

KILBEGGAN TO MULLINGAR GREENWAY PROJECT

Connectivity Strategy - Preferred Option

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Connectivity Strategy for Preferred Option

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1 INTRODUCTION

The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will be a recreational trail, providing tourists, commuters and leisure users (collectively Non-Motorised Users - NMU) with a dedicated corridor linking the two towns. The project will be a purposeful recreational facility for use by cyclists, walkers and other designated users. The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will complete a greenway/cycleway between Mullingar and Tullamore via the Grand Canal Greenway (Kilbeggan Branch).

The existing Old Rail Trail links Athlone and Mullingar with a 43 km cycling / walking trail that utilises a converted stretch of the disused Midlands Great Western Railway. The Old Rail Trail forms part of the Galway to Dublin Greenway that will form part of the European-wide EuroVelo 2 Capitals Route linking Dublin, London, Berlin, Warsaw, Minsk and Moscow. The section of greenway between Athlone and Maynooth is now complete including a crossing of the River Shannon in Athlone. Just to the west of Mullingar, at Newbrook, the Old Rail Trail meets the Royal Canal Greenway.

The Royal Canal Greenway commences in Maynooth in County Kildare and continues through Counties Meath and Westmeath before terminating in Cloondara, County Longford. The Royal Canal Greenway is currently Ireland's longest greenway at 130 km and opened to the public in March 2021. The section from Maynooth to Mullingar, County Westmeath will form part of the Dublin to Galway Greenway once the remaining sections of that greenway are complete.

The Grand Canal Greenway follows the route of the Grand Canal and links Dublin and the River Shannon via Tullamore and a number of other towns and villages on the route. In Offaly, the Grand Canal runs from Shannon Harbour in the west to Edenderry in the east. There is an existing section of greenway between Tullamore and Kilbeggan Harbour via the Grand Canal Greenway at Ballycommon (approx. 7 km east of Tullamore). The completed sections of the greenway utilise the old towpath for the canal.

The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will also provide a strategic level connection between the Royal Canal Greenway/Old Rail Trail in Mullingar and the Grand Canal Greenway in Tullamore (via the Kilbeggan Branch of the Grand Canal Greenway).

This Connectivity Strategy has been prepared to consider how the Preferred Option will be connected to the wider greenway network, facilities, amenities and nearby conurbations. The Preferred Option is illustrated in **Figure 1.1**.

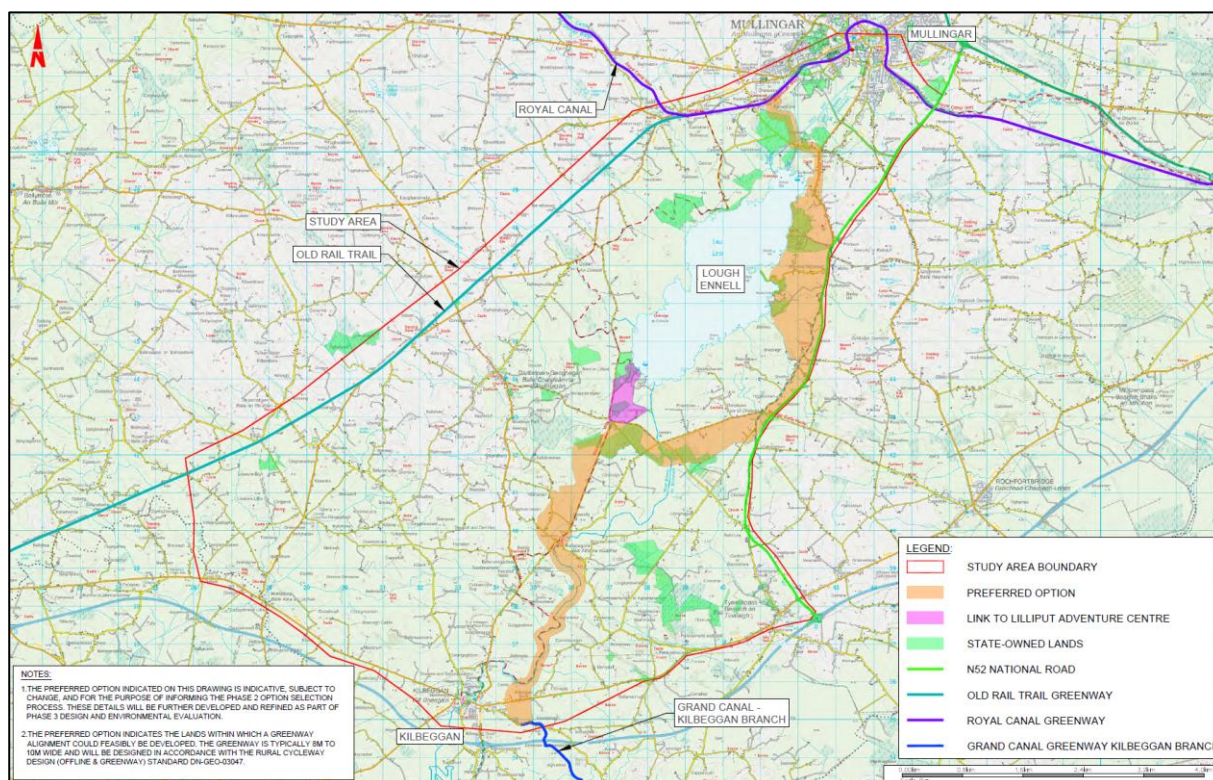


Figure 1.1 Preferred Option for the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway

2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

The broad area for the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway is situated in the midlands of Ireland with picturesque views and a variety of available recreational activities whether they be physical or leisure. At the heart of the area between Kilbeggan and Mullingar is Lough Ennell, a relatively underdeveloped area in terms of tourism facilities, and direct access to safe walking and cycling routes. Without adequate active transport links, tourists and locals often must travel by car to trails, cultural heritage attractions, amenities and to make use of the water-based activities occurring on Lough Ennell.

The Westmeath Way shown in **Figure 2.1** is a walking trail that extends from Kilbeggan to Mullingar on a broadly north south orientation and to the west of Lough Ennell. A significant section of the waymarked trail west of Lough Ennell is currently closed.

