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This document compiles the IWAI's suggestions regarding the Development Potential of Tullamore Harbour (Inner), on the Grand Canal. IWAI appreciates the invitation by Grafton Architects & Waterways Ireland (WI) to submit ideas to the study on the future potential of Tullamore Inner Harbour.

I. Introduction & IWAI History

The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI) was established in 1954. It has 23 branches across the island of Ireland. It has 3000 members. It represents a wide range of members interests regarding inland waterways use and activities, navigation issues, community interests, tourism development, all in relation to the socio and economic benefits of the waterways.

IWAI has a long history of working with statutory agencies, funding groups, and community interests with regards to promoting access to the waterways. In recent years this has taken the form of working with Waterways Ireland – the navigation authority, Government Departments in relation to legislative reform regarding byelaws on boating use on the canals and Barrow sections of the inland waterways, undertaking large infrastructural refurbishment projects such as the regeneration of the Boyne Canal in Co. Meath. IWAI also supports Special Interest Groups such as the C-SIG which has undertaken a digital national mapping and charting project of much of the Shannon, Erne, Royal Canal, Grand Canal, and Barrow Navigation. In 2018, as a response to the severe difficulties encountered by boating users on the

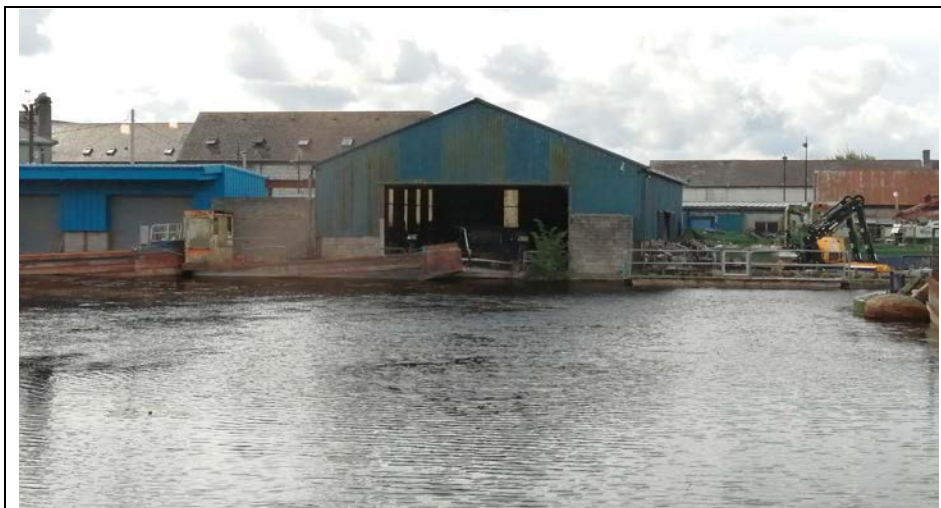
Grand Canal, Royal Canal and Barrow Line, a special interest group Nav-Watch¹ was established within the Canal branches of IWAI. The purpose of this group is to constructively contribute to the knowledge base by compiling data reports regarding access to these waterways, their navigational maintenance, development and use from a boating perspective. Then, sharing this information with Waterways Ireland to help focus attention on more critical issues affecting these navigations.

2. Tullamore Harbour & Inner Harbour

Tullamore was the original western terminus of the Grand Canal before the extension to Shannon Harbour was added. Hence, Tullamore was planned with a large harbour together with an inner harbour flanked with extensive stores buildings to securely accommodate goods ready for transit. The inner harbour also contained a dry dock facility. The canal's designers were impeccable in the quality and detail of design of the facilities necessary for a commercially viable canal.

3. Tullamore Dry Dock

Harbours, quaysides and stores buildings were built in cities and some major towns on the canal's route, these were supported by the essential service of a dry dock, where boats can be easily grounded for service or repair. Dry dock facilities were strategically positioned close to or in major harbours along the length of the canal. Dublin, Sallins, Tullamore and Shannon Harbour all had dry dock facilities. Now, as we are in the midst of a massive resurgence in canal boat ownership, brought on in the main by the national housing crisis, the only available dry dock on the Grand Canal is in Shannon Harbour.



The covered dry dock within the inner harbour, Tullamore.

