

Consultation Response Document

Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030



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Executive Summary

Waterways Ireland conducted a comprehensive public consultation on the draft Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 between June and October 2024. This fifteen-week consultation process engaged diverse stakeholders through multiple channels, including online platforms, in-person events, and written submissions. The consultation followed extensive internal engagement and aimed to gather insights on our proposed approach to managing the natural, built, and cultural heritage of Ireland's waterways through to 2030.

The consultation generated substantial engagement, with 138 stakeholders providing feedback through various channels: 80 participants attended in-person sessions, 39 submitted detailed online questionnaires, 9 participated in webinars, and additional input was received through written submissions and individual consultations (phone and one-to-one). This broad range of participation provided valuable perspectives on our approach to waterway heritage management.

Key themes emerged across all consultation formats. Natural heritage and biodiversity protection emerged as the highest priority, with stakeholders emphasising the need for conservation measures and sustainable management practices. Community engagement and partnership development were identified as critical success factors, with participants highlighting opportunities to strengthen collaboration with local groups and environmental organisations.

Stakeholders expressed interest in several areas:

- Integration of conservation measures with recreational development
- Enhancement of public education and awareness programmes
- Improvement of information accessibility and stakeholder communications
- Development of specific heritage and biodiversity projects
- Long-term strategic planning beyond 2030

In response to consultation feedback, we have made several targeted enhancements to the draft plan. These include expanding our knowledge gathering framework, strengthening our approach to partnership development, and clarifying implementation pathways. Key Result areas have been refined to better reflect stakeholder priorities while maintaining the plan's strategic focus.

Some matters raised during consultation, while important, fall outside the specific scope of this plan and will be addressed through other organizational frameworks.

This consultation report details the feedback received, explains our response to key themes, and documents changes made to the draft plan. It demonstrates our commitment to meaningful stakeholder engagement while ensuring the final plan provides robust strategic guidance for waterway heritage and biodiversity management up to 2030.



HERITAGE & BIODIVERSITY PLAN



Introduction

Between June and October 2024, Waterways Ireland conducted a comprehensive public engagement exercise on our Draft Heritage & Biodiversity Plan (H&B Plan) 2030. This Plan outlines our approach for managing, conserving, and promoting the natural, built, and cultural heritage across Ireland's waterway network up to 2030. This Plan builds upon our previous Plan, through:

- An independent evaluation of our previous plan's outcomes
- A detailed assessment of current and emerging heritage and biodiversity regulations
- Analysis of policy requirements at national, European and international levels
- Extensive internal stakeholder engagement

This consultation process aimed to gather diverse perspectives on our proposed approach to waterways

heritage and biodiversity management. We received valuable input through multiple channels, including online questionnaires, webinars, in-person events, written submissions, and direct communications. A total of 138 stakeholders participated, representing community groups, NGOs, heritage organisations and individual citizens.

The development of the Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 recognises that successful implementation depends on organisation-wide commitment and expertise. To this end, Waterways Ireland prioritised comprehensive staff engagement in May 2024, conducting four dedicated webinars and issuing a detailed staff questionnaire. This internal consultation phase proved invaluable, drawing upon our colleagues' operational knowledge, technical expertise, and direct experience in waterways management. The resulting feedback led to important changes in the draft plan, ensuring it reflects both practical operational considerations and strategic organisational goals. This collaborative approach established a strong foundation of staff support and understanding, which will be essential for delivering the plan's objectives through to 2030.

Consultation Methodology

Consultation Period

Waterways Ireland conducted a comprehensive 15-week public consultation from June 24th to October 4th, 2024. To ensure wide ranging participation and accessibility, we implemented an inclusive engagement strategy that combined digital outreach with traditional communication methods and bespoke workshops.

Communication Channels



The consultation was promoted through an integrated communications campaign comprising:

- Targeted emails to identified stakeholders and Statutory Consultees
- Advertisements in local and regional newspapers
- Press releases to relevant media outlets
- A comprehensive social media campaign (example to the left)
- An introductory video on the Waterways Ireland website explaining the consultation process and its importance

Access to Consultation Documentation

To maximise accessibility, the draft Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030, along with associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screenings, were made available through multiple channels:

- Digital access via the Waterways Ireland website
- Physical copies distributed to 45 libraries along the waterways network
- Direct provision to stakeholders upon request
- Ezine circular
- Leveraging of contacts within the Heritage Officer Network
- At public events e.g. Heritage Week 2024