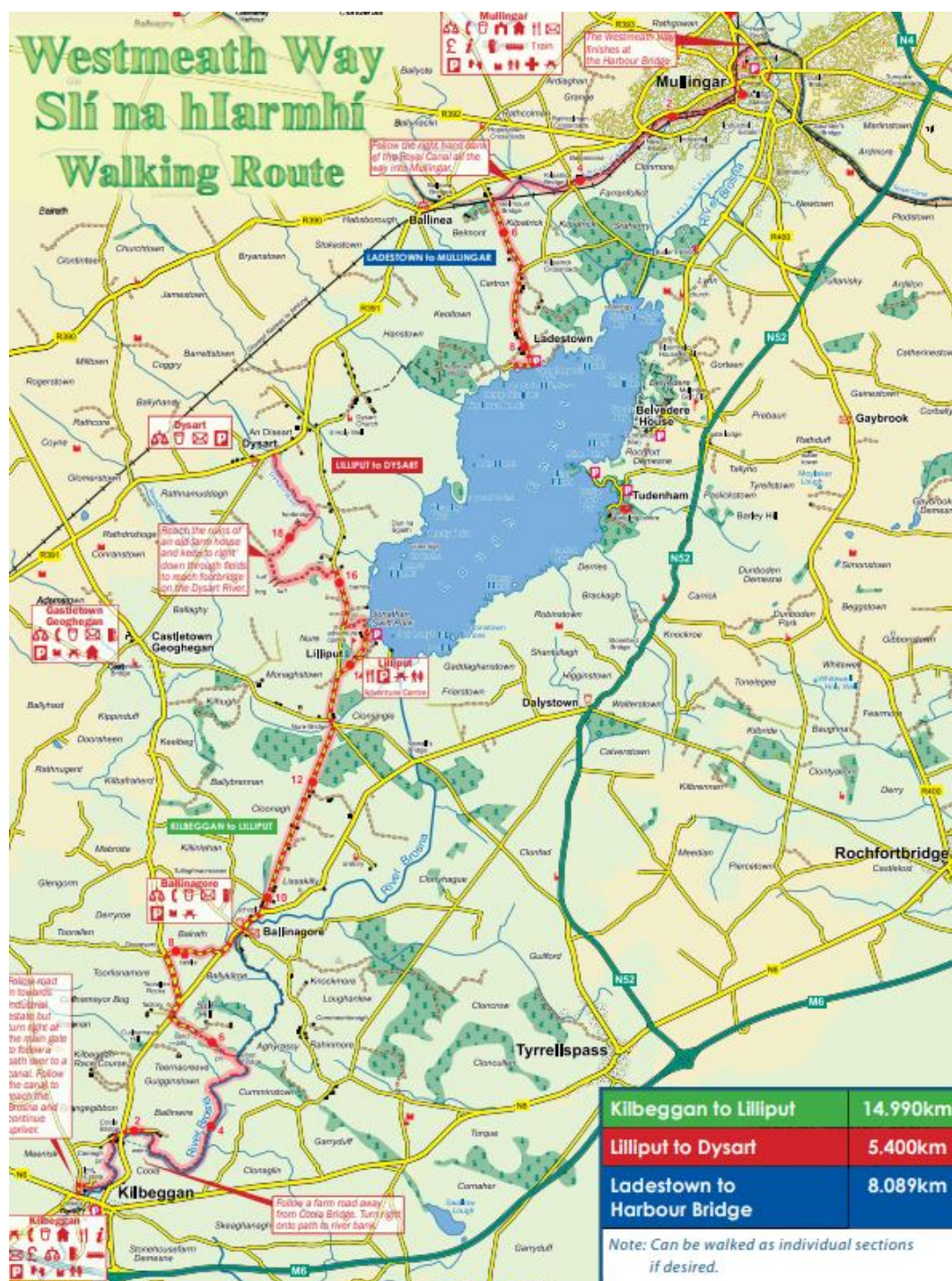


Figure 2.1 Westmeath Way Walking Trail

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There is an existing on-road cycle route connecting Kilbeggan to the Old Rail Trail at Streamstown. This route does not provide segregation.

A greenway will provide an opportunity to link various transport modes through an active travel facility, providing connectivity for tourists and locals seeking to visit attractions in the Kilbeggan to Mullingar area.

Key to understanding the existing conditions are the following:

- Start and end points of the greenway;
- Existing transport infrastructure and accessibility considerations for the greenway;
- Land ownership, and, in particular, state-owned lands; and
- Communities within the broad area.

2.1 Start and End Points

The main consideration for the start and end points for the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway, is that they facilitate connectivity to the wider network of greenways / cycleways, especially the Grand Canal Greenway (Kilbeggan Branch) as well as the Old Rail Trail and Royal Canal Greenway.

The start point for the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway is therefore fixed at Kilbeggan Harbour, approximately 1km southeast of Kilbeggan. This is the start point of the Kilbeggan Branch of the Grand Canal Greenway which continues south / southeast toward Tullamore in County Offaly.

The purpose of the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway is to link the two towns, with Mullingar ostensibly envisaged as the terminal point. However, in line with sustainability principles and national guidelines (e.g. NIFTI) re-using existing infrastructure must also be considered, and therefore a connection point to the existing Old Rail Trail and the adjacent Royal Canal Greenway, which both directly connect to Mullingar, is also a reasonable consideration for the project. The Old Rail Trail also ties into the wider Active Travel offerings in Mullingar.

Further information on the greenways in the area and plans for other cycling infrastructure are discussed in **Section 4**.

2.2 Existing Transport Infrastructure and Accessibility

Existing transport infrastructure is an important consideration for the siting of greenways. They need to be readily accessible for all users and they should integrate with existing transport infrastructure to promote modal shift and sustainability principles. The area surrounding Kilbeggan and Mullingar offers excellent connectivity to transport infrastructure including: M6 Motorway, Grand Canal Greenway (Kilbeggan Branch), N52, Old Rail Trail, Royal Canal Greenway, and the Dublin to Sligo railway line.

Accessibility for local communities and visitors to the area will be an important part of the success of the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway. Suitably designed access and egress points will be a vital component of the greenway design.

Further information on the transport infrastructure in the area are discussed in **Section 5**.

2.3 Land Ownership

Most of the land holdings in the study area are privately owned. There are however some sizeable land holdings in the ownership of State bodies throughout the area, particularly those owned by Coillte and Westmeath County Council. The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage owns some environmentally important areas of bog and smaller plots are owned by a variety of other entities e.g., Waterways Ireland. State owned land includes existing roads and rail lines within the general area. There is also a corridor of land owned by Westmeath County Council along the N52. An illustration of the state-owned lands within the Study Area is provided in **Figure 2.2**. It should also be noted that the Old Rail Trail is also within state ownership.

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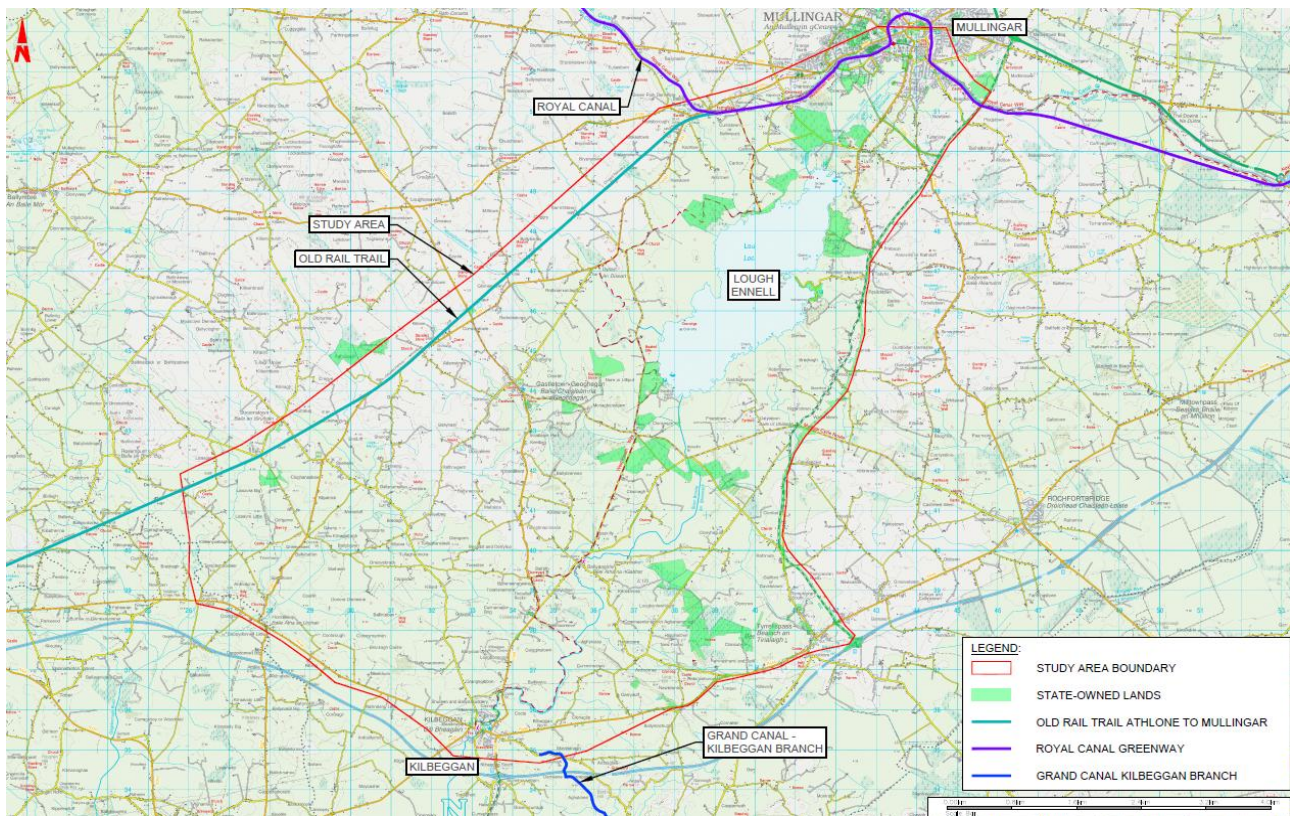


Figure 2.2 State Owned Lands in the Area

2.4 Communities

The main populations within the Preferred Option are illustrated in Figure 2.3.

