

Shandon Area Ecological Report

Discussion Document, May 2004



***The residents of Shandon Gardens
value the amenities and wildlife of their area
and are dedicated to protecting their natural
and built environment***

Cover image: Holly blue butterfly. Found to occur commonly in the area. It would make a suitable emblem species for conservation in Shandon given that it is scarce and locally distributed in Ireland.

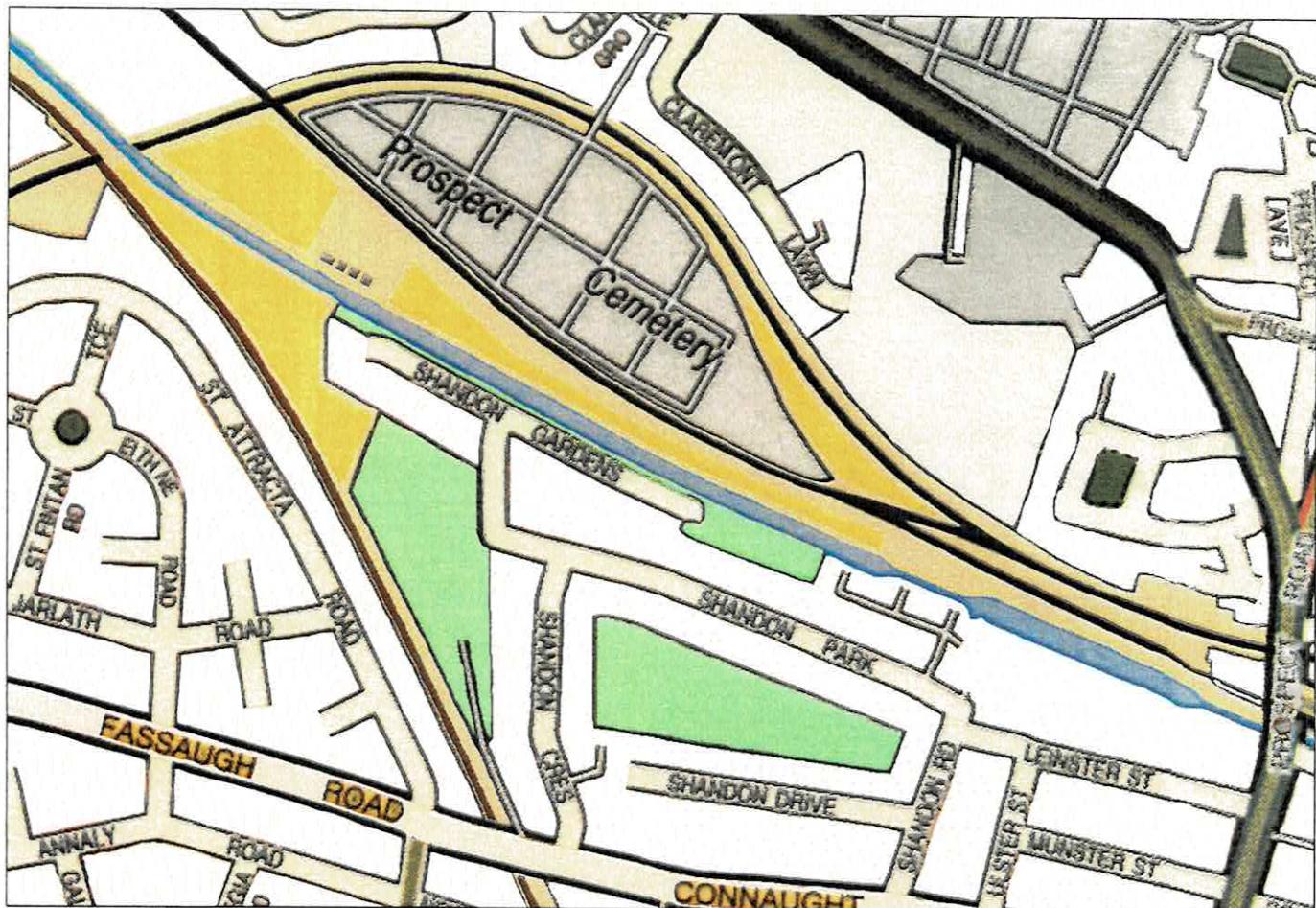
Shandon Area Ecological Plan

for

Shandon Gardens Residents' Association

Discussion Document, May 2004

Cóilín MacLochlainn



Abstract

A survey of birds, butterflies and other fauna was undertaken during February-May 2004 in order to ascertain the wildlife species supported in the Shandon estate area of Phibsboro, Dublin 7. Recommendations are made on how the natural amenities and opportunities for wild birds can be improved for the benefit of people and nature.

Rationale

The members of Shandon Gardens Residents' Association are actively involved in safeguarding and improving the built and natural environment in their area. They seek to enhance the conditions for local wildlife and wildflower communities, the better to improve the environment and the quality of life for local residents. This study was commissioned to document the birdlife of the area and provide a consultative document, or draft area ecological plan, with management recommendations for the purpose of future discussions with public, private and corporate entities with interests in the area. The main part of the study was a bird survey as wild birds are excellent indicators of environmental health and show up the areas of most value for wildlife.

Introduction

Shandon Gardens is located beside the Royal Canal in Phibsboro, Dublin 7, not far from Dublin city centre. It is part of a mature residential neighbourhood with Victorian-style redbrick housing from the 1920s together with housing stock from the 1930s, '40s and '50s. The area is distinguished by its varied environment of mature terraces with private gardens; the canal and its well-vegetated banks; a pitch & putt club with border hedging of privet; and some undeveloped green spaces.

Amenities in the area include:

- The Royal Canal and canalside walk (Royal Canal Way)
- The public green space at Shandon Gardens next to the Royal Canal
- A public park (Mount Bernard Park)
- Shandon Pitch & Putt Club (privately owned and managed).

The area also includes three 'green' or undeveloped sites that provide informal recreational space for local residents and support valuable wildlife habitat. They are:

- CIE lot at the back of Mount Bernard Park
- Coke Oven Cottages field on the north side of the canal
- Land abutting the north side of the canalside walk.

These three 'green' areas survive as they are isolated by railway lines and the canal and are thus currently inaccessible to emergency services. The St Paul section of Prospect Cemetery (Glasnevin Cemetery), accessed from Finglas Road, is similarly islanded and has some potential for environmental improvement works.

Survey area

The survey area extended from Shandon Pitch & Putt Club grounds and the rear of Shandon Drive, north to St Paul's, Prospect Cemetery; and from Westmoreland Bridge (Cross Guns Quay) on the Royal Canal, west to the railway-line canal underpass opposite St Atracta Road.

The survey area was divided into zones to facilitate discussion on management and improvement. The zones are defined by geography and land ownership (private or corporate) and are treated as separate management units for the purposes of this plan and for future discussions.

