

CLARE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

[2025 -2030]



Cuideachta
Forbartha
Áitiúil an Chláir
Clare Local
Development
Company



COMHAIRLE
CONTAE AN CHLÁIR
CLARE
COUNTY COUNCIL



Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority

COILLTE



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This plan is supported by the
Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht.



The Plan does not provide consent, establish a framework for granting consent or contribute towards a framework for granting consent. The Clare Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030 does not set the framework for future development consent of projects and is required to be consistent with the National and Regional Planning Policy and in particular the Clare CDP 2023-2029. Any projects that may arise in the future associated with the Plan will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licensing requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting framework.

Contents

Foreword	2
Executive Summary	4
Action Plan	5
Introduction	6
Context	8
Our Green and Blue Spaces	8
Taking Part	8
The Strategic Landscape	9
The Opportunities and Challenges	9
Crosscutting Themes and Consultation Comments	10
County Clare Outdoor Recreation Action Plan	12
Pillar One: Collaborate, Lead, Respect, Inform	14
Case Study: 12 O'Clock Hills	16
Pillar Two: Encourage the Experience	18
Case Study: Kayak le Chéile	21
Pillar Three: Manage Capacity	22
Case Study: NPWS Bus to Walking Trails	25
Abbreviations of Organisations	28
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals	29
Appendix 1: National and Local Strategies	30
Appendix 2: Strategic Environment	35



Foreword

It is with great pride that I introduce the Clare Outdoor Recreation Plan – a product of collaboration, community insight and shared ambition for the future of outdoor recreation in our county. This plan represents the collective voice and vision of a wide range of partners who care deeply about the people and places of Clare. Over the past

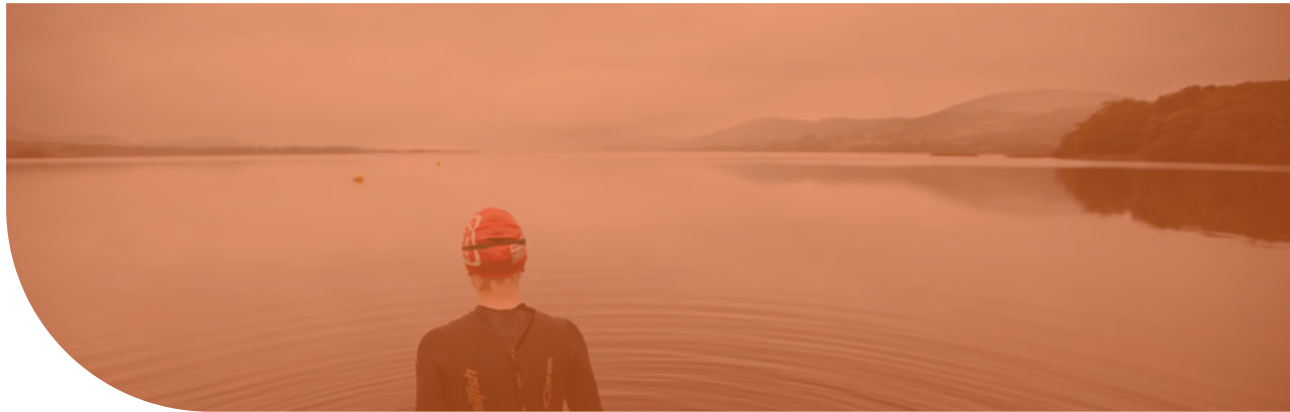
year, stakeholders from local communities, national agencies, landowners, recreation groups, environmental organisations and public bodies have come together to shape a plan that is inclusive, ambitious and rooted in respect for both our landscapes and those who use them.

As Chairperson of the County Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC), I want to sincerely thank everyone who gave their time, knowledge and perspective throughout the development process. Your input has been instrumental in identifying the opportunities, challenges, and priorities that now form the foundation of this plan. Special recognition is due to our Outdoor Recreation Officer, Jessica O’Keeffe, whose energy, coordination and dedication to stakeholder engagement were vital in driving the process forward. Jessica’s work has ensured this plan is both grounded in local realities and aligned with national strategies.

The plan outlines the core action areas that will guide our work: Collaborate, Lead, Respect and Inform, Encourage the Experience and Manage Capacity. These pillars will support the development of a more vibrant, inclusive and sustainable outdoor recreation culture across Clare. The plan is grounded in the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy and feeds directly into Clare Sports and Physical Activity Plan.

This plan is not a final destination, but a starting point. Its success depends on continued partnership, shared stewardship and a collective commitment to realising its goals. I look forward to working with you all as we bring this vision to life—for the benefit of our communities, our visitors and the generations to come.

Eoin Hogan, Chairperson, County Outdoor Recreation Committee



“In County Clare, the outdoors isn’t just where we go – it’s where we belong. It anchors our identity, drives our wellbeing and brings us together in meaningful ways. It provides a shared vision for enhancing, managing and safeguarding our outdoor spaces – ensuring they are accessible, sustainable, and enjoyable for all. It recognises the power of outdoor activity to improve health and community connection and sets a strategic foundation for future investment and participation”

John Sweeney, CEO, Clare Sports Partnership



“Outdoor recreation strengthens rural communities, builds connection to place, and creates new pathways for inclusion and enterprise. This plan ensures that our shared spaces benefit all of Clare’s people.”

**Dóirín Graham,
CEO, Clare Local Development Company**



“This plan is a blueprint for how we balance growth with sustainability, ensuring that Clare’s remarkable landscapes remain accessible, welcoming, and resilient for generations to come.”

Gordon Daly, Chief Executive, Clare County Council



Executive Summary

The vision of this outdoor recreation Action Plan is to:
Promote participation to realise social, health and economic benefits and quality of life for all our citizens whilst respecting our natural landscape and supporting responsible outdoor recreation.

Outdoor Recreation includes activities in the natural environment, such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming. This list is not exhaustive. It does not include activities that take place on pitches or courses (golf, football) or motorised sports such as quads/scramblers.

This County Clare Outdoor Recreation Plan aligns with National Outdoor Recreation Strategy and with Clare Sports and Physical Activity Plan so that there is a coordinated and sustainable approach to developing, managing and utilising County Clare’s and Ireland’s outdoors.



An ongoing consultation process, both local and national, organisations, communities and participants in the outdoor recreation sector has revealed Five Strategic Themes:

- **Places:** we must preserve, maintain and sustain our outdoor recreation places.
- **People:** we will include and sustain more participants in a respectful culture.
- **Partnership:** continued stakeholder collaboration.
- **Participation:** a growing range of opportunities with a variety of activity providers.
- **Promotion:** More awareness-raising and communication resources are needed.

