



DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL TOURISM STRATEGY 2017 - 2020



Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall
Donegal County Council

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DONEGAL AIRPORT



GLENVEAGH NATIONAL PARK & CASTLE



GRIANÁN OF AILIGH

1.0 FOREWORD

CATHAOIRLEACH OF DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL - CLLR TERENCE SLOWEY



As Cathaoirleach of Donegal County Council, I am pleased to present this Donegal Tourism Strategy 2017 - 2020 which sets out a shared vision for the development of tourism in County Donegal over the next three years. The Elected Members of the Council have, and continue to acknowledge and prioritise the importance of tourism to the County and to their electoral areas demonstrating a passionate approach to striving for tourism development as a major contributor to the economy, to employment locally and to the strength of the Donegal Brand.

The key aims and objectives of the strategy reach across a range of important themes and have been agreed following consultation with a range of stakeholders. The valuable work being done by Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland in developing key strategic themed products, in marketing the product abroad and in engaging locally through the key regional resource has set a very strong base within which to position local and regional initiatives.

This strategy, as a means to deliver Quality Tourism Development and the resulting enterprise, is inclusive and recognises that the involvement of all sections of the community is vital to the future development of County Donegal and to building a sustainable tourism product by raising awareness worldwide of brand 'Donegal'. Developing partnerships is a vital component of this Strategy, connecting with our cross-border neighbours through a joint approach to develop tourism and ensure success. The people of Donegal have the skills and determination to deliver an authentic, unique and quality visitor experience and through collaborative work between Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism Ltd, Údarás na Gaeltachta, community groups, local organisations and SMEs we can deliver success.

Cllr. Terence Slowey - Cathaoirleach

1.0 FOREWORD

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL, MR. SEAMUS NEELY



As Chief Executive of Donegal County Council, I am delighted to deliver this Donegal Tourism Strategy and wish to acknowledge the input of everyone involved in production of this most valuable working document that will continue to evolve over time.

The Tourism Strategy covers 2017 – 2020 and over the three years will be monitored and evaluated to adapt to a range of changes in the future. This Donegal County Council Tourism Strategy and Action Plan provide the context for a range of innovative tourism initiatives, marketing and development plans and EU and Government funded projects, which will seek to promote County Donegal as a world class tourism destination on the Wild Atlantic Way.

The plans set out in this strategy for the next three years will stimulate our tourism economy, create and sustain employment in Donegal. The strategy seeks to build on the work undertaken to date by Donegal County Council and Donegal Tourism and will support the implementation of Irish government and EU policy in the tourism sector.

There is an emphasis in the Tourism Strategy on harnessing all of the county's resources in our towns, villages and rural areas such as our people, our history, heritage and culture, our breathtaking landscape, the Gaeltacht and our amazing coastline. Donegal has an abundance of natural resources and we wish to ensure that in the long term as our tourism sector grows, we also have provisions in place to protect and safeguard our natural environment and our cultural and linguistic traditions.

Donegal communities have seen many changes in the past decade including economic depression, mass emigration and unemployment. This strategy will focus on ways that tourism initiatives can revive flagging economies, increase employment all year round, reduce emigration, entice people who have emigrated to come home, provide an attractive source of income and improve living standards throughout the county. With a comprehensive strategy, delivered and implemented to a high standard, we can increase economic growth, create and sustain jobs in tourism and other sectors, improve quality of life in Donegal and encourage social inclusion.

There is no doubt that with the implementation of a strategic tourism investment plan could target funding mechanisms in the EU. With the wonderful natural resources that already exist in the county, means that Donegal could be firmly established as a primary tourist destination and starting point of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Mr. Seamus Neely - Chief Executive, Donegal County Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Neely', written in a cursive style.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Donegal is a County steeped with a rich and diverse tourism offering. It has a reputation for delivering world-class tourism services and attracting visitors from not alone all over the island of Ireland but from many overseas destinations including the UK, USA, and mainland Europe in particular. The continued development of the tourism product throughout Donegal will enable the industry to grow further, support additional jobs, further improve visitor attractions

and deliver a Donegal that is prosperous to live in, work in, invest in and visit.

Donegal has been named the 'Coolest Place on the Planet' by National Geographic Traveller as part of their 'Cool List 2017' awards. The Managing Director and Publisher of National Geographic Traveller, Mr. Matthew Jackson visited Donegal in February 2017 and presented the 'Coolest Place' Award Certificate to Donegal Tourism and the

"County". Donegal has also been awarded the 'Ireland's Hidden Gem' title by readers of the 'Irish Independent Travel' publication. Many of the businesses in Donegal continue to achieve due recognition and 'Certificate of Excellence' Awards from TripAdvisor. The County hosts 37 Discovery Points and 3 Key Signature Discovery Points on the Wild Atlantic Way including Sliabh Liag, Malin Head and Fanad Head.

Donegal County Council is committed to the continuous development of a diverse, exciting and high quality tourism product and offering. The tourism industry supports in excess of 29,000 jobs in the NW region, currently attracting a near 300,000 overseas visitors annually. In addition to this approximately 330,000 domestic visitors come to Donegal to enjoy our Blue Flag beaches, experience the cultural and heritage attractions all round the County, and to stay in our world-class accommodation.

3.0 A Strategy for the Future of Tourism

Donegal County Council developed this tourism strategy to set out a 'clear and defined road-map for the development of tourism in Donegal' in the near term. Donegal County Council has a clear goal of implementing this comprehensive tourism strategy over the next three years by continuing a collaborative partnership approach to delivering on the action plan. The potential benefits for the people of Donegal in developing tourism are far reaching in terms of the future of the County and the future of the next generation of Donegal people. Tourism is a key driver of sustainable economic growth, job creation and social well being.



3.1 Donegal Tourism Economy – The Opportunity

Donegal is forecast to continue to increase its share of the overall tourism sector in Ireland as a follow on to the substantial growth over the last number of years. Donegal is well positioned to benefit from this increasing growth in tourism and there is an opportunity for Donegal to work collaboratively both within the County and with our neighbouring areas in Northern Ireland, to compete for a greater share in the market.

3.2 The Vision

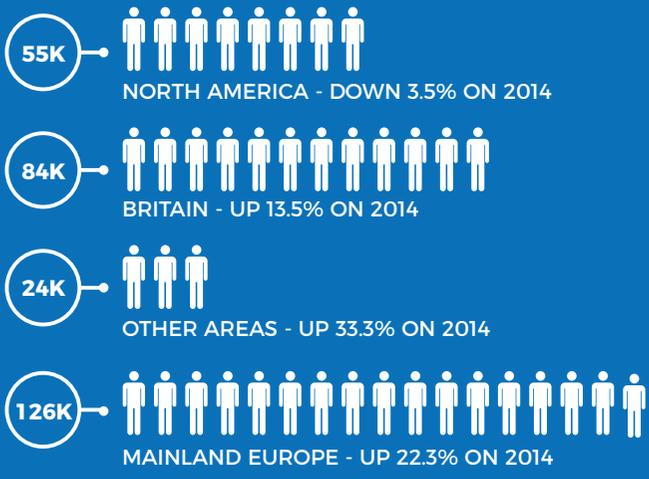
To promote the Donegal brand and showcase the entire county as a first choice visitor holiday experience where excellence and value are paramount. Donegal will take its place as a primary destination on the Wild Atlantic Way in Ireland, offering an extremely attractive total visitor experience unique to Donegal.



