silt and dredged material is addressed at an early stage in the process and early samples are taken and discussions with NIEA environmental waste is held to determine if material is a waste product or by product. This is fundamental to the cost of the project.

Long Term Dredging and Maintenance

It is important that there is a budget set aside to maintain the entrance every year and that an annual light dredge is carried out.

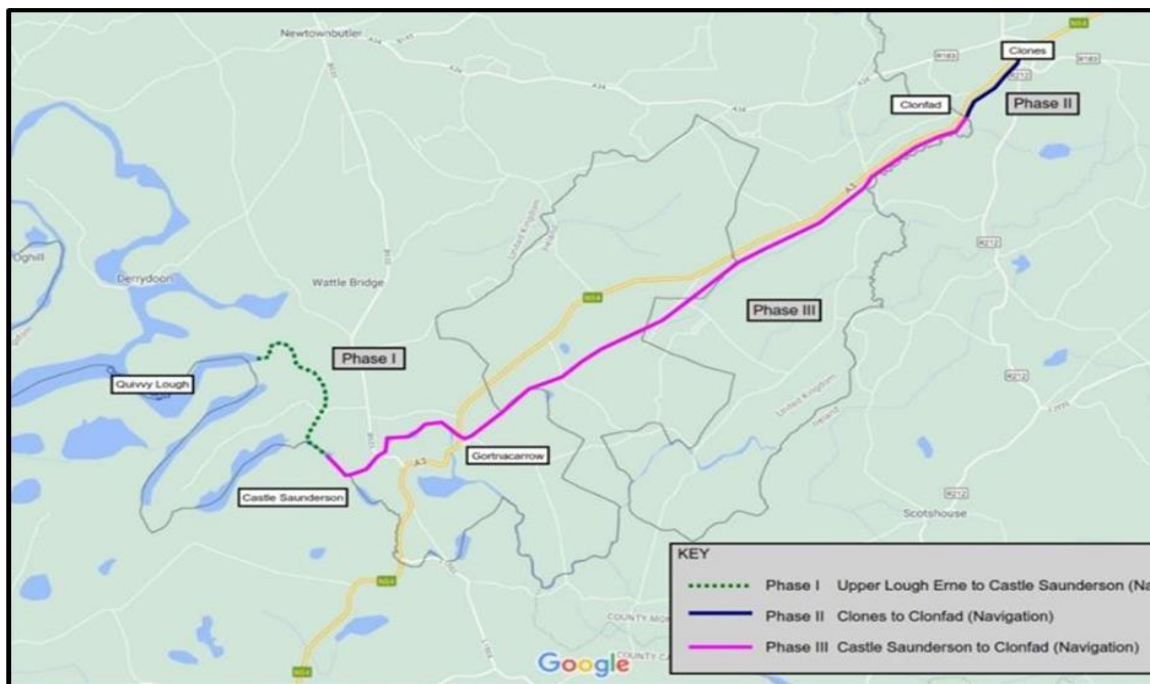
Connection to Ulster Canal

Work on the original Ulster Canal began 180 years ago (1841) and within the year it was open to commercial traffic. The navigation combining river and canal was circa 93km long, passing through Counties Fermanagh, Cavan, Monaghan, Tyrone, and Armagh. The Canal however was not a commercial success and affected badly by the coming of the railways and the last trading boat using the system was in 1929 and it officially closed in 1931.

Lough Erne to Clones

In 2007 following a meeting of the North South Ministerial Council, the Ulster Canal Restoration project was added to Waterways Ireland remit. The organisation was tasked with restoring the section from Quivy Marina and Lough in Co Cavan to Clones in Co Monaghan. This is a stretch of approx. 13.5 kilometres.

Ulster Canal Development Phase 1,2,3



Phase 1 was completed in 2019 and is now open to the public. It included c.2.5 kilometres of new river navigation along the River Finn between Quivy Lough and Castle Saunderson. The work programme involved the dredging of the River Finn, construction of a new lateral canal and navigation arch at Derrykerrib bridge and the installation of new floating jetty at Castle Saunderson. This element of the project cost €3m.

Phase 2 of the Ulster Canal restoration will focus on the restoration of the canal between Clones and Clonfad in County Monaghan, including a canal basin marina and amenity area in Clones. In November 2020 Waterways Ireland submitted an application for the €12m funding for Phase 2 from the ROI Rural Regeneration &

Development Fund. In December 2020 the Shared Island team within the Department of the Taoiseach announced it would contribute €6m of the €12m.

