

Planning Department
Leitrim County Council
Áras an Chontae
St. Georges Terrace
Carrick on Shannon
Co. Leitrim
N41 PF67

By email submission: cdp@leitrimcoco.ie

Date: 12th August 2020

Re: Preparation of Leitrim County Development Plan 2022-2028: Fáilte Ireland Pre-Draft Submission

To whom it may concern,

1. Introduction

This submission has been prepared by Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, in response to the public notice seeking submissions in relation to the preparation of a new Leitrim County Development Plan ('the Plan') for the period 2022-2028 by Leitrim County Council ('the Council').

Fáilte Ireland welcomes the opportunity to engage with Leitrim County Council on the emerging Plan for the County. Fáilte Ireland is seeking to enhance the partnership approach between the County Council and the National Authority and ensure that the expertise of both organisations is shared.

The preparation of this submission comes at a time when Fáilte Ireland are emphasising the need for land-use plans to manage all land uses and economic drivers – of which tourism is but one, in a more holistic, strategic and spatial manner to maximise the efficient use of resources and the achievement of greater outcomes for society at large.

We hope that this submission can represent a first step in a collaborative process that culminates in the adoption of the new Development Plan.

The Objective of this Submission

Fáilte Ireland has prepared this submission to support and assist Leitrim County Council in the formulation of planning policies and frameworks for the period 2022-2028. Fáilte Ireland are seeking to enhance the partnership approach between the County Council and the Authority and ensure that the expertise of both organisations is shared.

The submission seeks to enhance the policy coverage in the new Development Plan to ensure a meaningful framework is established for the enhancement of tourism in the County, and the wider region, during the Plan period. It has been prepared with inputs from professional planners as well as various strands within Fáilte Ireland. It provides the Council with a concise single submission from the Authority dealing with all aspects of tourism – from strategic planning, to visitor experience and destination management.

Tourism is an important economic driver in Co. Leitrim generating approximately €50m from overseas and domestic revenue. It has a compelling role to play in safeguarding and growing jobs in the local economy. Relative to its potential to deliver economic growth and jobs, there are opportunities for tourism in Leitrim to perform better. The current Leitrim County Development Plan 2015-2021 states “there are plenty of opportunities to double the size of the tourism sector in Leitrim”.

As the National Development Authority for tourism in Ireland, Fáilte Ireland recognises and will continue to ensure that all tourism initiatives it is involved in are planned, developed and managed in a sustainable and integrated manner. For Fáilte Ireland the main objective in working towards a sustainable tourism sector is to protect, enhance and promote both our natural and built heritage for the common benefits of visitor, industry, community and the environment. The VICE (Visitor, Industry, Community and Environment) Model for Sustainable Tourism is an approach that Fáilte Ireland adopts in all of our activities and outputs and this approach should underline the approach to sustainable tourism development in Leitrim.

The submission has been prepared having regard to the tourism profile of the County; the background information in the Issues Paper; the existing Growth Strategy for Tourism in Leitrim 2015-2021 and an established template for sustainable tourism policies being used by Fáilte Ireland to guide Planning Authorities.

For ease of reading, we have structured this submission as follows:

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Commentary on the Current Leitrim Development Plan
- 3) Key Tourism Assets in County Leitrim

- 4) Discussion of Background Information Provided
- 5) Further Suggestions for the New Development Plan
- 6) Conclusion

2. Commentary on the Current Leitrim Development Plan

The vision statement in the current County Leitrim Development Plan 2015-2021 states:

“County Leitrim to be a vibrant, socially inclusive, progressive and distinctive county, providing a good quality of life for all who work, live and visit the county and offering equal opportunities for employment to its people; while protecting, conserving and enhancing the best of the natural and built environment”.

While the vision statement indirectly protects the county’s tourism amenities and assets referring to the natural and built environment; and, to those who visit. We request that tourism be referenced within one of the ‘key aims’ contained within the Core Strategy.

Section 3.2 of the current Leitrim Development Plan references some of these considerations such as natural and built heritage, landscape, rural economy, tourism destinations etc. In order to achieve a consistent approach to tourism in Ireland, we request the Council include a dedicated tourism chapter or strategy within the future Development Plan. This enables decision makers and stakeholders to easily follow guidance in relation to tourism amenities and assets.