CLIMBING AT ERRIGAL MOUNTAIN

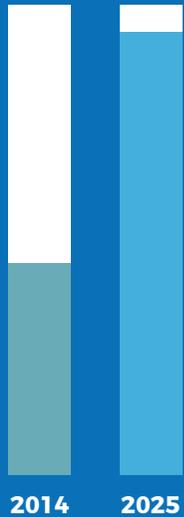


**OVERSEAS TOURISTS TO CO. DONEGAL
IN 2015: TOTAL NUMBERS: 289,000**



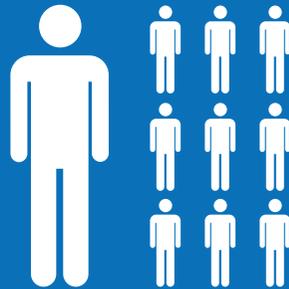
3.3 Objectives

- Work with Ireland’s main tourism organisations - Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to input and influence major marketing and development activities
- Promote brand ‘Donegal’ and maximise the opportunities presented by the Wild Atlantic Way
- Encourage our visitors and Diaspora to become brand ‘ambassadors’ for County Donegal
- Increase overall visitor numbers to Donegal
- Reduce seasonality and increase spend and dwell time
- Create the circumstances to enable long-term development of tourism with a Public-Private collaborative effort
- Develop collaborations and partnerships across multiple regions and sectors
- Develop tools, systems and practices for more effective communication
- Assist businesses in the tourism sector to provide a range of high quality tourism products and experiences
- Improve connectivity in Donegal, connecting people to the world with high speed broadband internet access in all tourism areas
- Adopt a sustainable approach to tourism to ensure minimal impact on our precious environment, culture and linguistic resources
- Develop key tourism infrastructure across County Donegal as a necklace that connects Donegal Nationally and Internationally
- Identify development strategies and the investment needed to underpin sustained infrastructure improvement in the tourism sector in Donegal
- Develop County Donegal as a unique coastal and marine tourism destination – embracing coastal, river and lake resources and a wide range of marine activities, both water-based and shore-based
- Invest in training and education opportunities for the tourism sector in Donegal



Tourism is a vital component for the national and local economy. Revenue from overseas tourism is expected to reach €5 billion by 2025 from €3.5 billion in 2014 (Fáilte Ireland).

It is estimated some 220,000 people are employed in the industry at present.



Tourism Ireland reach a global audience up to 600 million each year.

4.2 National Context

Tourism is a vital component for the national and local economy. Revenue from overseas tourism is expected to reach €5 billion by 2025 from €3.5 billion in 2014 (Fáilte Ireland). This growing indigenous industry is already a massive contributor to employment growth and is estimated to employ some 220,000 people in the industry at present.

Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority. Their role is to support the tourism industry and work to sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourist destination and provide a range of practical business supports to help tourism businesses better manage and market their products and services.

Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas as a holiday and business tourism destination. They deliver world class marketing programmes in 23 markets across the world and reach a global audience up to 600 million each year.

4.3 Local Context

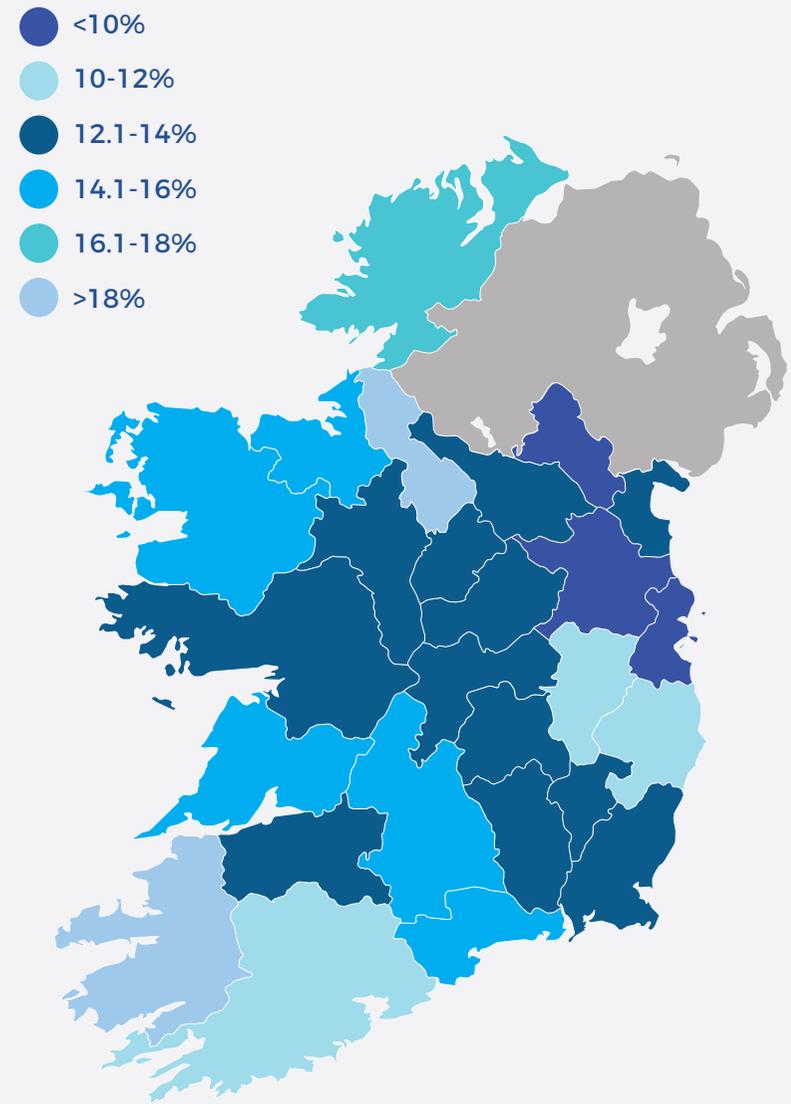
Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland have major roles to play at a national and international level. Donegal County Council, working with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland plays a key role in local economic and community tourism development, leading on destination product and tourism infrastructure development at a regional level.

