

Date: 22nd April 2022

Our Submission to Leitrim Draft County Development Plan 2023-2029

We in Leitrim Tourism Network (“LTN”) wish to submit our input to the Draft Leitrim County Development Plan 2023-2029 (“the Plan”).

LTN was formed to market and sell Leitrim for what it still is - magically scenic, traffic-free, still mostly unspoilt, authentic, quiet, welcoming and most of all people-friendly.

Our members work in partnership with various other stakeholders including Leitrim County Council, Leitrim Development Company, Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and our neighbouring counties to promote Tourism in Leitrim and the North West.

Tourism is a standout key to the regeneration of Leitrim, and in recent times the profile of our County has been further enhanced as a magnificent Tourism destination.

It is vital therefore that the Tourism strategy in the Plan maximises Leitrim’s untapped potential and that its objectives for Tourism do not conflict with other parts of the Plan as a whole.

Part 5 of the written statement of the Plan recognises the importance of Tourism and naturally “The Council is fully supportive of all future developments that will contribute positively to the tourism potential of the county, while protecting the heritage and environment of the county, to achieve maximum economic and social gain.” A number of pillars are identified with the second one being that “All investment decisions in product/infrastructure capitalise on, but protect, Leitrim’s natural & built assets that give Leitrim a lead within competitive set.”

This pillar we submit should be amended to

“All future investment decisions in product/infrastructure should capitalise on, and at the same time, seek to preserve and protect Leitrim’s mountain scenery, lakes and rivers and natural & built assets that give Leitrim such a lead within a competitive set in walking, cycling and activity Tourism related activities.”



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This pillar is merely words on paper unless it is deemed to take absolute precedence over and above the proposed continued development of gigantic onshore industrial wind farms, the continued unsustainable massive Sitka Spruce plantations and the recent granting of prospecting licences in our County. Fracking of course is to be prevented at all costs as well.

We cannot prevent the industrialisation and denigration of our landscapes if the current plans for these proven unsustainable activities remains unchecked and so the Plan needs to ensure that this pillar takes precedence above all else. Otherwise we contend that any tourism strategy is fundamentally flawed.

We are encouraged by the emphasis of GreenWays which form a massive part of the future of Tourism in Leitrim.

In conjunction with the SLNCR rail trail committee, the LTN strongly believe that we need to maximise the incredible and unique potential of the ecology corridors that are our disused railway corridors in Leitrim. These mostly disused and largely undisturbed railway corridors in their current state are rich with natural, man made, and cultural and heritage features- railway hedgerows, railway bridges, former railway buildings,, veteran trees, culverts and waterways, wildflowering earth banks, etc. and a rich variety of biodiversity and provide important wildlife and ecological habitats. The plan needs to emphasise the sensitive development of the GreenWay trails within this preserved green infrastructure. The Dromahair demonstration stretch is proof that a gentle and sustainable approach is absolutely achievable in developing GreenWays with the emphasis on Green!. The result would be a true 'GreenWay' that remains complementary to our rural green and relatively undeveloped countryside in Leitrim.

The priority therefore should be **to develop unique and proper "Green" Ways for Leitrim.**

In this regard the LTN advocate for the following goals be imbedded in the Plan;

1. The development and maintenance of GreenWays in Leitrim should be carried out using the smallest and lightest plant machinery possible to minimise disturbance to the existing former railway corridor and associated habitats. Smaller machinery can operate easily within the often-narrow woodland corridors framing the former SLNCR ballast (as experienced during the development of the Dromahair demonstration stretch)
2. Landscape and woodland ecosystem features such as hedgerows, treelines, and woodlands associated with the former railway corridors must be preserved in so far as possible. Where removal or thinning of existing woodland or hedgerows along the trail is absolutely necessary best practice should include mitigation measures to replace the woodland and in all cases seek to re-connect the woodland network by replanting identified near-by gaps. Merging canopies over the corridor should be maintained and encouraged where possible to promote Green Lane corridor effects.
3. Hedgerows and treelines should be enhanced throughout the entire route during the development and maintenance of the Greenway. Enhancement should prioritise the planting of gaps and increasing density using a diverse range of suitable species of local provenance. Other enhancement activities could include hedge laying where appropriate.
4. Vegetated margins at the base of hedgerows, tree-lines, alongside route verges and on flanking earth banks, etc., should be retained. Natural re-vegetation of bare ground should be encouraged. Soil and material arising from the necessary clearing of the ballast and ditches should not be spread on top of sensitive areas such as existing earth banks or the base of hedgerows and trees. Instead, it could be used to infill gaps or create new earth banks where suitable.
5. Rail ballasts should be up-cycled using base materials that are of similar nature to maintain favourable soil conditions for grassy banks and verges present (i.e., acidic, neutral or calcareous). Soft, unbound trail surfaces have been advocated as more user and environmentally friendly, while remaining aesthetically sympathetic to our rural farmland landscape. Where heavy machinery access is required (e.g., farm access), a double-track bound surface (as applied for the RAVeL in Wallonia, Belgium)

