

MWP

Project Summary

**Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS)
for Carn Park Link Trail at Baylin, Co. Westmeath**

Westmeath County Council

August 2023

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1. Introduction

Malachy Walsh and Partners Engineering and Environmental consultants (MWP) has been commissioned by Westmeath County Council to provide Engineering and Environmental Consulting Services for the delivery of an Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) at Baylin, Co. Westmeath. This report summarizes the details of the proposed scheme and addresses the environmental, drainage issues associated with the scheme. The report gives recommendations for the proposed works within the specific environmental context of Baylin, based on fundamental project principles as outlined below:

- Provide new and improved facilities to accommodate leisure activities with universally accessible designs accommodating vulnerable road users;
- Linking facilities to create a greater sense of place and connectivity, specifically the Baylin Bog Trail and the Carn Park Forest Walk which will link to the Old Rail Trail Greenway;
- Improvements of wayfinding and accessibility between Baylin and the various leisure trails, and
- Maximising the amenity and the value of the existing asset that is the environmental context of Baylin.

MWP undertook a site visit on the 5th of April 2023 to determine a suitable approach to the proposals.

2. Site Location

Baylin is a village in the eastern environs of Athlone Town. Despite its proximity to a large urban center, it maintains a rural setting, with a significant European Site located immediately to the south of the village. This European Site, Carn Park Bog, is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC 002336) and a Proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA 000676). The “Old Rail Trail” greenway passes close to the village, with an access point located 2.5 km to the South. A location map for the village is shown in the Figure below.

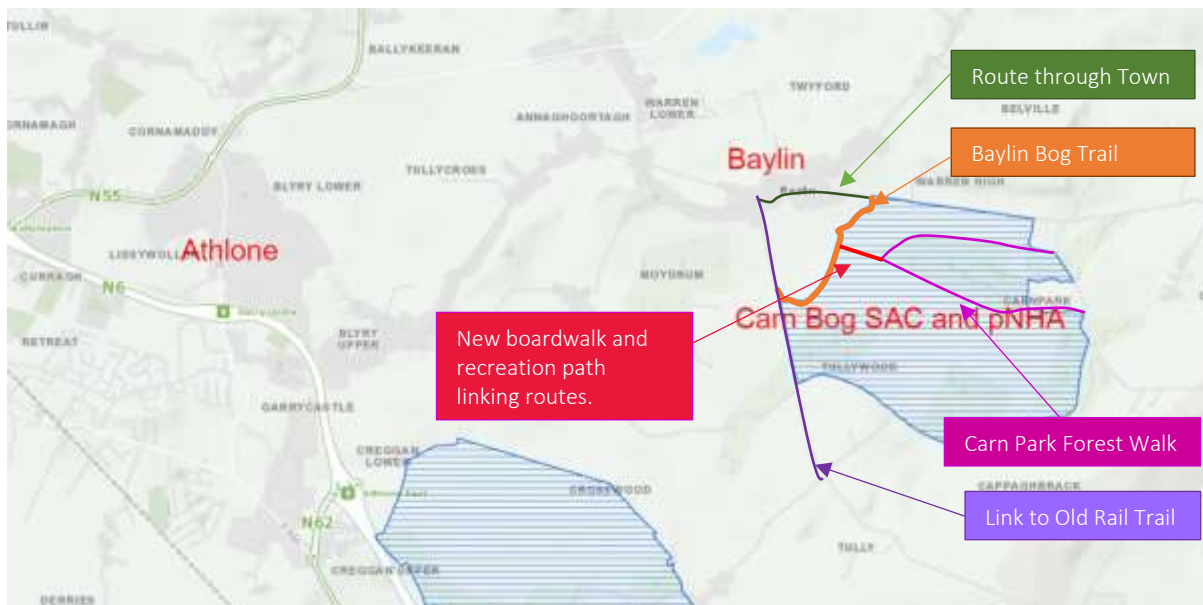


Figure 2-1 Site Location

2.1 Existing Infrastructure

MWP acknowledge that there are several existing recreation assets in the Baylin area which are highlighted in the Figure below.

