



# Barrow Blueway Economic Plan

Experience the Barrow Blueway

JULY 2021



## **A Blueway is ...**

*A network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites, based on, and closely linked with the water, together with providers facilitating access to activities and experiences.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bluewaysireland.org/>

# **Barrow Blueway** Economic Plan

Experience the Barrow Blueway

# FOREWORD

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On behalf of County Kildare LEADER Partnership, I welcome the publication of the Barrow Blueway Economic Plan as an important step in realising the potential of our waterways to contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of County Kildare.

The opportunity for a Barrow Blueway Economic Plan was first identified in August 2019 when Kildare County Council, Laois County Council and Waterways Ireland held community information meetings about this potentially exciting new development. County Kildare LEADER Partnership attended these meetings and received enquiries from entrepreneurs and community groups alike with ideas for project development.

Shortly afterwards, the Minister for Rural and Community Development announced funding under the Rural Regeneration Fund to progress the Barrow Blueway project from Lowtown/Robertstown to Athy. The momentum created by this announcement created the opportunity to bring people together and to plan for the sustainable development of business and outdoor activity in time for the opening of the newly finished towpath, on schedule to be completed by the beginning of 2023.

Work on this plan began in earnest in August 2020 with the appointment of Louise Browne Associates and with the approval of grant aid under the Rural Development / LEADER Programme. The project has been overseen by a steering group from County Kildare LEADER Partnership, Kildare County Council and Waterways Ireland. The engagement of local stakeholders has been of prime importance throughout the process from design of the project brief and planning workshops to final draft. Participants from a variety of sectors such as enterprises, tourism businesses, state agencies, local authorities, elected members, sports clubs, and community organisations have been actively involved in the process of developing this plan.

The launch of this plan follows closely on from the publication of “Our Rural Future” Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 by Heather Humphries TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development. The plan itself has been closely aligned to the Government’s Rural Development Policy, particularly Measure 36, (Investment in Blueways) and the associated Sustainable Development Goals. As we begin the economic recovery from the global COVID-19 pandemic, the launch of the plan is timely and is intended to provide a boost to the local tourism industry and highlight the benefits of outdoor leisure and recreation for the health and wellbeing of our communities.

The process involved in developing this economic plan has not only created a blueprint for the development of the Grand Canal Line of the Barrow Blueway route, but has also established new and improved relationships among all stakeholders. We look forward to building on these relationships and encouraging businesses and the local community to benefit from the development of the wonderful resource that the waterways provide.

I wish to thank everyone who has contributed to the development of this report and, in particular, Waterways Ireland, the local authorities, and the staff of County Kildare LEADER Partnership who have all been fully committed to this project over the last twelve months, despite the restrictions of COVID-19.

Pat Leogue,  
General / Social Inclusion Manager,  
County Kildare LEADER Partnership,  
July 2021

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# Barrow Blueway Economic Plan: At a Glance

## Purpose

Spurred on by the construction of the Barrow Blueway, the purpose of the plan is to inform, guide and encourage economic development initiatives that will bring the experience of the Blueway to life for local people and visitors to the area.



### THE PLACE

The focus of the plan is the Barrow Line - the canal spur off the Grand Canal - which stretches some 46kms from Lowtown/Roberstown in north county Kildare to Athy. The towpath route, while predominantly rural, is punctuated, beyond Roberstown, by the towns of Rathangan, Monasterevin, Vicarstown and Athy.



### OUR VISION

To realise the economic potential of the Barrow Blueway as a catalyst for land and water based recreation and as a corridor that connects communities, places and experiences.

## The Enabling Context

### The Blueways Initiative

Blueway Partners  
Developing Blueways  
Blueway Accreditation

### The Barrow Blueway Project

Towpath Works - onsite  
Road Crossings and Safety  
Improvements at Junctions, Bridge  
Design - at detailed design  
Completion Due - start of 2023

### Policies, Plans & Projects

Suite of Enabling Policies  
Masterplans & Feasibility Studies  
Projects - in train

# The Blueway Blueprint

## KEY PRINCIPLES



**Community Participation** - Involve local people every step of the way



**Partnership** - Work together to effect change



**Stewardship** - Actively manage the natural and cultural heritage



**Sense of Place** - Be true to the distinctiveness of this area



**Universal Access** - Provide opportunities for all to enjoy



**Share the Space** - Accommodate the needs of different users

## KEY ELEMENTS



**Making Plans** - Pre Arrival Information



**Getting Started** - Arrival Points, all geared up



**Taking the Plunge** - Activity Points, fully equipped



**Keeping Going** - Service Points, along the way



**Staying Dry** - Shelter Points on the longer stretches



**Going Deeper** - Heritage Engagement Points, with a story to tell

## KEY PLACES

1. Robertstown

2. Ballyteague

3. Lock 22

4. Rathangan

5. Ummeras

6. Ballykelly

7. Monasterevin

8. Fisherstown

9. Vicarstown

10. Athy

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES



**What's Here?** - Building on existing assets



**What's Coming?** - Plans & projects in the pipeline



**What Else We Could Do** - Other things that will make a difference

# Gearing Up



Activating the Blueway



Doing Business



Providing Support

## Getting the Word Out



- Story
- Identity
- Communication

## Managing the Blueway



- Management Plan
- Visitor Safety
- Shared Stewardship



# 01 Introduction

## 1.1 Why a Plan?

In commissioning this report, our client team – County Kildare LEADER Partnership, Kildare County Council and Waterways Ireland – wanted to develop a shared vision and plan for a positive visitor experience grounded in the sustainable economic development of the Barrow Blueway. Spurred on by the construction of the Barrow Blueway, the purpose of the plan is to inform, guide and encourage economic development initiatives that will bring the experience of the Blueway to life for local people and visitors to the area. Creating an evidence base for such initiatives in terms of the very latest market intelligence on Blueway users; building an

awareness of related developments along the route and hearing first-hand from all those wanting to develop their ideas has been the driving force for our work. In presenting this plan-led approach we are concerned to ensure that the activation of the Blueway will be in keeping with the area's distinctive sense of place; will align with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development and will result in benefits not only for those keen to be involved in its development but also for canalside communities up and down the Barrow Line of the Grand Canal.



The Barrow Blueway, if well developed, could meet a range of needs -

- **enhance people's well-being** – enabling them to be active in nature
- **improve people's prospects** – by presenting business opportunities
- **appeal to visitors** – by delivering a range of excellent experiences
- **increase awareness and appreciation** – by facilitating encounters for the young and not so young with the waterway's natural and cultural heritage
- **add value to the work that is underway** – by building on and integrating what is being developed – the path itself, the plans and masterplans for the places along the route and the projects which are being developed by individuals, communities and other organisations
- **improve the range, depth and accessibility of activities** – by identifying the needs and motivations of users and visitors
- **orientate people** – by letting them know where to go, what to do, what they can see
- **reveal the stories of the place** – through interpretive wayfinding
- **identify vital connections** – linking things to do, places to go, things to discover
- **facilitate pleasurable access to the water and along the towpath** – by offering choice of movement – on land, on water
- **provide a suitable venue**, close to where people live, for universal access to cycling and paddlesports

### 1.2 Who is it For?

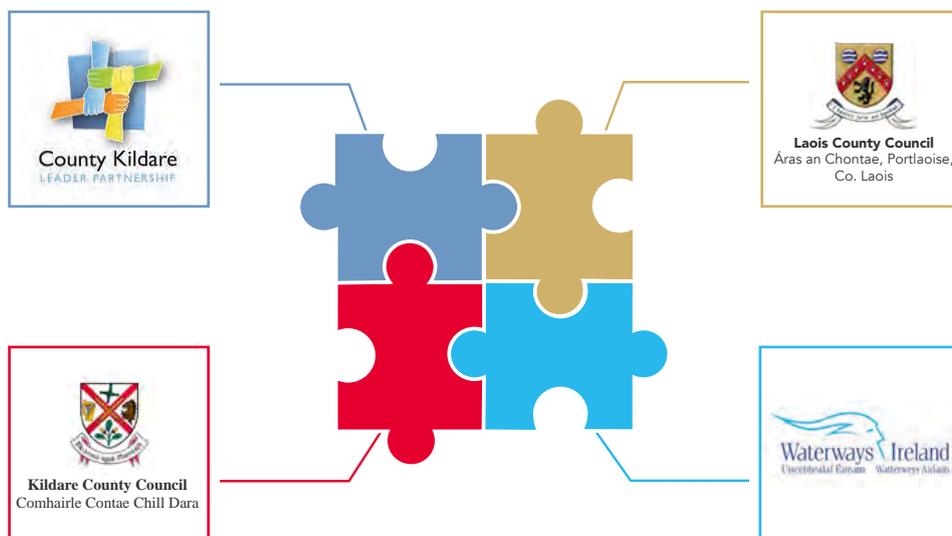
First and foremost, this plan is aimed at potential entrepreneurs, recognising that they do not exist in isolation and that their success is dependent on a wider collaborative effort. It is also aimed at the partners, agencies and communities as they work together to facilitate the development of the Blueway. Importantly the plan is for all those who contributed to its development on the way through so that they can see, not only the outcome of the time they invested in the process, but also how their own venture might best be realised within the context of the wider agenda which the plan sets out.

### 1.3 How was it Developed?

Following a competitive tendering process, Louise Browne Associates was commissioned by County Kildare LEADER Partnership in August 2020 to undertake the work. The development of the plan relied hugely on the input from a wide range of contributors, listed on page 70. Ideas, experience and expertise were sourced through a comprehensive series of one-to-one strategic conversations; five publicly advertised participative workshops and a series of focus group working sessions with community development groups, key agencies, and other interested individuals. A three-day field trip, conducted by barge, bike and on foot enabled members of the consultant team to travel the length of the canal, visit each of the settlements and experience the destination through the eyes of a visitor. Our site investigations were supplemented with desk research drawn from a wide range of sources which we were keen to ensure were as up to date as possible.

### 1.4 How it Works

In what follows we provide an initial introduction to our study area – The Place. This section is supported by a series of appendices which detail the outcome of our audit of the destination’s assets, attributes, heritage features and facilities. In sections three - The Blueway Initiative - we set out the background to this project and detail important considerations for its future development, promotion and management. In section four, we explore the Market Opportunity to better understand the motivations and needs of existing and prospective users and visitors. In section five - the Destination Response - we draw on the outcomes of all the engagement undertaken – people’s hopes, concerns and ideas - and begin to fashion a vision for the Barrow Blueway and a mission for all those who are keen to be involved in its development. An important consideration here is our development of what we are calling a Blueway Blueprint – a framework which identifies what’s needed, what’s missing and the role places along the route could and indeed, need to play, if the ambition for the Blueway is to be realised. In section six, The Economic Opportunity, we present the spatial outworking of the blueprint where we explore at key locations along the route, ‘What’s Here?’, ‘What’s Coming?’ and ‘What Else We Could Do’ in terms of recommended interventions. Section seven - Gearing Up - and eight - Getting the Word Out - deal respectively with the activation of the Blueway and its marketing and promotion and include recommended system-wide actions. Finally, in section nine - Managing and Keeping Track - we consider how best to ensure that this initiative delivers on its promises.

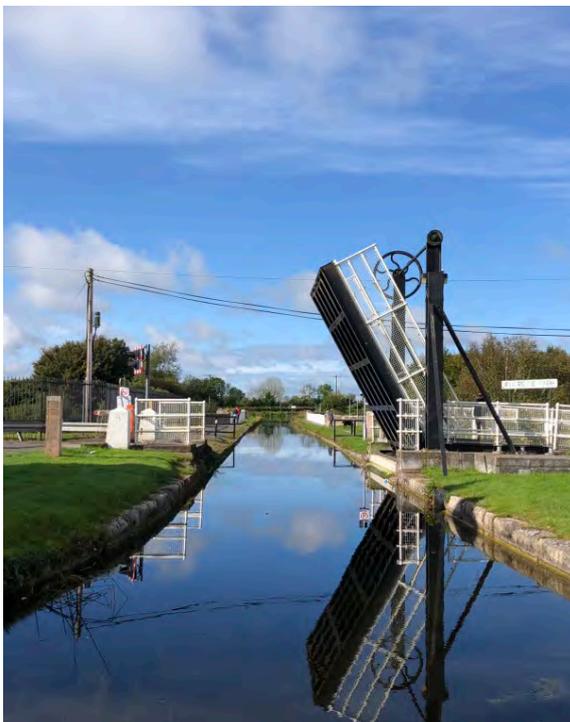


## 02 The Place

*The River Barrow rises in the Slieve Bloom Mountains in the southern midlands, and flows, joining its sister rivers the Nore and the Suir, into the Irish Sea at Waterford Harbour. Through a tremendous feat of engineering, it was made navigable in the eighteenth century by the insertion of short sections of canal along its course. Today the 114km long 'Barrow Way' follows what's left of canalside towpaths and riverside roads from Lowtown in County Kildare to St Mullins in south County Carlow.*

### 2.1 Our Focus

The focus of this plan is the Barrow Line – the canal spur off the Grand Canal - which stretches some 46kms from Lowtown/Robertstown in north county Kildare to Athy. The towpath route which is currently signposted as the Barrow Way, is predominantly rural and is punctuated by the towns of Rathangan, Monasterevin, Vicarstown and Athy.



### 2.2 Key Characteristics<sup>2</sup>

The Canal sits above the valley of the River Barrow as far as Monasterevin and crosses some of its tributaries by short aqueducts. At Monasterevin it crosses the Barrow via a longer aqueduct and leaves the river valley. An important designation therefore is the River Barrow and River Nore Special Area of Conservation (SAC). What is clear from ecological surveys carried out for the riparian councils along the Barrow and the Barrow Line is the high quality of the environment in terms of its biodiversity, water quality and visual appeal and its sensitivity at certain times of year. While the Canal has not been designated as a whole, parts of it have proposed National Heritage Area (pNHA) status and it is close to and interacts with the River Barrow and River Nore Special Area of Conservation under the EC Habitats Directive.

The primary features of built heritage on the route are the canal structures most of which date from 1790 and are intact. Of significance are the bridges, aqueducts, winding holes, warehouses, quays and Grand Canal agent's offices, examples of which can be seen in Athy and Monasterevin. The Canal is an important part of Ireland's industrial heritage and links the navigable River Barrow with the Grand Canal between the Shannon and Dublin. Although its significance was reduced soon after by the building of the faster railways, the Canal tells the story of agrarian and industrial development and is part of the socio economic history of the towns along its route.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on our Place Audit & Analysis click here.

## 2.3 The Towns and Villages

### Robertstown

Predominantly situated on the southern banks of the Grand Canal, Robertstown is an historic settlement which developed with the arrival of the Canal in 1784. Located within the western boglands, the T-shaped village core runs along the canal between Binns Bridge and the former Grand Canal Hotel and the intersection with Robertstown Hill. The Barrow Line of the Grand Canal connects to the main line of the Canal west of the village, at Lowtown. Its location offers significant potential for the village in terms of waterways related tourism as well as potential to develop walking /cycling routes linked to the wider network along the Grand Canal, the Barrow Blueway and incorporating looped local routes.