Engagement Opportunities

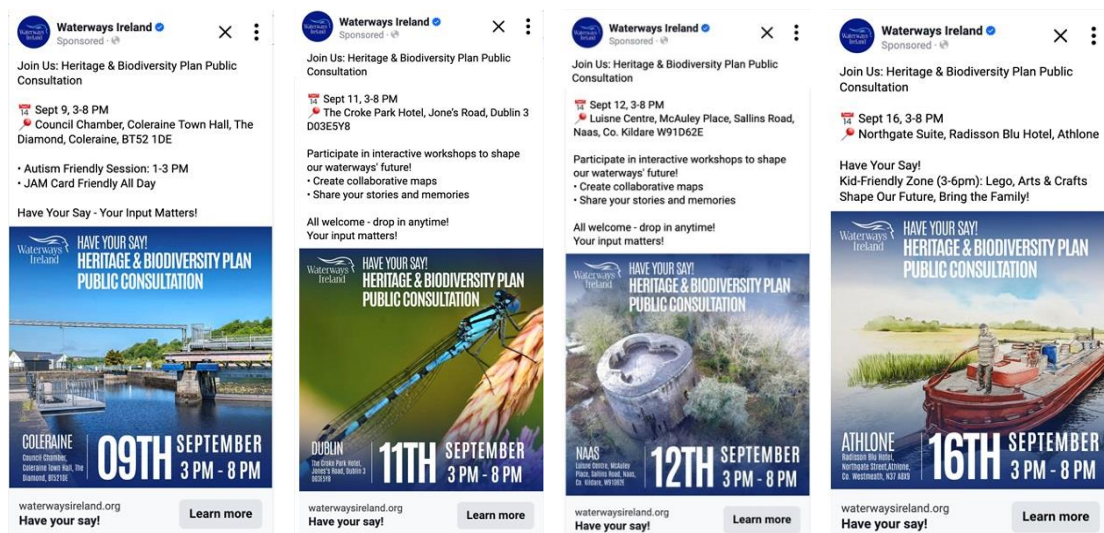
The consultation process offered a range of opportunities for engagement:

Digital Engagement:

Two structured online webinars held on September 2nd and 4th, 2024, accommodating both targeted stakeholders and the general public. An online questionnaire hosted on the Waterways Ireland website and email addresses for submissions were also offered: heritageplan@waterwaysireland.org and martina.mccarthy@waterwaysireland.org



Waterways Ireland webpage where all consultation material, webinar and in-person event details were hosted



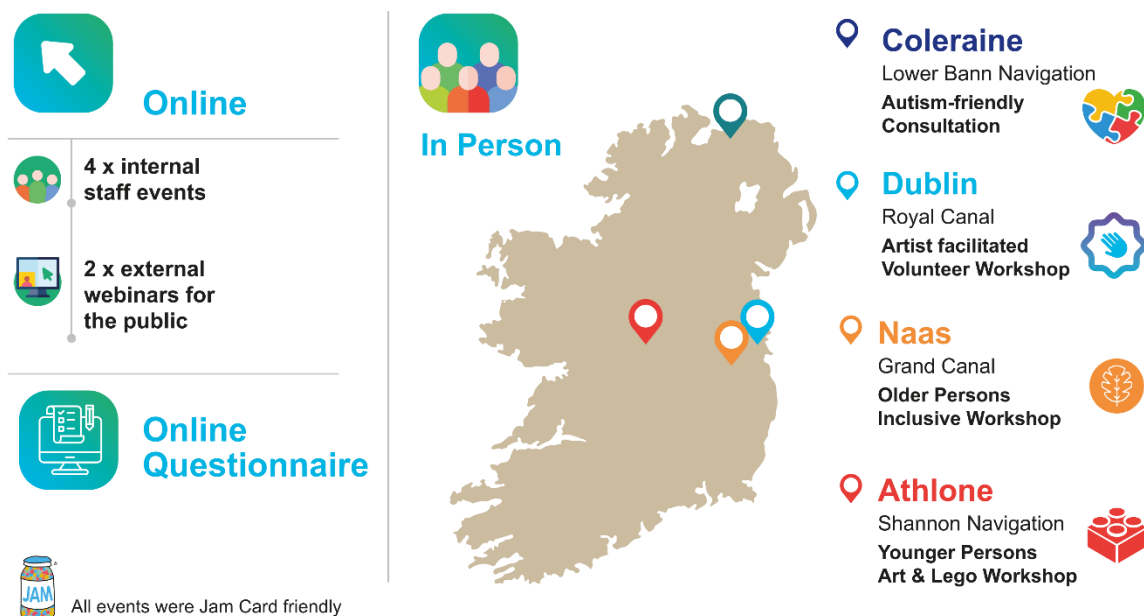
Examples of social media campaign promoting the consultation

