NWBCN

**Reply to Letter to the Editor Newry Reporter dated 22 January 2020**

As a happy blow-in to Warrenpoint I can confirm that the activities and aspirations certainly of the main political parties fully reflect the views of the people of the community and its hinterland of South Down. And being a democracy that was clearly demonstrated in the recent election where both the SDLP and Sinn Féin championed the cause of the Narrow Water Bridge.

However the real credit for, what hopefully will be a major breakthrough for the project, must go to the commitment and dedication a few local people who refuse to take no for an answer and will not let the dream die.  This selfless commitment down the decades to see an ancient crossing at Narrow Water given an appropriate and modern expression for the benefit of the entire community has been commendable. It has seen them through misunderstanding, alienation and constant press criticism and negative briefing from powerful vested interests. It was this dedication that saw them through the heartbreaking disappointment of 2013 when after years of campaigning they witnessed the shattering of a dream through colossal incompetence and political mishandling. A bridge that received the backing of both governments and support funding from Brussels disappeared Brig O’ Doon-like before their eyes.

Underpinning the prejudice against the Narrow Water Bridge, as in often the case, is at best a fundamental misunderstanding and at worst ignorance. This has led to the pitting of one project against the other. The Southern Relief Road and the Narrow Water Bridge are however seen by the relevant departments North and South as separate and complementary projects. The SRR project has strategic traffic planning at its core with the necessary objective of relieving traffic congestion to the south of Newry. The NWB, on the other hand, is an urgently needed tourist infrastructure project designed specifically with a low visual impact on the surrounding landscape to create tourist access to appropriate motorised, cycling and pedestrian traffic to the greater South Down area.

Newry Mourne & Down has the greatest proportion of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty of all the municipal areas in Northern Ireland. This incredibly corresponds with one of the lowest levels of foreign tourist throughput in Ireland. And this despite the proximity of the main entry point of Dublin Airport whose passenger figures are now hitting the 40 million mark annually.

Within our natural capital lies the wealth of future generations. With foreign investment from the development agencies for the constituency of South Down (an area that has a Deprivation Rating of 5 - five from the bottom that is!) representing just 3% of the total investment in Northern Ireland for the years 2013 to 2018 coupled with a spending per head of population in Newry & Mourne of £113 to Belfast’s £452, it is clearly not going to come from without.

It is also worth mentioning Northern Ireland has an incredibly poor record of getting things right. Most of the major projects over the past 60 years would not be repeated today. I’m referring to the siting of universities, the closure of railways, the woefully inadequate Westlink at its time of opening. Even our beloved Newry Canal was the result of a mistake. They thought they had discovered coal at Coalisland!

In a climate-altered world with natural capital and species diversity being lost at an incredible rate we owe it to the coming generations to get this right. And we have one chance to do it. The Narrow Water Bridge is more than a bridge. It represents a positive vision of the future. A vision that is in tandem with new and exciting developments in eco-and active tourism catering for the thankfully ever increasing number of green-oriented tourists from Britain, Germany, France and further afield.

Degraded landscapes, inappropriate development, empty and derelict hotels, crumbling now for generations, not only act to discourage visitors but add to the continuing abandonment of one of the most beautiful parts of Ireland by its young people.

Adrian O’Hare

Secretary

**NARROW WATER BRIDGE**

**COMMUNITY NETWORK**

[www.narrowwaterbridge.co.uk](http://www.narrowwaterbridge.co.uk)