

# Feedback on the proposed Changes to River valley Park

Version 1.0

Rivervalley  
Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023  
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## Introduction.

Over the last year or so I've been studying various aspects of Rivervalley Park. During that time I've explored a large percentage of the park in detail. My studies of the park continue. I would like to note that this study is not driven by the Fingal County Council plans for that park. However I want to give context to my feedback given the immersive experienced of Park life that I've had. Over that period I've explored many sites and spoke to many people. The park has many layers and I'm only beginning to scratch the surface.

This document is a summary of points i would like to make regarding your plans. I've tried to keep them in the same sections that your proposals. I've added other section of aspects that are not contained in your plans but are significant to the Park ecosystem. It is incomplete.

I've used numbering in case you wish to refer to a point. Each of these points are in summary, I had not planned to reporting my studies at this stage to this report is as detailed as I can make it given the time constraints. As mentioned I'll continue to study so over time I'll be publishing more detail as it becomes available.

Finally I'd like to establish that this information is not for the purpose of creating opposition. It is mealy endeavouring to provide authentic information on the Park. The park gets more amazing as i uncover its layers.

I suggest that this park development takes the form of not an infrastructural project but that of a developing reserve that over time reveals itself. There are so many local people with amazing information about the park. There are many voluntary groups who would take park in the developments.

Thank you for your initiatives and development of this resource, I hope that you consider publishing any adjustments you have made to your design post feedback.



## 2. Old Canal Proposed Restoration

2.0 The canal project is a resurrection of a structure that was there over 300 years ago and has now disappeared.

2.1 The current canal site is a protected structure this would make it difficult and expensive to restore.

2.2 The location of the proposed canal feature is too close to the recreational hub feature, 300 years ago it was in the middle of a field.

2.3 A wild habitat has formed on the site through natural rewilding for over 100 years, this rewilding will be undone.

2.3 The current pond is home to birds, amphibian life, plants and grasses aquatic trees and mosses. The surrounding trees and shrubs and scrub house squirrels, nesting birds, insects, bees and hedgehogs.

2.4 A lot of trees and shrubs will have to be cleared from both the canal area and through the park area to create a line of sight to the round tower.

2.5 The round tower is 1.4 Km (just under a mile) from the proposed view point it is not a good view of the tower.

2.6 The grassland to the west of the site has a soft boggy and is nice for walking.

2.7 The grassland at the west end and the pond at the east end are connected by a marsh / wetland habitat in the middle.

2.8 The grassland is part of the path system enjoyed by walkers and dog walkers.

2.9 The privacy and seclusion of the loop walk offers a peaceful walk to some.

2.10 Large excavation machinery will need to enter and exit the park and presumably use the entrance at river valley community centre, making that section of the park inaccessible for an extended period.

Is the destruction of the current habitat worth it? That's the decision to be made.

There is opportunity here to develop this site and respect the current habitat and the previous ingenious feet of engineering.

## 2.11 Canal research

To give context to the Old Canal proposal, the description and appraisal given by the FCC Architects department in 2015, establishes the who when and where it came from in the first place.

### Description

Previously identified as a medieval fish pond, this is a canal, a remnant of extensive early 18th century landscaping undertaken by Robert Molesworth of Brackenstown House (Protected Structure RPS No.364). The canal survives as a U-shaped depression flanked by parallel banks that extends for 570m. The section to the south is used as a walkway and is defined by well-established trees. The western third within private ownership has been cleared and the banks levelled. The majority of the canal is intact, although water-logged to the east.

### Appraisal

Dating from 1717, the canal basin, banks and walks were part of elaborate gardens and a designed landscape by Italian designer, Alessandro Galilei, for Robert Molesworth owner of Brackenstown House and estate in the early 18th Century. The canal was a central part of the gardens that harnessed water from the Ward River through artificial waterworks. The canal is therefore a surviving element of an ingenious technical feat of 18th Century engineering and design, making the designed landscape at Brackenstown one of the most significant 18th Century landscapes in the country.

<https://consult.fingal.ie/ga/system/files/materials/4389/Bal-Swo%20-%20Building%20Structure%20-%20Prop%20Add.pdf#page=36>

The result of that appraisal was to add the structure as 'Former Canal' to the list of protected structures in the 2017-2023 development plan. It has been retained as such in the 2023-2029 development plan.

