Chapter 3
Assessment of Alternatives

Table of Contents

3. ASSESSMENT OF ALTERNATIVES

3.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1 of this Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), the proposed development is considered to be a public road under Section 50 of the Roads Act 1993 (as amended) and will therefore be assessed under this legislation.

Article 5(d) of the EIA Directive 2011/92/EU (as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU), states that the information provided by the developer shall include "*a description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the developer, which are relevant to the project and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for the option chosen, taking into account the effects of the project on the environment*".

This requirement has been transposed into Irish law by Section 50(2) of the Roads Act, 1993 (as substituted by Regulation 4 of the European Union (Roads Act, 1993) (Environmental Impact Assessment (Amendment)) Regulations, 2019 which require an EIAR to contain "*a description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the Road Authority or the Authority, as the case may be, which are relevant to the proposed road development and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for the option chosen, taking into account the effects of the proposed road development on the environment*".

This chapter outlines the reasonable alternatives considered under the scope of the proposed West Clare Railway Greenway Section 1 project (the 'proposed development' hereafter). Roughan & O'Donovan (ROD) carried out an option selection process, comparing a variety of potential route links and route corridor options, taking into consideration many aspects including the environmental impact, which resulted in a Preferred Route Corridor being identified. A report titled *West Clare Railway Greenway Section 1: Kilrush to Kilkee Feasibility Study & Options Report* was produced in February 2025 and a summary of the process and findings are included herein.

As set out in Chapter 2 of this EIAR, the primary objective is to provide a safe and scenic walking and cycling route between Kilkee and Kilrush, which is substantially segregated from other traffic. In summary, the project aims to enhance connectivity in West Clare, reduce dependency un private vehicle use, reduce road accidents and promote "slow tourism" by developing a 15.2km long 3m wide asphalt-surfaced route which follows closely along the abandoned West Clare Railway corridor. In the future, this development has the potential to connect to other proposed greenway developments in the area, as and when they are progressed, namely West Clare Railway Greenway Sections 2, 3 and 4.

3.1.1 Guidance Documents

The assessment of alternatives has been informed by a range of guidelines and policies, including:

- Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) (July 2022) *Project Manager's Manual for Greenway Projects*;
- TII (February 2024) *TII PAG Unit 13.0 - Appraisal of Active Modes;*
- TII (2021) *Code of Best Practice National and Regional Greenways;*
- Department of Transport (DoT, 2023) *Transport Appraisal Framework;*
- DoT (2022) *Greenways and Cycle Routes Ancillary Infrastructure Guidelines;*
- TII (2022) *Project Manager's Manual for Greenway Projects (PE-PMG-02047);*
- TII (2022) *Rural Cycleway Design (Offline and Greenway) (DN-GEO-03047)*;

- National Transport Authority (NTA) (2023) *Cycle Design Manual;*
- TII (2023) *Guide to the Implementation of Sustainability for TII Projects (GE-GEN-01101);*
- TII (2023) *Environmental Planning of National Road and Greenway Projects (RE-ENV-07008);* and
- TII (2023) *TII Circular Economy Strategy 2023-2025.*

3.1.2 Strategic Assessment Report

In 2020, Clare County Council prepared a Preliminary Strategic Assessment Report (SAR) for the West Clare Railway Greenway. This report provided an overview of the constraints and interfaces which were associated with the development of a greenway along the disused West Clare Railway corridor. The SAR included policy context, a preliminary economic impact assessment, consideration of high-level project options, and physical and environmental constraints along the railway. The Study Area was defined by a buffer around the original railway, to allow for multiple route options to be assessed. A detailed constraints study was undertaken to identify relevant physical and environmental constraints within the Study Area.

3.2 Functional Requirements and Typical Details

3.2.1 Design Standards

The Feasibility and Option Selection Report set out the typical design requirements that any rural sections of the proposed Greenway through agricultural fields and the like should adhere to. The TII standard for Rural Cycleway Design (offline & Greenway), DN-GEO-03047 (2022) sets out design criteria and factors that need to be considered when providing active travel facilities in rural areas, and the following development principles which were considered in the assessment of the alternatives:

- Coherence – the development of a coherent network of cycling infrastructure which links origins and destinations in a logical way, and which is continuous and easy to navigate.
- Convenience – serve main destinations and the provision of proper signage.
- Directness – geographical as well as time elements to be considered.
- Safety – ensure safety for all users including pedestrians and cyclists, in particular at road crossings and entrances.
- Comfort – cycle facilities should meet surface width, quality and gradient standards to be convenient, avoiding complex manoeuvres.
- Attractiveness – complement and, where possible, enhance the area through which it passes.
- Access – be accessible to all types of cycles, including those with panniers and railers as well as trikes and recumbents.

3.2.2 Greenway Width and Cross Section

Where possible, the TII Design Standard requires that a Greenway should provide a 3m wide surfaced track, suitable for use as a two-way facility accommodating up to 300 users an hour. It suggests that this should be widened to 5m in busier sections. The Design Standard recommends the provision of 1m grass verges on either side of the track, however it is noted that this is not always provided due to constraints in corridor width and over existing structures.

The build-up of the greenway pavement typically consists of the following:

- Surface Course, 50mm bituminous macadam
- 150mm Sub-base crushed stone
- 300mm Capping (larger crushed stone) (where necessary on soft ground)
- Geotextile layer (where necessary on soft ground)

In line with TII's Rural Cycleway Design (Offline and Greenway) guidance document, the greenway will have a machine laid closed pavement construction, with the sub-base and surface preferably laid using a paver.

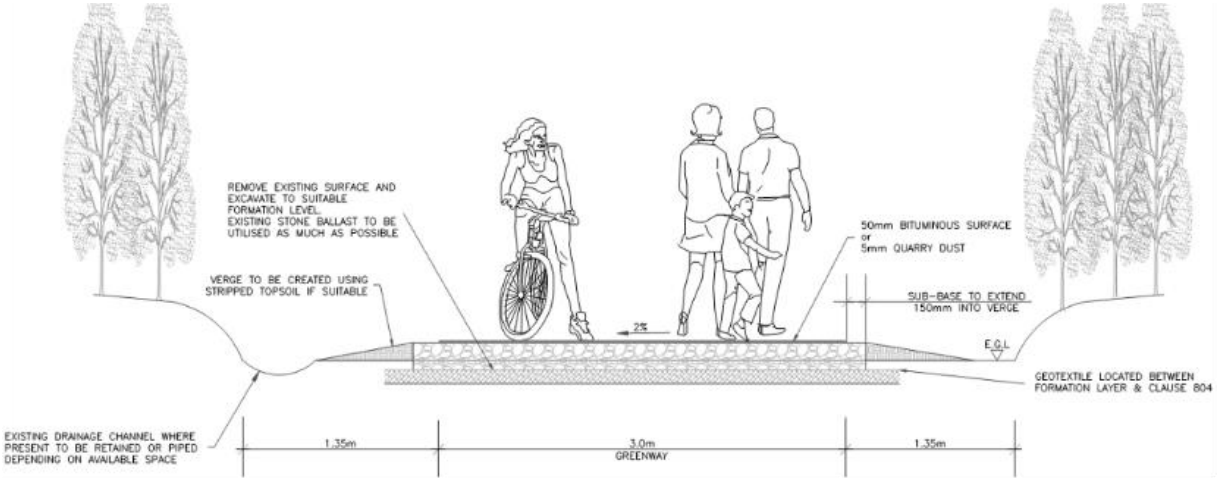

Plate 3-1 Desirable Greenway Cross Section

3.2.3 Other Design Considerations

The Feasibility and Option Selection Report also set out the requirements for any greenway solution with regards to access, animal-proof fencing, road crossings, signage and information, drainage and flood risk, bridges, structures and ancillary infrastructure that should be considered throughout the option selection phase.

3.3 Study Area

Considering the overall objective of the project is to deliver a greenway that follows the route of the former West Clare Railway, a study area was developed by examining an area approximately 1km either side of the former railway corridor to accommodate possible alternative routes to the original rail corridor while following the general direction of same. The Shannon Estuary and Poulnasherry Bay form the southern boundary of the Study Area, while the N67 generally forms a natural barrier to the north, since it would be both challenging and undesirable to have multiple crossings of the national secondary route over such a short distance.

This area was then reviewed to ensure that any towns, villages, tourist attractions, amenities etc. within the immediate vicinity of the study area, which provided opportunities to achieve the 5 S objectives (as outlined in the *Strategy for Future Development of National and Regional Greenways 2018*) were included where feasible, whilst avoiding any major physical and environmental constraints present.

These 5 S objectives include areas that are:

1) Strategic,
2) Scenic,

3) Sustainable,
4) Substantially segregated & shared use, and
5) Offer lots to See and do.

The general principle used to define the study area was that it must be large enough to include all feasible route options. The study area was developed as shown in Plate 3-2 below (Figure 3.1 in Volume 3 of this EIAR), and is bounded by the existing N67 to the north and north, and the coastline along the Shannon Estuary to the south. It encompasses Kilkee at the western extremity and Kilrush at its eastern extremity. The southwestern boundary closely follows the route of the former railway line south of Poulnasherry Bay, and nearby local roads adjacent to the original line of the West Clare Railway.

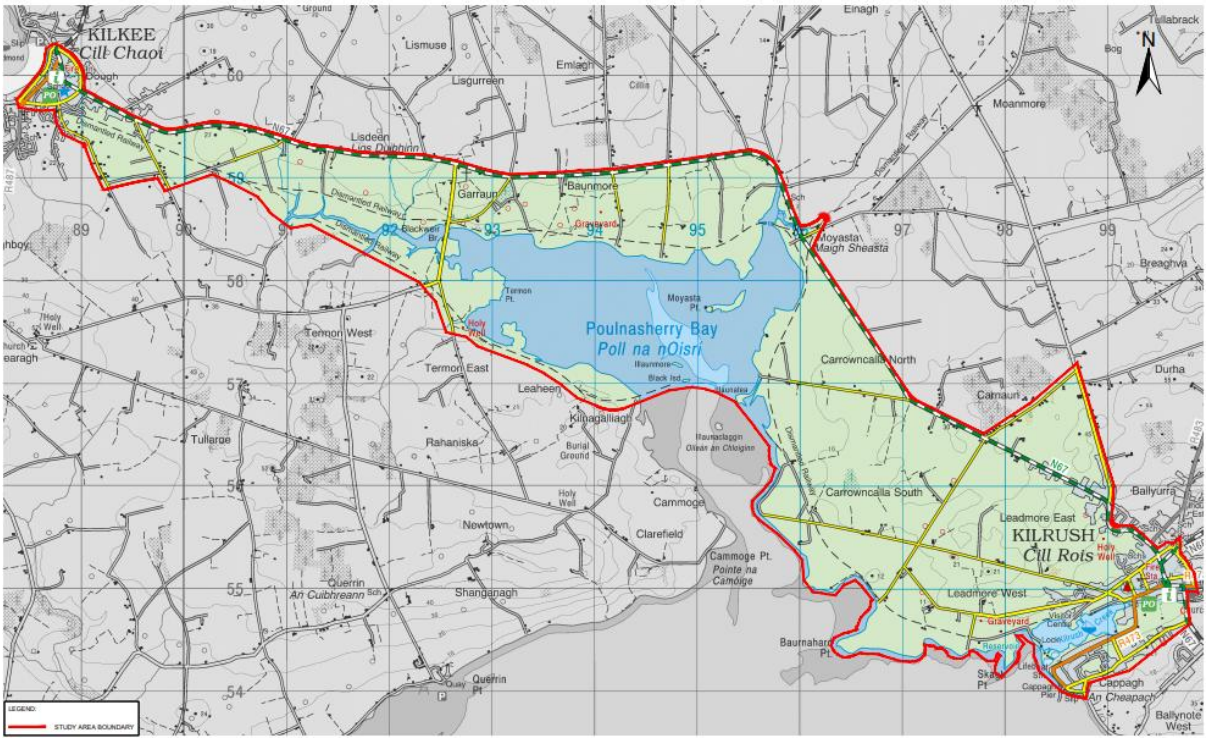

Plate 3-2 West Clare Railway Greenway Options Selection Study Area

3.4 Existing Constraints and Opportunities

A constraints and opportunities study was undertaken for the proposed West Clare Railway Greenway Section 1: Kilrush to Kilkee, which assessed both Environmental and Physical Constraints.

Environmental Constraints and Opportunities were assessed under the following headings:

- Population and Human Health
- Biodiversity
- Soils and Geology
- Hydrology
- Hydrogeology
- Landscape and Visual
- Noise and Vibration
- Air Quality

- Climate
- Archaeology, Architecture and Cultural Heritage
- Material Assets and Land – Agriculture

A summary of the main constraints and opportunities identified for each of the environmental headings are provided in the following sub-sections.

3.4.1 Population and Human Health

There are three settlements within the study area- Kilkee, Moyasta and Kilrush. Kilkee is a popular seaside resort, and the largest town on County Clare's coast. The town is the gateway to the Loop Head Peninsula. The village of Moyasta is a small settlement in between the two towns, located near Poulnasherry Bay. A number of local amenities are present including a National School, a local pub and the West Clare Railway Heritage Museum. Kilrush is located at the mouth of the River Shannon on the Wild Atlantic Way. It is the regional market town and is one of 15 designated Heritage Towns in Ireland.

Population

According to the 2016 Central Statistics Office (CSO) Census, Co. Clare had a total population of 118,817 people, comprising 58,785 males and 60,032 women. According to the 2022 CSO Census data, the population for Co. Clare increased by 7.68% between 2016 and 2022, as shown in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1 Population Change between the 2016 and 2022 period (CSO Census Results, 2016 and 2022)

Region	2016 Population	2022 Population	Population Change	Population Change
State	4,761,865	5,149,139	387,274	8.13%
County Clare	118,817	127,938	9,121	7.68%

The Southeast Regional Spatial and Economy Strategy (RSES), which has been adopted by the Southern Regional Assembly, states that Co. Clare is predicted to experience a rise in population based on demographic population predictions, which indicate that Clare will likely have a population of 129,500 - 131,500 persons by 2026 and 134,000 - 137,000 by 2031.

The study area is comprised of 6 Electoral Divisions (EDs), all of which encompass the proposed development's Study Area as shown in Figure 3.2 of Volume 3 of this EIAR. According to the Census (2022) there is a population of 5,522 within the Electoral Divisions overlapped by the study area.

Age Profile

The proposed greenway would be an amenity and recreational resource for people of all ages. The age profile was determined by analysing Census 2022 data for the 6 EDs that overlap with the study area. A considerable portion of the study area population is classed as vulnerable, i.e. young children and elderly adults, as shown in Table 3-2.

Table 3-2 Age Profile (CSO Census Results, 2022)

Region	Age Groups by % of the Population				
	0-14	15-24	25-44	45-64	65 +
State	19.7%	12.5%	27.6%	25.1%	15.1%
County Clare	19.5%	12.4%	24%	27.1%	16.9%
Study Area EDs	17.2%	10.3%	21.7%	27.1%	23.6%

Principal Economic Status

The economic status of the population residing in the study area was determined using CSO Census 2022 data. The figures show that 43.1% of individuals within the study area EDs are 'at work,' slightly lower when compared to the county average and national averages. This is to be expected with a significant percentage of the population within the study area EDs classed as retired (24.4%).

Table 3-3 Economic Status of Persons aged 15 and over (Census, 2022)

Region	Economic Status							
	At work	Looking for first job	Unemployed having lost or given up previous job	Student	Looking after home / family	Retired	Unable to work due to sickness or disability	Other
State	56.1%	0.8%	4.3%	11.1%	6.6%	15.9%	4.6%	0.7%
County Clare	54.5%	0.8%	4%	11.4%	6.4%	17.8%	4.3%	0.7%
Study Area	43.1%	1.4%	6.7%	7.4%	7.5%	24.4%	8.6%	1%

Housing

According to Census 2022, there are 4,104 dwelling units within the study area EDs. 54.6% are occupied dwellings, while 1% are temporarily absent, 34.8% are unoccupied holiday homes. The remaining 9.6% are other vacant dwellings.

Table 3-4 Occupancy status of permanent dwellings Within the Study Area EDs (Census, 2022)

Occupancy	Study Area Average
Occupied	54.6%
Temporarily absent	1%
Unoccupied holiday homes	34.8%
Other vacant dwellings	9.6%

Travel to Work, School, or College

The travel patterns of the population to work, school, and college within the study area EDs were compared to State and Co. Clare travel patterns.

The percentage of people who commute by foot is higher than the county and state average. The percentage of the population who use a bicycle in the study area is comparable with the county average but lower than the state average, while those who use private vehicles is slightly lower than the county average but comparable to the state average. It is noted that "Not Stated" is ~50% higher than the County and State averages.

Table 3-5 Travel to Work, School or College of Population aged 5 years and over (Census, 2022)

Region	Modes of Commuting					
	On Foot	Bicycle	Public Transport (Bus and Rail)	Private Vehicle	Do not Commute (work mainly at or from home)	Not Stated
State	16.6%	3.5%	14.9%	45.6%	9.7%	9.7%
County Clare	13.1%	1.5%	8.4%	57.3%	9.6%	10.1%
Study Area	22.4%	1.4%	3.7%	49.6%	8%	15%

Human Health Profile

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines human health as "*a state of complete physical,* mental *and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity".*

According to the 2022 Census, 72.7% of the population in the study area EDs reported having "good/very good" overall health, while 14.4% reported having 'fair' overall health. 3.2% of persons reported having poor or very bad health and 9.7% did not state, as indicated in Table 3-6. The number of respondents in the study area EDs that declared 'fair' and poor or very bad health is slightly higher when compared to the state and county averages.

