

# **Corlea Archaeological Settlement and Biodiversity Project.**



**Pic 1: Rehabilitated and re-colonised bog.**

**September 2013**

# The Corlea Archaeological Settlement and Biodiversity Project.

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Prepared by Planning Section, Longford County Council, September, 2013.

## **1 SCOPE OF WORKS**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Keenagh Community Co. Op and Wetlands Heritage Ireland propose to create an Archaeological and Biodiversity Project on a portion of rehabilitated cutaway bog at Corlea, Longford.

It intends to carry out this project in association with Bord na Móna, Corlea Trackway Centre, Longford County Council, Longford Community Resources Ltd., and the Department of Arts Heritage and the Gaeltacht with close consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. This project would compliment the existing facilities at the Corlea Centre and provide further educational and interpretation of the area's history, archaeology and biodiversity.

The project has wide ranging scope, benefiting visitors to the Corlea Centre, Schools as well as improving the wider tourism attractions of Longford and the Midlands. The proposal is a stand alone project that may represent a first step in a broader development proposal of the gradual conversion of cutaway bogs in Longford to Biodiversity Parks. These emerging Biodiversity Parks could then be linked with the Shannon, Lough Ree and the Royal Canal to create a Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. Indeed it may be possible in time to utilize the Royal Canal as a Walking/Cycling route from Dublin to Longford and connect in with routes across the cutaway bogs and the Shannon to the Mayo and Sligo roads.

These broader longer term development goals would provide Longford and Roscommon with major amenity and tourism facilities of international importance and attraction. The plans for the Corlea project will be sympathetic with the conservation and biodiversity action plan of Bord na Móna. It is also intended to develop the project in a sustainable manner bearing in mind the rich cultural and natural heritage resources of the area. The principles of Ecotourism providing for a destination with a set of standards based on sound environmental practices highlighting all that the region and its people has to offer will guide the development of the project.

### **1.2 Purpose of the Project:**

The initial purpose of the project is to provide an additional archaeological and ecological open air facility based around the existing Corlea Trackway Centre. The proposed project will provide visitors with educational, interpretive and family orientated facilities to experience what life was like in early Ireland. In addition they will be provided with an introduction to the bogs and their wonderful biodiversity.

### 1.3 Project Sequential Framework

The existing facility at Corlea Visitor Centre presents and interprets an Iron Age bog road which was built in the year 148BC across the boglands to the River Shannon. This Trackway is the largest of its kind to have been uncovered in Europe. Inside the building, an 18 metre stretch of preserved road is on permanent display along with Display Boards and artifacts. Bord na Móna and the Heritage Service have carried out conservation work on the surrounding bog to ensure that it remains wet and a living healthy bog. Now it is intended to extend the Centres visitor facilities over time.



**Pic 2: Corlea Centre, Kenagh, Longford.**

Table 1. Timeframe for projects.

2013	Corlea Visitor Centre existing
2014/15	Corlea Archaeological & Biodiversity Project
2014/15	Link with Royal Canal
2015/2022	Project Link across bog to Corlea Centre
2015/2022	Royal Canal walking/Cycling route to Mullingar
2025/2030	Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

Keenagh Community Group now has the agreement of Bord na Móna to develop approximately 12 acres of cutaway bog near Corlea Centre for a recreated Iron age type settlement and to present the developing Biodiversity of a rehabilitated cutaway bog. This area has its own existing car park and shall be initially linked back to the centre and Keenagh by a dedicated walking route along the public road. This project will be developed in 2014/5. An important aspect of the proposal is that it be delivered in a very cost effective manner requiring minimal resources in input from the various bodies involved.

The above proposed walking trails and the Corlea Centre have the potential to be linked with the adjoining Royal Canal in the period 2014/15. This will facilitate boating,

walking and cycling visitors coming from Dublin and travelling to the West via Longford and the Shannon to visit Corlea Centre.

As the portion of bog immediately adjoining the Corlea Project site is worked out and rehabilitated by Bord na Móna it is hoped to develop an additional area of bog with a direct link back to the Corlea Centre. This would provide a dedicated walking trail through the bog presenting the developing biodiversity. It is expected that a portion of the low lying bog shall be re-watered and colonized with appropriate native plants, birds and fish. The timetable for this portion of the project to be achieved is expected to be between 2020-2025.