The Action Plan incorporates these five themes across its three pillars and nine action areas.

County Clare Outdoor Recreation Action Plan Engaging, Emerging and Drafting



Consultation Process

Initial consultation,
Meetings, forums,
site visits and
questionnaires.



Emerging
understanding and
discussion document.
Feedback.



Drafts and
final
Action Plan.



Definition

“Outdoor Recreation includes physical activities that take place in the natural environment, such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, surfing, cycling and wild swimming.”
Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023 - 2027.

Emerging Themes

Places

Preserve, Maintain and Sustain
Outdoor Recreation Places.

People

Include more participants in a
respectful culture.

Partnership

Stakeholder collaboration,
land access generosity.

Participation Range of
opportunities, a variety of
activity providers.

Promotion Awareness raising
and communication resources.

Development Categories

Maintain and Renew
Existing resources.



Divert
Alternative Venues, Transport



Enhance
Add value, upgrade.



Animate
Programmes,
Promotion



Expand New
Facilities



Action Plan Pillars



A shared understanding and collaboration for quality sustainable outdoor recreation.



More opportunities, sustainable providers, diverse participants and activities



Manage our infrastructure, sustain our environment and collaborate with neighbouring Counties.

Introduction

The County Clare Outdoor Recreation Plan aligns with the National Strategy; Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors 2023 – 2027, and with the Clare Sports and Physical Activity Plan so that there is a coordinated and sustainable approach to developing, managing, and utilising County Clare’s and Ireland’s outdoors.

County Clare is located on the west coast of Ireland and is known for its rich heritage and geologically diverse landscapes. The 3,450 square kilometres County has an increasingly multi-cultural and ethnically diverse population of 118,817¹ and is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the Shannon Estuary to the south, County Galway to the north, and counties Tipperary and Limerick to the east.

The County provides a diverse and picturesque backdrop for various outdoor recreation activities. The 250 square kilometres of karst limestone Burren region supports diverse habitats and is a haven for hiking, rock climbing and caving.

The Shannon Estuary and Ireland’s third-largest lake, Lough Derg, hosts a range of water sports, hiking, and cycling nearby. Kilrush, Loophead and Kilkee greet the Atlantic and provide sailing, angling, scuba diving, snorkelling and dolphin-watching venues. Along the Atlantic coast and the majestic Cliffs of Moher are numerous sea kayaking and surfing sites, including the most popular surfing destination in Ireland, Lahinch.

These varied outdoor landscapes and seascapes provide outdoor recreation opportunities at introductory to advanced levels, and significant investments in outdoor recreation infrastructure have supported local and visitor participation in the County Clare outdoors.



¹ 2022 Central Statistics Office.

These outdoor recreation settings and participation opportunities enhance the quality of life, provide placemaking opportunities and can create a pride of place.

This Action Plan supports the diversity of County Clare’s outdoor recreation activities, places, and participants and respects the host communities and landowners who make access to the outdoors possible.

This plan acknowledges the importance of accessibility and inclusivity² via Universal Design principles so that there are welcoming and usable outdoor spaces for all.

However, increasing outdoor recreation participation and ecologically sustaining these outdoor recreation venues is challenging. The provision, management, upkeep and use of outdoor recreation may negatively impact nature conservation sites and habitats. These ecologically diverse landscapes require protection to prevent their direct, indirect or cumulative habitat loss.

This Action Plan supports ecological sustainability and diversity by monitoring outdoor recreation in sensitive locations, improving participant carrying capacity where appropriate, encouraging alternative venues and screening for Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment as required for outdoor recreation developments. Should any projects arise from this plan they would be subject to the relevant statutory planning and consenting process in particular the Clare County Development Plan 2023 -2029 and any superseding plan.

The Clare Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORA) will provide the leadership and means of collaborating to realise this plan. A Clare Outdoor Recreation Forum (CORF) will also be established to discuss and provide perspectives to CORA on the County’s key outdoor recreation issues. Implementation groups for specific issues will be established as required.

² This Plan recognises and supports our obligations of equality, diversity and inclusion for our outdoor recreation community as per the Equal Status Acts 2000-2018, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, and the Disability Act 2005.

County Clare Outdoor Recreation Structure

Outdoor recreation in County Clare is influenced by the physical landscape, the generosity of landowners, our recreational and cultural heritage, and our tourism positioning. This Action Plan acknowledges and supports the collaboration of these stakeholders.



Comprised of the representatives of primary stakeholders, this committee has a shared responsibility for outdoor recreation in County Clare.

CORA is responsible for the delivery of the Action Plan

- Pillar 1:** Collaborate Lead, Respect, Inform.
- Pillar 2:** Encourage the Experience.
- Pillar 3:** Manage Capacity

Context

County Clare’s beaches, bays, estuaries, cliffs, the low-lying fields and uplands, and the Burren, along with the lakes and rivers, and their valuable ecosystems all support a range of outdoor recreation activities. Some of these sites overlap with neighbouring counties, along the River Shannon, Lough Derg, and the Galway Burren region. These natural green and blue spaces shape the landscape character, and they provide excellent and diverse venues for outdoor recreation for residents and for tourism in County Clare.

Our Green and Blue Spaces

The network of outdoor recreation amenities in County Clare are possible due to the generous access given by landowners to private land, as well as the access provided to state and semi-state lands.

Clare County Council provides, maintains, and supports a range of outdoor recreation facilities, including walking and cycling routes, parks, beaches, and playgrounds. The Local Authorities Water Programme works on behalf of Clare County Council to positively orient communities towards their inland waterways. Clare Local Development Company employs the Rural Recreation Officer for County Clare and oversees the Walks Scheme³, including eight trails with over one hundred participating landowners. Coillte provides six recreation sites with walking trails in their County Clare forests.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has four Nature Reserves in County Clare and the Burren National Park and oversees thirty-seven Special Areas of Conservation and ten Special Protected Areas. Waterways Ireland has secured Blueway accreditation on Lough Derg, designating this location as a significant water sports destination.

Taking Part

A significant number of outdoor recreation amenities were developed and continue to be maintained by volunteer community groups.

A number of local agencies that support the use of the outdoors such as Clare Sports Partnership which employs the Outdoor Recreation Officer for County Clare and is responsible for the growing sports participation and outdoor recreation in the County. The Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board’s Burren Outdoor Education and Training Centre provides outdoor recreation to people of all ages, especially in the education and youth sectors. There is also a diverse range of outdoor recreation clubs in County Clare and commercial outdoor recreation activity providers.