Table 3-6 General Health Status of Population (Census, 2022)

Region	General Health			
	Very Good / Good	Fair	Very Bad / Bad	Not Stated
State	82.9%	8.6%	1.7%	6.7%
County Clare	82.6%	9%	1.8%	6.6%
Study area	72.7%	14.4%	3.2%	9.7%

Health statistics displayed in Plate 3-3 below illustrate County Clare's highest mortality rate per 100,000 for the four primary causes of death from 2007 to 2012 for all age categories in comparison to Ireland, indicating that the highest incidence of fatalities are due to heart disease and stroke followed by cancer, respiratory disease, and injury or poisoning.

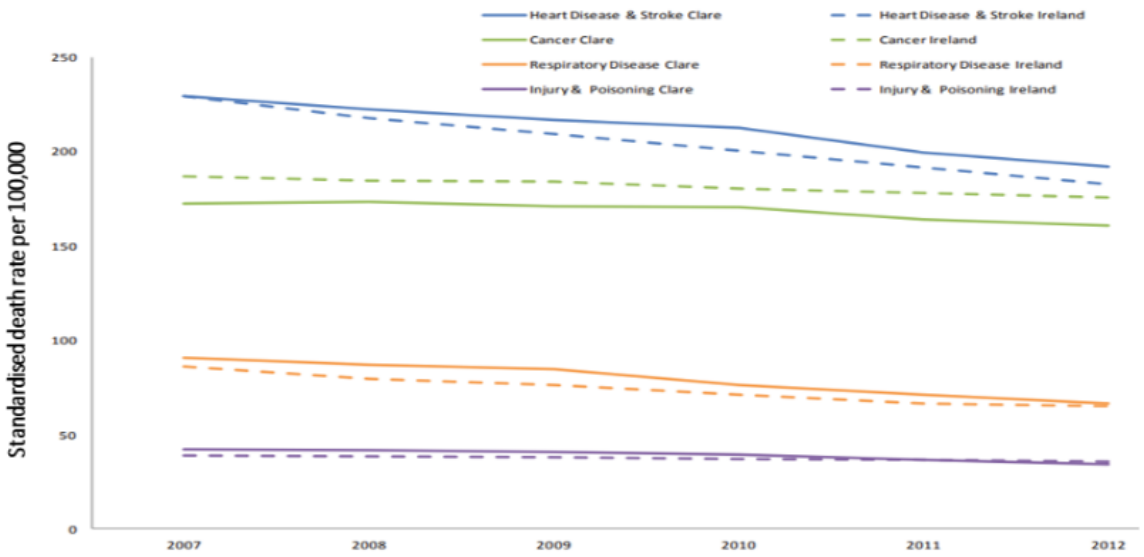

Plate 3-3 **Death rate per 100,000 in Co. Clare for the four principal causes of deaths of all ages over the 2007 – 2012 period. Source: Lenus, (2015)**

Bathing Areas

Cappagh Pier in Kilrush and Kilkee Beach are the closest designated bathing area to the proposed greenway (EPA Maps). The water quality of Kilkee Beach was classified as having "Excellent" water quality in 2023, while Cappagh Pier in Kilrush was classified as having "Good" Water Quality according to the EPA *Bathing Water Quality in Ireland A Report for the Year* (EPA, *2023)*.

Local Amenities

There are many local amenities present within the study area, in particular within the towns of Kilrush and Kilkee. A number of schools and churches are located within the towns, in addition to sports grounds and other services such as Post Offices and Pharmacies as set out in Table 3-7 below.

Table 3-7 Local Amenities Present in Study Area

Type	Name	Townland
Schools	St. Senan's Primary	Drimna
	Gaelscoil Ui Choimin	Drimna
	Labasheeda Central National School	Kilrush
	Moyasta National School	Moyasta
	Scoil Realt na Mara	Dough
	St. Joseph's Community College	Dough
Churches	St. Senan's Church	Kilrush
	St. Flannan's Catholic Church	Garraun
	Church of Immaculate Conception and St. Senan	Dough
Post Offices	An Post Kilrush	Kilrush
	An Post Kilkee	Dough
Sports Grounds	St. Senans G.A.A.	Kilrush

Type	Name	Townland
	Kilkee SubAqua Club	Dough
Pharmacies	Duffy's Kilrush Pharmacy and Opticians	Kilrus
	Malone's Totalhealth Pharmacy	Kilrush
	The Central Pharmacy	Kilrush
	Williams Pharmacy	Dough
	Hurst Pharmacy	Dough

Tourist Attractions

There is a wide range of existing tourist attractions within the study area and its surrounding areas. The attractions provide access to a range of cultural heritage sites, natural historical landscapes and other facilities, as well as active domestic and foreign tourism activities including walking and cycling routes. Tourist facilities in Kilkee include Kilkee Waterworld, Kilkee Golf Club and the Oceanlife Dive Centre. Tourist attractions in Kilrush include the Vandeleur Walled Garden, the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Centre, West Coast Aqua Park, Eco-Sea Safari, Kilrush Golf Club, and the Museum of Irish Rural Life. The West Clare Railway Heritage Museum is located in Moyasta at the location of the former Moyasta junction of the Ennis to Kilrush Railway and the Moyasta to Kilkee spur. A variety of natural attractions also attract visitors to the area, including a number of walking trails and beaches.

3.4.2 Biodiversity

The constraints and opportunities assessment in relation to Biodiversity identified designated sites within the study area and a further 1km buffer zone around the study area, to address the potential for ex-situ impacts. Including the 1km buffer zone, there are 3 no. SACs, 1 no. SPA, and 3 no. pNHAs identified within this area, as shown in Table 3-8. There are no NHAs, Nature Reserves, National Parks or Ramsar sites within the area.

Table 3-8 EU Designated Sites within the Study Area

SAC	SPA	pNHA
Lower River Shannon SAC	River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA	Poulnasherry Bay pNHA
Kilkee Reefs SAC	-	Tullaher Lough and Bog pNHA
Tullaher Lough and Bog SAC	-	Farrihy Lough pNHA

Desk studies and field surveys were undertaken to identify the habitats present in the study area and the predominant habitat types were found to be improved agricultural grassland (GA1) and wet grassland (GS4).

A number of habitats within the study area are classed as Annex I habitats under the Habitats Directive. The following Annex I habitats were identified as being present within the study area:

- Mudflats and Sandflats not covered by seawater at low tide [1140]
- Large shallow inlets and bays [1160]
- Reefs [1170]
- Salicornia and other annuals colonising mud and sand [1310]
- Atlantic salt meadows (*Glauco-Puccinellietalia maritimae*) [1330]

- Mediterranean salt meadows (*Juncetalia maritimi*) [1410]
- Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and
- *Callitricho-Batrachion* vegetation [3260]

The proposed greenway has the potential to have an impact on water quality inside the study area due to its proximity to Poulnasherry Bay. The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) online map viewer indicates that the Termore East River and its Rahaniska tributary, the Tullaroe river and its three tributaries including Termon West, the Lisluinaghan river and its two tributaries including Lisdeen, the Garraun river and its Baunmore tributary, and the Lismuse river and its two tributaries, Emlagh and Moyasta, flow into Poulnasherry Bay in the centre of the study area. Additionally, the Moyasta river and its six tributaries, including Einagh, Moanmore South, Ballykett and Gowerhass, flow into Poulnasherry Bay to the north of the study area. The Wood River and its seven tributaries, including Parknamoney, Ballynacurtaun, Kilcarroll, Moyadda Beg and Knockerry East also flow into Poulnasherry Bay. The Dough River and its two tributaries, and the Kilkee Upper River and its two tributaries, Kilkee Lower and Kilfearagh, flow into Moore Bay to the north-west of the study area. The study area encompasses parts of the Shannon Estuary North catchment (Code: 27), Mal Bay catchment (Code: 28), and the sub-catchments of Doonah SC 010, Wood SC 010 and Doonbeg SC 010.

The Termon East 010 and Moyasta 010 series of rivers were classified as 'Good' river quality based on The River Waterbody WFD 2013-2018, whereas the Kilkee Lower 010 series of rivers were classified as having 'Poor' river quality. The EPA Q-rating classifies the water quality of the Moyasta rivers as 'Good' (Q3-4), at a station on the eastern boundary of the study area (Station Code: RS27M040900), and as 'Poor' (Q3), at a station on the south-eastern boundary of the CSA (Station Code: RS27M040700). The Shannon Plume in the west of the study area is classified as having a 'High' status under the Coastal Waterbody WFD Status 2013-2018, and the Mouth of the Shannon in the east of the study area is classified as having a 'Good' status. The Kilrush groundwater body (IE SH G 123), is classified as 'Good' under the Ground Waterbody WFD Status 2013-2018. The aquifer within the study area is classified as a 'Locally Important Aquifer' by the Geological Survey Ireland (GSI).

A number of species of importance, as outlined by the Habitats Directive and Birds Directive, been identified within the Constraints Study Area. The following conclusions were drawn regarding the potential impact of the proposed development upon these species:

- **Bats** – Multiple suitable habitats for bats have been identified within the study area, however loss of roosts is unlikely due to the lack of mature trees in the area at present.
- **Otter** – Otter was recorded in the study area during the field surveys and has the potential be disturbed by the introduction of people and dogs to the area.
- **Marine Mammals** – Records of 16 marine mammal species in the 10km^2 squares that intersect with the study area. It is considered unlikely that the proposed development would affect cetaceans.
- **Fish** – The River Shannon and other rivers and streams within the CSA support fish including lamprey species and Atlantic Salmon. The proposed development has the potential to impact fish directly by habitat loss, habitat degradation and habitat fragmentation, and indirectly through water quality impacts.
- **Invertebrates** – The closest location of Freshwater Pearl Mussel is in the Cloon River. This river enters the Shannon estuary approximately 15km east of Kilrush. Given the location of the Cloon River relative to the proposed development, and the assimilative capacity of the Shannon Estuary, it is considered that there is no risk to this species. There are records of Marsh Fritillary (Euphydryas aurinia) and Narrow-mouthed Whorl Snail (Vertigo angustior), which are listed on Annex II of the Habitats Directive, within

the 10km grid squared that intersects the study area. The project has the potential to impact these species directly by direct loss of individuals, habitat loss, habitat degradation, habitat fragmentation, disturbance, and indirectly through water quality impacts.

- **Badgers** – The proposed development has the potential to temporarily impact badger populations recorded in the area during the construction phase. National guidelines apply for mitigating impacts for this species and reference to these guidelines should be made in this regard.
- **Birds** – Birds may be vulnerable to visual and noise disturbance during the construction and operational phases of the proposed development. 24 of the 91 bird species recorded in the CSA were listed in Annex I of the Birds Directive. 17 of the 91 species were listed on the BoCCI4 Red List, and 69 species were listed on the BoCCI4 Amber List. Based on surveys undertaken to date, the key area for waterbird activity within the CSA was identified as Poulnasherry Bay, following the coast from Carrowncalla, through Moyasta, to Garraun. This area had the highest level of waterbird activity in terms of abundance, frequency of occurrence and diversity, however it is noted that most of this activity is some distance offshore. Nationally important populations of grey plover, pintail, wigeon, dunlin and shelduck were recorded in this area. Other areas of significance to waterfowl include Kilkee Beach, Blackweir river mouth and Kilrush Marina. Generally, there was a low density of waterbirds in inland areas. The highest activity was in farmland fields running down to the shore at Carrowncalla South, farmland fields adjacent to the river channel in Moyasta village, on Ferry Road near Moyasta village, and in fields north of the river channel in Lisdeen East. Regionally important numbers of curlew, lapwing, mallard, snipe, redshank, brent goose, little egret and teal were recorded.
- **Other Species** – Other notable species that would likely utilise the area include Hedgehog, Pine Marten, Pygmy Shrew, Red Fox, Irish Hare, Irish Stoat, Common Frog, Smooth Newt and Common Lizard. Any proposed works at drainage ditches should ideally be undertaken outside the frog spawning season (between January-June) to reduce the risk of impacts on these species. Where works are deemed necessary within this period, a frog survey will be required to inform potential mitigation works and a licence from NPWS may be required prior to undertaking any translocation of spawn, tadpoles or immature frogs.
- **Protected Flora** – One plant species, Large white-moss (*Leucobryum glaucum*), listed on Annex V of the Habitats Directive, was recorded in the 10km^2 grid square intersecting the Constraints Study Area. Large white-moss is found on peatland and woodlands, and therefore impacts on populations of this species are unlikely, since this section of the former railway generally avoided these areas. No plants listed on the Flora (Protection) Order 2022 have been recorded.

A number of invasive plant species were recorded during field surveys. Consideration shall be given to avoiding any stands where possible and the relevant management guidelines shall be consulted if avoidance is not possible.

3.4.3 Soil and Geology

Based on the Geological Survey of Ireland's (GSI's) geological online mapping, the bedrock in the study area from Kilrush and west towards Moyasta is part of the Gull Island Formation, while the area of Kilkee and northwest of Kilkee is underlain by the Central Clare Group. The Gull Island Formation is described as grey siltstone with up to 20% sandstones at the base of the succession. The Central Clare Group comprises sandstones, siltstone and mudstone. The geology of the study area is predominantly fluvio-deltaic and turbiditic and comprises shale, sandstone and coal of the late Palaeozoic era.

According to Teagasc Soil Maps, the area north of the Shannon Estuary is included in the Kilrush soil association, comprised of fine loamy drift with siliceous stones and areas of fine loam over shale bedrock. Peat is located in the east of the study area, southeast of Kilrush and in the west on the periphery of Kilkee areas. Additional peat areas are also located north of the N67 between Kilkee and Moyasta, and along Poulnasherry Bay at Moyasta. A localised area of Ashgrove is identified near Kilrush, described as fine loamy drift with siliceous stones. Tidal marsh is found predominantly in the northwest part of the Shannon Estuary North Bay. Estuarine silts and clays are present in Moyasta and around Poulnasherry Bay, and a small area of Alluvium is located west of Kilrush town. Within the area of Kilkee and Kilrush, the soils and subsoils are urban and can be classified as 'made'.

The study area includes the northernmost section of the Loop Head peninsula, close to Kilkee, which comprises poorly drained soils such as Kilrush and Tullig. The study area is underlain by Fluvio-deltaic and basinal marine shale, sandstone, siltstone and coal of Palaeozoic, Carboniferous, Pennsylvanian age. In terms of Quaternary Sediments, the area predominantly comprises till derived from Namurian sandstones and shales, and is interspersed by blanket peat, particularly around Kilkee and Moyasta. Areas of Bedrock outcrop or sub crops are scattered within the study area, predominantly near Kilrush, Poulnasherry Bay and west of Moyasta.

Overall, the study area exhibits Low landslide susceptibility, with the exception of a very small area near Kilrush having a Moderately High susceptibility. There are no records of geological heritage areas within the study area.

3.4.4 Hydrology & Hydrogeology

Hydrology

The baseline conditions of the study area of the proposed development site were established during a desk study. The study area lies within the Shannon Estuary North Catchment (HA 27) and crosses 2 no. sub catchments: Wood_SC_010 and Doonah_SC_010. The following surface water bodies are identified within the study area for the project:

- Kilkee_Lower_010 River
- Termon East_010 River
- Moyasta_010 River
- Wood_010 River
- Wood_020 River
- Mouth of the Shannon Coastal Waterbody

There were no Q Values available from the EPA for Kilkee_Lower_010, Termon East_010 and Mouth of the Shannon Coastal Waterbody. The Q values of Moyasta_010 are classified as 'Bad', while Wood_010 and Wood_020 are classified as 'Good' and 'Moderate' respectively.

Within the Wood_SC_010 subcatchment, two river waterbodies (Wood_010 and Wood_020) out of the four river waterbodies within this subcatchment were classified as being 'At Risk' in terms of the WFD Risk 3rd Cycle. The remaining two waterbodies, Moyasta_010 and Termon East_010 were classed as under 'Review'. Forestry, a golf course and runoff from the Moyasta urban area were noted as resulting in heavy siltation and excess nutrients in Wood_020 surface waterbody. The river waterbody in Kilkee town had an 'Unassigned' status in relation to the 2013-2018 WFD.

The study area from the Mouth of the Shannon (Has23;27) to the east of Blackweir Bridge extending to the Poulnasherry Bay was designated as shellfish area named as West Shannon Poulnasherry Bay (IE_SH_060_0000). There were two WFD Bathing Water (Kilkee and

Cappagh Pier, Kilrush) locations identified adjacent to the study area. Both bathing waters were classified as having achieved Excellent Water Quality in 2020, and for the four consecutive years 2017-2020 (WFD, 2021). However, Cappagh was designated "Good" for Water Quality in 2023 as identified in Section 3.4.1 above ((EPA, *2023)*.

The study area crosses the River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA, and the Lower River Shannon SAC. Both of these areas contain Water Dependent habitats and species. An EPA licensed discharge facility was identified 200m west of the Mouth of the Shannon coastal waterbody, within the study area. No drinking water rivers were noted within the study area.

