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**Public Consultation - SEA Shannon Tourism Masterplan**  
**Waterways Ireland - Western Regional Office**  
**Scariff, Co. Clare**

**Question Title**

1. Are you a

- Resident
- Business Owner
- Member of a heritage, community or environmental group
- Visitor

Other (please specify)

**Question Title**

2. If you are a domestic, international visitor or resident which of the following activities have you participated in?

- Cruising
- Angling
- Walking
- Cycling
- Rowing
- Wildlife Enthusiast
- Sailing
- Canoeing/Kayaking

Other (please specify)

**Question Title**

3. Please state your geographical area of interest.

- Discovery Zone 1: Upper Shannon, Lough Allen and Shannon-Erne Waterway
- Discovery Zone 2: Mid-Shannon Lough Ree, peatlands & Shannon Callows
- Discovery Zone 3: Lower Shannon Lough Derg & Lower Shannon
- The Entire Masterplan Area

**Question Title**

4. Do you feel the Masterplan will contribute positively to the area?

- Community life
- Increased local jobs
- Local activity groups
- New business
- None

Other (please specify)

The Regional Assembly consider that the Masterplan will provide a stimulative mechanism on which to progress the appropriate development of settlements and their surrounding hinterlands, along this route including the nationally designated Regional Growth Centre of Athlone. The inclusion of reference to the NPF is extremely welcome reiterating that the report specifically states the need for *‘tourism development and promotional branding to ensure that areas like the Midlands and Lakelands areas are developed and promoted in such a way as to play their full part in tapping the economic potential of regional and rural areas in the region’* (p.35). The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region further recognises this specific need for tourism development and branding of the blueways, greenways and peatways of the Midlands, including reference to this Masterplan and support for the Hidden Heartlands brand which the masterplan is indicated to provide an underpinning of, by establishing the Shannon as a compelling tourism destination for both domestic and overseas visitors. The RSES defines Athlone as a Regional Growth Centre that will accommodate significant new investment in housing, transport and employment generating activity. It is an important self-sustaining centre that will act as an economic driver for the Region, capitalising on its strategic location and high-quality connections, while also servicing and supporting a wider local economy, which extends beyond the Region. This will complement the role that the remaining settlements and wider rural area will play, in tapping into the social and economic potential offered particularly at this time which has witnessed job losses associated with historical industrial scale peat harvesting.

### Question Title

5. Having reviewed the Draft Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030 and associated Environmental Report, please list the sections you like to comment on in more detail.

The Shannon– What makes it Special?

The Tourism potential of the River Shannon and its corridor is recognised throughout the RSES for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly and is regarded as an important foundation for tourism product within the region. The Assembly welcome the inclusion of the unique experiences listed for the Shannon as part of the Draft Report. It is noted that the Executive Summary provides additional unique experiences which should be incorporated into the main document. This includes reference to the Shannon’s dark skies, unspoilt environments, ‘soft adventure’ and outdoor activities in contact with nature,

traditional pubs, restaurants, cafés and organic food growers, as well as a vibrant arts and culture scene. The reference as part of the executive summary to the modern Shannon is extremely welcome and provides a ‘forward looking’ perspective. This should be enhanced as part of the main document, including as part of the vision, to incorporate Athlone’s national role as a Regional Growth Centre and the potential that this brings.

## Thematic and Experiential Framework for the Shannon

The Three Shannon Themes of ‘The Shannon- Mighty River of Ireland’, ‘The Natural Timeless Shannon’ and ‘Shannon Journeys and Adventures’ are welcomed and are considered to cover a wide range of experiences. Explicit reference to the rich historical value of the Shannon to Ireland would enhance this section and ensure that the potential of this was fully developed to maximise prospective tourism.

## Shannon Discovery Zones

Discovery Zone 2 (DZ2): Lough Ree, Shannon Callows and Peatlands

The detailed themes presented as part of ‘Discovery Zone 2’ are extremely welcome and in keeping with the RSES. This includes initiatives such as exploring vibrant Athlone, a vital hub on the Shannon, reference to Lough Boora, Hodson Bay, Corlea Trackway, Peatlands, Wetlands, Lough Ree, Clonmacnoise, dark skies of Boora Bog, and the Royal Canal Greenway.