³ The Walks Scheme, overseen by the Department of Rural and Community Development and Gaeltacht, was launched in 2008 to facilitate the development and maintenance of key walking trails by private landowners.



The Strategic Landscape

A variety of national and local development strategies shape the outdoor environment in County Clare including:

- The Project Ireland 2040 investment priorities of strengthened rural economies, sustainable mobility, and enhanced amenity and heritage.
- The Common Agricultural Policy Rural Development Programme, Multi-functional Agriculture, and the LEADER Programme.
- Our Rural Future and the increased demand for outdoor recreation and rural tourism.
- Our Shared Future emphasises Ireland’s image as an outdoor activity holiday destination.
- The National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027 and the role of outdoor recreation in increasing participation in sports and physical activity.
- Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors, the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2027 sets the strategic context for this Action Plan.
- The Transport for Ireland Local Link Services provides transport access to the outdoors in parts of County Clare.

The Opportunities and Challenges

This Action Plan will consider a range of opportunities and challenges⁴ for outdoor recreation in County Clare. There are opportunities to continue balancing the enjoyment of the outdoors with the sustainability of the host communities. The rich biodiversity of our land, coast and inland waterways must be protected against intrusion in sensitive areas or overuse that tramples the outdoors we want to enjoy. The people living in these areas also must be respected, the carrying capacity of their roads, considerate parking, avoiding litter, good dog management, contributing to the local economy and demonstrating respect for landowners are part of how the outdoors acknowledges and sustains communities.

There are also opportunities to include more people in the outdoors. New residents, those with lower socioeconomic profiles and individuals with disabilities should be equally welcomed to the outdoors. Making the outdoors more inviting and accessible, providing more diverse activities, promoting participation programmes, having doorstep access or affordable public transport. to get into the outdoors are parts of the solution for getting everyone outdoors.

⁴ Additional challenges and opportunities are outlined in the SWOT analysis in Appendix 2. of these.



Crosscutting Themes and Consultation Comments



Places

"It is a great place, great facilities, but it is almost too popular."

"The communities and volunteers need more help to maintain facilities. It is harder to fund maintenance than it is to develop the trail in the first place."

"Cycling on roads does not feel safe, and it is not for children."

"You have to travel to take part in outdoor recreation, even to our local forest, because there is no footpath to there."

"It can be difficult to get some people involved if there are no toilets or places to change."

People

"Very few young people or teenagers are in the outdoors unless they are with their parents."

"A lot of people who are new to the outdoors don't really understand. They litter, don't look after their dogs or don't consider other people. They just don't understand."

"In general, if there is a problem or I don't know how to do something, there is someone or some organisation that I can turn to for assistance."

"People on low incomes can find it difficult to get to forests and other places that you have to drive to."

Partnership

"There are many farmers willing to support outdoor recreation on their land but sometimes one careless or rude participant can undo years of good relationship building."

Participation

"During good weather, a lot of people take part, but many don't have the confidence or the understanding that you can go out in not-so-good weather as well."

"We offer courses that allow new participants to take part safely without having to buy expensive equipment or, worse, cheap equipment that they do not know how to use."

"It can be a nightmare driving the local roads because of the extra traffic."

"The place is packed, and it can be difficult to get space or avoid too many other people."

"A lot of people are now going open water swimming and Dragon boating. People that you would expect to be home sitting by the fire. Its great."

Promotion

"Not sure where I can get information on places."

"People coming into the county, even new residents, don't know the hidden places and activities that we know."

"Not sure how you reach youth, also what is attractive to young people as they have so many other options now."

County Clare Outdoor Recreation Action Plan

The vision of this outdoor recreation Action Plan is to:
Promote participation to realise social, health, and economic benefits and quality of life for all our citizens whilst respecting our natural landscape and supporting responsible outdoor recreation.

Our mission is:
Collaborate so that more people experience the enjoyment of the outdoors in a variety of great places.

The following Action Plan sets out how we will realise quality of life and sustainable outdoor recreation places across the three outdoor recreation development pillars of (1) Collaborate, Lead, Respect and Inform, (2) Encourage the Experience, (3) Manage capacity.

These three pillars are informed by and align with Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors, The National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2027 as follows:

Alignment

County Clare Outdoor Recreation Plan:
Pillars and Action Areas.

Embracing Ireland's
Outdoors, National
Outdoor Recreation
Plan Strategic
Objectives



Pillar One: Collaborate, Lead, Respect, Inform



A share understanding and collaboration for quality sustainability and outdoor recreation.

Quality and sustainable outdoor recreation is possible when there is a shared understanding amongst everyone who has an investment, a responsibility or is a participant. For example, landowners (private and state), communities, land stewards⁵, and activity animators⁶. This shared understanding requires collaboration and leadership and open communications.

Action Area 1: Collaborate and Lead

The Clare Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC) will bring together the experience, perspectives and voices of the outdoor recreation sector so that there is a shared, clear agenda and consistent leadership. CORC will provide a collaborative venue for the various outdoor recreation stakeholders in the County. This committee will meet every quarter to coordinate the development of outdoor recreation in the County and to realise this Action Plan.

An outdoor recreation stakeholder forum will also be established. This forum will include invited members, and it will meet at least once a year to discuss and provide outdoor recreation perspectives to CORC.

The Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) and Outdoor Recreation Officer (ORO) will support the realisation of this Outdoor Recreation Plan. The Outdoor Recreation Officer will oversee and support the implementation of the plan.

Action Area 2: Inform

Accessible and comprehensive communications on outdoor recreation resources and opportunities for residents and visitors.

⁵ There are various organisations that have a stewardship, protecting, and advocating role for the outdoors, such as Tidy Town Groups, Town Teams, the Office of Public Works, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Local Authority Water Programme, Inland Fisheries, National Governing Bodies of Sport and others.

⁶ Groups that encourage outdoor participation include outdoor recreation clubs, commercial activity Providers, and Clare Sports Partnership.