The areas of Kilrush and Kilkee were noted as being liable to flood from coastal/estuarine waters. Recurring flooding at Cappagh Road is caused by tidal waters and occurs on average every 2-3 years. Recurring flooding in Kilkee is caused by overflowing of the Victoria Stream that flows in an easterly direction north of the R487 in Kilkee town, due to heavy rainfall/runoff in combination with high tides. The flooding in that area occurs on average once every year. Recorded flood events also occurred around north of Kilkee and in the southern part of Kilrush town, according to OPW flood map. The area along the Moyasta_010 river waterbody, including around Moyasta village, was classified as having medium probability of river flooding. Additionally, areas in Kilkee along Kilkee_Lower_010 river and in Kilrush, near Kilrush Marina and along Wood_020 river, were classified as having high probability of river and coastal flooding. A separate flood alleviation project in Kilkee received planning permission from An Coimisiún Pleanála in August 2025 which includes a series of flood defences situated within the catchments of both the Victoria, Well & Atlantic Streams, the three sources of fluvial flooding in the town.

Hydrogeology

The bedrock underlying the study area is a Locally Important Aquifer – Bedrock which is Moderately Productive only in Local Zones. There were no public water supplies in the study area however there are wells and boreholes used for agricultural and domestic use.

The estimated average groundwater recharge rates were found to range from 1 – 200 mm/yr with the areas of low recharge rate concentrated around both Moyasta and Kilkee where high levels of Peat are present. It is likely that the water dependent ecological habitats, the Lower River Shannon SAC and the River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA are groundwater fed. The Kilrush Groundwater Body comprises Naumarian sandstones and shales. The thickness of subsoil in the area ranges from 1m to over 20m and is thickest around Poulnasherry Bay, generally decreasing eastwards. The study area is underlain by the Kilrush Groundwater Body (IE_SH_G_123), which is predominantly characterised as comprising poorly productive bedrock. Within the study area, the catchment groundwater WFD 3rd Risk Cycle was found to be classified as 'Not at Risk'.

Groundwater vulnerability is predominantly moderate to low in the area around Poulnasherry Bay and west towards Kilkee, with small areas of Rock at or near surface. Some areas of Extreme and High Vulnerability are present in the east of the study area, particularly around Kilrush. There is a risk of contamination of surface and groundwater during the construction phase, however the low permeability of soils in the area means the potential for contamination in the underlying aquifer is low.

3.4.5 Landscape & Visual Amenity

The landscape of the study area is predominantly flat and is influenced by the nearby Poulnasherry Bay and surrounding rivers. The majority of the Study Area is within the coast which is identified as a 'heritage landscape' through the Landscape Character Assessment for County Clare, which was included in the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029. This designated the area as one where natural and cultural heritage are prioritised over

development. There are no scenic routes (or protected views) in the study area. A small section of the study area was found to be designated as a settled landscape, around Kilkee.

The majority of the study area falls into category 21 of the Landscape Character Assessments (LCAs), meaning it has the characteristics, pressures and opportunities of the Loop Head LCA. A small section in the southeast portion of the study area, by Kilrush, is categorised by the Shannon Estuary Farmland LCA (LCA 18).

LCA 21 Relevant characteristics include:

- Expansive and remote character
- Flat peninsular farmland – very distinctive ladder fields, estuaries, salt marsh and mudflats, sand and boulder coves, shelving, coastal rocks, vertical cliffs.
- Settlement concentrated along the southern peninsula
- CDP is also supportive of the further development and enhancement of Loop Head and the Kilkee area as a tourist destination, referring to cycling and niche tourism.

LCA 18 Relevant characteristics include:

- Views across the Shannon Estuary
- Flat coastal fringe sloping towards the sea
- Kilrush area has a high proportion of holiday home development.

The main connector between Kilrush and Kilkee is the N67 national secondary road, which passes through the village of Moyasta. Local roads connect this road with the coast. The topography of the area varies mainly between sea level and 10m, sloping gently towards the sea with some hills over 20m OD north and west of Kilrush. The N67 road is at slightly higher elevation than the coastal area. The disused railway follows a level gradient, at a slightly lower elevation in sections around Poulnasherry Bay.

Land Uses within the study area were identified as primarily agricultural, with much of the old railway corridor occupied by farmland, and some scattered dwellings. Other land uses were found to include transportation – having been subsumed as both National and Local roads, as well as roads in urban areas. A higher concentration of dwellings was identified along the N67 and along the approach roads to Kilrush and Kilkee, while settlement in areas such as the south of Kilkee is more scattered.

A number of watercourses are present in the study area, with streams entering Poulnasherry Bay from Moyasta and also the western shore. Several areas of mudflats and saltmarshes are also present. Beyond the urban areas of Kilrush and Kilkee, which include existing roads in the study area, the main landcover is agricultural pastureland, with areas of saltmarsh, marginal and wetland along Poulnasherry Bay. The disused railway is paved in some areas. The centre of Poulnasherry Bay is noted as 'Intertidal Flats'.

Landscape Values and Character, Opportunities and Constraints

A description of the landscape value and landscape and visual character, the opportunities and constraints relating to the three character areas within the study area listed below was provided, which is summarised below:

N67 Route Corridor and Local Roads:

- Overall, the N67 corridor is considered of Low landscape value with certain exceptions at Moyasta and on local roads closer to Kilrush.
- Few distinctive landscape elements in this section apart from the railway infrastructure at Moyasta.

- The N67 corridor is along the north and eastern boundary of the Heritage landscape.
- Overall limited opportunities – busy road corridor between the outskirts of Kilkee and Moyasta to Carrowncalla with houses scattered along route.
- Scenic views generally restricted along the N67 and few scenic qualities.
- Relatively narrow road corridor with no verge outside of the main towns.
- Local roads on approach to Kilrush have pleasant rural character which may change depending on design of proposed Greenway design (whether it is a doubling of road width or a separate parallel track within the fields, but with hedgerows retained).

The Former Railway line along Poulnasherry Bay and local roads:

- Located within a Heritage Landscape, the character of which is influenced by the proximity to Poulnasherry Bay and the natural heritage features including the salt marshes and intertidal flats and coastal views.
- The railway line, where it remains, is a relatively level surface which traverses a tranquil landscape close to the shoreline.
- This part of the study area is more remote and tranquil, passing through mainly agricultural lands, adjacent to the shore, and along narrow and quiet roads, giving an opportunity to increase recreation while maintaining the unique character and sense of tranquillity.
- Enhanced information/restoration of and sensitive design of interfaces with remnants of railway bridges and railway crossings which need to be treated sensitively.
- Sensitive habitats e.g. saltmarshes close to the Greenway route provide an opportunity to educate and inform users on the route.
- Some residences lie along the former railway corridor and the proposed greenway would need careful and sensitive design and landscape proposals to balance the need for residential amenity and privacy while optimising the route for Greenway users. This could also be an opportunity to enhance the landscape and biodiversity in some areas. The pleasant character of tranquil, narrow rural roads, most of which have hedgerows to both sides, can be an opportunity or a constraint depending on the Greenway design.

Settlements of Kilrush, Moyasta and Kilkee:

- Sensitive retention/restoration of elements of the railway infrastructure at Moyasta could enhance the sense of character and could be incorporated into the Greenway design.
- Moyasta would be a suitable hub location given the pleasant amenity area adjacent to former railway line, and scenic views to the bay. The settlement could be enhanced by the provision of a well-designed Greenway route and hub which would maximise the location and views in the area as well as the existing railway related infrastructure and elements.
- Street width, on-street parking and some areas of green space along the streets in Kilkee may be considered constraints. Some quieter residential streets would need careful consideration of route design to balance greater numbers of walkers/cyclists with residential amenity.
- The waterfront in Kilkee is an opportunity for a well-designed Hub to integrate with the public space and maximise proximity to the town's facilities and take advantage of the natural and built heritage.
- In Kilkee and Kilrush, several streets have a strong sense of character, either historically, architecturally or otherwise, which must be maintained.

3.4.6 Noise & Vibration

The study area mainly comprises agricultural land, with the exception of the village of Moyasta and towns of Kilrush and Kilkee. One-off housing occurs throughout the area with sections of forest and wetland scattered between. Poulnasherry Bay is located in the centre of the study area. The noise-sensitive receptors in the area include private residential dwellings, the Lower Shannon SAC and the River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA, 3 no. graveyards, 4 no. churches, 2 no. funeral homes and 7 no. schools.
The main contributor to noise in the study area was identified to be vehicular traffic along the N67 road, located along the northern boundary of the study area. Other sources of noise include smaller regional and local roads.

3.4.7 Air Quality & Climate

The potential sensitive air quality and climate receptors in proximity to the study area include 7 no. schools in the area: Scoil Realt Na Mara, Kilkee, St. Joseph's Community College, Kilkee, Kilrush Community School, Kilrush, St. Senan's Primary, Kilrush, Cathermurphy National School, Kilrush, Gaelscoil Ui Choimin, Kilrush, and Moyasta National School, Moyasta. Sensitive ecosystems located within 50m of the route corridor include The Lower River Shannon SAC, River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA, Poulnasherry Bay pNHA and Kilkee Reefs SAC. There are two IE (Industrial Emissions) licensed sites within 1km of the study area, namely Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics Ireland Limited and Shannonside Building Supplies Limited. Land use is predominantly agricultural, as a result there are no significant sources of air pollution in the study area. The largest contributor to air pollution in the area is likely the N67 road, followed by smaller, local roads in the area.

Increases in annual rainfall have been observed in the west of Ireland. The EPA has compiled a list of potential adverse impacts which may be of relevance to the proposed project, including:

- More intense storms and rainfall events.
- Increased likelihood and magnitude of river and coastal flooding.
- Water shortages in summer in the east.
- Adverse impacts on water quality; and
- Changes in distribution of plant and animal species.

Ireland's climate is dominated by the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC). Weakening of AMOC is expected to lead to rising sea levels around Ireland. With climate change, Ireland's temperature and rainfall will undergo more and more significant changes e.g. on average summer temperature could increase by more than 2°C, summer rainfall could decrease by 9% while winter rainfall could increase by 24%.

3.4.8 Archaeology, Architecture, & Cultural Heritage

There were 30 no. archaeological sites identified within the study area including 17 no. ringforts, 3 no. enclosures, 3 no. holy wells, 2 no. churches, 2 no. graveyards, 2 no. fulachta fiadh and 1 no. redundant record. 29 of the 30 total sites were scheduled for inclusion in the next revision of the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP). There were a further 41 no. structures recorded on the RPS, with twenty-eight of those structures also recorded on the NIAH. There were also three Architectural Conservation Areas within the constraints area located at Kilkee, Kilrush and Cappagh and four demesne landscapes. Kilrush House demesne was listed on the NIAH Garden Survey and partially overlaps with the CSA.

A review of the Excavation Bulletin (1970–2023) found that four archaeological investigations were carried out to date within the constraints area, none of which revealed anything of

archaeological significance. Analysis of aerial photography did not identify any previously unrecorded sites of archaeological potential within the study area.

3.4.9 Material Assets and Land – Agriculture

The study area is an area of approximately 20km^2 that is comprised predominantly of agricultural lands. The potential of the agricultural lands is somewhat limited due to the predominance of poorly draining heavy soils, peats and to a lesser extent, areas with well-drained soils. Land cover is almost entirely grassland with a low number of small forestry plots. In general, lands are extensive to moderately intensive with land use comprised of livestock grazing. There are a number of more intensively operated farms present that mainly consist of dairy farms. The agricultural constraints within the study area include farmhouses and farmyards where the essential farm buildings and facilities are located for the operation of on-farm activities.

In the study area, there were 9 no. dairy farms identified, with high levels of dairy farm activity in Leadmore West, Carrowncalla South, Termon West and Lismuse/Garraun. The primary constraint on dairy farms is the farmyard and adjoining milking platform as a unit given the daily movement of dairy cows to and from grazing paddocks. The impact of landtake on the milking platform as well as land severance can have a significant effect on the operation of a dairy farm depending on the scale of operation and the availability of land.

There were 4 no. equine holdings located in Lisdeen, Baunmore, Leadmore East and Drimna. The primary constraint on such farms is the stable yard and associated facilities where the intensive activities involving human interaction with horses are carried out. The direct impact of landtake at or in the proximity of where the intensive activities are performed can have a significant effect on the equine operation. Severance of adjoining lands may have a significant effect and result in a high level of operational disturbance.

No pig, poultry or tillage lands or horticultural constraints were identified in the study area. Two agribusinesses were found to be operating within the study area, namely Moyasta Oysters in Kilnagalliagh, Kilkee, and CMK Foods, Garaun, Moyasta. The key constraint associated with these businesses is landtake involving a direct impact to the business premises or associated lands.

3.4.10 Physical Constraints

Key physical constraints within the study area were set out as part of the constraints and opportunities study, including the current condition of the West Clare Railway line and watercourses in the area. These physical constraints have been divided by settlement, namely Kilrush, Moyasta and Kilkee, and are summarised below.

Kilrush

West of Kilrush, part of the railway line functions as private access to an existing wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) and the lock gates to Kilrush Marina. The bridge at Brew's Bridge Beach is no longer intact but the abutments are still present. The corridor has been expanded for agricultural operations in places but is largely intact from Brew's Bridge Beach to Pella Road. At this point, the corridor has been widened to facilitate residential and agricultural use. The rail corridor then diverges, with one route following the coast where the remnants of an ill-fated 19th-Century attempt to bridge Poulnasherry Bay are present, and the other route tracking north following the canal embankment. The N67 from Kilrush to Moyasta has led to a high concentration of private dwellings being developed along the southern/western side of the road between Kilrush and Carrowncalla. A typical width of 7.5m is observed, widening up to 15m in places, while the sign posted speed limit is 100km/hr. The Wood_010 waterbody flows into the Wood_020 waterbody and flows along the southern boundary of Kilrush, under the N67 to enter the Shannon Estuary at Cappagh Road Bridge, via Kilrush Marina.

Moyasta

The former railway station at Moyasta is now part of the West Clare Railway Heritage Museum, which is privately owned and currently closed to the public. The N67 runs through the village, with a footpath following the southbound lane of the N67, linking Moyasta National School just north of the Poulnasherry Bay with the village, and wide verge areas, either grassed or paved, line both sides of the road. The N67 corridor varies in width between 7.5m and 15m through the village. The railway line diverges at Moyasta where the former Ennis to Kilrush and Moyasta to Kilkee spur meet at Moyasta Junction. There was also a historic railway link directly from the Kilrush line to the Kilkee spur. The Moyasta to Kilkee corridor includes the Moyasta 'Red Bridge' which is still intact and bridges Poulnasherry Bay, as well as its approach embankments. This bridge is approximately 4m wide. Beyond the bridge, the railway corridor is well defined. It crosses local roads between Moyasta and Kilkee with a section running directly adjacent to the coast with some sections overgrown. The former station at Blackweir Bridge is now a private dwelling, as is the Kilkee Station House. Keane's Oyster Bar and St. Flannan's Church are also located adjacent to the N67 at the junction with the L2016 local road, north of Blackweir Bridge. Similar to the Kilrush section of the corridor, a number of private dwellings have been constructed on or adjacent to the former line in this area. In the area of Termon West and Leaheen, west of Moyasta, the roads in the area do not have any footpaths and are between 5.5m and 6m in width. The Moyasta_010 waterbody flows into the Poulnasherry Bay at two points in Moyasta. From the east of the study area it flows through Moyasta, parallel to the railway line, under the N67 bridge, and into Poulnasherry Bay. It also enters Poulnasherry Bay from the north, crossing the N67 575m north of the first bridge. Poulnasherry Bay is located slightly southwest of Moyasta and is an extension of the Shannon Estuary North Catchment.

Kilkee

The railway corridor travels west from Lisdeen to Kilkee and terminated at Kilkee Station, which is now in private ownership. The town of Kilkee has 2 no. primary circulation routes, namely Chapel Street and O'Connell Street. Shops and restaurants are concentrated on O'Curry Street, which runs parallel to Strand Line. Orbital circulation is mainly facilitated by Circular Road, which runs around the perimeter of the town. Typical street widths within Kilkee are approximately between 7.5m and 17.5m (footpaths inclusive). The Strand Line Road is a one-way street, constrained due to its narrow width, informal parking and houses which front directly onto the road carriageway. A continuous footpath is provided along the southern boundary of the N67 on its approach to the town. East of Kilkee, the Termon_East_010 waterbody crosses the study area from the north, crossing under the N67 three times towards the tributaries of Shannon Estuary North and into Poulnasherry Bay. The Kilkee_Lower_010 river waterbody flows from the southeast into Kilkee and on into Moore Bay at two points, one on the northern side of Kilkee and the other entering the bay at the beach by Marine Parade.

3.5 Consideration of Alternatives

Following on from the Constraints and Opportunities study, the following Do-Nothing and Do-Minimum options were considered to ascertain if they were feasible to bring forward throughout the option selection process.

3.5.1 Do Nothing Option

The 'Do Nothing' option would require pedestrians and cyclists to utilise the existing roads from Kilrush to Kilkee. In this scenario, cyclists and pedestrians use the N67, a busy national road which is the main transport corridor connecting the two towns and runs via Moyasta, and along which there have been two fatalities among these user groups in recent years. The N67 has a posted speed limit of 100km/hr and minimal hard shoulder set back. This makes the road unsuited to both cyclists and pedestrians due to safety concerns. Indeed, there have

been two vulnerable road user fatalities on the route since 2021. Both Kilrush and Kilkee have limited cycling infrastructure and Moyasta lacks a continuous footpath or road crossing facilities in the village. The area is served by a small amount of bus routes to cater for the local residents, though options are limited and force reliance upon private car use in many cases.