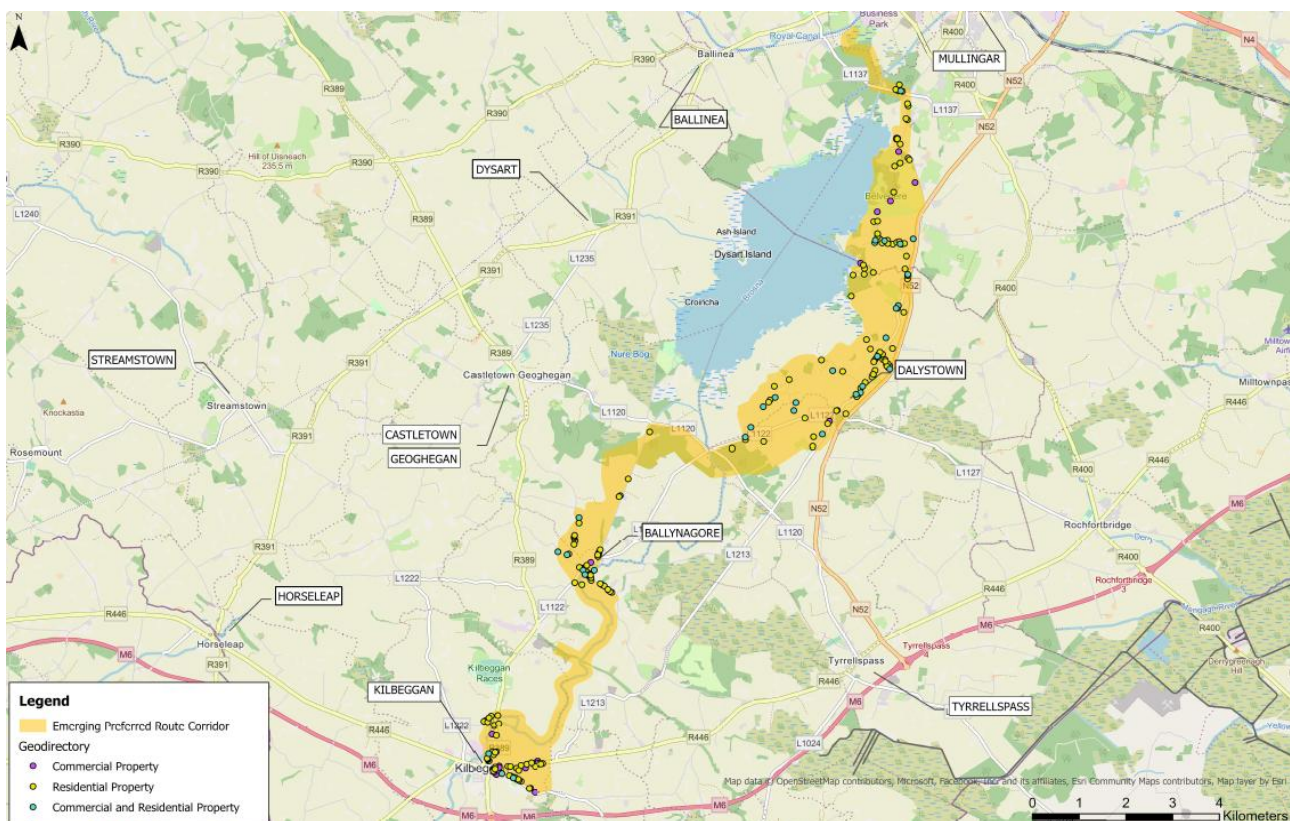


Figure 2.3 Population Distribution within the Preferred Option

Connectivity Strategy for Preferred Option

Within the Preferred Option are the following main agglomerations / communities (south to north):

- Kilbeggan
- Ballynagore
- Dalystown
- Carrickwood
- Belvedere
- Mullingar

3 CONNECTIVITY OBJECTIVES

The overarching objective of the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway is to connect the Grand Canal Greenway, via the Kilbeggan Branch, to the Old Rail Trail Greenway and/or the Royal Canal Greenway in Mullingar.

The objectives with regards to connectivity are as follows:

- AC1: To increase the number of people who choose to take part in physical active outdoor recreation and leisure activities.
- AC2: To connect to other tourist activities or attractions within the region, such as historic and cultural heritage sites, and recreational activities.
- LU1: To connect to existing transport infrastructure including greenways, cycleways, rail, canals, roads, and public transport.
- LU2: To encourage modal shift to more sustainable modes, i.e. walking and cycling, by facilitating connections to places of employment, schools, recreational hubs and urban centres, where possible.
- LU3: To facilitate the implementation of the National Cycle Network (NCN) through connecting the population centres of Mullingar and Kilbeggan.

3.1 Support connectivity and economic growth in the local and regional area

The Preferred Option will increase the economic contribution of tourism and create local employment in the Kilbeggan to Mullingar area by creating connections to areas of high scenic value and attractions. The Preferred Option has a variety of scenic areas following the banks of the River Brosna, the Split Hills and Long Hill Esker, Woodlands, and Lough Ennell. There are also a number of attractions including Lilliput Adventure Centre, Westmeath Way Walking Trail, Carrick Wood, Belvedere House and Gardens Connection to the Old Rail Trail and Royal Canal Greenways and connection to the Grand Canal Greenway Kilbeggan Branch.

3.2 Enhance accessibility to existing amenities, services and facilities

By connecting to attractions and scenic areas as described above, the Preferred Option will provide a quality experience that will encourage people to increase their physical activity and take part in outdoor recreation. Creating connections within these areas will also promote increased tourism opportunities, which will also benefit from the public transport available in both Kilbeggan and Mullingar towns. The key attractions in and adjacent to the Preferred Option are listed below.

- Kilbeggan Distillery
- Grand Canal Greenway (Kilbeggan Branch)
- Kilbeggan Pitch and Putt
- Coola Mill
- Better Together Therapy Riding Centre
- Lilliput Adventure Centre
- Lakeland Shooting Centre
- Carrickwood
- Lough Ennell Caravan Park
- Sauna Society
- Tudenham
- Molly Moo's Pet Farm

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- Belvedere House and Gardens
- Mullingar Golf Course
- Bloomfields Hotel
- Riverbirch Photography Hides
- Old Rail Trail Greenway
- Royal Canal Greenway

3.3 Enhance social inclusion and promote healthier communities through linking communities and disadvantaged areas

The greenway will provide high-quality infrastructure that will be segregated from traffic and built to a standard that will be attractive to people of all age groups and abilities. Connecting population centres in the area will provide better access for people with limited resources including access to Kilbeggan and Mullingar towns, access to schools, access to public transport and access to healthcare facilities.