In-Person Sessions:

Four consultation sessions were conducted across key locations:

- Coleraine (September 9th) - Included a dedicated two-hour autism-friendly session designed to provide a welcoming and accommodating environment for persons with autism and their families. This session featured reduced sensory stimulation, clear communication, and flexible participation options to ensure everyone could comfortably engage and share their input.
- Dublin (September 11th) - This public consultation session featured an inclusive, community-based workshop, with a targeted invitation to waterway volunteers, where participants freely contributed their insights, memories, and suggestions.
- Naas (September 12th) - This public consultation session featured an inclusive, community-based workshop, with a special invitation to older persons, where participants freely contributed their insights, memories, and suggestions.
- Athlone (September 16th) - This event featured a dedicated Lego, and Arts and Crafts workshop. These workshops focused on engaging younger children and families in a fun and creative environment. This interactive session provided an opportunity for children to express their ideas and visions for our waterways through hands-on activities, ensuring that voices of all ages contribute to shaping the future of our waterways.

Additional engagement opportunities were leveraged through established heritage events, including a National Heritage Week event in Tullamore, Co. Offaly.



Participation Breakdown

The consultation engagement comprised:

- 80 participants across in-person consultation sessions
- 39 detailed submissions via the online questionnaire
- 9 attendees at online webinar sessions
- 7 written submissions received by email
- 3 additional engagements through individual meetings and telephone conversations



Age Friendly Workshop at Consultation Event in Naas, Co. Kildare



Child & Family Friendly Event at the Consultation Event in Athlone, Co. Westmeath



Autism Friendly Consultation Event held in Coleraine, Co. Derry



Volunteer Friendly Workshop at Dublin Consultation Event

Key Themes & Responses

The consultation generated extensive feedback, providing valuable insights into stakeholder priorities and concerns. Through subsequent analysis, we identified recurring themes that emerged across different consultation formats and stakeholder groups.

Our analysis focused on three key considerations for each theme:

1. Areas where current plan provisions adequately address stakeholder feedback
2. Elements requiring amendments or clarification in the final plan
3. Topics raised that, while important, fall outside the scope of the plan

The consultation revealed a focus on several priority areas: the protection of natural heritage and biodiversity, addressing the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change, fostering meaningful community engagement, strengthening stakeholder partnerships, enhancing public education and awareness, promoting sustainability and resilience, and ensuring accessibility and inclusion across our waterways.

While this report synthesises the key messages and primary concerns expressed during consultation, it represents a strategic analysis rather than an exhaustive account of all individual submissions. This approach allows us to focus on the issues that will shape the final Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030. Each theme is examined in detail in the following sections, with clear responses outlining how stakeholder input has influenced the plan's development.

Theme 1: Natural Heritage and Biodiversity Protection	
Natural heritage and biodiversity protection	
Stakeholder Feedback:	Natural heritage and biodiversity protection emerged as the highest priority among consultation respondents. Stakeholders emphasised several concerns: • Conservation of waterway ecosystems and associated biodiversity • Maintenance and improvement of water quality • Mitigation of climate change impacts on waterway environments • Management of invasive species threats • Long-term ecosystem resilience
Our Response:	The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 places natural heritage and biodiversity protection at its core. This prioritisation reflects both our organisational commitment and our statutory obligations as custodians of Ireland's waterways. The plan establishes a framework for: • Implementing evidence-based conservation strategies • Ensuring we meet legal and ethical obligations for biodiversity protection • Restoring and enhancing ecological corridors along our waterways Our approach aligns with current best practices in biodiversity management while acknowledging the urgency of addressing the biodiversity crisis. This commitment is detailed in Objective 2 of the plan, which outlines specific Key

	Results for protecting and enhancing natural heritage across our waterway network.
Plan Status:	No Changes Required: The current draft plan addresses the priorities raised. The emphasis placed on natural heritage and biodiversity protection by stakeholders validates our strategic approach and reinforces the importance of maintaining strong environmental protections in the final plan.