Whilst some parts of this Canal development are in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, the main economic beneficiaries and most of the nodal development points on the present Ulster Canal development are in the Republic of Ireland side of the Canal, including Quivy Lough Marina, Castle Saunderson Estate and Clones Town. There is therefore a need to address the apparent imbalance in the sharing the economic benefits of the Ulster Canal proposal in a more cross border basis and to examine the option of developing the Blackwater side of the Canal that lies within Northern Ireland.

The River Blackwater Part of the Ulster Canal

In Jun 2007 Fitzpatrick Associates in conjunction with Price Water House Coopers carried out a full economic appraisal into the restoration of the Ulster Canal, titled “Restoration of the Ulster Canal Updated Economic Appraisal – Final Report June 2007” After option 2 and option 3 was considered the list of options was shortlisted to the following:

1 Status Quo. Status Quo

4a Restoring the full length of the Canal in a single stage.

4b Restoring the full length of the Canal in two stages:

Stage 1: Restoring the waterway in the northeast between Lough Neagh and Maydown and restoring the waterway in the southwest between Lough Erne and Clones; *and*

Stage 2: Restoring the remaining middle section between Maydown and Clones, with Stage 2 immediately following Stage 1.

4c Restoring the full length of the Canal in two stages with a ten-year gap between the two stages:

Stage 1: Restoring the waterway in the northeast between Lough Neagh and Maydown and restoring the waterway in the southwest between Lough Erne and Clones; *and*

Stage 2: Restoring the remaining middle section between Maydown and Clones, with a ten year gap between the two stages.

5a Restoring both ends of the Canal i.e., Lough Erne to Clones and Lough Neagh to Maydown, without restoring the middle section between Maydown and Clones.

5b Restoring the southwestern end of the Canal i.e. Lough Erne to Clones.

5c Restoring the northeastern end of the Canal i.e., Lough Neagh to Maydown. (Northeast End)

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

When the maximum displacement factor was taken into consideration, the smallest net present cost option was identified as the Blackwater stretch of the Canal, known below as the Northeast Section and not the Lough Erne to Clones section. known as the Southwest section. This was the case irrespective of whether a UK or ROI discount rate was used

Table 9.1a: NPC for each option
(Displacement applied 85%, UK Discount Rate)

Option	Description	Capital Costs NPC £'000s	Revenue Costs NPC £'000	Benefits NPV £'000s	Residual Value NPV £'000s	Total NPC £'000s
1	Do Nothing	0	0	0	0	0
4a	Restore Full Canal	158,626	13,982	10,571	1,197	160,839
4b	Restore Full Canal in 2 Stages	133,561	12,239	8,835	1,232	132,732
4c	Restore Full Canal with 10 year Gap	109,048	10,535	7,137	8,026	104,419
5a	Restore both Ends	41,502	7,175	3,788	368	44,520
5b	Restore South West Section	27,410	4,436	1,454	210	28,183
5c	Restore North East Section	14,347	5,805	2,334	201	17,617

Table 9.1b: NPC for each option
(Displacement applied 85%, ROI Discount Rate)

Option	Description	Capital Costs NPC £'000s	Revenue Costs NPC £'000	Benefits NPV £'000s	Residual Value NPV £'000s	Total NPC £'000s
1	Do Nothing	0	0	0	0	0
4a	Restore Full Canal	156,220	12,288	9,236	806	158,466
4b	Restore Full Canal in 2 Stages	128,531	10,627	7,580	2,849	129,728
4c	Restore Full Canal with 10 year Gap	102,465	9,062	6,021	5,403	100,103
5a	Restore both Ends	40,889	6,341	3,310	248	43,672
5b	Restore South West Section	27,004	3,949	1,270	141	28,541
5c	Restore North East Section	14,141	5,145	2,040	135	17,111

This Blackwater option seems to have been identified by this appraisal as the most affordable option and yet it was not chosen as an option on its own or as a first stage in other options. Of course, as is the case with most green book economic appraisals, the study did not give an option recommendation. However, for the purposes of this report there is no record of how or why the decision to proceed with Lough Erne to Clones over the Lough Neagh to Maydown was made but by 2010 Waterways Ireland had begun consultation with Stakeholders on this option. It most likely taken later by ROI and NI senior civil servants and Ministers with a recommendation to the North South Ministerial council at a sometime after 2007.