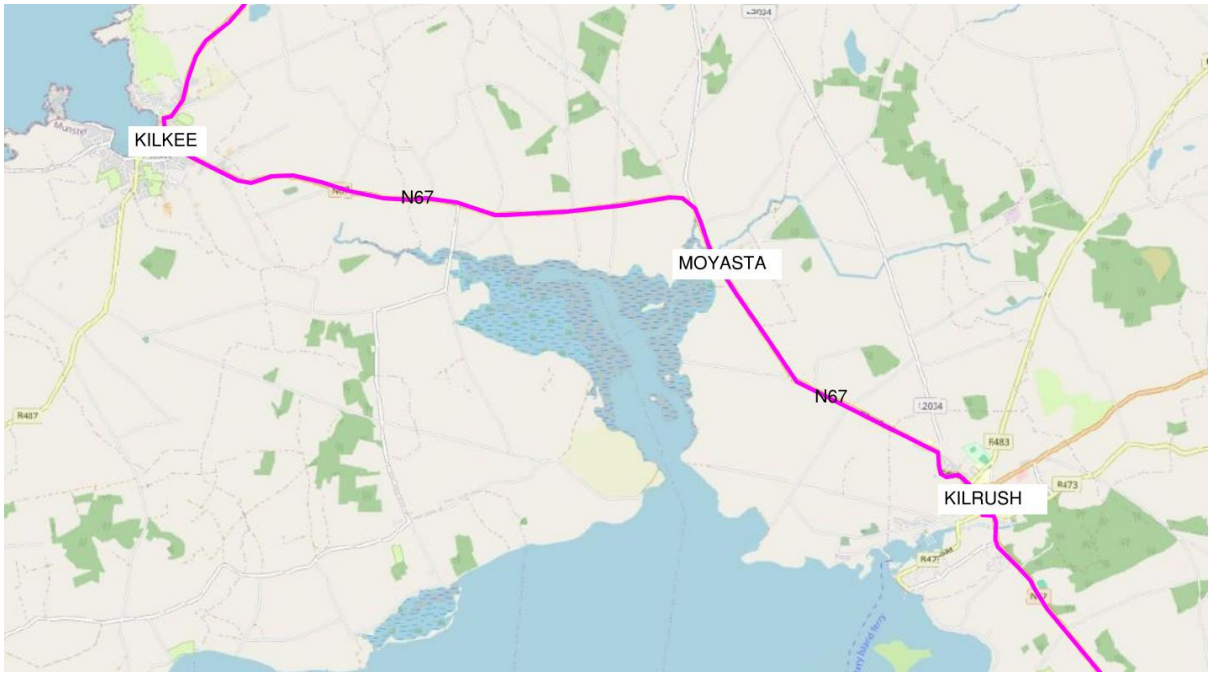

Plate 3-4 Existing N67 Route between Kilrush and Kilkee

The 'Do Nothing' scenario does not align with local, national or international policy. The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 contains **Objective CDP 11.5b)** to *"facilitate and support the delivery of a safe, accessible and convenient cycle network and environment across the county and in the Limerick-Shannon Metropolitan Area as set out in the Cycle Network Plans for Shannon and Limerick contained in the LSMATS"* and **Objective CDP10.11b)** to *"support and facilitate the development of a network of interlinked greenways and necessary supporting infrastructure along the former route of the West Clare Railway subject to project level environmental assessments (Refer to Volume 2 for the indicative route of the West Clare Railway Greenway"*.

The National Sustainable Mobility Policy outlines a strategic framework to 2030 for active travel and public transport to support Ireland's overall requirement to achieve a 51% reduction in carbon emissions by the end of this decade. The Climate Action Plan 2023 outlines actions to be taken across various sectors including encouraging a modal shift towards active travel modes.

Having regard to the foregoing, and to Chapter 2, which describes the need for the scheme, this option is not appropriate for further consideration.

3.5.2 Do Minimum Option

A 'Do Minimum' scenario would likely entail implementing a "quiet road" solution to connect Kilrush and Kilkee via Moyasta; possible routes are shown in Plate 3-4. The implementation of a "quiet road" would be achieved through the provision of reduced speed limits, traffic calming measures and signage in the area. As illustrated in Plate 3-4, any possible routes still require travelling along a section of the N67 National Secondary Road west of Moyasta. As noted in the above section, this is dangerous and unsuitable for cyclists and pedestrians,

with limited scope to provide any on-line or segregated facilities along this route. It doesn't meet the objectives of the project as set out in Section 2.5 in Chapter 2 of this EIAR.

Plate 3-5 Possible Do Minimum Routes for cyclists between Kilkee and Kilrush

While the N67 is manifestly unsuitable for pedestrian and cyclist usage (as evidenced by its recent safety record), quieter local roads may present an attractive option for many of these users. There are various of these present in the study area – particularly between Kilrush and Moyasta. However, these routes are not considered suitable to achieving the overall objectives of the West Clare Railway Greenway for the following reasons:

1. They do not align to national policy that these routes should be substantially segregated from all other traffic;
2. These roads are narrow with few if any refuges or passing bays. Therefore, their incorporation within the greenway would pose significant issues in terms of interactions between farm machinery and greenway users.
3. Resurfacing the roads, as would be necessary for the greenway, would result in the potential for increased traffic speeds, increasing the hazards for greenway users, and reducing road safety generally by increasing the speeds of all interactions along the routes.
4. The roads are unsuitable for use by wheelchairs and buggies while in use by general vehicular traffic (including refuse trucks, maintenance vehicles, emergency services, etc.
5. It is not intended to light the greenway, and therefore the increased use of existing unlit trafficked roads at night by vulnerable road users would create particular road safety issues.

On the basis of the foregoing, the Do Minimum option is not considered to be an appropriate option to carry forward for further consideration. Nevertheless, individual sections of local road have been considered as potential elements of the greenway through subsequent stages of the route selection process in order to ensure that the optimal route is ultimately selected through each section of the route.

3.6 Identification of Potential Route Links

As part of the Route selection process, the designers are required to identify all potential link options within a defined study area and to carry out an assessment to identify which of these link options are suitable, and which are unsuitable, to potentially form part of a pedestrian and cycle greenway facility.

Following the constraints and opportunities study which was undertaken by ROD to review the environmental and physical constraints present within the study area for the proposed development, a 'spiders web' of potential links was identified along which the proposed greenway could potentially follow. These potential links were identified along the historic railway line, local and regional roads, hedges and field boundaries, as shown in Plate 3-4 (Figure 3.3 in Volume 3 of this EIAR).

The individually coloured lines shown on the drawing represent each of the potential route links identified. The colour of each link has no significance, other than to differentiate it from adjacent links. Each link was also assigned an identifying label in the form of WCXX as shown on the drawings, to assist referencing a particular link. This information was displayed as part of non-statutory Public Consultation No. 1.

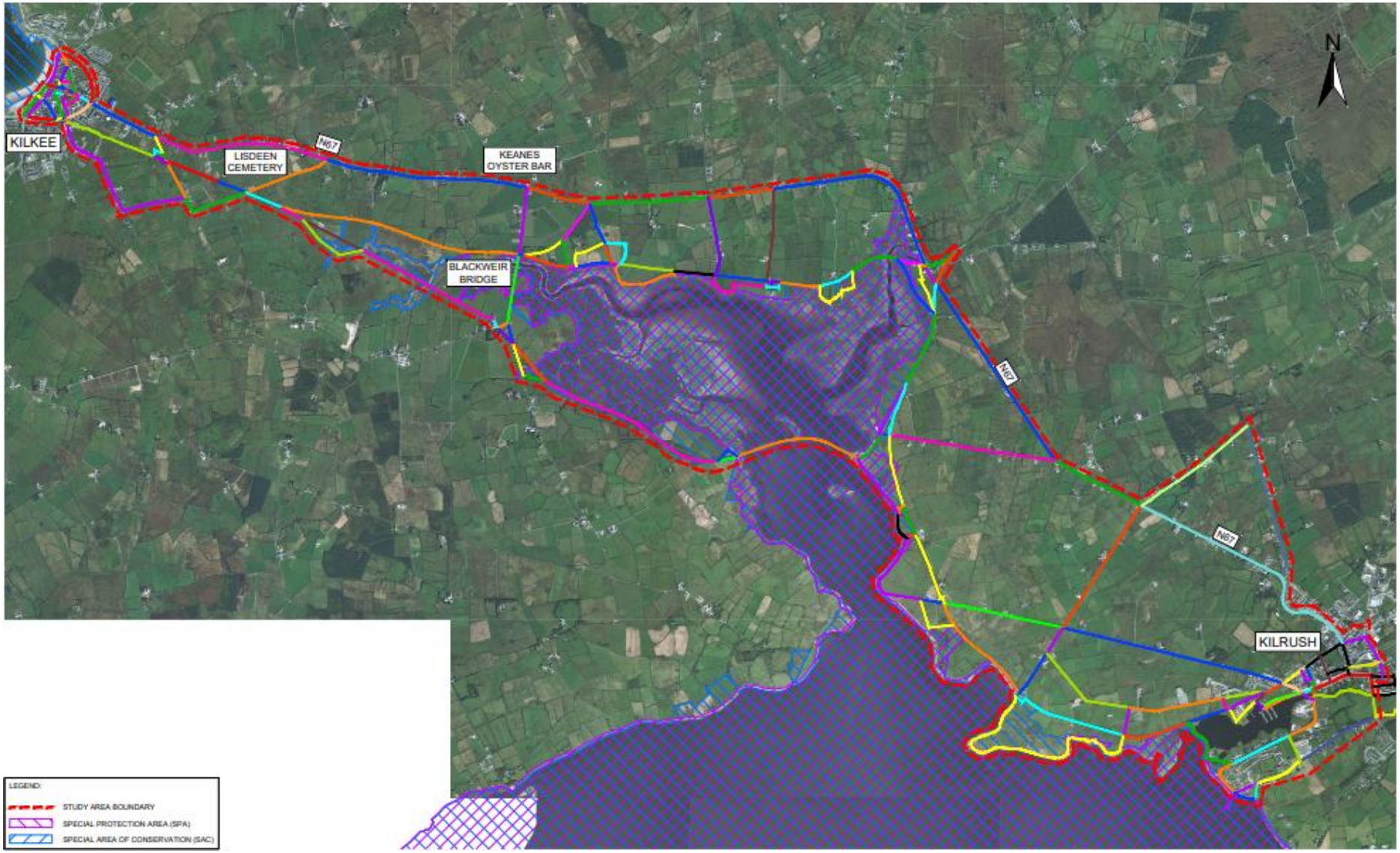

Plate 3-6 Potential Route Links for Stage 1 Assessment

3.6.1 Public Consultation No.1, September 2021

A non-statutory public consultation for the West Clare Railway Greenway Section 1: Kilrush to Kilkee was held between the 13th September 2021 and the 4th October 2021 to gather local feedback and information on the overall project, the proposed study area and the potential route links identified. The non-statutory public consultation was restricted due to COVID-19 limitations, prohibiting the in-person attendance of a representative of ROD or Clare County Council. Display boards identifying the study area and the spider's web of potential route links were provided at three locations, namely the Kilrush Public Library, Sweeney Memorial Library, Kilkee, and the Clare County Council Offices, Ennis for the duration of the non-statutory public consultation. Brochures were also provided which gave an explanation of the project status, the overall scheme drawing and encouraged feedback from the public. All information provided was also made available for download on Clare County Council's website.

A printed feedback form was available to the public at each location, and a digital version was provided on the Clare County Council website. Submissions were accepted three ways: through the drop off facility at the display location, by post to an address at Clare County Council Offices, Ennis, or scanned and emailed to a dedicated ROD address. Due to COVID-19, an additional call-back facility was provided by ROD, allowing for public submissions to be recorded by designated ROD staff.

Prior to the non-statutory public consultation, the publicity campaign consisted of newspaper advertising in the Clare Champion and Clare Echo on the 10th of September 2021. This advised the public of consultation times, locations, and the online consultation facility. A copy of the newspaper advertisement was also available online on Clare County Council's website for the duration of the consultation period. A radio advertisement was broadcast on Clare FM also on the 10th of September 2021, three times that day, prior to the non-statutory consultation. During the consultation period, the advertisement was broadcast three times per day, two days per week. A briefing on the project for local councillors was held on 16th September 2021.

Following the non-statutory Public Consultation, the information gathered was reviewed and fully considered by the design team. The feedback which informed the option selection process, included the following primary themes / issues:

- Submissions that support options bridging Poulnasherry Bay;
- Submissions that object to options bridging Poulnasherry Bay (SAC);
- Privacy and safety concerns related to the proposed developments proximity to private dwellings;
- The implications of potentially routing the greenway through private lands, in particular the implications on farming operations and access for agricultural activities;
- Ecological concerns regarding the proposed links to the SAC and SPA, noting the sensitive wildlife and habitats located throughout the area.
- Stating the design of the greenway should conserve and enhance the sensitive biodiversity located along the route, incorporating a "sensitive maintenance practice" in the operational stage;
- Recommendations to utilise the Kilrush and Kilkee Stations as start / end points for the route;
- Proposed spur access to Moyasta / the Moyasta junction, highlighting a safe and segregated connection point for children traveling to school;

- Recommendations to provide additional parking spaces in addition to making the end to end points more cycle and pedestrian friendly in order to prioritise connectivity to local amenities and attractions.
- Recommendations to include signage to highlight the historical significance of the railway corridor.
- Accessibility concerns for users with different mobility needs.

3.7 Route Options Assessment Methodology

The Route Options Assessment follows on from the non-statutory Public Consultation, taking into consideration the themes and issues highlighted previously to inform the decision-making process. The identification of the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor is a two-stage process consisting of a high-level Stage 1 sifting assessment, followed by a more detailed Stage 2 qualitative and quantitative assessment based on specific criteria informed by Government guidance and technical requirements.

All identified route links within the study area are initially subjected to a "Stage 1 – Sifting" assessment. This is a high-level appraisal in which these route links are evaluated based on their ability to satisfy the project requirements and objectives for the West Clare Railway Greenway, while also assessing their high level economic, engineering, and environmental impacts. During the assessment, each route link receives a basic pass/fail response based on the culmination of the above assessment.

Each route link that passed the Stage 1 sifting assessment is then advanced to the Stage 2 assessment where combinations of these links have been used to create route corridor options. These route corridor options are then assessed using the Transport and Accessibility Appraisal (TAA) table provided by the Transport Appraisal Framework (DoT, 2023).

3.7.1 Stage 1 Sifting Assessment

During the Stage 1 Sifting Assessment, a spider's web of potential links was developed within the study area. The viability and suitability of each link to form a potential element of the emerging preferred route option were assessed using a high-level, qualitative method based on professional judgement and knowledge of existing constraints and conditions within the study area ascertained from available surveys and site visits. This exercise assessed how technically feasible these link options were, based on project specific objectives, engineering feasibility, economic impact and the environmental impact of each link. In addition to being assessed on their individual merits, the links were also screened relative to each other, resulting in some links being ruled out if more viable and suitable alternatives existed.

This assessment stage focused on engineering constraints together with desktop studies and windshield surveys undertaken to inform population catchment analysis and environmental constraints and opportunities. Each potential route link was assigned a Pass or Fail rating. Where a potential route link was deemed unviable, unsuitable, or is likely to result in significant impacts that could not be mitigated compared to another available link, the route link was assigned a Fail rating. This is documented in detail in the Feasibility Study & Options Report, along with the reason for the rating in each instance.

The Stage 1 Sifting Assessment for the West Clare Railway Greenway Section 1 identified several links which were determined as unsuitable for further consideration and did not progress to be included within the Route Corridor Options. The sifting assessment identified a number of links as having ambiguous impacts on biodiversity, such as WC79, WC89 and WC90. As significant impacts cannot be ruled out, these link options were assigned a 'Fail'

score during the sifting assessment. WC153 was anticipated to bridge Poulnasherry Bay, however this link also failed due to the significance of works required to reinstate the original embankments of the railway line and build a bridge approximately 1km in length. As a result, the existing Moyasta 'Red Bridge' (WC78) was identified as the only feasible option to allow greenway users to cross the bay.

Certain links directly impacted upon local business – links WC186 and WC187 impacted upon the Oyster Factory and so were sifted out. Despite being generally well-drained, flood risks in the area led to the failure of certain links. WC190 ran adjacent to the N67 for a significant portion of the route and was sifted out due to flood risk. Road safety risks caused links relying on busy, high traffic roads such as WC103, WC105 and WC106 to fail the initial sift. The Stage 1 Sifting Tables are provided in Appendix 3.1 of this EIAR, in Volume 4.

Following the Stage 1 Sift process, the links which passed the assessment were identified as being suitable to assemble in various configurations to form the greenway corridor. A number of links which passed the Stage 1 process also fell away where there was no remaining linkage potential i.e. where they relied on continuation links upstream or downstream that failed the Stage 1 assessment and could not therefore form part of a viable through route.

3.8 Stage 2 Assessment

Following the initial non-statutory Public Consultation for the West Clare Railway Greenway Section 1 Kilrush to Kilkee, the Code of Best Practice National and Regional Greenways was published by the Irish Government in December 2021. The Code of Best Practice states that following the initial Stage 1 assessment of the study area, a number of broad route corridor options (which may be up to hundreds of metres wide) shall be identified. These route corridor options should be developed and put on display for non-statutory public consultation to invite feedback on the proposals and to highlight any issues that may not have been considered in the development of these corridors.