*'We had travelled less than a mile along the summit level before we saw ahead, framed by the arch of a bridge, the canal hotel at Robertstown. It is an almost exact replica of the Shannon Harbour hotel, but is in better repair being at the present time a Turf Board hostel for workers on the bogs. Robertstown itself, a whitewashed canal depot, a post office and a shop and 'select bar' or two strung along the canal waterfront beside the hotel, is a canal village... There was, for me at any rate, a fascination about Robertstown which I find difficult to define ... A particular atmosphere, melancholy, nostalgic yet captivating, always invests a waterfront no matter whether it is that of some old seaport town, some cliff-walled fishing cove or merely, as in this case, some inland village beside a still canal. It captivates because it is a doorway to the unknown and so appeals to our sense of adventure and that nomadic instinct which lies buried in all of us.*

*(From Green & Silver, L T C Rolt, George Allen and Unwin, 1946)*



### Rathangan

Rathangan is located on the Barrow Line and the River Slate. The Canal is designated as a proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA). The protection and conservation of these waterways is important from a local and international perspective. The Slate River is a valuable amenity resource in the town and its banks, along with those of the Canal offer, potential for developing passive recreational areas. Amenity areas outside the town include Killinthomas Wood and Lullymore Heritage Park and Rathangan also boasts a wide variety of sporting and social clubs.



### Monasterevin

Monasterevin gets its name from St. Evin's Monastery, on the site of the present Moore Abbey which was built by the Earls of Drogheda in the 17th Century. The town was laid out in typical 18th century grid format, with the West End and Drogheda Street dating from this era. The construction of the Canal in 1786 and later the railway, facilitated the industrial development in the town, most notably Cassidy's Distillery on the Dublin Road. The town's intriguing configuration of waterways has earned Monasterevin the title, "Venice of Ireland". Monasterevin has a wealth of natural amenities which considerably enhance the historic fabric of the town. The Canal and the River Barrow provide an extensive amenity for walking, angling and boating and constitute prime recreational and environmental assets. The town also has strong associations with the Earls of Drogheda, Irish Tenor Count John Mc Cormack and the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins.



### Vicarstown

Vicarstown, located in County Laois, originally developed as an 18th century port on the Grand Canal Barrow Line. The village core is focused on the Canal where a number of historic canal warehouses were built in the 1800s. The village grew further west of the Canal where a public house, a Catholic Church and Old School House were subsequently developed. Of key significance is the Grand Canal pNHA which links to the Stradbally River SAC at Cormac Aqueduct. Active recreational space is available at the GAA playing fields located to the west of the village. Similarly, the Old School House also provides for the multifunctional communal and recreational needs of the community.

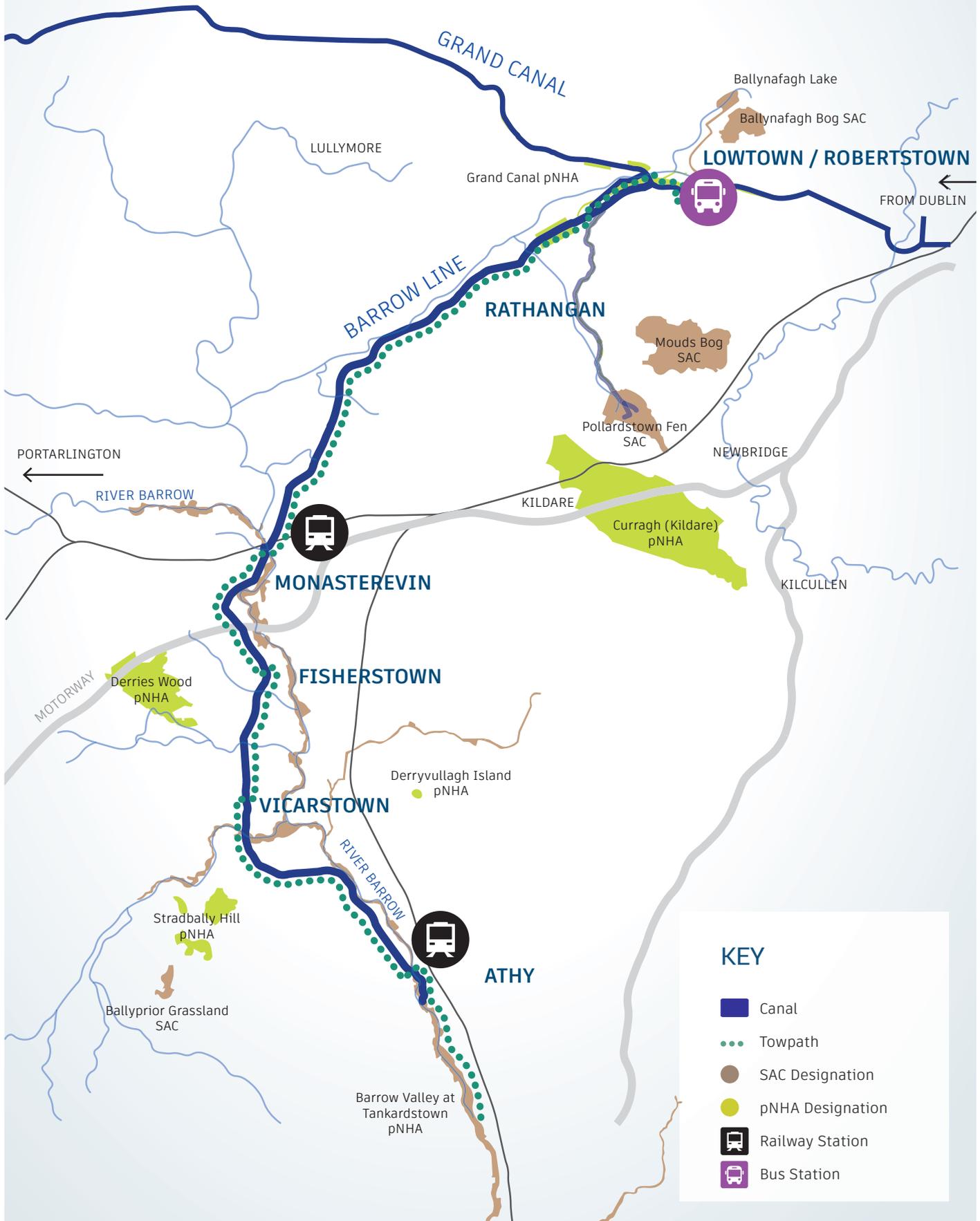


### Athy

With a name dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the town of Athy developed as part of the Anglo Norman settlement in Ireland. Its strategic location on the River Barrow was to play a key role in the development and consolidation of the town over the intervening centuries. The opening of the Barrow Line Canal in 1791 led to a boom in the trade of corn resulting in the construction of warehouses and other facilities in the town. The arrival of the railway in the mid 19th century led to the further consolidation of the town. Given the location, extent and quality of both the River Barrow and the Grand Canal Barrow Line at Athy, there is enormous potential for the development of waterways tourism throughout the town and a great opportunity to harness the benefits of the Barrow Blueway.



# The Place



## 03 The Blueway Initiative

### 3.1 The Barrow Blueway

Waterways Ireland owns and manages the Grand Canal Barrow Line, a 46 km long still water canal between Lowtown, a junction on the Grand Canal and the Barrow Navigation at Athy Co. Kildare. Most of the route is within County Kildare, with a section of towpath and canal in County Laois. Waterways Ireland is currently developing the infrastructure for the Blueway by resurfacing the existing towpath to create a 2.5m wide, traffic-free, multi-use route. Kildare and Laois County Councils are providing pedestrian crossings where the route crosses roads and a number of lowered jetties are being put in place to enable easy access and egress for paddlesports.

The programme of works to create the 46 km Blueway is being funded through a successful application by Waterways Ireland, Kildare County Council and Laois County Council to the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to progress the Barrow Blueway project from Lowtown/Robertstown through Vicarstown, to Athy. The project is being led through a partnership approach which also includes the private, community and voluntary sectors thereby ensuring that it will be developed, promoted and maintained for the benefit of the region as a whole.

The concept for the Barrow Blueway was initially developed as a 115 km route from Lowtown to St Mullins in County Carlow. The SAC designation along the River Barrow however meant that planning permission for that part of the route was not granted. The remainder of the route is available for walkers as a grassy surface and will continue to be available as a National Waymarked Way, the Barrow Way.

The development of the Grand Canal Greenway from Celbridge is also moving forward with significant sections either in progress or completed<sup>3</sup>. Robertstown is not only on the Grand Canal but is also close to the planned end of the Barrow Blueway at Lowtown. It is likely that more experienced cyclists will use both facilities – one in conjunction with the other – and may rise to the challenge of the longer cycle route.



### 3.2 The Ambition for the Blueway

This initiative is designed as an opportunity to promote well-being through opportunities for walking, cycling and enjoying the water on paddle-powered craft. A small number of barges and cabin cruisers currently use the waterway. Motorised craft may come in greater numbers as a result of the additional services provided for Blueway users as the waterway is linked to the Shannon via the Grand Canal and to St. Mullins via the Barrow. Apart from increasing people's well-being, a greater level of use of the waterway and its towpath by visitors to the area is intended to improve the local economy and to support local services.

### 3.3 The Blueway Partners

The development of Blueways has been achieved through a partnership between Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland, Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland. Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Offices and LEADER companies are also engaged in animating the routes, facilitating business development and service provision and in marketing the opportunities. The partners have decided that in order for a route to call itself a Blueway in Ireland it must meet certain criteria. These are set out in the Blueway partnership's publications<sup>4</sup> with routes being subject to accreditation.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.waterwaysireland.org/Pages/Development-of-the-Grand-Canal-Greenway.aspx>.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/blueway-management-development-guide\\_0.pdf](https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/blueway-management-development-guide_0.pdf)



### 3.4 Blueway Accreditation

There are multiple Blueways in Ireland and Northern Ireland which are at various stages in the official accreditation process. This independent accreditation process evaluates the merit of Blueway developments against a range of criteria including: Visitor Experience; Technical Standards, Safety; Sustainability; Environmental, and Access. The process operates to ensure that high quality, visitor centric Blueway experiences are developed. The Barrow Blueway (Lowtown to Athy) has received Stage 1 Accreditation approval, and Stage 2 approval will be sought when physical product development is completed.

Progress towards accreditation is in three development phases:



Progress is assessed at each stage by an independent inspector appointed by the Partnership. This role is currently fulfilled by Humphrey Murphy of Irish Leisure Consultants.

### 3.5 Blueway Accreditation Criteria

Blueway accreditation criteria are organised into 6 main categories, dealing with:





## The Experience

The Blueway experience should take account of the fact that preparing trail infrastructure is an important part of the development but that the key to its success is the kind of experience the participant receives from it. The trail should be appealing in the sense that it should also provide opportunities to engage with the landscape, culture and heritage of an area, highlighting those elements that contribute to a distinct sense of place.

The trail needs to be designed in such a way that it is possible and comfortable to use for each activity, broken into appropriate sections, and that all services for arrival, accommodation, hire equipment, eating, learning skills to use the trail and guided activity experiences or journeys are in place. Information is needed for visitors in advance to allow for planning and preparation, and information and signage should be available to guide people to access points and trail services. One of the requirements for a trailhead is that facilities for changing and toilets should be available to the user.



## Technical Considerations

Blueway trails need to conform to trail standards set through Sport Ireland or Sport Northern Ireland in consultation with the Governing Bodies of the relevant sports. There are guidelines for walking, cycling, and shared use trails; and for small craft water trails (paddling kayaks, canoes and stand-up paddleboards (SUP) or rowing small craft. Trails that support sailing journeys or snorkel journeys are also included in the guidelines but are not relevant to the Barrow Blueway.

In addition, arrangements need to be made to ensure that the Blueway is designed in such a way as to facilitate multi-use and universal use, and is managed to mitigate against user conflict. Sustrans' 'one path' approach is worth consideration and can be accessed at <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/for-professionals/our-approach/one-path-initiative-developing-a-positive-culture-on-busy-paths/>





### Access

Blueways are required to have formal access agreement to both land and water for a minimum of 10 years. Since both towpath and water are in the ownership of Waterways Ireland this agreement has preceded the Blueway development. Public liability insurance needs to be put in place by the trail developer for the purposes for which it is to be used.

Commercial users of a Waterways Ireland Blueway who are providing on-water activities are required to have a licence to use the Blueway with their groups; should be able to demonstrate their competence and must have insurances in place. Ireland’s Association for Adventure Tourism (IAAT) has recently negotiated access to a group insurance scheme on behalf of its members. [www.iaat.ie](http://www.iaat.ie) or [@iaat.ie](mailto:@iaat.ie) has details of membership, insurance, representation and business support for adventure tourism providers. A guide for businesses operating on the Blueway has been developed – see Appendix A. This has been drafted to direct interested businesses, depending on the nature of the enterprise and its intended location, to the relevant point of contact and associated processes.



Links to National Governing Body accreditation schemes relevant to the Barrow Blueway include;



[See link](#)



[See link](#)



[See link](#)

For those leading community health walks on a voluntary basis the Irish Heart Foundation provides training



[See link](#)



### Safety

Blueway criteria require that experiences are designed for novices with few or no skills in adventure activities. It is important that users are not exposed to hidden dangers. Providing for adventure activities requires both the infrastructure provider and the users to be well informed about the risks they will take, since adventure activities have inherent risk, and should be aware of the care they need to take.

Activity operators can minimise risks for novices through providing appropriate experiences and guiding and supervising participants. Operators should ensure that they can demonstrate their competence to lead people in the Blueway environment. User organisations may apply for training and approval/ accreditation/recognition from governing bodies of the sports they intend to lead. A prerequisite is always personal competence in the activity, before seeking to lead others, as is a valid adult first aid certificate, preferably with a remote first aid element. Safeguarding training and screening of staff who work with children or vulnerable adults is recommended.



### Conservation and Environment

Blueways should be designed with a knowledge of sites and features with nature conservation designations, the habitats and species they are designated for and the activities to which they are sensitive. In the case of the Barrow Blueway, the Special Area of Conservation SAC (Nore and Barrow) intersects with the Blueway each time it crosses over or travels close to the river Barrow. The water supply for the Grand Canal Barrow Line emerges from springs in Pollardstown Fen which is also an SAC. Blueways are intended to enhance, and enable people to understand and enjoy the natural environment they travel through. Canal towpaths are important biodiversity corridors with interesting flora and fauna both in and out of the water. Guided nature walks and information materials can help users to understand and protect sensitive flora and fauna. Old canal bridges are particularly important for bats and the water environment, with its emergent vegetation, supports a diversity of damselflies and dragonflies.



### Sustainability

In order to ensure the sustainability of the route, three main requirements must be in place to achieve Blueway accreditation:



The Blueway Management Group requires the development of a formal document e.g. a memorandum of understanding or other formal partnership agreement, which sets out as a minimum;

- Aims and Objectives
- Spirit of the Agreement i.e. collaboration
- Synopsis of Overall Activities
- Term, Termination and Review
- Specific Agreements – these may include:
  - Key Responsibilities of each party
  - Key Contacts / Representatives
  - Financial Obligations / Budgets
  - Branding
  - Intellectual Property

To ensure ongoing sustainability the group should be led by a local authority or state agency.

# 04 The Market Opportunity

## 4.1 Market Context

In undertaking the market assessment, much of the research cited relates to the performance of the sector and consumer sentiment prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, more recent research indicates trends towards increased outdoor activity, and it is anticipated that the completion of the Barrow Blueway project will coincide with a time when travel restrictions cease to have a negative impact on visitor numbers.



### TOURISM RECOVERY TASKFORCE

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a Tourism Recovery Taskforce was appointed in May 2020 to prepare a Tourism Recovery Plan. Published in October 2020, the Plan includes recommendations on how the Irish tourism sector can best adapt and recover in a changed tourism environment as a result of the crisis. Key areas of focus include increasing investment in product development, restoring competitiveness and building a sustainable tourism industry. The purpose of the Group is to oversee the implementation of the Recovery Plan produced by the Tourism Recovery Taskforce and monitor the sector's recovery from the COVID crisis. The expectation that pre-crisis levels of tourism demand will not bounce back before 2023 provides tourism destinations with an opportunity to reshape the industry towards one that is more sustainable, more innovative and that equally benefits travellers, local communities, the environment, and local economies.