Such a chapter which would (a) encompass all of the policies and objectives relating to this important economic driver, building on the actions and objectives set out in the Leitrim Tourism Strategy 2015-2021 and (b) recognise the significant role that tourism plays in the overall operation and development of the County. In particular, Fáilte Ireland promotes the incorporation of the principles of sustainability in the tourism policy section of the County Development Plan (included in Appendix A of this Submission).

The Authority would also like to see tourism policies and objectives clearly set out where possible through the inclusion of maps in the Development Plan. The inclusion of the County’s strategic tourism locations; transport routes; scenic routes and views; tourism attractions and facilities; and transportation hubs in the Development Plan maps, serves as an effective tool to highlight the importance of tourism in the strategic planning of the County.

3. Key Tourism Assets in County Leitrim

Leitrim possesses a range of tourism amenities that the current Development Plan relates to, including the following:

- North Leitrim Glens
- Glencar Waterfall
- Sligo/Leitrim Greenway
- Shannon Blueway
- Lough Rynn Demesne
- Cultural Quarter in Carrick on Shannon

However, it is noted the following tourism assets could also be added to this list in the Development Plan:

- *Manorhamilton Castle*
- *Parke's Castle*
- *Eagles Rock*
- *Creevelea Friary*
- *Glenfarne Forest*
- *Lough Allen*
- *Beara Breifne Way*
- *Ball Room of Romance*
- *Acres Lough*

We request the forthcoming Development Plan protects and promotes key assets in County Leitrim primarily in the form of a dedicated tourism chapter which provides a clear and comprehensive strategy which is clear for stakeholders to regard.

Fáilte Ireland has placed significant investment in a number of newer key tourism assets in recent years in particular the brand initiative 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' which includes the Beara Breifne Way, the town of Carrick-on-Shannon as a destination town and the Shannon Masterplan.

Ireland's Hidden Heartlands

'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' is a brand initiative created by Fáilte Ireland which has had much success since its launch in 2018. It encompasses Roscommon, **Leitrim**, and Longford as well as parts of Westmeath, Cavan, North Tipperary, Galway, and Offaly. It aims to promote the hidden treasures of Ireland focusing on the inherent beauty of the inland countryside, where activity and relaxation coexist with the rural communities and their lifestyles. The promotion is identified as 'Yours To Uncover' which encourages visitors to focus on themes of discovery and exploration and encourages visitors to uncover their unique experience of the natural beauty and treasures of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands.

We request that the 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' identification and branding is fully integrated into the Development Plan and that an objective aligning with, supporting and promoting this initiative is also included. Ireland's Hidden Heartlands encourages individuals to be 'Active in Nature' through a range of activities across Greenways or Blueways including walking, cruising, cycling, and angling. Fáilte Ireland are currently developing Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand guidelines which will assist stakeholders.

Policies as identified in this submission relating to accommodation, multi-partner approaches, the establishment of navigation and signage strategies, provision of facilities for walkers, cyclist, water based tourists are all encouraged to deliver on the potential of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and should be fully enshrined in the Development Plan.

The Beara Breifne Way

The Beara Breifne Way is a long-distance walking route based upon the historic 14-day march of O'Sullivan Beara in 1603. The route has historic relics dotted throughout the journey which stand as snapshots in time, reflecting its history. One of the largest community-based projects in Ireland, the Beara Breifne Way has 12 stages, from Cork to Cavan and many points in between. It has seen more than 40,000 people walk its path, with the area's heritage displayed throughout.

We request an objective to safeguard its future success in the new plan, this should relate to key issues such as promoting key facilities and services for visitors such as accommodation, signage, parking, and sustainable transport. A priority should be to provide a wider range of targeted public transport options for visitors who wish to travel from urban areas to rural based visitor attractions and amenities. Possible delivery mechanisms to be explored would include the extension of the Rural Transport Network (Local Link) to include tourism objectives and key tourism sites. Enhanced walking and cycling facilities also have a key role to play in utilising our resources and moreover opening up access to the abundance of natural assets.

The Shannon Masterplan

In partnership with Fáilte Ireland and Local Authority Representatives, Waterways Ireland is leading the preparation of the Shannon Masterplan. The key objective of the Masterplan is to revitalise the combined Shannon Navigation and Shannon Erne Waterway as a key destination within Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, identifying world class visitor experiences based on the region's natural and cultural assets. This Masterplan is currently in preparation and due to be placed on public display soon.

