**Leitrim County Council**



**PART 8**

**BRIEFING DOCUMENT**

***Proposed walking / cycling route from Corgar lough to Aughawillan***

**Introduction and Background to Project**

Leitrim County Council in conjunction with Ballinamore Development Company is proposing the development of a stretch of walkway / cycleway (Greenway) to be provided from Corgar Lake to Aughawillan, a distance of approximately 2.9 km in length. This will add to the Greenway currently under construction between the town of Ballinamore and Corgar Lake.

The route for the proposed Greenway will start at Corgar Lake across the L5374 Local Road from where the Greenway to Ballinamore ends and extend eastbound for approximately 2.9 km. The route will initially be within the field directly south of the existing disused railway line for a distance of 60m until it passes the Railway Cottage at Corgar. From here, the route will step onto the old disused railway line and travel along its path for the remainder of its length. The route will pass through agricultural land until it reaches the L53741 Local Road in the townland of Drumcullion, which it will pass under using an existing arch bridge. The Greenway will continue along the disused railway line where it will terminate at the bridge between the townlands of Lisgruddy and Corramahan. There is one section of forestry along the proposed route in the townland of Corduff, with the rest of the route consisting of farmland.

The proposed Greenway is to be a traffic free route following the route of the former Cavan & Leitrim Railway. Much of the boundaries of the railway line remain intact except for short sections through fields where boundaries have been cleared for agricultural purposes.

This section of the route forms part of the wider regional Greenway project from Dromod to Belturbet. Roughan O’Donovan Consulting Engineers were previously appointed to undertake the full environmental assessment of the proposed route and to prepare a design of the project to be brought through the appropriate planning consent process.

**Scheme Overview**

The route of the former Cavan – Leitrim Railway is still clearly visible with the majority of the existing corridor approximately 5-6 metres wide. There is sufficient space for the construction of the proposed development within the original land-take of the railway.

The entire route will be cleared of existing vegetation, trees / saplings which have grown within the corridor with hedges cut back on either side of the corridor. Fences, gated crossings and drainage associated with the former rail line will be restored. The detail along the route will be determined at the Detailed Design stage of the project which will adhere to the principals of Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly National Roads Authority) ‘Rural Cycle Scheme Design’ and the National Transport Authority ‘National Cycle Manual’.

The proposed Greenway will predominantly be constructed at a width of 3.0m with an additional 1.0m wide grass verge on either side of the track. The finished surface of the proposed development will be surface dressed. Drainage of the Greenway will vary along the route depending on whether its running along a raised section of embankment or down in a cutting. In areas where the Greenway is running along an embankment, drainage will be onto the grass verge. In areas where the Greenway is running through a cutting, drainage will consist of filter drains on either side. These filter drains will empty into nearby drainage ditches and streams along the route. Safety fences will be erected along the route and shall comprise of 1.2m to 1.4m high stock-proof or timber post and rail fencing.

The location and details of the project accompany the Part 8 application drawings.

**Landownership**

There are 15 individual landowners along the route between Corgar Lake and Aughawillan. The co-operation of these landowners will be essential to the successful development of this stretch of Greenway but also to the wider development from Dromod to Belturbet over time. Discussions are on-going with all parties and the route shall be as developed on the basis of ‘Permissive Access Agreements’.

These Permissive Access Agreements will identify the key issues for the development of the Greenway. Where access through property has not been deemed possible or appropriate, a local route diversion has been identified as part of the agreed recommended route. This is the case at the Corgar Railway Cottage where the old disused railway line was deemed to be too close to this home. In this case, agreement was reached with the adjoining landowner to allow the Greenway to be constructed offline and located in a field just to the south of the old disused railway line for a distance of 60m.

**Planning Policy Context**

***National Policy***

Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future, (2009)is the transport policy for Ireland for the period 2009-2020. It recognises the vital importance of continued investment in transport to ensure an efficient economy and continued social development, but also promotes more sustainable transport modes such as walking, cycling and public transport.