## 4.2 Supply Side Considerations

### Land-based trails



The walking route along the towpath has been in place for many years and is promoted by Sport Ireland as a National Waymarked Way. Signage for the route is in place and a monitoring system was installed by the National Trails Office in Sport Ireland. The route is easy due to its level nature. The current surface of the former towpath varies from grass to tarmac with the majority of the route not having a sealed surface. At present whilst both walkers and cyclists use the route, the surface is most suitable for well-shod walkers or people on mountain bikes. In order to better accommodate walkers and cyclists a suitable surface is being provided along the route. This is a major undertaking which is being put in place in stages through a partnership approach with Waterways Ireland and led by Kildare County Council with completion anticipated by the beginning of 2023.

**Water-based trails**

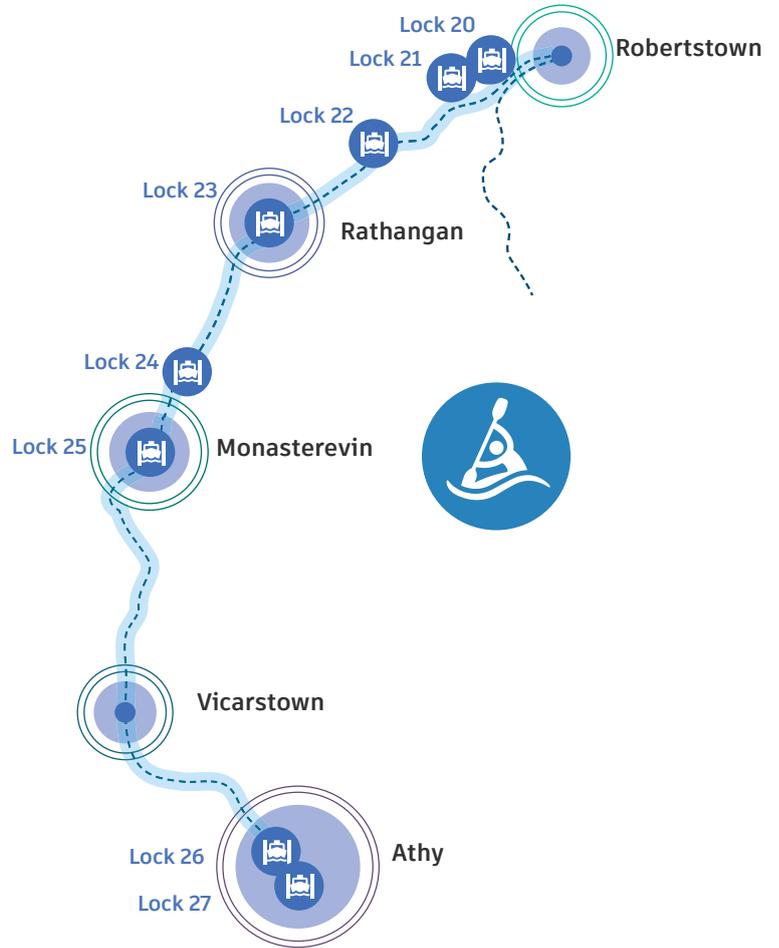


The feasibility of the Barrow Line route for paddlesports was examined by Canoeing Ireland for the Barrow Blueway Marketing Sub Group<sup>5</sup> and a detailed report prepared based on fieldwork by the authors<sup>6</sup>. The report concluded that this still water canal offers a great opportunity for the development of a Blueway trail. Some of the distances between service and access points are considered challenging for beginners and there are some places where it would be difficult for someone accidentally capsizing or entering the water to climb out. The report recommends providing lower jetties at some locations at the right height for paddlesports users. Nine sets of lower jetties are being installed by Waterways Ireland as part of the ongoing work on the Blueway infrastructure. The main purpose of the jetties is to allow paddlers to exit the water, carry their craft around locks and re-enter the water on the other side. Locations where this is required include;

- Lock 19 (old Barrow Line)
- Lock 20
- Lock 21
- Lock 22
- Lock 23
- Lock 24
- Lock 25
- Under the M7 motorway bridge
- Lock 26

The paddling feasibility study recommends dividing the trail into five sections, accessed via 6 trailheads or access and service points at;

- |                                  |                         |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>1</b> Lowtown                 | <b>4</b> Monasterevin   |
| <b>2</b> Lock 22 Glenaree Bridge | <b>5</b> Vicarstown     |
| <b>3</b> Rathangan               | <b>6</b> Athy (Lock 27) |



<sup>5</sup> Members of the Barrow Blueway Marketing Sub Group are detailed on page 71

<sup>6</sup> Canoeing Ireland 2019 Lowtown to Athy Blueway Feasibility Study - Trail survey carried out by Ciaran Maguire and Aidan Doran.

**Service Provision**

With the exception of Lock 22, the proposed trailheads coincide with the main settlements and their services. The feasibility study recommends that toilets and showers should be available at each of the trailheads and suggests that existing facilities such as the railway station at Monasterevin and the shop and garage close to the canal at Rathangan, might be adapted. The feasibility study notes the

lack of services for visitors along the way. Canoeing Ireland points to the importance of providing services if the route is to be developed.

At least two canoe outfitting companies ‘Go with the Flow’ and ‘Paddle your Own Canoe’ already use the route in providing self-guided holidays for their guests.



**GO WITH THE FLOW**

Go with the Flow River Adventures is a family run, adventure activity business established in 1996 by Charlie Horan. Based in Kilkenny, it offers affordable, guided canoe trails, canoe hire and canoe holidays on the River Barrow. No prior experience is required and ‘adventures’ are available for complete beginners of all ages and abilities. The company also sells canoes and kayaks. A typical holiday would involve facilitating an arrival by train to Monasterevin from Dublin and the provision of canoe and camping equipment for a journey via the Grand Canal Barrow Line and the Barrow Navigation to St Mullins or Graiguenamanagh over 5 days.



**PADDLE YOUR OWN CANOE**

Paddle Your Own Canoe offers the opportunity to rent a canoe and camping gear and organises multi-day trips. It offers trails between Monasterevin and New Ross and a variety of packages. Customers are expected to transport themselves to the starting point beside the river, where they are met and given a brief introduction followed by a demonstration and safety talk and a practice session in an area of calm, sheltered, flat water. All canoeing gear is supplied and camping needs can be supplied if customers don't have their own tent etc.

The feasibility of the route for paddleboarding has been tested through practical activity from the commercial operator **Shannon SUP** which has worked with beginners on the waterway. Existing activity hubs at **Athy and Vicarstown** also offer opportunities for paddlesports including paddleboarding for local people. The **Blueway Kayak Club** at Monasterevin provides opportunities to try activities and gain leadership qualifications. Paddleboarding is facilitated by the provision of lower jetties suitable for access and egress by kayaks, with a good example of this being at Vicarstown.

A Rowing and Kayaking Club operates in Athy and offers a range of opportunities to try canoeing on the canal and river. The club works with Canoeing Ireland to develop leaders for this community-based activity. There is a vibrant life on the water in Athy

and the club supports the Tri-Athy triathlon event by providing safety cover, and it has hosted a series of canoe polo events in the canal harbour. The Kildare Sports Partnership has supported the development of the club and its leaders and has recently taken forward a Strategic Plan for the Shackleton Outdoor Education Centre at Athy on the Dominican lands between the canal and river<sup>7</sup>

At Vicarstown, the Laois Sports Partnership has assisted the development of the Stradbally, Vicarstown and Timahoe (SVT) Activity and Wellness Hub which has an activity centre on the canal. This offers opportunities for canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding for local people. Monasterevin, Athy and Vicarstown have received funding through Sport Ireland from the Dormant Accounts fund to assist local people to have more active lifestyles and to develop volunteer leaders to support this.

7 S3 Solutions, June 2021, Shackleton Outdoor Education Centre, Strategic Plan

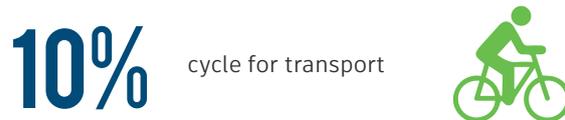
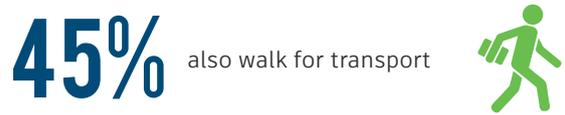
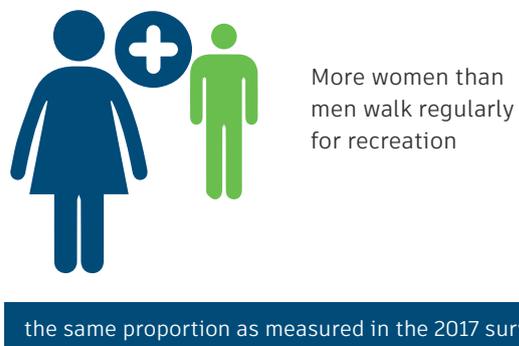
### 4.3 Demand Side Considerations

#### Local Demand

Sport plays a variety of important roles in Ireland today. Participation in sport not only provides considerable physical benefits, but also enhances mental wellbeing. Social participation in sport provides a key community bond. Sports clubs are at the heart of communities throughout Ireland and play a critical role in bringing individuals together and forging community spirit. Three out of every five people in Ireland regularly participate in sport – either actively or socially. Ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to participate in sport and is encouraged to take this opportunity, is a key ambition for Government. Considerable investments are made by Sport Ireland, Local Authorities and Waterways Ireland in order to achieve this.



THE IRISH SPORTS MONITOR (ISM) 2019 IDENTIFIED THAT **RECREATIONAL WALKING IS THE MOST POPULAR FORM OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.**



22% of people surveyed in the ISM report that they have a long-term illness, health problem or disability, and 16% overall report that they have an illness, health problem or disability that prevents them from taking part in sport or exercise. No difference exists by gender, however those who are older are more likely to report a disability with 36% of those aged 65 or older reporting this. Social participation in sport is lowest amongst people with a disability resulting in their being less likely to join a club. Volunteers are an important component in enabling sports participation, but 75% of volunteers reported having no training in provision for people with disabilities in their own club setting.

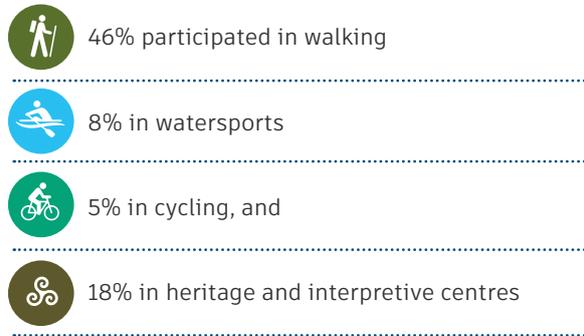
The ISM report identifies that a high proportion of those walking, running and cycling are reliant on **public space** and public facilities to do so. In a more recent report<sup>8</sup> the number of adults participating in sport and recreational walking in Ireland during Covid-19 restrictions is stated as having reached unprecedented levels. In 2020 the participation rate in sporting activity was 51%. Three sports dominated with approximately 710,000 participating in exercise, 680,000 in running and 510,000 in cycling. The proportion of adults described as sedentary in the National Sports Policy<sup>9</sup> has declined to 11% compared to 22% during the same period in 2019.

#### Recreation Markets in Ireland & the UK: Key Sources

- NUI Research on Ireland’s Marine Tourism Sector ‘A Survey of Marine and Coastal Overseas Tourism Activity in Ireland 2018
- RYA, British Marine, Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA), Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), British Canoeing (BC) and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) Annual Watersports Participation Survey UK 2019. This source refers to data from 2018, the most recently published data from this survey, and it surveys people living in the UK, including their participation in activities whilst on holiday
- ORNI, Assessing the Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation in Northern Ireland, 2019

#### Visitor Demand – The Domestic Market

In 2019 domestic visitors were estimated to have taken part in a number of activities relevant to the Blueway. Of these;



Overall in 2020 Fáilte Ireland research shows that domestic trips were mainly focused on the outdoors, and that building itineraries to both help and encourage broader activities planning would be well received by those looking to book. Walking was dominant in terms of activities undertaken with both cycling and water activities increasing in popularity from 2019 to 2020.

In terms of consumer sentiment Fáilte Ireland has identified (Feb 2021) that some 87% of Irish people are considering a short break within the next 12 months in Ireland and 69% are considering a longer break.

Waterways Ireland commissioned research from Amárach in 2016 on business and user attitudes towards improving the surface of the towpath of the River Barrow and the Grand Canal Barrow Line. The research took place at 8 locations along the current route of the Barrow Way with the towns of Athy and Monasterevin being included. 409 surveys were recorded with the following results:

- Profile of respondents:
- Slightly more males than females
  - 51% aged between 26 and 45 years
  - Repeat visits were the norm with three out of five using the trail daily, weekly or more often
  - 15% were on their first visit
  - 86% were walking, compared to 7% who were cycling and 4% who were out running

<sup>8</sup> This report was carried out for Sport Ireland. The research was in five phases, beginning on 28th February 2020 with the latest phase covering 30th April to 15th May 2020. In total over 5,000 interviews took place during this period. IPSOS MORI

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/aaa7d9-national-sports-policy-2018-2027/>

- 15% were accompanied by their families, with and without buggies
- The majority of respondents had travelled from within 10km of the facility

**Views of users on the development of a well surfaced trail:**

- Just under 80% of people felt that an improved surface as proposed for the Blueway would lead them to visit more often or take a longer walk or cycle
- People with children and older people were more likely to feel they would use it more often.
- Only 7% of people surveyed close to Athy or Monasterevin had a negative response to the idea of improving the towpath surface

**Views of businesses on the development of a well surfaced trail.**

A telephone survey of 60 businesses included 5% from Monasterevin and 25% from Athy. 50% of businesses overall were from hotels, restaurants, and bars or from tourism and leisure activity providers. Two thirds had an element of tourism provision in their businesses but for only 20% was this year-round business.



When asked what, if at all, a Blueway might bring to the area the following responses were received:



Some businesses expressed concern that increasing numbers of cyclists would reduce the path’s appeal to walkers and wanted to ensure that the path was usable by all.

### Visitor Demand - The Overseas Holiday Market

In the UK there was an increase of 0.7 million in the number of people taking part in water sports activity of any kind from 2017-2018, with the increase primarily in family groups. The number of women and young people increased significantly from 2017-2018. Canoeing and kayaking were the most popular type of boating activity, demonstrating a long-term growth trend of 4% increase year-on-year. The study<sup>10</sup> found that 2.1 m people in the UK paddle at least once per year in canoes, kayaks or stand-up paddleboards. Boat ownership has not been increasing in the UK over the past five years, the exception being in respect of kayaks and paddleboards.

Fáilte Ireland’s report on overseas holidaymakers to Ireland in 2019 identified hiking and cross-country walking as the main activity engaged in, with some 2.3 million taking part in this activity. Cycling was the second most frequent activity engaged in at 361,000 people.



#### 4.4 Market Potential

The Sport Ireland/Waterways Ireland report<sup>11</sup> on the development of small vessel water trails considers some specific types of user, mainly from the local and domestic market, including;

- **Dependent or supervised groups** which are led by an instructors or guide as a mechanism for personal development, outdoor learning and ‘wilderness’ encounters delivered by commercial or not-for-profit organisations. These groups are typically at introductory level and will take part in a session of 2-3 hours starting and finishing in the same place or undertaking a short journey. They are also predominantly formed of school age participants though there is a growing family market. This category included Gaisce and Duke of Edinburgh Award Groups where journeys are planned with experienced staff and remotely supervised. Camping is not common for any but the expedition groups likely to take on the whole trail.
- **Peer Groups:** e.g. small groups of friends who travel along canals and rivers on bike, paddleboard, kayak or canoe as part of a social outing, fun or to have an experience of the ‘wild’. As such means of transport have become easier

to source, including hire opportunities, this type of experience has become more popular, particularly on still water. This group may wish to use camp sites.