¹ Nav-Watch – comprising expert members of Canals & Barrow branches of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland from the Royal Canal, Kildare, Dublin, North Barrow, Barrow, Offaly, and Shannon Harbour IWAI regions.

Not since the closure of the canals in 1961 has access to the dry dock facilities in Tullamore been more important. It is a missing essential service required by the growing number of vessels on the Grand Canal. Currently, if a boat in Dublin requires dry docking for repairs or just for inspection, as is required periodically for insurance, that boat must take a four or five day journey to Athy on the Barrow Line or west to Shannon Harbour. You must double that time to allow for the return journey, then add service time spent in the dry dock and this becomes unnecessarily expensive and time consuming for the many people who live on their boat but work full time. It can total a round trip of up to 160 miles at as little as 2mph. The mothballing of essential canal facilities is not part of WI's remit and this facility should be reopened once WI leave this site. The bridge which obstructs the entrance to the inner harbour should also be removed.



The bridge which blocks access to the inner harbour, Tullamore.

The dry dock in Tullamore requires some small work to bring it into service again. The structural chamber of the dock is in good repair, these structures were solidly built and have stood the test of time well. The outlet pipe which empties the dock was apparently damaged by workers in the course of adjacent excavation works. The pipe needs to be surveyed and repairs should follow. Even without the use of the outlet pipe the dry dock can be emptied by pumping it's water back into the harbour.

4. Renaming the Harbour

It has been suggested that the harbour be renamed **Grand Canal Harbour, Tullamore**. Tullamore harbour has been kept from public view for over two centuries, now that the opportunity to open it to the public has finally arisen, perhaps it might be more appropriate to choose a name which gives a sense of ownership to the people of Tullamore. **The People's Harbour, Tullamore** might seem more appropriate. The name 'Grand Canal Harbour' is already in use. It refers to the original terminus of the

Grand Canal in Dublin and although it has been filled in since the mid-twentieth century, it's name survives strongly in the hearts and minds of historians and canal enthusiasts alike, it will also be attributed to the vast residential complex being built on that site currently.

5. Facilities to Embrace all Canal and Greenway Users

The recent development of the Greenways has been enormously successful and has also helped focus attention on the canals and their potential for barge cruising and water based tourism. Improved access and additional parking has made Greenway routes more accessible, but they are still totally lacking in some of the most basic services.

WI Service Blocks

Toilets, changing rooms, washing facilities and showers are only present in a few locations on the canals where they had previously been built for the boating community. These services need to be developed and expanded for use by all canal and greenway users. Many of IWAI's members are boat owners, and as such, are very familiar with the network of WI Service Blocks in harbours along the Shannon and also in a small handful of locations on the canals. These facilities are much used on the river by boaters but on the canals they need to be promoted and made available to walkers, cyclists and kayakers too. A service block available to all should be central to any redesign of Tullamore Inner Harbour.



WI service block including toilets, showers and washing facilities.

Lower the Walls, Let the People See In!

The inner harbour and compound has long been hidden from view behind high stone walls. In opening the site to the public it would seem appropriate to cut these walls down in height to circa 40cm, add a capstone and top that with a suitable railing design with a water based heritage theme. This will allow greater light penetration and give the public full view of the redesigned harbour complex.



Harbour compound boundary walls.

