

Toe In the Water

The name “Toe in the Water” comes about from our love of water and want to embrace it, however that is not a reflection of our true relationship with water in Northern Ireland, never mind with the built environment. Thus, we are testing the waters with our toes, afraid to go in and embrace it as an integral part of our lives, in the manner that we test the temperature of water before we jump in.

There are Rivers and Loughs in NI where we are not allowed, unable to immerse ourselves, due to reasons such as:

- Environmental, blue-green algae in Lough Neagh
- Pollution, of River Lagan
- Drinking Water, Lough Fea
- Protected Habitats, Ballinderry River

Our mixed relationship with water over NI’s history, where it was the heart of our industry, thus the seahorse being the Belfast’s emblem, as well as being named after the River Farset; or the largest fresh water lake in Lough Neagh, being neglected and an environmental issue. To an integral part of lives, relaxation through cold water swimming, vital drinking water or just being surrounded by Lough and sea.

From a current perspective we are not caring or loving to the waterways in NI, as mentioned in the brief, water quality in Lough Neagh restricts it’s use, as it is a dying water way from neglect.

In terms of the build environment, although we love the thought of water, we don’t interact with the water enough, as such the proposal I am putting forward is to encourage debate and discussion in the public on our waterways.

The Built Environment Relationship to Water

Trying to force water to our wills, rather than embrace the environments as they are, impacts our towns and cities, often when there is a surplus of water, 1 in 33 (25,000) properties are within river and coastal floodplains, and a further 45,000 properties in NI are at risk of flooding.

Which in turn makes us want to exert our will on it further, through flood alleviation schemes.

This encourages the population of NI to disregard the water ways, as they have been hidden behind flood defence walls and not easily accessible to interact with.

Water is seen as something as tranquil yet untameable, as seen on 16th August 2008, where the newly opened Westlink underpass flooded due to rainfall, and it showed us that is not easily controlled even with the built environment.



Location

When I first started to think about the brief and concluded I was going to propose to build a bridge, I first thought to do it over open water, at the Ballinderry River. Previously along the river there stood a fisherman's bridge, yet during a previous deluge of rain the bridge was washed away and since then never reinstated.



However, as I want to promote a debate in discussion this was not the appropriate location to achieve this. Thus, in a juxtaposed position, I propose to build a bridge over the River Farset, a river that is already built over and forgotten about, as a wider thought on how we build over and forget about water. Exact location being the public space between the Albert Memorial Clock and Custom House Square, close to where the Farset discharges into the River Lagan.

The River Farset location can be a temporary installation with the bridge being relocated in the future to a small water way, to allow people to engage with water, to be seen as a way show that for the future we want to embrace water more than we do now. Or dependant on further detail design two sister bridges could be built, in both locations, dependant on budgetary constraints.

Construction

At the River Farset location, i.e. custom house square, how the base of the design, where the bridge crosses over, depends on the exact location of the underground river, be it under the paviments or under the road.

- Under the Road

As it may be under the road, it not feasible to put the bridge over the road and so installation would be beside it in the existing public space. Through removing a section of paviments, a miniature pool is installed, tanked to hold water, which can naturally dry or fill up dependant on the NI weather. With this created the paviments are re-laid to a slope creating a dip where the water becomes exposed, creating the sensation that the water is bubbling up from underground, the river is breaking free.

- Under the Pavours

However, if under the pavours, the River Farset is only 600mm below ground level, which may cause issue creating the above, and such expose the river, installing heavy duty glazing, to allow the public to see the river below, installing lighting highlighting it further.

The bridge itself will be constructed in timber, with footings to be developed in detail design.

Always need a troll under the bridge!

As a child I remember playing on a small stone bridge in Drum Manor castle, where they landscaped the inside when they removed the roof, and a dry bridge installed. Always enacting the 'Three Billy Goats Gruff' story, someone hiding under the bridge and when we cross calling out "who's that tramping over my bridge?" and then the 'troll' chasing you.

So always there should be a troll under the bridge, one that is a caretaker and watcher over the water and anyone who would seek shelter there. For kids to whisper they're secrets to.

The intention of the troll holding a red flag is a representation of the red flag in NI's relationship with water, the red lines within Stormont that create stalemate and deadlock in creating change for the better, for our waterways.