There are current proposals to link Dublin to Mullingar and Longford Town to the Shannon via the Royal Canal as walking cycling routes. It is envisaged in time (2020/2025) that the Royal Canal link will be continued from Mullingar through Longford to the Shannon thus improving access to Corlea.



Pic 3: Royal Canal potential walking and cycling routes. (photos sourced from Benbulbin Photography at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/37681288@N00/3666751434/in/set-72157624247068608/>)

When the bogs have been worked out by Bord na Mona over the next 10/20 years one of the options under consideration is that they be used as Nature and Biodiversity locations. The existing bog rail tracks could then be utilized as additional walking/cycling tracks to increase the network through the emerging Mid Shannon Wilderness Park (See below) linking with the ISPCA Animal Refuge at Derryglogher and on to Lough Ree at Lanesboro. Indeed it may also be possible to link a walking/cycling route from Dublin through Longford and across the Shannon to Strokestown, Roosky and on to Westport and Sligo.

#### **1.4 An Ecotourism Project**

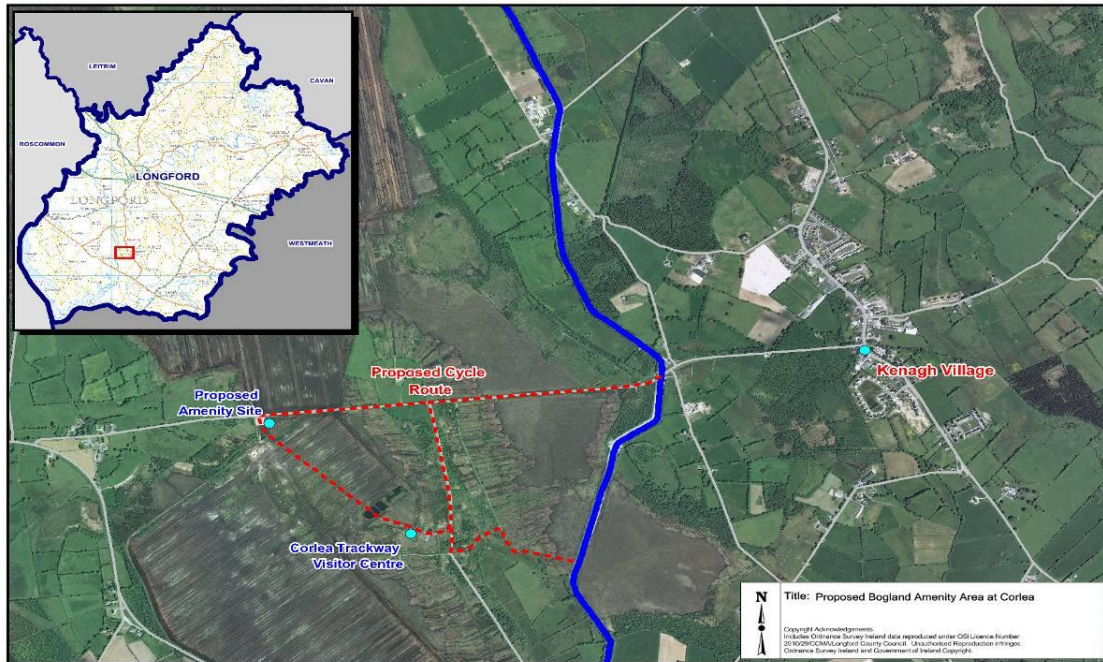
It is intended to use the principles of Ecotourism in the development of the Corlea Project. There is an established criterion which must be met in order to qualify for the ecotourism label. These cover a wide range of practices in eight key components of ecotourism as follows:

- Environmentally sustainable practices
- Natural area focus
- Interpretation and Education
- Contributing to Conservation
- Benefiting local Communities
- Visitor Satisfaction
- Responsible Marketing and Communication
- Cultural Awareness and Respect

The Corlea Project will incorporate many if not all of the above practices. By meeting and possibly exceeding in above areas, the project will indicate its dedication to educating the visitor and tourist about the native natural world and local culture. This environmentally innovative and socially responsible project will have a very positive impact on the environment and local communities.

## **2. Description of the Project**

The proposed Corlea Archaeology and Biodiversity project is to be located on a Bord na Móna site on the Lanesboro Road out of Keenagh Village. This portion of road has been developed by the Keenagh Community Group for amenity purposes. A footpath has been provided which is popularly used by local people. It links the village to the Royal Canal and out to the Corlea Centre as well as a circular walking route via Mosstown and back to Keenagh.