3.4 Support and facilitate the implementation of national, regional and local policy

The Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways (DTTaS, p.7, 2018) sets out how greenways are strategic infrastructure at both the national and regional levels. Greenways will be developed in appropriate locations and constructed to an appropriate standard in order to deliver a quality experience for all cycleway users. The Preferred Option will form part of the Strategic Greenway Network of national and regional routes by connecting the Royal Canal Greenway/Old Rail Trail in Mullingar and the Grand Canal Greenway (via the Kilbeggan Branch of the Grand Canal Greenway). The Preferred Option will also connect to local infrastructure such as the Westmeath Way, trails at Tudenham, trails at Belvedere House, Gardens and Park, Trails at Bloomfields House Hotel and trails at Lilliput.

The Preferred Option will connect the towns of Mullingar and Kilbeggan creating links for local communities to access existing public transport infrastructure, places of employment, healthcare, schools and recreational facilities.

4 INTEGRATION AND CONNECTIVITY TO OTHER GREENWAYS

4.1 Old Rail Trail

The Old Rail Trail links Athlone and Mullingar with a 43 km cycling / walking trail that utilises a converted stretch of the disused Midlands Great Western Railway. Services on the railway line ceased in 1987 with some intermittent use up to 1995.

To the southwest of Mullingar, at Newbrook, the Old Rail Trail meets the Royal Canal Greenway.

The Old Rail Trail forms part of the Galway to Dublin Cycleway that will form part of the European-wide EuroVelo 2 Capitals Route, see **Section 4.4**.

The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will connect to the Old Rail Trail at the Forest Park, Mullingar Business Park in the townland of Farranfolliot. The Old Rail Trail runs parallel to the Royal Canal Greenway at this location. From here users will be able to connect to the wider Active Travel network in Mullingar.

4.2 Royal Canal Greenway

The Royal Canal Greenway is 130 km of level towpath. From Maynooth, it follows the 200-year-old canal through westwards through Enfield and Mullingar to Cloondara in Longford.

The section of the Royal Canal Greenway from Maynooth to Mullingar forms part of the Galway to Dublin Cycleway that will form part of the European-wide EuroVelo 2 Capitals Route, see **Section 4.4**.

The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will connect to the Old Rail Trail which is parallel to the Royal Canal Greenway at the Forest Park, Mullingar Business Park in the townland of Farranfolliot. From here users will be able to connect to the wider Active Travel network in Mullingar.

4.3 Grand Canal Greenway

The Grand Canal Greenway follows the route of the Grand Canal and links Dublin and the River Shannon via Tullamore and a number of other towns and villages on the route. In Offaly, the Grand Canal runs from Shannon Harbour in the west to Edenderry in the east. There is an existing section of greenway between Tullamore and Kilbeggan Harbour via the Grand Canal Greenway at Ballycommon (east of Tullamore). The completed sections of the greenway utilise the old towpath for the canal.

The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will complete a greenway/cycleway between Mullingar and Tullamore via the Grand Canal Greenway (Kilbeggan Branch).

The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will also provide a strategic level connection between the Royal Canal Greenway/Old Rail Trail in Mullingar and the Grand Canal Greenway (via the Kilbeggan Branch of the Grand Canal Greenway).

4.4 EuroVelo 2 Capitals Route

The EuroVelo 2 route, also known as the Capitals Route, links Dublin with Moscow via London, Berlin, Warsaw, and Minsk. In Ireland, the route has been extended to include a link between Dublin and Galway. This route is partially completed with the Royal Canal Greenway linking Maynooth to Mullingar (and on to Longford). To the southwest of Mullingar, the Royal Canal Greenway meets with the Old Rail Trail which links Mullingar and Athlone. In 2023 a new pedestrian and cycleway bridge was opened across the Shannon in Athlone where it will join with the proposed Athlone to Galway section of the Euro Velo 2 route.

The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will facilitate a north-south connection between the Euro Velo 2 route at Mullingar to the Grand Canal Greenway linking Tullamore and Dublin. When complete, greenway users will be able to travel a >200 km loop from Dublin to Mullingar along the Royal Canal Greenway, then south on the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway to Ballycommon (approx. 8 km east of Tullamore) and back to Dublin along the Grand Canal Greenway (or vice versa).

4.5 National Cycle Network

The National Cycle Network (NCN) Plan was prepared by TII and published by the Department of Transport in January 2024. The NCN focuses on linking cities and towns of over 5,000 people with a safe, connected and inviting cycle network. It includes plans to create cycle routes to destinations such as transport hubs, centres of education, centres of employment, leisure and tourist destinations. Where possible, it will optimise the potential for people to cycle as part of their daily activities, such as work or educational commuting. It will also integrate with existing and proposed cycle infrastructure. Both road safety, and the safety and security of users, will be central to the development of the NCN.

The NCN builds on previous work completed by TII and aligns with the work being undertaken by the National Transport Authority (NTA) in developing urban and county level cycle networks. It integrates with other cycle routes and networks in various stages of development, including the EuroVelo routes, greenways and the Strategic Plan for Greenways in Northern Ireland. The NCN plan will complement these other cycling development projects and will provide a core spine that other networks and routes can connect to.

In the NCN, Mullingar is identified as a “Primary Node” and Tullamore as a “Secondary Node”. The NCN Plan includes a link between Mullingar and Tullamore (assessed as Corridor Option 57B and updated to Corridor No. 55 in the final plan).

The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will provide the NCN connection between the Primary Node of Mullingar and the Secondary Node of Tullamore.

4.6 Cycle Connects

The NTA are developing proposals for a proposed safe, accessible and convenient cycle network for Ireland, CycleConnects. This should connect more people to more places and encourage sustainable travel. Cycling links are proposed in key cities, towns and villages in each county along with connections between settlements. The plan includes both existing and planned cycle routes including greenways and blueways. CycleConnects includes a map of proposed cycleways in County Westmeath. The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway is included, albeit an indicative route only is shown (**Figure 4.1**).

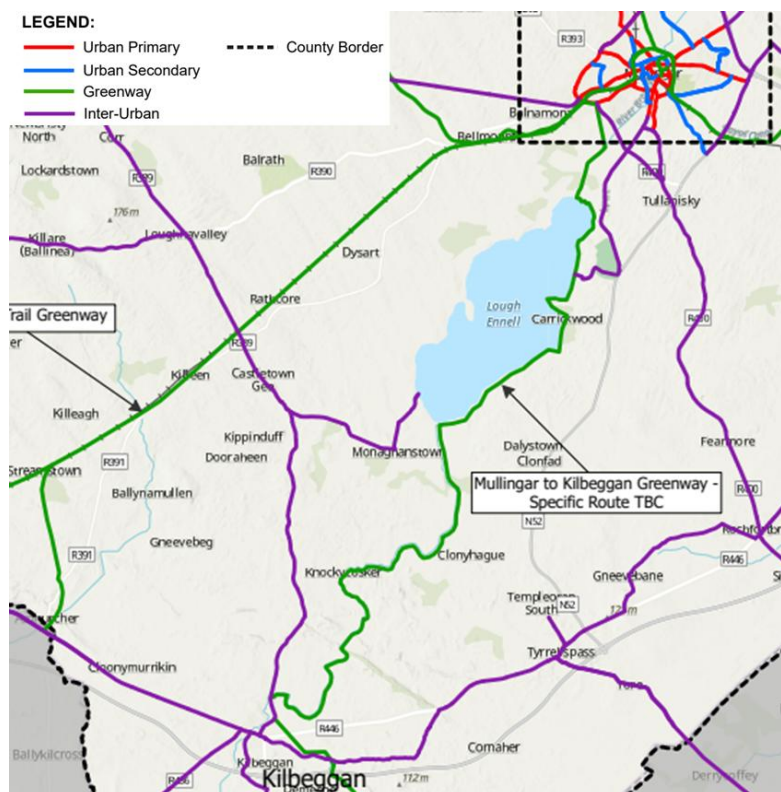


Figure 4.1 Extract from the CycleConnects Plan for County Westmeath (NTA, 2022)

The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will provide the connectivity to NCN projects planned for County Westmeath including inter-urban routes shown as purple lines on **Figure 4.1**.