Methods

The area was visited on ten occasions in February-May 2004 inclusive, with an earlier visit in September 2003 to reconnoitre the ground. All birds and butterflies seen, and any evidence of wild mammals present, were recorded and some counts taken. The emphasis was on recording presence or absence, though any evidence of breeding was also noted.

Results

The Shandon area supports a wide variety of Irish resident and migratory bird species – 38 resident species plus five migratory species were recorded (Table 1). Five butterfly species were recorded (Table 2) and information obtained on the presence of six mammal species (Table 3).

Highlights included:

- Nesting swans, mallards and moorhens along the canal (visiting kingfishers were also reported).
- Large numbers of nesting greenfinches behind Mount Bernard Park and in the canalside hedges and in the Coke Oven Cottages field.
- Large numbers of nesting house sparrows around the Shandon Pitch & Putt Club and Coke Oven Cottages.
- The presence of two birds of prey – kestrel and sparrowhawk – indicating plentiful supply of small bird and mammal prey. A peregrine falcon was also seen.
- Large emergence of holly blue butterflies in April. Holly blue is local in Ireland, restricted to the south and east.

It should be noted that owing to the short time-frame of the survey, it is likely that some bird species were missed. For example, Swift,* a common summer migrant that arrives in mid-May, would be expected but had not arrived by the time of the survey's completion. Likewise, it is certain that many more butterfly species occur, including orange tip, red admiral, large white, small white, common blue and others.

* Swift was recorded in late May, following completion of the survey.

Table 1. Bird species recorded in the survey area, February-May 2004*

<i>Species</i>	<i>General status</i>	<i>Breeding status</i>
Grey heron	resident	breeding nearby presumed
Cormorant	casual visitor	
Mute swan	resident	breeds
Mallard	resident	breeds
Tufted duck	resident	breeding presumed; stock of feral origin
Sparrowhawk	resident	breeding nearby presumed
Peregrine falcon	casual visitor	
Kestrel	resident	breeding in area presumed
Moorhen	resident	breeds
Black-headed gull	winter visitor	
Lesser black-backed gull	summer visitor	breeding presumed, probably on local factory rooftop
Herring gull	resident	breeding presumed, probably on local factory rooftop
Common gull	winter visitor	
Woodpigeon	resident	breeds
Rock dove (feral pigeon)	resident	breeding presumed
Collared dove	casual visitor	breeding nearby presumed, probably in local cemetery
Swift	summer visitor	breeds
Kingfisher	casual visitor	breeding presumed west of 7th Lock
Swallow	summer visitor	breeding presumed nearby
House martin	summer visitor	breeding presumed nearby
Grey wagtail	resident	breeding presumed nearby
Pied wagtail	resident	breeding presumed
Wren	resident	breeds
Dunnock	resident	breeds
Whitethroat	summer visitor	breeding possible
Goldcrest	resident	breeding presumed
Robin	resident	breeds
Blackbird	resident	breeds
Redwing	winter visitor	
Song thrush	resident	breeds
Long-tailed tit	resident	breeding presumed
Coal tit	resident	breeds
Blue tit	resident	breeds
Great tit	resident	breeds
Chaffinch	resident	breeds
Greenfinch	resident	breeds
Goldfinch	resident	breeds
Linnet	resident	breeds
House sparrow	resident	breeds
Starling	resident	breeds
Magpie	resident	breeds
Jackdaw	resident	breeds
Rook	resident	breeding presumed nearby
Hooded crow	resident	breeding presumed nearby

* For more detail, see Appendix I, page 17

Table 2. Butterfly species recorded in the survey area, February-May 2004*

Holly blue
Green-veined white
Peacock
Speckled wood
Small tortoiseshell

* For more detail, see Appendix II, page 18

Table 3. Mammal and amphibian species recorded or reported in the survey area*

Fox
Hedgehog
Badger
Brown rat
Daubenton's bat
Soprano pipistrelle
Frog

* For more detail, see Appendix III, page 18



The canalside strip is a wonderful wildlife resource

Recommendations

Of greatest potential for ecological improvement within the survey area are the canalside, the public and privately-owned green spaces, and parts of the public park. Local residents could contribute by making minor adjustments to their gardens. There follows the recommendations by zone.

Zone A: Shandon Pitch & Putt Club and surrounds

Zone A is centred on Shandon Pitch & Putt Club and is bounded by Shandon Crescent, Shandon Park, Shandon Road, Shandon Drive and Shandon Green. The pitch & putt club is the oldest existing in the country.

Key findings

The Shandon Pitch & Putt Club is notable for its house sparrow population. At least 25 pairs breed in the boundary hedging of privet and in the roof-gutters and gardens of surrounding houses. In winter, the privet hedging supports a night-time roost of hundreds of house sparrows from the surrounding district.

Large concentrations of urban house sparrows are today confined to older housing estates, presumably as suitable nest-sites in gutters or under roof-tiles are available, whereas these are often inaccessible on modern housing.

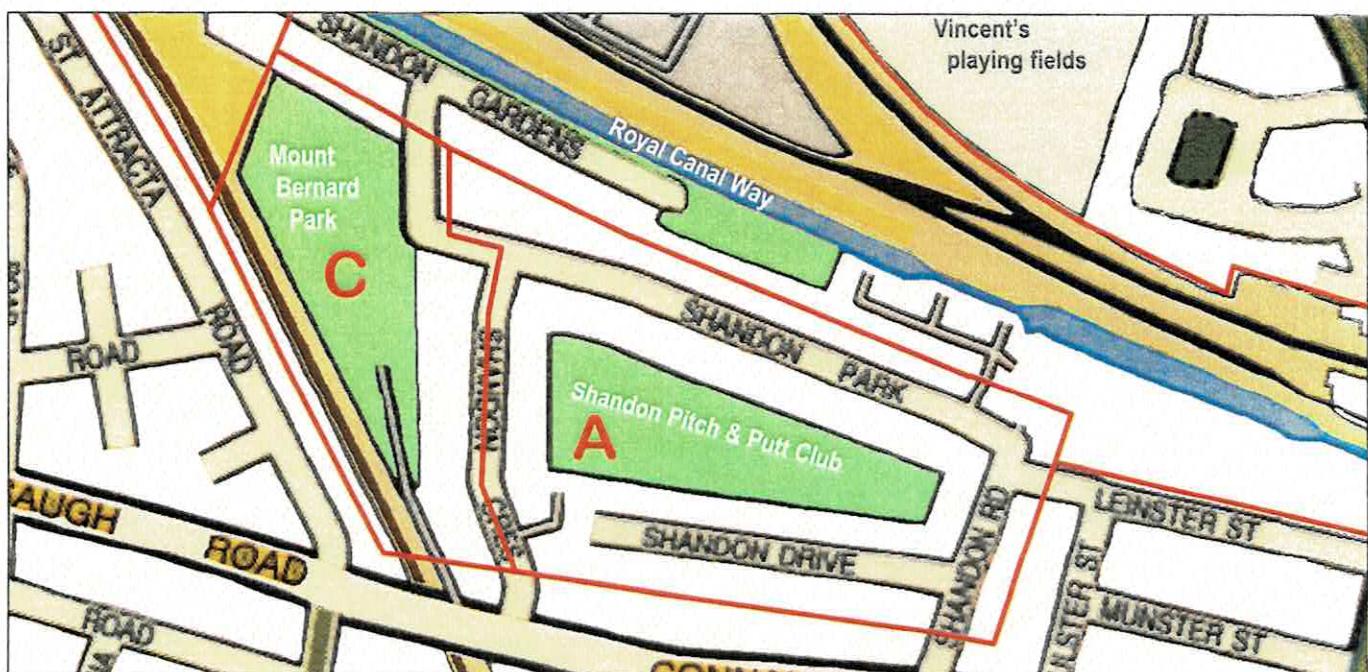
The club grounds and surrounding back gardens provide a tranquil sanctuary for a variety of other garden birds. Blackbirds, song thrushes, robins, dunnocks, starlings and chaffinches were all noted.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the club's boundary hedging be allowed to thicken inwards in one or two corners to safeguard the sparrow roost. The north-east and south-east corners (Shandon Road end) of the course are those most favoured by the sparrows. A thickening of one or two metres would benefit the roost without affecting the course. The north-east corner (with its compost heap) offers the most potential space for thickening.