New Decade New Approach

It is important to note that whilst the “New Decade New Approach” Jan 2020 document made reference to the Ulster Canal in the section titled “Connectivity and Infrastructure” on page 59, it was very specific in its wording. It did not relate to the Ulster Canal as a whole including the Blackwater River and Lough Neagh end, but only on the Lough Erne to Clones section.

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

“We believe this is an immediate opportunity to move forward quickly together to deliver on plans to complete key infrastructure projects including the A5 and the Ulster Canal connection from Clones to Upper Lough Erne. The Government will deliver on its funding”

In minutes of evidence to the Northern Ireland Assembly DFI Committee in Apr 2021 the Chief Executive of Waterways Ireland, John Mc Donagh, made the following statement in his response to a question for Roy Beggs MLA about a wider Ulster Canal Remit to Lough Neagh.

“I need to be really clear that our remit allows us to take the Ulster canal restoration water project as far as Clones. I want to be clear with everyone that Clones is where the remit starts and stops. Effectively, we are looking at the stretch between Lough Erne and Clones. At the moment, we are doing sections on a phased basis.”

In response to a question to Minister Mallon in the Jun 2021 at the “Ministerial Statement for the North South Ministerial Council Meeting” she indicated that

“There are the remaining plans to restore the Ulster canal from Clones to Lough Neagh. The restoration of that stretch remains a goal, and all parties have signed up to it and reiterated their commitment to it in the Stormont House Agreement, Fresh Start and New Decade, New Approach. It is a commitment that I am certainly keen to see honoured so that we can get full completion and restoration of the canal, so that we have that connectivity, and it can deliver all the benefits that we know it will.”

There is therefore a need to push this agenda forward and lobby for the Blackwater River end of the Ulster Canal to be put on the North South Ministerial Council agenda and for the Blackwater to be turned into a practical project on the ground.

It would therefore be recommended that the two main Councils form a working group and take the lead in lobbying the DFI Minister and the North - South Ministerial Council. It is also important for them to project manage the dredging of the mouth of the river as a stage one and then lobby for and find appropriate funding to implement the development recommendations highlighted in this report.

Economic Costs and Benefits

The benefits of developing the River Blackwater derive from the fact that it will attract additional recreational boating and shoreline activity and that these then have a wider spin-off for facilities such as restaurants, marinas, cafes, bars tourist accommodation. Examples of Recreational Activity would include:

- Cruising and boating activity both by tourists and by residents.
- Recreational angling
- Walking along the pathways and walks connected to the river
- Visits to heritage assets, e.g., industrial architecture, cultural heritage sites

Capital Estimated Costing

The table below provides an estimated capital cost associated with improving and adding new inland water way recreational infrastructure along the River Blackwater.

Item	Cost	
	ABC Area	MUDC Area
ConeyIsland Jetty/s replacement	£520000	
Maghery Coney Island Markers installation	£3000	
Maghery Road and Car Park Upgrade	£55000	
Maghery Toilet	£2500	
Maghery Canal Cut Dredging	£250000	
Maghery Jetty Upgrade	£25000	
Ferry Bridge Upgrade	£2500	£2500
Ferry Bridge Carpark upgrade	£10000	£1000
Coalisland Point new jetty and berthing Facility		£490000
Coalisland Canal Path Improvement		£25000
ABC Campsite Upgrade	£4500	
Bond Bridge Jetty Car Park and Slipway repair	£25000	
Replace Argory Jetty	£490000	
Historical tidy up of First Ulster Canal Lock	£10000	
New additional Moy Jetty		£490000
Upgrade existing Moy Carpark Jetty and slipway		£65000
Upgrade Blackwatertown Jetty and slipway		£45000
Canoe Access upgrades	£32500	£32500
New Information Signage	£2250	£2250
Maintenance Boat	£3250	£3250
Evaluation Report	£4500	£4500

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

	£1397500	£1161000
Design and Supervision	£209625	£174150
Overall Estimated total exl vat	£1,607,125	£1,335150