5 INTEGRATION AND CONNECTIVITY TO THE EXISTING ROAD AND RAIL NETWORKS

5.1 Integration and Connectivity Overview

Within the wider study area of the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway, there are a number of strategic transport hubs. The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway is well situated to take advantage of the proximity to these transport hubs that will provide users with a sustainable means to access the greenway. The potential for integration and connectivity to and from the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway is summarised in **Table 5.1**. This list is indicative only and the final set of access points will be intrinsically linked to the route selected within the Preferred Option.

Table 5.1 Integration and Connectivity to and from the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway

Access Point	Description
Kilbeggan	The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will commence at Kilbeggan Harbour where it will tie-in with the existing Grand Canal Greenway (Kilbeggan Branch). Kilbeggan Harbour is approximately 1.5 km from Kilbeggan town centre. In addition, the Preferred Option crosses the R446 to the east of Kilbeggan town where there is an existing combined cycle and walking path linking to the secondary school and back into Kilbeggan town. There is a bus stop in the centre of Kilbeggan with regular services to/ from Athlone, Galway and Dublin and also between Tullamore and Mullingar. TFI local bus services between Mullingar and Kilbeggan with a stop at Ballynagore runs once a week on Friday. There is a seasonal daily service from Mullingar to Belvedere House and Gardens between April and September. The N52 road links Mullingar to Tullamore (via the M6) and passes to the east of Kilbeggan and the Preferred Option. Slieve Bloom town link bus service runs Monday to Saturday between Mullingar and Tullamore. Regional Roads in and around Kilbeggan include the R389, R436, and R446.
Mullingar	The Preferred Option meets the Old Rail Trail and Royal Canal Greenways at the Forest Park, Mullingar Business Park, to the southwest of Mullingar. This is approximately 2 km from Mullingar Railway Station (also a Bus Éireann stop). The N4, Dublin to Sligo Road passes to the east and north of Mullingar and provides access to/from towns and cities on the N4 to Mullingar and hence the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway. The N52 road links Mullingar to Tullamore (via the M6) and is to the east of Mullingar. Regional roads in and around Mullingar include the R390, R391, R392, R393, R394 and the R400.
Old Rail Trail	The Old Rail Trail runs between Athlone and Mullingar to the west of Kilbeggan, Lough Ennell and Mullingar. Access to the Old Rail Trail from the Preferred Option will be at Mullingar. An on-road link to the Old Rail Trail exists between Kilbeggan and Streamstown. It should be noted, however, that the All-Island Strategic Rail Review (DoT, 2024) has recommended the re-opening of a railway line between Mullingar and Athlone which may impact on the Old Rail Trail as a cycling and walking route.
Royal Canal & Royal Canal Greenway	The Royal Canal Greenway meets the Old Rail Trail in Newbrook to the west of Mullingar. An access at this point would provide linkages to the national strategic greenways in the area. The Royal Canal continues west from Mullingar to Ballina/ Ballinea, where it then heads northwards. The Royal Canal provides a natural northern boundary for the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway.
N52 National Road	The N52 is the only National Road within the wider area of the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway and runs in a north/south direction to the east of Kilbeggan, Lough Ennell and Mullingar. It forms a natural eastern extent for a study area for this project. As a result, it is not envisaged that there will be any crossing of the N52 required.
R446 Regional Road	The R446 runs broadly east to west from Tyrrellspass through Kilbeggan and on through Horseleap. Kilbeggan Harbour, the start point for the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway, is to the south of the R446. Therefore, a crossing of the R446 will be required at some location in or around Kilbeggan town.

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Access Point	Description
M6 Motorway	The M6 Motorway passes to the south of Kilbeggan. The Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will not connect to the motorway and therefore no access to/from the M6 motorway will be considered. The M6 Motorway provides a natural southern extent for a study area.
Regional and Local Road Crossing(s)	Where the route crosses an existing regional or local road, access points for local communities can be provided, subject to meeting safety and design standards. Care must be taken that access points do not attract unsafe or illegal parking. More minor access infrastructure, including signage and bike parking can also be provided at key locations.
Sligo to Dublin Railway Line	The Dublin to Sligo railway line connects through Mullingar. Given the location of the railway line it is not anticipated that there will be an interaction between it and the Greenway. The railway line provides a natural north-eastern extent for a study area.

As described in **Table 5.1**, there are five physical features within which the study area for the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway was considered:

- Royal Canal to the south and west of Mullingar, in the north of the broad area;
- Dublin to Sligo Railway through Mullingar, in the north and east of the broad area;
- M6 Motorway to the south of Kilbeggan, extending between Horseleap and Tyrrellspass;
- N52 to the east; and
- Old Rail Trail to the west.

5.2 Road Network

The proposed Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway will interface with the existing transport networks, private land and communities between Kilbeggan and Mullingar. The following existing infrastructure provides opportunities for ease of access to/ from the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway:

- M6 motorway just south of Kilbeggan.
- R446 linking Kilbeggan to Tyrrellspass (east) and Horseleap (west).
- R389 linking the M6 in Kilbeggan to R392 in Skeagh Beg.
- R391 linking Horseleap to Mullingar via R390 at Ballinea.
- N52 to the east of the project study area linking Mullingar to Tyrrellspass and the M6.
- The N4 which passes north of Mullingar.

Bus services are available in Mullingar and Kilbeggan for both national and regional routes connecting to Sligo, Longford, Galway, Athlone, Tullamore and Dublin. TFI local bus services between Mullingar and Kilbeggan with a stop at Ballynagore runs once a week on Friday. There is a seasonal daily service from Mullingar to Belvedere House and Gardens between April and September.

5.3 Active Travel

Mullingar has a relatively flat topography and as such it is suited to cycling and walking. As noted previously there are a number of strategic greenways connecting to Mullingar, namely the Old Rail Trail and the Royal Canal Greenway. A number of Active Travel schemes have been constructed or are planned for Mullingar that will enhance walking and cycling facilities within the town and ensure connectivity between the strategic greenways and the centre of the town. Figure 5.1 illustrates the existing Active Travel facilities within Mullingar.

Parking areas for bicycles is located at both Market Square and Dominick Square with other bicycle parking facilities located at shopping centres, Westmeath County Council offices, the library and the Railway Station.

