

Submission NO: 147



Development Plan Review,
Planning Department,
Clare County Council,
New Road,
Ennis,
Co Clare.
V95 DXP2



By email submission to: forwardplan@clarecoco.ie

Date: 16th November 2020

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

To whom it may concern,

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 the new Clare County Development Plan ('the Plan') for the period 2022-2028 by Clare County Council ('the Council').

Fáilte Ireland welcomes the opportunity to engage with Clare County Council on the emerging Plan for the County. Fáilte Ireland is seeking to enhance the partnership approach between the 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 submission has been prepared having regard to the tourism profile of the County; the background information in the Issues Paper; the current Development Plan 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. The Objective of this Submission
2. Commentary on the Current Clare Development Plan
3. Background Information Provided: Issues Paper
4. Key Tourism Assets & Challenges in County Clare
5. Further Suggestions for the New Development Plan
6. Conclusion

1.0 The Objective of this Submission

Fáilte Ireland has prepared this submission to support and assist the 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 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.

County Clare possesses a wealth of natural and built heritage amenities, it has many attractions of international significance and tourism is a hugely important sector. The natural beauty of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark, a UNESCO world heritage site, has drawn many visitors to the area however there are many areas of the County which are lesser known but have significant potential. East Clare has an attractive landscape and amenities such as Lough Derg and the River Shannon however a lack of accommodation and food offering is required to complete the tourism product in this part of the county.

Fáilte Ireland has invested significantly in key towns, initiatives and amenities in the County such as the various Visitor Experiences Development Plans, through the Destination Town Funding Scheme which was awarded to Ennistymon and funding for projects including Bunratty Castle & Folk Park, Management Plan for Holy Island, Ballycuggeran Amenity Scheme. We have identified areas such as Loop Head and the Burren, where such plans could complete the rich offering already present in the County. We wish to see these investments acknowledged and further progressed in the new Development Plan. We request an objective supporting continued cooperation between the Council,

Fáilte Ireland and other tourism stakeholders in the county as is contained in Chapter 9 of the current Development Plan.

A successful tourism sector also creates significant benefits for many other sectors such as agriculture, food and drinks, accommodation providers, transport and retail. For this reason tourism is a particularly important activity and spatial land use in its own right to be accommodated within the emerging County Development Plan notwithstanding its contribution to enhancement of Quality of Life and the enhancement of places of residence, work and leisure and can positively affect both physical and mental wellbeing which is a key principle of the Southern Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES).

2.0 Commentary on the Current Clare County Development Plan

The current Clare County Development Plan is a high-quality document with a detailed Chapter focused on Tourism. We request the forthcoming Development Plan continue this approach. The vision statement in the current County Clare Development Plan states:

“A county that has maximised its unique characteristics, strengths, location and connectivity to become Ireland’s centre of culture, tourism, heritage and the preferred international destination for sustainable investment and innovation. A county in which citizens, visitors and all stakeholders are empowered and supported by public bodies under the leadership of a professional, responsive and progressive local government system “

The vision statement protects the county’s tourism amenities and assets referring to natural and built environment; and also references tourism an important part of the County’s attractiveness. We welcome the detail provided by Goal VIII which relates directly to tourism:

Goal VIII: *A County Clare in which tourism growth continues to play a major role in the future development of the County, adapting to the challenges of competing markets by maximising the development of a high-quality diverse tourism product*

Fáilte Ireland welcomes the dedicated chapter on tourism contained within the current Development Plan and requests that a similar dedicated chapter and focus be carried through in the new Development Plan. The Chapter sets out a detailed breakdown of the various aspects and types of tourism relevant to Clare.

The inclusion of a dedicated chapter enables decision makers and stakeholders to easily follow guidance in relation to tourism amenities and assets. In particular, Fáilte Ireland promotes the

incorporation of the principles of sustainability in the tourism policy section of the County Development Plans (included in Appendix A of this Submission).

The Clare Wind Energy Strategy 2017 – 2023 is included within Volume 6 of the Development Plan. Fáilte Ireland recommends that all Councils prepare a Renewable Energy Strategy, and this should continue to be an objective for the County which should be progressed in the short term. Included within this should be a map, which identifies areas suitable and unsuitable for the siting of wind turbines.