Collaborate and Lead	Ref	Action	Indicator	Lead
	P1:1	Establish and operate the Clare Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC) and Clare Outdoor Recreation Forum (CORF) to provide a collaborative venue for the outdoor recreation network.	Representative CORC membership. CORC to meet once every quarter. One to two CORF meetings per annum. Published actions and minutes.	CSP
	P1:2	Clare Outdoor Recreation Forum (CORF) meetings, outdoor recreation site visits, workshops, conference opportunities and facility ⁷ .	Links with Comhairle na Tuaithe, Sport Ireland and National Governing Bodies and their resources, conferences and workshops.	CSP
Inform	P1:3	Annual and multiannual resources will be pursued to realise the action plan.	Multiannual resource priority profile for infrastructure, programmes, events and training. Profile of funding sources aligned with priorities. The quantity of annual resources that have been secured.	CORC

Inform	Ref	Action	Indicator	Lead
	P1:4	Complete an outdoor recreation communications plan for the sector and participants.	Annual outdoor recreation communications plan. Biennial review of the communications planning and process.	CSP
Collaborate and Lead	P1:5	Develop or support an inclusive County Clare outdoor recreation portal and social media resource that identifies the locations, events and self-led opportunities for diverse outdoor recreation in the County.	Range of online resources, posts and engagement metrics. Evaluation of potential third-party online resources to host the Clare Outdoor Recreation Portal, for example, Get Ireland Active.	CORC

⁷ Training opportunities will, in most cases, be provided via national organisations such as Sport Ireland Outdoors.



12 O'CLOCK HILLS

Context

Nestled about 5 km southeast of Kilkishen in East County Clare, **the 12 O'Clock Hills** recreational and heritage project offers a distinctive blend of natural beauty, outdoor adventure, and cultural experience. The facility features three well-marked walking routes, thoughtfully designed to suit different fitness levels and interests, from leisurely heritage strolls to more challenging looped hikes.

Intervention

Across all **three trails**, visitors benefit from clear way-marking (using red, blue, and purple arrowheads), plentiful resting points, and engaging interpretative features such as maps and display lecterns. **The Belvoir trailhead** provides ample parking, including bus spaces with advance booking, while toilet facilities and a weekend food van add to the visitor-friendly experience. Strong community involvement underpins the project, with local volunteers contributing to maintenance, trail upkeep, and signage.

Outcome

The project has had a clear positive impact, with users frequently noting improved mental well-being and a stronger connection to nature. User ratings are consistently strong—for example, the **Blue Trail achieves 4.6 stars from 526 'AllTrails' reviews**. The facility successfully provides a variety of trails for all abilities, enhances engagement through heritage features and offers sweeping views of the surrounding countryside. Managed sustainably by a local volunteer committee, the 12 O'Clock Hills stands as an exemplar of community-managed trails in the county.



Pillar Two: Encourage the Experience



More opportunities, sustainable providers, diverse participants and a respectful culture.

Commencing and sustaining participation in outdoor recreation is more likely if events and programmes invite participation, provide diverse activity choices, sustain activity providers, and include others like you⁸.

Action Area 3: More Opportunities

Encouraging more programmes and events that inspire, encourage and signpost diverse participation opportunities in the outdoors. In addition to active recreation in the outdoors we will encourage more opportunities for contemplative and relaxed outdoor recreation activities such as meditation in outdoor settings, environmental awareness, experiencing the arts, community gardens and outdoor photography.

Action Area 4: Sustainable Providers

Outdoor recreation clubs, outdoor education venues and commercial providers are crucial entry points, and they can support sustained participation and career opportunities in outdoor recreation.

Action Area 5: Diverse Participants

Everyone in our community⁹, regardless of their physical, intellectual, economic, or other status, should be aware of, feel welcome and be empowered to take part in the outdoors.

Action Area 6: Respectful Culture

Creating a shared awareness and practice around responsible behaviour in how we use and look after the outdoors.

⁸ While recreational walking will continue to be our most popular activity, the outdoors is increasingly experienced through a diverse range of activities, including (in alphabetical order): angling, cycling (gravel, mountain, or trail), dragon boating, kayaking, rock-climbing, rowing (inland and coastal), wild swimming, sailing, scuba diving, snorkelling, and surfing.

⁹ Sport Ireland target groups include but are not limited to ethnic minorities, women and girls, youth at risk, persons with disabilities, and persons from disadvantaged backgrounds.

More Opportunities	Ref	Action	Indicator	Lead
	P2:1	Programming and promotion to support new participants across diverse active and reflective outdoor recreation activities on land and water.	Identify existing activity programmes such as Her Outdoors and others that will support outdoor recreation activities. Twice-annual timetable outdoor recreation-related programmes and initiatives. Number of diverse outdoor recreation activities and participation rates.	CSP
	P2:2	Review the existing opportunities for sustained outdoor recreation participation and progression and pilot "Get out and Stay Out" animation programmes and events.	Feasibility of a pilot sustaining participation programme/resources. The number of pilot programs implemented participation and retention rate.	CSP
Sustainable Providers	Ref	Action	Indicator	Lead
	P2:3	Explore the potential for a School's Outdoor Recreation programme during the school year.	Engagement with outdoor sports providers, National Governing Bodies of sport to identify a pilot approach. Feasibility study completed. Number of schools expressing interest and involved.	CSP
	P2:4	Continue to work with National Governing Bodies for outdoor recreation to assist existing clubs in grant applications, training support, and the emergence of new clubs.	Club membership baseline and changes. Number of new clubs established. Grant and training outputs.	CSP
	P2:5	We will continue to engage directly with commercial outdoor recreation providers, outdoor education providers, and their representative bodies to advocate for, and support their local provision of quality outdoor recreation experiences in both rural and urban settings.	Profile of supports and infrastructure requirements for outdoor recreation providers.	CSP/IAAT
	P2:6	Identify any outdoor recreation instructor training and enterprise development gaps and opportunities.	Profile of outdoor recreation providers and activity experiences. Provider and instructor training needs analysis. Resources secured.	LCETB & IAAT (CSP)
	P2:7	Evaluate the existing and the potential for additional large-scale outdoor recreation participation events in the County.	Profile of existing events and potential new event opportunities. Quality, sustainability and satisfaction appraisals of key events.	CCC

Diverse Participants	Ref	Action	Indicator	Lead
	P2:8	Profile current outdoor recreation participation in County Clare and identify participant gaps, barriers and opportunities.	Review our methods of counting and enhance our visitor data ¹⁰ collection, and user feedback at selected sites. Biennial participation profile survey, identifying underrepresentation, barriers to participation, capacity issues, and the economic impacts of outdoor recreation.	CORC (CLDC, CCC)
	P2:9	Identify the priority increased outdoor recreation participation target groups and the associated participation initiatives required to engage with these groups.	Profile priority target groups. Tailored initiatives, targeted participation numbers and satisfaction rates. Number of new Urban adventure Hubs. Collaboration with Active Disability Ireland.	CSP

Respectful Culture	Ref	Action	Indicator	Lead
	P2:10	Promotion of responsible behaviour at all outdoor recreation venues and events.	Collaboration with Leave No Trace and the delivery of Leave No Trace training sessions/events. Adoption and promotion of Comhairle na Tuaithe's guidelines for Outdoor Activity Events. Alignment of outdoor recreation messaging and programmes in County Clare with the emerging national outdoor recreation responsible behaviour campaign.	CORC (LNT)



¹⁰ Integrate our data and facility auditing with the Get Ireland Active national digital database.



