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€2m project will help boost tourism and job creation in border area

The Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Heather Humphreys T.D., has today (Tuesday) secured Government approval to restore the Ulster Canal from the Shannon-Erne waterway to the International Scout Centre at Castle Saunderson, near Belturbet in Co. Cavan.

The project, which is expected to cost in the region of €2 million, will be undertaken by Waterways Ireland, which is a North South Implementation Body jointly funded by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Department of Culture, Arts, and Leisure in Northern Ireland. As the project will be funded from Waterways Ireland's own resources, additional Exchequer funding will not be required.

Speaking today, Minister Humphreys said:

"I am delighted that the Government has agreed to my proposal to restore the section of the Ulster Canal linking the Shannon-Erne waterway to Castle Saunderson. This project has the potential to act as a catalyst for the regeneration of this border area. It will provide a wonderful recreational facility for local communities and should act as a significant draw for tourists.

"This project will have a very positive impact in an area that is still recovering from the long term effects of the Troubles. It shows that the Government is committed to investing in projects that will benefit communities on both sides of the border. This is an excellent example of cross-border support and cooperation.

"The project will give this border region, which has suffered greatly from economic deprivation, a much needed boost in terms of job creation and tourism. There is significant potential for growth in the waterways based tourism market and I have no doubt that the reopening of this section of the canal will help to attract significant numbers of visitors to the area.

"The restoration of this 2.5km stretch of the Ulster Canal is shovel ready, with much of the preparatory work already completed. Since planning permission has already been secured, I look forward to the project progressing without delay for the benefit of local communities on both sides of the border."

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Note to Editors:

Background:

The Ulster Canal is one of only two waterways to cross the border, the other being the Shannon-Erne waterway which was successfully reopened in the 1990s. Originally opened in 1841, the Ulster Canal was the last major waterway built in Ireland, passing through counties Fermanagh, Cavan, Monaghan and Tyrone. It is now the last such waterway remaining unrestored.

The development, which has been approved today, will see the restoration of a 2.5 km stretch of the canal from Upper Lough Erne to Castle Saunderson, near Belturbet in Co. Cavan. Planning approvals are in place from the relevant authorities in the two jurisdictions.

Evidence from elsewhere, including the Shannon-Erne Waterway, demonstrates the restorative effects of reopening canals and of the visitor spend attracted to the area in helping create business and community development opportunities.

The International Scout Centre:

The 30 acre International Scout Centre at Castle Saunderson is seen as one of the top scouting campsites in Europe and is capable of hosting over 1,000 campers on site. In 2014 alone, over 12,500 people visited the centre.