Additionally, a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) was prepared as part of the current Development Plan process the LCA should be updated and continue to include references to tourism assets to ensure the protection of the integrity of key tourist amenities from negative visual and landscape impacts.

Overall, the current Development Plan presents a number of well-considered and balanced policies and objectives to support tourism.

3.0 Background Information Provided: Issues Paper

The Issues Paper is a clear set out and detailed document, we welcome references to tourism within the section entitled ‘Economic, Enterprise, Tourism and Retail Development’ (page 12) which sets out general considerations in this regard.

This sections states: *In order to promote sustainable economic development, a balance of location and diverse economic activity along with the protection of the environment and people’s quality of life is required.*

Further, in specific reference to tourism the IP states: *County Clare has a strong tourism base which is primarily founded on its unspoilt unique natural environment including the Burren, Cliffs of Moher, Lough Derg as well as a wealth of historic towns and villages and archaeological sites including Scattery Island and Inis Cealtra (Holy Island).*

The Wild Atlantic Way has attracted many visitors and the County Development Plan will support its continued success along with the development of the Shannon Estuary Way to further promote the West Clare area.

We wish to see the forthcoming Development Plan include a detailed Chapter in relation to tourism providing clear guidance for tourism stakeholders in the county.

The Issues Paper identifies a number of questions or issues for the new plan to address. A number of these influence tourism development. In responding to these areas of interest, Fáilte Ireland would maintain that appropriate consideration, planning and protection of tourism through forward planning and development management are key to development of the tourism industry.

The questions relating or effecting tourism detailed in the Issues Paper and Fáilte Ireland's response are responded to throughout the submission.

4.0 Key Tourism Assets & Challenges in the County

Clare has a wealth of built and natural heritage resulting in a broad range of tourist amenities and attractions which include but are not limited to, *inter alia*:

- Aillwee Cave
- Aistear Park
- Atlantic Aer Venture
- Blarney Woollen Mills
- Bunratty Castle and Folk Park
- Caherconnell Fort and Sheepdog Demonstrations
- Clare Heritage Museum
- Craggaunowen
- Doolin Cave
- Dysert O'Dea Castle
- Ennis Friary
- Fanore
- Kilkee
- Lahinch
- Lisdoonvarna Spa Well
- Loop Head Lighthouse and Peninsula
- Loug Derg
- Michael Cusack Centre
- Poulmabrone
- Quin Abbey
- Scattery Island
- Inis Cealtra (Holy Island)
- Slieve Bernagh Mountains
- The Burren Centre
- The Cliffs of Moher
- The Music Centre
- Two Mile Gate Lakeside Park & Ballycuggeran Woods
- Vandeleor Walled Garden
- West Clare Railway

It is considered that there are some over-arching objectives and challenges for County Clare that should be carefully considered in the formulation of the tourism chapter of the forthcoming Development Plan. The Development Chapter should provide the complement and provide planning policy in land use and development terms for the Clare Tourism Strategy.

It is considered that the recently adopted Clare Tourism Strategy titled *Guiding our Journey to a Vibrant New Future in Tourism*, prepared in partnership with Shannon Heritage, Shannon Group and

Fáilte Ireland, aims to position Clare as a globally recognised, sustainable destination, with a vitality that comes from deep tradition, against a stunning landscape over the next 10 year period.

Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDPs) & Destination Development Plans (DEDPs)

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 Visitor Experience 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.

Fáilte Ireland have prepared and are preparing further Visitor Experience Development Plans which will focus on the development of tourism from a regional basis including County Clare and we request an objective acknowledging and supporting these VEDPs. These plans include:

- The Burren and Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience Development Plan- Recognising the need for improved development and promotion of the area's unique features to achieve increased international cut-through, Fáilte Ireland has developed a Visitor Experience Development Plan for the Burren and Cliffs of Moher destination. This Plan also provides a clear direction towards strengthening and growing the destinations international market share through the delivery of hero experiences.
- Cliff Coast Destination Experience Development Plan - Recently initiated, covers West Clare from Spanish Point right down to the tip of Loophead and utilises the Ferry too cross the water and then continues to North Kerry (Tarbert to Tralee).

