

SUBMISSION to
Pre-Draft Consultation on the proposed Clare County
Development Plan 2022-2028

on behalf of Kilkee Tourism Ltd.



In compliance with the recommendations we have restricted our submission to broad outlines which we intend to expand on in more detail in later submissions.

This submission is mainly concerned with Kilkee and it's hinterland.

KILKEE is, at the moment, almost totally dependent on tourism and will probably remain so for the duration of this plan. As good planning shapes the environment and because Kilkee has a unique identity it is imperative that these should be emphasised in any development plan to ensure that there is a thriving and sustainable tourist industry.

TOURISM

Any plans for the tourist industry should be based on the Failte Ireland tourist categories. Projects and marketing should be defined how they slot into their perceived audience.

The three categories relevant to Kilkee and Loophead are:

Culturally Curious (CC) - tourists in this category are independent 'active sightseers', interested in history, heritage and culture in the broadest sense.

Social Energisers (SE) – tourists in this category tend to be young and looking for excitement especially sports and activities.

Great Escapers (GE)– tourists in this category tend to be older and want relaxing stay in unspoilt area away from large crowds.

We are using these categories as a template for our tourism submission but it goes without saying that good forward planning is just as much about the local community as about tourists.

Heritage and History(CC) - this is an area which is one of the natural strengths of Kilkee with its 19th century town structure and historical connections. The town centre, a designated Architectural Conservation Area, is in theory protected from inappropriate development but up to now has been badly policed and much unauthorised architectural changes have taken place which have done nothing to enhance the town centre. A Heritage Centre is a necessary requirement to create a focus for the heritage and history of Kilkee. Protected structures in the town are quite often neglected and the new plan should endeavour to ensure that these important structures are retained in optimum condition. The official list of these structures has many inaccurate details including dates. Kilkee heritage and Historical society will forward corrections to be incorporated in the new list.

Geology (CC). In recent years our geological heritage has become more publically prominent thanks to the influx of student and post-graduate geologists. The cliffs and rock formations between Kilkee and Loophead lighthouse has some unique features and these should be protected by guaranteeing access to the special areas and also preventing indiscriminate quarrying on these sites.

Archaeology (CC)- There are a number of sites and structures in the Kilkee area which would, if identified and excavated, be a valuable addition to the overall heritage offering.

Biodiversity (CC,GE) – in this era of environment recognition Kilkee is very well placed to showcase its biodiversity. The town is nearly completely surrounded by Natura 2000 conservation areas and Clare Co Council should in conjunction with NPWS develop an overarching plan to co-ordinate promotion of the different areas. A biodiversity site which should be developed immediately and without any further delay is the old reservoir which is at the moment contaminated with illegally dumped asbestos. It has the potential for really excellent biodiversity park and community amenity. Birdwatching is becoming more and more popular as nature and the environment become centre stage.

Arts & Culture (CC, GE) – Kilkee has an excellent facility in Cultúrlann Sweeney and its offering should be expanded. Artist's work spaces are urgently required because the cost of any such space in Kilkee is prohibitive. Craft shops are an attraction especially for the older tourist and such shops and craft workshops should be encouraged.

Wild Atlantic Way (CC, GE). This project has been very successful, however, as Fáilte Ireland have stated that it will need refreshing from time to time which will include adding new discovery points and maybe removing ones that have proved unsuccessful. This plan should ensure that some new discovery points are ready for inclusion when the review is undertaken. Parts of the WAW, which have been widened for traffic, may be amenable to cycle lanes and their inclusion as part of the plan would be in keeping with the trend for sustainable connectivity between communities.

Walks & Trails (GE, SE). The Loophead Peninsula and the West Clare coastline around Kilkee have the potential to be a mecca for walkers. The long Loophead Peninsula coastline is potentially an ideal walking trail for serious walkers and walking clubs. The shorter walks are ideal for the tourists who just wish to stroll and meander through the unspoilt countryside or through Special Areas of Conservation or through the Victorian areas of Kilkee. The West Clare Railway Trail should be expedited to come on stream within the period of this plan.

Cycling (GE, SE) – The Eurovelo route runs the total length of the Clare Atlantic coastline through Kilkee. This is a valuable facility and should be more heavily promoted with marketing and signage. Short trips along the route, especially with electric bikes, are ideal for the more relaxed tourists.

Water sports (SE)- Kilkee is a major centre for water sports. There are already a large number of water based activities on offer; kayaking, scuba diving, sailing, snorkelling, fishing, surfing, canoeing, stand up paddle boarding, coastering, windsurfing etc with potential for expanded and deeper development. Beach sport is a growth area for tourists and Kilkee has huge natural advantage in the size of the large beach where sports need not impinge on other beach users. The beach in Kilkee is deteriorating gradually and erosion is

becoming a major problem. It is important to preserve this excellent natural amenity by carrying out an oceanographic study to find out why this is taking place. A number of quiet beaches in West Clare which have been used for generations have been closed off by landowners in the past few years. It should be the aim of this plan to re-open these beaches to the public.

Accommodation. – Accommodation in Kilkee falls into two categories. For the tourist there is a large number of holiday homes, apartments and mobile homes. As CSO figures show over 70% of houses were vacant on census night. It can be taken that there are sufficient numbers of this accommodation type. The opposite is the case with lack of hotel rooms, B&B rooms and overnight camping sites. The policy for the duration of this plan should be to correct this imbalance. For permanent accommodation, a shortfall in two areas stands out. Affordable housing for, mainly young, Kilkee residents who want to buy their own home is in extremely short supply. Clare Co council has an excellent site on the Miltown Road in Kilkee to make such sites immediately available. The other area of housing shortage is in the area of sheltered housing for an ageing population. Such accommodation should be encouraged.

Enterprise – Tourism is the major industry in the area but is subject to seasonality and the vagaries of weather or connectivity disruption. To insure against this a number of enterprises should be developed especially around farm-based rural enterprise, agritourism, agrifood, renewable energy. Forestry is a useful form of farm enterprise but the indiscriminate siting of fast growing biodiversity sterile plantations has led to environment backlash against this type of forestry. A more environment friendly planting would be best for both nature and the farmer's lifestyle. Remote working is now an option for many and the new IT working spaces in Kilkee are a welcome addition to the town and should be promoted. The retail structure in the town of Kilkee is very weak and this development plan should ensure that more retail outlets open in the town for the benefit of locals, more employment and social activity. Shopping has now become a tourist activity which is another reason for promotion of a retail town centre vibrancy. Education is a very important part of enterprise and to develop a business culture Post Leaving Cert courses should be offered in Kilkee Community College.

Infrastructure – The town infrastructure is very weak and has been neglected over many years. The Traffic Management Plan which was drawn up in the early 1990s with much local consultation was never properly implemented. A new plan is now required. This need not be expensive or take long as the centre of the town is quite small. Some experienced executives with local input should have a plan produced in time to put into this development plan. Towards a Better Kilkee is going the same way as the traffic plan. Some very fine suggestions in the publication, which were the responsibility of Clare Co Council have not been implemented and should be done so. Waste water treatment and flood relief are both ongoing for a long number of years. Both projects are linked by their proximity to Walkers Stream but with twobodies responsible for the projects it appropriate that they

liaise and get both projects finished. Town centre vibrancy should be developed by among other actions the elimination of derelict sites with greater use of local authority powers for the handling of these eyesores and applying the Vacant Sites Levy.

We hope that Clare Planning Office will give careful consideration to our comments and take them on board. We look forward to engaging with Clare Co Council personnel.

John Williams, secretary, Kilkee Tourism, Erin Street, Kilkee, Co Clare.