Never before has Donegal experienced such collaborative efforts across the region evidenced through the various external reviews and publications commenting on visitor experience and the various strategies that reflect the countywide agenda. There are in addition new and existing strategic plans such as the Local Community Development Plan, County Development Plan, Cultural Services Plan 2016 and Donegal County Council Corporate Plan all of which embrace and support tourism as a key resource now and for the future. These plans provide opportunities to think laterally across all aspects of service provision and amenities. This, in turn, will lead to the creation of synergies which ultimately raise satisfaction levels for visitors.

Donegal County Council has also been engaged with a number of strategic work programmes which enhance and promote existing tourism offerings such as the development of the three Signature Points on the Wild Atlantic Way – Fanad Lighthouse, Malin Head, and Sliabh Liag, in addition to the the signage programme for the Wild Atlantic Way in the County.

Tourism is a key contributor to employment in Donegal with at least one in every ten people in employment being engaged in the tourism and hospitality sector. The recognition of the business potential of tourism is well proven in Donegal and has been instrumental in the recovery and regeneration of the area, with tourism start-ups playing a significant part in economic development. In 2011, over 20% of new enterprises in County Donegal were in the tourism sector. Tourism dependency in the County as depicted on the map is 16 -18% which is the third highest in the country.

Regional tourism dependency ratio, % of total enterprises



Source: McFeely & Delaney, 2013, Ibec calculations

4.4 Donegal Airport

Donegal Airport opens up the North West for the leisure and business traveller. Located at Carrickfinn, Kincasslagh, the airport is approximately 15 minutes drive from Dungloe and Gweedore, and 45 minutes from Letterkenny. Donegal Airport is situated on the west coast in the area of The Rosses/ Gweedore, just 40 minutes flying time from Dublin. The region is noted for its unspoiled natural scenery, its maritime environment, including a significant fishing industry, inhabited islands and a developing tourism industry.

The airport achieved significant passenger growth rates year on year. The growth of the Donegal/Dublin route is mainly due to excellent flight times (early morning out of Donegal and Dublin and evening returns) which is particularly suited for the business and commercial commuters. The twice daily service suits the leisure and tourism market particularly with regard to onward connections. The Scottish service operates four times per week increasing to six times per week during peak seasons. Aer Lingus is the current carrier on both these routes and

provides an excellent service. The airport has opened up whole new markets to the tourism sector, enabling product providers i.e. hotels, transport providers, golf clubs, leisure fishing, etc, to promote their facilities to wider domestic and international markets.



5.0 THE MARKET & TARGET AUDIENCE

5.1 Market Segments

In order to sustain and build on international and domestic tourism, Fáilte Ireland's Growth Strategy created customer segmentation to assist in breaking down target audiences. Two of these target audiences fit well with the Donegal Tourism target market and are as follows:

CULTURALLY CURIOUS

Seek authentic experiences

Like to get off the beaten track & immerse themselves in the local stories

Travel as couples / individuals

Motivated by the discovery of local areas that offer real and quality experiences accompanied by engaging stories.

Who are the Culturally Curious?

They choose their holiday destinations carefully and are independent 'active sightseers' looking to visit new places and expand their experience by exploring landscapes, history and culture. They are unlikely to return for some time once they have visited a new place, and often travel as a couple or as individuals and rarely in a family group. The age group for this demographic is 40+.

GREAT ESCAPERS

Seek quality time relaxing

Like picturesque landscapes & explore natural / rural locations

Usually couples, often with babies or quite young children

Motivated by getting away from the stress of everyday life and to spend quality time together

Who are the Great Escapers?

They are often couples, approximately 30 years old, some with young children. Most are taking time out from busy lives and careers. They are specifically interested in rural holidays and travel very much as a couple or family. Great Escapers are on holiday for a break, to get close to nature, and to experience quality family time. They are more likely to take part in slightly more strenuous, but not extreme, exploration. They are more interested than other segments in getting connected to nature especially the more remote and exciting places.

Domestic Tourism

FOOTLOOSE SOCIALISERS

On average in their late forties and well educated, they are made up of groups of friends that enjoy getting away and spending quality time together. They make up 15 percent of the domestic market.

INDULGENT ROMANTICS

Indulgent Romantics make up 14 percent of the domestic market. Although relatively broad in terms of age profile they are more likely than average to be aged between 45 and 64. They are made up of couples whose ultimate goal is to find the perfect romantic hub for their holiday where they can soak up the luxury, reward themselves, be well looked after and reconnect with one another.

IN TERMS OF DOMESTIC TOURISM, THREE MARKETS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED:

CONNECTED FAMILIES

Connected Families make up 23 percent of the domestic market, the single largest segment. They are made up of relatively young families. They are made up of parents in their thirties and early forties and children generally under the age of ten. For Connected Families, family holidays are the best weeks of the year and a special opportunity to spend quality time together, creating memories to last a lifetime.

A key asset in the tourism product in Donegal is the range of natural landscape within the County. Donegal has the capacity to meet the requirements of any visitor wanting to participate in their choice of outdoor activity. The list below is an overview of the types of activities available to the discerning tourist.

LAND-BASED ACTIVITIES

Equestrian
Rock Climbing
Cycling
Shopping
Parks & Gardens
Walking & Hiking
Horse-Racing
Golf Family Fun
Cookery & Crafts

Sailing
Fishing & Angling
Diving
Coasteering
Cruising
Surfing
Kayaking
Canoeing

WATER-BASED ACTIVITIES

5.2 Target Audiences



The main geographic target markets for Donegal Tourism Ltd include the following:

- The UK (including Northern Ireland)
- Republic of Ireland
- Europe (France and Germany in particular)
- USA



6.0 ACCOMMODATION

6.1 Accommodation Overview

Revenue from overseas tourism is expected to reach €5 billion by 2025 from €3.5 billion in 2014 (Fáilte Ireland) and employment in the sector will reach 250,000. This will be underpinned by 10 million overseas visits per year by 2025, compared to 7.6 million in 2014.

Donegal is well placed to accommodate a significant increase in tourist numbers as there is an established diverse range of quality tourist accommodation including hotels, guesthouses, rental cottages, bed and breakfasts, and camping and caravanning sites.

Accommodation in Donegal has grown significantly in the last two decades, including the addition of a five star hotel. Donegal has 6,611 hotel beds in the County with a total of 56 registered hotels. There are a number of high quality 3 and 4 star hotels in busy areas in particular, many of which have leisure and/or spa facilities on site, this breakdown includes one 5* hotel, fourteen 4* hotels, twenty eight 3* hotels, seven 2* hotels and three 1*.