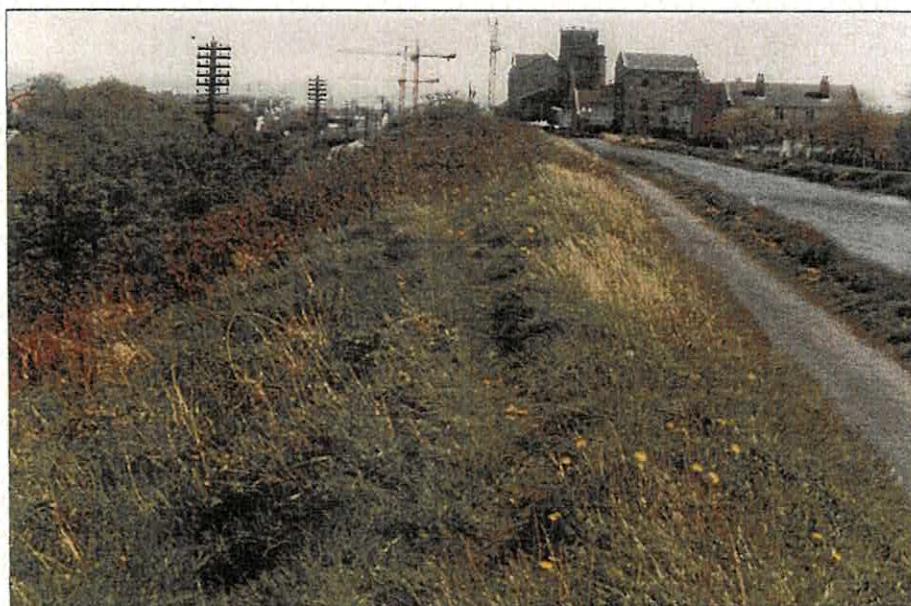
This zone also includes Shandon Park, a road noteworthy for the excellence of its trees, maintained by the city council. Trimming needs to be carried out sensitively to avoid affecting the appearance and ecological value of these roadside trees.

Recommendations to garden owners in this zone would apply to all garden owners in the survey area and are thus made separately (see page 15).





Shandon Pitch & Putt Club: could the NE corner hedging be thickened to safeguard roosting sparrows?



The canalside strip could be visually improved with judicious planting of trees and shrubs



Shandon Gardens: the canalside park is open and windy – it could be sheltered with hedging

Zone B: Shandon Gardens / The Royal Canal Way

Zone B incorporates Shandon Gardens and the Royal Canal Way at Phibsboro. It includes the open green space managed by city council next to the Royal Canal on Shandon Gardens. It also includes the Coke Oven Cottages field and lands abutting the north side of the canalside walk. It faces CBS St Vincent's playing fields and St Paul's, Prospect Cemetery.

Key findings

The canal with its well-vegetated banks is an oasis for waterbirds close to the city centre. Swan, mallard and moorhen nest along the watercourse. Cormorant, grey heron and tufted duck also use it regularly. A pair of kingfishers was reported above the 7th Lock: kingfisher is an Annex I listed species under the EC Birds Directive.

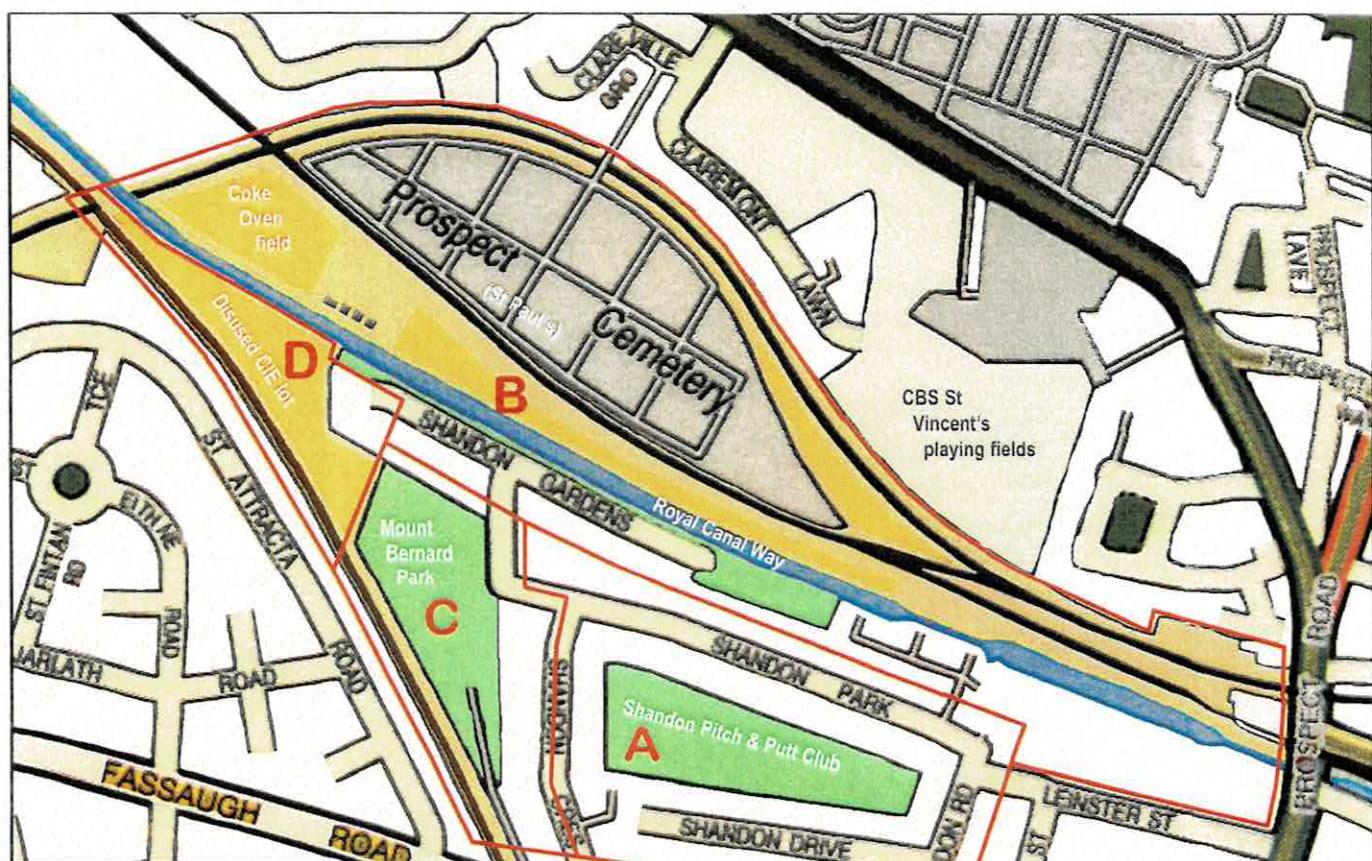
The Coke Oven Cottages gardens and field, and the undeveloped strip beside the canalside walk, support the widest diversity of bird, mammal and butterfly species in the area. Greenfinch and woodpigeon are most abundant, while song thrush, chaffinch, blue tit, coal tit, great tit and long-tailed tit are more abundant here than elsewhere. Foxes are found here, a badger was reported, while

