

Limerick's most under-used attraction is the Shannon and its Special Areas of Conservation. Why can't we turn the image of Limerick into the biggest city-park in Europe?

this is limerick city **3.5km²**

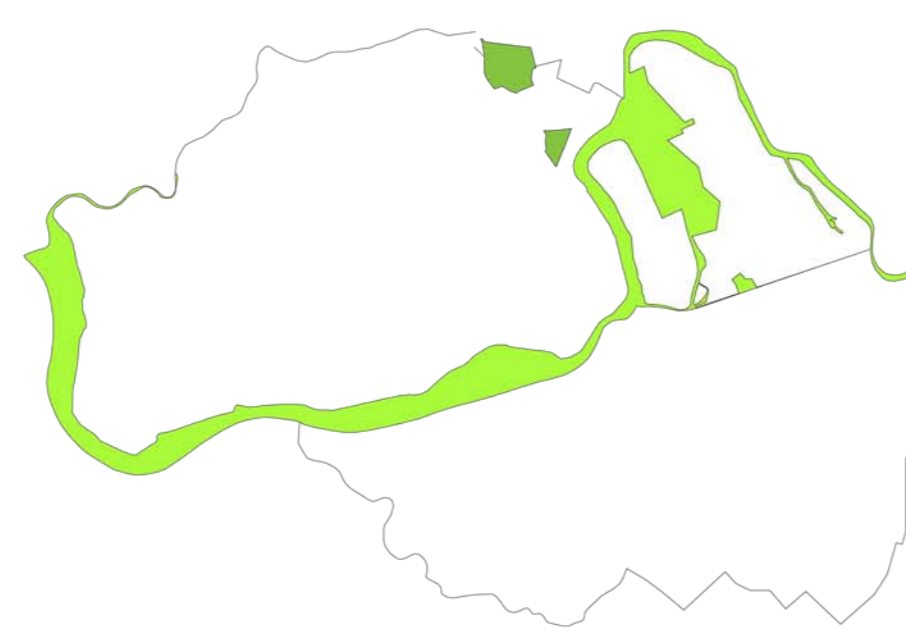


The SACs make up 3.5km² of the city centre. Can we change the image and perception of Limerick and transform its SAC into one of the biggest city parks in Europe? In a study conducted by the ESRI on the perceptions of Limerick city versus Waterford, Cork and Galway cities, it was found that only 9% of the respondents would choose Limerick as the city in which they would like to spend a day out in. Can this new park be Limerick's new selling point?

but what is an SAC?

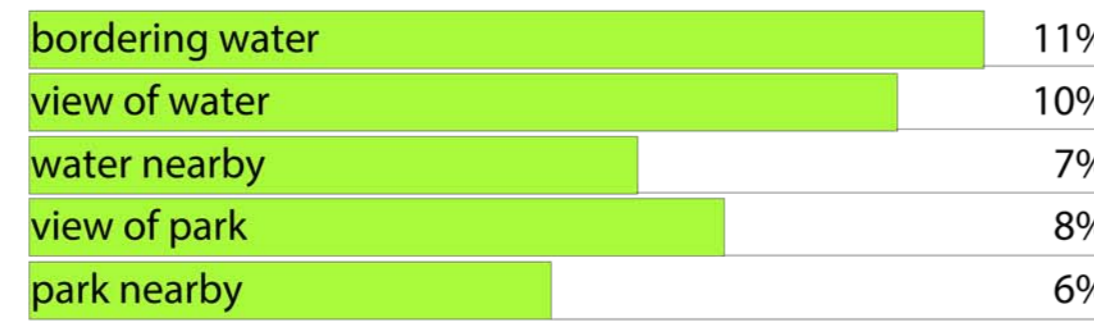
30%

Thirty percent of Limerick is green space which includes parks, SACs, sports pitches and residual areas. From the Limerick City Development Plan, we can see 6% of Limerick is zoned as an SAC. Yet this area is entirely underused, underappreciated and underrated.