In line with the Code of Best Practice, feasible route corridor options were developed around combinations of the links that emerged from the Stage 1 Sifting assessment process. A map illustrating the potential route corridor options was developed, as shown in Plate 3-7. The route corridor options from Kilkee to Kilrush were broken down into 5 sub-sections to assist with the route selection process as follows:

- Sub-section A from Kilkee to Blackweir Bridge
- Sub-section B from Blackweir Bridge to Moyasta
- Sub-section C from Moyasta to Carrowncalla South
- Sub-section D from Carrowncalla South to Kilrush Marina
- Sub-section E from Kilrush Marina to Cappagh Pier

In certain places within these sub-sections, only one option had emerged. In other places, a number of local corridor options remained, including deviations from the original West Clare Railway route corridor. Where practicable, these corridors make use of farm boundaries or field boundaries to minimise impacts on landholdings. The route corridor options are generally 50m wide to allow movement within the corridor when designing the preferred route.

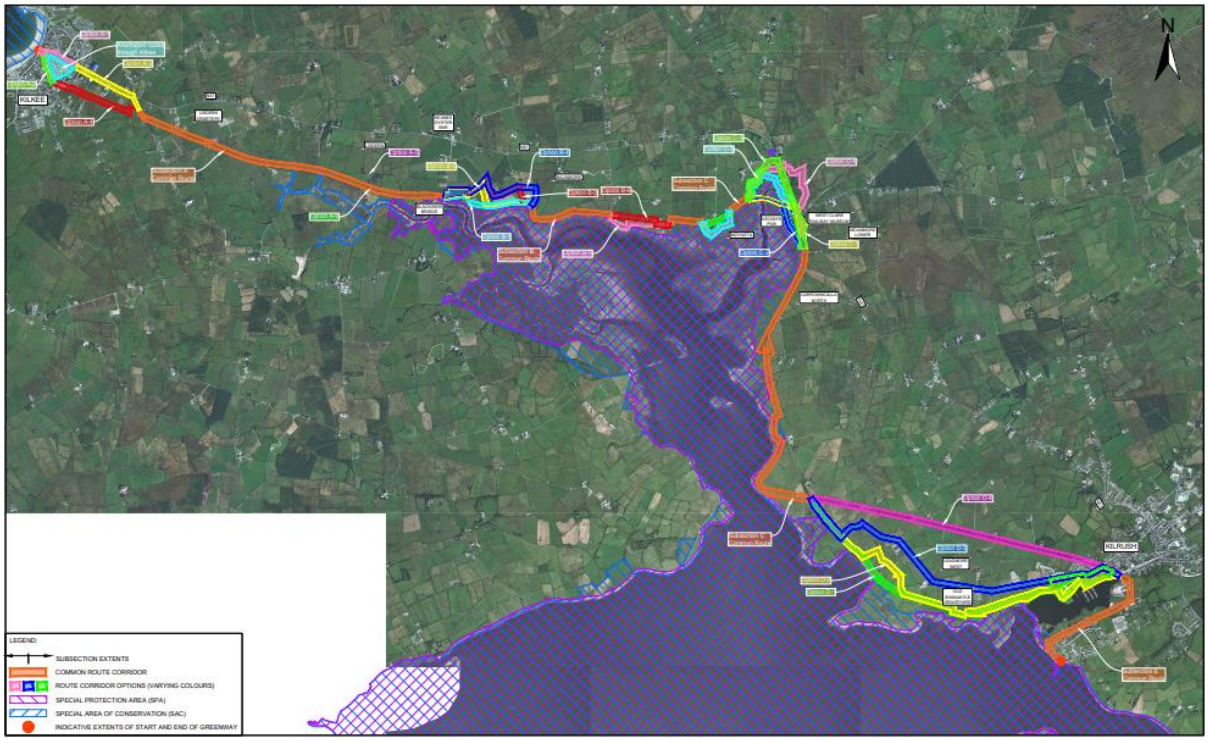

Plate 3-7 Route Corridor Options Displayed at Public Consultation No.2

3.8.1 Public Consultation No.2, September 2022

The second non-statutory public consultation for the West Clare Railway Greenway Section 1: Kilrush to Kilkee was held from 9th to 30th September 2022 to gather local feedback and information on proposed route corridor options within the study area. The study area and Potential Route Corridor Options, as identified by the design team, were placed on display in two locations, Kilrush Public Library and the Sweeney Memorial Library, Kilkee. Brochures were also provided at each location, explaining the status of the project and means of providing feedback. As this non-statutory public consultation took place in 2022, COVID-19 restrictions no longer applied. A number of Clare County Council and ROD staff were present at in-person information sessions, held from 3:30pm to 8:30pm on the evenings of the 14th and 15th of September. These sessions were held with the aim of providing clarity to the public in respect to the proposed development. All information contained within the brochure and exhibition boards was also made available for download from Clare County Council's website. A brochure and set of drawings were also put on display in the Clare County Council Offices, Áras Contae an Chláir, Ennis.

Public feedback both during and beyond the consultation period was encouraged and facilitated through a number of submission methods. A printed feedback form was available at both public consultation venues, which could be submitted through the drop-off facility at each venue, by post to Clare County Council, or by scanning the form and emailing it to an ROD address. A digital version of the feedback form was also available from the Clare County Council website and could be submitted using the same options as above. The call-back facility was again provided during the second non-statutory consultation, notwithstanding the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. This facility allowed members of the public to contact designated ROD staff and give their submission via telephone.

Prior to the non-statutory public consultation, the publicity campaign consisted of newspaper advertisement placed in the Clare Champion and Clare Echo on the 5th of September 2022. This advised the public of consultation times, locations, and online consultation. A copy of the

newspaper advertisement was also available online on Clare County Council's website for the duration of the consultation period. A radio advertisement was broadcast on Clare FM also on the 9th of September 2022, three times that day. During the consultation period, the advertisement was broadcast three times per day, two days per week until the 30th of September. A briefing on the project for local councillors was held on 6th September 2022.

The second non-statutory public consultation resulted in feedback which helped to progress the option selection process. The following points represent the primary themes / issues raised:

- Support for the proposed development was expressed in various submissions.
- Others expressed no concern and instead provided constructive feedback.
- Submissions proposed utilising the Kilkee and Kilrush Railway stations as facilities for the greenway.
- Submissions that favour the route following the former railway corridor as close as practicable.
- A large number of submissions queried the implications of potentially routing the greenway through their lands and in particular the implications on farming operations, access for agricultural activities, and impacts to land holding.
- Privacy, safety, and security concerns posed from the proximity of the proposed development to residential properties.
- Many submissions expressed strong support for fully off-road routes that fully segregated from traffic.
- Submissions that queried the maintenance plan for the proposed development.

Direct engagement with potentially affected landowners was also facilitated during the second public consultation, where requested, in accordance with the Government's Code of Best Practice for Greenways.

3.8.2 Refinement of Route Corridor Options

As a result of the discussions with landowners and members of the public during the non-statutory public consultation event and upon review of the feedback received, a number of refinements to the route corridor options were made. The refined Route Corridor Options assessed as part of Stage 2 are shown in Plate 3-8 below (Figure 3.5 in Volume 3 of this EIAR).

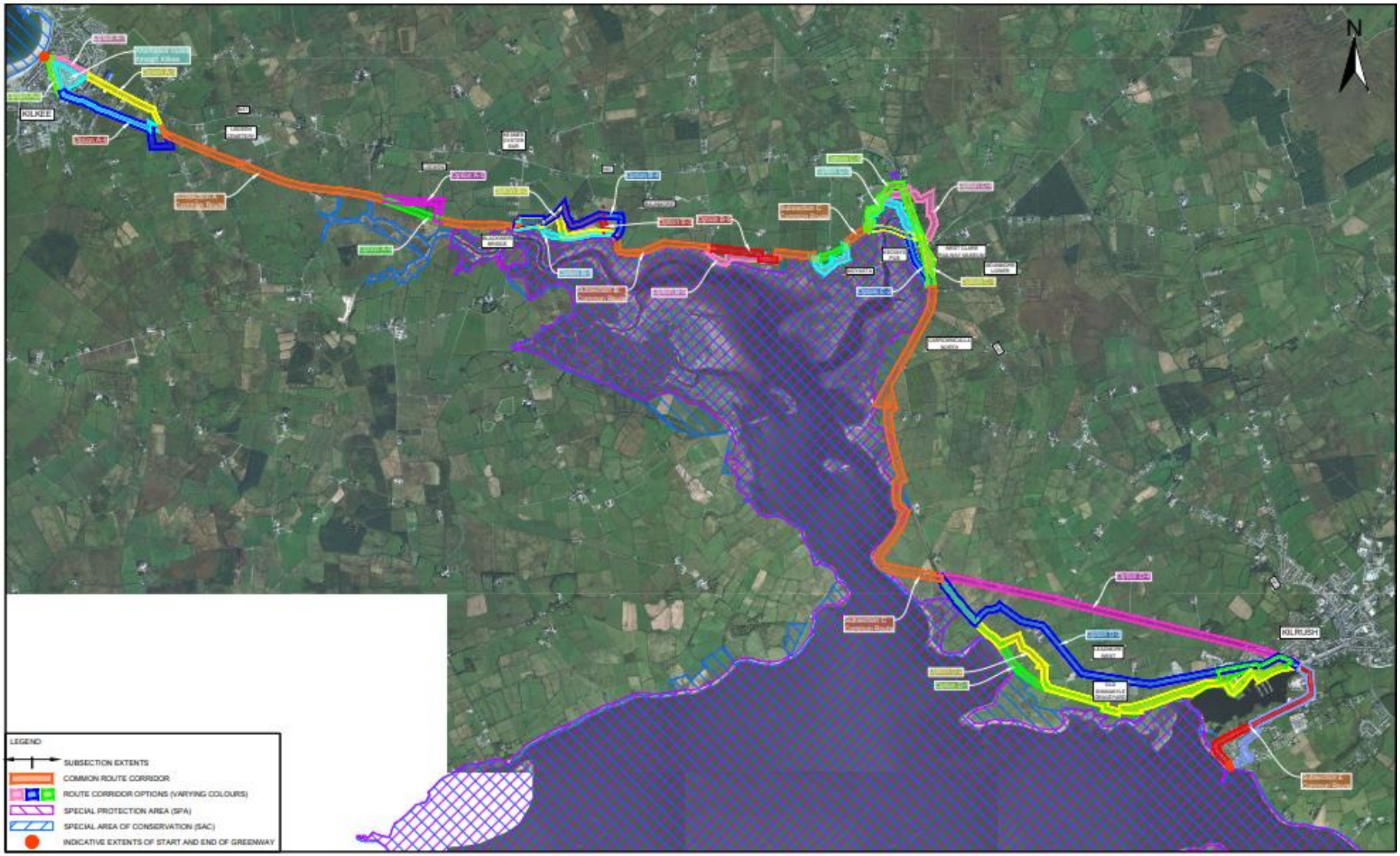

Plate 3-8 Stage 2 Refined Route Corridor Options

3.8.3 Guidance Documents

The methodology used to identify the emerging preferred route corridor has been developed using the following guidance documents:

- Project Manager's Manual for Greenway Projects (July 2022)
- TII PAG Unit 13.0 - Appraisal of Active Modes (February 2024)
- Code of Best Practice National and Regional Greenways (2021)
- Department of Transport - Transport Assessment Framework (June 2023)

3.8.4 Stage 2 Options Assessment Procedure

This stage consists of a more detailed qualitative and quantitative assessment based on specific criteria and sub-criteria. The *" Transport Appraisal Framework - Appraisal Guidelines for Capital Investments in Transport"* was published by the Department of Transport in June 2023 and replaced the earlier Common Appraisal Framework (CAF) which was previously followed in the assessment of transport projects. The Stage 2 assessment procedure was therefore updated from CAF (as originally intended) to follow the TAF criteria, as that was the most recent guidance for the appraisal of transport scheme options at the time the assessment was undertaken.

The procedure for the assessment of the route corridor options follows the criteria set out under the Transport Accessibility Appraisal in Module 7 of the Transport Appraisal Framework (TAF). Module 7 discusses the principles of appraisal and the various appraisal tools available. The TAF requires that a Transport and Accessibility Appraisal (TAA) is to be used in the detailed appraisal of schemes estimated to cost more than €30m. The TAA is similar to a Multi Criteria Analysis in its assessment of non-monetised impacts of scheme options on the basis of established criteria.

The TAA assesses options under six key criteria:

- Accessibility
- Social
- Land Use
- Safety
- Climate Change
- Local Environment

The TAA is a qualitative assessment for the various route corridor options, ranked on a seven-point scale ranging from high positive to high negative. The full set of TAA tables for each route corridor option is provided in Appendix 3.2 in Volume 4 of the EIAR, while the summary tables of the scores under the above criteria are set out for each of the route corridor options in the relevant subsections below. Table 3-9 describes the assessment ranking used to determine each score. In each case, every effort has been made to identify the route corridor that best aligns with the project objectives, maximises the benefits for local communities, supports the potentially affected landowners and has the least impact on the environment. A number of sub-criteria were scoped out at this stage, all of which fall under Accessibility criterion. As there are no major land transport hubs or interchange facilities (bus or rail services) within the study area, these were not considered under the *"Access to Services"* sub-criterion. It is also presumed that the proposed greenway will not enhance access to international gateways or freight, as these facilities do not fall within the study area, nor is the development of the appropriate nature to improve accessibility to these facilities. As a result,

the sub-criteria "Access to International *Transport Gateways"* and "*Freight Access*" have been scoped out.

ROD led the preparation of the Options Selection Report with the assistance of various discipline specialists who have prepared the appropriate sections of this Stage 2 Assessment.

Table 3-9 Assessment Ranking

Assessment Ranking	Description
	High Positive - The option is likely to significantly improve conditions in the relevant criteria.
	Positive - The option is likely to improve conditions in the relevant criteria.
	Slight Positive - The option is likely to somewhat improve conditions in the relevant criteria.
	Neutral - The option will result in no changes to conditions in the relevant criteria.
	Slight Negative - The option is likely to somewhat worsen conditions in the relevant criteria.
	Negative - The option is likely to worsen conditions in the relevant criteria.
	High Negative - The option is likely to significantly worsen conditions in the relevant criteria.

3.8.4.1 Route Corridor Options Assessment for Subsection A

Subsection A runs from Kilkee to Blackweir Bridge. There are seven total Route Corridor Options within Subsection A. Options A-1 and A-2 follow existing roads through Kilkee and travel east to link with Route Corridor Options A-3 and A-4. From here, Common Route A progresses east to Blackweir Bridge following the line of the old railway.

Feedback from Public Consultation No. 2 led to the identification of three further Route Corridor Options, A-5, A-6 and A-7. Route Corridor Option A-5 follows a similar path to A-4, however it diverts from the original railway line to avoid properties along the rail corridor and travels south and east along a field boundary, before rejoining the Subsection A Common Route via the local road. In addition, Route Corridor Option A-4 has been extended to incorporate a route to the back of the housing estate along the route of the former railway line as part of the corridor. Route Corridor Option A-6 has been created to consider an alternative route around farming operations in the area which currently utilise the railway corridor. Route Corridor Option A-7 is the direct route along this section, which follows the railway corridor and may impact farming operations.

The Subsection A Common Route is shown in orange in Plate 3-9 (Figure 3.6 in Volume 3 of this EIAR), following the former West Clare Railway. The route travels east from the outskirts of Kilkee through Lisdeen, covering approximately 2.6km before reaching Blackweir Bridge.

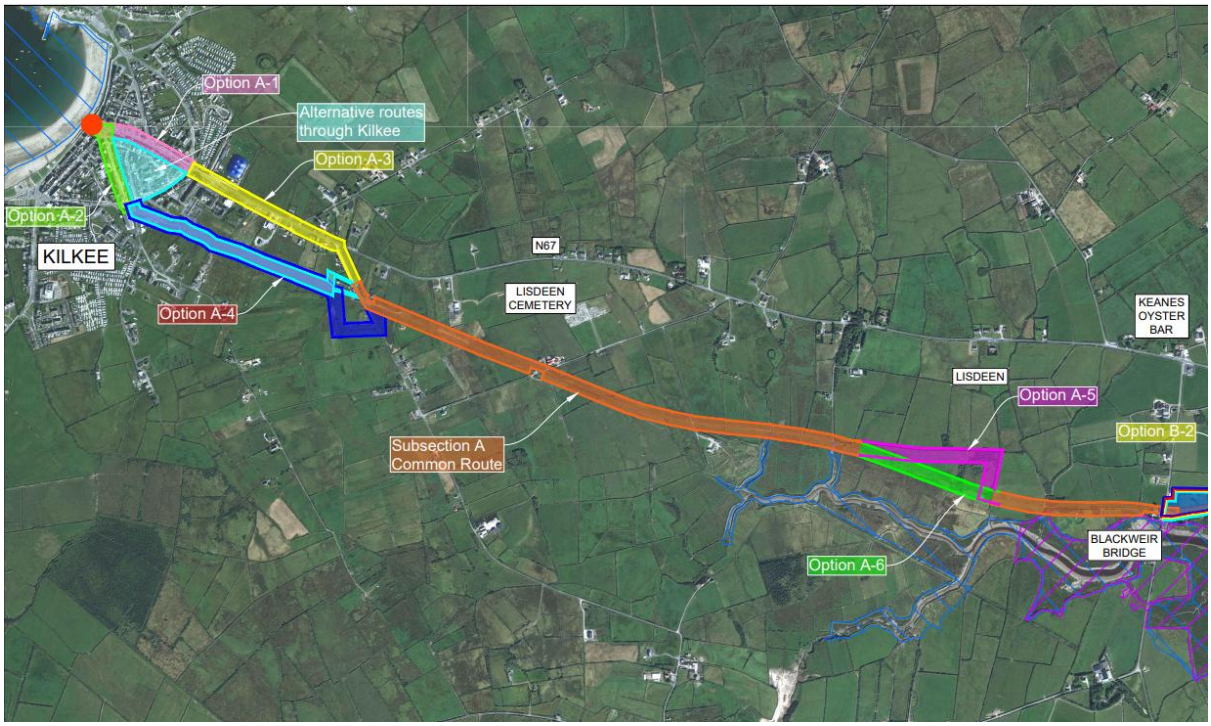

Plate 3-9 Route Corridor Options in Subsection A

The tables below provide the assessment summary for the route corridor options A-1 and A-2, A-3, A-4 and A-5, and Common Route A, in accordance with the procedure described in Section 3.8.4.