Map 1: Site of Corlea Archaeological and Biodiversity Project

The project is in two parts: 1. Archaeology, 2. Biodiversity.

## 2.1 Archaeology:

The bogs of Longford have been the subject of a number of archaeological surveys and excavations and have proven to be very rich in evidence of human activity since prehistoric times. A number of remarkable wooden trackways dating from the Iron Age have been found including that at Corlea. Other smaller and simpler sites, dating from the Bronze Age to the early medieval period, were also investigated in the vicinity of the Corlea Trackway. These included brushwood pathways and less substantial track ways. Some 25km north west of Corlea in the townland of Edercloon a dense complex of trackways and structures was excavated.

The proposed Corlea archaeological open-air facility will consist of a series of outdoor architectural reconstructions primarily based on archaeological sources including the findings in the Longford Bogs such as those at Corlea and Edercloon. It will present simple copies of archaeological structures and materials to provide an interpretation of how people lived and acted in the past.

Specifically a number of very simple hazel rod huts shall be constructed and roofed with turf sods. A fire place and a number of home made tools and containers shall be provided. In addition very simple trackways and bog platforms will be constructed replicating those found in the area. Additional hazel rods and sods shall be available to allow children to build their own hut.



Pic 4: Typical simple recreated Iron Age homes to be built at Corlea.

Over time these various constructions can be added too, to present in very simple forms the various eras of human settlement in Ireland from the Mesolithic Period, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age through to early medieval times. The aim of the presentations shall be to present the development from simple hunter gathers through to a more sophisticated farming society.



Pic 5: Bog platform and Path.

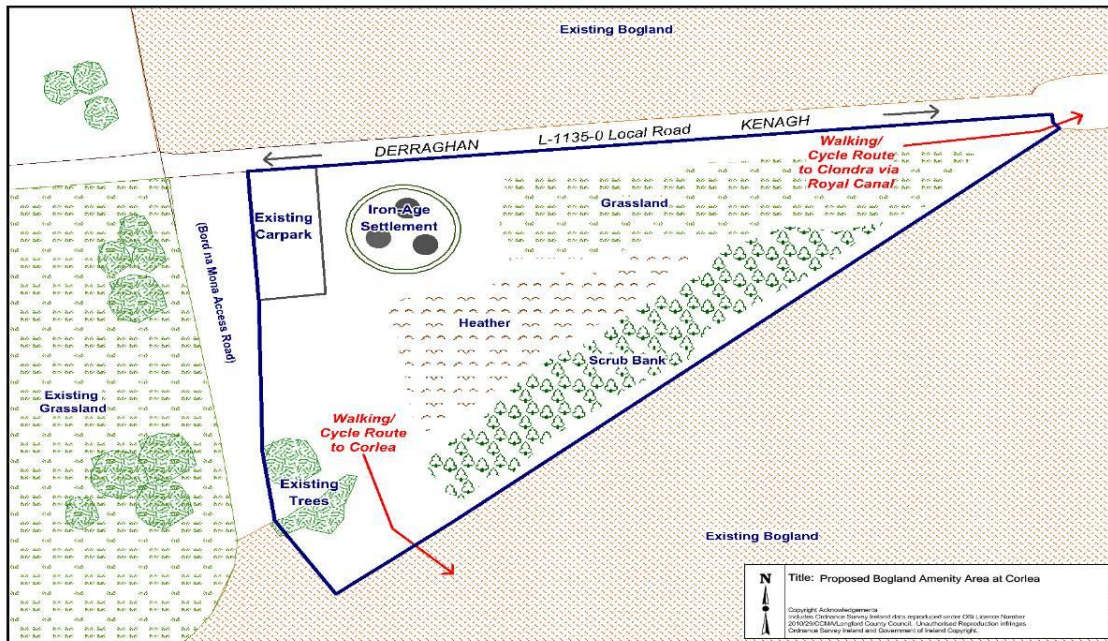


Pic 6: Example of Iron Age life.

As the Iron Age people were also farmers a small area for growing appropriate crops shall be provided. Samples of the type of food eaten shall be presented. This will be accomplished in accordance with general scientific methods for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment of its visitors.

Extensive exhibitions and replica dwellings from various periods in Irish history ranging from Neolithic village, Irish mythology and folklore, early Christian times, can be added to the existing Corlea Centre for presentation purposes. History will truly come to life with the reconstructed homes, utensils, lifelike figures and informative displays.