Cost is based on estimated costs of similar project costs and should be noted that dredging cost may be more if dredge material is regarded as waste. There is need for a full technical survey of items and costs

Annual Revenue Costs

The following provides a basis revenue cost to manage promote and maintain the river after work has been carried out. This need sto be split between the two Councils

Item	Cost					
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	
Blackwater Co ordinator	£42000	£42000	£43000	£43000	£44000	
Marketing	£15000	£15000	£15000	£15000	£15000	
Maintenance of Mouth	£8000	£8000	£8000	£9000	£9000	
Maintenance of boat and river	£5000	£5000	£5000	£5000	£6000	
Annual Total	£70000	£70000	£71000	£72000	£74000	
Total over 5 years						£357000

Annual Economic Return

Previous studies have highlighted the potential for the restoration of the Canal to stimulate additional expenditure in the economy from the visitors to the restored Canal. The 2006 Socio- Economic Study of the Ulster Canal, (*Socio-economic Study of the Ulster Canal, Final Report, 2006. PricewaterhouseCoopers with TDI*); and *Socio-economic Summary Report for the NE and SW Section of the Ulster Canal, Final Report, February 2006.*) identified that the restored Canal would generate activity from the following sources:

- Moored Boats.
- Visiting Boats.
- Trip/Day Boats.
- Canoeing.
- Angling.
- Informal Walking.

The study estimated that the net benefit of visitor expenditure from restoring the Lough Erne to Clones section lay between £250k and £500k per annum.

However, this was based on considerable displacement of boats form the Lough Erne and Shannon system of 73%. There is in the region 500 boats berthed on Lough Neagh with approximately of 350 small and non-sailing boats that could

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

navigate river and probably some 4,000 launches likely during peak activity in the summer. So, there is a significant opportunity for smaller boats to take the opportunity to navigate up the river and economic benefit would be gained from these boat visits to the main sites. The additional spend from these extra boating and walking visitors would be in the following areas

- Increased spend in Local restaurants and retail shops in local towns and villages such as Maghery, Moy and Blackwatertown
- Increase stay in local accommodation through better berthing
- Increase business to new tourism experiences such as Woodlab Distillery Gin Making experience
- Increased food and drink spend to sites such as the Argory and new possible mobile café facilities at Maghery, Verners Bridge and Blackwatertown Coalisland Canal
- Potential increase in overnight camping and Pod accommodation at fees being paid at the Argory and Riverside Pods
- Potential increase in boat sales at Sands Marine Boat Yard Ancillary boating equipment and fuel that would be needed to navigate rivers
- Increased income and profitability for boats such as the Blackwater Community Barge
- Increase spends in fishing permits and tackle sales

For the purposes of this study and taking into consideration inflation we would estimate the conservative visitor expenditure to be in the region of £280,000 per annum.

Projected Annual Visitor Spend

Item	High Estimate
Moored Boats	0
Visiting Boats	£75,000
Hire boats	£15,000
Trip/Day boats	£35,000
Canoeing	£65,000
Angling	£30,000
Cycling	£10,000
Informal Walking	£50,000
TOTAL	£280,000

NB This is not a Gross Value-Added Figure

Other Multiplier Economic Benefits

It is important to note that there may be other important multiplier effects of the capital investment and visitor expenditure in the area, such as

- New potential development sites particularly at Maghery
- Additional jobs created in the construction of the project
- Additional new tourism experiences created

Post Project Monitoring and Evaluation

Finally, in attempting to monitor the economic impact of any additional recreational activity and capital investment the following evaluation indicators could be used. An annual report should be provided detailing the improvement to tourism activity, and wider economic development. A boat monitoring system should also be put in place to monitoring boating activity.

Recreational Activity

- New berths created
- Increase day boat and trip boat traffic levels
- New levels of other water-based activity
- Increase in number of anglers
- Increase in wild camping
- Awareness and usage of the amenity among the local community
- Growth in visitor accommodation and pods/camping

Wider economic Impact

- The number of new related private sector projects (restaurants, accommodation, visitor facilities).
- The number of new employment opportunities created by new private sector tourism businesses
- Enhancement of heritage sites along and adjacent to the river
- Number of new commercial housing developments at nodes

Cross Border and Cross

- Extent to cross border partnerships formed

Conclusion

The River Blackwater is one of the most underutilised inland waterway tourism opportunities in Northern Ireland. As indicated in this report, it is navigable for 19.5 miles from its mouth and is the original navigable part of the Ulster Canal. Entrance to the river is via the Canal Cut at Maghery but the last time it was dredged was in 2006/7. It has without doubt been neglected and forgotten about and its entrance is now totally sited up and cannot be accessed by boat.