Operational Detail and Implementation	
Stakeholder Feedback:	Consultation participants requested more specific operational details regarding biodiversity management, including: • Development of a dedicated Biodiversity Action Plan • Explicit, measurable biodiversity targets • Invasive species management • Specific commitments to habitat restoration • Guidelines for sustainable maintenance practices, particularly regarding herbicide use and mowing regimes
Our Response:	The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 establishes a high-level strategic framework through our Objectives and Key Results (OKR). While maintaining this strategic focus, detailed implementation will occur through specific project initiatives that translate our objectives into actionable outcomes. The plan's biodiversity objectives will be delivered through several established mechanisms. These include our ongoing commitment to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan through annual initiatives, comprehensive ecological surveys conducted as part of our wider Climate, Heritage and Environmental remit, and direct support for community-led biodiversity projects through our Heritage & Biodiversity Grant Scheme. This approach addresses stakeholder concerns through several key results areas: • Research and monitoring activities targeting habitats and invasive species management are embedded within Key Results 1.2 and 2.3, ensuring these priorities receive dedicated attention and resources. • To support evidence-based decision-making, we will integrate and publish biodiversity and environmental quality data annually (Key Result 1.1), while ensuring this information informs operational decisions across the organisation (Key Result 1.3). • The delivery of high-quality heritage, biodiversity, and climate initiatives (Key Result 2.3) will incorporate stakeholder calls for innovative approaches and best practices in addressing environmental challenges.
Plan Status:	In response to stakeholder feedback, we have enhanced the plan's clarity in several ways: • Expanded the context sections for each objective within the OKR framework, providing clearer links between strategic goals and implementation actions • Added specific reference to invasive species management in the "Heritage in the Context of a Climate and Biodiversity Crisis" section, acknowledging this as a critical priority These changes maintain the plan's strategic nature while providing stakeholders with greater visibility into how objectives will be achieved through specific initiatives and actions.

Water Quality Management	
Stakeholder Feedback:	Consultation participants expressed significant interest in water quality protection and pollution prevention, requesting more information about monitoring and management approaches. These concerns reflect the importance of water quality to both ecosystem health and waterway users.
Our Response:	Water quality management forms an integral part of our custodianship responsibilities in Waterways Ireland. Our Climate, Environment & Heritage team conducts systematic water quality monitoring across our canal network in accordance with requirements of the EPA and Water Framework Directive. This monitoring programme generates comprehensive data that contributes to national water quality assessment through our partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and can be viewed here . While detailed water quality management protocols fall outside the direct scope of the Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030, our commitment to water quality protection supports and enhances the plan's biodiversity objectives.
Plan Status:	No Changes Required: The current draft plan appropriately addresses water quality considerations within its framework, while detailed operational aspects of water quality management continue through established environmental compliance programmes. This approach ensures proper oversight while maintaining the plan's focus on heritage and biodiversity objectives.

Climate Action Integration	
Stakeholder Feedback:	Several respondents sought stronger evidence demonstrating how the Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 aligns with and supports climate action objectives.
Our Response:	The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 operates in concert with Waterways Ireland's dedicated Climate Action Plan 2030, published in 2022. This climate strategy outlines our organisation's approach to addressing climate risks and achieving our climate action ambitions. While the Heritage & Biodiversity Plan focuses on its core remit, it deliberately complements and reinforces our climate objectives. The interconnected nature of biodiversity and climate challenges demands this integrated approach. Our Climate Action Plan 2030 provides the detailed framework for climate response, including: • Specific emissions reduction targets • Adaptation strategies for waterway infrastructure • Heritage Protection • Biodiversity & Nature Based Solutions
Plan Status:	No Changes Required: The current draft appropriately references climate considerations within its scope, while detailed climate action planning continues through our established Climate Action Plan 2030. This approach ensures a comprehensive climate response while maintaining the distinct focus of each strategic document. For stakeholders seeking additional detail on our climate commitments, we recommend reviewing the Climate Action Plan 2030, available on our website here .

Cross Jurisdictional Concerns	
Stakeholder Feedback:	Several respondents raised concerns about environmental challenges affecting waterways, including: • Impacts from agriculture and other land use practices • Sewage infrastructure • Ecological damage to specific waterways in Balbriggan, Sligo, and Limerick
Our Response:	While we acknowledge the importance of these environmental concerns, they fall under the statutory responsibilities of other agencies and local authorities. Waterways Ireland's remit is specifically defined by legislation and encompasses only designated inland navigable waterways. For the waterways mentioned in the consultation feedback: • Local authorities, DAERA and EPA hold primary responsibility for investigating waterway pollution • The EPA oversees water quality monitoring and enforcement • Uisce Eireann and Northern Ireland Water maintain responsibility for sewage infrastructure
Plan Status:	No Changes Required: The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 appropriately focuses on areas within Waterways Ireland's statutory remit. However, we remain committed to collaborating with relevant agencies through established channels to support overall waterway health and environmental protection. Stakeholders with concerns about these issues are encouraged to contact the appropriate regulatory bodies, and we are happy to provide guidance on identifying the relevant authority for specific waterway management questions, through heritageplan@waterwaysireland.org