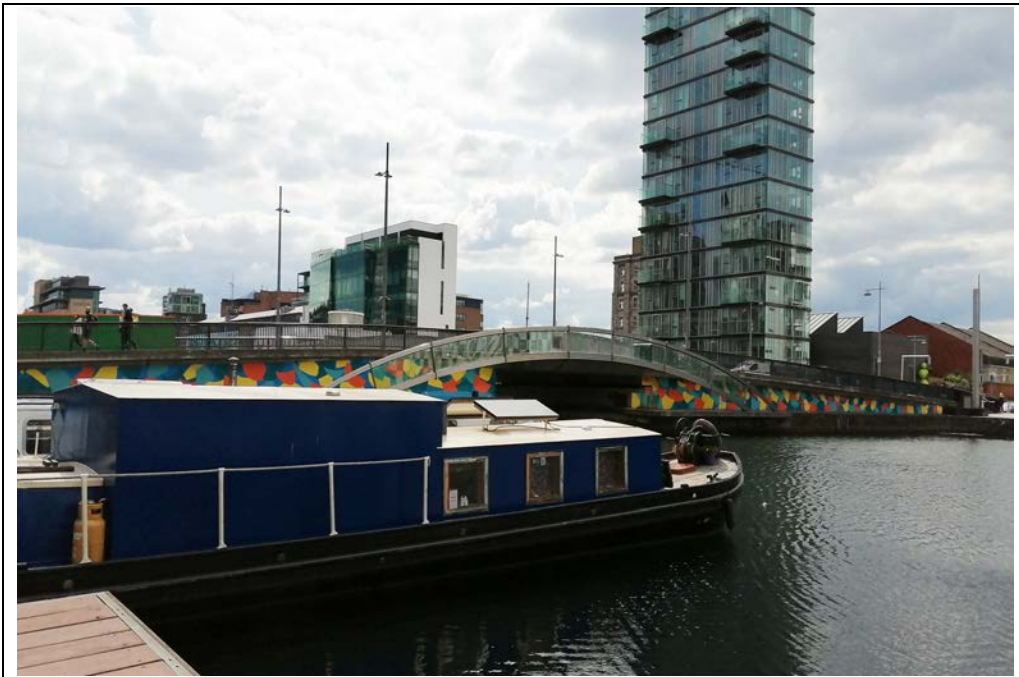
6. High-Rise Dreams

Offaly County Council would appear to favour some type of high-rise residential development on the site. Looking at the *Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027*, Chapter 7: *Retail and Town Centre Strategy, and Regeneration* refers to 'Taller Buildings' and suggests that the harbour site might be suitable for such a development, this was echoed in the McCabe visual of high-rise developments overlooking the harbour.



The F. McCabe vision of Tullamore Harbour.

This concept may be heavily influenced by Grand Canal Dock (GCD) in Dublin where high-rise buildings surround the inner dock on three sides. The McCabe illustration presents a bright picture of water based activities happily merged with tall buildings. Sadly the opposite is true, as is found in GCD where tall buildings block direct sunlight from the residents of the marina for much of the day. Only in summertime when the sun is high in the sky does the dock really benefit from direct sunlight. The tall buildings channel and trap wind, making the docks a very unwelcoming and windswept location for any type of watersports. In the case of Tullamore, a tall building on the site of the current Waterways Ireland offices would block direct sunlight to the entire main harbour. Taller buildings might be better placed in the northern corners of the site i.e. the current location of the lock gate building shed and the far north corner to the church side of the site. The retail building to the north of the harbour, which are not currently part of the available site should be aquired and included. Their location offers the best option for any tall residential buildings.



High-rise in GCD, Dublin.



The Inner Dock, GCD, Dublin – Surrounded by tall buildings.



WI office building. A tall building in this location would shade the outer harbour.



The retail buildings to the north of the site have a derelict appearance. They should be acquired and incorporated into the site.

Suitability & Parking

A high-rise residential development situated within the harbour compound would require a considerable number of parking places in a site where space is restricted. If residential developments were being considered for this restricted site without providing parking for those residents, we believe a more suitable site would be to locate the development close to the railway station and bus links. The Coen's site adjacent to the new Lidl store would seem more appropriate.

7. Suggested Buildings & Facilities

This development can be a waterways hub, providing essential services which will enhance the canal waterway, but it also can be so much more. It should be a place where the people of Tullamore feel welcome and are drawn to. The ground floor of the buildings should be given over to publicly accessible facilities with a cafe at its core. The location will create a unique atmosphere, an adjacent exhibition space to inspire, a meeting room to educate and inform, these will ensure worthwhile public facilities are available for local groups and communities. A fixed exhibition space could be dedicated to the history of the Grand Canal with specific emphasis on Tullamore, the eventual Tullamore Extension of the canal and the Tullamore Fort featuring its link with the expansion onward to Shannon Harbour. Retail units might sell/rent kayaks or paddleboards which can be used in the outer harbour. The local Tullamore Canoe Club should have a presence and premises in the harbour too. Courtyards surrounding buildings should be paved or cobbled sensitively. It is a relatively small site with two thirds water and only one third land, the ground surrounding buildings should be open and accessible ensuring a strong public realm space. A regularly serviced and working pump-out facility should be included since the