Kayak Le Chéile

The River Fergus, adjacent to Scoil Chríost Rí in Ennis, had very negative connotations, including incidents of suicide.

To help the community reconnect with the river in a more positive way, a pilot kayaking programme for 4th - 6th class in Scoil Chríost Rí was funded by Clare Sports Partnership.

This programme reconnected the community with the river and an urban outdoor adventure hub was funded through Dormant Accounts.

The club expanded its kayaking programme to include:

Kayak4Dads and a Kayak4Mums introductory kayaking course for the pupils parents. Some parents who completed this went on to receive their Level 1 kayaking award presented to them by their children.

The Kayak Le Chéile Regatta a kayaking and stand up paddle (SUP) boarding regatta on the River Fergus, takes place in summer and features fun races and an inclusive pedalo.

Through Dormant Accounts funding, a kayaking club was established, Kayak Le Chéile. Members of the school and community formed part of the club committee. The funding purchased kayaks, helmets, paddles and buoyancy aids for the children in the school and for members of the community to use.

The Burren Outdoor Education Centre provided kayak instructor training to individuals from Scoil Chríost Rí, Clare Youth Services and Gaelscoil Mhíchíl Cíosóg in Ennis.

Various kayaking programmes were delivered through Kayak Le Chéile. This helped foster a love of kayaking and the water as a physical activity within the Cloughleigh community in Ennis.

Pillar Three: Manage Capacity



Manage our infrastructure, sustain our environment and collaborate with neighbouring Counties.

Action Area 7: Maintain, Enhance and Develop our Infrastructure

- First, we must maintain and renew the outdoor recreation assets at our existing venues by continuing to support the hardworking communities that create and manage these facilities.
- We will enhance outdoor recreation amenities where possible with more parking, toilets and signage.
- We will also develop new outdoor recreation facilities and venues, especially off-road facilities for walking and cycling and the connecting kilometre¹¹ between communities and the outdoors.
- We will support creative transport opportunities to manage the participation distribution/ load and geographically balance the County's outdoor recreation resources.

Action Area 8: Sustain our Environment

There are limits to the locations and the volume of participants that an environment and host communities can support. We live here! Climate change is bringing additional stresses to the outdoors. There are also opportunities for outdoor recreation experiences to make people more aware and responsible for the host environment.

- Outdoor recreation in County Clare will adhere to statutory environmental legislation and the spirit of this legislation. Where practical outdoor recreation amenities will be future-proofed for climate change.
- Outdoor recreation facilities will increase awareness and appreciation of the host environment and the value of biodiversity.
- Further monitoring and evaluation of visitor numbers, carrying capacity measures and visitor dispersal initiatives are required to support the host community sustainability of our outdoor recreation venues.

Action Area 9: Collaborate with Neighbouring Counties

There are several outdoor recreation venues and experiences that will benefit from a shared approach with our neighbouring Counties, including:

- Lough Derg Blueway: the ongoing positioning and promotion of Lough Derg as a Blueway destination and supporting trailhead facility developments.
- O'Briensbridge: an established rowing training venue and an emerging community water-sports venue with the potential for increased appreciation and use of the Castleconnell rapids and the Errina Canal link into Limerick City.
- Shannon Estuary: has an established marine-based inter-jurisdictional framework (Counties Clare and Limerick) in place. There are opportunities to improve access to the estuary through the ongoing development of facilities at the targeted hubs for active, contemplative and in-nature activities (dolphin and bird watching).

Manage our Infrastructure	Ref	Action	Indicator	Lead
	P3:1	Continued adherence to the National Trails Register guidelines and accreditation process for land and water trails ¹² .	Number of registered trails, continuity and new.	CLDC
	P3:2	Continued compliance with and, where appropriate, expanding the Walks Scheme in the County.	Kilometres of trails in Walks Scheme, number of landowners.	CLDC (FO)
	P3:3	Audit of our land and water outdoor recreation assets and their development priorities.	Community Trail Plan with an emphasis on locations with low provision and connecting-kilometre priorities.	CORC (COILLTE, CLDC)
	P3:4	Explore the inclusion of all land and water (marine and inland) resources in County Clare under a common maintenance, development, monitoring and promotion framework ¹³ .	County trail management and maintenance plan.	CCC (CLDC)
	P3:5	Support the integration of outdoor recreation transport needs within any review of public transport/ park and ride arrangements.	County Clare transport review submissions. Further alignment of transport services with the needs of the recreation community.	CORC

¹² Including adopting the Great Outdoors Guidelines for accessibility.

¹³ As a function of the County Clare Outdoor Recreation Committee.

¹¹ Sometimes referred to as a 'last mile' solution. The connecting kilometre is the physical links that make it easy for the members of a community to connect their urban areas with green and blue spaces.

Ref	Action	Indicator	Lead
P3:6	Continued adherence to national and EU environmental protection legislation at all outdoor recreation venues.	Number of non/compliance issues. List of protected sites under outdoor recreation pressure and their issues. Annual profile environmental protection measures implemented.	CCC
P3:7	Identify the feasibility of a 'We live here!' messaging initiative to enhance host environment awareness and carrying capacity actions at pilot County Clare outdoor recreation settings ¹⁴ .	Feasibility study, number of potential pilot locations identified, level of community and agency support. Integration with County Clare's Sustainable Tourism Policy. Collaboration with Active Disability Ireland.	CORC
P3:8	Undertake neighbouring county outdoor recreation co-development objectives and initiatives.	Number of cross-county objectives identified. Neighbouring county stakeholder engagement. A two-year neighbouring county integrated action plan and review.	CCC



¹⁴ Education, stewardship, being in nature, limiting invasive species, foraging and citizen science.



