

Report on	Lower Bann Blueway
Date of Meeting	11 February 2021
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Charmain Bell

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To update Council on the Blueway Feasibility Study carried out for the proposed development of a Blueway along the Lower Bann from Newferry (West) to Toomebridge.
2.0	Background
2.1	Blueways are a network of multi-activity recreational trails, based on or alongside idyllic lakes, canals and rivers in Ireland. They provide scenic routes into the heart of rural Ireland by canoe, bike or on foot. A Blueway offers a truly unique experience into the countryside and along stunning waterways, allowing the visitor to experience a beautiful fusion of the past and present. A Blueway is very similar in concept to a greenway except rather than being a trail across land, this is a water trail.
2.2	The development of Blueways presents valuable opportunities for rural communities to attract more visitors. These values lie not only in the recreational opportunities that they offer but also in their potential to stimulate local businesses and regenerate local areas.
2.3	The Lower Bann River which stretches for 60km from Toome to the Atlantic is rich in wildlife, history and built and natural heritage as evidenced by the wide range of environmental designations attributed to it. Although considerable development has taken place along the River in recent years, in order for the River to maximise its full outdoor recreation potential moving forward, several key issues have been identified that require urgent addressing namely; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the River is currently a hidden asset, not reality identifiable as a destination and therefore it cannot capitalise on its role in social and economic development. • currently access on the water allows full length navigation but the river banks only allow fragmented river bank routes for walkers and cyclists. • given that the Lower Bann drains Lough Neagh, Rivers Agency is obligated to manage the water levels in Lough Neagh releasing excess into the Lower Bann with consequent impacts on water levels and flows which then impacts water and river bank based recreation e.g. sailing and angling.

<p>2.4</p> <p>2.5</p> <p>2.6</p> <p>2.7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • water skiing and jet skiing zones are not always being adhered to by the user groups thereby causing damage to the biodiversity and habitats of the area. <p>In order to address these issues, Waterways Ireland has been working with the Local Authorities to create a 'Blueway' along the Lower Bann, which will significantly enhance the recreational opportunities in this part of Mid Ulster.</p> <p>A Lower Bann Blueway would result in the development of a multi-use trail running alongside the already fully navigational water course linking walking, cycling, canoeing and paddle boarding with local towns and villages, leading to the creation of recreational hubs (clusters of activity), which then can be marketed as a 'Blueway', making the Lower Bann become more visible and recognised as a valuable recreational asset in the Mid Ulster District Council (MUDC) area.</p> <p>Stage 1 of the Lower Bann Blueway from Portglenone to Newferry was completed in 2019 with the provision of 25 additional coarse angling stands installed from the Porglenone Bridge upstream. These were designed to complement the existing 89 angling stands and walkway which also underwent improvements which included widening the existing path and repairing damaged pegs. As a result of the development, in June 2019 the Lower Bann hosted the 25th European Coarse Angling Championships. Additional work on the Blueway has also commenced from Newferry downstream towards the existing 89th peg.</p> <p>Council Officers working in collaboration with Waterways Ireland appointed a company to carry out a feasibility study to investigate the potential of extending the Blueway from Newferry (west) to Toome.</p>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Main Report</p>
<p>3.1</p> <p>3.2</p> <p>3.3</p>	<p>Gerry Darby Consulting was appointed to undertake and produce a feasibility study and recommendations report to assess the potential of extending and developing a Blueway either over land or water along the Lower Bann from Newferry (west) to Toomebridge, including Lough Beg. Consideration was given to the existing tourism attractions/tourism providers within a 5 mile radius of the stretch of water (<i>within the Mid Ulster District</i>), and how to improve accessibility to the Lower Bann.</p> <p>The proposal also refers to the significant sites in the Mid Ulster Council area namely, Lough Beg and Church Island, Newferry West, Hutchinson's Quay and Portna. This will build on an already developed stage one trail along the Lower Bann from Portglenone to Newferry which was completed in 2019.</p> <p>This study provides a variety of trail options, together with a preferred option, based on the limitations and barriers that exist along the shoreline. These barriers and limitations include potential quick shoreline flooding, access permissions from landowners, and the tight statutory planning and environmental regulation as a result of strict European and local environmental legislation.</p>

4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: £1,000 MUDC Grant aid received from Waterways Ireland £10,000
	Human: Delivered within the roles and responsibilities of council officers
	Risk Management:
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications:
	Rural Needs Implications:
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	For information
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Blueway Feasibility Study along the Lower Bann from Newferry (West) to Toomebridge
6.2	Appendix 1. ASSI Creation and Views about Management
6.3	Appendix 2. Blueway Management Development Guide
6.4	Appendix 3. Trail Specifications