pending canal by-laws will require all boats to have holding tanks for brown water. Day boats could travel further along the harbour level of the canal. A barge hire centre could be established offering barge trips and holidays on the canal (linking possibly with barge hire in Sallins and Shannon based rental firms to extend range of travel). Echoing the success of Celtic Canal Cruises, which at one time had up to thirty boats for hire close to Tullamore, would benefit Tullamore greatly economically and fits well within the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand promoted by Fáilte Ireland to promote midlands tourism. A paved courtyard adjacent to the harbour's quayside should be incorporated into the design. Possibly covered with sail-like screens for shelter, this area would be ideal for public events outdoor. The curtilage of the canal, which is listed, should be respected and maintained.

A service block can offer facilities to boaters, walkers, cyclists and all who visit the area. Simply having an available toilet block will attract people toward this section of the Greenway. A small number of serviced liveaboard berths in one corner of the inner harbour would provide essential services for the liveaboard community. It would also bring a strong 'boating' atmosphere to the harbour which would be evident no matter how quiet the harbour might be at any time. This mixed zone use would be appropriate for the site and would also ensure a greater feeling of security. Additional liveaboard berths should be considered by WI for a location just outside the main harbour. These high quality planned and serviced berths would bring annual revenue for WI while enhancing the vista of the waterways heritage of the town of Tullamore. Slipway access for launching vessels is extremely limited on the Grand Canal. The slip in the harbour is essential and should be retained.

Living Heritage – The Heritage Fleet

The location of this harbour, only two day's travel by boat from the Shannon, makes it an ideal location for a centre of excellence for boat building and repair crafts on the inland waterways. The existence of the dry dock would be central to this. The heritage fleet of Grand Canal boats and heritage barges could be a complimentary addition to a fixed exhibition on the Grand Canal. With so many of these vessels still in existence there is an opportunity here to create a 'centre' for these barges which highlights the continued living heritage of the canal. WI have previously mentioned using 51m (the Carpenters barge) as a working, living history venue to commemorate the history of the canal's working fleet. Tullamore is an ideal location to base this, the barge could also take small groups on tours of the canal throughout the Tullamore area.



Heritage barges. Most of these boats survive and have been converted to private houseboats.

8. Liveaboard Boat Communities

For a variety of reasons, many people are choosing to make their home on a barge, a lifestyle more aligned with the rhythm of nature. Locations in Dublin and Kildare are highly sought after and as those places reach capacity, as with the housing crisis, people are looking farther west along the canals. WI have developed some liveaboard berths in Sallins which have been hugely successful, this community has now out grown its capacity and more such serviced locations are urgently required. Good sized towns like Mullingar and Tullamore, which have excellent rail and bus links, will be the next focus of attention for the prospective liveaboard.

With only twenty official liveaboard berths in Dublin's Grand Canal Dock demand is exploding and to-date both Waterways Ireland and Dublin City Council have been slow to respond to the increased interest in this seemingly idyllic and low stress way of life. We estimate in the region of 1000 liveaboards in various pockets throughout the country, the main concentration being in Dublin City and County. **Planning sensitively for these growing communities is long overdue.** A vast number of people have applied to Waterways Ireland for a liveaboard berth and have created a long waiting list. Many others have simply bought a barge and had it craned into the canal, moved to a desired location where they have begun their liveaboard lifestyle. Any development within Tullamore Harbour should make adequate provision for this. It is now definitely a case that if you build it they will come!



Liveaboard barges based in Hazelhatch, Co. Dublin.

Low-Carbon Community

By their nature, boating communities are low-carbon communities. Shore power is not always available. When disconnected from any communal electricity grid, each boat is responsible for its own electricity and heat generation. Boats commonly use off-grid electricity production methods such as solar panels and wind turbines to meet the electricity needs of the boatowner. Every electrical appliance is carefully chosen in order to reduce the electrical demand. Most boats run on a 12 volt system similar to that used in cars.

Every decision to switch on an application is a calculated decision for the boatowner, based on an assessment on whether there has been enough electrical power generated that day and whether the use of electricity is necessary. In comparison with conventional housing, there is a much greater awareness of energy usage and no demand on the electricity grid. With recent advances in the efficiency of solar panels, there is a growing number of liveaboards boaters who are completely off grid with their electricity usage.