Theme 2: Strengthening Stakeholder Engagement and Community Partnerships	
Community and User Engagement	
Stakeholder Feedback:	Consultation participants emphasised the need for robust engagement with waterway users, local interest groups, and community organisations, highlighting how strong partnerships enhance heritage and biodiversity outcomes.
Our Response:	Waterways Ireland maintains an extensive community engagement programme that has demonstrated significant success through our previous plan period. This programme continues to evolve and strengthen through multiple established channels. Our active community partnerships operate through several key programs: • The Community Heritage & Biodiversity Grant Scheme, providing direct support for local initiatives • The Stories from the Waterways program, capturing and preserving local heritage • Annual Heritage Open Day events, facilitating direct community interaction • The Community Engagement Toolkit, offering resources for local participation • The Tidy Towns Special Award, recognising community-led environmental stewardship

	We also maintain productive collaborations with diverse stakeholders, including: • Academic institutions such as the National College of Art and Design, NU Galway and James Madison University. • Environmental organisations including the National Biodiversity Data Centre, Birdwatch Ireland, RSPB and Irish Wildlife Trust • Heritage groups like the Heritage Boat Association • Waterway user groups such as the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 reinforces our commitment to stakeholder engagement through Key Result 3.2, which provides a framework for expanding and enhancing these partnerships over the plan period.
Plan Status:	No Changes Required: The current draft plan effectively addresses community engagement while providing flexibility to develop new partnership opportunities, as they arise.

Strategic Partnership Development	
Stakeholder Feedback:	During consultation, stakeholders emphasised the value of expanding our partnership network to include a broader range of organisations. Respondents specifically identified opportunities to collaborate with established environmental and community organisations including Tidy Towns, Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWAI), Birdwatch Ireland, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), and the National Biodiversity Data Centre.
Our Response:	The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 recognises the strategic importance of diverse partnerships in achieving our objectives – as outlined in the previous section. While Key Result 3.2 provides our primary framework for stakeholder engagement, we acknowledge the need to expand our collaborative approach beyond traditional heritage organisations. In response to stakeholder feedback, we have enhanced Key Result 2.5 to encompass partnerships with all organisations that can contribute to our heritage and biodiversity goals. This expanded scope enables us to: • Leverage expertise from environmental and community organisations • Pool resources effectively across partner organisations • Implement joint initiatives that benefit from diverse perspectives
Plan Status:	Partnership Framework has been enhanced: Based on consultation feedback, we have revised Key Result 2.5 to explicitly include all organisations that can contribute to heritage and biodiversity objectives, rather than confining its scope to heritage organisations. This change provides a stronger foundation for developing strategic partnerships throughout the plan period.

Theme 3: Integrating Conservation Priorities with Recreational Access	
Potential for Environmental Impact of Recreational Development	
Stakeholder Feedback:	During consultation, participants expressed concerns about the environmental impact of recreational infrastructure development: • Potential impacts to habitats during recreational development e.g. Greenways

	• Ecological effects from increased visitor numbers • Pressure on sensitive environmental areas from tourism growth
Our Response:	Waterways Ireland operates under a mandate to manage, maintain, develop, and restore inland navigable waterways primarily for recreational purposes. While this mandate establishes our responsibility to provide recreational access, we recognise the critical importance of delivering these services through environmentally sustainable approaches – as enshrined in our Long Term Plan, Climate Action Plan and this draft Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030. Our commitment to best practice implementation in heritage, biodiversity, and climate initiatives (Key Result 2.3) ensures that recreational development follows rigorous environmental protection protocols. Through Key Result 2.4, we actively monitor and report on how our activities contribute to global sustainability goals, particularly biodiversity protection under Sustainable Development Goal 15. This transparency enables stakeholders to track our environmental performance
Plan Status:	No Changes Required: The current draft effectively balances our statutory recreational mandate with strong environmental protections. This approach ensures we can continue delivering recreational amenities while maintaining robust ecosystem safeguards.