Fáilte Ireland requests the inclusion of an objective recognising and supporting the forthcoming Masterplan. In addition, views and prospects of the Shannon are hidden in many places, increasing the accessibility of these vistas and providing of access and allowing them to become more visible

would help increase appreciation for the Shannon's scenic attributes and its use for land based activities such as cycling and walking.

Carrick-on-Shannon Destination Town

In 2019 funding was allocated to Carrick-on Shannon through Leitrim County Council as part of the €15.5 million 'Destination Towns' initiative launched earlier in 2019 by Fáilte Ireland. The purpose of the funding is to boost the attractiveness and tourism appeal of towns nationwide.

Fáilte Ireland requests the inclusion of an objective to support future tourism initiatives in Carrick-on-Shannon in order to capitalise on the potential benefit of the funding for the town of Carrick-on-Shannon.

4. Discussion of Background Information Provided

We welcome references to tourism in the Issues Paper, in particular regard to 'Rural Development and Natural Resources', and 'Economic Development'. We submit that greater detail focusing on tourism is appropriate to meet its broad range of considerations.

The Issues Paper possess a series of questions with a direct bearing on tourism, the following responses summarises Fáilte Ireland's views on the key questions:

How can the County Development Plan support tourism?

For the County Development Plan to support tourism in Leitrim it is important as requested above that the 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' identification and branding is fully integrated into the Development Plan and that an objective aligning with, supporting and promoting this initiative is also included. Ireland's Hidden Heartlands encourages individuals to be 'Active in Nature' through a range of activities across Greenways or Blueways including walking, cruising, cycling, and angling. Fáilte Ireland are currently developing Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand guidelines which will assist stakeholders.

There is a fundamental link between tourism and many other sectors which needs to be acknowledged in the draft plan, which should result in an increase in the level of policy cross-compliance and consideration of potential benefits and impacts on tourism in the development of policy. The tourism sector does not directly own or manage the tourism assets which underpin the sector and therefore is reliant on this alignment of policies for the sustainability of the sector. We would welcome the inclusion of an 'strategic aim' relating specifically to Tourism in the Core Strategy.

Tourism-related activities can be an important source of finance for the capital investment needed to support development and maintenance in areas of low population. It can play a key role in

ensuring the continued economic viability in more peripheral rural areas with important consequences for both cultural and social continuity as well as better utilization of capital investment in sparsely populated areas.

Tourism can make a key contribution to rural economies and communities. Most tourism facilities in County Leitrim are community or locally owned and managed, meaning spending remains in the local economy and as such should be promoted and safeguarded by the Development Plan. As such support for the internationally recognised VICE model should be identified in the Development Plan. This model identifies sustainable tourism as the interaction between Visitors, the Industry that provides services to them, the Community and culture that hosts them and their collective impact on and response to the Environment where it all takes place.

The key to unlocking the growth potential of an area is the development of experiences that will motivate potential tourists to firstly visit there and secondly to dwell in the area. These new experiences are less concerned with visitors passively seeing or doing things; they encourage tourists to immerse themselves actively in the locale, interacting with people, engaging the senses, and learning the history and stories of the places. Fáilte Ireland's response to this challenge has been the creation of a framework to develop and deliver destination development plans along with strengthening destination towns. This approach identifies the key assets of an area and provides a framework to present the experiences and stories of that area in a way that tourists can readily and easily understand. It clearly identifies tangible actions and a process for businesses to shape their respective tourist experience(s) in line with the overall experience brand proposition and the key motivating themes for their area.

What can Leitrim do to attract more domestic and overseas visitors?

The Shannon and Shannon/Erne Blueway and cycleway was recently awarded RRDF funding which will provide a quality recreational experience between Carrick-on-Shannon and Drumshanbo and between Leitrim Village and Kiclar. The development of blueways provides valuable opportunities for rural communities to attract more visitors. These values lie not only in the recreational opportunities that they offer but also in their potential to stimulate local businesses and regenerate local areas. A blueway can be defined as “a network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites, based on and closely linked with the water, together with providers facilitating access to activities and experiences”. This definition is as defined in the National Blueway Development and Management Guide.

Greenways are key tourism infrastructure and play an important role in Irish tourism. They boost the appeal of Ireland in the travel market, add value to the existing high tourism offering and support the development of rural communities and job creation in the rural economy, as well as the protection and promotion of natural assets and biodiversity. It is our ambition for Ireland to be recognized internationally as a year-round activity destination. There has been significant growth in cycling tourism in Ireland in recent years. In 2018 it was the 2nd largest activity with 450,000

overseas visitors participating in cycling while on holiday. A projected annual growth of 4% per annual is expected to 2028.