FANAD HEAD LIGHTHOUSE



HOTELS

PREMISES	56
ROOMS	2759
BEDS	6611



GUESTHOUSES

PREMISES	10
ROOMS	98
BEDS	217

B&B

B&B

PREMISES	59
ROOMS	243
BEDS	584



SELF-CATERING

PREMISES	9
ROOMS	242
BEDS	1287



HOSTELS

PREMISES	14
ROOMS	481
BEDS	481



CAMPING & CARAVAN SITES

PREMISES	6
ROOMS	248
BEDS	1108



6.2 PARTICULAR STRENGTHS

- » The people of Donegal are renowned for their warm welcome and kind hospitality
- » Branding for the County is strong - govisitdonegal.com
- » An active and engaged tourism trade that is willing to work collaboratively
- » The unique and diverse profile of the county - a varied natural environment, culture, heritage, music, social attractions and activities
- » The start (or end) of the Wild Atlantic Way
- » A strong range of supporting integrated strategies
- » Connectivity to Northern Ireland and the potential to develop a link between the Wild Atlantic Way onto the Causeway Coastal Route via Derry City enabling the North West to collectively compete .
- » High quality, good value and varied accommodation
- » Historic towns and villages
- » Excellent shopping and dining experiences
- » Strong linkages with over 250 community groups working on many aspects of county development including tourism
- » A vibrant creative economy, Irish language, heritage and culture in the Gaeltacht of Donegal with strong partnerships between Donegal County Council, Údarás na Gaeltachta
- » Several inhabited islands with a fantastic natural environment, perfect for niche activities
- » Donegal has one of the longest coastline in Ireland with 13 Blue Flag beaches
- » Green Coasts awards for excellent water quality and the natural unspoilt coastline
- » State of the art sporting and recreation facilities, Donegal Airport at Carrickfinn is a key transport link into Donegal and a world renowned scenic landing experience, Access links with City of Derry Airport and Knock Airport
- » The history of Donegal is told in the Donegal Museum, Letterkenny
- » A focus on theatre and the arts
- » An excellent range of natural and man-made attractions and locations Donegal has unique strengths in links golf, outdoor (walking and cycling) and water-based activities, in particular the county is home to world-famous surfing locations
- » Letterkenny is designated as a joint gateway town with Derry in the National Spatial Strategy, a key tourism gateway to the North
- » Tier 2 Towns in Donegal have been designated with various themes which have great potential as some are specific to tourism e.g. Bundoran (Marine Tourism), Ballyshannon (Cultural Tourism), Donegal Town, Carndonagh, Buncrana (General Tourism), Ballybofey and Stranorlar (Sport)
- » Partnerships and Consortiums - due to the involvement of Donegal County Council in many successful EU, national and local funded projects, there are very successful partnerships and consortiums already in place to access future funding opportunities
- » The Donegal Diaspora are located worldwide and there is great potential to develop linkages and to enlist the assistance of the Diaspora as ambassadors for Donegal
- » The presence of a third level institution in County Donegal - LYIT Tourism College in Killybegs and the Donegal ETB (Education and Training Board) are key drivers of education and training in the tourism sector
- » The LEO (Local Enterprise Office) is a vital support for businesses in the tourism sector with the development of the Donegal Food Trail



WEAKNESSES

- » The seasonality of the tourism industry, while improving continues to be an issue
- » Perception of Donegal as being a long distance to travel (from certain regions)
- » Lack of motorway and rail access, transport infrastructure needs improvement
- » Challenges exist with the provision of suitable public transport services for tourists
- » Limited number of tourism experiences within the county
- » Highest unemployment rate in the state
- » Poor broadband connectivity in many areas including at key tourism sites
- » Lack of skills and education in certain areas and poor awareness in the tourism sector of the quality and depth of the tourism product, poor knowledge of the Wild Atlantic Way.
- » Lack of visitor accommodation in certain areas in Donegal
- » Lack of foreign language trained staff
- » High level of staff turnover in the hospitality sector
- » Need to increase awareness of providers of the importance of quality of profiles and imagery



BUNDORAN, PHOTO: MARK MAGUIRE/HEXICAM AERIALS



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OPPORTUNITIES
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- » Strengthen the tourism sector through the Tourism Sectoral Forum, the Board of Donegal Tourism, and the Associate Members Committee and all SMEs and community groups involved in tourism
- » Increased opportunities for marketing of the county on a shared cost basis
- » Capitalise on key awards received e.g. 'Coolest Place on the Planet' with National Geographic Traveller and 'Ireland's Hidden Gem' with Independent Travel
- » Increased funding for tourism investment
- » Further development of our Paths & Trails Network
- » Develop and build on a clearly recognisable brand Go Visit Donegal
- » Develop and enhance visitor experiences at our key tourism sites
- » Capitalise on our unique coastal and marine tourism opportunities including our Blue Flag beach status
- » Increase the number of festivals that are hosted in Donegal
- » Develop 'Off Season' activities and roll out of packages to extend off peak season
- » Increased funding for tourism investment (i.e. Fáilte Ireland Capital Development Programme, Leader and EU funding)
- » Exploit product development opportunities through partnerships, networks/linkages and community and business engagement
- » Continued development of a strong Diaspora network
- » Development of the three Signature Points and Discovery Points on the Wild Atlantic Way
- » Work closely with Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland and other key tourism bodies and organisations
- » Cross border opportunities with Northern Ireland
- » Opportunities to develop tourism products around our extensive history and heritage
- » Support the development of the food sector in Donegal as an important tourism pull factor e.g. The Food Coast, Donegal's Atlantic Coastal Trail
- » Support tourism SMEs in Donegal to enhance their products and services
- » Develop, support and promote unique niche tourism products exclusive to Donegal
- » Investment in training and education in the tourism sector
- » Investment in museums and heritage centres



THREATS

- » Limitations of financial and human resources
- » Competition from well established destinations on the Wild Atlantic Way
- » Failure to work effectively with adjoining counties, the private sector and local communities
- » Increasing competition from other destinations world wide
- » Implications of Brexit on tourism and the fluctuating currency situation with Euro and Sterling and US Dollar
- » Over-development of tourism may endanger the natural environment if not properly managed and planned in advance, sustainable tourism is vitally important
- » Inhabitants of Donegal who engage in activities that have a negative impact on tourism Government investment going to other parts of Ireland
- » Competition in terms of EU and national funding sources



JEFFRY'S HOUSE, DONEGAL



BUNDORAN



6.3 Strategy Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Successful implementation of the Donegal Tourism Strategy requires the continuation of a partnership approach embodied in collaboration between Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland, businesses, the education sector, community groups and other state agencies. The Donegal County Council Tourism Unit will take a lead role in the delivery of this Tourism Strategy. Donegal Tourism Ltd and its Associate Members will have a key role in assisting in both the development and the monitoring of the integrated work and practices at local level that will enable the successful delivery of the Action Plan. The Action Plan as set out in this Tourism Strategy will act as a road map for the future of tourism in Donegal, a future where all stakeholders continue to work together to deliver real results and achieve the vision adopted.