Sustainable Tourism and Heritage Infrastructure Integration

Stakeholder Feedback:	During consultation, participants provided thoughtful recommendations for aligning tourism development with ecological conservation objectives. A particular focus emerged around the adaptive reuse of historic waterway buildings, highlighting opportunities to preserve built heritage while meeting current recreational needs.
Our Response:	The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 recognises that effective waterway management requires robust data and evidence-based decision making. We are strengthening our approach through two key mechanisms. First, we have expanded Key Result 1.2 to encompass broader knowledge gathering initiatives, moving beyond traditional heritage research. Second, Key Result 1.3 establishes a framework for embedding heritage and biodiversity considerations throughout our organisational operations. This approach ensures that all development decisions, including reuse projects, are informed by comprehensive environmental and heritage assessments.
Plan Status:	In response to this feedback, we have revised Key Result 1.2 to explicitly include broader knowledge gathering activities rather than focusing solely on heritage research. This change provides a more comprehensive framework for collecting and analysing data that will inform integrated planning decisions

Theme 4: Communications & Reporting on Performance

Stakeholder Communication and Information Sharing

Stakeholder Feedback:	During consultation, respondents identified opportunities to enhance our information sharing processes and improve tracking of stakeholder communications.
Our Response:	Waterways Ireland maintains a centralised communication system through our headquarters, featuring: • A dedicated public enquiries telephone line • A monitored organisational email address (info@waterwaysireland.org) • A Team charged with directing enquiries to relevant departments

	- Specialised follow-up from our Climate, Environment & Heritage team for matters within their remit Beyond these core channels, we facilitate engagement through multiple complementary approaches: - Information webinars - Active participation in County Heritage Forums - Community initiatives - Individual stakeholder consultations The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 reinforces our commitment to effective communication through Key Results 3.1 and 3.2, which focus on increasing stakeholder involvement and enhancing engagement opportunities. These objectives provide a framework for continuously improving our communication processes.
Plan Status:	No Changes Required: Our current communication framework, supported by the plan's strategic objectives, provides appropriate channels for information sharing and stakeholder engagement.

Digital Resource Access and Educational Content	
Stakeholder Feedback:	During consultation, participants recommended enhancing the accessibility of heritage and biodiversity information. Specific suggestions focused on creating dedicated online spaces for citizen science initiatives and educational resources.
Our Response:	Waterways Ireland maintains comprehensive digital resources through our website and online Archive, providing: - Detailed information about heritage and biodiversity projects - Educational materials - Children's Resources e.g. Eco Dial and Activity Sheets - Interactive resources including the Virtual Reality Canal Experience These are promoted through: - Regular heritage-themed events (Heritage Week, Engineers Week, Biodiversity Week) - Heritage Plan Open Day activities - Targeted school engagement programs - County Heritage & Biodiversity Forum participation (e.g. Galway, Offaly, Limerick, Leitrim, Clare) However, in direct response to consultation feedback, we have initiated a new development project with our Marketing and Communications team. This project will create a dedicated platform for sharing research outcomes from our Community Heritage & Biodiversity Grant Scheme, making valuable local heritage information more accessible to the public. Other knowledge sharing initiatives will also be progressed over the life of the plan.
Plan Status:	Enhancement In Progress: While our current digital framework provides strong foundations for information sharing, we are actively implementing improvements based on consultation feedback. The new research information platform demonstrates our commitment to expanding digital access to heritage and biodiversity resources. However, no changes to the plan text are proposed.

Performance Monitoring and Public Reporting	
Stakeholder Feedback:	During consultation, participants emphasised the importance of transparent reporting on heritage and biodiversity activities, objectives, and outcomes. This feedback reflects stakeholder interest in understanding how we measure and communicate our progress.
Our Response:	The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 incorporates a comprehensive monitoring system for our Objectives and Key Results (OKR). This will provide a mechanism for tracking plan implementation progress with the development of an Annual Impact Report. This approach ensures accountability while demonstrating our commitment to transparent operations.
Plan Status:	No Changes Required: The current draft plan includes robust transparency measures through the OKR Dashboard framework. This system provides appropriate mechanisms for communicating our activities, objectives, and outcomes to all stakeholders.