Daubenton's bats and soprano pipistrelle bats feed along the canal. A pond in the field held spawn probably of Smooth Newt (Annex I species, EC Habitats Directive). Holly blue butterflies were most abundant in this zone.

Recommendations

The Royal Canal Way is a designated conservation area under the Dublin City Development Plan. This study recommends that the public green space or park located between Shandon Gardens and the 6th Lock be added to the conservation area. At present, the park is unsympathetic to wildlife and to people. It would benefit from the planting of trees and shrubbery inside the railings.

In addition, the long, narrow canalside park along Shandon Gardens is windy, owing to its long fetch. Subdividing it into sections by planting rows of hedging and trees would provide more shelter for birds and people. The hedging could be hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel or other shrub species suitable for birds and butterflies. Oak, Monterey pine and cedar of Lebanon are all attractive tree species that provide good shelter.



The canal bank itself is over-trampled and needs a greater width of wild growth on one or both sides to maximise its ecological value. This would require an imaginative solution, as anything planted on the banks will come under trampling pressure. A low concrete barrier (one-foot high) set back one metre from the water's edge might achieve the desired result.

The strip of land abutting the north side of the canal walk is self-sown with brambles and scrub and is very useful for wildlife. A more formal addition of trees and native shrubs would enhance it visually, and enhance the sense of public ownership, without affecting its value for wildlife.

The canalside walk itself would benefit from an improvement scheme similar to that provided between Morehampton (Cross Guns) Bridge and Binns Bridge.

The Coke Oven Cottages field with its tall hedgerows, woodland scrub and watered ditches is a haven for wildlife.

Greenfinches, woodpigeons and thrushes abound, while sparrowhawks and kestrels hunt for small prey. It is likely that the pasture has never been treated with agricultural chemicals and supports a wealth of invertebrate life. It would be advisable to protect it as a sanctuary for wildlife and as a public amenity (picnic site or pony-riding field) into the future, especially as other undeveloped plots in the area are likely to be infilled gradually. Some light, judicious planting of native trees and shrubs would enhance its wildlife value, though its central open pasture and ponds should be maintained in order to protect any species currently dependent on these habitats. Access needs to be provided, with proper gates or entry points.

The dry, stony railway sides at the east end of St Paul's Prospect Cemetery would benefit from the planting of shrubs such as pyracantha and gorse. These would add scent and colour to this urban setting and support birds such as linnets, which occur in the area.



Canal at Shandon Gardens: the canal banks are fairly bare and growth needs to be encouraged



The Coke Oven Cottages field with its hedgerows and ponds is an important haven for wildlife



The end of the St Paul's Prospect Cemetery site would benefit from the planting of gorse and pyracantha



The 6th Lock, Royal Canal: many butterflies sun themselves on the wall and hedges to the left

Zone C: Mount Bernard Park

Zone C, or Mount Bernard Park, is bounded to the north by Shandon Gardens (Nos 50-84); to the east by Shandon Crescent and Shandon Park; to the south by a disused railway line and St Attracta Road; and to the west by disused CIE sidings.