We request an objective acknowledging and supporting these Visitor Development Plans and Destination Experience Development Plans and we acknowledge the County Councils contribution to these plans. We wish to see an objective supporting continued collaboration with Fáilte Ireland and tourism stakeholders to ensure successful implementation and delivery of these Visitor Experience Development Plans. The development of Visitor Experience Development Plans can provide a comprehensive and holistic response to ensuring Clare attractions and activities are appreciated and

appeal to visitors. Vitally, these plans will be delivered in a way that encourages visitors to spend more time in an area, without compromising the environment or culture of the region.

We request a policy/objective supporting the promotion and implementation of Catalyst Projects as identified in these Regional Development Plans. We have identified areas such as Loop Head and the Burren, where such strategic plans could complete the rich offering already present in the County.

The Burren & Cliffs of Moher

Located in County Clare on the West Coast of Ireland, the Burren and Cliffs of Moher region is part of the Wild Atlantic Way.

The Burren is an area of unique natural beauty and heritage but also a very sensitive environment. The Burren Geopark is Ireland's premier ecotourism destination. The Burren Ecotourism Network (BEN) is a network of businesses in the Burren which offer a range of tours and experiences relating to the heritage, landscape, geology and food of the area. In addition, the Burren Farm Experience and Burren Eco tours offer unique perspectives and experience of this landscape.

The Cliffs of Moher is Ireland's second top fee-paying attraction, with over 1.5 m visitors. The pace of growth in day visitation, with the accompanying visitor management concerns, and the overall low visitor spend in the area arising from the nature of visitation are the key challenges to the asset going forward.

As outlined above we wish to see the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience Development Plan continually supported by the Council and we acknowledge their contribution to the VEDP and request a specific objective contained within the draft Plan supporting the implementation of the Plan and the catalyst projects contained within it.

The key objectives of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience Development Plan are to develop hero, supporting and ancillary experiences for the region that will:

- motivate visitors to stay longer and spend more;
- extend the length of the season;
- align to relevant brand, target markets and segments;
- sustain and increase job creation in the local area; and
- protect the special environmental character of the region.

This includes funding supports for catalyst projects identified under the VEDP including the Burren Discovery Trail, which is due for completion in June 2021

Clare County Council, supported by Fáilte Ireland, is currently undertaking the Cliffs of Moher Strategy 2040 that will set out the strategy to deliver a world class visitor experience utilising best practice visitor management and environmental management practices to ensure the future of the natural asset is safeguarded.

Eco-Tourism/Wellness

It is considered that Clare is well positioned to deliver on eco and wellness tourism. One of the catalyst projects in the Burren & Cliffs of Moher VEDP is to create a 'Wellness the Wild Atlantic Way' programme that looks at the broader definition of 'wellness' including connection, time in nature, and the need to sleep well, as well as the traditional, relaxation, healthy food and exercise elements.

As discussed above the Burren Geopark is Ireland's premier ecotourism destination. The Burren Ecotourism Network (BEN) is a strong network of likeminded businesses within the Burren who collaborate together to offer a range of unique experiences relating to the heritage, landscape, geology and food in the destination under the umbrella of BEN. In addition, the Burren Farm Experience and Burren Eco tours offer unique perspectives and experience of this landscape.

The Burren Food Trail, Loop Head and Scattery Island are all past recipients of EDEN (European Destination of Excellence) which is an initiative that aims to promote local, sustainable tourism development models across the EU.

The combination of eco-tourism products, with existing landscape and food offerings would be ideally complemented by wellness products positioning Clare to the core of these sustainable tourism markets in Ireland.

Ennis

As the main County town, Ennis has the potential to become the tourism hub for the County. Using the town as a base, visitors can explore both the Wild Atlantic Way and the proximate tourism assets and products in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands however currently visitors often bypass the town on route to more well-known destinations in the west. It is considered that public realm improvements and increased bedspace capacity could enhance the attractiveness and increase dwell time.

