
Galway City Community Network

The Public Participation Network in Galway City

Submission to

Proposed Waterways Forum

July 2019

Preface

Established in 2014, Galway City Community Network (GCCN) is the Public Participation Network in Galway City. It represents groups and organisations in the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City. The twin objectives that GCCN pursues are to

- Advance the values of sustainability, equality, culture, community, empowerment and inclusivity and embed these in the policies, programmes and practice of local government, state organisations, national government and civil society;
- Develop and implement progressive models of and approaches to representation, participation and engagement for civil society in informing and shaping policy development and implementation.

Submission

Galway City Community Networks welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the proposal to establish a Waterways Forum in Galway City.

As was outlined in the meeting between Galway City Council and a range of stakeholders, the Waterways are a crucial part of the heritage and current culture of Galway City. As also outlined at the meeting, the management of the Waterways is governed by a variety of actors, often underpinned by archaic legislation. As a result, responsibility for the Waterways is very often unclear. In that context, the establishment of a Waterways Forum that will facilitate the participation of these interests is innovative and welcome.

Below GCCN outlines a number of suggestions for the terms of reference.

Aim

GCCN suggests that the aim of the Waterways Forum should be to bring all interested stakeholders, individuals and groups, statutory and non-statutory together to:

- Clarify current management and responsibilities;
- Explore common interests and concerns;
- Support consultation and collaboration with wider community
- Facilitate the development of a Masterplan for Galway Canals and Waterways, including developing the brief to inform the tender for a suitably qualified multidisciplinary team to undertake the work;
- Monitor the implementation of the Masterplan;
- Make recommendations to the appropriate Strategic Policy Committee, the Local Community Development Committee and Galway City Council.

See Appendix I for a more detailed scope of work.

Principles

1. **The process must be participatory.** The usual planning and consultation process proceeds with officials creating a draft plan often with the help of outside consultants. The draft plan is then offered to the public in a consultation process which most often results in objections, the need for clarifications, and repeated re-drafts. This gives rise to the sense of officials and the public fighting

with each other from entrenched positions rather than working together to realise the best outcome for all. The process ends up becoming drawn-out and adversarial. By involving stakeholders from the beginning all participants share the same knowledge; differences of opinion can be worked out along the way; and a final consensus achieved. Participants become advocates for the plan rather than objectors to it.

In establishing a Waterways Forum GCCN recommends that the approach goes beyond participation to true collaboration. This would involve members of the Waterways Forum being involved at all levels of planning, monitoring and review of any planning or Masterplanning exercises.

2. **The process must be visionary.** The opposite to a visionary process is one that starts from the current position and projects forward. A visionary process starts with a desired future state then works backwards to identify impediments and devise strategies for dealing with or removing them. We are recommending the latter.
3. **The current legislative framework must not be a constraint.** One of the three main reasons for the current poor state of our waterways is the set of antiquated, redundant, and dysfunctional laws that apply to the ownership, responsibility, and management of them. The main applicable laws are 170, 150, and 70 years old respectively. The first two of these are to be found in the statutory books of the UK Houses of Parliament.
4. **All relevant knowledge and information must be shared equally.** The Local Authority is in possession of various documents that are important for understanding and appreciating the issues surrounding the waterways. These must be shared with members of the waterways Forum so that any contribution to decision-making is informed by the most up-to-date research available and information.

In spite of the point 3 above about the relevant legislation it is still important to understand what the laws say and exactly what their implications are. There needs to be a better understanding of the geography, history, and cultural importance of the City's rivers and canals. This history and development go back to the founding of the City in the 13th century and extend through the medieval and early modern periods. There were significant periods of development prior to the canal building in the middle of the 19th century.

Information about the European Water Framework Directive, the National River Basin Management Plan, the Local Authority Waters Programme, CFram, and Rivers Trusts must be shared

Scientific studies need to be taken into account that have revealed the poor quality of the City's waterways.

The report from the five user workshops on the future of Galway's Waterways conducted during 2017 and 2018 should be fully considered by the planning forum.

The recommendations of the Natural Environment and Waterways Committee that met during the early 2000's should be taken into account.



5. **Users must be involved.** If the Waterways Forum is to negotiate between sometimes competing and even conflicting demands from users, users must be involved from the beginning. Below we list a number of users, representatives of which must be included.