- **Individuals** may also use the Blueway for regular training, for journeys and, if provided, for competition and challenge events. In general individuals will have equipment and skills and will make their own way and seek information from published information.
- an **additional type** of existing Barrow Line and Barrow user takes on the challenge independently but hires an ‘outfit’ of kayak, personal flotation device and camping gear from professional outfitters such as the Kilkenny based ‘Go with the Flow’ or ‘Paddle your own Canoe’ companies.

Market research carried out in 2016 identified significant potential markets for a Blueway product.

	Britain 19.4M
	France 16.3M(particularly northern France)
	Germany 37M

<sup>10</sup> Annual Watersports Participation Survey UK, 2019

<sup>11</sup> A Guide to Planning and Developing Small Vessel Water Trails in Ireland 2013. Developed by Waterways Ireland and the Irish Sports Council / National Trails Office in conjunction with Irish Leisure Consultants (ILC)

To attract such potential visitors, the key requirements are a mix of land and water based activities along with a rich opportunity to experience Ireland’s culture, music, history and hospitality, particularly in landscapes unique to Ireland and in sheltered waters. More recent research conducted by Fáilte Ireland into the Blueways Ireland Brand Proposition provides some further insights into the key segments for the Blueway offer, highlighting how the different life-stages of a prospective visitor present different opportunities as follows;

 <p><b>Unconstrained Adults Under 30</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Good interest in Blueways experiences/activities, but as one of the many days out/activity/holiday options they have when Covid restrictions lift</li> <li>■ Stronger opportunities among domestic cohorts than international.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Younger Families</b></p> <p>Open to some aspects of the Blueway experience, but the logistics of taking small children on the water (safety, stress involved) results in more barriers to overcome for this group than others.</p>
 <p><b>Older Family</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Parents of older families (early teens in particular) see the Blueways as a great option for their family.</li> <li>■ Lots to engage the kids as well as adults</li> <li>■ A great opportunity to get this age group off screens and doing something as a family.</li> </ul>	 <p><b>Unconstrained Adults 55+</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Certain aspects of the Blueways experience seem particularly relevant for the more active of this age group (varied pace, mix of activities, exploration of the country)</li> <li>■ Enthusiasm for the Blueways is very high among this cohort, the whole experience ticks a lot of their boxes.</li> </ul>

In addition to this, an appealing proposition must speak to the ‘dabbler’ market remembering that they are;

- enthusiastic, not highly accomplished
- seeking fun, not looking for something strenuous
- light hearted, not serious/focused
- activities are an aspect of the holiday, not the whole focus – the social aspect needs to be dialled up too.

In summary, this latest research has concluded that there is a lot of enthusiasm for active pursuits at the minute, with hiking and paddle boarding particularly on trend for our potential visitors.



### Market Segments Based on Level of Interest<sup>12</sup>



## 4.5 Responding to the Market Opportunity

### Aligning Service Provision with User Needs

The nature of potential Blueway users should drive the type of services provided. The main differences in the type of experience people are seeking will depend on a number of factors such as whether;

- they live close by, in the rest of Ireland or out of state
- they already have skills or are beginners at journeying skills such as walking, paddle boarding, kayaking or boat cruising
- they already have their own equipment or if they need to be outfitted for the journey or experience
- their level of confidence, for example how much help they need to get started and along the way
- their appetite for planning their own experiences and the extent to which they would like a streamlined package
- how often they would like to use the Blueway - is it a one-off visit or likely to be a regular feature of their lives
- their level of fitness and willingness to travel various distances
- their social expectation for the experience, will they travel with like-minded people
- the extent to which they are seeking an Irish cultural experience
- their mobility
- the extent to which the Blueway and Blueway experience is the driving factor in bringing them to the area, or whether it is incidental to their visit
- their age

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.outdoorrecreation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2006-VOL-14-2-Summer.compressed.pdf>

Aligning Service Provision with User Needs		
 <b>WALKERS</b>	<b>USER PROFILE</b>	
	People who live locally/all year round visitation/ families, individuals, groups	Visitors, domestic/international, holidaying in the area, half-day experience / multi-day trip with overnights
	<b>KEY REQUIREMENTS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- easy, safe and continuous access from key settlements</li> <li>- safe crossings</li> <li>- places to rest / take shelter along the towpath</li> <li>- places to get refreshments at beginning/end of walk</li> <li>- features of interest along the way – i-spy</li> <li>- connected trails from the towpath to facilitate looped walks</li> <li>- parking within settlements within easy walking distance of the start of the walk</li> </ul>	<b>as opposite plus</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- accessibility via public transport at critical points</li> <li>- walker friendly accommodation nearby</li> <li>- information &amp; orientation at beginning of walk</li> <li>- clear signage &amp; navigation aids</li> <li>- guide books &amp; maps</li> <li>- luggage transfer</li> <li>- evening meal</li> </ul>
 <b>CYCLISTS</b>	<b>USER PROFILE</b>	
	People who live locally/all year round visitation/ families, individuals, groups/ 3-hour cycle trips/utility cycling	Visitors, domestic/international, holidaying in the area, day rides / multi-day trip with overnights
	<b>KEY REQUIREMENTS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- easy, safe and continuous access from key settlements</li> <li>- safe crossings</li> <li>- short and long distance loops</li> <li>- cycle-friendly places to get refreshments at beginning/enroute/end of trip</li> <li>- connected trails from the towpath to facilitate looped routes</li> <li>- secure, visible bike-parking in towns</li> <li>- utility cycling - end to end journeys from home/work</li> </ul>	<b>as opposite plus</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- accessibility via public transport at critical points</li> <li>- part of a network of continuously off-road trails</li> <li>- bike-hire, repair, provisioning</li> <li>- cycle friendly accommodation nearby</li> <li>- information &amp; orientation at beginning of route</li> <li>- clear signage &amp; orientation enroute</li> <li>- guide books &amp; maps</li> <li>- bike pick up – for bike hire</li> <li>- luggage transfer</li> <li>- evening meal</li> </ul>
 <b>PADDLERS</b>	<b>USER PROFILE</b>	
	People who live locally/all year round visitation/ families, individuals, groups	Visitors, domestic/international, holidaying in the area, dabblers/ multi-day trip with overnights
	<b>KEY REQUIREMENTS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lockers</li> <li>- changing facilities</li> <li>- access &amp; portages</li> <li>- slipway</li> <li>- water quality information</li> <li>- emergency contact</li> <li>- lockable equipment storage</li> </ul>	<b>as opposite plus</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- online booking / walk-in</li> <li>- equipment rental</li> <li>- guided water-based activities</li> <li>- half-day activities</li> <li>- sheltered water</li> <li>- canalside accommodation</li> </ul>



While facilities and services required are detailed location by location in section 6, in summary they will need to include;

- accommodation and food aimed towards the user passing through
- packages of accommodation, equipment hire and return transport
- guiding services and information services and
- a set of animation events to draw attention to the facility. Examples might include:
  - A Blueway 10k race, on foot and by kayak and paddleboard or a race series
  - A Barrow Blueway Marathon of 26 miles traversing the whole of the Blueway.
  - Blueway Fun Days
  - Canal festivals

The development of further community sports activity hubs at Monasterevin, Rathangan and Robertstown with support from Local Sports Partnerships and Sport Ireland would create and service demand and increase both the number of local people benefitting from the Blueway and the longer term aim of developing local instructors and guides.

#### Duration of Stay

In terms of understanding the capacity of the Blueway to hold visitors in the area we have mapped two scenarios as illustrated overleaf. The first is aimed at those who wish to take it easy whether they want to walk, cycle or paddle their way along the route. The second scenario is a more challenging one. Both scenarios indicate the need for overnight accommodation at key junctures along the Blueway.



	Km from Lowtown	Paddlesport day	Cycle day	Walk day
<b>LOWTOWN</b>	0			
Ballyteague Bridge	1.8	Day 1	Day 1	Day 1
Lock 20 Ballyteague	3.4			
Lock 21 Ballyteague	3.6			
Lock 22 Glenaree Bridge	8.4			
Rathangan Bridge	12.4			
<b>RATHANGAN</b>				
Lock 23 and Spencer Bridge	13.2	Day 2		Day 2
Wilson Bridge	15.4			
Ummeras Bridge	17.8			
Lock 24 and Macartney Bridge	20.8			
Shepherd's Brook Bridge	22.2			
<b>MONASTEREVIN</b>				
Lifting Bridge Monasterevin	23	Day 3	Day 2	
Junction Mountmellick Branch	23.2			
Lock 25 Moore's Bridge	23.4			
Clogheen Bridge	24			
<b>FISHERSTOWN</b>				
Fisherstown bridge	29.2			
Courtwood Bridge	31			
Grattan Aqueduct	32.6			
<b>VICARSTOWN</b>	34.8	Day 4		
Camac Aqueduct	36.2			
Ballymanus Bridge	36.8			
Milltown Bridge	41			
Lock 26 and Cardington Bridge	44.4			
Lennon's Bridge	44.6	Day 4		
Lock 27 and Augustus Bridge Athy	45.2			
<b>ATHY</b>				
Lock 28 and Horse Bridge	45.6			



	Km from Athy	Paddlesport day	Cycling day	Walking day
<b>LOWTOWN</b>	45.9	Day 2	Day 1	Day 2
Ballyteague Bridge	40.6			
Lock 20 Ballyteague	37.2			
Lock 21 Ballyteague	36.9			
Lock 22 Glenaree Bridge	32.0			
Rathangan Bridge	28.0			
<b>RATHANGAN</b>				
Lock 23 and Spencer Bridge	27.2			
Wilson Bridge	25.1			
Ummeras Bridge	22.7			
Lock 24 and Macartney Bridge	19.6			
Shepherd's Brook Bridge	18.2			
<b>MONASTEREVIN</b>				
Lifting Bridge Monasterevin	17.5			
Junction Mountmellick Branch	17.4	Day 1		Day 1
Lock 25 Moore's Bridge	17.2			
Clogheen Bridge	17.1			
<b>FISHERSTOWN</b>				
Fisherstown bridge	16.4			
Courtwood Bridge	14.6			
Grattan Aqueduct	13.0			
<b>VICARSTOWN</b>	10.8			
Camac Aqueduct	9.5			
Ballymanus Bridge	8.9			
Milltown Bridge	4.7			
Lock 26 and Cardington Bridge	1.1			
Lennon's Bridge	1.0			
Lock 27 and Augustus Bridge Athy	0.3			
<b>ATHY</b>				
Lock 28 and Horse Bridge	0			

### 4.6 Projecting Demand and Impact

There has been some analysis of the economic impact of Greenways in Ireland and elsewhere based on surveys of expenditure and on methodologies such as the Travel Cost Method. A study published in 2016<sup>12</sup> identified average expenditure per person (cyclist) across international studies of greenway visitor expenditure. This study found an average spend per day of €47, with accommodation and food & drink accounting for the largest proportions. The average stay was found to be 1.56 nights and the average group size 2.82. 27% of this expenditure was on food and drink, almost 38% on accommodation, 4.5% on bike rental, 7.3% on retail. 8.5% on public transport and 11% on fuel (not counting filling the tank at home).

A study in 2012 of visitor expenditure likely to be generated as a result of potential changes to the infrastructure of the Barrow Navigation<sup>13</sup> estimated an uplift in visitor spend on Blueway activities as follows:<sup>14</sup>

Type of activity	Expenditure
Canoeing	€81,520
Cycling	€286,553
Informal Visits/Walkers	€751,563
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>€1,119,636</b>

There are no specific counts of users of the Barrow Way by any activity group so it is only possible to arrive at an estimate of future use based on the performance of other Greenways and Blueways, and canoe trails. The Barrow Blueway will have some advantages over more remote facilities such as;

- Proximity to centres of population, accessible from Dublin in less than an hour
- Served by public transport
- Level easy route
- Attractive towns and villages along the way at achievable distances averaging 10 km
- It may also benefit from tourism interest in the tourist attractions of Counties Kildare and Laois.

User figures that are available for start-up greenways amount to;

- Great Western Greenway: 80,000 users first year
- Great Southern Greenway: 250,000 users first year

If there is sufficient publicity for the Blueway and if the consumer understands that a Blueway is essentially a Greenway with additional facilities for watersports, there may be a high usage, particularly if linked with public transport opportunities to make it a one-way route. We have estimated 40,000 additional visitors for the first year of usage made up as follows;

Type of user	No of additional visits	Spend per visit	Total additional annual expenditure on Barrow Blueway (€)
Cyclists	20,000	€ 50	€ 1,000,000
Walkers and Runners	15,000	€ 28	€ 420,000
Paddlers	5,000	€ 25	€ 125,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40,000</b>		<b>€ 1,545,000</b>

This is a modest assumption but takes into account that the route existed and was usable, albeit for a more specialist user prior to the development of a Blueway. Spending may be higher if international visitors are attracted to the facility and if there are strong associations made between the history of the canal and the development of the Guinness Brewery and the Whiskey distilleries and Maltings. If the route is well marketed and consumers like it, this throughput and expenditure may double by year three but only if the required opportunities for expenditure are put in place with the capacity to service the route. A planned animation phase will assist in drawing attention to the route, whilst the development of user experiences will be an important part of realising the potential of the route.

<sup>12</sup> Greenways as a Tourism Resource: A Study of User Spending and Value Richard Mantona, Stephen Hynes, Eoghan Clifford., NUI Galway, Galway, Ireland.

<sup>13</sup> Unlocking the Barrow – a Cost Benefit Analysis, URS and Countryside Consultancy 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Based on the British Waterways Demand Model adapted for Ireland by Judith A Annett Countryside Consultancy.

## 05 The Destination Response

### 5.1 What you told us

Interest in the development of the Barrow Blueway has no doubt been gathering momentum over recent months especially as the work on site inches its way towards completion. Long-time paddlers, active walkers and sports development workers are interested in improved infrastructure, signage – especially signage that can be viewed from the water to assist with wayfinding- and experiences. Community groups are concerned to ensure that the initiative will result in real community, social and economic benefit. The custodians of natural and cultural heritage advocate wise use and careful planning whilst relishing the prospect of interventions that will bring people, whether they be local or visiting, up close to the special places the trail passes through and to the stories that shed light on how they have developed over time as a result of the waterway. Business operators and would-be service providers see expanded business opportunities and are keen to know how best to proceed with their ideas. Many people expressed safety, visitor impact and user conflict issues from a number of different perspectives. Others talked about the importance of marketing the Blueway and, as providers, keeping in touch with one another and with the project promoters. Some just wanted to learn more, see what was going on, or find out how they could get involved.

'My second is a suggestion - help business and amenities to promote each other. Our business, the Museum, Athy Boat Tours and various accommodation providers have, informally and organically, been sending people to each other for some time. It works!

Our business is a little novel, it's old, and it's known as a place to find about the history of Athy, about services on offer locally and so on. So taxi drivers, locals and other services send people to us, and we send them on. A booklet, a "Local to Local" directory of Blueway related businesses and amenities would be a good first step.