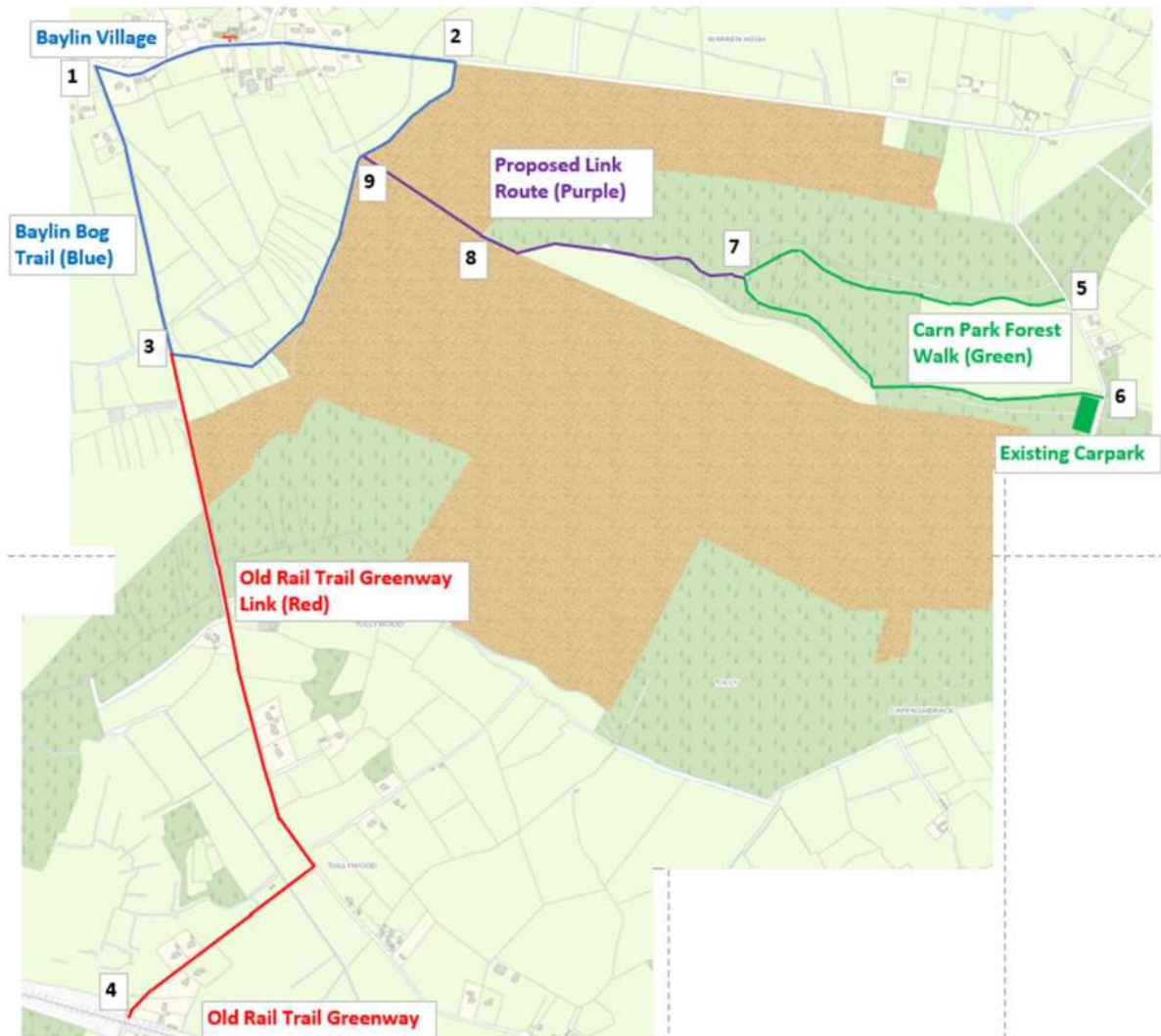


Figure 2-2 Existing Infrastructure

As denoted in the above Figure, the various sections of the project were inspected with the existing infrastructure along with the MWP proposals works will involve:

- Improvements to the existing facilities along the Baylin Bog Leisure Trail and increasing wayfinding along the main road (L1427 -Warren High Road) leading up to the trail;
- A complete leisure/active travel loop between the town of Baylin by implementing a safe pedestrian refuge along the southern edge of the L1427 linking to the Baylin Bog northern access and the creation of a 'shared space zone' prioritising pedestrians for c.635m along the local road leading to the southern access point of the trail;