The NPWS Burren Bus –

Daily Corofin to Mullaghmore Trail-Head Service – The Burren and Cliffs Explorer

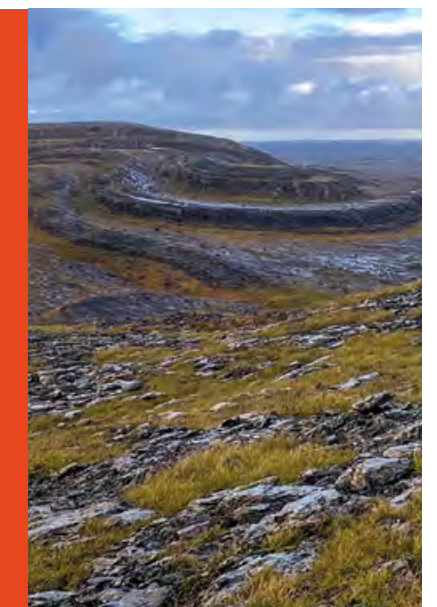
Context & Challenge

The Burren is one of Ireland's most unique and biodiverse landscapes, drawing visitors for its wildflower-rich meadows, limestone pavements and the iconic looped walks around Mullaghmore. Peak-season traffic creates pressure points: car congestion on narrow roads, ad-hoc roadside parking near trailheads (which negatively impacts vegetation), and safety risks for walkers and cyclists. Local residents in Corofin – often the first stop for visitors – reported that many tourists lacked clear, low-impact ways to reach the Burren National Park Trails without a car. The National Park's conservation goals, the needs of local businesses, and the visitor experience were all affected.

Visitor numbers to the Burren National Park are expected to grow and in the longer term, a number of sustainable visitor management measures will be needed, including an off-road walking/cycling route between the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) visitor centre in Corofin and the Burren National Park lands at Mullaghmore.

Intervention

The current NPWS Burren National Park bus was introduced as a simple, reliable shuttle service connecting Corofin to the park trailhead each day from May until the End of August. The 14 scheduled journeys daily are timed to meet typical accommodation checkout and day-trip patterns, the service offers multiple daily departures and returns, with a clearly marked stand in Corofin village and a set-down/pick-up point at the main trailhead near Mullaghmore. Fares are free to encourage uptake and space allocated for daypacks. The service is branded to be instantly recognisable, and driver training emphasises Leave No Trace messaging alongside safety briefings.





How It Works

Operations prioritise predictability and stewardship. The bus follows a fixed timetable, published across visitor centres, accommodation providers, and social media. Prior to boarding, NPWS Guides at the Burren National Park Information Point in Corofin brief visitors on the wildlife and landscape of the National Park and its importance, as well information on waymarked walking routes, weather awareness, conservation etiquette, and everything else they need to know to have an enjoyable, safe and responsible visit.

The free bus can be booked at – www.nationalparks.ie/burren



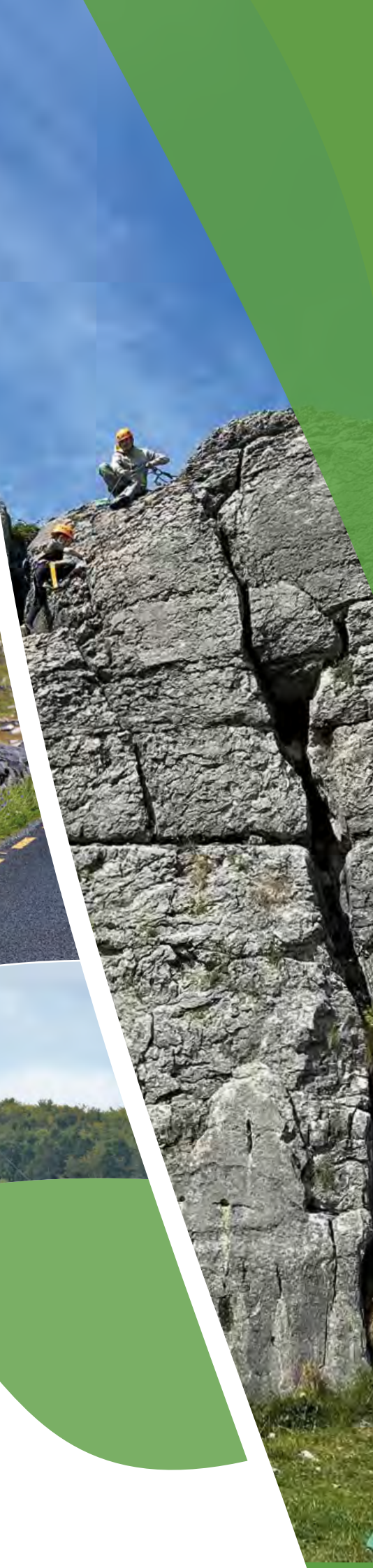
Outcomes

Although exact figures vary by season, the service has demonstrated a consistent pattern of benefits:

- **Reduced Congestion & Safer Roads:** Daily shuttle capacity displaces dozens of private cars during peak months.
- **Improved Visitor Experience:** Walkers arrive relaxed, oriented, and not preoccupied with parking or navigating narrow roads. Return rides create a natural “debrief” moment that strengthens word-of-mouth recommendations.
- **Environmental Gains:** The shuttle bus provides a more sustainable transport option, with fewer car journeys, thereby lowering emissions and lessening verge erosion around popular access points. The staff conservation briefing normalises Leave No Trace behaviour.
- **Local Economic Value:** Corofin businesses benefit from pre- and post-hike footfall. Cafés see morning coffee and takeaway trade; pubs and shops capture late-afternoon custom as walkers return.
- **Accessibility & Inclusion:** The bus widens access to the Burren National Park for visitors without cars, young people, and older adults who prefer not to drive unfamiliar rural roads.

Conclusion

The NPWS Burren Bus shows how a modest, daily shuttle from Corofin to the Mullaghmore area of the Burren National Park can deliver outsized benefits: helping to protect a spectacular environment, supporting local livelihoods, and giving visitors a safer, more enjoyable way to experience the Burren.



Abbreviation

Organisation

Coillte	Coillte
CORC	Clare Outdoor Recreation Committee
CORF	Clare Outdoor Recreation Forum
CP	Commercial Activity Providers
FO	Farming Organisations
CCC	Clare County Council
CLDC	Clare Local Development Company
CSP	Clare Sports Partnership
CTD	Clare Tourism Development
IAAT	Ireland's Association for Adventure Tourism
LCETB	Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board
LNT	Leave No Trace
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
ORO	Outdoor Recreation Officer
RRO	Rural Recreation Officer
NGB	National Governing Body's of Sport

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

This Action Plan recognises and supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In particular the following goals are actioned within this plan.