Ennistymon

Fáilte Ireland has published 'Development Guidelines for Tourism Destination Towns' to provide a framework to support communities and Local Authorities and set out the key drivers of what makes a town appealing to the international visitor. Ennistymon has been granted investment under Fáilte Ireland's Destination Towns funding programme which will assist in boosting the tourism appeal and attractiveness of the town.

Loop Head

Loop Head is another area of natural beauty however it is primarily accessible by car. Improved cyclist and walking facilities could allow this amenity to be far more accessible. This could also include the 'Ross' bridge. A more developed visitor strategy could improve the visitor experience.

The Lighthouse is currently undergoing refurbishment works following a successful application to the Rural Regional Development Fund, in order to capitalise upon this investment we wish to see access and tourism facilities improved in the area and supported through the Development Plan.

Wild Atlantic Way

Clare's Atlantic coastline offers dramatic views, caves and inlets, sea stacks and cliffs along with stunning views of the Aran Islands and Galway Bay. There are 189 Discovery Points along the Wild Atlantic Way and 17 in Clare alone. Fáilte Ireland would like to see the management and maintenance of these (in particular the 2 Signature Discovery Points) highlighted as a priority within County Development Plan.

The Wild Atlantic Way destination brand has been in place since 2014 and has seen huge success. We request continued development of routes and discovery points along the Wild Atlantic Way.

We request an objective aiming to work in collaboration with Fáilte Ireland to ensure continued maintenance of discovery points and ensure access routes are maintained for all users.

East Clare

Large parts of Clare are underappreciated and should be further supported by the new Development Plan. East Clare forms part of the Hidden Heartlands branding which seeks to build on the regions natural amenities including walking trails, greenways and woodlands coupled with access to water and water-based activities. East Clare has many amenities and an attractive setting which should be promoted such as Lough Derg, the River Shannon, Ard na Crusha and towns such as Scarriff and Killaloe.

The landscape in East Clare, with its mountainous profile is considered to have significant potential for hiking and walking. Moylussa Mountain, in the Slieve Bernagh Range, which is the highest point in Clare is located in East Clare.

It is considered that this part of the county is lacking in accommodation at all levels and types. We recognise that improving the product offering in key areas such as food and supporting infrastructure will increase visitor dwell time in these areas.

Lough Derg

Lough Derg is an area of great natural beauty and heritage with many exciting activity options in the area. Spectacular countryside terrain and the wonderful waters of the lake make an ideal setting for a range of activities from water-based pursuits to walking trails such as the Lough Derg Way which allow visitors explore the rolling hills by foot. A series of cycling routes and mountain bike trails offer a variety of options for all visitors.

In addition, there are many accessible heritage sites around Lough Derg as the lake has a long history. Key heritage sites along its shores include the Brian Boru Heritage Centre, Holy Island, Portumna Castle and Nenagh Castle.

Clare has excellent inland waterways between Lough Derg and the Shannon, the Council should promote access for on and off water-based activities and support the development of blueways in the County.

The Development Plan should identify the draft Lough Derg Visitor Experience Development Plan as a key objective of the forthcoming Development Plan. The new draft plan builds on the Lough Derg Road Map of 2014-2017 and outlines a vision for tourism development for the next four to five years. The plan proposes to work in tandem with Fáilte Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand, as well as the Shannon Tourism Masterplan, which identifies the Lower Shannon as a key discovery zone. The implementation of this Plan through the policies and objectives of the Development will ensure an increased tourism offering in East Clare.

Accommodation and Facilities

In many areas in the County there is a lack of accommodation or a lack of choice in accommodation. As highlighted above, we request the Council support the development of quality accommodation in key locations in particular in towns such as Kilrush, Ennis, Kilkee, Doolin, Lahinch etc. Providing a more reliable access to accommodation throughout the year would have a positive impact more widely on other businesses in the area.

More widely there is an absence of choices in accommodation for younger visitors and families and alternative accommodation facilities outside the main towns including holiday homes, motorhome parking, camping and glamping sites. We wish to see alternative and a more diverse offering in accommodation with associated facilities for walkers, cyclists and families which is of a high quality.