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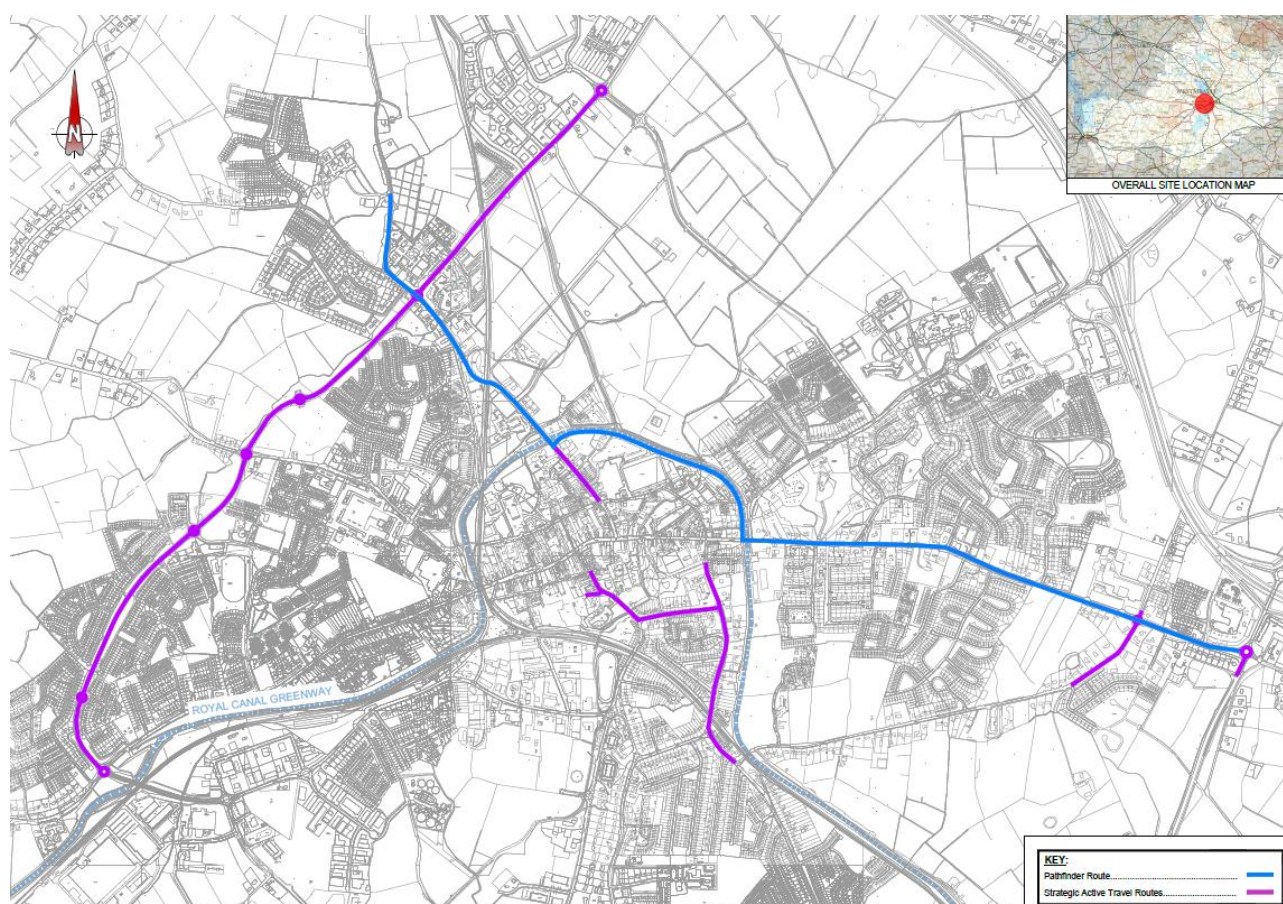


Figure 5.1 Mullingar Active Travel Schemes

5.4 Railways

5.4.1 Mullingar Railway Station

The Dublin to Sligo railway line passes through Mullingar. The station in Mullingar is located to the southwest of the centre of the town. The Royal Canal Greenway passes just to the west of the railway line and can be accessed from the station. The distance from the Mullingar railway station to the proposed start of the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway at Farranfolliot to the southwest of Mullingar town is approximately 2 km, following the Royal Canal Greenway, which meets the Old Rail Trail Greenway at Grange Bridge, just north of Farranfolliot.

5.4.2 All-Island Strategic Rail Review

In July 2024, the Irish Department of Transport and the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure published the All-island Strategic Rail Review. This review includes the recommendation for the restoration of rail services on the line between Mullingar and Athlone. The Old Rail Trail Greenway occupies the disused railway line linking Mullingar with Athlone. Should this railway line be reopened, then it provides another valuable transport link for users of the Kilbeggan to Mullingar greenway.

6 ACTIVITY BASED RECREATION AND TOURISM ACCESSIBILITY

There are a number of attractions, scenic locations, towns and villages within the study area. The location of the some of the attractions in the study area are illustration in **Figure 6.1**.

Attractions provide opportunities and constraints – opportunities to increase access for walkers and cyclists, and constraints in terms of respecting their setting within the environment. These attractions can positively enhance the experience for the users of the greenway and contribute to the project's success.

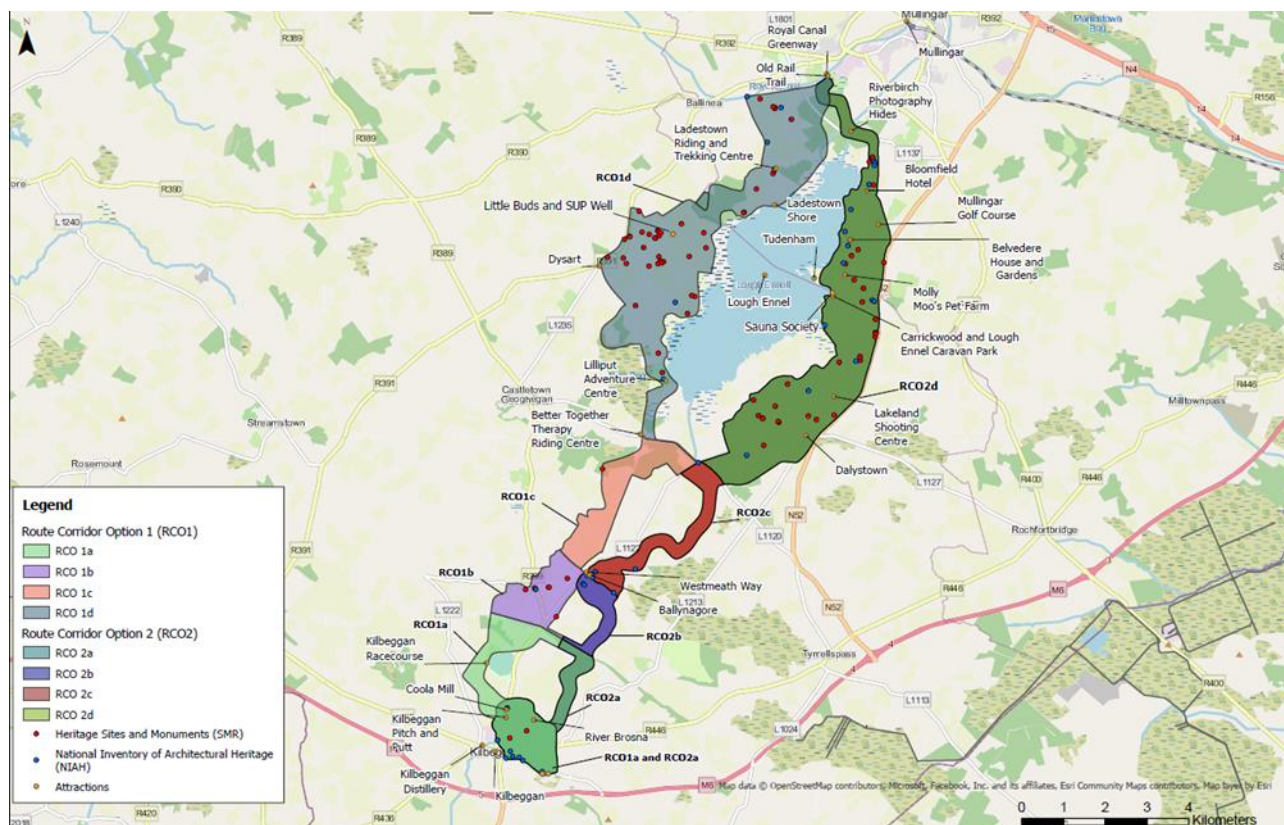


Figure 6.1 Heritage Sites, Monuments and Attractions

The Preferred Option passes close to a number of the attractions shown in **Figure 6.1**. These include (from north to south):

- Mullingar Town
- Connection to the Royal Canal Greenway
- Connection to the Old Rail Trail Greenway and
- Riverbich photography hides
- Bloomfield House Hotel
- Belvedere House and gardens
- Molly Moo's Pet Farm
- Carrickwood and Lough Ennell Caravan Park
- Lough Ennell
- Lakeland shooting centre
- Dalystown
- Westmeath Way Walking Trail

Connectivity Strategy for Preferred Option

- Lilliput Adventure Centre
- Ballynagore
- Kilbeggan

In addition to the above attractions being within the Preferred Option, the following attractions are located in close proximity to or within a short distance from the Preferred Option:

- Grand Canal Greenway (via the Kilbeggan Branch)
- Kilbeggan Pitch & Putt course
- Kilbeggan Distillery
- Kilbeggan Racecourse
- Historical sights associated with Lough Ennell including crannógs and ringforts

7 CONNECTIVITY TO NEARBY POPULATION CENTRES

The two main population centres in the area are Mullingar and Kilbeggan town, with a number of villages between the two as shown in **Figure 7.1**. The Preferred Option connects the two towns and will likely also connect to the village of Ballynagore and Dalystown along the route.