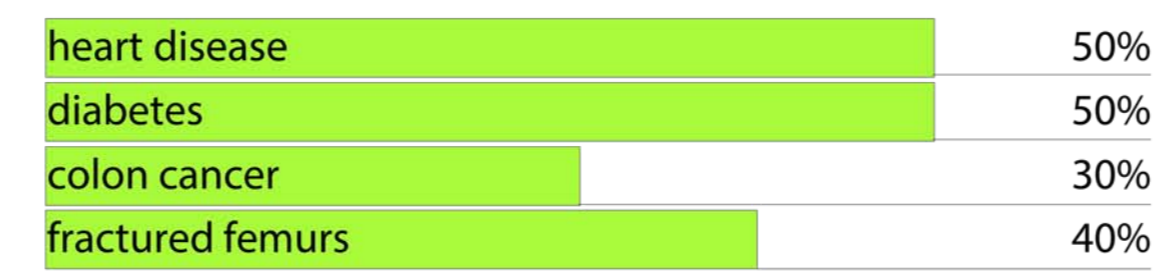
Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are prime wildlife conservation areas and are considered to be important on a European as well as an Irish level. SACs are mostly in the countryside, although a few sites reach into town or city landscapes, the Shannon/Limerick region being one such example. From this investigation into developing new policies for Limerick city, we discover that Limerick city's most underused attraction is the River Shannon and its surrounding areas. Why can't we change the image and perception of Limerick and transform its SAC into one of the biggest city parks in Europe?

The current condition of the SACs does not allow them to be used to their potential by humans or wildlife. Overgrown vegetation and aged infrastructure mean habitats are disrupted, access is reduced and visibility impaired along walking routes; from our research we understand many locals do not make use of the SACs for these reasons. If the SACs were to be developed it would open up one of Limerick's natural amenities for everyone to benefit from. A successful city park would accommodate varied use by city inhabitants and the current wildlife.



PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN PROPERTY VALUES

The ESRI carried out an analysis on housing property prices in Phoenix Park in Dublin (a similar SAC to the Shannon region), where green spaces were valued by homeowners in the area. They found that house prices varied with proximity to space. Similarly, a study run by CABI in the Netherlands found a 10% and 8% increase in property prices with views of the water and views of the park respectively.



PERCENTAGE DECREASE IN HEALTH RISK

As a result of numerous academic studies that have been carried out, it is widely accepted that regular exercise increases the health and well-being of the people. Improving the Limerick SAC would greatly enhance both the usage of the amenity and the public perception of it. 2007 SLAN surveys have also proven that there has been a notable increase in overweight and obesity levels in the past decade and they stress how regular physical activity reduces your risk of chronic diseases. For this reason, SLAN outlines how the healthcare system would benefit from reduced costs if people became more active.

€5.8 billion



The EU's annual budget for SAC development is €5.8 billion. The above graph shows an EU study into the relative value of SACs on a local, national and global level. We can see the development of Ecotourism and Recreation in the SACs is of highest value to people. Limerick can take advantage of these funds to create a vibrant park for its inhabitants, tourists and also future businesses.

SACs attract tourism



Rather than ignoring the SACs, investing in them would make the city a more vibrant place for its inhabitants, tourists and also future businesses.

Are we using this unique natural asset? Could we develop a more progressive engagement with the process of environmental protection? Benefits to society include recreational benefits, aesthetic benefits, health benefits, visual benefits (better scenery), eco-tourism and an overall better quality of life. provide a facility to improve the health and general well-being of the people.



So how can Limerick begin to use the SACs? From our research we have come up with a number of initiatives that could be developed to kickstart interest in this area. From kayaking to community gardens, the diverse urban areas the SAC traverses allows this urban park to cater to different interests. The SAC boundaries our central business district as well as some residential areas. A number of education facilities also boundary the SACs. As the map below suggests, the park stretches through the city with events and activities all along the river's course. Long term initiatives could foster stewardship amongst the people in these areas gathering support for larger one-off events.

Limerick's Urban Park