The Sligo Leitrim Northern Counties Railway (SLNCR) Greenway has recently been allocated €500,00 under the Carbon Tax Fund 2020 that provides support for feasibility, planning and design for greenways around the country. The development of the greenway would provide both economic and social benefits to Leitrim and further enhance the outdoor tourism and recreation facilities of the county. Fáilte Ireland would therefore, welcome the inclusion of a policy/objective to support the delivery of this project.

Fáilte Ireland has identified festivals as a key driver for tourism growth, particularly during off-season times. They are an important component of the Irish tourism product offering. They provide opportunities to showcase culture, people and places, thereby greatly improving the tourist experience. Investment in and business development support for festivals is helping to drive growth and entice both domestic and overseas visitors to different parts of the country in the off-peak season. Fáilte Ireland provides funding for local festivals through its 'Regional Festivals and Participative Events Programme', which has been managed by Local Authorities since 2018.

'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' has had much success since its launch in 2018 and brought focus to this part of Ireland which may not traditionally have been seen as an obvious tourism destination. Leitrim should actively promote engagement and co-operation with the other counties in the Hidden Heartlands (namely Leitrim, and Longford as well as parts of Westmeath, Cavan, North Tipperary, Galway, and Offaly) to ensure continued promotion and provision of facilities to attract both visitors and continued investment.

Are we making best use of our existing heritage sites?

Fáilte Ireland recognises that there is a strong interdependency between heritage and tourism. Leveraging of our heritage assets can lead to economic, social and cultural benefits for local communities, and the wider area. In 2017 over 90% of overseas holidaymakers across our 4 target markets visited a heritage site in Ireland as part of their holiday. This demonstrates that heritage is an intrinsic element of Ireland's tourism offering and as such, its economic value cannot be neatly separated from the overall value of overseas tourism to Ireland.

Tourism is a key economic driver often delivering full time and seasonal income into areas where employment opportunities are either scarce – or which constitute a suite of mixed activities throughout the year. Tourism-related activities can be an important source of finance for the capital investment needed to support development and maintenance.

It is acknowledged that the built, natural and archaeological heritage may have different and varying needs and requirements in order to unlock their potential, with the business and operations of attractions, conservation of monuments/ buildings etc, are particularly relevant. The formulation

of policies which acknowledge and support the positive role that heritage plays within tourism will benefit both heritage and tourism. A strong heritage policy with tourism as a priority sector within it, will help to ensure that the interests of both sectors are recognised. This will also enhance and promote co-operation between stakeholders.

Since 2017 Fáilte Ireland has established Strategic Partnerships with four state agencies including the Office of Public Works (OPW), National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS), Coillte and Waterways Ireland. As the owners and managers of these assets, Fáilte Ireland works with these agencies to optimise the visitor experience of state-owned lands and assets such as national parks, nature reserves, forest parks and heritage sites. This is key to positioning tourism on the agendas of those who directly manage and deliver the visitor experience but may not have tourism as their main remit. It is also key to note that heritage is not the single remit of any one agency or department and that a whole of government approach will be required, taking key areas and linkages with climate change, environment, to name but a few, into account.

How can a balance be achieved between protecting natural landscapes of Leitrim as a resource for tourism and residents of the county whilst accommodating development necessary to sustain the rural community?

Tourism can make a key contribution to rural economies and communities. Most tourism facilities in County Leitrim are community or locally owned and managed, meaning spending remains in the local economy and as such should be promoted and safeguarded by the Development Plan. As such support for the internationally recognised VICE model should be identified in the Development Plan. This model identifies sustainable tourism as the interaction between Visitors, the Industry that provides services to them, the Community and culture that hosts them and their collective impact on and response to the Environment where it all takes place.

Ireland's Hidden Heartlands proposition is very focused on nature and light touch/impact tourism, access to nature and experiencing is central to the brand. Therefore, any development should ideally start with the significance of the biodiversity and progress from there. Leitrim possesses a huge variety of habitats including. Many are home to species of rare plants and animals. These sites designated for nature conservation such as bogland, turloughs, eskers, callows, woodland, lakes, rivers and canals locations can be appreciated and visited through public parks, forest walks and other amenities thus increasing awareness of conservation requirements. Sustainable tourism and eco-tourism can help support the natural heritage by providing facilities required through education and careful management.