Local knowledge, obtained from local sources, complements all the online information, and has the advantage of being personal communication, which tourists on the ground prefer and indeed crave"<sup>15</sup>



<sup>15</sup> Workshop Participant

## 5.2 Your Ideas



### Tell the Stories of the Waterway

- a museum of the history of the canal, its associations & connections?
- points of interest along the route - quirky anecdotes – appeal to children, break the monotony
- the story of agriculture – tillage - the produce - the maltings – the breweries – the Guinness barges – linking to Dublin
- the story of the flora & fauna
- the story of the barge men
- the links to the other stories of Kildare – the peatlands, the Curragh, the horses
- the stories will be what differentiates this experience from that of other greenways & blueways



### Really Sell the Nature & Quality of the Experience

- branding – rural tranquillity is a key aspect of this blueway experience
- it has the potential to be the best of all the Blueways
- being on the water is a different type of experience – slow pace, close to nature
- participation in watersports is a key aspect of the experience
- opportunities are not limited to the Blueway route – link in to other places, make connections
- Levittstown Mill – we want to be part of the story – we have a lot to offer
- this is a great first step in focusing minds, seeing how we best develop the experiences



### Pay Attention to Transport & Transfers

- parking – convenient to the Blueway
- rail connections are there – convenient, cohesive & coherent connectivity from these points of arrival is needed
- public transport – Local Link



### Identify the Infrastructure We Are Going to Need

- accommodation – different types for different budgets, be creative
- hospitality – should there be a network of ‘Barrow Blueway Inns’ hospitality providers
- shelter – at intervals
- water points – at each stop-off point



### Strengthen Partnership Approaches to Development & Marketing

- there is a sense that the Blueway is really coming into focus now
- we need to join the dots – the attractions, the amenities, the activities – what’s there/what’s coming
- we need looped trails, interpretive journeys, intuitive wayfinding
- leave places for nature – biodiversity, peatlands, manage the access
- put packages together – do this creatively and collaboratively
- establish a providers’ forum – so that we can find out and join in, letting each other know what we are doing
- is there a role for Blueway ambassadors?
- we need to link into the food network – food is a really important consideration



### The Overall Initiative Needs to be Well Managed

- one organisation should take control of the quality standards
- is there a role for a rural recreation manager?

### 5.3 Our Vision

The vision for the Barrow Blueway seeks to reflect the distinctiveness of the area, the aspirations of its communities and the ambition of the partners so that together we can; -



#### Vision

Realise the economic potential of the Barrow Blueway as a catalyst for land and water based recreation and as a corridor that connects communities, places and experiences.

#### Mission

To develop a unique Blueway from Robertstown to Athy that provides great opportunities for all in the local community for self-powered land and water recreation and which helps the economies of Counties Laois and Kildare through providing compelling and sustainable experiences for visitors.



**Community Participation** – involve local people every step of the way



**Partnership** - Work together to effect change



**Stewardship** – Leave No Trace, and actively manage the natural and cultural heritage



**Sense of Place** – be true to the distinctiveness of this area



**Universal Access** – provide opportunities for all to enjoy



**Share The Space** – accommodate the needs of different users

### 5.4 The Barrow Blueway Blueprint

Developing a successful Blueway does not depend on the structure alone – the towpath and the waterway, although this combination of features can be an attractor to the area - but rather on the benefits local people and visitors derive from the experience. For this reason, we have developed a Barrow Blueway Blueprint – a unifying framework that enables us to focus on the experience each Blueway user might have in the area; the services and facilities required for their activity as well as the opportunities to provide for a high quality and memorable experience.

In order for the user to be able to take advantage of the Blueway a number of enabling elements need to be in place.

-  Pre-arrival information
-  Arrival points at key locations
-  Activity points both on arrival and along the way
-  Basic service points at intermediate locations
-  Shelter points on the longer stretches
-  Heritage interest points along and within easy reach of the route



## The Key Elements

Ideal specifications for each of these elements would include;



### Pre Arrival

- Information about the Blueway, where it is and what it offers and its relevance to the user
- The preparation the user needs to undertake to make the most of the opportunities
- The opportunity to book a Blueway experience



### Arrival Point

- Public transport to the desired starting point. Car parking, where necessary
- Signage between railway or bus station/ stop and beginning of the Blueway
- Opportunities for an overnight stay close to the start of the route
- Opportunities for a self-guided or a guided Blueway experience
- Ways to return the user to the starting point if required
- Opportunities to eat out and provision for a Blueway experience.
- The potential to buy activity supplies which will enhance the experience or enable a repair or replacement of a key piece of equipment
- Steam wash for new equipment being used on or in the waterway (biosecurity)
- Activity safety information and signage
- Blueway code of conduct
- Accessibility for a range of activity providers to provide a service
- High profile waterway or towpath event



### Activity Point

- Provision of hire (cycle, paddleboard, kayak or canoe) and outfitting (camping equipment)
- Provision of guided experiences on water
- Guided experiences on land (cycle, walk)
- Self-guided Blueway experiences
- Overnight accommodation with activity specific facilities and services (B&B, guest house, inn, camping pods, formal campsite)
- Facilities block – accessible toilets, showers, and changing
- Activity safety information and signage, biosecurity information
- Blueway code of conduct signage



### Basic Service Point

- Jetty or landing point suitable for paddlesport launch and disembark
- Potable water supply
- Toilet
- Café/pub/shop nearby



### Shelter Point

- Basic shelter
- Potable water
- Composting toilet



### Heritage Interest Point

- Point of interest with visitor facilities
- Opportunities for a guided experience relevant to the Barrow Blueway
- Jetty suitable for trip boat and paddlesports

### 5.5 Gap Analysis

In undertaking the gap analysis, we are mindful that much work is already underway to convert the shortcomings we have identified into opportunities. These and other factors forming part of the economic opportunity are spatially presented in a series of maps in section 6 of the report.

**Robertstown**

Robertstown has public transport from Dublin and is an attractive waterway town. It has an important heritage building in the Grand Canal Hotel where passengers overnighed after a day’s voyage from Dublin. It has a shop and public houses and pleasant waterside public space and harbour. There is very little activity and arrival provision at present. The Grand Canal Greenway is under development from Celbridge to Robertstown and the settlement will therefore achieve higher prominence, at least amongst cyclists. Plans are underway to augment the accommodation offer and to provide equipment and bike hire. In addition, a Masterplan makes provision for a community hub and associated amenities and a heritage barge is being restored. For Robertstown to function as an Arrival and Activity Point on the Blueway the gaps that need to be filled are as follows:

**Arrival & Activity Point**

- Additional opportunities for overnight stay close to the start of the route
- Opportunities for a self-guided or a guided blueway experience
- Accessible to a range of activity providers
- Ways to return the user to the starting point if required
- Opportunities to eat out and provisioning for a Blueway experience
- The potential to buy activity supplies, supplies which enhance the experience or enable repair or replacement of a key piece of equipment

- Steam wash for new equipment being used on or in the waterway (biosecurity)
- Activity safety information and signage
- Blueway code of conduct.

**Lowtown**

Although Lowtown is currently the official start or finish point for the Blueway and is where the work on the new canalside pathway ends, from a visitor point of view, it would be preferable to end at a point with services and public transport. For this reason, Robertstown is proposed as an Arrival and Departure point at the end of the Blueway. However, Lowtown has significance as a junction between the main Grand Canal between Dublin and the Shannon and was an important trading base for the Grand Canal Company. It is also significant for cruising boats and towpath users as it has newly restored and installed moorings with electric hook ups and water provision and the only service block on the Barrow Line at present with toilets, showers and changing facilities. Lowtown is proposed as an Activity Point and the gaps in provision towards this role are:

**Arrival & Activity Point**

- Provision of water activities for local people and visitors, both guided and unguided
- Steam wash for equipment being used on or in the waterway before and after trips (biosecurity)
- Provision of cycle hire in liaison with other providers on the Blueway
- Access for all activities
- Accessible to a range of activity providers
- Activity safety information and signage
- Blueway code of conduct

**Rathangan**

Rathangan is a smaller town than either Athy or Monasterevin and has fewer services, but its location makes it an important overnight opportunity along the Blueway. Its waterside park, walks and former canal heritage buildings present opportunities for the development of the town as an Activity Point on the Blueway. Rathangan scouts make good use of the waterway and are developing a scout den (Lavery Lodge) with potential for Blueway users. Traffic and junctions close to the access points from town to the Blueway are difficult for cycling arrivals and boat portages around the locks. Gaps in provision at Rathangan as an Activity Hub include:

**Arrival & Activity Point**

- Arrival point for small boat users
- Guided experiences on water
- Guided experiences on land
- Opportunity for a boat trip/hire
- Overnight accommodation with activity specific facilities and services (B&B, guest house, inn, camping pods, formal campsite or hostel)
- Facilities block – accessible toilets, showers, and changing
- Activity safety information and signage, biosecurity information
- Blueway code of conduct signage

**Monasterevin**

Monasterevin should be considered as a Blueway Arrival and a Blueway Activity point as it has a regular rail service from Dublin. It has a good wide stretch of water for events in Bell Harbour, an active Blueway Kayak Club, barge hire and formerly held a canal festival. At least one canoe outfitting and guiding firm offers holidays that begin at Monasterevin. In order to reach its full potential the following will be required:

**Arrival & Activity Point**

- Signage between railway station and beginning of the Blueway
- Opportunities for overnight stay close to the start of the route
- A focal point for activities
- Accessible to a range of activity providers
- Opportunities for a self-guided or a guided blueway experience for visitors
- Provision of hire (cycle, paddleboard, kayak or canoe) and outfitting (camping equipment)
- Ways to return the user to the starting point if required
- Guided experiences on land (cycle, walk)
- Overnight accommodation with activity specific facilities and services (B&B, guest house, inn, camping pods, formal campsite)
- Canalside food & beverage opportunity
- Facilities block – accessible toilets, showers, and changing
- Opportunity for a boat trip
- High profile water or towpath based event
- Steam wash for new equipment being used on or in the waterway (biosecurity)
- Activity safety information and signage
- Blueway code of conduct

**Fisherstown**

Fisherstown has potential for an intermediate stop with a cruiser jetty, some green space and a short walk to the centre of the village and pub. There is potential for Fisherstown to play a stronger role but it currently provides only a quiet place to stop.

**Service Point**

- Overnight accommodation – camping, pods

**Vicarstown**

Vicarstown is performing well as an activity hub for local people, with specific sectional buildings and disabled toilet for participants. It offers cycle hire, barge hire and arrangements for boat trips. We are not proposing Vicarstown as an arrival point due to difficult public transport arrangements. In order to play a full role as an Activity Point, Vicarstown’s gaps in provision are:

**Arrival & Activity Point**

- Provision of equipment hire (paddleboard, kayak or canoe) and outfitting (camping equipment) for visitors
- Provision of guided experiences on water for visitors
- Guided experiences on land (cycle, walk)
- Overnight accommodation with activity specific facilities and services (B&B, guest house, inn, camping pods, formal campsite, camper van park)
- Additional food & beverage
- Facilities block – accessible toilets, showers, and changing
- Car parking
- Activity safety information and signage, biosecurity information
- Blueway code of conduct signage

**Athy**

Athy has the potential to be an arrival point, an activity point, a departure point, and a heritage interest point. It performs best on the analysis of all of the settlements based on current infrastructure and activities. Current gaps in provision in Athy include:

**Arrival & Activity Point**

- Signage of Blueway from railway and bus stations
- Overnight accommodation with activity specific services
- Drinking water supply close to Blueway
- Visible point for guided activity and hiring equipment - cycles, canoes, paddleboards. (Could be remedied through the development of the Shackleton Outdoor Education Centre (SOEC))
- Changing, showers and toilets (as above re SOEC)
- Booking point for Blueway Services (as above re SOEC)
- Activity providers and hire services available in the town
- Arrangements for return from other points on the Blueway
- Arrangements for overnight and long-stay parking
- Activity, biosecurity and safety signage



Up to this point we have assessed the gaps in provision based on a Blueway user arriving by public transport and having a service provided on the Blueway before returning on public transport. All of the settlements have capacity issues in terms of being able to park beside the Blueway, and this is particularly problematic if users then undertake a multi-day trip on the waterway and leave their cars. One solution to this is to promote the use of public transport to access the Blueway. However, local users or those with complex journeys not served by public transport will arrive by car. Activity providers offering a full-service should include arrangements for private parking for clients. More specifically in;

- **Robertstown and Lowtown** – both have space for roadside parking and currently there is a small area for parking at Lowtown for people with boats on Waterways Ireland moorings. Robertstown is accessible by bus from Wellington Quay in Dublin.
- **Rathangan** - is very limited in parking and access for waterway and towpath users and opportunities should be taken for providing new access to the water with short-term parking for those arriving with their own equipment.

- **Monasterevin** - it will be important to decide which part of the town constitutes the arrival point for the Blueway and make either public or private arrangements for parking. The railway station in Monasterevin presents an opportunity to promote trips on the Blueway by rail from Dublin.
- **Vicarstown** – other than a handful of roadside layby parking spaces on the western approach to the village, there is no current public parking and this needs to be addressed through land lease or purchase.
- **Athy** - the parking situation is limited but the development of the Shackleton Outdoor Education Centre as a Blueway Activity Hub may solve this with the centre being designated as the start/end point for the Blueway.

From an economic point of view opportunities to provide secure parking for people using the Blueway should, where possible, be packaged with activities and equipment hire or with 'night before' accommodation.

## The Blueway Blueprint: In Summary

	<p><b>Making Plans</b></p>	<p><b>pre-arrival information</b>- where, what, how, what else, what's bookable</p>
	<p><b>Getting Started</b></p>	<p><b>arrival points</b> - public transport, adequate parking in suitable locations, information, signage, accommodation, bike hire, ways to get back, a guided experience</p>
	<p><b>Taking the Plunge</b></p>	<p><b>activity points</b> - equipment hire, outfitting, experience, overnight accommodation, facilities block</p>
	<p><b>Keeping Going</b></p>	<p><b>basic service points</b> - jetty, water, toilet, refreshments</p>
	<p><b>Staying Dry</b></p>	<p><b>shelter points</b> - basic shelter, water, toilet</p>
	<p><b>Going Deeper</b></p>	<p><b>heritage engagement points</b> - points of interest with visitor facilities, guided experiences, a heritage boat, boat trips</p>

# 06 The Economic Opportunity

## 6.1 The Visitor Economy

Waterways can generate several economic benefits for destinations particularly in terms of tourism and leisure activity<sup>16</sup>. This activity generates an economic return through increased expenditure by visitors, which in turn leads to money being retained locally within the economy, supporting jobs in local businesses. The concept of the visitor economy recognises the importance of the wider set of individuals and organisations that are all key to the success of the destination. While the economic activity of visitors - in particular the revenues they generate - lies at the core of the concept of the visitor economy, its meaning is broader than this.

**For the Blueway to work for visitors, it needs to work, first and foremost, for people locally.**

The existence of a cohort of service providers will be key to developing local interest in the Blueway, building local confidence in participating in Blueway activities – especially those on the water - and nurturing a community that is invested in, proud of and supports the Blueway. Building this local capacity will not only generate and maintain a positive disposition locally to the Blueway, but it will also provide a secure foundation on which to build a sustainable proposition for visitors, who will not necessarily be ‘in the know’ when it comes to finding out about where to go to have a great experience.

## 6.2 An Enabled Sector

It will be important to build the capacity of the sector - private businesses, community enterprises, and activity venues (existing and proposed) along with public sector interests - to develop Blueway experiences. The opportunities presented will only be realised through everyone working together to derive benefit for all through the provision of supporting services and facilities. Timing is a key consideration in this regard. Blueway service

providers, whether they are already involved in or are planning to provide nearby activity-friendly accommodation; water-based activities on the canal or hospitality services in nearby canalside towns and villages, need to have the capacity and lead-in time to respond to change. Whether change comes in the form of a sudden increase in visitation as a result of the completion of the towpath works or the development nearby of a new product or experience, planning for and anticipating the consequences of these changes is a key consideration for all involved in this initiative. We need to ensure that the Barrow Blueway makes a positive difference to the local and, in time, the regional economy.