Key findings

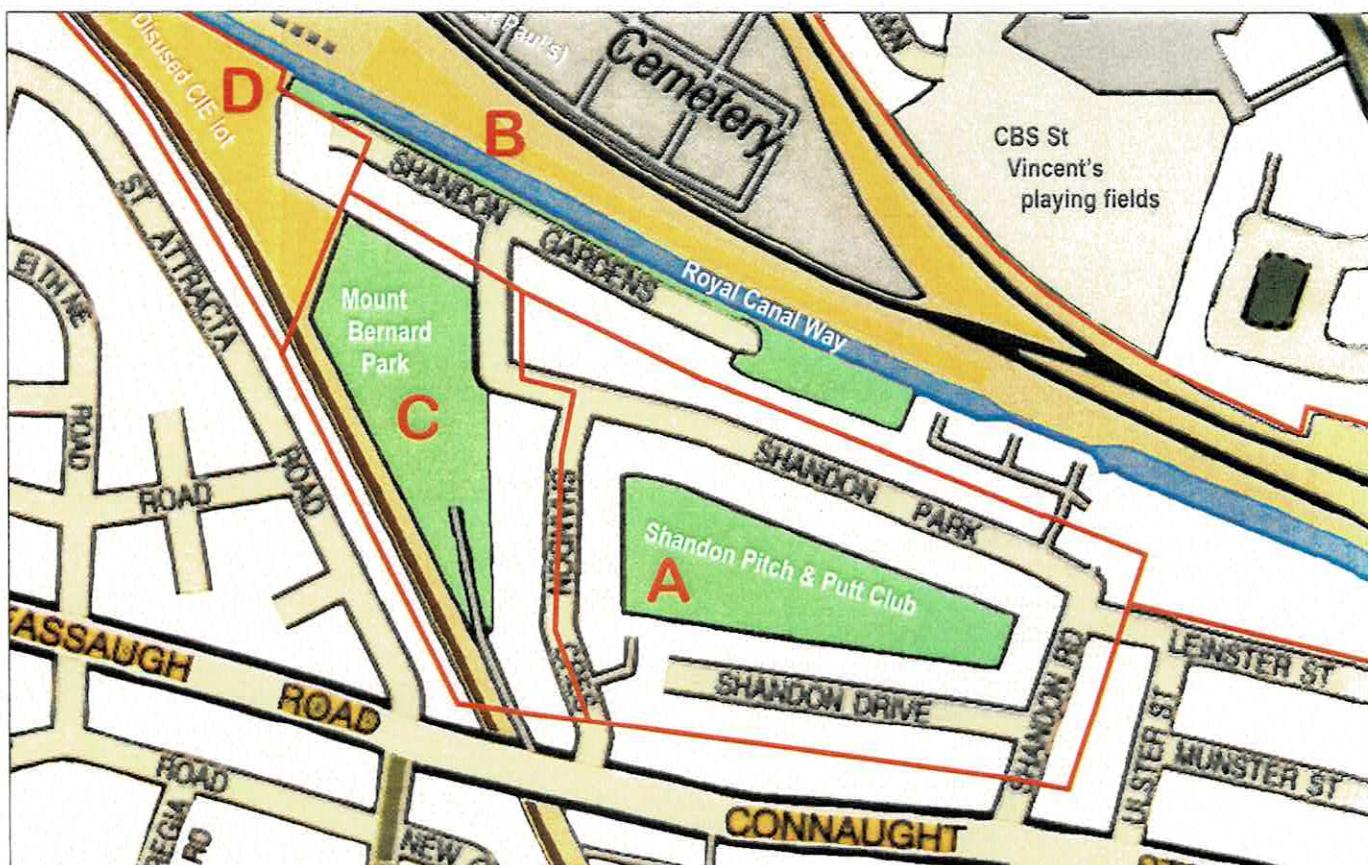
Mount Bernard Park is a relatively recent addition to the area's public amenities. It is basically open-plan with edge shrubbery and trees. While ideal for football and other field sports, and fitted with new courts, the park has limited visual appeal and is currently of limited value for wild birds. Jackdaws, magpies, starlings, blackbirds and tits are the commonest species using it.

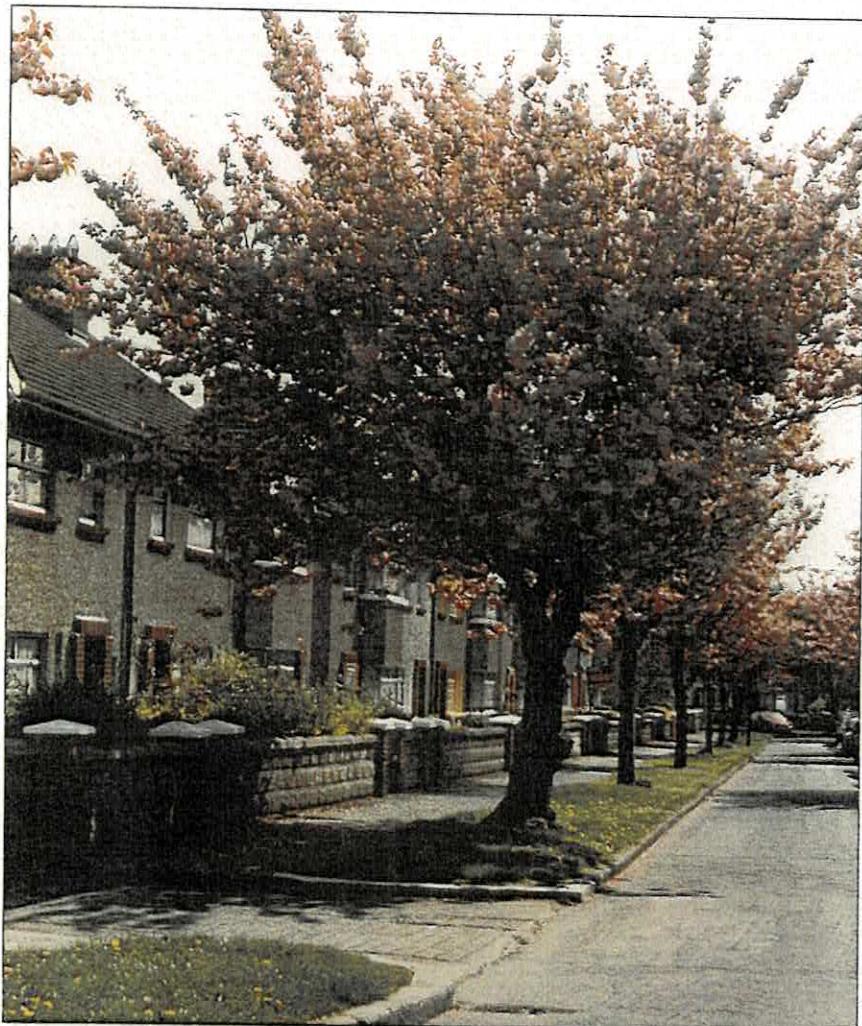
Shandon Crescent is distinguished by its roadside cherry trees, which blossom gloriously in spring.

Recommendations

The playing fields, lawns and courts will presumably remain the principal facilities of the park, so opportunities for improving its wildlife value are restricted to the boundaries and corners. The park authorities could enhance the shrubbery and trees in these areas with denser planting of native trees and shrubs. If undergrowth must be minimised for reasons of public safety, then trees that provide dense canopy heads should be chosen, e.g. oak, yew, Monterey pine, cedar of Lebanon, though shrubs and undergrowth add inestimably to wildlife value.

The narrow end-reach of the park is unsuitable for fieldsports and could most usefully be developed for wildlife and visual amenity. Again, planting should focus on the edges, with deep hedging backed by trees, while the central lawns could be planted with ornamental flower beds and fitted with features such as pond or fountain.





Shandon Crescent: fabulous cherry blossom in spring



Mount Bernard Park: the narrow end-reach, shown here, could be made more wildlife-friendly

Zone D: Disused CIE lot (west of Mount Bernard Park)

Zone D incorporates the disused CIE sidings and railway line west of Mount Bernard Park. It is situated beside the Royal Canal.

Key findings

This open undeveloped green space, with its scrubby hedgerows and rough grasslands, is frequented by a great number of wild bird species. Greenfinches, sparrows, tits, blackbirds and robins are particularly common.

Recommendations

This zone, owned by CIE, is currently derelict, though might in the future be developed as the rail network expands. At present, however, there is great potential for developing its wildlife and amenity value.

It would be most useful to create an oak and scots pine plantation on the short slope overlooking the park. This would provide excellent habitat for bird species while giving the park itself a much more attractive backdrop. The slope in question currently has few trees or bushes.