As mentioned in the Issues Paper County Leitrim has now the highest ratio of forestry planted area of any county in the state. The Authority recognises the need for developing forestry and understand the numerous environmental, social and economic benefits provided by trees and

forestry both at local and national levels. However, we also believe that forestry should be planned at appropriate locations and in accordance with best practice planning and sustainable development. Large scale forestry areas can have negative impacts visually, socially and environmentally, our landscape is one of the main motivators for holidaymakers choosing to come to Ireland. Ireland's Hidden Heartlands aims to promote the hidden treasures of Ireland focusing on the inherent beauty of the inland countryside. The Authority commends Leitrim County Council for commissioning a capacity assessment of the ability of the landscape to continue to absorb large scale afforestation.

Coillte Nature is seeking to advance its sustainability agenda by undertaking large discrete projects with a separate non-commercial focus. These projects are intended to increase the national forest estate but with a strong emphasis on carbon sequestration, species diversification, biodiversity and the development of outdoor recreation and tourism amenities. Coillte Nature will collaborate with other organisations through joint ventures, etc., in implementing forestry and recreation projects.

Are there any outdoor tourism and recreation facilities that the County lacks?

Fáilte Ireland acknowledges the value of angling tourism and the importance of a pristine aquatic environment in order to protect and sustain the sector. The development plan should ensure that it seeks to not only protect the water resources in the county but also enhance them. Angling is an important sector for Irish tourism, with the potential to provide for economic growth especially in rural areas and to provide overseas and indigenous anglers with a deep and enriching experience. In order to develop angling in the county continued engagement and collaboration with all relevant stakeholders in particular in the provision of ancillary infrastructure and services for anglers, such as water access, shelters, toilets, changing and other facilities which will enhance the user experience. Furthermore, stronger connections between water-based amenities and nearby population centres, where visitor services can be best accommodated.

How do we progress the development of further Blueways and Greenways during the life of the next County Development Plan?

From a tourism perspective, blueways and greenways are key tourism infrastructure and play an important role in Irish tourism. They boost the appeal of Ireland in the travel market, add value to the existing high tourism offering and support the development of rural communities and job creation in the rural economy, as well as the protection and promotion of natural assets and biodiversity. Other key considerations include ensuring that there are linkages to towns, villages and communities; interpretation (telling of local interesting and engaging stories); animation (year round events, etc which are continuously being refreshed, new elements added); and engaged and proactive communities and industry who utilises blueways and greenways for their own recreational use but also take pride and encourage their blueways and greenways being enjoyed by others.

In addition, we know that globally, activity tourism continues to grow in popularity and cycling in particular has the potential to grow further; but only if suitable infrastructure can be delivered on the ground and in the right location. Initiatives such as the Cavan Leitrim Greenway and the Cavan Railway Greenway from Ulster Canal Greenway north of Castle Saunderson and with a link to the Cavan - Leitrim Greenway at Belturbet will add to the offering of the county.

5. Further Suggestions for the New Development Plan

Tourism Amenities and Assets Maps

The Authority would also like to see tourism policies and objectives clearly set out in a Tourism Chapter and where possible through the inclusion of maps in the draft Development Plan.

Such a map should illustrate:

- Key **nodes** of tourism activity in the County – both existing and proposed specific tourism centres (major tourism attractions, water access etc.); including the list of key assets identified in Section 2 above;
- Existing transport **links** between nodes and identified trails – whether walking, cycling or road based including greenways and blueways;
- **Strategic tourism centres** (principal towns containing tourist facilities) where key services such as hotels etc. are located;
- **Sensitive environments** where the provision of services must be sensitive and appropriate to the robustness / sensitivity of the receiving environment;
- **Areas of unrealised tourism potential** where proactive policies will aim to encourage the development of this sector;
- **Branding** – reference and use of Fáilte Ireland Tourism Brand logos applicable to the county i.e. Ireland's Hidden Heartlands;
- **Sustainable travel** between sites with the promotion of public transport along key routes; Informed design and location guidelines for the development of tourism related facilities in sensitive amenities. Key to this would be the consideration of particularly special areas which may not normally be considered – such as the proposed views of proposed developments from riverside, prominent or elevated locations etc;
- **Areas of unrealised tourism potential** where proactive policies will aim to encourage the development of this sector;

Wind Energy & Landscape Considerations:

The Issues Paper provides detail in relation to the Council's approach to 'Climate Action, Energy and Environment'. Fáilte Ireland welcomes the Council's decision to commissioning the preparation of a

dedicated Renewable Energy Strategy. Included within this should be a map, which identifies areas suitable and unsuitable for the siting of wind turbines and sensitive areas such as tourism facilities or assets. Robust policies will assist the Council in ensuring a continued emphasis on the positive interactions between both the energy and tourism potential of the County.