Alongside this, the lifestyle of a liveaboard boater is in general, very eco-friendly. There is less household waste generated due to space restrictions. Water usage is kept to a minimum as the size of the water tank limits daily usage. This focus on renewable energy, low waste and water conservation results in a very low carbon lifestyle which is a model for future living.

Future-proofing the canals network

Any development within Tullamore Inner Harbour must not be looked at in isolation. As an integral element of the Grand Canal's entity, it's impact should be positive and seek to further enhance the network of the Grand Canal's locations and facilities. It should respect the heritage while improving conditions. Within those confines the addition of residential or retail units can be an acceptable compromise providing that they don't overshadow the waterway excessively.

9. Recently Uncovered Historical Detail

Some very interesting historical details relating to the reasons for constructing the harbour in this location have been discovered recently, thanks to the excellent work of Donal Boland and his colleagues. Below is an excerpt from their research.

[The entrance to the harbour is cut through the gateway of an existing military barracks, hence the sharp right turn. Features of this barracks remain to this day, these features should be retained.

The canal was first constructed to Tullamore where works ceased for a period. The mainline ended slightly beyond the spur line entrance with a small landing area for commercial vessels. This would suggest that the main objective of the canal construction was for military transport. The mainline was extended later to a military barracks at Clooney, onward to the Shannon at Shannon Harbour as part of the Napoleonic defences.

The Grand Canal has a military history that needs to be recognised and fostered. The remains of the Tullamore and Clooney military barracks should be preserved.]

Donal concludes with the following three points:

- The Tullamore harbour is very interesting as it was constructed in the grounds of a military barracks and was possibly one of the main reasons that the canal went to Tullamore and then stopped, with a spur to the barracks.
- The Grand canal was completed to the Shannon as part of the Napoleonic defences, its destination was a military barracks at Clooney just east of Shannon Harbour.
- My opinion is that the harbour would enhance my home town by being developed as a Green / Blue Oasis in the centre of the town rather than a commercial complex.



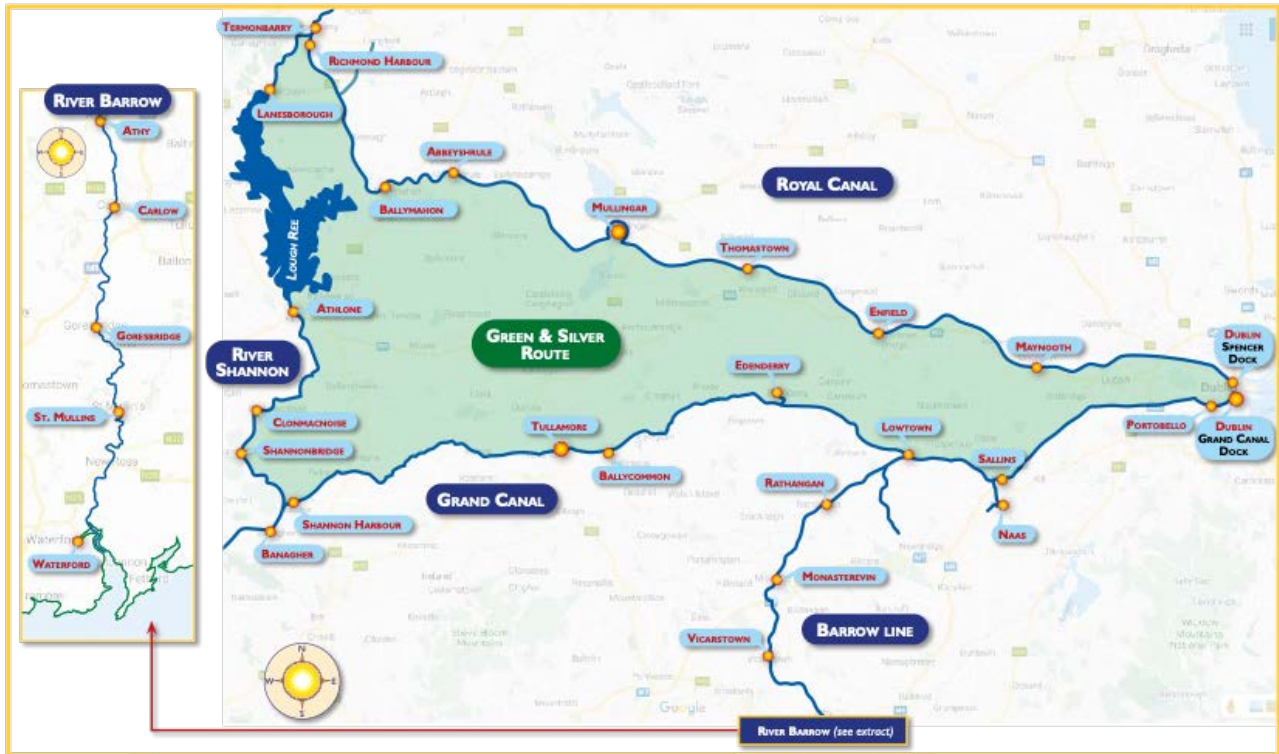
10. Tullamore and the Spectacular Green & Silver Route