Table 3-10 TAA Summary of Route Corridor Options A-1 and A-2

Route Corridor Option	Accessibility	Social Impacts	Land Use Impact	Safety Impact	Climate Change	Local Environmental Impact
Option A-1	Slight Positive	Neutral	Slight Positive	Negative	Neutral	Neutral
Option A-2	Positive	Positive	Slight Positive	Positive	Neutral	Neutral

On the basis of the above ranking, **Route Corridor Option A-2 is identified as the emerging preferred route corridor option** as it has rankings of Positive for three TAA headings including Accessibility, Social Impacts and Safety Impact due to the segregated nature of the corridor and connectivity to existing facilities. Route Corridor Option A-1 had two scores of slight positive for Land Use Impact, one negative for Safety due to its location along the N67, and three neutral. Route Corridor Option A-2 is also in line with more of the project objectives, and will provide a substantially segregated route along the original railway corridor, minimising pedestrian, cyclist and vehicle interactions. Option A-1 also has a higher public realm requirement than Option A-2.

Table 3-11 TAA Summary of Route Corridor Options A-3, A-4 and A-5

Route Corridor Option	Accessibility	Social Impacts	Land Use Impact	Safety Impact	Climate Change	Local Environmental Impact
Option A-3	Slight Positive	Slight Positive	Neutral	High Negative	Neutral	Neutral
Option A-4	Slight Positive	Positive	Slight Positive	Positive	Neutral	Neutral
Option A-5	Slight Positive	Positive	Slight Positive	Positive	Neutral	Neutral

Route Corridor Option A-3 was found to score the poorest, due to a High Negative under Safety Impact associated with the N67 along this route. Route Corridor Options A-4 and A-5 scored the same under overall Criteria, with Positive scores under Social Impacts and Safety Impacts and Slight Positive scores under Accessibility and Land Use Impact. Route Corridor Option A-4 is identified as the emerging preferred route corridor option as it is a more direct route linking to Subsection A Common Route, provided sufficient screening can be provided for the adjacent residents. Route Corridor Option A-4 is also in line with more of the project objectives and will provide a substantially segregated route along the original railway corridor, minimising pedestrian, cyclist and vehicle interactions. The preliminary design will be considerate of the private dwellings adjacent to the proposed corridor.

Option A-4 and Option A-5 scored equally in the TAA; however, Option A-5 is a longer, less direct route which will incur a higher cost. While A-4 is slightly higher in cost than A-3, it is still being progressed as the emerging preferred route corridor option based on the above assessment.

Table 3-12 TAA Summary of Route Corridor Options A-6 and A-7

Route Corridor Option	Accessibility	Social Impacts	Land Use Impact	Safety Impact	Climate Change	Local Environmental Impact
Option A-6	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	High Positive	Neutral	Slight Negative
Option A-7	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	High Positive	Neutral	Neutral

On the basis of the above scoring, Route Corridor option A-6 is emerging as having a slight negative score for the local environment impact due to the greenfield nature of the route corridor option and its proximity to two nearby ringforts. However, considering the existing railway is currently used for agricultural activities, Option A-7 would result in impacts such as severance and impacts on existing businesses. As the overall criteria scoring is slight and measures can be included to mitigate impacts on Archaeology at planning stage, Route Corridor Option A-6 is therefore being progressed as the emerging preferred route corridor option.

Option A6 has a slightly higher cost due to the longer route in comparison with Option A-7. However, Option A-6 is still being progressed as part of the emerging preferred route corridor option based on the above assessment.

Table 3-13 TAA Summary of Subsection A Common Route

Route Corridor Option	Accessibility	Social Impacts	Land Use Impact	Safety Impact	Climate Change	Local Environmental Impact
Subsection A Common Route	Neutral	Slight Positive	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Neutral

Subsection A Common Route was found to have a Positive impact under the criteria of Safety Impact, a Slight Positive score under Social Impacts and Neutral under the remaining headings. Subsection A Common Route is in line with the objectives of the project, following the original West Clare Railway corridor where practicable, providing a safe and substantially segregated sustainable transport corridor and protecting vulnerable users through improving / removing interactions with vehicles.

3.8.4.2 Route Corridor Options Assessment for Subsection B

Subsection B commences at Blackweir Bridge and continues east through Baunmore along Poulnasherry Bay SAC towards Moyasta.

There are eight route corridor options within Subsection B, in addition to the Subsection B Common Route. Options B-1 through to B-4 are located east of Blackweir Bridge. Options B-5 and B-6, and B-7 and B-8 are located further east, providing online options versus coastal options for assessment. East of Route Corridor Options B-1 to B-4, the Subsection B Common Route tracks along the coastline, with adequate screening due to existing hedgerows. East of Options B-5 and B-6, the Common Route B follows the route of the original rail line, on the approach to Moyasta. The full Subsection B Route Corridor Options are shown below in Plate 3-10 (Figure 3.7 in Volume 3 of this EIAR).

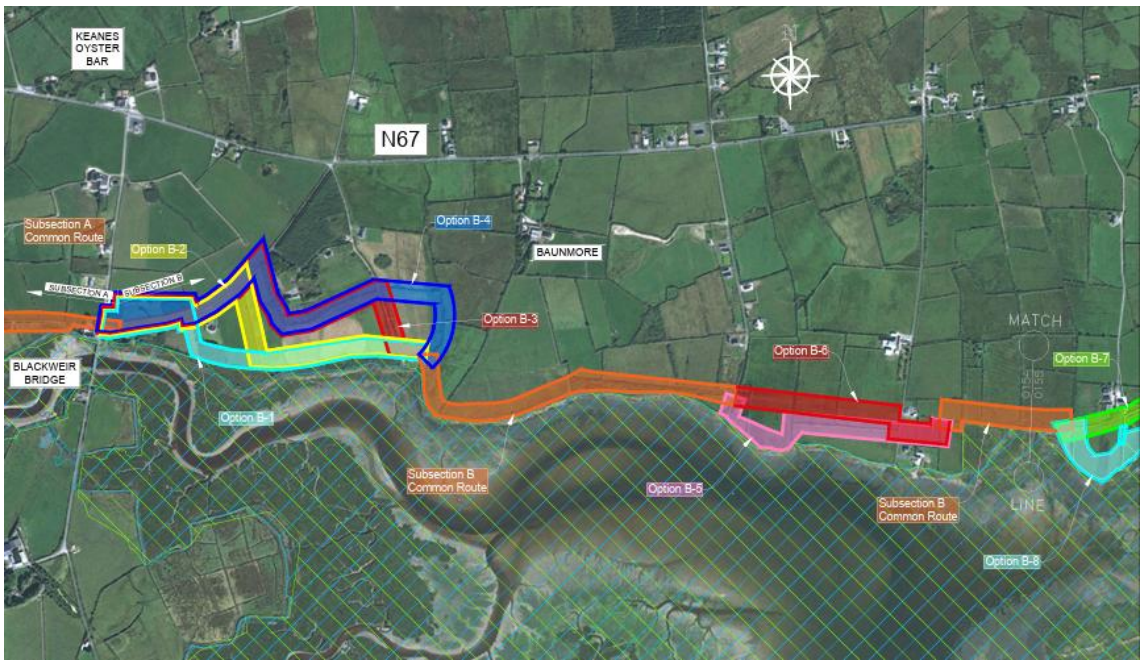

Plate 3-10 Route Corridor Options in Subsection B

The TAA summary tables below provide the summary assessment for route corridor options B-1 to B-4, B-5 and B-6, B-7 & B-8 and Subsection B Common Route.

Table 3-14 TAA Summary of Route Corridor Option B-1, B-2, B-3 and B-4

Route Corridor Option	Accessibility	Social Impacts	Land Use Impact	Safety Impact	Climate Change	Local Environmental Impact
Option B-1	Neutral	Slight Positive	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Neutral
Option B-2	Neutral	Slight Positive	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Neutral
Option B-3	Neutral	Slight Positive	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Slight Negative
Option B-4	Neutral	Slight Positive	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Slight Negative

On the basis of the above ranking, route corridor options B-1 and B-2 have the same overall criteria scores, with positive under Safety Impact, slight positive under Social Impact and Neutral under Accessibility, Land Use Impact, Climate Change and Local Environment Impact. Route Corridor Options B-3 and B-4 both scored Slight Negative under Local Environmental Impact due to the increased area of greenfield land affected. Option B-1 was identified as part of the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor for Public Consultation 3 due to being slightly shorter.

Table 3-15 TAA Summary of Route Corridor Option B-5 and B-6

Route Corridor Option	Accessibility	Social Impacts	Land Use Impact	Safety Impact	Climate Change	Local Environmental Impact
Option B-5	Neutral	Slight Positive	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Slight Negative
Option B-6	Neutral	Slight Positive	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Slight Negative

Both Route Corridor Options B-5 and B-6 have the same scores under the 6 main criteria. Although corridor B-6 is along the route of the original railway corridor, the original embankment has been removed and the land is currently used for agricultural activities and therefore this route option would result in impacts such as severance on an existing farm business. Subject to the development of mitigation measures for Biodiversity and Climate Adaptation measures, Route Option B-5 is being progressed, despite incurring a slightly higher cost than Option B-6.

Table 3-16 TAA Summary of Route Corridor Option B-7 and B-8

Route Corridor Option	Accessibility	Social Impacts	Land Use Impact	Safety Impact	Climate Change	Local Environmental Impact
Option B-7	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	High Positive	Neutral	Neutral
Option B-8	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	High Positive	Neutral	Slight Negative

Route Corridor Options B-7 and B-8 score similarly under the 6 TAA Criteria headings of Accessibility, Social Impacts, Land Use Impact, Safety Impact and Climate Change, while Option B-8 has an overall score of Slight Negative under Local Environment Impact compared to B-7 which scored as Neutral. This is due to the potential for Annex I habitats within the corridor, and the greenfield nature of the site having more potential for impacts. However, due to the potential severance that Route Corridor B-7 may have on the adjacent farm operations and its proximity to and potential to impact on one private dwelling, Route Corridor Option B-8 was identified as the preferred option and formed part of the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor at Public Consultation No.3.

Table 3-17 TAA Summary of Subsection B Common Route

Route Corridor Option	Accessibility	Social Impacts	Land Use Impact	Safety Impact	Climate Change	Local Environmental Impact
Subsection B Common Route	Neutral	Slight Positive	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Neutral

Subsection B Common Route has scored Positive under the criterion of Safety Impact, Slight Positive under the criterion of Social Impacts and Neutral under the remaining criteria. Subsection B Common Route is in line with the objectives of the project, following the original West Clare Railway corridor where practicable, providing a safe and substantially segregated sustainable transport corridor and protecting vulnerable users through improving / removing interactions with vehicles.

3.8.4.3 Route Corridor Options Assessment for Subsection C

Subsection C commences west of Moyasta, routing towards Kilrush, largely via the route of the railway corridor, through Carrowncalla North and Carrowncalla South. The route deviates from the original rail line at points to avoid developments. Route corridor options C-1 to C-5 identify potential corridors through the village of Moyasta. The Subsection C Common Route south of Moyasta incorporates the original railway line, tracking south from Moyasta to terminate at Pella Road. Refer to Plate 3-11 below (Figure 3.8 in Volume 3 of this EIAR).

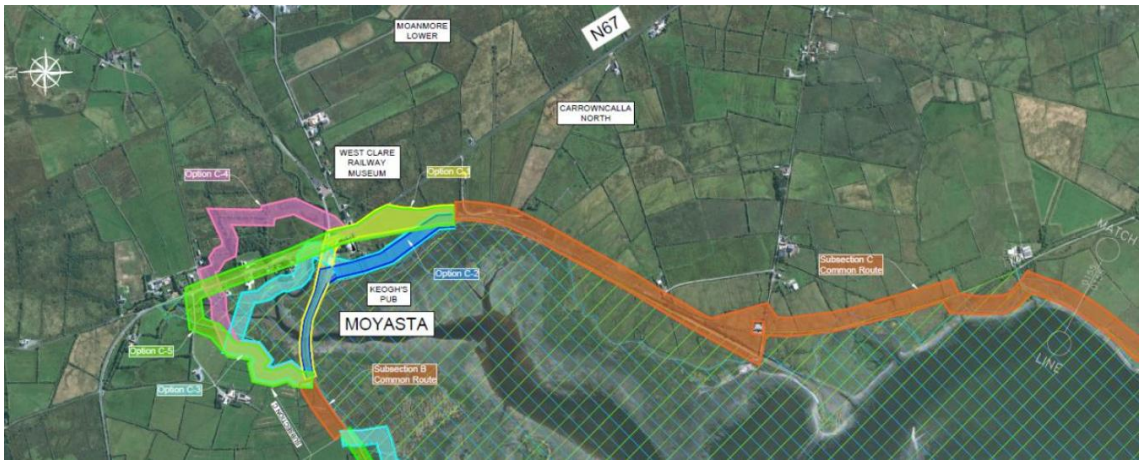

Plate 3-11 Route Corridor Options in Subsection C

The TAA summary tables below provide the summary assessment for route corridor options C-1 to C-5 and Subsection C Common Route.

Table 3-18 TAA Summary of Route Corridor Options C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4 and C-5

Route Corridor Option	Accessibility	Social Impacts	Land Use Impact	Safety Impact	Climate Change	Local Environmental Impact
Option C-1	Slight Positive	Positive	Slight Positive	Slight Positive	Neutral	Neutral
Option C-2	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	High Positive	Neutral	Neutral
Option C-3	Slight Positive	Slight Positive	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Slight Negative
Option C-4	Slight Positive	Neutral	Neutral	Slight Negative	Neutral	Slight Negative
Option C-5	Positive	Neutral	Neutral	Negative	Neutral	Slight Negative

Route Corridor Options C-3, C-4 and C-5 were found to have a Slight Negative score for the Local Environment Impact, due to anticipated impacts on Biodiversity, Landscape and Visual, Soils and Geology and Archaeology as a result of new bridge structures and greenfield construction. Route Corridor Option C-2 is scored High Positive under Safety Impact due to the route being completely removed from the N67, however it scored Neutral under Accessibility and Land Use Impact as it does not directly tie into the village of Moyasta. Route Corridor Option C-1 is therefore identified as the preferred Route Corridor Option as it has more overall positive impact scores than neutral. It scored Positive under Social Impacts, and Slight Positive under Accessibility, Land Use Impact and Safety Impact, while scoring Neutral under the Climate Change and Local Environment Impact. Route Corridor Option C-1 is in line with the objectives of the project, providing a sustainable tourism visitor attraction along the original West Clare Railway line, increasing the mode share of sustainable transport modes to schools and workplaces by tying into the village of Moyasta and the bus stop locations, in doing so enhancing connectivity to employment areas, and other key services. The connection to Moyasta village will offer a route with things to see and do in line with the 5 S's while also maintaining a substantially segregated route. On the basis of the above scoring, Route Corridor Option C-1 is identified as the emerging preferred route corridor option.

Options C-4 and C-5 as the longest routes have the highest anticipated cost, followed by Option C-3. Options C-2 and C-1 scored the lowest in respect of their shorter lengths and the use of existing bridge infrastructure.

Table 3-19 TAA Summary of Subsection C Common Route

Route Corridor Option	Accessibility	Social Impacts	Land Use Impact	Safety Impact	Climate Change	Local Environmental Impact
Subsection C Common Route	Neutral	Slight Positive	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Slight Negative

Subsection C Common Route has scored 'Positive' and 'Slight Positive' under Safety Impact and Social Impacts respectively. This route option brings users along the historic railway line and provides a path segregated from vehicular traffic, improving safety scores. Subsection C Common Route incurs a 'Slight Negative' in terms of Local Environmental Impact, as the route option travels along agricultural field boundaries and runs in close proximity to Poulnasherry

Bay, the impact of the route is scored as 'Slight Negative'. This route corridor is approximately 3.1km long.

3.8.4.4 Route Corridor Options Assessment for Subsection D

Subsection D includes four viable route options from Pella Road to the Kilrush Trailhead. The options vary in terms of directness, scenic value and impact upon the local environment. The options are shown in Plate 3-12 below (Figure 3.9 in Volume 3 of this EIAR).