**RPS ID/No 0909** Former Canal. Ward River Valley Park, Brackenstown, Swords, Co. Dublin  
Remains of canal that was part of extensive early 18th century designed landscaping of Brackenstown House

[https://www.fingal.ie/sites/default/files/2019-04/2017-2023\\_dev\\_plan\\_record\\_of\\_protected\\_structures.pdf#page=41](https://www.fingal.ie/sites/default/files/2019-04/2017-2023_dev_plan_record_of_protected_structures.pdf#page=41)

<https://www.fingal.ie/sites/default/files/2023-04/Fingal%20Development%20Plan%202023-2029%20-%20-%20APPENDICES%20-%20Interim%20Publication.pdf#page=127>

### Timeline

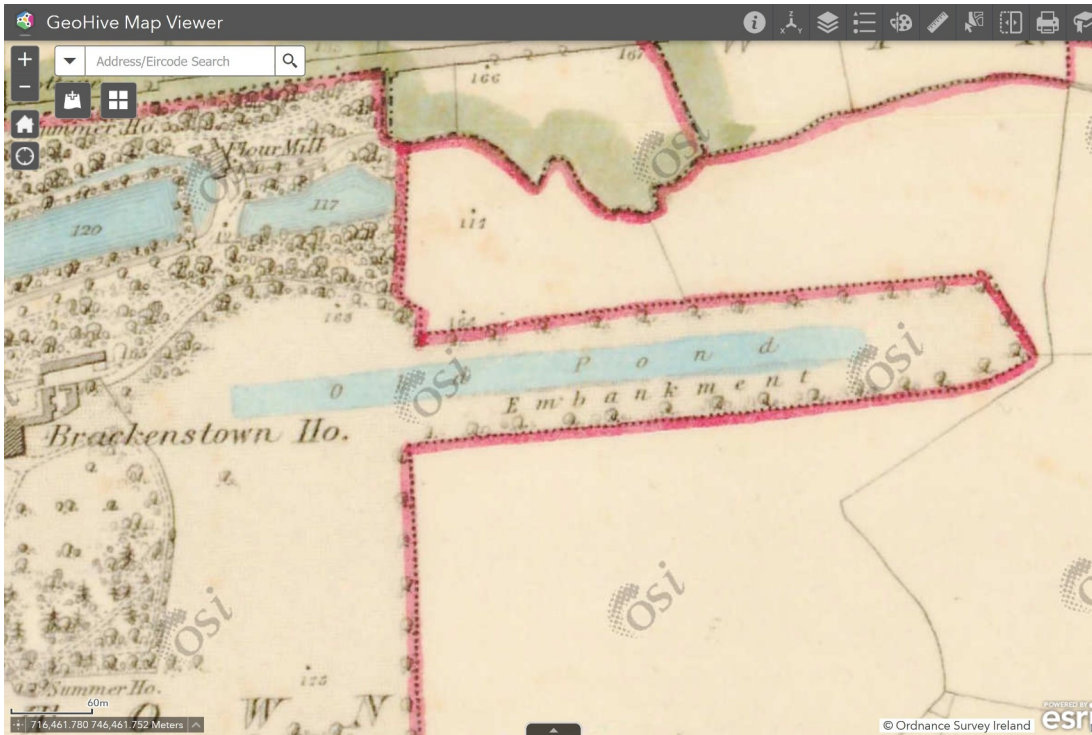
Using historic maps: <https://webapps.geohive.ie/mapviewer/index.html>

Coordinates: 53°27'25.2"N 6°14'49.2"W

1717 Canal is built (~300 years ago)

1837 Canal is labelled 'Old Pond' (~180 years ago)

1908 Canal resembles current 2023 structure (~115 years ago)



**6 Inch Maps Circa 1837**

120 Years after the canal was built, the map from 1837, Labels the Canal labelled as 'Old Pond'  
 This suggests that perhaps the "ingenious technical feat of 18th Century engineering and design" may have already began its neglect and degradation.



**25 Inch Maps Circa 1908**

Around 115 years ago show the map shows the Canal as degraded to something resembling its current shape. The canal is shown as a wet area to the East and a marsh to the West end.

Proposed imprint of canal on current map.



### 3. Routes and paths

The map provided for routes and connections does not have any landmarks so it is very difficult to understand.

3.0 It is also unclear what's new and what's existing in terms of path and bridge infrastructure. For a fundamental part of the project there is very sparse detail.

#### Greenway

3.1 A representative at the swords castle open day said the greenway is a large through way up to 5 metres wide. This seems excessive. The image shows the current 2 metre path and a 5 meter measure.



3.2 After many greenway projects country wide, there is concern for their negative environmental impact in terms of fencing blocking animal movement and the bisecting effect. These should be considered in the design.

<https://www.buzz.ie/news/irish-news/fences-greenways-environmental-impacts-wildlife-29841846>

3.3 There is no need for 2 parallel greenway in the middle section of the park

3.4 The old entrance to brackens town park is not on the plans yet seems like an ideal access point joining up. with existing road infrastructure.

3.5 The old path used by horses across the Iron bridge to the west of Ushers Lake is ideal for greenway from Knocksedan across the valley

3.6 The Route of the greenway seems to be pushing paths through the park for the sake of it rather than making useful through-ways.