6. Conclusion

Fáilte Ireland would like to thank the Council in advance for their consideration of this submission and encourage the inclusion of the Authority's recommendations in the preparation of the new County Development Plan. We greatly appreciate this opportunity to take part in shaping the Plan for the County and hope that this submission can represent a first step in a collaborative process that culminates in the preparation and adoption of the new County Development Plan.

Yours sincerely,



Shane Dineen

On behalf of, Fáilte Ireland

In relation to any follow up to this submission please contact:

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Appendix - Sustainable Tourism Principles

Key principles for sustainable tourism development should be set out as the introduction to the tourism policy statements of the County Development Plan. The following five principles, which have been prepared by Brendan O’Sullivan, Department of Geography, UCC, on behalf of Fáilte Ireland, encapsulate the need to achieve a balance between appropriate tourism development and economic, environmental and social sustainability.

- **Principle 1:** Tourism, when it is well managed and properly located, should be recognised as a positive activity which has potential to benefit the host community, the place itself and the visitor alike. Sustainable tourism planning requires a balance to be struck between the needs of the visitor, the place and the host community.
- **Principle 2:** Our landscapes, our cultural heritage, our environment and our linguistic heritage all have an intrinsic value which outweighs their value simply as a tourism asset. However, sustainable tourism planning makes sure that they can continue to be enjoyed and cherished by future generations and not prejudiced simply by short term considerations.
- **Principle 3:** Built development and other activities associated with tourism should in all respects be appropriate to the character of the place in which they are situated. This applies to the scale, design and nature of the place as well as to the particular land use, economic and social requirements of the place and its surroundings.
- **Principle 4:** Strategic tourism assets – including special landscapes, important views, the setting of historic buildings and monuments, areas of cultural significance and access points to the open countryside, should be safeguarded from encroachment by inappropriate development.
- **Principle 5:** Visitor accommodation, interpretation centres, and commercial / retail facilities serving the tourism sector should generally be located within established settlements thereby fostering strong links to a whole range of other economic and commercial sectors and sustaining the host communities. Sustainable tourism facilities, when properly located and managed can, especially if accessible by a range of transport modes, encourage longer visitor stays, help to extend the tourism season, and add to the vitality of settlements throughout the year.

Underlying these principles for Sustainable Tourism, the definitions of economic, environmental and social sustainability against which any tourism project assessed are defined as follows:

Economic sustainability must be considered to ensure that the tourism sector is managed.

Upcoming Fáilte Ireland Initiatives FOR LEITRIM

SHANNON MASTERPLAN



The River Shannon, its lakes and inland waterways are an integral part of the tourism offering in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. Fáilte Ireland has provided funding to Waterways Ireland to lead on the preparation of a Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon River, including the Shannon-erne Waterway. The Tourism Masterplan will assess the strengths and weaknesses of this key tourism asset in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, and will bring forward

proposals on how to grow a sustainable international tourism destination in the Shannon Corridor which respects the nature and diversity of the environment and its people. Leitrim County Council is part of the steering group to help guide the process. This Tourism Masterplan is expected to be completed by the end of June 2019 and will include product development and investment recommendations.

BEARA BREIFNE WAY



The Beara Breifne Way is Ireland's longest inland way-marked route, which spans Galway, Tipperary, Offaly, Roscommon, Leitrim and Cavan within Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. A Tourism Activation Plan has been commissioned by Fáilte Ireland, which will see a number of towns along the route identified as walking hubs to

drive visitors into nearby areas and maximise the tourism benefits increased tourist numbers will bring. Work on this Tourism Activation Plan is ongoing, with completion of the plan expected this summer. Local Authorities in these counties will be fully involved and will receive regular project updates.