Through commissioning this report, MUDC has recognised the past neglect, present needs and future untapped potential of the river and has now been working closely with DFI, other departments and council partners to address these problems and hopefully open up the river to new safe boating and expanding economic opportunities.

This report will hopefully act as a working tool to help shape the future development of the river and bring together new working partnerships, help protect its rich built and natural heritage, create new jobs, and stimulate economic prosperity for those who live, work, and visit its beautiful winding shores.

Recommendations and Funding

The following recommendations should be led by MUDC but responsibility for funding and implementation should be shared between MUDC and ABC Council via joint technical and joint tourism working groups. The two main working groups detailed below should include senior director level staff and the report should be approved by each Council committee and at full Council meeting level to provide political support for the study recommendations.

Strategic Priority

1) Set up Joint Technical River Blackwater working group to:

- Prepare DFI Business Plan requirement for dredging and marker system
- Meet at early stage with NIEA Waste Section and argue strongly for need for section 25 exemption
- Apply for all other appropriate permissions and licences such as Natura 2000 and ASSI permission and a waste licence for dredged material
- Implement and project manage dredging the mouth of the River Blackwater
- Regularly dredging and remove debris in river keep it open for boat traffic from Lough Neagh with involvement of DFI
- Prepare full costing, engineering report and tender specification on identified infrastructure and project manage work
- Update existing Ferguson Mc Elveen costed engineering report on the restoration of the Coalisland Canal
- Invite Waterways Ireland to give advice and help and become a partner in development of any Shared Island and Peace Plus Programme funding application
- Develop and agree a basic voluntary navigation code particularly in relation to staying overnight at jetties.

2) Set up joint MUDC/ABC River Blackwater Tourism group to:

- Lobby North South Ministerial Council for Ulster Canal inclusion along Blackwater.
- Arrange Blackwater Tourism Development Seminar
- Develop and apply for funding programme for development of infrastructure as indicated later in report.
- Employ coordinator to promote and develop tourism programme on river and liaise with private sector to develop a new small marketing programme.
- Create River Blackwater private public and community tourism connectivity and new marketing group through new private public tourism cluster.

3) ABC to include Lough Neagh and navigable rivers (Blackwater and Upper Bann) as a new Tier I Strategic Tourism priority. MUDC to realign Tourism strategy to River Blackwater.

Specific Recommendations

- 1) Provide a navigational marker system for access to the Canal Cut entrance to the River Blackwater and to Coney Island based on the recommendations of the DFI report “Review of Aids to Navigation of Lough Neagh”.
- 2) Provide Upgraded jetty and berthing facilities at:
 - Coney Island (Replace) ABC
 - Maghery (Restore) ABC
 - The Point and Coalisland Canal (New) MUDC
 - The Argory (Replace) ABC
 - The Moy Village (Restore and New) MUDC
 - Blackwatertown (Restore) MUDC
- 3) Provide Upgraded parking and slipway facilities at
 - Maghery Country Park ABC
 - Argory House Shore ABC
 - The Moy MUDC
 - Blackwatertown ABC
- 4) Upgrade all Blackwater Canoe access points and provide upgraded information signage where needed ABC/MUDC
- 5) Provide outdoor Toilet facilities at Maghery and ABC campsite. ABC
- 6) Carry out study into developing a biodiversity and wild food corridor along the Coalisland Canal and provide funding to implement main recommendations. MUDC
- 7) Lobby DFI to implement recommendations of “Review of Navigational Aids Lough Neagh” on the whole of Lough Neagh starting at the Blackwater River ABC/MUDC
- 8) Arrange Major annual Canoe event along the Blackwater–Neagh–Bann the longest natural stream flow in Northern Ireland. ABC/MUDC
- 9) Potential for a new taste food festival in the Moy. MUDC
- 10) Examine potential via study on access to location “Battle of Yellow Ford”

Potential Funding

The following provides suggestions potential funding opportunities. Priority should be given to the DFI Capital Blue Green Programme, the Shared Island Fund and the new SEUPB Peace Plus Programme.

