

Leitrim County Council



PART 8

BRIEFING DOCUMENT

PROPOSED WALKING / CYCLING ROUTE ALONG DRUMSHANBO NARROW GAUGE TRAIL

Introduction and Background to Project

Leitrim County Council in conjunction with the Drumshanbo Community Council is proposing the construction of a walk/trail on the periphery of Drumshanbo Town that will link the Dowra road (R207) with Convent Avenue and onto the Ballinamore road (R208). The route of the proposed trail will follow the line of the disused Cavan-Leitrim Narrow gauge railway line where possible, this railway line ran from Arigna to Ballinamore passing through Drumshanbo and closed in 1959.

The proposed walk/trail will provide a scenic recreational use for locals and visitors to the town and connect housing developments on the Dowra road and on Convent Avenue with the national school and the GAA grounds from an active travel perspective.

The trail will commence on the Dowra road where a controlled pedestrian crossing is proposed to allow safe crossing of the R207 and then extend along the route of the disused railway line to Convent Avenue. It will then cross Convent Avenue at an uncontrolled pedestrian crossing and continue along the disused railway line for approx. 680m. It will then turn off the disused railway line along a field boundary and connect up with the Ballinamore road(R208) adjacent to the National School.

This project will add to the development of a full walking loop of Drumshanbo town along a rich industrial heritage route of the Narrow-Gauge Railway which closed in 1959. It encompasses historic sites along the route including the Railway Station House and the iconic Water Tower, along with providing scenic view of Sliabh an Iarainn, Lough Allen and parts of the town.

Scheme Overview

The route of the former Cavan – Leitrim Railway is still clearly visible in parts 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 and drainage associated with the former rail line will be installed. 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'.

Where the trail leaves the disused railway, it will follow along field boundaries until it reaches the Ballinamore approach road(R208). The trail will not exceed 12% slope. There will be some cut and fill along short sections of the field sections to achieve a slope of 12%.

The proposed trail will predominantly be constructed at a width of 2.5m. with an additional grass verge on either side of the track. A sealed asphaltic concrete surface will be provided on the section between the Dowra road and Convent Avenue with low level public lighting. The finished surface on the section between Convent Avenue and the Ballinamore road may be an unsealed gravel compacted with no public lighting. Drainage of the trail 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 trail is running along an embankment, drainage will be onto the grass verge. In areas where the trail 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 entire length is approximately 1000m.

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

Landownership

The majority of lands required for the trail are part of the old railway line and are owned by Leitrim County Council. Two other portions of land are required located off the route of the railway line. Discussions have taken place with these landowners, and they agree in principle with the proposed development with agreements to follow when planning is approved.

Planning Policy Context

National Policy

Project Ireland 2040 - The National Planning Framework is based on achieving ten strategic outcomes, the most pertinent of which to this chapter is sustainable mobility, securing compact and sustainable growth and ensuring a transition to a low carbon and climate resistant society. The transition to more sustainable modes of travel (walking, cycling, public transport) is promoted, particularly within smaller towns and villages and in rural areas. The NPF also supports the implementation of planning and transportation strategies for urban areas, with a major focus on improving walking and cycling routes, including continuous greenway networks and targeted measures to enhance permeability and connectivity.

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 2023-2029

Leitrim County Council has a number of policies and objectives set out in our County Development Plan which supports the proposed development. Core Strategy Objective 4 states that it is the policy of the Council To promote the integration of land use and transportation policies and to prioritise provision for cycling and walking travel modes and the strengthening of public transport with particular emphasis on the bus for inter urban centre travel. One of the stated projects in this regard is the former Cavan & Leitrim Railway Line.

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 wellbeing 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.

Section 5.2.10 of the County Development Plan deals with Leitrim Recreation Strategy. The Recreation Strategy sets out a roadmap for the further development of recreation amenities in the county in the interest of both residents and tourism. The key amenities identified were walking trails and loops; the Shannon-Erne Waterway as a Blueway-Greenway; the Lough Allen Basin; water and land based recreation and adventure (e.g., canoeing, kayaking, rowing, walking, cycling, equestrian); angling (game, pike and other coarse angling), and; rail to trail Greenway projects on the former Sligo Leitrim and Northern Counties rail line and the former Cavan Leitrim rail line.

Section 5.5 of the County Development Plan deals with Greenways, Cycling and Walking. It states that Leitrim County Council is 'strongly committed to developing further walking and cycling tracks, recognising the benefits not only for the local community but also for generating tourism activity and the resulting economic impacts'.

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

Section 8.8 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 to facilitate tourists and warn motorists.