This is a three year 'living' Tourism Strategy that will evolve and adapt to emerging market trends, to outside influences that impact tourism, to funding streams and to visitor requirements in the tourism sector. It will be continuously monitored and evaluated to ensure that the Tourism Strategy meets the objectives set out and will be reviewed and an updated every three years.

6.4 The Collaborative Approach

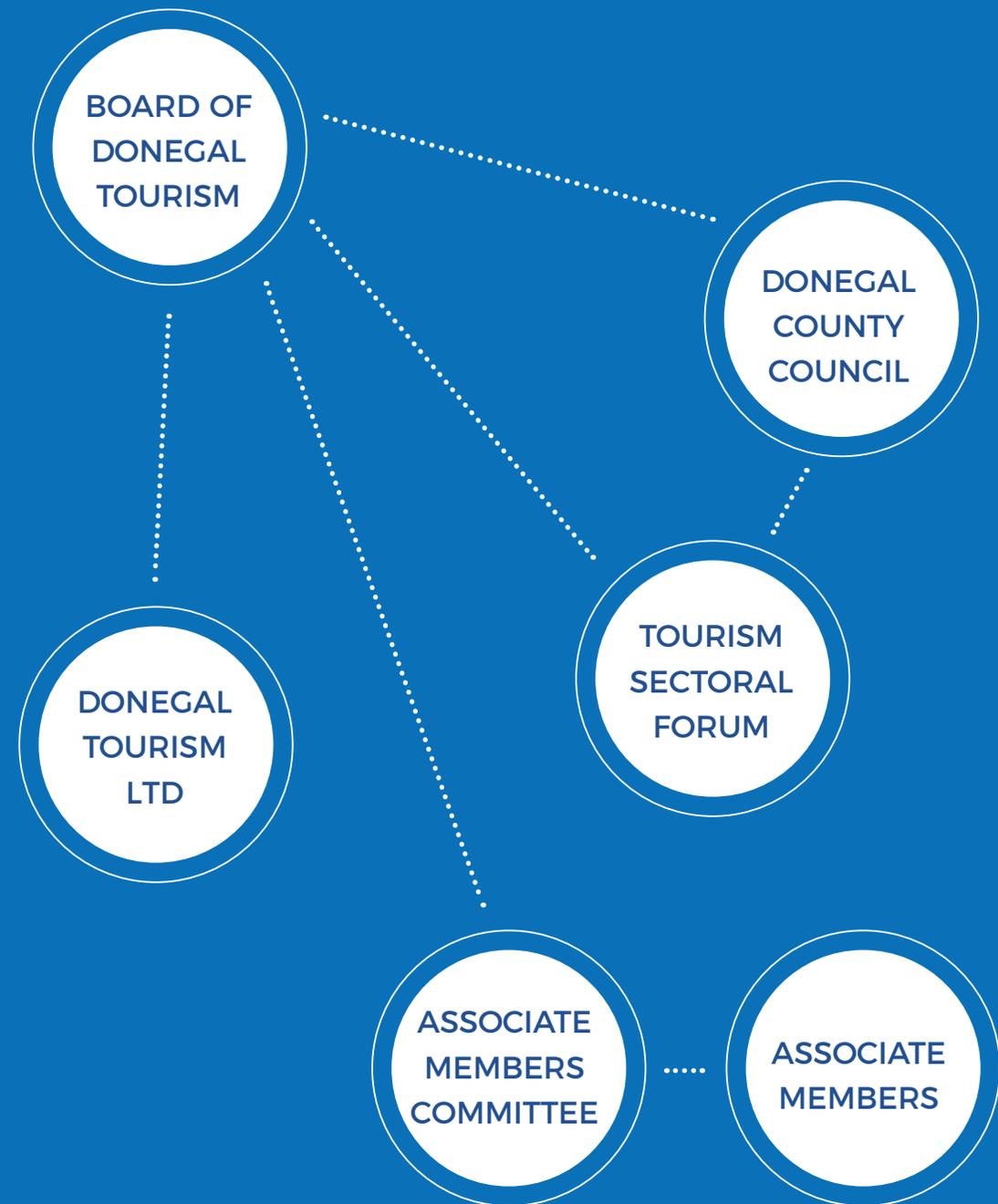
A unique strength of the tourism success in Donegal to date is the collaborative approach that now exists across the Membership and Staff of Donegal County Council, Agencies such as Fáilte Ireland, the Tourism Providers, and the Community and Voluntary Sector in the County. Donegal County Council, through its continued financial and organisational support, will through its Tourism Unit, continue to develop, promote and celebrate Tourism in the County. The Council has always had a strong commitment to tourism and the development of this Tourism Strategy further demonstrates the dedication of the Local Authority to stimulating the Donegal economy and creating and maintaining jobs in the tourism sector.

The approach to date is one based on a partnership and team work within Donegal County Council and across the County. The extent and impact of the work done in the County over that past number of years by the various partners in the tourism area has benefited from the existence of Donegal Tourism Ltd as a vehicle to jointly plan, resource and implement a comprehensive programme.



6.5 Structure of Donegal Tourism CLG

Donegal Tourism CLG is a company limited by guarantee, set up through involvement by Donegal County Council in its tourism development and marketing remit. The Board of Directors of Donegal Tourism Ltd is comprised of a range of representatives from across the tourism sector in the County including the Cathaoirleach and Chief Executive of the Council. In order to assist the Board of Donegal Tourism in engaging the sector to the fullest extent it has set up an Associate Members Forum which together with the Tourism Sectoral Forum feeds into the activities of Donegal Tourism Ltd including its planning and marketing activities in particular. This structure will continue to be a key pillar in the future development of Tourism in the County and will be the primary point of collaborative engagement between the Council's Tourism Unit and the wider Tourism Sector.



6.6 Strategy Alignment

Donegal County Council will continue to align its work in this area with the wide range of strategies that have an impact on tourism. One of the most significant, being the County Donegal Development Plan is currently being reviewed. The Draft Plan which is due to be published in early May, 2017 will:

- Recognise Donegal's significant tourism resource, the opportunity presented by the Wild Atlantic Way and recent positive media exposure regarding Donegal's tourism product, the importance of 'regionality' (i.e. attracting visitors to the North West) and 'seasonality' (developing new products and attractions which encourage visitors to stay longer and extend the season) and the overall role that tourism plays in the socio-economic regeneration of the county.
- Set out an overall strategy for tourism related developments to be based on; protecting Donegal's key underlying tourism resource, facilitating new developments which provide signature, supporting and ancillary tourism experiences consistent with the overarching themes and brand proposition of the Wild Atlantic Way and providing new high quality tourism accommodation at appropriate locations in a manner

which safeguards the tourism resource and generates economic benefits for the local community.