WEB IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME



Fáilte Ireland is launching a pilot Web Improvement Programme this summer for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. This new programme will help successful applicants improve the quality of their website, the user experience and drive additional traffic to their website with the

objective of increasing visitor numbers from domestic and overseas markets. Funding will be available to successful applicants to implement the required improvements to their websites. Further information will be available on www.failteireland.ie

DESTINATION TOWNS – OPEN FOR APPLICATIONS

Through Fáilte Ireland's Destination Towns initiative, every Local Authority in the country – including Leitrim County Council – will be able to bid for funding of between €250,000 and €500,000 to develop up to two towns in their area that have the potential to become a tourism hub.

The new scheme, which is now open for applications, will provide funding for the Local Authority to enhance public spaces and attract more overseas visitors. The Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands teams are working closely with the council on its funding submission. The closing date for applications is September 2019.

PLATFORMS FOR GROWTH INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

Platforms for Growth is Fáilte Ireland's new four-year capital investment programme worth €150million. The programme specifically targets product themes and types known as 'platforms', which have the greatest potential to grow tourism in Ireland. The first of the platforms to be launched is Immersive Heritage and Cultural Attractions, which will focus on developing world-class attractions that appeal to overseas visitors who are looking for hands-on experiences.

The programme will fund projects of scale (greater than €2.5million) and falls under the Government's Project Ireland 2040 strategy which supports sustainable growth in the Irish tourism sector to drive higher revenue and job creation around Ireland. Platforms for Growth is now open for applications until 17th July 2019 and a series of workshops will be held around the country. Find out more: www.failteireland.ie/platformsforgrowth



Your local Fáilte Ireland representative in Leitrim is:
Sarah McCarthy, sarah.mccarthy@failteireland.ie

Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority and is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport.



Developing Tourism in LEITRIM



Fáilte Ireland wants Leitrim to benefit as much as possible from tourism across the county and has looked at the natural assets and the distinctive experience they might offer in each area.

Given Leitrim's proximity to the River Shannon and Lough Allen, the majority of the county forms part of the new **Ireland's Hidden Heartlands** brand which encourages visitors to be 'active in nature' and to discover rural Irish communities. County Leitrim is an ideal fit for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, which offers the area the best opportunity to grow its economic return from tourism. In the west of the county, Leitrim's coastline features as part of Fáilte Ireland's **Wild Atlantic Way** brand.

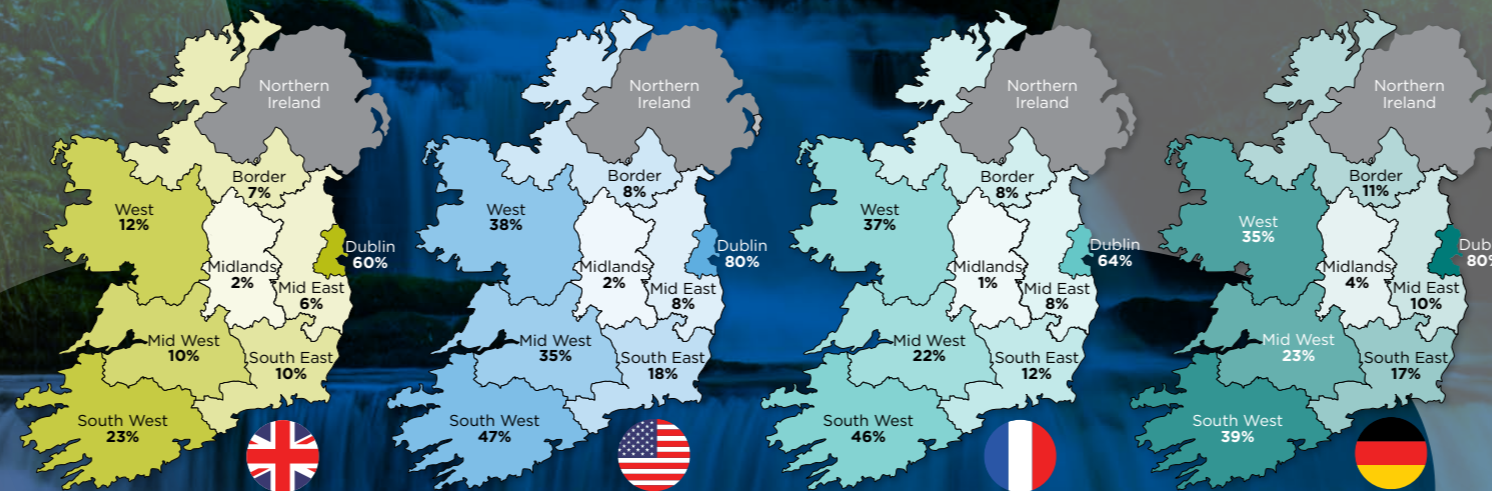
Tourism JOBS & REVENUE

Every
€1 million
of tourist expenditure
helps to support
27 tourism jobs

Tourism
generates
€1.8bn
in exchequer revenue –
the equivalent of
€1,000
per household