In accordance with RSES policy, the Assembly welcome the inclusion of Athlone as the “thriving capital of this zone, an ancient crossing point on the river, with excellent accommodation, fine dining and attractions. Recent public realm enhancements place Athlone’s Castle, Luan Gallery, Cultural Quarter and waterfront at the centre of its tourism offering” (p. 51). The reference to enhanced impetus to complete the Dublin- Galway cycleway and develop a southern link towards Clonmacnoise and Shannonbridge is welcomed. This is in line with policy contained as part of Table 7.1 of the RSES.

The management issues presented relating to DZ2 which includes promotion of Athlone, post production uses of the peatlands, access issues regarding the islands of Lough Ree, and the need for integrated future management of the Shannon Callows, are welcome. However, it is unclear from the document how these management issues are to be addressed and responsibility for same. This is considered essential in order to deliver many of the tourism prospects presented as part of the Masterplan.

## Shannon - Strategic Initiatives

The Assembly welcome the seven interlinking strategic initiatives that build on the inherent strengths of each discovery zone in order to create many reasons for visitors to stop and stay. The initiatives are considered to provide a robust basis on which to develop a strong tourism foundation along the route and include, clear and consistent Shannon messaging,

enhancing on water visitor experiences, enhancing waterside visitor experiences, Shannon's towns and villages, protecting and enhancing Shannon's environment, improving Shannon connectivity and, enterprise and community networks.

In relation to Strategic Initiative 4 Shannon's Towns and Villages, the Assembly consider that further consideration should be given to the Hierarchy presented prior to its finalisation. The use of the term hierarchy suggests the ranking or grading of the settlements according to their relative status. Currently the settlement hierarchy shown at Figure 19 depicts Gateway Towns above Hub Towns. Gateway Towns are described as towns of scale just outside the Shannon corridor that act as gateway portals to the region. Hub Towns are described as towns offering year round facilities of scale at the core of each discovery zone. This means that towns such as Longford, Cavan, Birr and Nenagh are placed above settlements such as Athlone and Limerick City, as part of the current settlement hierarchy depicted. It is therefore advised that Figure 19 be amended to show the hierarchy of towns within the corridor as priority.

In addition to the above, it is also considered that the terminology 'Hub Towns' does not adequately reflect the importance of these settlements for the success of tourism along the Shannon. In this regard a revised term that emphasises the importance of these settlements (such as main, principal, chief, prime etc.) should be used in order to convey their critical importance.

The segment relating to Athlone as part of Section 6.5.4 is welcome, however, it is considered that reference to Athlone as a nationally designated Regional Growth Centre should be included. The development opportunities and proposed projects for the Shannon towns and villages are a positive addition to the masterplan and the Assembly welcome the inclusion of opportunities relating to Clondra, Lanesborough and Banagher, coupled with the enhancement of festivals and events. In addition the stated importance of the gateway towns of Birr and Longford is constructive.

As part of Strategic Initiative 5 Protecting and Enhancing the Shannon Environment, the Assembly welcome a number of proposals that are in keeping with policy contained as part of the RSES. This includes Destination Development and Rewilding Plan to develop access to Shannon Peatlands and the biosphere for Lough Ree. In terms of initiative 6 relating to connectivity, the RSES strongly advocates connectivity as key to the Green Infrastructure section contained as part of the RSES at Section 7.7. In this regard Figure 20, highlighting the walking and cycling trail infrastructure of the Shannon Region with connections to national infrastructure, is a positive addition that depicts connectivity levels along the route.

### Implementation of the Tourism Masterplan

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The Assembly strongly welcome the section relating to the implementation of the Tourism Masterplan. In particular the supporting Action Plan contained at Appendix One of the document is considered extremely beneficial in enabling the roll out of the Masterplan. A column identifying who is responsible for each of the Actions would serve to enhance the implementation strategy further.

**Question Title**

6. What do you think are the key environmental issues and potential environmental effects associated with Draft Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030? Please specify.

It is noted that the Masterplan is accompanied by an Environmental Report, an AA Screening Report and Natura Impact Report. These documents have outlined potential environmental effects associated with the Draft Tourism Masterplan. Accordingly, the Assembly recommend engagement with the relevant bodies in this regard, including the Office of Public Works, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency and Irish Water.

**Question Title**

7. Are the potential impacts of the Draft Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030 adequately addressed in the Masterplan and/or the Environmental Report? If not, please specify below

Please see question 6 above.

**Question Title**

8. Your input is greatly appreciated. Thank you!

**Question Title**

9. What is your name?\*

**Question Title**

10. What is your address?\*

Done

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