WC POL 1 To promote walking and cycling as efficient, healthy and environmentally friendly modes of transport by securing the development of a network of direct, comfortable, convenient and safe cycle routes and footpaths, particularly in town centres and in the vicinity of schools.

WC POL 6 To require adequate filtered permeability solutions in relation to large-scale residential, commercial or mixed-use development proposals (both in terms of new development and retrofitting into existing built-up areas) to facilitate active travel, accessibility and connectivity in settlements.

Section 8.9 of the County Development Plan deals specifically with Blueways and Greenways. Greenways are off-road routes for walkers, cyclists and other forms of non-motorised transport which are often created along abandoned rail lines.

BG POL 1 To continue to support the develop an integrated and connected network of sustainable greenways, blueways and green routes within Co. Leitrim and into adjoining counties.

BG POL 2 To support the implementation of the strategy for Greenway Development in Ireland "Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways" in relation to the development and extension of greenways throughout the county.

Section 7.8.5 of the County Development Plan deals with 'Healthy Communities'. The 'Healthy Leitrim Strategy' 2019-2021 aims to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Leitrim over the coming years. The Council is aware that the tourism and exploration potential of its trails and amenities has not yet been fully developed and will facilitate, and where necessary become directly involved in, the promotion and development of walking and cycling trails.

Relevant policies and objectives in this regard include:

HC POL 3 To facilitate the provision of appropriate high quality recreational and amenity facilities within the county.

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:

NH POL 1 To protect and conserve Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas.

NH POL 2 To implement Article 6(3) and where necessary Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive, to ensure that Appropriate Assessment is carried out in relation to works, plans and projects with the potential to impact European sites (SACs and SPAs), whether directly or indirectly or in combination with any other plan(s) or project(s). All assessments must be in compliance with the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, as amended, and the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended as relevant.

With regard to the Drumshanbo Settlement Plan, the County Development Plan includes the following objectives:

DSO 15 Provide for the expansion and development of educational, social, community and recreational facilities in Drumshanbo available to provide for the needs of the resident community and that of the wider rural hinterland.

DSO 34 Provide for the enhancement of tourism and amenity facilities within Drumshanbo where appropriate and to facilitate leisure tourism/amenity proposals subject to the preservation of the natural amenity of the area. Ensure that development proposals do not give rise to adverse impacts on the receiving environment.

DSO 35 Seek to advance through planning and detailed design the development of a greenway (walking/cycling route) along the former narrow gauge rail line and to integrate this infrastructure with other existing/proposed walking routes/footpaths around the town. Subject to planning consent being obtained, to seek to deliver the development of the Greenway within the life of this Development Plan.

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 by Aona Environmental Consulting 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 proposed scheme by Aona Environmental Consulting. 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 by Aona Environmental Consulting 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 scheme can be appropriately built and operated without significant adverse effects on designated areas, flora and fauna.

Archaeological Assessment

Archaeology has been reviewed and an Archaeology Impact Assessment Report has been issued by Fado Archaeology 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 trail will not impact on any recorded archaeological or architectural features.

Road Safety

The proposed trail is to be a traffic free route following the route as set out on the site layout drawing. The trail will interact with vehicular traffic at two locations.

- Where it commences at the Dowra road, a controlled pedestrian crossing is proposed to allow safe crossing for users.
- Where it crosses Convent Avenue, an uncontrolled crossing point is proposed.

Both crossings' points are in a 50 km /hr speed zone with acceptable sight distances for approaching traffic. Advance approach signage will also be erected in advance of these crossing points to warn motorists about the upcoming pedestrian crossing. Advance signage will be erected along the trails on the approach to the public road to warn trail users of a public road ahead.

Existing Bridges

The trail will pass under a former road bridge at Convent Avenue. The bridge is on the Record of Protected Structures (No. 82) as part of the old Cavan-Leitrim Railway. The bridge is in very good condition and is an interesting attraction on the trail. The original railway line ran underneath the middle arch of this road.

Public Lighting

Public lighting is proposed along the section of trail between the Dowra road and the Convent Avenue. It is not proposed between the section from Convent Avenue to the Ballinamore road as this is since as a more rural location.

Appendix A: Photographs of Proposed Footway / Cycleway



Figure 1: Start point for the Drumshanbo Narrow Gauge Trail on the Dowra Road.
The old disused railway line is located behind the tree in the above photograph.



Figure 2: Typical view along the old disused railway line in Drumshanbo



Figure 3: Typical view along the old disused railway



**Figure 4: View of the triple arch bridge on the Convent Avenue which will be the crossing point
The Greenway will pass through the central arch of the bridge.**



Figure 5: The location where the proposed trail will connect to the R208 Ballinamore road.

Appendix B: Appropriate Assessment Screening Report

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

Appendix D: Ecological Impact Assessment Report