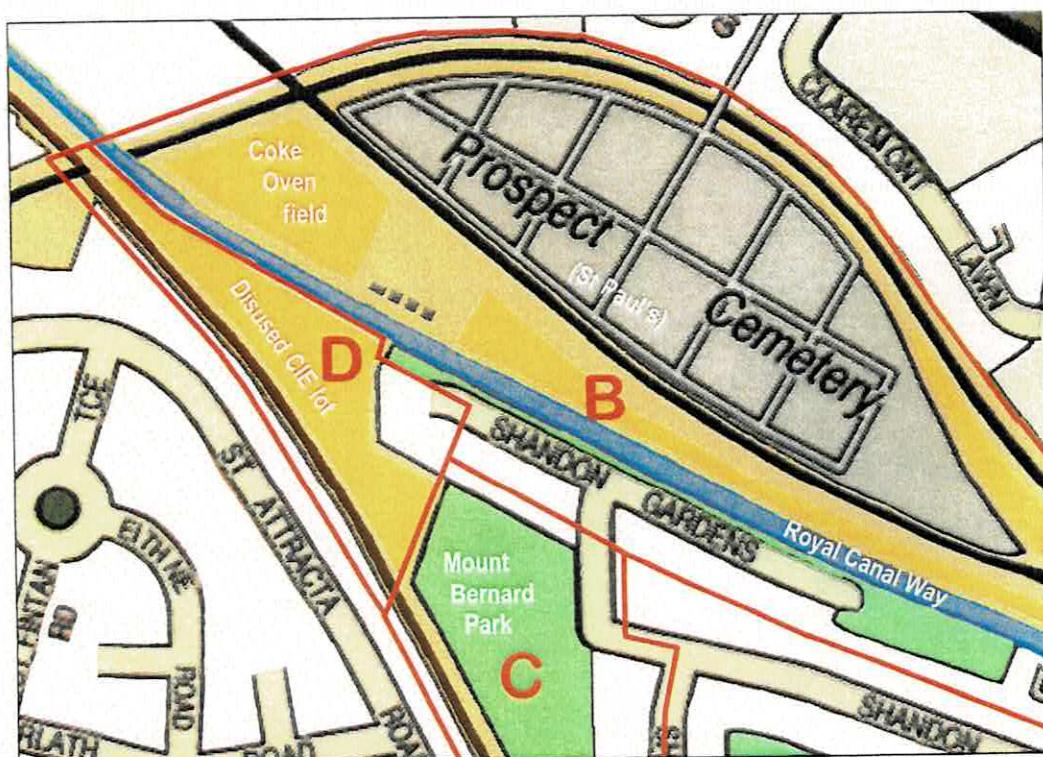
Immediately behind this slope is a small flat area of dry, pebbly ground. This area would be suitable for the planting of sacrificial grain for seed-eating birds, notably finches and

buntings. The patch could be sowed with oats and weeds of arable land, and, for conservation purposes, weed species that are threatened on Irish farmland. It would be a low-maintenance plot, capable of absorbing trampling.

The paths created by walkers are a very natural use of this area, and these paths could be made more permanent by the planting of low shrubs to either side. The remaining areas, thus cossetted from walkers, would be safer for wildlife.

Trees could be planted around the edges of the zone, creating a useful sheltered effect in the middle. Oak and scots pine, and some ornamental conifers such as cedar of Lebanon, would have the best long-term result. The shrubbery could be enhanced with hawthorn, blackthorn, willow, etc, though the site is already self-sown with such species and is likely to develop well on its own.

The side of the disused railway line could be planted with trees. As the trees would be planted down the slope, they would grow to a considerable height before impinging on the view of the houses opposite. Motorbike scrambling should be prohibited in this (and every) zone.





The slope behind Mount Bernard Park could usefully be planted with oaks and pines



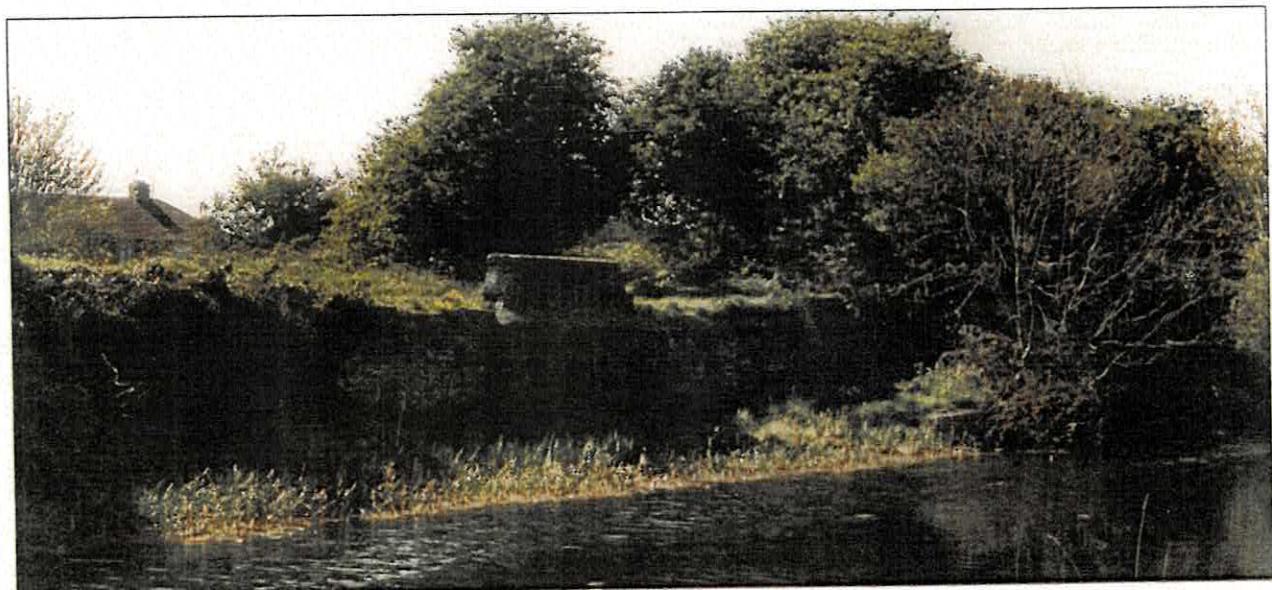
The area behind Mount Bernard Park suitable for planting with oaks and pines



The disused CIE lot behind Mount Bernard Park, showing pathways created by pedestrians



The scrub woodland on the railway embankment is a haven for wildlife



The remains of the original Coke Oven on the disused CIE lot behind the park



The canal and its well-vegetated banks at the Coke Oven provide excellent habitat for wild birds