Theme 5: Heritage Education and Public Engagement	
Youth and Community Heritage Education	
Stakeholder Feedback:	During consultation, participants emphasised the desire for strengthened heritage and biodiversity education, particularly focusing on engaging younger generations and local waterway communities. Stakeholders highlighted opportunities for targeted educational materials and structured learning programmes that could foster deeper appreciation of our waterway heritage.
Our Response:	The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 establishes youth engagement as a core priority, explicitly committing to "foster a shared sense of ownership in young people" (page 12). This commitment is realised through several established initiatives. Our Education Officer develops and maintains waterway heritage resources designed specifically for younger audiences. These materials are accessible through our website and actively promoted through targeted youth engagement events including Engineers Week, National Biodiversity Week, and Heritage Week. Building on achievements from our previous plan, we maintain a comprehensive engagement and supports programme including, but not limited to: • The Community Heritage & Biodiversity Grant Scheme, supporting local initiatives to the value of €20,000 annually • Our Community Engagement Toolkit, providing resources for heritage and biodiversity learning • The Tidy Towns Special Award, recognising excellence in community led initiatives • The Virtual Reality Canal Experience, offering immersive learning opportunities for all ages
Plan Status:	No Changes Required: Our current educational framework, supported by dedicated resources and diverse programming, addresses stakeholder recommendations for heritage and biodiversity education. This approach ensures we maintain strong educational outreach while allowing flexibility to develop new initiatives as opportunities arise. However, we will continue to advocate for this important aspect of the plan objectives and build on it, as resources permit.

Enhancing Community Engagement	
Stakeholder Feedback:	During consultation, participants emphasised the value of face-to-face interactions in building public understanding and stewardship of waterway heritage. Stakeholders recommended expanding in-person engagement opportunities while maintaining accessible digital resources to support diverse engagement preferences.
Our Response:	The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 supports multi-channel engagement through Key Results 3.1 and 3.3, focusing on reaching new audiences through both traditional and digital means. We demonstrate this commitment through initiatives such as the launch of A Boatman's Journey StoryMap. This resource, hosted on our GIS platform and website, was launched successfully at a National Heritage Week event, drawing over 85 participants through a collaboration with the Heritage Boat Association and Inland Waterways Association of Ireland. In response to consultation feedback, we have strengthened our engagement framework by updating Key Result 3.3. This revision expands our focus beyond digital resources to encompass all Waterways Ireland heritage and biodiversity materials, ensuring we maintain an appropriate balance between digital and in-person engagement opportunities.
Plan Status:	Broadened Engagement Scope: We have revised Key Result 3.3 to explicitly include both digital and in-person heritage and biodiversity resources. This change reflects our commitment to providing diverse engagement opportunities that meet varying community needs and preferences.

Theme 6: Accessibility and Inclusion	
Stakeholder Feedback:	During consultation, participants highlighted both the significant recreational value of our waterways and specific concerns about access restrictions. While acknowledging the waterways' importance as public amenities, respondents raised issues regarding fencing installations, particularly along the Grand Canal. These concerns focused on: • Restrictions to wildlife movement • Limitations on public access • Potential conflicts with conservation objectives • Impact on vulnerable community members
Our Response:	Since the consultation period, temporary barriers, installed as a mitigation measure to address Health & Safety and Public Health risks, that prompted these concerns have been removed, significantly addressing the immediate issues raised by respondents. However, the underlying principles of ensuring appropriate access while maintaining security remain important considerations for our operations.
Plan Status:	No Changes Required: While the specific concerns about fencing have been addressed through operational changes, the current draft plan provides appropriate strategic guidance through existing frameworks for ensuring inclusive access to our waterways.

Theme 7: Resource allocation and infrastructure	
Stakeholder Feedback:	During consultation, participants raised important considerations regarding operational resources and infrastructure maintenance. These concerns focused on two key areas: <i>Maintenance and Current Infrastructure</i> Stakeholders expressed concerns about infrastructure upkeep, specifically highlighting: • Waterway maintenance requirements • Water level management • Bridge infrastructure conditions • Facility cleanliness and accessibility <i>Infrastructure Development</i> Additionally, respondents emphasised the need for the sustainable expansion of facilities and amenities to accommodate diverse user needs across our waterway network.
Our Response:	The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 operates within Waterways Ireland's established planning and budgeting framework, which includes: • Alignment with our 10-year Strategic Plan • Integration with the 3-year Corporate Plan • Annual Business Plan Within this framework, the plan addresses infrastructure considerations through two key mechanisms: - Key Result 2.3 ensures our maintenance practices align with environmental sustainability goals, promoting responsible infrastructure management across our network. - Key Result 3.1 focuses on enhancing facilities to support public engagement with heritage and biodiversity initiatives. However, detailed operational funding and infrastructure development decisions fall outside the specific scope of the Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030, being addressed through our broader Corporate and Business Plans.
Plan Status:	No Changes Required: While acknowledging the importance of these operational concerns, the current draft appropriately addresses heritage and biodiversity considerations within its strategic scope, with broader infrastructure and resource matters managed through established organisational frameworks.