National Cycle Policy Framework (2009-2020)

The National Cycle Policy Framework (as part of Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future 2009) sets out a national policy for cycling, in order to create a stronger cycling culture, a friendlier environment for cycling and improved quality of life. The vision is that all cities, towns and rural areas will be bicycle friendly. The policy document sets a target of 10% of all trips by bicycle by 2020 and places emphasis on promoting and integrating cycle networks.

Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways (2018)

This document sets out to assist in the strategic development of nationally and regionally significant Greenways in appropriate locations constructed to an appropriate standard in order to deliver a quality experience for all Greenway users. It also aims to increase the number and geographical spread of Greenways of scale and quality around the country over the next 10 years with a consequent significant increase in the number of people using Greenways as a visitor experience and as a recreational amenity.

***Leitrim County Development Plan 2015 – 2021***

Leitrim County Council has a number of policies and objectives set out in our County Development Plan which supports the proposed development. Policy 1 states that it is the policy of the Council to deliver a *County Tourism Strategy* which will, inter alia, forge strategic and operational partnerships in tourism planning, marketing and promotion with surrounding Counties in the North West and Northern Ireland. One of the stated projects in this regard is the former Cavan & Leitrim Railway Line.

Section 4.6.1 of the County Development Plan deals with Sustainable Transportation. The policies and objectives contained therein are guided by the national policy document “*Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future*, (2009)” which is referred to above. The promotion of initiatives that can reduce congestion, improve local environments and encourage healthier and safer lifestyles are key features of sustainable transportation. Leitrim County Council seeks to influence people’s travel behaviour towards more sustainable options and seeks to do so by working closely with relevant organisations in improving public transport facilities and promoting opportunities for alternative transportation such as walking and cycling.

Leitrim County Council also recognises the importance of walking and cycling to the well being and quality of life of residents. It will support and encourage the continued development of walking as a sustainable form of transportation and will work with organisations and groups in the promotion of safe walking throughout the county, including heritage walks and the protection of public rights of way, which are an important amenity and tourism resource.

In accordance with the principles of sustainable development, the basis of the Council’s transportation policies include the encouragement of walking and cycling as a recreational activity and a healthy exercise.

Section 4.6.3 of the County Development Plan deals specifically with Walking and Cycling. A number of long distance walking and cycling tourist routes have been laid out and signposted throughout the County. The Council will facilitate the maintenance of existing routes and further expansion of these networks in co-operation with local community groups and the Regional Tourism Authority. These routes will be appropriately signposted so as to facilitate tourists and warn motorists.

**Objective 26** It is an objective of the Council to complete the design and progress to construction the provision of a walking/cycle way along the narrow gauge Railway from Dromod to Mohill and Ballinamore, and also along the former narrow gauge Railway route from Ballinamore towards Belturbet, in order to continue to secure this route, pending the re-introduction of rail line and services (such as a tourist/heritage train) along this former line.

**Objective 29** It is an objective of the Council to seek opportunities for the development of suitable walking routes, cycle tracks and bridle paths along redundant railway lines and other suitable locations such as; along waterways and historical access routes.

Section 3.10.2 of the County Development Plan deals with the ‘*Provision for Recreation and Amenity*’. The Council is aware that the tourism potential of its amenities has not yet been fully developed and will facilitate, and where necessary become directly involved in, the promotion and development of amenities.

Relevant policies and objectives in this regard include:

**Policy 46** It is the policy of the Council to encourage safe walking and cycling by providing linear parks, footpaths, cycle paths and public lighting in towns and villages.

In relation to Natura 2000 sites which refer to Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas, the County Development Plan states that the Council shall take appropriate steps to avoid, in these areas, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of the *EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC Directive)*.

With regard to Natura 2000 sites, the County Development Plan includes the following policies:

**Policy 76** It is the policy of the Council to protect and conserve Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas including ‘Candidate’ and ‘Proposed’ areas.

**Policy 77** It is the Policy of the Council to ensure that all Plans and Projects that have the potential to negatively impact on the integrity of the Natura 2000 network, will be subject to a Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA), in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and in accordance with best practice and guidance.

**Environmental Assessment**

Appropriate Assessment

NATURA 2000 sites are protected habitats for flora and fauna of European importance. They comprise Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), designated under the Habitats Directive and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), designated under the Birds Directive.