- a. Clubs – kayakers, rowers, boaters, anglers, sub-aquas. These can be further sub-divided into adult clubs and the student clubs at the University and secondary school levels
- b. Residents – All those who live along the banks of the rivers and canals
- c. Businesses – All those whose businesses are located along the canal banks and waterways
- d. Organisations and Institutions - Schools, churches and convents that are located along the banks of the canal and waterways
- e. Environmentalists, walkers, tour guides, etc – Those people who are concerned about the environment and biodiversity, who just like to walk along them or who take visitors for walking tours that involve the rivers and canals.

See Appendix II for a list of organisations/groups that should be represented.

- 6. **Water safety** must be part of the consideration, particularly given the sometimes unfortunate connection to mental health and self-harm must be part of the considerations.
- 7. **Adequate time must be given to the process, but a deadline should also be set.** This is not to say that the process needs to take a long time. However, the amount of information to be taken in should not be underestimated nor should the time required to deliberate and reach consensus be underestimated. In order to avoid the process dragging on longer than it needs to an ambitious

deadline should be set and the process should move forward with a sense of urgency. A deadline of a month or two should be possible for issuing a draft report.

8. **An outside facilitator should guide the process.** The users, stakeholders, and officials will all have strong and conflicting opinions therefore the use of a professional, independent facilitator is the best way to manage consensus within an agreed time frame and with a professional output.

Appendix I Detailed Scope of Interest

- Explore current usage and knowledge
- Identify issues and concerns for the promotion, development and protection of Galway Canals and Waterways
- Update members on work to date along with results of assessment reports, screening and ecological impact assessment
- Increase awareness of the current value of the waterways – environmental, wildlife habitats and corridors, both aquatic and terrestrial, history and heritage e.g. mills and industry, recreational, community focus and amenity, visitors and tourism, role as green infrastructure for the city through education workshops and outdoor events
- Work to recognise common interests
- Describe future possibilities, opportunities and outcomes for wildlife and biodiversity, community resource, sport, recreation, history and heritage, green infrastructure, education and enhanced awareness for all ages, residents and visitors, with improved signage and provision of information
- Promote community involvement in current and future use of the canals and waterways, in particular, involvement of local schools and other educational bodies
- State key priorities for waterways for support and protection of heritage, community and environmental considerations including water quality, habitat protection and biodiversity enhancement, flood protection and management
- Promote collaboration with NUIG, GMIT, NPWS, environmental groups and citizen scientists to develop a profile of wildlife and biodiversity on the canals and waterways to identify current and future threats and appropriate mitigation actions
- Facilitate consultation and collaboration with the wider community
- Highlight the importance of protecting wildlife and biodiversity and existing communities along with increased use of the canals and waterways, protection of green spaces along the waterways for wildlife and residents, recognizing the protected structures (RPS) of the canals and rivers and the SAC status of the river, located adjacent to the Galway Bay SAC
- Consider how the canals and waterways can contribute to flood management, carbon reduction and environmental sustainability through development of green infrastructure, including possibilities of electricity generation
- Establish clear planning and environmental policies and guidance for developing beside or on the canals and waterways
- Review feedback from consultation and collaboration
- Outline elements for Masterplan
- Prepare brief for Masterplan
- Review draft Masterplan
- Make recommendations to appropriate SPC and GCC, re future development and management of the waterways, role of GCC, LCNT, Waterways Ireland, Inland Fisheries etc.

Appendix II Representation

Membership to include representatives of all interested stakeholders, individuals and groups

- Galway City Council;
- Galway City Community Network – representing the Community, Environmental and Voluntary sectors in Galway;
- National Parks and Wildlife Service;
- Office of Public Works;
- Lough Corrib Navigation Trust;
- Galway Waterways Foundation;
- Corrib Beo;
- An Taisce;
- Galway Environmental Network;
- NUI Galway;
- CFRAMS;
- Inland Fisheries;
- Local Authority Waterways and Community Office;
- Galway residents, in particular those who live near the waterways;
- Sporting groups – rowers, kayakers;
- Recreational groups – fishermen, boat users, cyclists, walkers;
- Safety bodies – Galway Fire Brigade, Garda Síochana, Claddagh Rescue;
- Business owners – B&Bs, restaurants, cafes;
- Heritage groups - Galway Civic Trust;
- Engineers with an interest in the area, for example Paul Duffy.