Funding Opportunities

- **Shared Island Fund**
- DFI Blue Green Programme
- Leveling Up and UK Community Renewal Programme
- Rural Development Programme 2021 – 2027 Pillar 2 Sustainable Tourism

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

- Tourism NI 2022 – 23 Capital Investment Programme
- Invest NI ecommerce programme
- Rural Development Programme Skills Development
- Peace Plus theme 2 Programme Area Skills Development Programme:
- TNI Cluster Development Funding
- Rural Development Tourism Pillar and Social Business Development
- Peace Plus Theme 4: Healthy and Inclusive Communities the Rural Regeneration and Social Inclusion Programme.
- Peace Plus Theme 6: Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration the Strategic Planning and Engagement Collaboration and dialogue
- **Dormant accounts fund (Fund an individual to develop new sustainable financial mechanisms for private and NGO Tourism businesses**
- **EU Horizon research programme**
- **National Lottery Fund**
- **Esmee Fairburn Trust**

APPENDIX ONE

Research Bibliography

- 1997–1998 feasibility study (including engineering, economic, environmental and heritage aspects): cost of restoration £68.4 million, benefits over £7.5 million a year
- 2000–2001 updating of previous study and its costings and Waterways Ireland assessment: capital cost £89 million, net present cost at £39 million (both at 2000 prices), construction to take seven years. “The project will not stand up to a scrutiny that is concerned purely with pounds and pence or with viability”, a negative economic benefit
- 2006 Waterways Ireland Socio Economic Summary Report for the NE and SW Sections of the Ulster Canal Final Report February 2006: this report assessed the benefits of reopening the two ends of the canal. It estimated that there would be increased economic activity in the two sections of the canal corridor of up to £2 to £4 million per annum, construction jobs of 600 to 740 person years over three years and wider employment creation of up to 100 jobs resulting from increased economic activity. The report did not assess the costs
- 2006 Blackwater Regional Partnership Socio Economic Study of the Ulster Canal Final Report and Socio-Economic Study of the Ulster Canal Appendices: BRP commissioned this study to “examine and quantify these wider social and economic benefits [identified in earlier reports] of restoring the Canal.” However, the study was not intended to compare costs and benefits. It says that “the latest outline cost estimates from the engineers suggest a figure of £125 million at January 2006 prices, including £110m capital costs and £15m non-capital costs” It estimated visitor expenditure along the entire Ulster Canal corridor at £3.1–4.0 million (including multiplier effects), with increased economic activity adding £5–10 million to the local economy, with additional receipts (income tax, VAT, and rates) for the public sector
- 2007 Fitzpatrick Associates Restoring the Ulster Canal: Outline Business Case and Updated Economic Appraisal – Final Report: this is the serious one, and most of my comments in later sections will be addressed to these documents. The take-home message is this: “In terms of formal quantified economic appraisal, all restoration options involve significant net costs over benefits.”
- 2010 Waterways Ireland Ulster Canal Restoration Plan: there will be some questions about this document in later sections

APPENDIX TWO

Technical Notes

Specific environmental assessment notes for River Blackwater Technical
Dredging specification (By Dr William Burke LNP)

To progress this programme the project developer will have to complete the following survey actions (Please note, all these actions should be developed and implemented in consultation with NIEA and relevant stakeholders):

- a. Bathymetric survey of the project area to determine substrate depth and to quantify the volume of material to be removed (dredged)
- b. Based upon the above survey, prepare a sediment sampling programme and collect surface and at depth samples. These are required to quantify potential contaminant levels and to inform how the dredged material will be disposed.
- c. An extended Phase 1 habitat survey which is a core element of an ecological appraisal to highlight any potential ecological constraints to the proposal, as well as identifying opportunities for ecological enhancement. This is especially important in respect of the designation features of the River and Lough.
- d. These three surveys in combination will provide sufficient data to inform:
 - a. Habitat Regulation/ Appropriate Assessment Report
 - b. Waste management and disposal methodology
 - c. Implementation Environmental Management Plan
 - d. Habitat/Species impact mitigation measures
 - e. Cost

Note on sediment quality standards

The input of heavy and trace metals may cause contamination in aquatic sediments. Assessing the environmental importance of metal concentrations can be done by comparing collected sediment quality data to known background concentrations and sediment quality standards, however, there are currently no freshwater sediment quality standards for NI or UK.