An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has been prepared to assist the Planning Authority in their determination. The report concludes that a Natura Impact Statement / Appropriate Assessment is not required for this project. This report is contained in Appendix B.

Environmental Impact Assessment

An Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report was completed for the full Greenway from Dromod to Belturbet in 2016 by Roughan O’Donovan. It concluded that a full Environmental Impact Assessment Report is not required for the project. This report is contained in Appendix C.

Ecological Impact Assessment

An Ecological Impact Assessment Report has been prepared as part of the Part 8 planning application to assist the planning authority in their determination. This report is contained in Appendix D. It concludes that if all mitigation measures are implemented, the proposed greenway scheme can be appropriately built and operated without significant adverse effects on designated areas, flora and fauna.

**Archaeological Assessment**

An Archaeological Assessment Report has been prepared as part of this Part 8 planning application to assist the Planning Authority in their determination. This report is contained in Appendix E. It concludes that the development of the greenway will not impact on any recorded archaeological or architectural features.

**Road Safety**

The proposed Greenway is to be a traffic free route following the route of the former Cavan & Leitrim Railway. The Greenway will only interact with traffic where it commences at Corgar Td. There is carparking available at the Corgar entrance to the proposed Greenway, which will result in some interaction between pedestrians/cyclists and vehicles. A pedestrian gate will be provided at Lisgruddy Td for local access only.

The crossing at Corgar is located on the local road L5374 which has a speed limit of 80km/hr. Sight distance of greater than 120m is available to the north at this crossing. On the south side the available sight distance is 90m. Considering the road alignment to the south with a number of tight radius bends the operation speeds on this road is less than 60km/h and therefore a sight distance of 90m is adequate. Also advance signage will be erected in accordance with drawing no. CLGW-002.1 to advise drivers of the crossing ahead.

**Existing Bridges**

The Greenway will pass under an existing road bridge at Drumcullion Td and finish at an existing road bridge between the townlands of Lisgruddy and Corramahan. As part of this project, vegetation will be removed from both bridges and any pointing of stonework required following this will be carried out.

**Public Lighting**

Public lighting is not proposed along this section of proposed Greenway.

**Appendix A: Photographs of Proposed Footway / Cycleway**

A picture containing tree, outdoor, nature, way

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Figure 1: View east towards the old Railway Cottage in Corgar Townland

The old disused railway line is located behind the timber gate in the above photograph. It shows how close the old disused railway line is to the old Railway Cottage. The Greenway will initially be offset from the disused railway line (to the south) until it passes the old railway cottage and then it will revert back onto the old disused railway line for the remainder of its length.

A picture containing plant, tree, outdoor

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Figure 2: Typical view along the old disused railway line in the townland of Corgar

The original boundaries of the railway line are visible in this photograph. The original boundaries remain intact for the majority of the route except for short sections through fields where boundaries have been cleared for agricultural purposes.

A picture containing grass, outdoor, tree, plant

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Figure 3: Local road L53741 which the Greenway will pass beneath via an existing arch bridge

The Greenway will continue in a north-eastern direction once it passes beneath the Local Road L53741. The existing triple arch bridge beneath this road is shown in Figure 4.

A picture containing tree, outdoor, grass, forest

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Figure 4: View of the triple arch bridge on the L53741 Local Road

The Greenway will pass through the central arch of the bridge.

A picture containing tree, outdoor, plant

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Figure 5: Typical view along the old disused railway in the townland of Drumcullion

Once again, the original boundaries of the railway line are visible in this photograph.

A picture containing plant, tree

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Figure 6: Typical view along the old disused railway in the townland of Lisgruddy

A picture containing tree, nature, outdoor, water

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Figure 7: View of the bridge on the Local Road L1373, at which this section of Greenway will terminate

This is also a triple arch bridge, similar to the bridge in Figure 4.

**Appendix B: Appropriate Assessment Screening Report**

**Appendix C: Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report**

**Appendix D: Ecological Impact Assessment Report**

**Appendix E: Archaeological Assessment Report**