Sustainable Development Goals

Actions

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING 	3. Good Health and Wellbeing: Better, more accessible health systems to increase life-expectancy	2:1, 2:2, 2:8
4 QUALITY EDUCATION 	4. Quality Education: Inclusive education to enable upward social mobility and end poverty	1:5, 2:3, 2:6
5 GENDER EQUALITY 	5. Gender Equality: Education regardless of gender, advancement of equality laws, fairer representation of women	2:8, 2:9,
9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 	9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure: Generating employment and income through innovation	2:5, 2:6
11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES 	11. Sustainable Cities and Communities: Making cities safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable	2:5, 2:8,
14 LIFE BELOW WATER 	14. Life Below Water: Conservation, promoting marine diversity and regulating fishing practices	3:1, 3:3, 3:4, 3:6, 3:7
15 LIFE ON LAND 	15. Life on Land: Reversing man-made deforestation and desertification to sustain all life on earth	2:10, 3:1, 3:3, 3:4, 3:6, 3:7

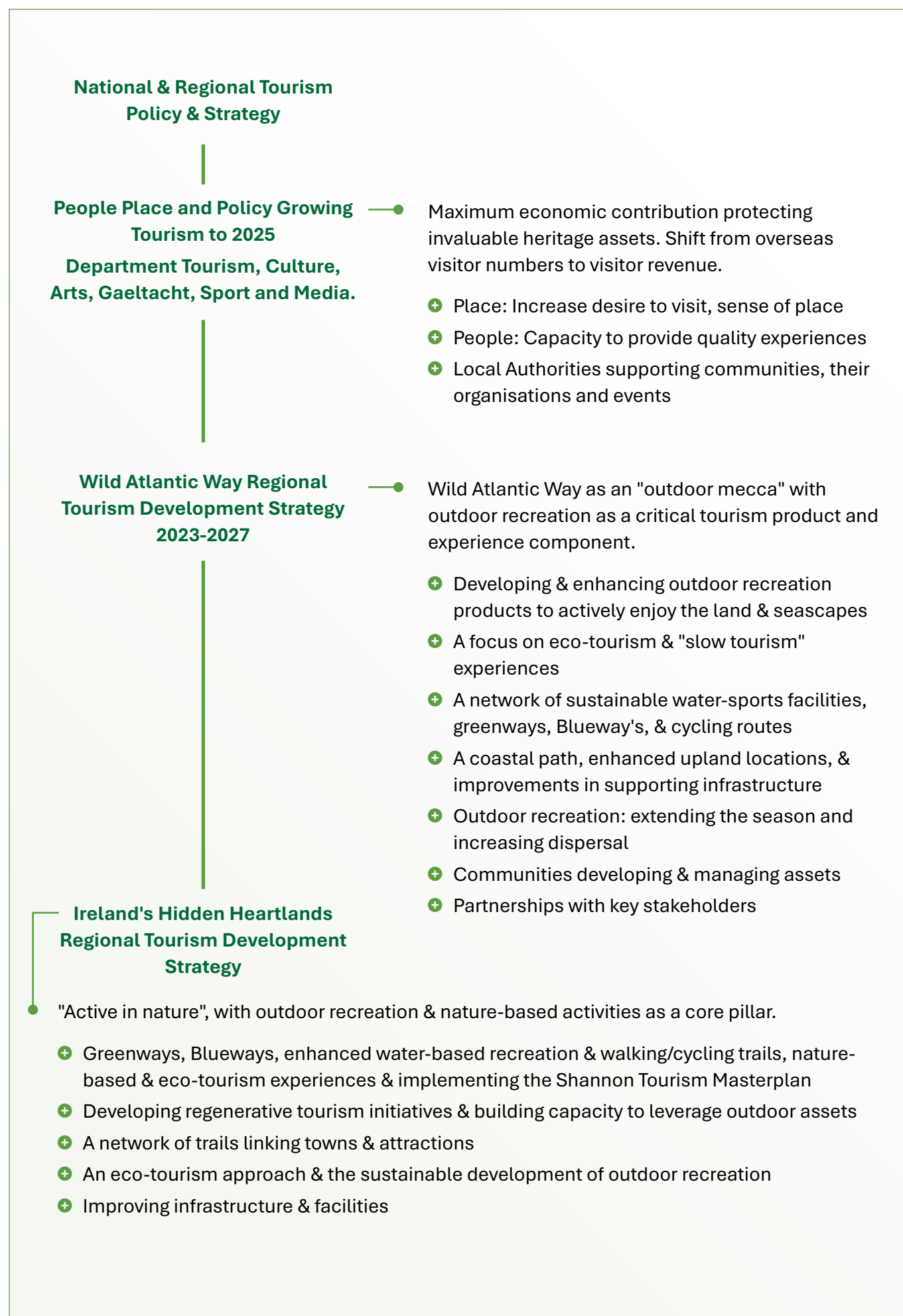
Appendix 1: National and Local Strategies

A variety of national frameworks shape County Clare's development, including:

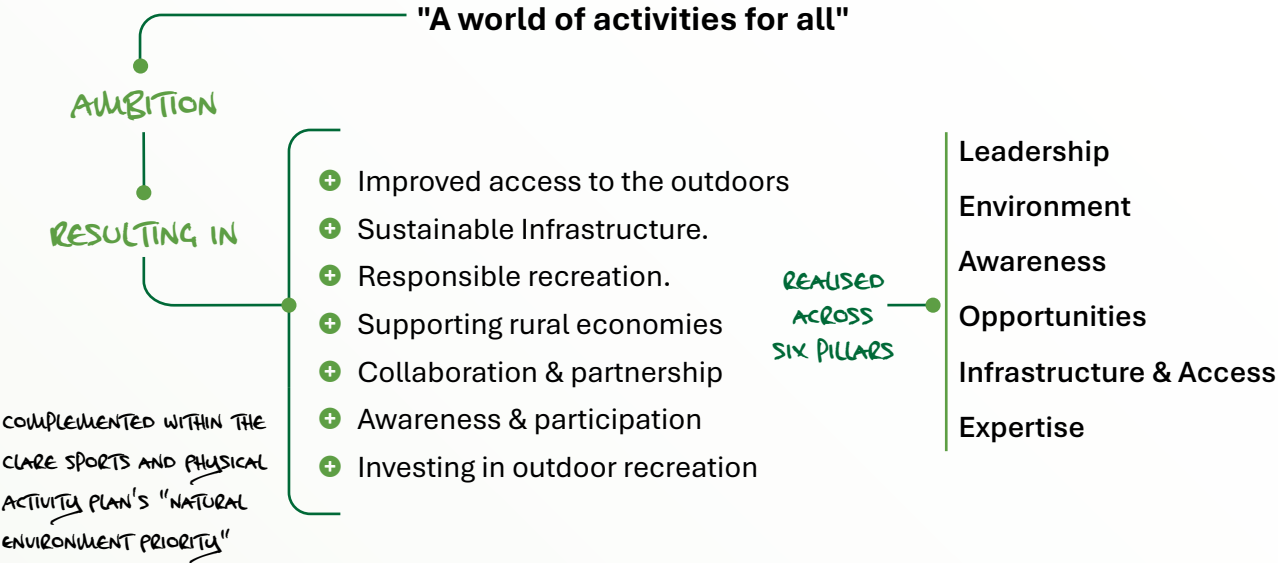
- The Project Ireland 2040 investment priorities of strengthened rural economies, sustainable mobility and enhanced amenity and heritage.
- The Common Agricultural Policy Rural Development Programme, Multi-functional Agriculture and the LEADER Programme.
- Our Rural Future and the increased demand for outdoor recreation and rural tourism.
- Our Shared Future emphasises Ireland's image as an outdoor activity holiday destination.