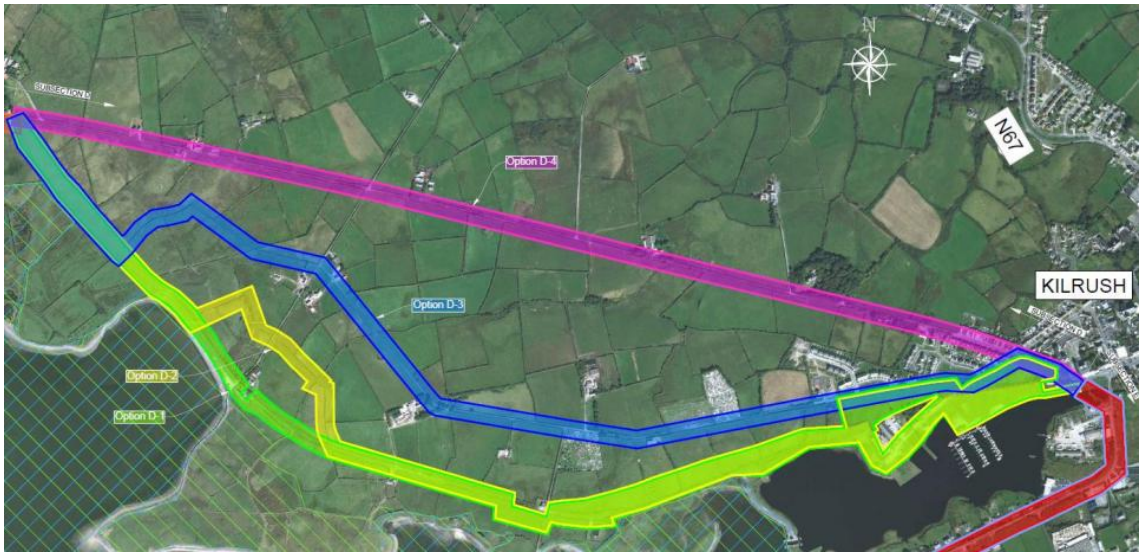

Plate 3-12 Route Corridor Options in Subsection D

The TAA summary table below provides the summary assessment for route corridor options D-1 to D-4.

Table 3-20 TAA Summary of Route Corridor Options D-1, D-2, D-3, D-4

Route Corridor Option	Accessibility	Social Impacts	Land Use Impact	Safety Impact	Climate Change	Local Environmental Impact
Option D-1	Positive	Slight Positive	Slight Positive	Positive	Neutral	Slight Negative
Option D-2	Positive	Slight Positive	Slight Positive	Positive	Neutral	Slight Negative
Option D-3	Positive	Neutral	Neutral	Slight Positive	Neutral	Slight Negative
Option D-4	Positive	Neutral	Neutral	Slight Positive	Neutral	Slight Negative

On the basis of the above ranking, route corridor option D-1 and D-2 both scored Positive under the headings of Accessibility and Safety Impact, Slight Positive under Social Impacts and Land Use Impact, and Neutral under Climate Change. All options are rated as having Slight Negative impacts on Local Environment, as all options are adjacent to, or are within Lower River Shannon SAC and River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA and traverse agricultural lands. Route Corridor Options D-3 and D-4 in comparison, only scored Slight Positive under Safety Impact and Neutral under Social Impacts and Land Use Impact. D-1 has been identified as the Emerging Route Corridor Option as it scored more favourably under the sub-criteria of Public Realm and Transport Users with Different Mobility Needs.

Option D-1 will tie in with the popular swimming location at Brew's Bridge car park, providing an opportunity to improve facilities at this location and a direct active travel link to Kilrush town. This option is in line with the objectives of the project as it will use the original West Clare Railway Corridor where feasible, improve access to scenic and rural areas of West Clare for modes other than the private car, increase the mode share of sustainable transport modes through the provision of a substantially segregated transport corridor for vulnerable road users.

Option D-4 has the shortest route and therefore has the lowest anticipated cost. D-2 as the longest option has the highest anticipated cost. D-1 and D-3 were found to have similar costs. D-1 was the option progressed based upon the TAA scoring outlined above.

3.8.4.5 Route Corridor Options Assessment for Subsection E

Subsection E begins at the pedestrian bridge in Kilrush, near the Kilrush Marina, and extends to Cappagh Pier. One common route was identified for Subsection E during Public Consultation No.2, however prior to the appraisal of options, another option was considered using roads through housing estates as set out in Plate 3-13 below (Figure 3.9 in Volume 3 of this EIAR).

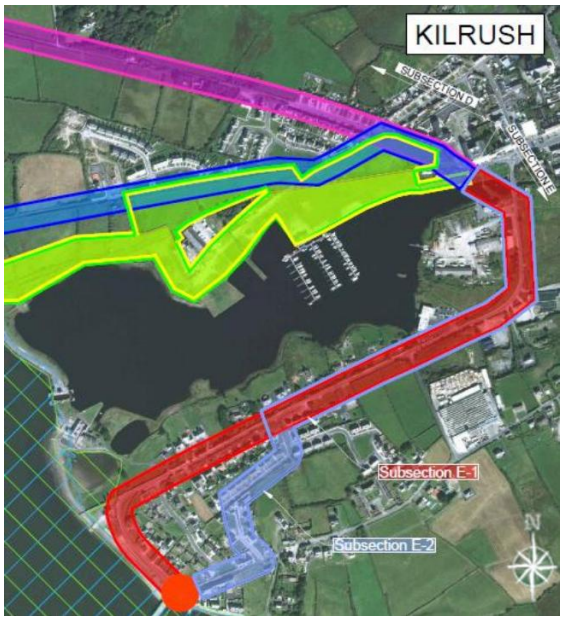

Plate 3-13 Route Corridor Options in Subsection E

The TAA summary table below provides the summary assessment for route corridor options E-1 and E-2.

Table 3-21 TAA Summary of Route Corridor Options E-1 and E-2

Route Corridor Option	Accessibility	Social Impacts	Land Use Impact	Safety Impact	Climate Change	Local Environmental Impact
Option E-1	Positive	Slight Positive	Slight Positive	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Option E-2	Positive	Slight Negative	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral

On the basis of the above ranking, route corridor option E-1 is identified as the emerging preferred route corridor option. It has scored Positive under Accessibility similar to Option E-

2, however it has scored Slight Positive under Social Impacts and Land Use Impact compared to E-2 which scored Slight Negative and Neutral under these two headings respectively. Both options are of similar length and incur similar costs as a result.

A decision was taken subsequent to Public Consultation No. 2 to omit Subsection E from the scheme, and to end the greenway at the proposed Kilrush Trailhead. Clare County Council is separately developing a network of enhanced walking and cycling trails around Kilrush, including linking to the Vandaleur Gardens and the (to be) refurbished Mars Cinema, and it is felt more appropriate that connectivity from the proposed Greenway Trailhead to Cappagh Pier would be developed as part of that strategy.

3.8.5 Public Consultation No. 3, March 2024

The third non-statutory public consultation for the West Clare Railway Greenway Section 1 took place from 15th March to 12th of April 2024. This consultation presented the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor to the public and invited the public to provide their observations on the option selection process and the corridor selected as shown in Plate 3-14 below (Figure 3.10 in Volume 3 of this EIAR).

Plate 3-14 Emerging Preferred Route Corridor on Display at Public Consultation No. 3

As in previous consultations, exhibition boards were erected for the duration of the consultation period in two locations, the Kilrush Public Library and the Sweeney Memorial Library, Kilkee. The exhibition highlighted the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor and also key environmental constraints. Brochures were also printed and provided at each of the venues. These brochures explained the status of the project and encouraged public feedback. All information contained within the brochure was also published online on the Clare County Council website and also the dedicated project website, www.westclarerailwaygreenway.ie. A number of representatives from both Clare County Council and ROD were present at both in-person information sessions, held from 3:30pm to 8:00pm on the evenings of the 20th and 21st of March 2024. The sessions were held with the aim of engaging with the public and providing clarity in regard to the option selection process and purpose of the consultation. Direct engagement with potentially affected landowners was also facilitated during the third public consultation, where requested, in accordance with the Government's Code of Best Practice for Greenways.

Public feedback both during and beyond the consultation period was encouraged and facilitated through a number of submission methods. A printed feedback form was available at both public consultation venues, which could be submitted through the drop-off facility at each venue, by post to Clare County Council, or by scanning the form and emailing it to an ROD address. A digital version of the feedback form was also available from the Clare County Council website and could be submitted using the same options as above. The call-in facility was again provided despite the removal of COVID-19 restrictions. This facility allowed members of the public to contact designated ROD staff and give their submission via telephone. In addition to this, individual landowner consultations were facilitated at the public consultation venues, outside of information sessions, held on the 20th and 21st of March.

Prior to the non-statutory public consultation, the publicity campaign consisted of newspaper advertisement placed in The Clare Champion on the 15th of March 2024 and in The Clare Echo on the 14th of March 2024. This advised the public of consultation times and locations. A radio advertisement was broadcast on Clare FM from the 15th of March 2024, three times a week for three weeks concluding on the 12th of April 2024. The public consultation material was available across a variety of platforms during the consultation period, including:

- West Clare Railway Greenway Website – www.westclarerailwaygreenway.ie
- Clare County Council's Website – www.clarecoco.ie
- Clare County Council's social media platforms – X (formerly known as Twitter) and Facebook.

Following the third non-statutory public consultation, the information gathered was collated and the following points were raised:

- 22 submissions expressed support for the greenway.
- 21 submission expressed concerns about security and safety for residential and agricultural properties.
- 1 submission expressed concern about the potential impact on farming operations because the proposed route is present along the boundary of agricultural land.
- 11 submissions expressed concerns about access to agricultural lands, private dwellings, and Poulnasherry Bay.
- 8 submission expressed concerns about privacy and screening for residential dwellings along the proposed route.
- 7 submissions raised queries regarding ancillary facilities.
- 11 submissions raised concerns about potential congestion on roads.
- 7 submissions expressed concerns about the local environmental impacts;
    - 4 submissions expressed concerns about biodiversity impacts and highlighted concerns for native flora and the protection of birds present in Poulnasherry Bay.
    - 1 submission expressed concern about land and soil impacts.
    - 1 submission related to hydrology, highlighting the presence of a small stream near Blackweir Bridge.
    - 1 submission expressed concerns about impacts on archaeological, architectural, and cultural heritage.
    - 3 submissions expressed concerns about landscape and visual impacts, specifically mentioning potential impacts on views while some submissions highlighted how the greenway will provide scenic views for greenway users.
- 8 submissions provided feedback on specific options that are being considered.

- 4 submissions expressed a preference for a route as close as practicable to the original West Clare Railway route.

3.8.6 Refinements to the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor

A further review of the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor was undertaken by the design team following Public Consultation No.3 in consideration of the submissions received during the consultation event. Habitat surveys were also undertaken by ROD ecologists along the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor in June and July 2024 to confirm the habitats present within the corridor and to inform the confirmation of the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor.

Based on this review, two changes are proposed to the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor, for the reasons set out in the below paragraphs.

Route Corridor Options B-1 to B-4

Following Public Consultation No.3 and the further surveys undertaken, it was confirmed that a section of Route Corridor Option B-1 is currently in use as a private garden and biodiversity wildflower meadow. As it is the intention of the project to avoid direct impacts on private dwellings and gardens in so far as possible, the options assessment for Route Corridor Options B-1 to B-4 has therefore been reviewed.

Route Corridor Options B-1 and B-2 scored the same under the main TAA Criteria, and Option B-1 was selected over B-2 as part of the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor for Public Consultation 3 due to the direct nature of the corridor and the alignment with the original railway corridor in line with the objectives of the project.

As Route Corridor Option B-2 scored better than Route Corridor Option B-1 under the sub-criteria Biodiversity and Landscape and Visual, and it avoids the area of private garden and wildflower meadow, the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor has been amended and Route Corridor Option B-2 is therefore selected as the Preferred Route Corridor Option at this location, in place of Route Corridor Option B-1.

Route Corridor Options B-7 and B-8

Habitat surveys which were carried out by ROD Ecologists in June and July 2024 along the Emerging Preferred Corridor identified that Saltmarsh habitat is present within the footprint of Route Corridor Option B-8 along the eastern coastal section of the corridor. Due to the sensitive nature of the habitat, direct impacts on this habitat would result in significant impacts on the environment in this location.

Upon review of TAA for Route Corridor Options B-7 and B-8, Route Corridor Option B7 scored Neutral under Local Environmental Impact compared to Route Corridor Option B-8 which scored Slight Negative. In addition, whilst both route corridor options scored Neutral under the overall Criteria of Climate Change, Route Corridor Option B-8 scored Negative under the sub-criteria of Climate Adaptation due to its high vulnerability to coastal flooding and extreme wind in relation to landscaping.

Based on the results of the Habitat surveys, the above review of the TAA assessment and under the assumption that design measures, mitigation and accommodation works can be developed to reduce the impact on the adjacent farm business and dwelling, the Emerging Preferred Route Corridor has been amended and option B-7 is therefore selected as the Preferred Route Corridor Option at this location, in place of Route Corridor Option B-8. As a result, Route Corridor Option B-7 will therefore form part of the Preferred Route Corridor for the project instead of B-8.

3.8.7 Description of the Preferred Route Corridor

Following the Stage 1 and Stage 2 assessment process and the inclusion of feedback from Public Consultations No.1, 2 and 3, the Preferred Route Corridor for the West Clare Railway Greenway Section 1 Kilrush to Kilkee comprises the following route corridor options: A-2, A-4, A-6, Subsection A Common Route, B-2, B-5, B-7, Subsection B Common Route, C-1, Subsection C Common Route and D-1. The drawing of the Preferred Route Corridor is provided below in Plate 3-15 (Figure 3.11 in Volume 3 of this EIAR).

Similar to the approach adopted at Kilrush, where local linkages to Cappagh Pier are to be developed by the County Council as part of a comprehensive local walking and cycling strategy, a similar approach has been adopted for Kilkee. The connection of the greenway to the pier will require careful urban design to integrate with existing street uses, and warrants a comprehensive public realm study in and of itself. It is therefore proposed to terminate the West Clare Railway Greenway near the former Kilkee Train Station at the eastern edge of the town, with complementary local active travel and public realm measures to be separately implemented by Clare County Council in consultation with the local community.

Plate 3-15 The Preferred Route Corridor

The Preferred Route Corridor is approximately 15km in length, commencing in Kilkee and navigating to Kilrush town via Moyasta, largely following the former West Clare Railway Corridor.
The route corridor begins near the former Kilkee Station House, through the Percy French Estate along the railway line before diverting to the front or back of the Meadow View Court estate, continuing eastwards through the townland of Lisdeen. Here, the route diverts around one agricultural field boundary to the north and rejoins the rail corridor before approaching Blackweir Bridge.

From Blackweir Bridge, the route proceeds through the townland of Garraun and has the potential to travel east within the footprint of the field north of the minor local road for approximately 240m before turning south following the railway embankment east. The corridor then deviates from the original railway line and follows the boundary of the agricultural field in a south and then easterly direction along existing hedgerows, before following adjacent to or along a short section of existing minor road in order to travel south along the townland boundary towards the coast.

Upon entering the townland of Moyasta, the corridor travels south and east within the field perimeter again, and then follows a hedgerow east towards a local road. The corridor travels east and then north to connect to the railway corridor once again. The corridor crosses the Moyasta 'Red Bridge' on the approach to Moyasta Village, and travels through the former railway yard before traveling south on a route adjacent to the N67 and then diverging from the national road again, following a spur of the original railway to rejoin the embankment to the south of Moyasta.

Within the townlands of Carrowncalla North and Carrowncalla South, the corridor runs south along the route of the original rail embankment, routing around private dwellings. The route diverges west of the railway corridor at Carrowncalla South and makes use of an existing path before tying into Pella Road. The route travels eastwards inside the agricultural field boundary to return to the route of the railway. Traveling southeast, the route tracks towards Kilrush, connecting with Brew's Bridge and providing deviations around two local properties, one at Brew's Bridge and one further east in the townland of Leadmore West. The route then deviates around a factory in Kilrush and from here may follow the railway or follow the marina on approach to Kilrush. The greenway will terminate at the Kilrush trail head in Kilrush town.

In conclusion, the Preferred Route Corridor as set out in the above paragraphs has been recommended as the optimum solution to meet the project specific Policy Need and the Objectives of the project.

The Preferred Route Corridor can facilitate the development of a substantially segregated route in line with the Rural Cycleway Design Manual.

Within the preferred route corridor, the preliminary design has been developed to avoid or minimise, where possible, significant impacts on property owners and the receiving environment through design refinement and the incorporation of appropriate mitigation measures.

3.8.8 Deviations from the Preferred Route Corridor during further Design Development

During the development of the preliminary design, two further deviations from the Preferred Route Corridor have been proposed to reduce impacts on agricultural lands and properties adjacent to the route. A comparison of the route options has been undertaken, using the Transport Appraisal Framework headings, to assess the differences between the potential for a route within the Preferred Route Corridor, and an alternative that has been identified throughout this process.

3.8.8.1 Deviation at Lisdeen

The first of these is in the townland of Lisdeen, along Common Route B, where a slight deviation from the original railway line has been considered to travel around the perimeter of the adjacent field, to avoid impacting the original railway corridor, which is currently in use by the landowner and to reduce severance on the affected lands.