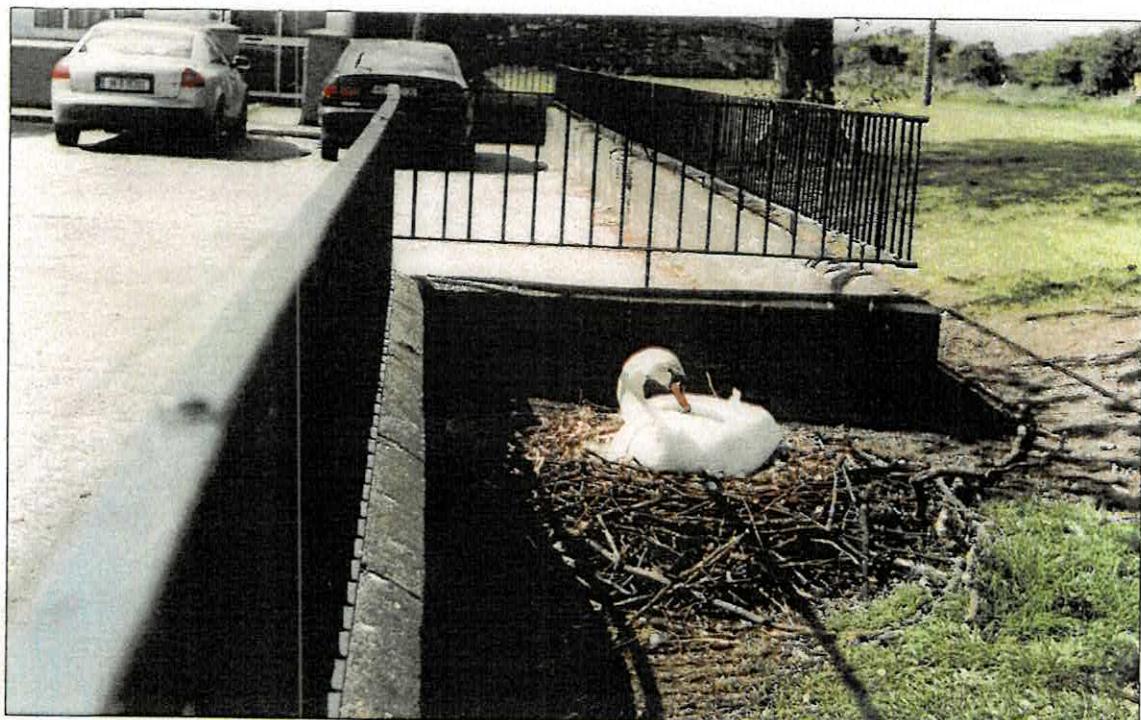
Recommendations to private garden owners

Garden owners in the survey area should be encouraged to build on the bird-friendly value of their garden by adopting the following recommendations:

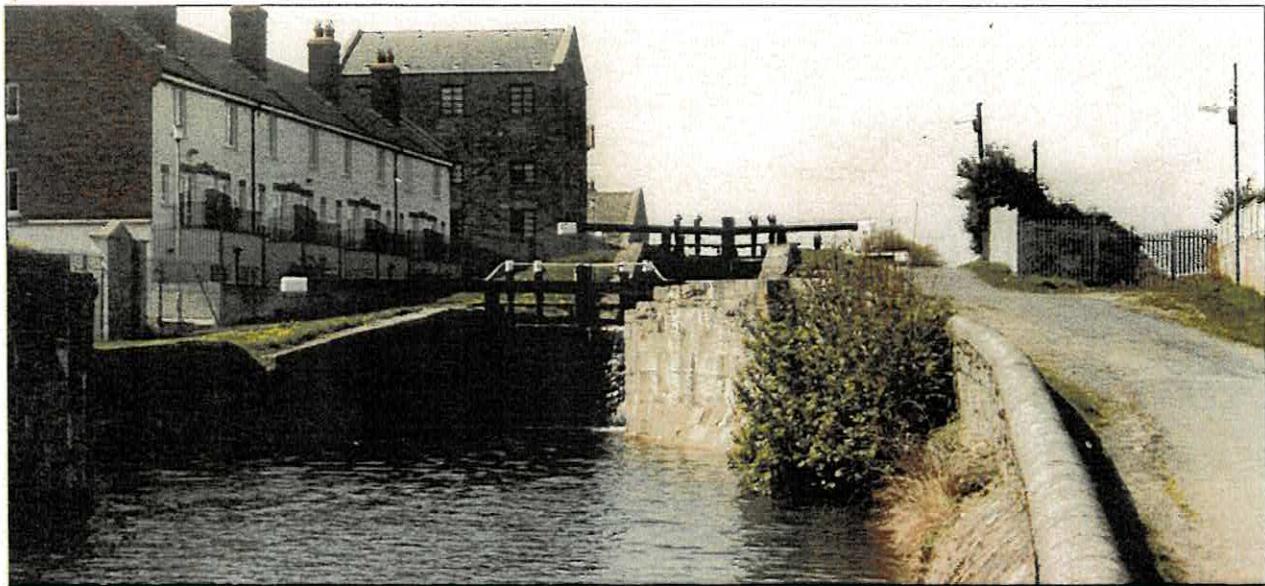
- allow hedge and tree growth in one back corner, preferably a corner adjoining a neighbour's similarly hedged corner (to maximise the benefit). These would provide roost and nest sites and feeding for birds.
- choose hedge species with a view to their attractiveness for birds and butterflies. Native species preferred, e.g. hawthorn, ivy. Avoid exotic conifers, especially *Leylandii*. An oak tree, where there is room for one, would be especially useful, and could be kept small.
- avoid using slug pellets, as they are highly toxic to song thrushes and other species that feed on slugs and snails.

- provide bird food in winter, using bird-feeders. Sunflower seeds, mixed grain, butter and fruit are most useful. These will attract a great variety of birds, easily viewed from the house.