**Map 2: Layout of Corlea Archaeological and Biodiversity Project.**

## 2.2 Biodiversity

Biodiversity specifically relates to the diversity of habitats, species and genetic diversity of species in the world around us from insects in the soil, to extensive woodlands, to the animals that inhabit them. Since the 1990s, Bord na Móna has adopted a programme of enhancement of biodiversity which has become closely linked to the after-use and rehabilitation of cutaway bogs.

The Corlea proposal follows the Bord na Móna programme in utilizing this proposed portion of cutaway bog to allow for the rehabilitation and re-colonisation of the bog. Re-colonisation of the bogs following peat production leads to establishment of a mosaic of habitats and species, some of which are considered rare and restricted in distribution in Ireland. The Corlea Project shall present the history of the development of the bogs, the rehabilitation programme and the developing biodiversity resource as educational tours to the visiting public.



Pic 7: Typical Bord na Móna rehabilitated and re-colonised Bogs (Photo, left, sourced from <http://www.heartland.ie/exhibition/environment>, photo, right, sourced from <http://www.bordnamona.ie/our-company/biodiversity/projects/>)

The proposed biodiversity trail will tell the story of Irish peatland's past, present and future possibilities. The cutaway bogs around Corlea which have been harvested by Bord na Móna for energy since the 1940s can be established as unique and welcoming habitats for a wide range of flora. The trail will also go through rejuvenating peat land and woodland areas of the Park and cover topics such as peat land formation, woodland ecology, native plants and animals, renewable energy and animal and plant identification.

Vital to enhancing our national biodiversity resource is the wise use and management of cutaway bogs and related lands, and creating awareness of the local, national and regional value of biodiversity of peatlands.



Pic 8: Typical rehabilitated bogs with scrub and rushes (photos sourced from Bord na Móna)

### **2.2.1 Nature conservation and biodiversity corridors**

In recent years Bord na Móna has been attempting to give due care to nature conservation and to retaining biodiversity corridors within their national bog network to sustain important refuges for peatland flora and fauna. This is a key requirement of Article 10 of the Habitats Directive. Rehabilitation of the cutaway bogs generally involves measures to accelerate re-vegetation, through activities such as drain blocking to create wetlands, and other targeted practices such as tree planting.

Rehabilitation allows for the expansion of biodiversity back onto the bogs and the creation of diverse and valuable wildlife reserves. It is envisaged that, overtime, as the cutaway bogs are worked out that they will be properly managed to return to a natural type environment and may form part of a proposed Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.



Pic 9: Re-watered cut away bog by Bord na Móna (photo sourced from [http://www.bordnamona.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/BAP\\_review2012/BNM\\_BAP\\_2012\\_CF\\_lowres.pdf](http://www.bordnamona.ie/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/BAP_review2012/BNM_BAP_2012_CF_lowres.pdf))

### 3. Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

The Corlea Project represents a first step in the development of a future Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. Much of the land involved is in State ownership. Existing natural amenity areas such as Lough Ree, the Shannon, the Royal Canal and the future rehabilitated bogs, all of which are in very close proximity to each other in Longford/Roscommon, can be combined to create the Wilderness Park.



Pic 10: Mid Shannon Wilderness Park from Lough Ree at Athlone looking North.

As Bord na Móna completes its rehabilitation work on the bogs it may be possible for existing local communities, and Longford County Council to take responsibility for the cutaway bogs. This will not conflict with any future intention of Bord na Móna and it's potential future use of the bogs. The amenity use of the Rehabilitated bogs can be compatible with any future use for the bogs such as renewable energy projects.



Map 3 Bord na Móna Bogs.



Map 4: Longford/Roscommon Bogs and Shannon

It is envisaged that overtime as the cutaway bogs are worked out one of the options under consideration by Bord na Mona is that certain bog areas would return to a natural type environment. These natural environment areas could then, in association with Lough Ree and the Shannon, the Royal Canal, and River Inny etc, form part of a proposed Mid Shannon Wilderness Park. The use of the bogs for other purposes such as renewable energy can be achieved in a compatible manner. The large national resource that the Bord na Mona Bogs are can continue to be developed to provide employment and wealth creation opportunities in the national and local interest including for tourism and amenity purposes.