- The provision of a controlled crossing point for Scoil Ciarain between the existing set-down bays and the school access gate;
- A new link between the Baylin Bog Trail and Carn Park Forest Walk comprising of a 350m raised boardwalk and a proposed upgraded gravel road of c.625m linking the two leisure routes maximising the towns unique environmental assets;
- A shared space zone of c. 235m between the two access points of the Carn Park Forest Walk, along the Carn park Road, establishing a complete leisure route incorporating the Carn Park Forest Walk;
- A complete leisure route incorporating the Baylin Bog Trail and Carn Park Forest Walk extending c.6.5km in length promoting outdoor recreational activity and pedestrian safety, comfort, and priority.

3. Scheme Objectives

The objectives of the overall scheme can be described as the delivery of an Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) at Baylin, Co. Westmeath. This includes the requirement of finding the most effective means of maximising the amenity value of existing assets. As part of achieving this, it includes the provision of a pleasant, usable, and safe pedestrian/cycle pathways and circular routes between the village of Baylin, the Baylin Bog Trail, and the Carn Park Forest Walk. This proposed connectivity loop with multiple access points intends to enhance the leisure activity and active travel connectivity within the town. The scheme proposals further align with the strategic objectives as outlined in '*Embracing Irelands Outdoors (2023-2027)*' as follows:

- **Leadership** – Creating a more coordinated, cohesive and connected approach to maximise and ensure best use of resources and environmental assets within the town's surroundings;
- **Opportunities** – To increase and support the promotion of active travel and outdoor recreational activities by increasing safety for vulnerable users (young school children) and universally accessible design standards;
- **Access** – To improve and protect the access to the outdoor infrastructure and improving connectivity between nodes by creating complete and protected loops.
- **Environment** – To protect the environment through the development of outdoor recreation, in keeping with best practice;
- **Awareness** – Creating awareness of outdoor recreational activities and improving wayfinding along the main routes.

4. Committed Development

A desktop search of proposed and existing planning applications was undertaken on the 16/08/2023. The search intended to highlight any potential or planned development in the surrounding area of Baylin which would potentially impact the proposals included within this project proposals. It was however noted that there was no proposed development within the near vicinity of the proposed developments, resulting in no cumulative impact on the surrounding infrastructure.

5. Identification of Need

The Westmeath County Council Development Plan (2021-2027) includes in their Council Proposed Policies (CPO's) specific objectives which aligns with the project proposals for the Baylin ORIS outlined within this planning report. A few of the identified objectives outlined within the Development Plan written statement are:

- **CPO 6.21:** Encourage the celebration of the unique attributes of towns and villages in the design and delivery of all visitor interpretation, signage, and public realm schemes in order to provide tourists with a strong 'Sense of Place' and a more memorable visit.
- **CPO 6.59:** Support increased opportunities for off-road walking, including looped walks and longer distance trails, taking account of 'positive control points' in trail design, such as areas of natural beauty, lakeshores or rivers, bogs, built heritage and archaeological features and with links to towns and villages where services may be provided for walkers and hikers. In designing walking trails, the Sport Ireland Guide to Planning and Developing Recreational Trails will be consulted.
- **CPO 6.60:** Continue to maintain and further enhance the County's walking and cycling trails, striving to achieve National Trails accreditation and other standards as set by Sport Ireland, in partnership with local communities and landowners.
- **CPO 6.61:** Support the re-routing and upgrade of the Westmeath Way walking trail, bringing it off-road and link to scenic areas where possible, ensuring its status as an accredited National Waymarked way in the long term and exploring options such as the Walks Scheme for future maintenance.
- **CPO 6.62:** Support the provision of visitor interpretation along walking and cycling trails, including storyboards, artworks, and other media, to create a greater sense of place, connecting and immersing visitors in our local heritage and stories.
- **CPO 6.63:** Support the provision of services for visitors using walking and cycling trails which are appropriate to the location and activity, including bike service points, picnic benches at scenic locations, public toilets in remote areas etc.