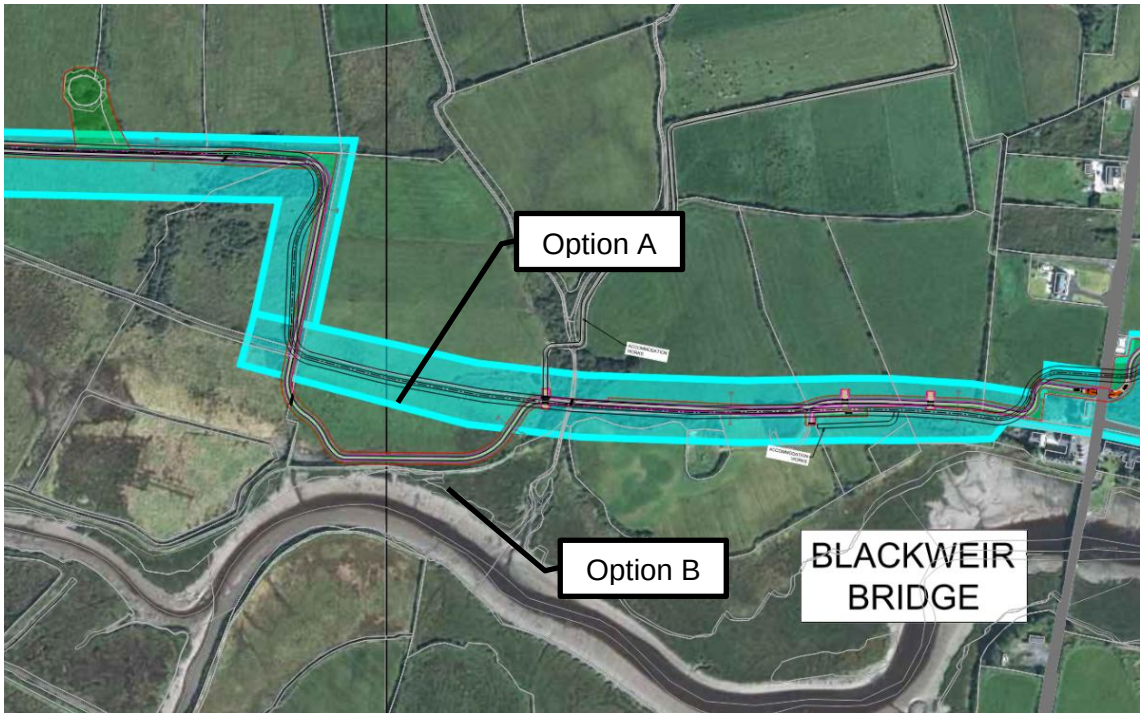

Plate 3-16 **Deviation from the Preferred Route Corridor at Lisdeen, west of Blackweir Bridge**

Accessibility: Both options will ultimately link to Kilkee, Moyasta and Kilrush and in isolation, will not improve or disprove accessibility to services, recreational facilities, jobs or other facilities. The topography of Option B around the field perimeter falls towards the Shannon Estuary at a gradient of between 5.7% at the western extremity of the field and 7% at the eastern extremity, however these gradients will occur over lengths of the greenway shorter than the maximum allowable distance of 150m. The alternative route of Option B therefore introduces slightly longer and more challenging gradients than Option A however these are within the permissible vertical alignment standards for Greenways.

Social Impacts: Both options will provide similar benefits to deprived groups and users with different mobility groups. Both corridors will be segregated from motorised traffic, ensuring a pleasant environment for all users. As described above, Option B will introduce slightly steeper terrain and a longer distance than Option A however these gradients are within the permissible vertical alignment standards for Greenways.

Land Use Impact: Both options traverse agricultural land and will be screened as appropriate using a natural boundary. Option A follows the route of the original West Clare Railway, however it causes disturbance and severance to agricultural practices, potentially having a negative impact on the land use surrounding the greenway.

Safety: Both options will be wholly segregated from motorised traffic creating a safe environment for all active travel and mobility impaired users.

Climate Change: While both routes will result in some GHG emissions the scheme overall will promote a modal shift to more sustainable modes of travel through active travel by providing improved facilities for walking and cycling within the area. Both options have medium to low vulnerabilities to the majority of climate hazards.

Local Environment Impact:

- Air Quality: There are no receptors within 200 – 350m of either route. Option B is within Poulnasherry Bay pNHA, while both options are located in close proximity to the Lower River Shannon SAC and the River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA. Neither option is predicted to result in significant air quality impacts.
- Noise and Vibration: There are no residential receptors within 300m of either option.
- Biodiversity: Option A is located along the alignment of the former railway line and traverses grassland, while Option B is located along the field boundary in improved grassland. Both options would result in some grassland habitat loss.
- Landscape and Visual: Option A is located along the alignment of the former railway line and traverses grassland, while Option B is located along the field boundary in improved grassland.
- Water Resources: Neither route crosses any surface water bodies, transitional waterbodies, estuaries or bays. The CFRAM River Flood Extents – Present Day Map shows that the routes do not traverse lands with any probability of flooding. Both options at this location are located within an existing flood berm, which protects the land from coastal flooding. Neither route crosses any areas with past flood events. Both routes are located in areas of medium groundwater vulnerability. Option B intersects with 1 groundwater well, while Option A is located approx. 45 m from it. Both routes are located adjacent / close to the SAC and SPA.
- Soils and Geology: Option A would require construction along the remains of the original railway embankment, while Option B would require construction within greenfield land.
- Material Assets – Agricultural: The former rail line has been converted into agricultural lands and is currently used as an access track by the landowner. Route A would therefore result in impacts and severance to existing operations, while Option B would require some landtake, but due to its location, would not cause severance to the landholding.
- Archaeology, Architecture and Cultural Heritage: Option A will run along the route of the former railway which has been subject to ground disturbance previously. Option B will cross greenfield land, therefore having the potential to impact on buried archaeological remains.

Overall, the potential for impacts from both Options A and B are very similar, with Option A being located closer to the boundary of the SAC and SPA, and in greenfield land, but having a lesser impact on agricultural operations and land severance, by being routed to the edge of the field. Option B is slightly longer and steeper than Option A, however it has been identified as the preferred route going forward through Phase 3 at this location, due to the positive benefits it brings and the reduced impact on private land in keeping on the Government Code of Best Practice for Greenways.

3.8.8.2 Deviation at Baunmore

The second location is located in the townland of Baunmore, along Common Route B, where it has been requested that the proposed route deviate around an adjacent field to avoid having impacts on the adjacent property which would have been potentially indirectly impacted by the Preferred Route Corridor. The alternative route follows the opposite field boundary within the impacted field, and routes away from Poulnasherry Bay for a section, before rejoining the Preferred Route Corridor to the east.

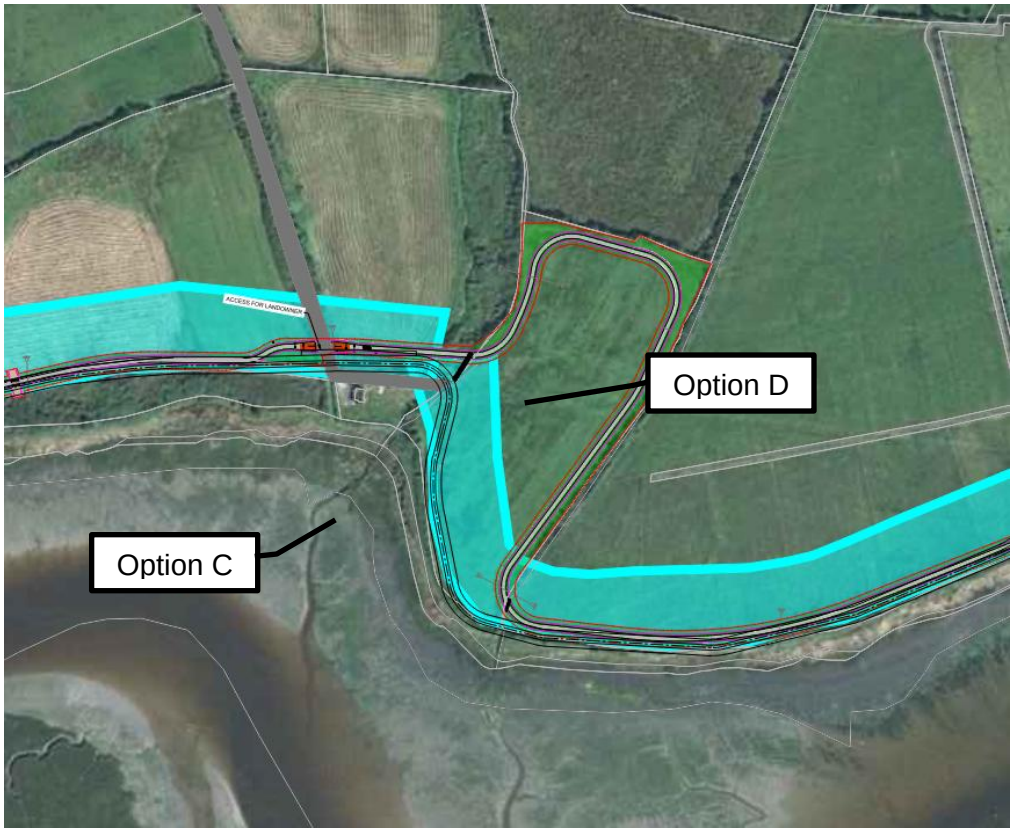

Plate 3-17 Deviation from the Preferred Route Corridor at Baunmore

Accessibility: Both options will ultimately link to Kilkee, Moyasta and Kilrush and in isolation, will not improve or disprove accessibility to services, recreational facilities, jobs or other facilities. The field topography falls at a 4% gradient to the Shannon Estuary along the western boundary of the site, while the eastern boundary falls more gently at a 2% maximum gradient, therefore there is no significant difference between options in terms of gradient.

Social Impacts: Both options will provide similar benefits to deprived groups and users with different mobility groups. Both corridors will be segregated from motorised traffic, ensuring a pleasant environment for all users.

Land Use Impact: Both options traverse agricultural land and will be screened as appropriate using a natural boundary.

Safety: Both options will be wholly segregated from motorised traffic creating a safe environment for all active travel and mobility impaired users.

Climate Change: While both routes will result in some GHG emissions the scheme overall will promote a modal shift to more sustainable modes of travel through active travel by providing improved facilities for walking and cycling within the area. Both options have medium to low vulnerabilities to the majority of climate hazards.

Local Environment Impact:

- Air Quality: Both options have 1 no. high sensitivity receptor within approx. 20m of the route. Neither options is predicted to result in significant air quality impacts. While both options are located in close proximity to the Lower River Shannon SAC and the River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA, Option D deviates from these sites for the majority of the route. Neither option is predicted to result in significant air quality impacts.

- Noise and Vibration: Both options are located in a rural environment, with one residential receptor located in proximity to both options. Option D diverts the greenway farther from the residential property due to the route traversing north around the adjacent field, and due to the agricultural access arrangement.
- Biodiversity: Option C is routed along the western and southern boundaries of the field, while Option D is located along the northern and eastern boundaries of the field. Both options will result in the loss of improved agricultural grassland, with Option C resulting in the loss of a slightly bigger area, due to the increased length of the option compared to Option D.
- Landscape and Visual: Both options are located along field boundaries in improved grassland, and will be provided with screening. Option D will have a smaller visual impact on one nearby residential property.
- Water Resources: Neither route crosses any surface water bodies, transitional waterbodies, estuaries or bays. The CFRAM River Flood Extents – Present Day Map shows that the routes do not traverse lands with any probability of flooding. The CFRAM Coastal Flood Extents – Present Day map shows that neither route option traverses land with any probability of coastal flooding. Neither route crosses any areas with past flood events. Both routes are located in areas of medium groundwater vulnerability. Option C is located approx. 240m from a groundwater well, while Option D is located approx. 100 m from it. Both routes are located adjacent / close to the SAC and SPA, while Option D is routed away from them for the majority of the route.
- Soils and Geology: Both options would require construction within greenfield land.
- Material Assets – Agricultural: Both routes will follow the respective perimeters of the adjacent field, along the boundary, insofar as possible. The route within the field is slightly longer for Option D than Option C.
- Archaeology, Architecture and Cultural Heritage: Both options will cross greenfield land, therefore having the potential to impact on buried archaeological remains.

Overall, the potential impacts from both Options C and D are very similar, with Option C being slightly longer, but being located further from the residential property and the boundary of the SAC and SPA for the majority of the route. Both options are routed to the edge of the field in so far as possible. On the basis of the requests made and the review above, Option D has been identified as the preferred route at this location.

3.9 Trailheads

Following identification of the preferred route, a need for additional parking / trailhead facilities was identified at both Kilrush and Moyasta. In both cases, it became apparent that open, undeveloped, appropriate land holdings were available immediately adjacent to the old railway stations. Even a cursory assessment would indicate that no more appropriate sites were available in the vicinity, and therefore, these sites were included in the proposed development, subject to environmental assessment. The selection of these sites was also aligned with the aim of the project in utilising and enhancing the former West Clare Railway. In addition, these sites have been zoned as part of the Clare County Development Plan to facilitate future development of the West Clare Railway Greenway.

Consideration was given to the provision of a trailhead in Kilkee, but no suitable sites are available within the town, and it would be inappropriate to bring additional traffic through residential areas to access a new trailhead near the proposed terminus of the works. Some potential sites were identified on the approach to the town along the N67. However, following the commissioning of surveys of the usage of existing parking facilities at Kilkee, it was

determined that there is adequate parking and servicing already available within the town, and that it would therefore be inappropriate to provide additional parking provision. This is documented in Chapter 5 of this EIAR.

3.10 Cross Section

The proposed typical cross section has been designed in accordance with the prevailing TII standard, where practicable, and alternative, non-standard provision has not been considered.

3.11 Bridge Locations

Bridges are required at a number of locations to accommodate the proposed greenway. In each instance, the topography has been reviewed and directly affected landowners consulted to identify the optimal location for the proposed structure. Where feasible, existing bridges have been incorporated into the design to minimise potential impacts on the environment. This has then been subjected to environmental assessment in this EIAR to ensure that the preferred location would not result in unacceptable environmental impacts.

3.12 Site Compounds

It has become practice to identify the location of construction compounds for construction of the works such that the environmental impact associated with the temporary provision of same can be assessed. Once the design of the scheme had been determined, the potential locations for such compounds was reviewed. It became immediately obvious that the most appropriate locations were at the proposed trailhead locations, and that the (temporary) acquisition of additional lands for construction could only be justified where these trailhead locations couldn't service the construction needs. Having reviewed the potential construction logistics, the team is satisfied that the two proposed construction compounds are adequate and appropriate for a construction project of this scale. The only additional areas required are in the immediate vicinity of some of the proposed bridges for craneage logistics. This is reflected in the proposed land acquisition. Temporary parking and welfare facilities for construction workers will be accommodated along the works corridor where space permits. The provision of additional or alternative construction compounds is therefore neither necessary nor appropriate.

3.13 Summary of Conclusions

Overall, the preferred route corridor was selected to best align with the objectives of the project, following the original West Clare Railway corridor where practicable, providing a safe and substantially segregated sustainable transport corridor through minimising vehicle interactions with pedestrians and cyclists.

The preferred route corridor has been selected to reduce severance impacts on existing farms and local businesses as well as minimising local environmental impacts such as archaeology and biodiversity impacts which have been minimised where possible through the route selection process.

The preferred route corridor provides a direct active travel link between the towns of Kilrush and Kilkee, and links them with the village of Moyasta as well as locally popular locations along the route such as Brew's Bridge which is a popular swimming location. This is in line with the project objective to improve access to scenic and rural areas of West Clare for modes other than the private car.

In addition, the preferred route corridor ties into the village of Moyasta, increasing sustainable transport modes to schools and workplaces thereby enhancing connectivity to employment areas and other key services.

The selection of trailheads, bridge locations and site compounds was focused on the use of infrastructure and land associated with the former West Clare Railway, which is consistent with the aims of the proposed development. The selection of the trailheads was also carried out with due consideration of the land use zoning in the Clare County Development Plan. As outlined in Chapter 2 of this EIAR, the Clare County Development Plan identifies the indicative location of the West Clare Railway Greenway alongside the proposed trailhead locations, and includes land use zoning which facilitates the use of these sites for the purpose of developing the West Clare Railway Greenway.

3.14 References

European Directive 2014/52/EU:

Roads Act, 1993, no. 14/1993, s. 50, Dublin: Roads Act, 1993

Central Statistics Office (2016), Census Interactive Map, https://visual.cso.ie/?body=entity/ima/cop/2016&boundary=C03786V04535&guid=2AE19629201613A3E055000000000001

Central Statistics Office (2022), Census Interactive Map, https://visual.cso.ie/?body=entity/ima/cop/2022&boundary=C04167V04938

Environmental Protection Agency (2024), Bathing Water Quality: https://gis.epa.ie/geonetwork/srv/eng/catalog.search#/metadata/c8a4347f-ee75-4206-a7af-70dd7a610dc0

Environmental protection Agency (2024), River Water Quality: https://gis.epa.ie/geonetwork/srv/eng/catalog.search#/metadata/a0179512-dca7-450d-8391-374c4bf00375

Council Directive 92/43/EEC: EUR-Lex - 01992L0043-20250714 - EN - EUR-Lex

Geological Survey Ireland (2025), Spatial Resources: Geological Survey Ireland Spatial Resources

Teagasc (2015) Soil Information Systems National Soils Map: https://gis.epa.ie/geonetwork/srv/eng/catalog.search#/metadata/2cd0c5e9-83b2-49a9-8c3e-79675ffd18bf

Council Directive 2000/60/EC: Directive - 2000/60 - EN - Water Framework Directive - EUR-Lex

Environmental Protection Agency (2025) Industrial Emissions Licensing search: https://epawebapp.epa.ie/terminalfour/ippc/ippc-search.jsp?name=shannonside&Submit=Search+by+Name

Clare County Council (2016), *Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023*, available: Clare County Development Plan 2017 - 2023: Volume 1: Written Statement

Clare County Council (2023), *Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029*, available: volume-1-written-statement-clare-county-development-plan-2023-2029-55992.pdf