

From Revd Richard Beadle (Church of Ireland minister for Manorhamilton, Lurganboy, Drumkeerin, Dromahair and Kinlough & Bundoran)

Dear Leitrim Co Council

Having read the County Development plan with particular reference to heritage and tourism I would be bold enough to make the following observations:

**I believe North Leitrim should become part of a new national park and exploring the merits of this should be a priority.** As a blow in I hope, I have a perspective of value. I have widespread experience of national parks in the UK especially. I can see many benefits to a National Park and have felt ever since moving here 3 years ago, that North Leitrim is presently missing a trick not being one.

I am very supportive of a national park and believe this should be a priority to explore. However I have 3 major concerns if we do not think out of the box:

- a) Concern that most Irish National Parks have degrading ecosystems due to underfunding and lack of government supports.
- b) Concern that present emphasis for a national park is driven by economics for jobs and people. If we fail to seriously protect and enhance our natural environment we will lose our most valuable resource.
- c) I question if enough of north Leitrim has enough of the necessary 'Wow' to attract the visitors required on landscape and arts alone.

Taking these 3 concerns into account I would suggest **North Leitrim becomes a NATIONAL ECO HERITAGE PARK based on the greenway and the glens.**

**I would suggest adding these key layers to add value to the natural resource our natural landscape already provides.**

**1. That the national park uses new economic frameworks to inform policy decisions.**

These take climate & biodiversity issues seriously. Amsterdam has just adopted (May 2020) the doughnut economic model shared by Kate Raworth to help inform their policy making. To take such a step would be a challenging but a right step demonstrating that the national park is serious in facing the huge global challenges of the modern world. This would help set Leitrim apart from other National Parks increasing our tourist appeal.

**2. The Farming community would be encouraged to sign up to High value nature agricultural programmes, enabling Eco Tourism.** The environment is seen often as the enemy (and septic tanks have clearly not helped!) . We have to begin to see our natural environment as our best friend. Bad land, marginal land has a new value if we can recognise it's nature potential. Governments will increasingly have to follow european directives on climate and biodiversity issues (note new European strategy for increased protected land for 2030). North Leitrim has much that we may well be directed to protect and value more - can we be proactive rather than reactive, alert to this coming necessary challenge? .

**3. Target schools to visit for residential education field trips - geography, environmental studies.** With our landscape and an emphasis on biodiversity we should be well suited. Crucially these will become future visitors in later years. Do we have suitable venues to host school groups?

**4. There is a whole realm of eco tourism that we are not even beginning to touch** because we do not realise what we have (or should have with the right protections in place). As nature is enhanced so will the numbers of visitors. For example the amazing sandmartin colony at Parkes Castle will not draw on it's own but as part of a package of wildlife to see locally, it becomes an attraction well worth seeing (castle lover or not!). Especially if flagship species like hen harrier, curlew can be encouraged, nature can greatly