- may be advantageous to prevent deterioration of the trail surface but leaving a soft centre margin to meet user preferences.
6. Future maintenance of the greenways should adopt ecological best practice, i.e. sensitive hedgerow pruning and laying, late mowing of ground vegetation as necessary, securing dead trees and branches as standing and lying deadwood and replanting of same, no herbicide use, etc. Maintenance programmes should seek collaborative partnerships between the Local Authority, landowners, communities (including schools, men's groups, tidy towns etc.) to promote local ownership and stewardship. In addition, these partnerships could support future initiatives including the interpretation of local history and knowledge relevant to the SLNCR and other former railways, its communities, and our surrounding prized landscape.
 7. Community based shared allotments need to be promoted and encouraged in and along the greenway network with strict organic principles thus creating a network of allotments which double as educational tools and commercial enterprises all working and connecting into and working in conjunction with our farmer's markets and local cafes and restaurants with cargo bike deliveries to the cafés restaurants and homes all along the greenway.

In addition the Tourism potential of an optimum network of GreenLanes needs to be explored and developed throughout Leitrim. These ecological lanes can be developed as arteries to the GreenWays along the most suitable quiet country roads and lanes which are and will remain relatively traffic free. They should be identified and designated as walking and cycling routes connecting heritage sites and beauty spots with existing tourism accommodation thus encouraging new AgriTourism related developments. This will enhance the viability of Tourism accommodation and extend the reach of our GreenWay Super highways into the most far flung parts of our County with relatively low capital outlay. Community groups should be encouraged to adopt and promote their own optimum GreenLane in their community to connect into the neighbouring optimum GreenLane and the local authority should provide best practice and uniform development guidelines for traffic calming measures, shared road ethics giving priority to the walker and cyclist over the motorist, pulling in



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points to allow vehicles to pass safely, viewing points or green windows at particular beauty spots, hedge cutting to improve visibility and sight lines, surface dressing and appropriate signage and a uniform system of road markings .

Much more emphasis needs to be made in the Plan to encourage cycling in our towns and villages especially in the expectation of the rollout of the proposed GreenWay infrastructure and GreenLanes in our communities.

The Plan should be boldly declaring a goal to make County Leitrim the most cycle and pedestrian friendly County in Ireland.

County Leitrim is already a Mecca for walking and activity tourism.

We already have an abundance of walking trails but there is so much potential for creating a story or theme to accompany the trail to illustrate the rich heritage and culture engrained in our natural landscape.

Spain and Portugal have exploited this to the nth degree with their caminos and of course all religions have some form of pilgrimage in their beliefs.

Walking and cycling are of course healthy activities and leave no carbon footprint and the development of walking trails to mass rocks and other similar monuments and reminders of our past should be encouraged and funded.

This can only add to our superb standard of living in the great unspoilt outdoors that Leitrim offers every day of every year in all weathers to residents and visitors alike.

We want to involve our residents and visitors alike in making them even more aware of their architectural and cultural heritage so that these relics and traditions and beliefs from our past can be preserved for generations to come.

The members of the LTN fully welcome and support the endeavours of Leitrim County Council in the development of the Plan so long as the above recommendations are implemented and so long as other policies and activities in the Plan are not inconsistent with the recommendations made.



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Yours sincerely

Conor A Maguire
Secretary