The project proposals have considered universal access design guidelines, including the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS). The approach promotes sustainable design and accommodates vulnerable road users by providing adequate width and access facilities on new infrastructure for people with disabilities. Additionally, the proposals include for the improving on safety elements surrounding the primary school, improving the crossing facility and implements designs which dictate the priority of pedestrians above that of vehicular traffic.

6. Environmental Assessment Report

An Appropriate Assessment (AA) was undertaken in line with the requirements of Article 6[3] of the EU Habitats Directive (EC 92/43/EEC) on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora; the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010; and the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 as amended, for the development of a recreational trail and boardwalk linking Carn Park Forest Walk and the Baylin Bog Trail, Baylin, Co. Westmeath. The assessment concluded that no impacts are likely as a result of the proposed works on the conservation objectives or overall integrity of Carn Park Bog SAC 002336 due to the scale and nature of the works, and the lack of any pathways for indirect impact on any other European site. It was therefore recommended that Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is not required, and the project is screened out.

7. Ecological Impact Assessment

In addition to the Appropriate Assessment Screening Report, an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) was also created as per the requirements of Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, in order to establish the potential for significant impact on any of the qualifying interests of the nearby Natura 2000 sites. This report comprises information regarding the ecological status of the proposed site of works, including an assessment of the potential impacts of the proposed works on the ecology of the surrounding areas. The screening assessment concluded that there was no likelihood of significant effect on any European Site and recommended that the project need not proceed to Stage 2 AA.

8. Sewerage Facilities and Surface Water Drainage

The proposed scheme does not include any new demands on the surface water infrastructure or sewerage facilities.

9. Design Standards

The scheme was designed in accordance with the various publications as listed:

- National Cycle Manual (NCM), 2007, National Transport Authority. <https://www.cyclemanual.ie/>
- Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) Version 1.1, 2019, Government of Ireland. <https://www.dmurs.ie/>
- Traffic Management Guidelines, 2003, Department of Transport, Government of Ireland.
- Traffic Signs Manual, Chapter 7 Road Markings, 2019, Department of Transport, Government of Ireland.
- Cycle Infrastructure Design, Local Transport Note 1/20, July 2020, UK Department for Transport.

- TII Publications (Standards), Transport Infrastructure Ireland. <https://www.tiipublications.ie/>
- TII Publications (Technical), Transport Infrastructure Ireland. <https://www.tiipublications.ie/>
- DN-PAV-03021 Pavement and Foundation Design.
- DN-PAV-03024 Bituminous Mixtures, Surface Treatments, and Miscellaneous Products and Processes DETR Guidance on the use of Tactile Paving surfaces
- <http://universaldesign.ie>
- Natural Stone Surfacing – Good Practice Guide
- Guideline for Managing Openings in Public Roads

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

10.1 Conclusion

The proposed design incorporations for the Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme in Baylin, provides pedestrian and cycleway linkages between the town centre and two leisure routes namely the Baylin Bog Trail and Carn Park Forest Walk. These improvements include the connecting of the towns assets while improving, safety, sense of place and linkages. Wayfinding to and from the leisure routes and the Old Rail Trail Greenway is incorporated throughout the design proposals.

The new boardwalk provides an essential link creating a larger active travel loop and aligns with Westmeath County Council objectives. This alongside the incorporation of the shared space zones creates a high quality, comfortable and safe link for pedestrians to access from multiple points.

The overall increase in awareness of pedestrians and cyclists throughout the proposals further improves the safety for vehicular traffic as well by the passive traffic calming measures and lines and signs improvements. Additionally, the project includes philosophy adapted by 'safe routes to schools' to provide a designated and safe crossing for school children, establishing pedestrian dominance along vulnerable routes.

10.2 Recommendations

The Active travel and connectivity improvements proposed throughout this scheme will significantly improve the sense of place within the town of Baylin. It further aims to enhance and optimise the surrounding environmental assets that have been neglected. The scheme proposals, incorporating traffic related improvements for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles are envisaged to have no negative impact on the mobility of the surrounding transport network. It is thus the opinion of MWP that all transport related elements brought by the proposals result in a positive impact on the town and its surrounding network.

The Appropriate Assessment Screening report concluded that Natura 2000 sites within the zone of influence are not likely to be significantly affected by the proposed works and can therefore be screened out for further consideration for Appropriate Assessment.