Small scale accommodation is often locally owned and managed. This results in tourist spending having a direct and immediate benefit to the local economy. The Council should support the development of a wide range of accommodation and other local enterprises through Development Plan policies, objectives and zonings.

It is considered that the Development Plan should particularly support the development of tourist accommodation in areas of the County which currently have limited accommodation offerings. This is a key component of improving the attractiveness to tourists and ensuring economic synergies can occur for local businesses. Increasing the dispersal of visitors throughout the county, supported by accommodation and facility offerings, would support rural development initiatives.

As a way of encouraging local enterprises the Council should consider encouraging more pop-ups and temporary uses such as campervan facilities, coffee kiosks etc. along the WAW and Greenways. While these uses should be carefully managed, they may provide an additional attraction to an area lacking in these facilities and services encouraging visitors to stop off and stay for an extended period. Any such proposed facilities should be considered with regards to potential impacts on the environment and the relevant environmental assessments should be carried out.

Wastewater Treatment Capacity

The importance of high-quality Wastewater Treatment Plants to ensure treated wastewater will not harm or pollute the surrounding environment when it is discharged into it, is crucial to protect our coastal areas, rivers and lakes. The quality of bathing waters is also paramount to the tourism sector. In Ireland, we are particularly fortunate to have a varied and beautiful coastline with many pristine beaches that are open to the public to enjoy. To ensure their standard, it is imperative to continue to make strident efforts to protect and improve our waters.

As recently demonstrated by the frequency of Bathing Advisory Notices issued by the Council in 2020, there is a significant shortfall in wastewater treatment infrastructure in the County. This is most notable at this time in Lahinch and Kilkee.

The impact of insufficient wastewater treatment on the tourism has the following impact:

1. A threat to the development and promotion of on water and in water activities and attractions through degradation of water quality.
2. Prevention of further development of tourism infrastructure such as accommodation due to lack of sewage treatment capacity in the area.
3. Potential negative implications for the tourism industry where it may be perceived that additional visitor numbers are exacerbating and putting additional pressure on an already inadequate or absent treatment system resulting in further negative impacts on the receiving environment.

As such the provision of this infrastructure should be prioritised as a matter of urgency.

Sustainable Tourism

The approach to Tourism in the new County Development Plan will need to place a strong emphasis on 'Sustainable Tourism', we welcome the early reference to this in the Issues Paper. This is defined as *'tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities'*¹.

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. Given the popularity of the Cliffs of Moher, particular resources should be devoted to ensuring negative environmental impacts are avoided given the sensitivity of the area. Such as, damage to vegetation, erosion along the paths and disruption of seabirds.

Within Fáilte Ireland there are a number of diverse sectors and teams and we recognise that the practice and promotion of sustainable tourism development influences and is influenced by all in a variety of ways. Entities such as the regional experience brands, product development and enterprise supports work with sustainable development as a cornerstone to all of their plans, strategies and actions on a daily basis.

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 should be supported in the Development Plan.

Tourism development must be balanced with the protection of the natural environment, a key attractor itself, and the people who live in these areas. Ongoing environmental management of amenities and managing visitor expectation is crucial to sustainable tourism in the County.

Traffic management and safety are issues which must also be carefully considered. The Council should continually monitor this in particular car park capacity, suitability of public realm and traffic management in towns.

¹ Making Tourism More Sustainable - A Guide for Policy Makers, UNEP and UNWTO, 2005, p.11-12
<http://www.unep.fr/shared/publications/pdf/DTIx0592xPA-TourismPolicyEN.pdf>

5.0 Further Suggestions for the New Development Plan

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.

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.

Towns and Villages

Fáilte Ireland has published 'Development Guidelines for Tourism Destination Towns' to provide a framework to support communities and Local Authorities and set out the key drivers of what makes a town appealing to the international tourist. Ennistymon has been granted investment under Fáilte Ireland's Destination Towns funding programme. We wish to see this funding be capitalised upon in order to maximise its benefit to the town.