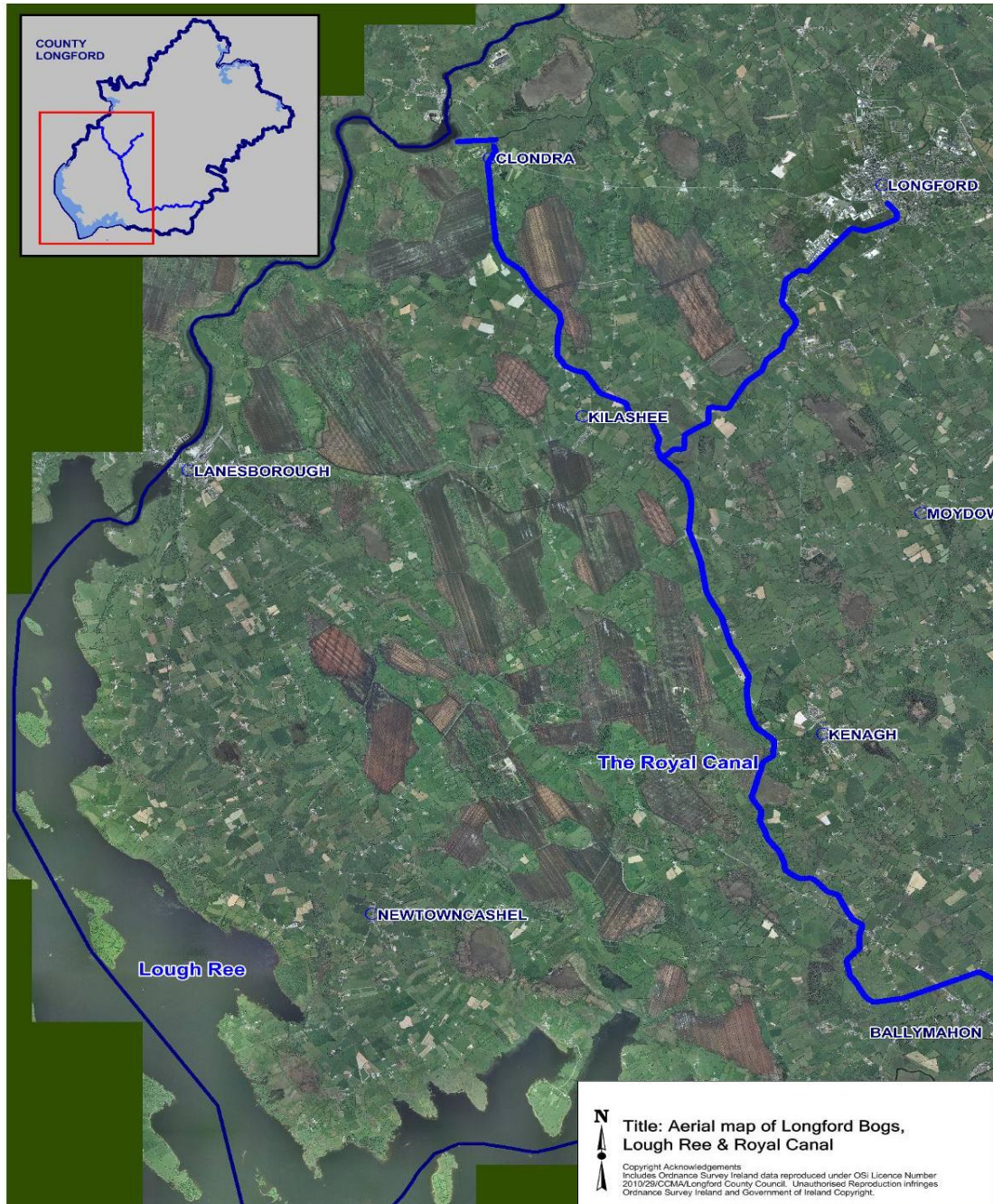
As well as the rehabilitated bogs, rivers and lakes, existing facilities and attractions can be utilized to enhance the attractiveness of the Mid Midlands Park. Facilities such as the Corlea Visitors Centre, the ISPCA Animal Refuge, Commons Mid Park at Lanesboro, Clondra Harbor and Strokestown House etc. already exist and only require a minor amount of refocusing to fit into the broader picture of presenting the Park.