- Give effect to this strategy by setting out key objectives including: developing new motivational 'must do' signature tourism experiences, facilitating a wide range of tourism products and attractions, providing quality public visitor infrastructure, developing new greenways, walking and cycling routes, and enhancing road, air and sea access to Donegal.
- Provide a policy framework to manage future development which will seek to inter alia; safeguard the natural landscape and built heritage of the county, protect the scenic amenities of the Wild Atlantic Way, preserve the visual settings of key tourism attractions, enhance cruise ship access, and facilitate resource/activity based tourism products, campervan stopover sites, and purpose built high quality holiday resorts.



6.7 Collaboration with the Trade

Donegal County Council recognises the value of and takes a leading role in collaborative marketing and tourism development with the tourism trade in Donegal. Donegal Tourism regularly communicates with representatives from the tourism trade and has a number of segmented databases ensuring that information sent out via regular e-mail newsletters is relevant and informative to recipients based on their sector and individual needs.

Donegal County Council in association with Donegal Tourism has hosted a number of key tourism events aimed at the trade over recent years including the very successful 'Connecting the Wild Atlantic Way Tourism Conference' which featured a number of excellent industry relevant keynote speakers from organisations such as Google, Facebook, Customer Service Excellence Ireland and more, plus relevant case studies presented by local SMEs in the tourism sector. As an ongoing priority Donegal County Council plans to host events that are relevant and of potential benefit to the tourism sector and will host two general Tourism Seminars and one Marine Tourism Seminar annually.

Donegal County Council and Donegal Tourism have included participation at promotional marketing events annually as a vital element in the overall Marketing Strategy for the County. During 2016 and 2017 'Destination Donegal' has been promoted at the Holiday World Shows in Belfast and Dublin to an audience of approximately 66k visitors. The promotion of Donegal at the Holiday World Shows demonstrated the benefits of collective marketing as representatives from the trade attended the shows and the stand was divided into key regions of Donegal. This was extremely useful to the potential visitors enabling them to get first hand local knowledge of each area. Donegal County Council Tourism Unit also promotes the County at a number of other events such as Connect16, Celtic Connections, SeaFest, Dive 2016 and many more.

Donegal County Council has developed a trade website aimed at representatives and stakeholders in the tourism sector. The trade website is www.countydonegal.com and aims to provide a source of useful information such as details of projects, upcoming events, digital marketing tips and much more.

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit provides a range of training and support services for the tourism sector including the development and maintenance of websites, guest lecturing at various events and at the Tourism College, online training webinars, marketing advice and support, informative newsletters with details of upcoming training courses and much more.

Businesses and representatives from the tourism sector have regular opportunities to participate in joint marketing campaigns working with staff in the Tourism Unit of Donegal County Council for example online social media campaigns, promotional events and trade shows, offline print campaigns and much more. SMEs in the tourism sector have provided a range of complimentary prizes as sponsorship for competitions.

What Our Businesses Need



6.8 Connecting Donegal with Northern Ireland and Neighbouring Counties

It is intended that the Tourism Strategy will nurture collaborations with Northern Ireland and other neighbouring counties such as Leitrim and Sligo and beyond, depending on the target audience and product being promoted. The goal is to promote the North West to a worldwide audience, allowing for more visitor choice, increasing our competitiveness and improving our offering.

Cross-border collaboration has always been an important element in the overall strategy of Donegal County Council and a successful track record of working together with Councils and other representatives in both Northern Ireland and beyond on a wide range of cross border initiatives with many successful projects is already in place.

Many cross border projects already underpin successes to date. The Greenway Initiative will link Inishowen to Derry and the Lifford area to the wider Strabane area with a non-motorised greenway tourism route. The MalinWaters project is a partnership of several regions including Northern Ireland.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council and Donegal County Council have a history of strong working relationships and have delivered many successful projects over the years. There is a desire to look at ways to connect the Wild Atlantic Way to the Causeway Coastal Route via Derry.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council has worked with Donegal County Council on projects such as MalinWaters and the INTERREG IVA funded Sliabh Liag and The Gobbins project where capital works were strategically delivered alongside a joint marketing plan. There is scope to explore linkages further.



“Donegal has 6,408km of road network of which 152km is National Primary, 157km is National Secondary and 6,099km are regional or local roads.”

7.0 INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure is vital to a growing tourism economy and poor underdeveloped infrastructure is a barrier to tourism development. Donegal County Council is committed to identifying gaps in the tourism infrastructure and assessing means of sourcing funding to resolve those gaps by adopting a feasible phased approach to infrastructure enhancement. Efforts are ongoing to maximise opportunities in sourcing additional funding for various capital projects to supplement funding already committed by Donegal County Council through their 3-Year Capital Budget Plan 2016-2018. When Infrastructure is being put in place it is also important to consider the future maintenance of such infrastructure which will have costs and require responsibility.

Infrastructure includes a wide portfolio of work including roads, broadband, air access, rail, signage, water, wastewater, transport, housing, footpaths, playgrounds and parks, local amenities, buildings, leisure centres and streetscapes. Other examples of important tourism infrastructure include for example, cycle routes, greenways, paths and trails, riversides, marinas, pontoons and moorings etc.

The Donegal County Council in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland have been and continue to be involved in the installation of the Wild Atlantic Way infrastructure (signage, Discovery Points, Photo Points, etc.) in addition to regularly supporting and assisting in the construction of funded tourism initiatives, such as some of the improvements at Sliabh Liag.

Donegal County Council is continuously working on a county wide programme of capital works to support community, economic and tourism development objectives. Improvements to our roads network will be an important objective for Donegal County Council in supporting the Tourism Strategy. Donegal has 6,408km of road network of which 152km is National Primary, 157km is National Secondary and 6,099km are regional or local roads. The Public Art Office has plans for the development of new sculptures that will enhance various important tourist sites in Donegal. The development of a Donegal Diaspora Centre would be a great asset and focal point for Donegal Diaspora.

MALIN HEAD

Malin Head developments are being carried out in a phased approach with Phase 1 including the development of a viewing platform. Phase 2 will include the construction of a toilet block, car parking, lay-bys and the production of a Master Plan for the overall development of Malin Head. As a film location for Star Wars and an area of outstanding natural beauty, Malin Head must be prepared to deal with increasing visitor numbers in the coming years.

SLIABH LIAG

Sliabh Liag is a major flagship tourism project for Donegal with investment coming from a number of sources including Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland and EU INTERREG IVA funding. Capital works at Sliabh Liag have included the development of visitor amenities and access improvements including the mountain path. Donegal County Council in association with Donegal Tourism Ltd has developed a website and social media presence for Sliabh Liag, which will be handed over to the community company that is to manage the Sliabh Liag site going forward.



FANAD HEAD

Fanad Head peninsula on the Wild Atlantic Way is an excellent touring route flanked by the new developments at the Fanad Lighthouse Visitor Centre and self-catering accommodation that has now opened there.