These guidelines are intended as a practical aid to Local Authorities, Chambers of Commerce, LEADER Programme Local Action Groups and other business and community groups who consider their town to either be a tourism destination town or have the potential to develop as one. They can also be used by smaller towns and villages with the potential to further develop as day trip destinations.

Tourism has many overlapping benefits which can help the vitality and vibrancy of rural towns. Encouraging small scale tourism entrepreneurship can provide a much needed boost to towns as spending by those visitors stays in the local economy as well as proactive planning policies including provision of supporting infrastructure such as visitor car parking, toilets, café or catering facilities – particularly in sensitive or more rural locations.

Other measures which can have a positive influence on tourism in towns includes improved public realm, improved wayfinding and signage, the promotion of town facilities and tidy towns initiatives. In terms of architectural design, it can be useful to engage with towns to facilitate consistent approach to the design of signage, streetscape and colour schemes. For example, support a town painting schemes for urban renewal.

Encouraging small scale tourism entrepreneurship can provide a much needed boost to the local economy as spending by those visitors stays in the local economy. Proactive planning policies including the investment into the traffic management, car-parking, toilet facilities, public realm and accessibility of these towns will yield important benefits to the local economy and tourism sector. For example, improved pedestrian facilities can result in increased footfall and revenue supporting local business.

Small businesses have been badly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and will require further support from the Council. In the context that outdoor events and gatherings are going to play a more pivotal role in attracting visitors and events to the city, towns and villages, high quality public realm and external spaces should be identified and prioritised for delivery.

In addition to the above, the Council should take a proactive approach to addressing vacancy and dereliction by encouraging properties back into use. Vacant properties can have a profound negative impact on the community.

Support for Festivals

Fáilte Ireland has identified festivals as a key driver for tourism growth, particularly during off-peak season. 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. We wish to see support for festivals in the emerging Development Plan.

Clare has a rich literary and musical tradition which should be enhanced and more accessible. Many such festivals take place during the year. Other examples include the Loop Head Wellness Weekend and the many food festivals in the County, Clare Food & Drink Fleadh, Burren Food Fayre, Carrigaholt Oyster Festival etc., which should be further promoted in the new Development Plan.

Tourism Amenities and Assets Maps

Fáilte Ireland would also like to see tourism policies and objectives clearly set out where possible through the inclusion of maps in the draft Development Plan.

Such a map and the wider chapter 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 4 above.

- Existing transport **links** between nodes and identified routes– 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; Further guidance is available here: <https://www.failteireland.ie/FailteIreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/Publications/Failte-Ireland-Tourism-Destination-Towns-Guidelines.pdf?ext=.pdf>
- **Sensitive environments** where the provision of services must be sensitive and appropriate to the robustness / sensitivity of the receiving environment and in particular its existing tourism significance;
- **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. Wild Atlantic Way and Hidden Heartlands.

Wind Energy

The Clare Wind Energy Strategy 2017 – 2023 (Volume 5) and the Clare Renewable Energy Strategy 2017-2023 (Volume 6) form part of the current Development Plan. Fáilte Ireland recommends that all County Councils prepare a Renewable Energy Strategy, and this should continue to be an objective for the County which should be progressed in the short term. Included within this should be a map, which identifies areas suitable and unsuitable for the siting of wind turbines.

Landscape Character Assessment

Chapter 13 of the current Development Plan includes a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) which references the National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025. The LCA includes references to tourism throughout and Map 13A references 'heritage landscape' as designated landscape type.

Fáilte Ireland recommends that all County Councils prepare a Landscape Character Assessment, and this should continue to be an objective for the County which should be updated in the forthcoming Development Plan. To achieve a more specific protection for tourism assets, we request an objective protecting the integrity of key tourist amenities from negative visual and landscape impacts.

6.0 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.

Should you have any queries on this please do not hesitate to contact Fáilte Ireland, where we would be happy to discuss the matters raised above and will be available throughout the County Development Plan Review process.

Yours sincerely,



Shane Dineen

On behalf of, Fáilte Ireland

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APPENDIX A- Sustainable Tourism Principles

The following five principles 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. 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 addresses 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.