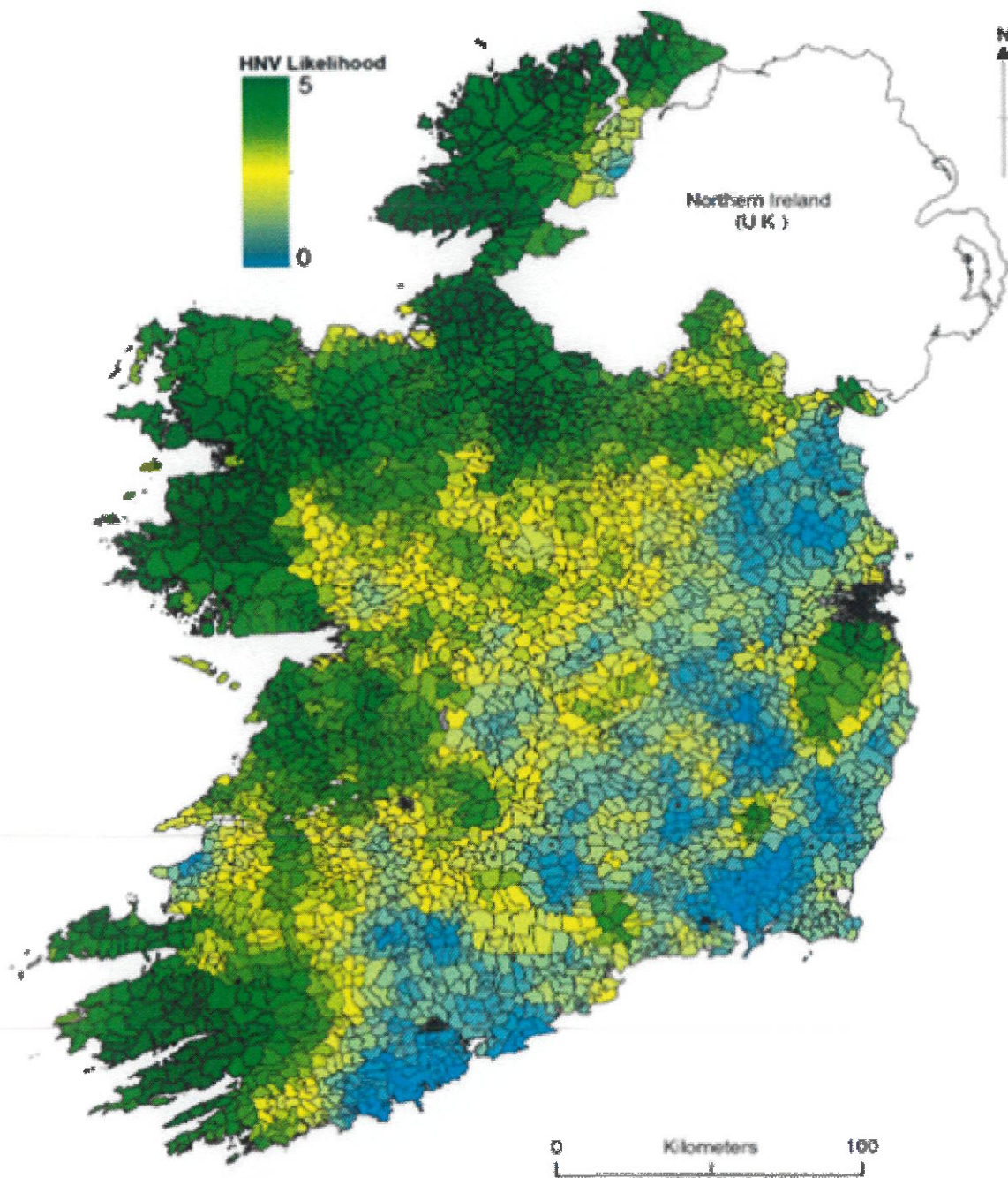
help add visitors. Scotland and Wales both major on their wildlife for tourism (red kites, osprey, eagle, pine marten etc) so must we. First we need to see their value and support and develop what we have and could have. A golden eagle sighted on Arroo Mountain yesterday (tweeted by Leitrim development Co.) gives a glimpse of the potential draw we could have.

There is lots more I could say (I am presently doing a series of bitesize talks on the points made to possibly put online) but I hope this at least gives a sense of some clear thinking on this issue. North Leitrim is a wonderful place to work with incredible potential. I believe though that the full potential will only be realised if the protection and enhancement of the environment is recognised as the key.

Thank you for all your hard work.

Yours sincerely

Revd Richard Beadle

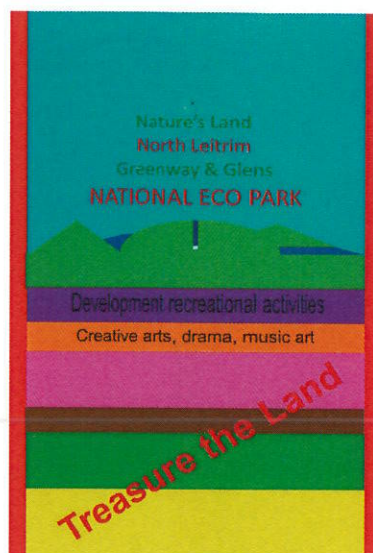
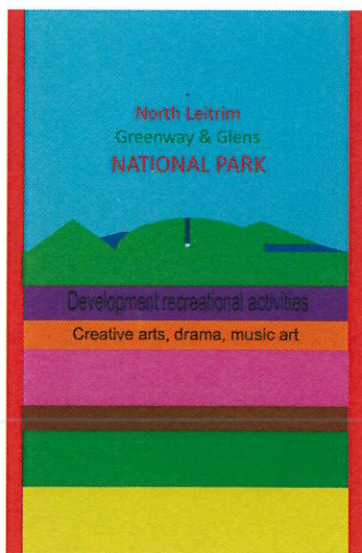


This image is from a talk on High Nature Value land by James Moran from the Agro-ecology and rural development group. It clearly shows Leitrim as an area where nature has huge potential as an asset if farmers are rewarded for biodiversity due to the natural constraints on the land.



Present thinking on a National Park?

A better future way to increase our potential as a National Park?



This is limited and will not protect Leitrim's greatest resources

Prioritising the land and it's biodiversity will add product value, increasing visitors & will help secure the land and environment for future generations.