FANAD LIGHTHOUSE

Fanad Lighthouse is a major tourism attraction for Donegal and a great asset to Fanad Head. Fanad Lighthouse opened to the public for

the first time in March 2016. The building was one of 5 across the north, renovated with funding from the EU Interreg programme as delivered by the SEUPB. Infrastructure works at Fanad Head include the refurbishment of the Lighthouse itself to create a unique visitor centre experience and adjoining self-catering apartments.

Guided tours are now offered and the visitor can learn about lighthouses and the important function they perform at sea, go back in time hearing stories of the light keepers of times past and can climb to the top of the tower.

There is also the opportunity to stay in a lighthouse with 3 lighthouse keepers' houses available for hire. These offer most 'mod cons' (no TV or internet) but still have that special timeless atmosphere.

After a successful first year, the project is already on 'Phase 2' with builders on-site on the new visitor centre which is due to open in June and consists of car-parking, washroom facilities, ticket office and small cafe with the assistance of funding from Fáilte Ireland.





FANAD HEAD - FAMILY WALK

7.1 A Wide & Varied Offering

County Donegal as a border County is bounded on the southwest, west and north by the Atlantic Ocean and on the east by Counties Tyrone, Derry, Fermanagh and Leitrim. Donegal shares 93% of its entire land boundary with Northern Ireland and the remainder with County Leitrim in the south. In terms of a Post-Brexit world, Donegal stands to be the Irish county which will have the largest land border with Northern Ireland, and by definition will hold the largest land border of any County between Britain and the European Union.

Donegal is home to Ireland's most northerly point at Malin Head, the highest sea cliffs in Europe at Sliabh Liag and lots of sandy beaches such as Magherawarden, Rossnowlagh, Trawbrega, White Strand, Narin, Marble Hill, Downings, Carrickfinn and Magheroarty, and more. Many beaches have Blue Flag status and the two major sea Loughs of Lough Swilly and Lough Foyle can be enjoyed in Donegal. It also has the longest coastline of not only the Wild Atlantic Way, but also of any county on the island of Ireland. Being one of the largest counties in Ireland, Donegal enjoys several different geographical attributes ranging from its low lying sandy beaches to its mountainous terrain further inland, and its series of rugged peninsulas of the north of the County.

Additionally, Donegal also boasts one of the largest collections of inhabited and uninhabited islands off of its coastline. Donegal has significant connectivity by air, through its own Donegal regional airport, and also through Ireland West Airport Knock, City of Derry Airport, Belfast International Airport, and George Best Belfast City Airport, all of which can be reached within two hours. Donegal truly is a place to 'get away from it all'.



7.2 Adventure Tourism

Adventure tourism is highly impacted by the development of Information Technology that allows an easy access to information, making the planning and booking stages of the trip much easier. According to the Adventure Tourism Market Study, 69% of the adventure travellers reported online research in advance of their trip. Between 2010 and 2013 the number of people searching for information on Facebook has doubled.

The adventure travel market in Europe (also North and South America) has experienced an average annual increase of 65% between 2009 and 2012 together with a global increase in percentage of adventure travellers (26.3% in 2009 to 41.9% in 2012).

Adventure tourism is defined by the Adventure Travel Trade Association as 'any domestic or international trip that includes at least two of the three aspects: physical activity, interaction with nature and cultural learning or exchange'. There are 34 different activities considered as different forms of adventure tourism and categorised as either 'soft adventure' (e.g. hiking, bird watching, horse riding, angling) or 'hard adventure' (climbing, trekking, caving, sky diving) or other tourism activities.

Adventure travellers are more likely to explore new destinations and new products. They want to connect with local people and regional culture and look for authentic experiences.

Donegal, located along the world-class Wild Atlantic Way route, with varied and largely untouched landscape, good amenities and growing numbers of adventure experiences available throughout, can offer everything adventure seekers wish for and more. Recent accolades of the 'Coolest Place on the Planet' by the National Geographic Traveller Magazine and 'Ireland's Hidden Gem' in Independent Traveller will attract large domestic and global attention, opening up an array of PR opportunities for the county.

TOP PRIORITIES FOR DONEGAL:

- Market the County in a strategic manner, appeal to potential first time visitors, as well as the seasoned adventurers by using specific customised content
- Use marketing channels carefully
 - utilise online and offline platforms, focus on engaging with travel writers, travel bloggers to produce high impact editorials in magazines and newspapers
- Research and analyse marketing efforts adopted by Top 10 countries for 2010-2015 (both: developed and developing)
- Work with regional organisation in an effort to grow Donegal's ranking in accordance with the ten pillars of Adventure Tourism Competitiveness*:

1. Sustainable Development Policy
2. Safety and Security
3. Health
4. Natural Resources
5. Cultural Resources
6. Adventure Activity Resources (cycling, climbing, hiking, rafting)
7. Entrepreneurship
8. Humanitarian
9. Tourism Infrastructure
10. Image

7.3 Niche Tourism

7.3.1 FOOD TOURISM

Donegal has a strong and growing reputation as a producer of good quality food as well as an excellent offering in a range of restaurants and local artisan food products. Donegal's unique location and natural environment has resulted in distinctive farming and fishing techniques. This has led to the production of distinctly Donegal food products, particularly in our most remote, unspoilt and least agriculturally productive areas. The agri food sector is continuing to experience growth as more and more indigenous brands are becoming established and being distributed to a wider consumer base.

The Donegal Food Strategy has presented a clear vision as to how to achieve success 'by working collectively to make Donegal famous for food and recognised as a pioneering region for its approach to fostering and growing new start up and existing food businesses' and as set out in The Donegal Local Economic & Community Plan 2016-2022.

7.3.2 FILM TOURISM

Having played host to a long line of productions and with films such as, Star Wars, A Shine of Rainbows, 48 Angels and Grabbers in recent years, Donegal has been firmly established as the perfect choice for film location managers. Ethereal landscapes, clean

light, long days, friendly hospitality and quality production resources through the Donegal Film Office are amongst the many features attracting film makers from all over the world. Accommodating productions whether large or small has many direct and indirect benefits to the County. These include the direct creation of employment locally, increased business to local service providers and in many cases the final product acts as a global showcase of Donegal's offering.

7.3.3 WILDLIFE TOURISM

Donegal has much opportunity to develop coastal and inland wildlife tourism. Donegal County Council has had an influential involvement in projects such as Inch Wildfowl Reserve and Wildsea Europe, both with an aim to promote wildlife tourism while ensuring the protection of our species and natural environment. Donegal is ideally located and attracts a wide range of species with factors such as the flow of the Gulf Stream making our waters ideal feeding and breeding grounds for species such as the basking shark, minke whales, dolphins, blue fin tuna, seals etc. There is potential to develop Donegal as a Whale Heritage Site with the World Cetacean Alliance. Birdlife in Donegal is also exceptional and many species thrive here. Our land mammals are also attracting attention in terms of wildlife tourism. We

have a considerable offering that the wildlife specialist observer wants to see and also plenty to attract the more casual wildlife watching visitor.