Tourism
supports
260,000
jobs
nationwide

Regions Visited By KEY OVERSEAS MARKETS



*Holidaymakers can visit more than one region, therefore the sum of regions adds up to more than 100%

Counties which make up regions: **DUBLIN** Dublin. **MIDLANDS** Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois. **MID-EAST** Wicklow, Kildare, Meath, Louth. **SOUTH WEST** Cork, Kerry. **SOUTH EAST** Waterford, Kilkenny, Carlow, Wexford. **MID-WEST** Clare, Tipperary, Limerick. **WEST** Galway, Mayo, Roscommon. **BORDER** Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan.

2018 Accommodation Supply IN LEITRIM

- 9 Hotels with 806 beds
- 4 Bed & Breakfasts with 31 beds
- 2 Caravan/campsite with 260 beds
- 3 Guesthouses with 53 beds
- 24 Self-Catering units with 119 beds
- 9 Irish Welcome Standard with 787 beds

*Fáilte Ireland registered/approved accommodation. Source: Capita.

In general, holidaymakers spend the largest portion of holiday nights staying in hotels (38%). Guesthouses/B&Bs are next most popular for overnight stays (21%). American and British holidaymakers favour hotels, while the French and Germans prefer guesthouses and B&Bs.

Fáilte Ireland Support for FESTIVALS

Fáilte Ireland has identified festivals as a key driver for tourism growth, particularly during off-season times. Investment in and business development support for festivals is helping to drive growth in the regions and entice both domestic and overseas visitors to different parts of the country in the off-peak season.

Fáilte Ireland also provides funding for local festivals through its 'Regional Festivals and Participative Events Programme', which has been managed by Local Authorities since 2018.

New Festival IDEAS

As well as the range of major national festivals Fáilte Ireland supports, the 'Festival Innovation Programme' was launched in 2018 to support unique and high tourism impact festivals and events which will stand out internationally. Festivals are encouraged to apply on our website: www.failteireland.ie/festivalsandevents

Fáilte Ireland Support for NATIONAL SCHEMES

OUTDOOR RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE FUND 2018

Fáilte Ireland has partnered with the Department of Rural and Community Development to provide funding of almost **€11million for 78 projects across 24 counties** – including Leitrim – under Measure 2 of the 2018 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme.

The scheme is part of the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development and provides funding for new outdoor recreational infrastructure. It also supports the maintenance, enhancement and promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in Ireland. Fáilte Ireland has

invested a total of €3million into the scheme with the aim of enhancing existing tourism recreation infrastructure and ensuring that the economic benefits of tourism are spread regionally across the country.

The key strengths of the County include landscape, heritage, natural environment, lifestyle and amenity pursuits. The sector is highly affected by seasonality and there are extremes in visitor numbers as key attractions contrasted with smaller attractions which struggle to maintain visitor numbers. These 'peaks and troughs' should be carefully managed to ensure the protection of natural resources. Tourism innovation should also be encouraged – particularly where it brings about environmental benefits. Finally, for projects to be economically sustainable they should meet the needs of the permanent and also visitor population alike, so the preparation of robust business plans for all such developments will ensure proposals are viable and sustainable.

Environmental sustainability will be central to the development and protection of a viable tourism sector and this is a key consideration in the County where tourism attractions are located in environmentally sensitive areas and close to historic areas where the quality of the built heritage and environment must be protected from inappropriate development – whether tourism related or not. The 'mainstreaming' of policy guidance tools such as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will undoubtedly address any deficits in relation to many of these key policy areas.

Social sustainability is arguably more difficult to assess. Many of the potentially negative impacts of tourism development can however be addressed through careful consideration of the social and cultural nature of the receiving environment. The impacts that large-scale developments can have on existing local communities' policies can be assessed having regard to the impact of visitor numbers on local quality of life, culture and heritage – with a particular emphasis placed on unique areas such as culturally sensitive areas where small impacts over time may have a significant cumulative effect