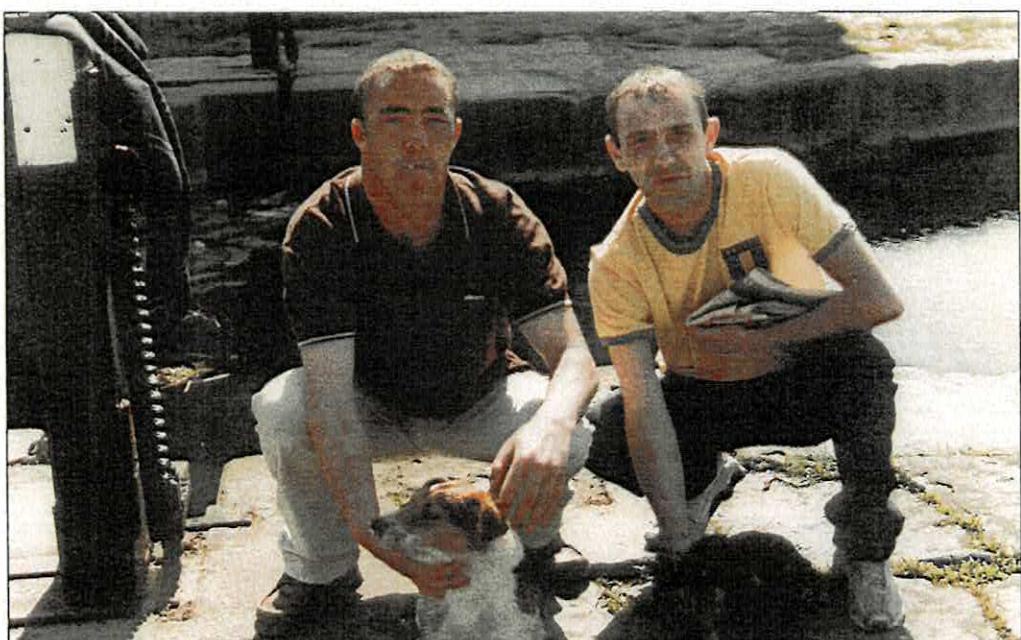
- residents could put up nest-boxes in early spring for small birds such as tits. Make sure the boxes are cat-proof (the entrance hole should be tiny, about an inch and a half across) and difficult for a cat to access (e.g. on the end of a slender bough). They should always face north to avoid baking chicks in the hot sun. As it is almost impossible to prevent cat predation, there is very limited value in providing nest-boxes - they are too obvious and most are predated by cats or crows and fail to fledge a brood. So garden owners would be much better advised to improve the nesting habitat in their garden and provide feeding. Tits like to nest in holes in stone walls (very difficult for a cat to get at).



Nesting swan at Shandon Gardens: the nesting swans are protected and fed by the residents



The 6th Lock



Taking it easy at the 6th Lock



The Royal Canal Way at Shandon is a pleasant and popular walking route brimming with wildlife

Appendix I

Bird species recorded in the survey area, February-May 2004 (except where otherwise indicated).

Grey heron Regular visitor or resident. Breeding nearby presumed. Seen regularly, peak count of two.

Cormorant Casual visitor. Seen once; also reported by local observer.

Mute swan Resident, breeds. Two pairs nested; up to five immature birds also present in late winter/early spring.

Mallard Resident, breeds. Peak count of fourteen adults on Shandon canal stretch. Clutch of six ducklings seen in spring.

Tufted duck Resident, breeding presumed. Peak count two pairs. Stock presumably of feral origin.

Sparrowhawk Resident, breeding nearby presumed. One female seen. Others reported.

Peregrine falcon Casual visitor. One adult seen.

Kestrel Resident, breeding presumed. Adult male seen regularly. Other reports received.

Moorhen Resident, breeds. Peak count fourteen. Mostly on canal, but also in Coke Oven Cottages field.

Black-headed gull Winter visitor. Flock of up to 20 present in winter above 6th Lock.

Lesser black-backed gull Summer visitor, breeding presumed. 3-4 present near 7th Lock in spring, factory roof-nesting expected.

Herring gull Resident, breeding presumed. Peak count four, factory roof-nesting expected.

Common gull Winter visitor. Up to three on canal in winter.

Woodpigeon Resident, breeds. Very common. Peak count of 50, with 33 in Coke Oven Cottages field alone.

Rock dove (feral or street pigeon) Resident, breeds. Flocks of twenty plus seen regularly at Mills.

Collared dove Casual visitor, breeding nearby presumed (probably in cemetery). Reported by local observer.

Swift Summer visitor, breeds. Several present in late May. Breeding under roofs presumed.

Kingfisher Casual visitor. Pair reported above 7th Lock by local observer. Breeding likely west of 7th Lock.

Swallow Summer visitor, breeding presumed. Many seen in September 2003. Some arrivals noted in spring 2004.

House martin Summer visitor, breeding presumed nearby. One seen in September 2003.

Grey wagtail Resident, breeding presumed nearby. Single birds seen on two occasions along canal.

Pied wagtail Resident, breeding. Pair seen on two occasions, 6th Lock.

Wren Resident, breeds. Seen regularly. Abundant all habitats.

Dunnock Resident, breeds. Single-figure numbers noted, e.g. at Coke Oven Cottages gardens.

Whitethroat Summer or casual visitor. One seen on disused lot, September 2003, most likely a passing migrant.

Goldcrest Resident, breeding presumed. Small numbers seen regularly, mainly at Coke Oven Cottages gardens.

Robin Resident, breeds. Seen regularly, abundant.

Blackbird Resident, breeds. Seen regularly, abundant.

Redwing Winter visitor. Seen once in canal-bank shrubbery, late spring. Presumably occurs regularly in winter.

Song thrush Resident, breeds. Seen regularly, especially at Coke Oven Cottages gardens.

Long-tailed tit Resident, breeding suspected. Winter flocks seen widely, pair lingered into May in canalside scrub.

Coal tit Resident, breeds. Seen regularly, common.

Blue tit Resident, breeds. Seen regularly, common.

Great tit Resident, breeds. Seen regularly, common.

Chaffinch Resident, breeds. Seen regularly, common.

Greenfinch Resident, breeds. Seen regularly, common. Most abundant finch in area, 20-40 pairs.

Goldfinch Resident, breeding presumed. Small flocks seen regularly.

Linnet Resident, breeding presumed. Small flocks seen regularly.

House sparrow Resident, breeds. At least 25 pairs at pitch & putt club, others behind Mt Bernard Park and at Coke Oven Cottages gardens. Winter roost of hundreds in pitch & putt club boundary hedging, mostly in south-east corner.

Starling Resident, breeds. Seen regularly, common.

Magpie Resident, breeds. Seen regularly, common.

Jackdaw Resident, breeds. Seen regularly, low numbers.

Rook Resident, breeding presumed nearby. Seen regularly, small numbers.

Hooded crow Resident, breeding presumed. Seen regularly, small numbers.

Appendix II

Butterfly species recorded in the survey area, February-May 2004.

Holly blue Up to 30 seen a day, in April.

Green-veined white Common.

Peacock One seen.

Speckled wood Common.

Small tortoiseshell Common.

Appendix III

Mammal and amphibian species recorded or reported in the survey area.

Fox Evidence of presence in Coke Oven Cottages field and railway sides. Sighting by local observer on railway line.

Hedgehog reported by local observer.

Badger Reported by local observer.

Brown rat Reported by local observer.

Daubenton's bat Recorded on Shandon stretch of Royal Canal by Dublin Bat Society (Brian Keeley).

Soprano pipistrelle Recorded on Shandon stretch of Royal Canal by Dublin Bat Society (Brian Keeley).

Frog Recorded at Coke Oven Cottages field by local observer.

Smooth Newt Spawn suspected at Coke Oven Cottages field in spring 2004.