The National Sports Strategy 2018 – 2027 and the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy objectives on increasing participation in sports and physical activity, provide the national sports context for the Clare Outdoor Recreation Plan.





Embracing Ireland's Outdoors
National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023 - 2027



A Local Sport & Physical Activity Plan for County Clare

- + Develop a County Clare Outdoor Recreation Plan
- + Planned and co-ordinated approach to outdoor recreation via the Clare Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC)
- + Improve supporting facilities, at key outdoor destinations
- + Explore the extension of existing transport schemes to outdoor destinations
- + Explore access to key outdoor recreations and destinations
- + Capitalise on emerging funding opportunities for outdoor recreation initiatives

Clare County Development Plan 2023 - 2029

- + Outdoor recreation for active & healthy lifestyles community wellbeing, tourism, rural economy
- + Balance recreation & environmental protection
- + Long-distance walking & cycling routes, linking to national networks
- + Key locations: Shannon Estuary, Lough Derg, the Burren, and coastal areas

County Clare Outdoor Recreation Plan

- + Ensures Collaboration and Coordination of Stakeholders
- + Collectively Prioritises how resources and investments should be focused.

CONTRIBUTING TO TOURISM

Wild Atlantic Way Regional Tourism Development Strategy

Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy

Guiding our Journey to a Vibrant New Future in Tourism

County Clare Tourism Strategy 2030

Appendix 2: Strategic Environment

SWOT overview of the outdoor recreation context for County Clare

Strengths	Weaknesses
✓ County Clare has beautiful outdoor beaches, cliffs, rivers, lakes, lowland, and hill areas that support various outdoor activities. ✓ There is a growing network of land trails and an emerging base of water activity venues, many of which have enhanced support facilities such as public toilets. ✓ Many residents enjoy outdoor activities, mainly walking, while water sports (marine and inland) are growing in popularity. ✓ County Clare is a popular destination for outdoor recreation beginners, dabblers, and experienced participants. ✓ There are active local outdoor recreation clubs and outdoor education and commercial activity providers. ✓ There is a history of outdoor recreation collaboration and generosity between landowners, participants, communities, volunteers, the County Council, agencies, and activity providers. ✓ There is a strong local awareness and interest in environmental sustainability. ✓ Some public transport/park-and-ride initiatives reduce vehicle traffic to popular venues. ✓ While most participate outdoors for recreation, there are also competitions in sports like rowing and triathlon. ✓ Some outdoor recreation locations strive to include people with a disability. ✓ Outdoor recreation is an important tourism asset in the County. ✓ There are outdoor recreation instructor training opportunities.	✗ There is an uneven distribution of resources and visitors. Hence, some popular outdoor recreation site's environmental and community-carrying capacities are in danger of being overwhelmed. ✗ Dabbler and novice participants can be less attuned to the outdoor recreation culture. This inexperience results in poor safety practices, inconsiderate parking, other-user conflict, poor dog control, not respecting landowners' rights, and littering. ✗ There are limited car parking facilities at some locations. ✗ Some trailheads have limited supporting services, such as toilets and coffee/snack facilities. ✗ Some high-usage water activity sites require changing facilities and easier water access. ✗ The road network in parts of the County cannot manage the combined volume of outdoor recreation, tourism, and resident traffic. ✗ Public transport to and from the County's outdoor recreation sites is limited, hindering participants without private transport. ✗ There is an ongoing challenge to make more outdoor recreation venues accessible for individuals with additional needs. ✗ Public access to private land for outdoor recreation is not always possible. ✗ The existing on-road walking and cycling venues in the County are less relevant to participants due to safety concerns. ✗ There is poor lighting in some venues. ✗ Outdoor recreation facilities could be more available outside of the main population centres.

¹⁵ This capacity issue impacts environmental sustainability, crowded outdoor recreation experiences, and overwhelmed community spaces, such as local roads and parking areas.

Appendix 2: Strategic Environment

SWOT overview of the outdoor recreation context for County Clare

Opportunities	Threats
- Given the high level of initial engagement, there is potential to grow longer-term outdoor recreation participation amongst beginners. - There is further scope for inclusive outdoor recreation facilities and programmes. - There is potential to expand the variety of outdoor recreation venues and the facilities at these venues. Water activities are a key participant growth area. - There is apparent demand for additional off-road walking and cycling trails for recreation, tourism, and transport, particularly developing a Greenway. - Neighbouring county boundary outdoor recreation developments should be considered. - The emerging Clare Outdoor Recreation Committee and Public Forum can further support stakeholder collaboration. - Contemplative and gentle outdoor recreation, such as forest bathing, mindfulness, environmental stewardship, and creativity outdoors, is growing. - The County's rich and varied heritage and arts resources can be further integrated into the outdoor recreation experience. - There are opportunities for more school-based outdoor recreation programmes. - An information hub and a focused online presence for outdoor recreation in the County. - Activity diversity, enhanced facilities, and additional programming might further extend the outdoor recreation season.	The primary threats are sustaining the environment and the quality of experiences given climate change, ongoing demand for outdoor recreation, and other land and water pressures. These issues have the potential to undermine: - Stakeholder collaboration and communications. - The quality of some outdoor recreation venues. - Water quality and pollution at recreational venues. - Habitat and biodiversity protection, including the potential spread of invasive species. There are also threats due to: - Volunteer or community burnout. - Inappropriate participant behaviour and carelessness. - Lack of appreciation and respect for private farming and forestry operations. - Lack of awareness and experience in sometimes hazardous outdoor settings. - Potential conflicts between different user groups. - Inadequate resourcing of venues and infrastructure.



Thanks to Humphrey Murphy of Irish Leisure Consultants for his work on the consultation and the plan. Thanks also to Edel Butler for the visual design of the document.

