Ulster Canal Greenway Development Strategy – SEA

Dear Mr Bingham

Thank-you for your letter dated 24th March 2016 regarding the Ulster Canal Greenway Development Strategy. The Department of the Environment Northern Ireland (DOE NI) have considered the SEA Screening Checklist and our opinions are set out below.

The letter requests us to make a determination in relation to the Screening Checklist submitted. DOE NI does not have any statutory role in interpreting or determining whether a specific plan or programme submitted to them: constitutes a plan or programme; is subject to preparation or adoption by a national, regional or local authority, or prepared for adoption through a legislative procedure; sets a framework for development consent; determines the use of a small area or at a local level; or is a minor modification to a plan or programme in relation to the SEA Regulations (Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (NI) 2004). Waterways Ireland would be the ‘Responsible Authority’ in these regards.

The Department are consulted in relation to determinations of whether a particular plan, programme or modification is likely to have significant environmental effects (See Regulation 9 of the SEA Regulations). In such instances a determination report must be provided which contains information described in Schedule 1 of the SEA Regulations. Although the screening checklist considers Natura 2000 sites a determination report would consider a wider range of environmental issues. For example the Historic Environment Division would likely request that assessment of the route should include consideration of built heritage assets along it and the potential impacts on these (GIS datasets for the historic environment can be found at https://www.doeni.gov.uk/publications/historic-environment-digital-datasets and guidance specifically in relation to historic canals is available at https://www.doeni.gov.uk/publications/guidance-re-use-canals-and-navigations-northern-ireland ). They would expect that the route be designed in line with core conservation principles in relation to the historic environment.

Nevertheless we can confirm that SEA procedure is a useful tool to provide a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of plans and programmes with a view to promote sustainable development. We agree that the proposed Ulster Canal Greenway
Development Strategy would benefit from the adoption of the SEA process. The SEA process provides best environmental practice and would demonstrate that environmental risk and mitigation associated with the development of the Greenway sections has been considered during the development of the project. We also consider that such an approach could enhance environmental credentials and may assist with future applications for European funding.

Yours sincerely

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