The proposed Corlea Archaeological and Biodiversity Project when added to in time with the Royal Canal Walking/Cycling Route and the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park will provide the various communities and villages of South Longford with a wonderful amenity facilities and infrastructure. It will also encourage visitors to the area especially of the walking and cycling variety. This will help the area to build a more sustainable ecotourism base which will in turn provide economic benefits to the area.



## Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

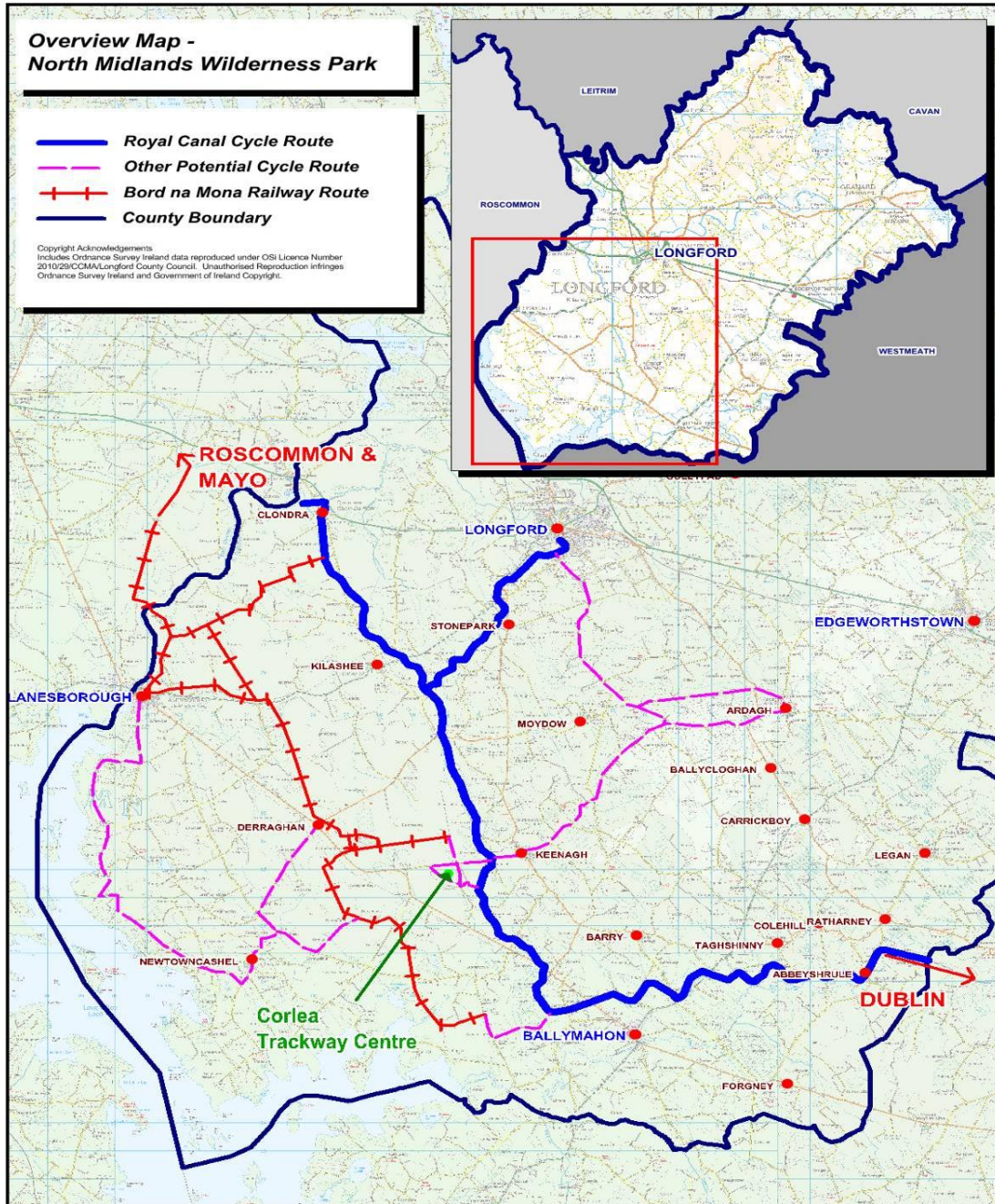
Mid Shannon Wilderness Park including Lough Ree, the Shannon, the Bogs and the Royal Canal.



Map 5: Potential Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

## Mid Shannon Wilderness Park

Walking/cycling network within the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.



Map 6: Potential Walking Cycling Routes in Mid Shannon Wilderness Park.