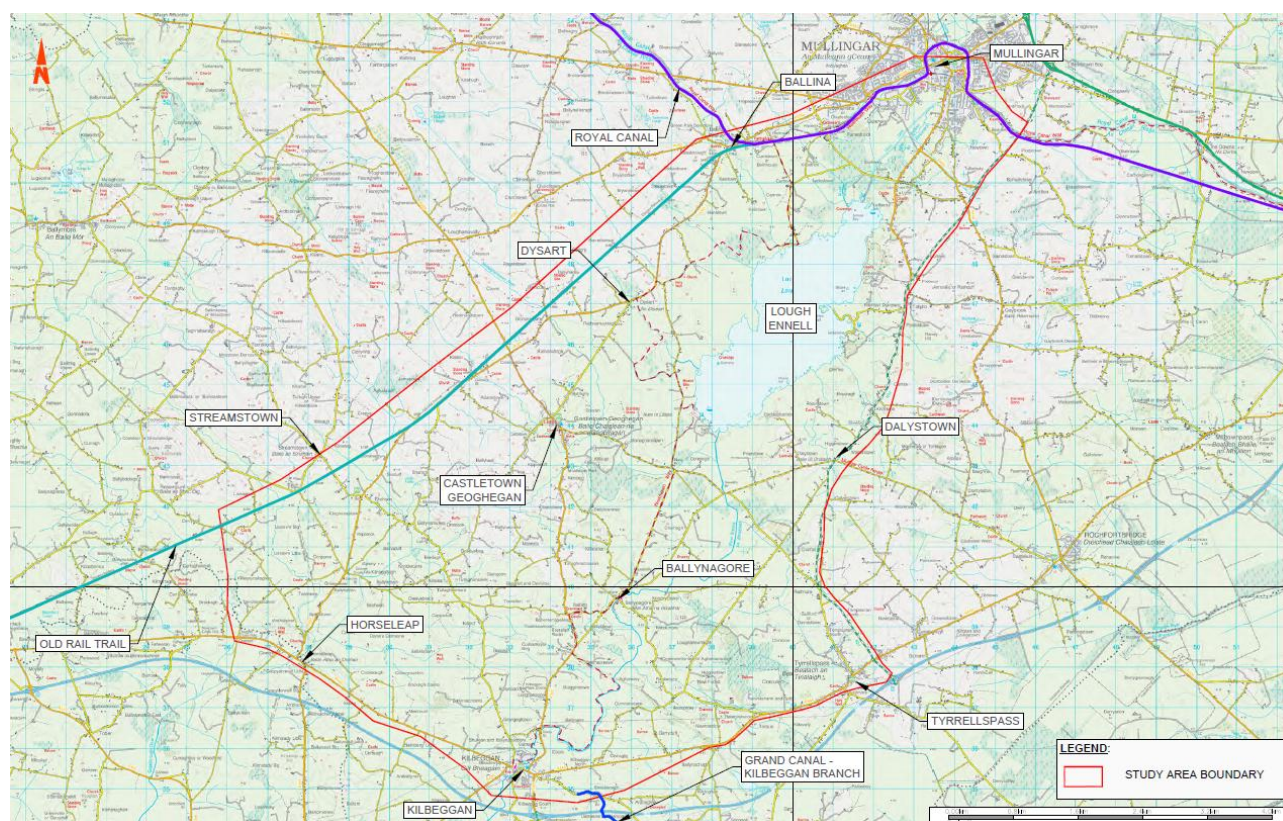


Figure 7.1 Population Centres

7.1 Kilbeggan

Kilbeggan (in Irish Cill Bheagáin) is the main town in the Barony of Moycashel in County Westmeath. The name signifies: The Church of [St] Becann. Kilbeggan, like Mullingar, is located on the River Brosna – here the river has been harnessed to power the waterwheel of the local distillery. The town lies south of Lough Ennell and quite close to the Offaly border with the nearest villages being Rahugh and Ballinagore. It lies approximately halfway between Horseleap to the west and Tyrrellspass to the east and is connected to both through the R446 regional road. Kilbeggan is also on the line of the Esker Riada the great chain of eskers which were deposited across central Ireland after the last Ice-Age. Kilbeggan has a population of 1,909 according to the April 2022 census.

Kilbeggan became an important market town as evidenced by the substantial Market House which still survives in the Square though it is no longer used for its original purpose. The market was saved in 2006 and is held in the Square each Saturday morning.

The town of Kilbeggan is synonymous with the production of whiskey. The distillery which later became Locke's in Kilbeggan was founded in 1757. In more recent times the arrival of Cooley Distillers and Beam Inc has seen the Kilbeggan Distillery Experience become a major tourist attraction offering great insights into the world of distilling in Ireland.

Kilbeggan is also associated with horse-racing – the first races were held there in 1840. It is the only racecourse in Ireland where all the races are over jumps under the National Hunt Rules. Since 1992 the number of meetings has increased from three to eight. The Midlands National each July is the highlight of the season and is the biggest summer steeplechase outside the Galway Festival.

Kilbeggan holds a Knighthood Festival on the June Bank Holiday weekend to commemorate the 18th C knighting of Kilbeggan innkeeper, Thomas Cuffe, by the then Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

7.2 Mullingar

The name Mullingar (An Muileann gCearr) is derived from 'The wry or left-handed mill'. It is the county town of Westmeath and is located in the centre of the county. The river Brosna flows through Mullingar. Situated within Mullingar is the imposing renaissance style Roman Catholic Cathedral of Christ the King, which was completed in 1936. The cathedral has twin towers over 42.5 meters high surmounted by gilt bronze crosses.

The area around Mullingar is surrounded by a number of fine limestone lakes including Lough Ennell, Owel and Derravaragh. The town grew up around the monastery of Lynn and came into its own after the Anglo-Norman invasion when the manor of Mullingar was assigned to the Petit family. There are records of burgesses and grants of fairs going back to the early years of the 13th C indicating that it was becoming established as a town by that time.

In the nineteenth century two major infrastructural advances in Mullingar were the arrival of the Royal Canal (1806) and the arrival of the railway in 1848. The railway was initially connected to Galway via Athlone and subsequently to Longford.

Mullingar is the county town of Westmeath. It is the third most populous town in the Midland Region.

Mullingar had a population of 22,512 as recorded in the April 2022 Census.

7.3 Ballynagore

The village of Ballynagore in the parish of Newtown, County Westmeath is approximately 2.5km north of Kilbeggan town on the road to Mullingar. The river Brosna flows through the village and is crossed by triple-span road bridge, built circa 1720 and new central arch added in 1951. The village boasts a number of other structures recorded in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage including a former corn and bleach mill, built circa 1770.

8 ASSOCIATED LINKAGE TO LOCAL AND REGIONAL ECONOMIES

Greenways can have a positive impact on economic development and regeneration in the local area. The Preferred Option will provide improved access to Kilbeggan and Mullingar towns. This will create a car free pathway to schools and work for some children and adults and access to the local amenities such as sports fields, shops, bars, and restaurants. The local economy could also be positively affected by increased day trips and overnight stays in the area.