Other elements that will contribute to ensure the economic success of the Blueway will include:

- Access to all of the things which we know attract visitors; the natural environment, the heritage and culture, the outdoor activities, leisure and cultural facilities, good food and engaging events; all the things which make a place special, distinctive and capable of engendering pride and interest as a place worth experiencing
- Supporting and well-designed infrastructure which will help to reinforce and shape the area’s sense of place and make it an easy place to visit. This will include signs, transport (including public transport), parking and orientation, interpretation, public space and amenities
- Engaged service providers who will cater for the needs of visitors (and of residents); create economic and social activity and increase spending such as the hotels, self-catering, guest houses, B&Bs, Airbnbs; the bars, pubs, restaurants, cafes, museums, visitor centres as well as the activity providers – as mentioned earlier- who, in facilitating and promoting access to the Blueway for a range of land and water-based activities, are in a key position to become ambassadors for its continued enjoyment and advocates for its enlightened stewardship.

<sup>16</sup> Fitzpatrick Associates, Update on the Economic Value of Recreational Trails in Ireland, Irish Sports Council 2010

### 6.3 The Places We Need to Focus on

In essence the Blueway represents the recreational use of the waterway itself in terms of the activity both on and off the water. More specifically the Blueway is best expressed through the supporting infrastructure and services that will facilitate access to the water as well as along the waterway. Launch sites, signage, storage facilities, service blocks, toilets, shelter and points of interest are all important considerations as identified within the Blueway Blueprint. The settlements themselves – the canalside towns and villages – have a key role to play in this regard. They must act as portals and nodes of supporting infrastructure, facilitate access, connect communities, and provide information, services and supporting experiences. To accommodate multi-day journeys, a network of supporting infrastructure, anchored by the towns and villages, needs to be appropriately spaced along the waterway to accommodate the needs of users in terms of water access, day-use facilities, manageable yet interesting itineraries as well as opportunities to explore the wider cultural landscape.



*‘Some people prefer to do the Barrow Way as a number of out-and-back excursions, starting and finishing at the same place each day. But we find that the novelty of walking from town to town keeps the children motivated. There’s also great freedom in not having a car.*

*But, oh, it’s so nice to turn a corner of the towpath and finally see a church spire or the flagpoles of berthed boats. We know then that within minutes we’ll be lying on freshly made beds, boots off, taking a well- deserved rest.’<sup>17</sup>*

In what follows we focus on the role that different places along the canal might play in delivering on the ambition for the Barrow Blueway. At each location we identify;

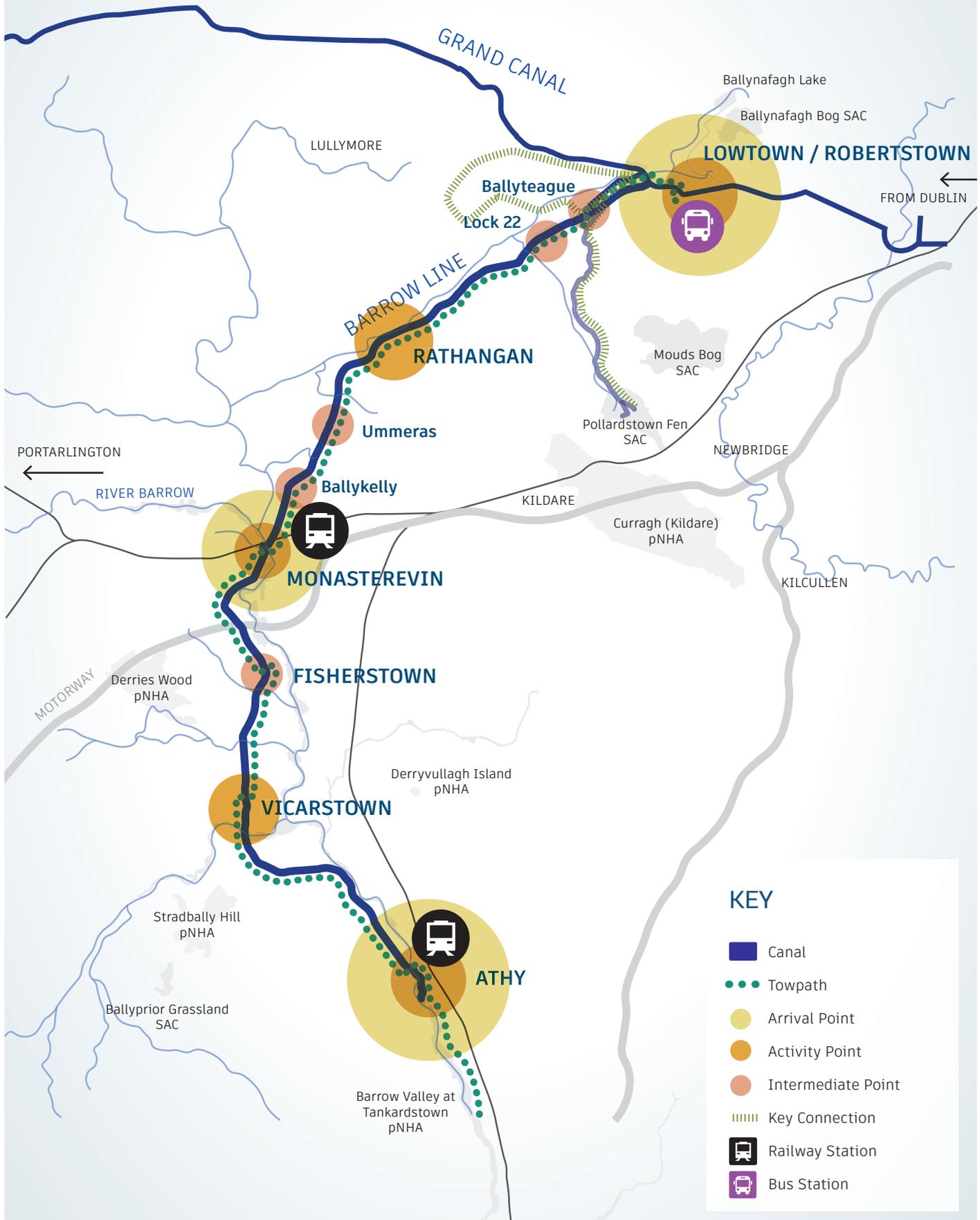
- **What’s Here?** – by mapping the key features and experience supporting elements
- **What’s Coming?** – by providing a description of plans being developed which have relevance for the Blueway and;
- **What Else We Could Do?** – the opportunities, including the identification of opportunity sites, which could be developed to enhance the experience for users and visitors.



<sup>17</sup> Orla Bourke, ‘Walk This Way’, The Irish Times, 14.11.09



# The Barrow Blueway Blueprint



# ROBERTSTOWN

Place of Arrival, Activity & Heritage Interest



## What's Coming?

- Grand Canal Greenway - Celbridge to Robertstown under development
- Robertstown Masterplan - makes provision for
  - a community hub
  - play area
  - Eco park - walks & trails
  - camping/glamping
- Heritage Barge - the 52M - floating heritage museum, guided tours



## What's Here?

- |                   |                 |                    |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Canal             | Jetty           | Parking            |
| Towpath           | Slipway         | Service Facilities |
| Opportunity Site  | Food & Beverage | Accommodation      |
| Heritage Interest | Bus Stop        |                    |



## What Else We Could Do?

- focus on the Quayside to develop a sense of arrival & orientation onto the water
  - integrate the existing jetty & parking provision as part of this sense of arrival
  - integrate plans to re-purpose the Heritage Barge moored at this location as a community hub
- assess scope to re-purpose the former Grand Canal Hotel & lands to the rear to provide
  - a highly visible point of welcome, information & booking for Blueway services
  - accommodation - camping, glamping, self-catering
- assess scope to provide facilities - changing, showering, lockers, storage
- offer equipment hire - bike, paddleboard, kayak, canoe & provisioning and outfitting
- develop self-guided/guided Blueway experiences
- explore opportunities to eat out / provide for evening dining
- augment the accommodation offer - provide for camping - pods, glamping
- tell Robertstown's story - the advent of the Grand Canal
- work to develop the elements identified in the Robertstown Masterplan
- provide car parking for those not arriving by bus, especially day-trippers

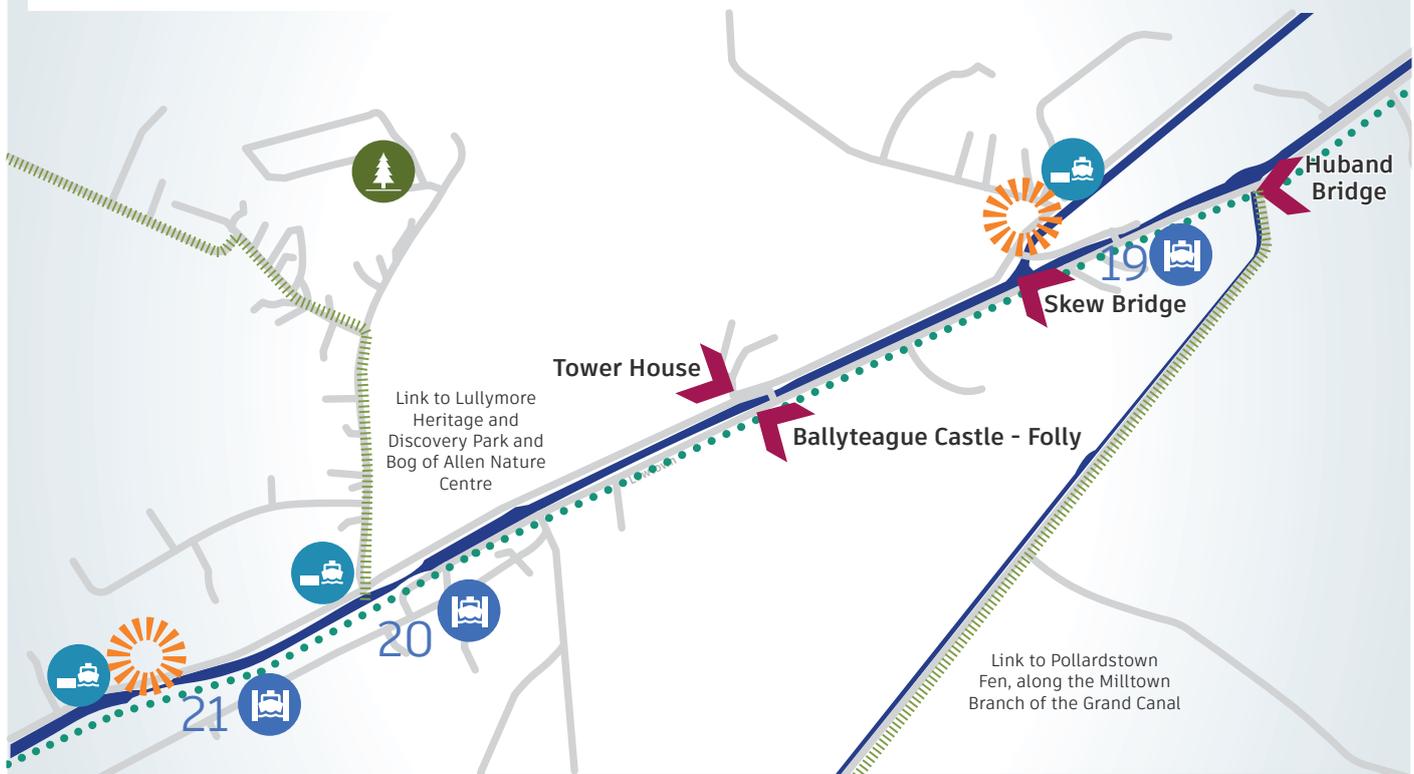
# BALLYTEAGUE

## Place of Connection & Service



### What's Coming?

- Lowered jetties for paddlers at locks 19, 20 & 21
- Conservation Management Plan for the Curragh Plains - opportunity for the Blueway to tie into the wider network of walking & cycling trails along the Milltown Branch of the Grand Canal to Pollardstown Fen & beyond



### What's Here?

- Canal
- ... Towpath
- ☀ Opportunity Site
- 🏰 Heritage Interest
- ||||| Key Connection
- 🚤 Jetty
- 🚧 Lock
- 🌲 Park

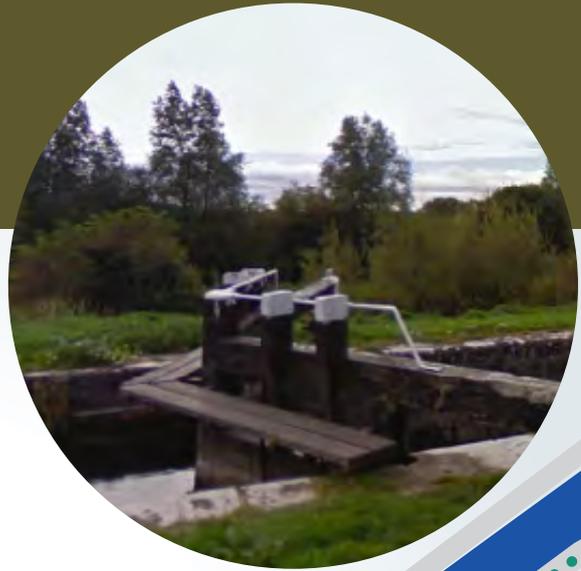


### What Else We Could Do?

- reach out to Ballyteague GAA, located above the skew bridge on the New Barrow Line to explore their engagement with the Blueway
- work with Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park and the Bog of Allen Nature Centre to develop an off-road, looped trail for cycle and walking trips from the canal
- explore the feasibility of the derelict canalside building at lock 21 to provide shelter/storage for waterway users who want to explore the wider area on foot
- interpret the significance of the heritage features at this location