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

Information and standards exist for marine systems and dredged material disposal. A set of quality standards, comparable to the marine ones, are those provided by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME). These are commonly used, globally, on freshwater projects due to the absence of other aquatic sediment quality thresholds. The CCME provide freshwater sediment quality guidelines for the following metals; arsenic (As), cadmium (Cd), chromium (Cr), copper (Cu), mercury (Hg), lead (Pb) and zinc (Zn). These metals are given sediment quality guidelines due to their known ability at high enough concentrations to cause toxic effects to aquatic species. The CCME defines two assessment values:

1. Interim Sediment Quality Guidelines (ISQG) / Threshold effect level (TEL):

This represents the concentration below which adverse biological effects are rarely expected to occur.

2. Probable effect level (PEL): The level above which adverse effects are expected to occur frequently.

Where there are no suitable freshwater sediment quality standards, marine standards will be utilised such as the Action Levels provided by CEFAS. Definitions for CEFAS action levels are provided below:

1. AL-1: contaminant concentrations where concerns over the quantity and nature of the material and characteristics of the receiving area need to be taken into account; and

2. AL-2: contaminant concentrations which will generally preclude disposal at sea.

For this proposal, it is recommended that samples are compared against the Action Level 1 and Action Level 2 guidance values for sediment quality in the Northern Ireland Guidance: Dredging, Disposal and Aggregate Dredging, under Part 4 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (NIEA, 2012) (see <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-guidance-dredging-disposal-and-aggregate-dredging-under-par-4-marine-and-coastal>)

Note on sediment sampling methodology.

□ A combination of 'sediment surface' and 'at depth' sampling will take place.

The 'at depth' samples will be determined from the results of a bathometric

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

survey but as an indication at this stage, they should be taken at depths of 1m and 3m below the substrate surface for all 'at depth' sample locations.

□ A sampling pattern will comprise 15 locations along the length of the canal and / or river mouth. The locations selected for analysis will determine the presence of contaminants in the deposits. The selection criteria should be designed to maintain a representative coverage across the study area whilst also allowing for the distribution of contaminants within the deposit down to the likely dredging depth (dependent on the findings of the bathymetry survey as referenced above).

□ Sediment samples will be analysed for substances that are considered of most concern for the freshwater environment, those which have combined properties of persistence, toxicity, and liability to bioaccumulate. Samples should therefore be analysed for a range of determinants (organic matter content, metals, nutrients, polychlorinated biphenyls - PCBs, pesticides, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons - PAHs).

APPENDIX THREE: QUESTIONNAIRE

BLACKWATER RIVER QUESTIONNAIRE

Name.....

ID Number.....

Score in order of priority 123

1) What are the main strategic **barriers** to tourism development on the Blackwater River and sites along its banks.

Item	Score
Low Government Departmental interest	
Planning and Environmental Restrictions	
Entrance to river blocked	

2) What are the main **opportunities** that exist for future tourism development along the River Blackwater Score with 5 as highest priority and 1 as lowest priority.

Item	Score
The Ulster Canal	
Towns along its banks	
Rich heritage	

3) Which of the following **bodies do you believe are most important** for the development of the River Blackwater as a tourism product.

Item	Score
Department for Infrastructure	
Tourism NI	
Local Councils	

4) What important tourism **inland waterway infrastructure** is needed to develop the Blackwater River.

Item	Score
Access height under Motorway Bridge	
New boat berthing facilities at main towns and sites	
Dredging of mouth	

5) What other issues do you think are **important to develop the Blackwater River as a tourism product**. Score with 5 as highest priority and 1 as lowest priority.

River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

Item	Score
Protection of built and natural heritage	
Promotion of river as a destination	
Have a great experience at one site	

6). What **tourism skills** are needed to help develop tourism products on the River Blackwater. Score with 5 as highest priority and 1 as lowest priority.

Item	Score
Marketing and promotion skills	
Clustering and co-operation skills	
Guiding and heritage skills	

7) Please provide one positive word to describe the River Blackwater and its tourism potential

.....

8) Are there any other issues you believe are important for the development of the River Blackwater and have not been touch upon.

.....