3.7 It appears that a well used path on the upper edge of the valley, along the brackenstown house property boundary south of Users lake is no longer on the routes map.

3.8 There are 3 new bridges proposed north of the canal on the valley floor, there is no detail here, are these boardwalk to bridge the marsh areas or new river crossings.

3.9 In total 11 bridges are marked on the map this seems like a lot but it's not clear on whether these are the new / existing.

3.10 Is there any grading of the paths? If the greenway is at the highly accessible initiative then the plan should cater for the existing hikers who prefer more tracks and trail.

3.11 The proposed routes do not have a 'flow' other than NS/EW but park users are loop users.

3.12 The park is very large but there are no toilet facilities on the valley floor, bio/natural facilities like those installed at Ardgillian seem like a good fit.

## 4 Recreational hub

4.0 The proposed recreational hub bridge will interrupt the view through the valley, would cause huge disruption to build, would be very expensive and massive engineering challenge. It's not clear on the benefits.

4.1 It seems like it's purpose is to 'Connect' the current sport areas into a 'Hub' so that the facilities can be shared.

4.2 For the cost of building the bridge it may be possible to duplicate the facilities on the north and south sides.

4.3 There is no play ground on the south side and having children walk from rivervalley to brackenstown to use a playground is unnecessary.

4.4 If the plan proceeds with the assumption that there might be a bridge at some future point then the 'Hub' concept cannot work.

4.5 The destination play area is too far into the valley for young kids and will probably be frequented more by older kids looking for a place to hang out. This conflict in purpose results in social problems like vandalism with is normally solved by 3 meter high fences. It's better to avoid this by design. This scenario has already happened in recent history with the old playground (at the site of the current fitness area) being fenced off and eventually removed due to social problems and lack of use by young kids.

4.6 Suggest keeping the young child play areas nearest the main entrances and the destination area to become somewhere for youth to congregate in a way that is acceptable to all.

4.7 The dog off leash area relocation is unnecessary the greenway can easily flow around the existing. Why is there current upgrades on the existing one and a plan to move it? This points to a lack of joined up thinking.

4.8 Given that the River is the most important feature of a river valley it seems it's missing from any recreation. Local stories say that swimming and playing in the river was a common past time for kids. The Jacko as it was / is known. If kids of the past could use the water for recreation then why not the kids of the present.

4.9 In time the river could become suitable for canoeing or similar activities.

4.10 The river is used for fishing currently on the eastern end of the park with seatrout migrating up.



## 5 Ecology

5.0 The Riparian Ecological Corridor is already there. It's up to this plan not to destroy it. The river is used by birds animals fish plants and humans access to the river for all is important.

5.1 Its very encouraging that the plan includes ideas to filter runoff water entering the river but keep it simple.

5.2 I suggest lessons are learned from the neglect of the water filtering initiative in ushers lake. It's a great idea, the birds like, it but it has received no maintenance.

5.3 Pretty much all of the other projects, paths, greenways, bridges, sport facilities, canal, have negative impacts on the ecology and habitat.

5.4 There seems to be a Plan to remove boulders / rocks fro the river in places of high erosion, the river is highly erosive in spots especially in high flow times. Perhaps adding protection in areas is necessary, inn the form of trees.

5.5 The fungi in the park does not get a mention. It is mentioned in a number of sources that the park houses 1896 the British Mycological Society recordered findings at the park  
[http://sources.nli.ie/Record/PS\\_UR\\_066970](http://sources.nli.ie/Record/PS_UR_066970)  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25521509>

## Points missing from the plan

### **The Mill, ushers lake, and surrounding complex.**

This entire complex is ignored in the plans or at least it seems that way. A representative did say on the open day that 'There ware plans' to restore this area. If there plans for this area then please include them. This is such a significant area.

The area including Ushers Lake, the surrounding paths, the weir, the sluices, the mill ruin, the millrace, the bridges and the confluence point where the millrace rejoins the river is an amazing area however, more importantly the structures are all already there, unlike the canal restoration.

This location is a perfect centerpiece.

It is large enough and impressive enough to be a unique tourist attraction. It is more interesting then the canal itself as it has intricate paths and loop walks and features. There are plenty of stories from grandeur to the Vicount to the flower mill and saw mill that is indicated here

It is also in need of critical care. Fencing it off as has happened now will not stop the erosion.

There are two major bridges already over the river. The stone bridge on the mill side and the Iron bridge on the west side. These were the main thoroughways and are perfect for development.

It's accessible from both sides, it already has in place a road leading up to the roundabout. This road has been completely ignored on the plan however it is one of the original main gates to brackenstown park.

### **Knocksedan bridge and Motte**

The bridge is in need of repair and would make an amazing bookend to the park.

Beside it is the motte which is in total neglect, our ancient past forgotten in our modern plans.