Theme 8: Systemic Challenges	
Stakeholder Feedback:	During consultation, participants highlighted several systemic challenges affecting waterway management, including: • Legislative framework impacting maintenance and development • Cross-jurisdictional complexities • BREXIT • Agricultural impact management • Environmental pressures such as algal blooms • Climate change effects on waterway ecosystems
Our Response:	The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 addresses these challenges through a structured approach to regulatory compliance and environmental management.

	Our approach prioritises resilience through alignment with current National and EU legislation and policies. Key Result 2.3 establishes our commitment to implementing best practices in heritage and biodiversity management, ensuring our approach remains current and effective. Additionally, Key Result 2.4 positions our activities within global sustainability frameworks, supporting systematic responses to environmental challenges. However, certain issues extend beyond the plans direct remit. For example, Brexit implications and cross-border considerations require coordination with multiple agencies and governmental bodies. These matters are addressed through separate organisational frameworks and inter-agency cooperation mechanisms.
Plan Status:	No Changes Required: The current draft provides appropriate strategic guidance for addressing systemic challenges within our organisational remit while acknowledging the broader context of waterway management challenges.

Additional Considerations:

The consultation process provided several important considerations that, while not directly within the Heritage & Biodiversity Plan's scope, warrant thoughtful response and clarification.

Long-Term Strategic Planning: Stakeholders emphasised the need for planning beyond 2030, particularly regarding climate change adaptation, development pressures, and ecological challenges. They called for an integrated approach that recognises the interconnected nature of natural, built, and cultural heritage. The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 addresses these concerns through alignment with Waterways Ireland's broader planning framework. This includes our Long Term Plan, Corporate Plan, annual Business Plans and Climate Action Plan. Key Result 2.2 specifically strengthens our capacity through enhanced skills development and resource allocation.

Protected Structures: Specific concerns were raised regarding protected structures, including the Lifting Bridge at The Downs and the Scherzer Bridges at Spencer Dock. These operational matters, while important, require coordination with our engineering and heritage teams through established processes outside this plan's direct scope. However, the principles of heritage conservation embedded in this plan will inform decision-making about protected structures.

Jurisdictional and Administrative Matters: Several operational concerns emerged during consultation that, while important, fall outside this plan's scope:

- Organisational overlap in waterway management e.g. OPW, Uisce Eireann, IFI, DfI Rivers, local authorities
- Private land use along waterways
- Management of non-WI waterways
- Administrative coordination between agencies

These matters are addressed through other organisational frameworks and departmental responsibilities within Waterways Ireland. The Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 provides appropriate direction for matters within its remit while acknowledging the broader context of waterway management challenges.

Heritage and Biodiversity Project Proposals

During consultation, stakeholders identified specific heritage and biodiversity initiatives they believe warrant prioritisation. These proposals reflect strong community interest in conserving and promoting our waterway heritage while enhancing biodiversity protection.

Heritage Proposals

Stakeholders proposed several location-specific projects focused on heritage preservation and tourism development. These include the development of Mount Sandel and its associated heritage trail along the Lower Bann, creation of a steamship trail on Lough Derg, and restoration of heritage assets in County Kildare, particularly the Corbally and Naas Canal sections. Infrastructure maintenance priorities were highlighted, specifically regarding bridge restoration along the Grand Canal in Kildare. Additionally, stakeholders emphasised the importance of preserving and interpreting our industrial heritage, particularly along the Royal Canal, Grand Canal Basin, and historic dry docks.

These project proposals align with our strategic framework through several key mechanisms:

- Key Result 3.1 and 3.2 support increased community involvement in heritage initiatives, providing opportunities to develop these proposed projects through stakeholder engagement.
- Key Result 1.2 establishes our commitment to heritage research, which will inform the development and restoration of heritage assets across our network.

These proposals will be evaluated at the project level, considering resource availability, technical feasibility, and alignment with broader organisational objectives.

Biodiversity Initiatives

Specific biodiversity proposals focused on invasive species management, e.g, three priority species in Lough Derg: the quagga mussel, Asian clam, and starry stonewort. While the Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2030 provides strategic direction, specific project implementation will occur through detailed project-level planning and availability of resources.