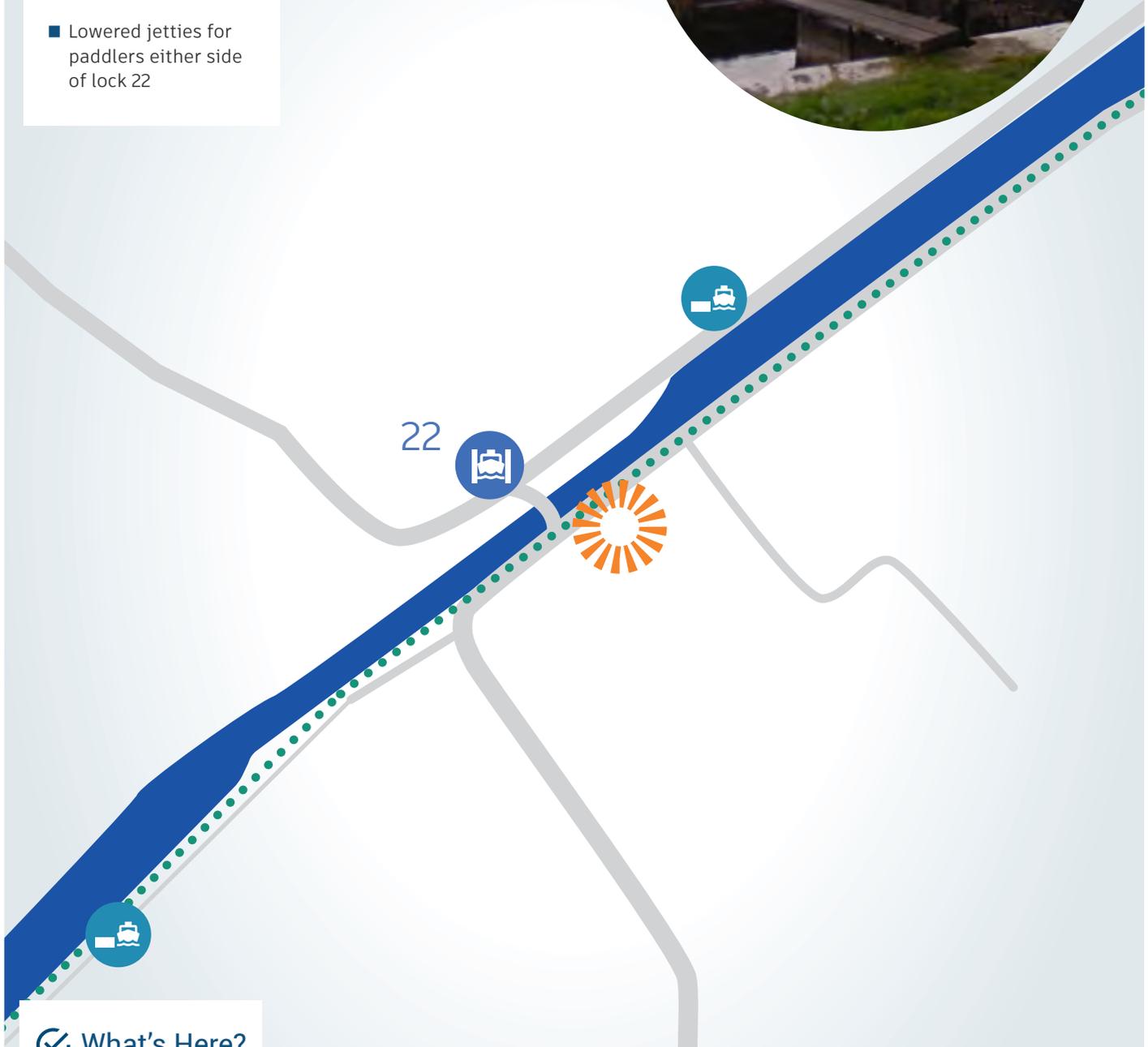
# LOCK 22

## Point of Service



### What's Coming?

- Lowered jetties for paddlers either side of lock 22



### What's Here?

- Canal
- ... Towpath
- ☀ Opportunity Site
- 🚤 Jetty
- 🔒 Lock



### What Else We Could Do?

- assess the potential of the former lock keeper's house to provide overnight accommodation/blueway services

# RATHANGAN

## Point of Activity & Heritage Interest



### What's Coming?

- Lavery Lodge - Scout Den (7th Kildare/Rathangan Scout Group) - potential for Blueway users
- Drummond's Mill (Rathangan Bridge) Masterplan - includes a re-purposing of two canalside heritage properties plus a re-instatement of the former canal harbour
- Public realm improvements in the centre of the town will include greater connectivity to the canal and a sense of arrival in Rathangan



### What's Here?

- Canal
- Towpath
- Opportunity Site
- Heritage Interest
- Jetty
- Water Point
- Food & Beverage
- Accommodation
- Park



### What Else We Could Do?

- develop an identifiable point of arrival for small boat users
- identify suitable canalside building for reuse as an activity hub
- provide a facilities block - accessible toilets, changing, showering, lockers & storage
- offer equipment hire - bike, paddleboard, kayak, canoe & provisioning and outfitting
- provide guided facilities on water/on land
- provide overnight accommodation with activity-specific facilities & services
- tell Rathangan's story - the ringfort, impressive late Georgian/Victorian architecture, mills & maltings

# UMMERAS

## Place of Connection & Service



### What's Coming?

- Rehabilitation Plan for Ummeras Bog as part of Bord na Móna's Bog Rehabilitation Scheme, announced in November 2020
- A feasibility study is currently being undertaken to explore the viability of developing a Peatlands Park Experience based on the natural and cultural heritage of Ummeras Bog



Ummeras Bridge



### What's Here?

- Canal
- Towpath
- Opportunity Site
- Heritage Interest



### What Else We Could Do?

- work with the promoters of Umeras Peatlands Park to integrate the peatland experience into the Blueway offer
- explore the potential for pedestrian/cyclist access from various points along the Blueway to the proposed Peatlands Experience and, in consultation with local landowners, work out a viable solution

# BALLYKELLY

Place of Connection & Service



## What's Coming?

- Ballykelly Distillery & Visitor Centre is located on a two-hectare site, north of Monasterevin and, currently being developed on site, it will include;
  - reception areas, tasting rooms and an exhibition space
  - a roof garden and viewing area onto the Mill buildings

18th Century Thatched Cottages  
Macartney's Bridge and Lock

Ballykelly Malthouse: Proposed Distillery & Visitor Centre

RIVER BARROW



## What Else We Could Do?

- ensure easy access from/to the water at this location
- assess the scope to provide a boat trip to/from the new facility
- profile the heritage significance of this prominent early 19th century industrial complex. The mill is of considerable historical and social importance as the focal point for local agricultural activities and a centre of employment in the past



## What's Here?

- Canal
- Towpath
- Opportunity Site
- Heritage Interest
- Jetty

# MONASTEREVIN

Place of Arrival, Activity & Heritage Interest



# MONASTEREVIN

Place of Arrival, Activity & Heritage Interest



## What's Coming?

- Monasterevin Masterplan - includes proposals for Canal Harbour -
  - public realm upgrades
  - town centre connections
  - historic wharf area to be a centre of activity again
- Monasterevin Aqueduct -
  - accessibility
  - improvements



## What Else We Could Do?

- create an access/focal point for activities at Canal Harbour/Bell Harbour
- formalise the launch point for paddlers at the approach to Canal Harbour & assess the scope for providing a similar launch site and recreational area at the Y on the approach to Moore's Lock
- address the canalside approach from the north in terms of road improvements & traffic calming
- explore the scope to reuse the industrial buildings at Canal Harbour for the provision of Blueway services - information, orientation, booking
- assess the scope to provide water, electricity and waste removal in the vicinity of Bell Harbour
- integrate these opportunities with access from the railway station and any plans for the conservation management of the former railway station
- provide a facilities block - accessible toilets, showers & changing
- provide equipment hire - bike, paddleboard, kayak, canoe
- provide guided experiences on water/land
- explore scope to provide a boat trip
- explore the scope to provide a canalside food & beverage opportunity
- provide activity-friendly overnight accommodation
- explore scope to provide accessible fishing locations and fishing information
- consider lighting the historical bridges
- profile the canalside public open space at Bell Harbour Estate
- profile the opportunities to experience biodiversity and nature along the Mountmellick Branch of the Barrow Line

# VICARSTOWN

## Point of Activity & Heritage Interest



### What's Coming?

- Heritage barge hire
- Camping pods
- Paddlesports leader development via SVT Activity Hub



### What's Here?

- Canal
- Towpath
- ☀ Opportunity Site
- 📍 Heritage Interest
- 🚤 Jetty
- 🚤 Moorings
- 🚤 Boat Hire
- 🚤 Lowered Jetty
- 🍴 Food & Beverage
- 🚲 Bike Hire
- 🅑 Parking
- 🚤 Mobile Supplier
- 🅐 Activity Hub



### What Else We Could Do?

- develop a facilities block -
  - accessible toilets, showers & changing
- explore the potential of part of the canal warehouse building to provide Blueway services
- assess the feasibility of providing camper van parking
- explore the scope to provide additional food & beverage
- address additional parking provision
- interpret the heritage features at this location

# FISHERSTOWN

Place of Connection & Service



## What's Coming?

- Camping Pods
- Foraging Trails

Fishermans Thatched Inn

Fisherstown Bridge

Fisherstown House

## What's Here?

- Canal
- Towpath
- ☀ Opportunity Site
- 📍 Heritage Interest
- 🚢 Jetty
- 🍴 Food & Beverage



## What Else We Could Do?

- explore the potential for providing overnight accommodation -camping- nearby
- interpret the heritage features at this location
- develop nature trails

# ATHY

Point of Arrival, Activity & Heritage Interest



# ATHY

## Point of Arrival, Activity & Heritage Interest



### What's Coming?

- Dominican Lands Masterplan in preparation to include provision for social housing, Eco park and the new Shackleton Outdoor Education Centre which will provide for;
  - boat & equipment storage
  - showers/changing
  - indoor multi-activity space
  - coaching & guiding
  - access to the canal above the Canal Lock
- The redevelopment of the Athy Heritage Centre to the Shackleton Museum will be the only museum in the world dedicated to the Antarctic Explorer, Ernest Shackleton
- Emily Square Masterplan
  - public realm improvements - consents in place
  - wider vision for the Square to include Barrow Quay, including flood defences and improved mooring facilities
  - designed to complement significant investment in the Athy Heritage Centre-Museum in the Town Hall (former Market House & Court House)
  - also relates to the Dominican Lands Masterplan, which includes the Library



### What Else We Could Do?

- focus on Athy Canal Lock/ William St South
- assess scope to repurpose the Canal Store/Malthouse/ former Canal Office buildings to provide:
  - information/booking point for Blueway services
  - visible point for activity hire services
  - showers, toilets & changing
  - canalside activity-friendly accommodation
  - tell the story of the town's mills & malhouses

# 07 Gearing Up

## 7.1 Activating the Blueway

Preparing for operating a Blueway requires teamwork between all the actors who are invested in its success, either as a means to promote the wellbeing of local people or as an attractor for people within Ireland or overseas.

The approach being taken of proceeding via a formally constituted Blueway Development Group is recommended in the guidelines for developing Blueways and also reflects the need for ongoing, long-term coordination of effort between agencies on elements such as infrastructure development, planning considerations, traffic management, motivation and encouragement, and sports and community development to provide animation, enterprise development, and funding support.

## 7.2 Doing Business on the Blueway

The provision of adventure activities is a part of the tourism industry in Ireland that can only take place against a strong background of voluntary and community effort. Guides, instructors, and leaders in adventure activities are all developed through the efforts of National Governing Bodies of Sport whose members are normally volunteers. Standards and instructor client ratios are set by NGBs and the experience requirements for people who lead and oversee programmes are considerable, meaning that providers need a long period of personal experience in the activity they provide, or must employ someone who has that experience.

The Blueway development process on the Barrow has recognised this in starting the activity development through Local Sports Partnerships, and providing personal competence, instructor and leader training through the sports hubs at Athy and Vicarstown, and through the Blueway Kayak Club at Monasterevin. The Scouts in Rathangan are also building a competence base in the community. It will be important to continue and strengthen this approach and support community members as they move through the competence, coaching, guiding and leadership levels. A similar approach to building a competence base should be taken in Robertstown. The SVT activity hub at Vicarstown already works with blind and partially sighted people in the community as part of their intention to be inclusive in their provision and have provided disabled access facilities and toilets at their site.





As a whole, the Blueway experience seeks to be inclusive as it is Government and County Council policy to be so. In this the Development Group (as recommended in the guidelines), communities and potential activity providers may be assisted through CARA disability inclusion training<sup>18</sup>. A formal audit of arrangements for people with disabilities to access Blueway experiences should be carried out prior to activity infrastructure being installed and may require some adaptation of existing structures and Blueway Arrival and Activity Points and access and egress from the water. It could be a requirement of achieving a licence to operate on the Blueway that businesses should demonstrate how they will provide universal access to their services. Use and display of the CARA inclusion charter is recommended.

### 7.3 Providing Business Support

As part of a coordinated approach by the Management Group and its partners, it will be important to enable businesses to work under licence on the Blueway to provide appealing experiences for visitors. Key considerations will include;

- providing support for local businesses to obtain centre or staff recognition from Canoeing Ireland, Mountaineering Ireland and Cycling Ireland
- providing information on conditions for obtaining a licence for commercial use of the waterway. Detailed guidance on licensing is included as part of the 'Information Guide for Doing Business on the Blueway' at Appendix A
- encouraging the development of sustainable local activity businesses and organisations located both on and off the canal to support participation by local people and visitors

In terms of encouraging the provision of activity-friendly accommodation along the route and close by the Blueway, key considerations will include;

- developing a network of accommodation providers for Blueway visitors
- developing an accommodation forum
- providing awareness sessions to experience and accommodation providers on the requirements of activity participants
- facilitate accommodation and activity providers to visit and participate in a successful Blueway experience elsewhere

In terms of encouraging sustainable transport use to access and return from the Blueway;

- convene a Blueway transport forum to plan for Blueway experiences and end-to-end journeys

<sup>18</sup> See: <https://caracentre.ie/disability-inclusion-training/>

# 08 Getting the Word Out

## 8.1 The Barrow Blueway Story

Our concept planning and blueprint development included a Place Audit and Analysis (see page 11) of existing amenities, features, and characteristics. As this work progressed, it became apparent that points of interest – the heritage places and associations – could be grouped or categorised into themes. Consequently, part of the spatial outworking of the blueprint involved the gathering or linking of these points of interest into particular themes. Our focus has been on acknowledging the places where these themes can be experienced rather than interpreting the themes themselves. As a result, we see the potential for a number of integrating themes as follows;



**Towers, Steeples and Stones** – Athy’s Medieval Origins



**Mills, Maltings & Distilleries** – as well as kilns, mash houses, workshops, offices, grain stores and warehouses - impressive reminders of the area’s industrial past at Athy, Rathangan, Monasterevin and Ballykelly



**Locks, Gates & Chambers** - exploring the canal transport heritage of the Blueway



**Lost Waterways, Lanes & Lace** – exploring Monasterevin’s hidden history



**Brown Gold & Birdsong** – slow travel through bogs and fens, transitioning from brown to green



**The Final Straw** - exploring the vernacular architecture of thatched dwellings along the Blueway



**Bluebells & Butterflies, Damsel & Dragonflies, Bats & Buzzards** – getting up close to the Blueway’s wildflowers and wildlife

## 8.2 Bringing the Story to Life

It will be important to add to the enjoyment of the waterway by developing and promoting appealing stories that can bring these themes to life. An indicative suite of interpretive structure concepts has been prepared. These ideas will require further site-specific detailed design and are presented here as an illustration of the type of approach that could be adopted. The structures are based on the heritage of the canal and reflect the scale and character of the landscapes along the route. They primarily utilise reclaimed elements which appear as remnants of the canal infrastructure left behind and exposed to the elements resulting in weathered metal enhanced by the characteristic black and white markings of the mooring bollards and gate beams.



Consideration should also be given to making evident and restoring the **historic milestones** remaining along the route as well as producing a ‘new heritage’ way of counting kilometres along the route in a way that

will represent heritage in the future. This customised approach to developing the interpretive response will provide a memorable and distinctive experience for visitors.

*The stories of the route are told not only through images and text, but also by the very materials and design of the structures themselves, including the design of utilitarian objects such as bike stands, seats and shelters.*



Textures and built materials: Steel, rust, rope, wood, cogs and gears.