APPENDIX FOUR: LIST OF STAKEHOLDER CONSULTEES

Blackwater River Inland Waterways Association

Blackwater Community Barge Project

ABC Council

MUDC

National Trust, The Argory

South Lough Neagh Regeneration Association

Chapter V Restaurant

The Auction Rooms

Moy Larder

Brew Coffee

The Ryandale

Tomney's Bar

Moy Antiques

APPENDIX FIVE: IRISH WATERWAYS



APPENDIX SIX

MCA Safety Letter



Maritime & Coastguard Agency
Belfast Marine Office
Maritime & Coastguard Agency
Bregenz House
Quay Street

Bangor BT20 5ED

www.gov.uk/mca

Nicola Mallon MLA
Minister for Department for Infrastructure
Room 708
Clarence Court
10-18 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8GB

E-mail: Tony.Skeats@mca.gov.uk

24/07/2021

Dear, Minister Mallon

LOUGH NEAGH NAVIGATION MARKER SYSTEM

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) Chairs the Northern Ireland District Safety committee of which the Loughs (Lough Neagh and Lough Erne) form a subgroup. The District Marine Safety Committees DMSC were set up nationally after the Thames Marchioness Disaster as a direct result of the recommendations of the Hayes report on the disaster. Members are drawn from a wide variety of interest groups. The terms of reference for the committee include the following:

- to raise awareness, and provide a forum for discussion, of proposals for safety measures affecting ships, crews, other water users, riparian occupiers or waters in the area, member organisations or others, and where appropriate, provide a committee response.
- identify any circumstances where present arrangements might not be effective, and where a need for action or improvement is identified, draw the matter to the attention of the responsible organizations,

During the last DMSC Meeting in July 2021 the issue of safety and navigation on Lough Neagh was raised and as a follow up I in my role as MCA Principal Surveyor and as Chair DMSC was invited by Lough Neagh Rescue and the Lough Neagh partnership to visit Lough Neagh. In particular the problems with the mouth of the Black water River.

I have been informed by the Lough Neagh partnership that your Department maintains 48 hazard markers around the Lough and is working with the Local Councils and the Lough Neagh Partnership to examine options for the dredging of the Blackwater River. Having inspected the Blackwater entrance, there is clearly a need to address safety issues here and examining this issue with partners is to be hugely welcomed.



River Blackwater Feasibility Study with Recommendations

The Committee are also concerned about the wider safety of the Lough and the commercial and recreational boats that operate there. It is important to note that Lough Neagh is the only freshwater Lough/Lake in the UK and Ireland that has substantial commercial boating activity with 95 fishing boats and 18 sand barges operating, plus a further 390+ recreational boats. At some 55m+ the larger sand dredgers would not be out of place in our seagoing ports. At present there is no statutory regime or byelaws concerned with the safe operation of many of these boats except a duty of care for the larger commercial operators and boat Masters licenses for those commanding them

Unlike the rest of the UK, and in fact Ireland, there is no "Navigation authority" on the lough who would look after the wider safety and Navigational aspects of water usage I have always felt this was rather unusual but probably reflects the historical usage and ownership of our inland waters throughout Northern Ireland. I note however that waterways Ireland carry out these functions in Lough Erne and part of the Bann.

Through the various Interest groups, I understand that your department's remit is limited in terms of its statutory responsibility and that you maintain the 48 hazard markers using powers provided in Part 111 of the Water Order 1999 Article 41. The maintenance of these markers is to be also hugely welcomed but I would ask if you could consider the implementation of the recommendations of the "Review of Aids to Navigation on Lough Neagh Study", previously instructed by DCAL and carried out by Waterways Ireland in 2017. I am told this could be carried out within the remit of Part III of the Water Order 1999 Article 41 and would address a much wider safety need in what is our biggest inland waterways resource. I am also informed that Capital funding could also be considered for this within the DFI Blue Green Programme.

I look forward to your reply and with others from the subcommittee would be more than willing to meet up with your department staff to discuss the safety issues in more detail.

If you would like to contact the Belfast Marine Office to discuss any aspect, please use +44 (0) 20 38172012. or my mobile 07715378009

Yours sincerely,

H A Skeats
BEng(Hons)CEng CMarEng MIMarEst
Technical Manager (Engineer)
UK Maritime Services
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