The 'Green and Silver' route is based on the route taken on a documented triangular journey undertaken by L.T.C. Rolt in 1946. His subsequent publication of *'The Green & Silver'* book in 1949, is now its 7th edition and as a boating 'classic' has become a bible for canals navigation enthusiasts in Ireland and many visitors from overseas. Rolt was one of the founders of the Inland Waterways Association (UK) in 1946.

The Green & Silver waterways route between Dublin and the midlands², has huge potential for economic benefit and social activity for the regions it passes through. It comprises a triangular waterways route via the Royal Canal, a section of the River Shannon, the Grand Canal and into Dublin (crossing the Liffey to get back to the Royal to complete the journey). This navigation route is of international significance, it is the only circular boating route in Ireland. To-date this route has been the secret bucket list trip of the inland boater and has been completed by international visitors who seek to explore our waterways. The completion of the Grand Canal and Royal Canal Greenways opens the

² Green & Silver Route - Dublin, Royal Canal, River Shannon, Grand Canal triangular navigation route.

possibility for this to become a uniquely Irish triangular Greenway where people can travel on or alongside a waterway for its entire route. Tullamore is well place to capitalize on this potential.



Green & Silver route – the Royal Canal, Grand Canal (via the Liffey in Dublin) and the Mid Shannon region. This is currently an underdeveloped route with huge potential for boating/greenway tourism.

Green and Silver book cover – comprised of the Royal Canal, the Grand Canal and the mid-Shannon. The route is approx. 320 km and can be completed in 10-12 days of continuous travel by boat, however it is preferable to take as long as you can.



11. IWAI's Wish List

IWAI's wish list for Tullamore Inner Harbour would be:

1. Lower the boundary walls to bring in light and the attention of the public.
2. Re-open the essential dry dock service to the public.
3. Build a Service Block providing facilities for canal, greenway and public use.
4. A regularly serviced working pump-out facility should be included since the pending canal by-laws will require all boats to have holding tanks for brown water.
5. Include an exhibition space, a meeting room, a cafe and a fixed exhibition depicting the canals history highlighting Tullamore and also featuring the connection between the canal harbour and the military barracks.
6. Include retail spaces where water based activities can flourish.
7. Build a small number of serviced liveaboard berths in one corner of the harbour. Other berths should be added outside the main harbour.
8. Ensure that building heights do not block sunlight from the harbour area. Rooflines might be higher on the boundary but become lower facing the water.
9. The curtilage of the canal, which is listed, should be respected and maintained.
10. Avoid the inclusion of large numbers of parking spaces within the site. Courtyards surrounding buildings should be paved or cobbled sensitively. Public access walkways should traverse the site.
11. A paved courtyard adjacent to the harbour's quayside should be incorporated for outdoor public events.
12. Ensure that the public realm space ideal is apparent throughout the site.
13. Accomodate the Tullamore Canoe Club within the development.
14. A centre for heritage vessels will attract regular barge traffic to the harbour and the dry dock.
15. Slipway access for launching vessels is extremely limited on the Grand Canal. The slip in the harbour is essential and should be retained.

Denis M-Baker
On behalf of IWAI Executive

Picture credits: © Denis M-Baker, unless stated below.

WI service block image courtesy of irishwaterwayshistory.com

F. McCabe vision of Tullamore Harbour by F. McCabe