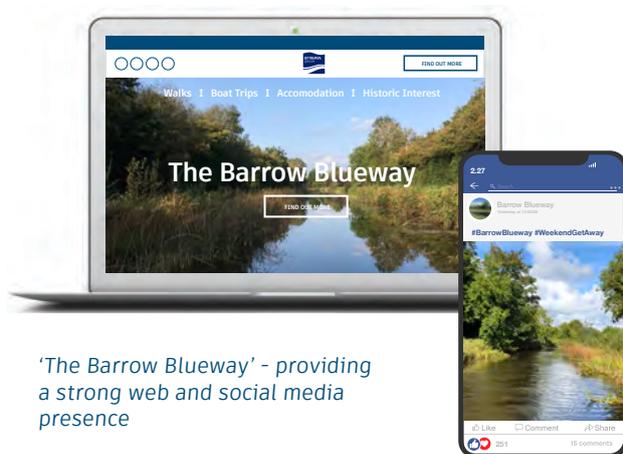
Colours found in heritage and built structures and the surrounding landscape

### 8.3 Creating an Identity

The Blueway will sit within the overall Blueways Ireland Brand and will appear on the consumer website: <https://www.bluewaysireland.org/website>. Creating a strong, recognisable identity for the Barrow Blueway, starts with a logo and brand which represents what makes this proposition unique. A brand identity will help visitors to quickly recognise the Barrow Blueway, promote a positive image of the trail, and celebrate the things that make this Blueway experience unique. A marketing campaign will help draw local people, neighbouring communities and visitors to the Blueway. It needs to be noted that the full potential of the Blueway may not be reached without an engaged local community that knows what it has to offer. The final accreditation of the route as a Blueway will bring with it permission to use the Blueway brand in signage and marketing materials for the route. It will be important that everyone contributing to the success of the Blueway is aware of the rules and opportunities around brand usage and whether they can use the style and the logos in respect of their own badging and promotions. As permission to use the brand signage will be issued relatively late in the process a discussion on the brand use is required at this stage to prevent people marketing with the Blueway logo before the route is fully ready and launched. There is some potential for confusion between Blueways and Greenways where they meet, in this case at Robertstown/Lowtown, which can be easily avoided through providing information about the differences.



Custom Barrow Blueway iconography and branding to signal routes, significance or purpose



'The Barrow Blueway' - providing a strong web and social media presence

### 8.4 Wayfinding

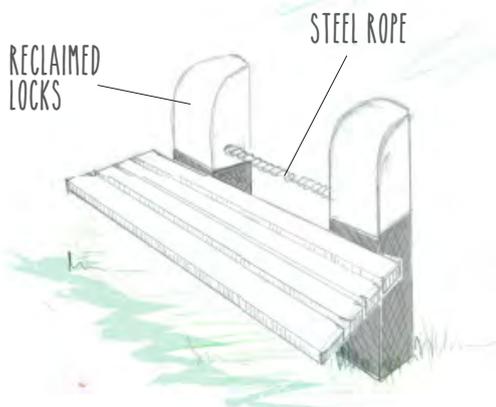
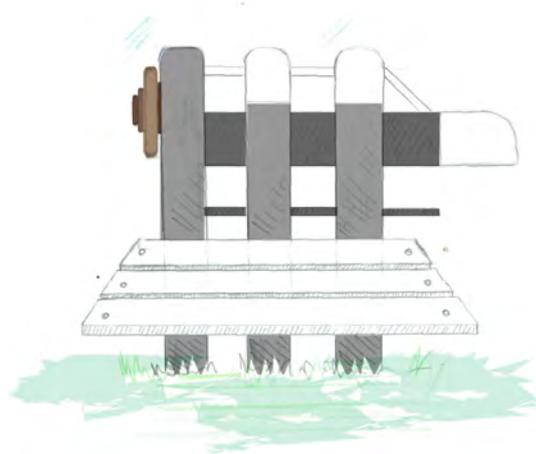
Signs and markers are essential components of the Blueway navigation system. Signage should include all signs associated with wayfinding, navigation and use information viewed from both land and water. In addition, interpretive signs, artworks and installations can provide information about the unique environmental, cultural and historical features associated with the Blueway and its canalside communities. In some instances, information about nearby business amenities (e.g., where to eat, sleep and shop) can also be helpful. To maintain visual continuity and legibility throughout the course of the route, elements like font type and size, color, and other aesthetic features (e.g., logo) should be consistent.

The current Blueways Ireland signage guidelines are not as comprehensive as those agreed for the Greenways and there are a few useful approaches that could be adopted in the case of the Barrow Blueway for example the forward planning for Blueway Signage.

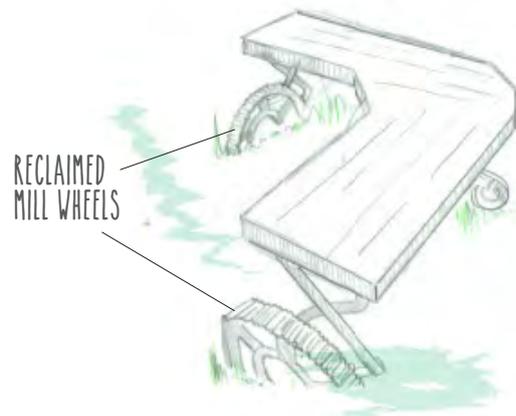
Merchandising using the Barrow Blueway Brand is a potential way to spread the message about the Blueway to other activity participants and its use in a series of Blueway events in the first year is recommended. Given the natural quality of the Blueway an opportunity for nature signage to be used within the brand exists such as images of dragonflies, damselflies, otter, kingfisher or where appropriate bog cotton by way of reference to the peatlands landscape through which the canal travels.



Custom navigation markers



Custom seating

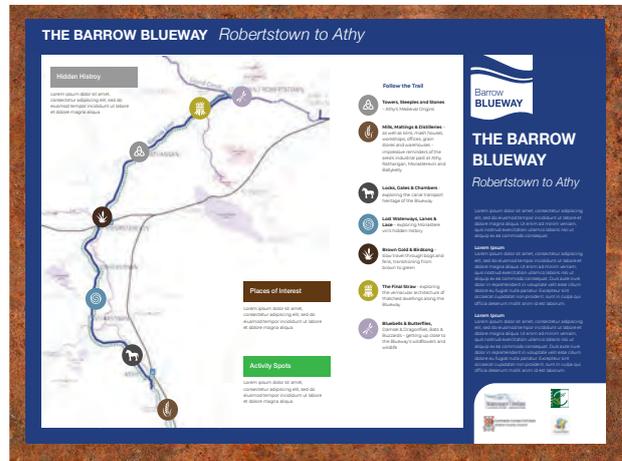


### 8.5 Communicating and Celebrating

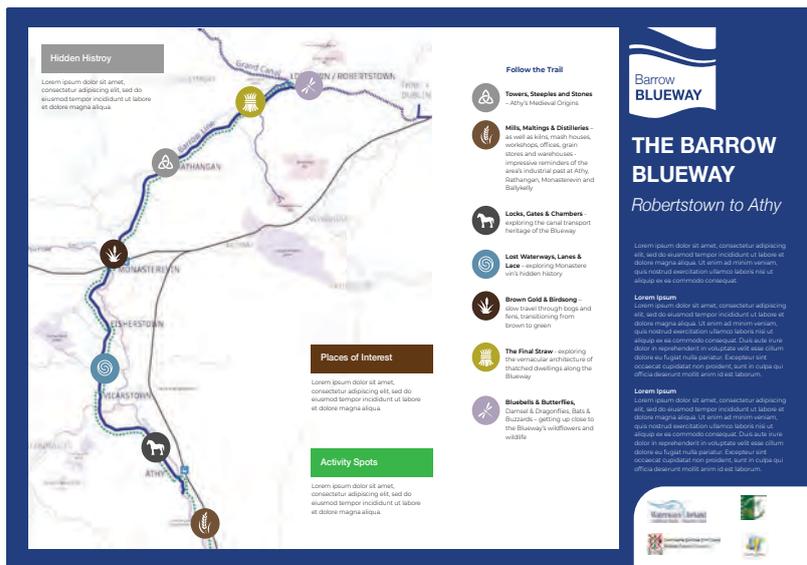
Communicating with regular updates about the Blueway is key to its continued success, while holding special events is a way to energise new and existing users of the trail.

Key tools for communication will include;

- Participating in local events to present about the Blueway
- Establishing a relationship with media outlets to help advertise major events and initiatives
- Sending regular email updates to key agencies, local businesses, environmental groups and volunteers
- Updating a social media account with user photos and stories about the Blueway
- Producing videos to post on websites and social media about the initiative
- Holding special events to celebrate the unique characteristics of the Blueway
- Publishing maps and guides to keep users informed and safe



Bespoke interpretive boards



Bespoke brochures detailing places of interest along the route.



# 09 Managing and Keeping Track

## 9.1 Blueway Management Plan

Access to the Blueway brand and its benefits requires the production and out rolling of a Blueway Management Plan. This is considered by the partners as good practice and guidance and reasons include:

- Blueway management that ensures the safety of users is considered and that trail standards are maintained at a consistent level
- Blueway management that relates directly to the liability of the Blueway Provider. Proper evidence of an implemented Management Plan will reduce the likelihood of the Blueway Provider being found at fault should a claim resulting from injury on the Blueway arise
- Funding – many funders will require evidence of a Management Plan that clearly shows how a Blueway Management Group (a follow-on stage from the Development Group which, in the case of the Barrow, will see Kildare County Council assuming a more prominent role) will ensure that the trail(s) project will be managed for a specified period of time, normally the duration for which their Letter of Offer is valid. This provides evidence that there is a procedure in place to ensure that the Blueway is maintained at the standard and for the purpose for which the project was funded
- Partner buy-in – a Blueway Management Plan ensures that all project partners are clear about the commitment required to managing the project, once completed
- A Barrow Blueway Development website or a web page on kildare.ie would be useful in providing everyone with access to the full range of information and keeping all interested parties up-to-date

**The Plan should identify the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners, and should:**

- Clearly relate to the requirements of the members of the Blueway Management Group
- Be developed by individuals who have an understanding of Blueway management, provision and development within the context of the area

- Clearly reflect the development process for that Blueway to date

**The Trail Management Plan should include (but is not limited to):**

- Visitor Safety Management Policy and Plan
- Biosecurity Plan
- Blueway Product Inventory
- Maintenance Plan
- Risk Assessment (and a recommendation that Blueway businesses and community activity hubs also prepare risk assessments for each site they use)
- Marketing Plan
- A statement of arrangements for different types of Blueway Users (commercial, voluntary, individual and peer groups)
- Promotion of Leave No Trace Policy

## 9.2 Visitor Safety Management Policy and Plan

The best practice in this area is outlined within Managing Visitor Safety in the Countryside – Principles and Practice. <http://vscg.org/publications/>. The Blueway Steering Group encourages the adoption of these risk management techniques. Developed by the Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group, the guiding principles and risk management techniques have been developed and implemented by all of its members. They have provided their worth in practice and have been recognised by enforcing authorities and courts, as the basis for sensible risk management.

The Blueway Development Group should consider the need for towpath rangers to monitor the condition and safety of the route on a regular basis and to monitor the behaviour of Blueway users and their compliance with guidance.



### 9.3 Stewardship

The Barrow Blueway is a long-term project taking place in a high-quality environment with good water quality and several stretches that feel remote and adventurous. Both towpath and water are biodiverse and this supports a fauna that adds to the potential enjoyment and likelihood of repeat visits and referrals. It will be important that the approach to management retains and enhances this quality and restores areas that may have been disturbed during the towpath resurfacing process.

Waterways Ireland and the statutory bodies have duties in respect of the areas with conservation designations on or close to the Blueway route. Their staff are already involved in the stewardship of the route in terms of its natural built and cultural heritage. It will be important though to engender a sense of stewardship of the nature of the route amongst users, providers and communities along the way.

Opportunities in this regard include:

- a nature and heritage subgroup to plan interpretation and the environmental content of user information
- a partnership with the National Biodiversity Data Centre in connection with gathering, accessing and recording data about species along the route
- continued monitoring and removal of litter and waste dumping along the route and in the water
- development of a Barrow Blueway Maintenance Group that can assist with monitoring and litter picks
- the development of heritage guides for the Blueway in collaboration with heritage officers and Athy Heritage Centre-Museum

## APPENDIX A:

### Information Guide for Doing Business on the Blueway

#### Do you have a business idea for the Barrow Blueway?

The Barrow Blueway is a partnership project between Waterways Ireland, Kildare and Laois County Councils and LEADER.

The processes vary depending on your business idea and are there to ensure that all Barrow Blueway businesses are well regulated and are of good quality.

Safe operation is particularly important if you are proposing to offer food & beverage or on-water activity services.

This information guide has been prepared to inform and raise awareness about what you need to do, and to connect you to the right organisation. The guide does not provide legal advice or replace the need to obtain the advice of an independent regulated professional.

#### Trading on the Waterway

Any activity on the waterway itself such as water sports, or on other Waterways Ireland property, requires an operating licence from Waterways Ireland. Businesses must maintain adequate insurance and demonstrate a robust approach to managing Health & Safety. Water based activity providers can make an application online.

Visit Waterways Ireland | Commercial Operating Licences or contact [carey.robinson@waterwaysireland.org](mailto:carey.robinson@waterwaysireland.org)

[See link](#)

#### Trading as a Mobile Activity Provider

Equipment hire operators (e.g. bike hire from a van) often need to be mobile in order to bring equipment to their customers. Where there is no requirement for the exclusive use of public property, and provided no physical obstruction or nuisance is being caused by the drop off/pick up activities, no formal regulation is needed.

Email [info@waterwaysireland.org](mailto:info@waterwaysireland.org) Waterways Ireland to ensure your business is listed for promotional purposes

#### Trading on Private Property

This includes businesses such as hospitality, a bike hire shop, or facilities such as car parking:

##### Planning Permission

Planning permission is required for any proposed property development from the relevant Local Authority, whether this entails physical works to your own property or just a change of use. If you consider that your project involves Exempted Development, a S5 Declaration of Exemption is needed.

##### Kildare County Council

[View all planning services](#)

[Find out how to make a Planning Application](#)

[Apply for a Declaration of Exemption](#)

##### Laois County Council

[View all planning services](#)

[Find out how to make a Planning Application](#)

[Apply for a Declaration of Exemption](#)

Tourism Accommodation providers should comply with the Fáilte Ireland industry standards.

[Fáilte Ireland Tourism Standards](#)

Food & Beverage Businesses must also meet Environmental Health Certification Standards

[HSE Standards](#)

## Trading on Public Property

### Casual Trading

Licences for proposed pitches (e.g. mobile coffee truck) on public property are required if the proposed pitch is on public property. Businesses must follow any statutory regulation applicable to their operations such as Health & Safety, Environmental Health etc. and maintain adequate insurance. Licences can only be granted in areas designated under casual trading bylaws.

#### Kildare County Council

Casual Trading is managed by Corporate Services Department.

[See link](#)

Only The Slip in Celbridge and Market Square, Maynooth are currently designated as areas for casual trading licences to be granted. Bylaws are currently being reviewed.

#### Laois County Council

Casual Trading is managed the by Roads Section.

[See link](#)

Only Portlaoise and Stradbally are designated as areas for casual trading licences to be granted.

### Outdoor Signage & Seating

Items such as signage, awning and pavement café/outdoor seating on public property require a licence from the either Kildare County Council or Laois County Council.

## Business Development & Funding Assistance

### LEADER Programme

Your Local Development Company in both Kildare and Laois can advise on eligible projects and support you to apply for LEADER funding.

#### County Kildare LEADER Partnership CLG

Web: <https://www.countykildarelp.ie/>

Email: [helen@countykildarelp.ie](mailto:helen@countykildarelp.ie)

#### Laois Partnership CLG

Web: <https://laoispartnership.ie/>

Email: [jennycollier@laoispartnership.ie](mailto:jennycollier@laoispartnership.ie)

### Local Enterprise Office

Your **Local Enterprise Office** is the first stop for enterprise support and can provide training and mentoring in your area as well as financial supports.

[See link](#)

# Thank You

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Uwe Taimre	<i>Monasterevin</i>
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# Barrow Blueway Economic Plan

Experience the Barrow Blueway

JULY 2021