Greenways have proven to be successful for the local economy in other parts of the country especially the Waterford Greenway, with Waterford having a previously similar small tourism base. A survey carried out in the opening year of 2017 indicates that people spent an average of €16.90 per day on food, drink, bicycle hire, and accommodation; 54% of people responded that they had spent money in the area in connection with their greenway visit. Another scheme - The Great Western Greenway in Mayo attracted 484,000 users in 2016 and was worth €38.9m to the local economy, supporting 200 jobs and 710 indirect jobs.

In an economic impact case study of the Great Western Greenway (Failte Ireland, p.ii, 2011), the report finds that the Great Western Greenway contributed to an additional economic spend of €3.8m per annum in the local economy from the combination of domestic and international tourist visitors with the average spend by domestic tourists being €49.85 and for overseas tourists €50.71. In the U.K., Sustrans reported (p.8, 2017) that "long distance cycle routes, which are predominantly rural, can generate as much as £30 million per year to the local economy; enough to sustain over 600 full time equivalent jobs." The report further states (p.9) that leisure-based cyclists can spend £9.20 per day with overnight tourists spending £22.90 per day. This is very similar to the findings from the 2017 survey of the Waterford Greenway.

A publication by Failte Ireland on Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Tourism Facts 2019 reported that 449,000 overseas Tourists visited Ireland's Hidden Heartlands that year generating €178m in revenue. Visitors spent an average of €397 per capita and stayed an average of 6.1 nights in Ireland. For domestic tourists that figure rose to 784,000 visitors generating €129m in revenue and spending on average 2.3 nights in the Hidden Heartlands.

The Eastern & Midland Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) 2019-2031, provides a strategic plan and investment framework to shape future growth and to better manage regional planning and economic development throughout the Eastern Region, which includes County Westmeath. The RSES notes that greenways and cycleways can enhance areas, contributing to liveable places and creating opportunities to be physically active. In relation to Mullingar, the RSES notes (p.87) that the town "provides an essential role in supporting population and job growth and in this regard acts as a crucial centre for the surrounding hinterland."

TII Mobility and Outdoor Value Estimate (MOVE) is a research project collecting data on outdoor activity travel with focus on greenways. The survey periods were chosen to record seasonal usage on selected greenways. The greenways surveyed were:

- Old Rail Trail
- Great Western Greenway
- South East Greenway
- Limerick Greenway
- Waterford Greenway

The tool was developed to help inform the planning and appraisal of future greenway projects. The information collected can provide a benchmark for user demand and data for the parameters and assumptions required for appraisal tools. The data from MOVE was used to inform the Tool for Economic Appraisal of Active Modes (TEAM) in the Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) for the Kilbeggan to Mullingar Greenway.

9 POTENTIAL ASSOCIATED SOCIO-ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF ENHANCED CONNECTIVITY OF THE PROJECT

The Pobal HP Deprivation index uses ten factors sourced from CSO statistics including population change, age, house occupancy education and employment status to estimate the affluence or disadvantage of an area. The map provided in **Figure 9.1** shows the deprivation index for the Kilbeggan to Mullingar area. The Pobal HP Deprivation index for the area is mainly comprised of Marginally above average and marginally below average.

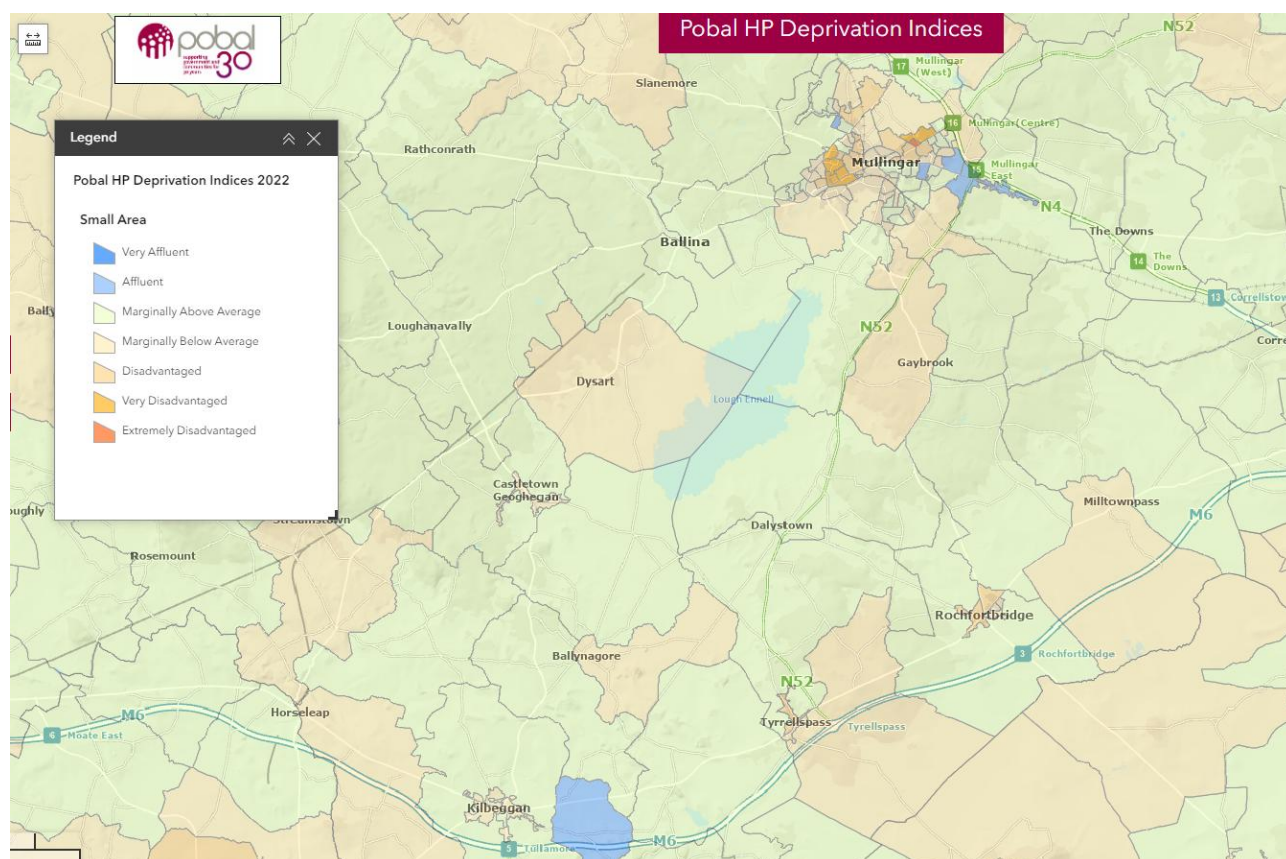


Figure 9.1 Pobal HP Deprivation Index Map

The Preferred Option provides opportunity to increase the economic status of individuals and communities by creating employment and providing alternative access to jobs, education, health care facilities and public transport for those who have limited means of travel. The areas that could benefit the most from a greenway in the area are Kilbeggan town, Ballynagore, and the area of Farranfolliot southwest of Mullingar town where the Preferred Option connects to the Old Rail Trail.

10 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Preferred Option will form part of the Strategic Greenway Network of national and regional routes by connecting the Royal Canal Greenway/Old Rail Trail in Mullingar to the Grand Canal Greenway in Tullamore via the Kilbeggan Branch of the Grand Canal Greenway at Kilbeggan Harbour.

The Preferred Option will also provide a connection between the towns of Kilbeggan and Mullingar, which will create links for local communities to access existing public transport infrastructure, places of employment, schools, recreational attractions and healthcare facilities.