7.3.4 ASTRO TOURISM

Astro Tourism is a new and emerging tourism activity in County Donegal with the increasing popularity associated with the Northern Lights – Aurora Borealis. Visitors come to Donegal to see the lights but also to partake in specialist activities such as photography, painting etc.

Rural areas with good quality clear dark skies and scenic backdrops in which to take part in photography, observation, painting etc.

7.3.5 BUSINESS TOURISM

Business Tourism is a key component of the emerging Tourism offering in the County. In 2015, it was worth €669m to the Irish economy, reflecting a 35% increase since 2011. It accounts for 16% of overseas tourism spend in Ireland and one of the highest yield sectors in tourism. (Fáilte Ireland) Donegal Tourism in 2016 showcased Donegal at Connect16 which was a platform for businesses involved in organising business events in Ireland. Delegations from Canada, United States, France, Germany and UK were in attendance.

7.3.6 SPORT TOURISM

Sport is an attractor which presents an opportunity to expand visitor numbers in Donegal. The economic benefits of Sports Tourism (both direct and indirect) are substantial. It generates economic activity by increasing tourism expenditure in hotels, restaurants, attractions, retail and service businesses in the locality. This year Donegal will host the 2017 All-Ireland Coastal Rowing Championships in Ballyshannon . This is one of the biggest Rowing Regattas in the country and takes place over 3 days in early August attracting over 4,000 visitors to Donegal for this event.

The Donegal International Rally is an annual sporting event held in Donegal. It is one of Ireland's longest established and best annual rally competitions and is a top event in the Irish Rallying calendar. The rally brings thousands of Domestic and International visitors to Donegal. Donegal Tourism aims to facilitate and grow a viable and internationally competitive sports tourism industry which can maximise its contribution to the Donegal economy.

7.3.7 GOLF

In total Donegal has 17 golf courses located around the county. The quality of these links golf courses is widely acclaimed in the golfing world. Ballyliffin Golf Club was recently voted the best 36 hole links complex in the world by the influential US Golf Magazine - Golf Odyssey.

There are only 150 links golf courses in the world and Donegal is home to 14 of these. The importance of golf tourism to Donegal cannot be over stated with local hotels, guesthouses, B&B's, bars and restaurants jointly benefiting from the spend in the local economy. It is essential that we continue to actively market and promote Donegal's unique golf product on the international stage.





SLABH LIAG HIKING

7.3.8 CULTURAL TOURISM

County Donegal's unique and varied culture is a source of immense pride. Our county and its culture have always been intertwined. This culture is an all encompassing, evolving force that helps us express and celebrate who we are as a diverse, traditional and modern people. Donegal County Council believes that to invest in arts, culture, heritage and language is a commitment to a healthier, more fulfilled, prosperous and successful county.

A unique model of delivery in Ireland, Donegal County Council Cultural Services is comprised of the countywide Library Service, the Arts Service, the Regional Cultural Centre, Donegal County Museum, the Archives Service and County Donegal Heritage Office. Through our arts, libraries, language and heritage, we showcase a county that strikes a unique cultural beat. We believe that this beat should be heard loudly, clearly and confidently across the mountains and lakes of Donegal, Ireland and the world.

Cultural tourism represents one of the largest and fastest growing sections of tourism globally. Overseas holidaymakers say that Ireland's history and culture are crucially important factors in their choice to come here. Our culture helps engender a deepened sense of place, citizenship and pride of place. Donegal County Council believes that promoting and supporting

the arts, culture, heritage and language, is good for our society, our economy and our national identity both at home and abroad. Donegal County Council is committed to the development of partnerships for delivery of shared cultural goals and works in partnership with organisations throughout Donegal and nationally to promote and develop its cultural tourism product. The workplans associated with this Strategy will enable the Council to:

- Continue to develop and secure the County's Festival and Events Programme
- Support a network of independent strategically important arts/cultural organisations in the County.
- Support the development of traditional arts, contemporary arts and new art forms.
- Provide access to genealogy resources through the Library, Museum and Archives Services and further enhance the capacity and resources available.
- Explore opportunities to unlock the potential of our built heritage through the conservation, regeneration and reuse of historic buildings for cultural activities
- Develop a county wide mechanism for information sharing on what's-on with particular emphasis on the extensive Donegal Cultural events calendar
- Identify and promote historic landmarks, historical figures and culture along the Wild Atlantic Way

7.4 Cultural Infrastructure

- Donegal Diaspora Centre – develop a world class Donegal Diaspora Centre where culture, entertainment and technology combine in celebration of the achievements and experiences of the Donegal Diaspora
- County Museum – renovate, develop and extend the Museum building to present the history of Donegal in an attractive, informative and interactive manner
- Archives Centre – develop a purpose designed Archives Centre to preserve and make accessible the unique archival heritage of County Donegal
- Artscape Donegal Sculpture Park - create a unique flagship sculpture park showcasing the best of modern and contemporary Irish sculpture set in Donegal's dramatic landscape
- Cultural Quarter - maximise opportunities to create a cultural quarter in Letterkenny to incorporate the RCC, An Grianan and the Museum



8.0 GREENWAYS AND BLUEWAYS

GREENWAY DEVELOPMENT

Greenways are increasingly becoming a very important and integral part of the tourism infrastructure both in Europe and on the Wild Atlantic Way. The emphasis is growing on the provision of Greenways where visitors can enjoy a high quality engaging leisure experience along traffic free eco-friendly routes that are mapped and have infrastructure and facilities of a high standard. Some examples of routes in the County are:

- North West Greenway project: €15 million INTERREG V funding to develop 46.5 km of cross-border greenway between the Strabane and Lifford areas and the Derry-Muff and Derry-Buncrana areas. This is a joint project between Donegal County Council and Derry City & Strabane District Council.
- Letterkenny to Burtonport Old Railway Line Phase one Greenway: Following feasibility study completion the next steps will be to progress planning and design works and establish the required permissions to enable a funding application for first phase works.
- Other significant route developments that are in planning phase include Ballybofey to Donegal Town, Border to Carrigans Village, Porthall to Strabane and Fintown to Glenties.



“ €15 million INTERREG V allocation to Derry City & Strabane District Council and Donegal County Council to develop 46.5 km of cross border greenway. ”

GREENWAY FEASIBILITY STUDY

Funding has been secured to advance the feasibility study on the Letterkenny to Burtonport old railway route for a possible greenway. Donegal County Council and Údarás na Gaeltachta have match funded the study.

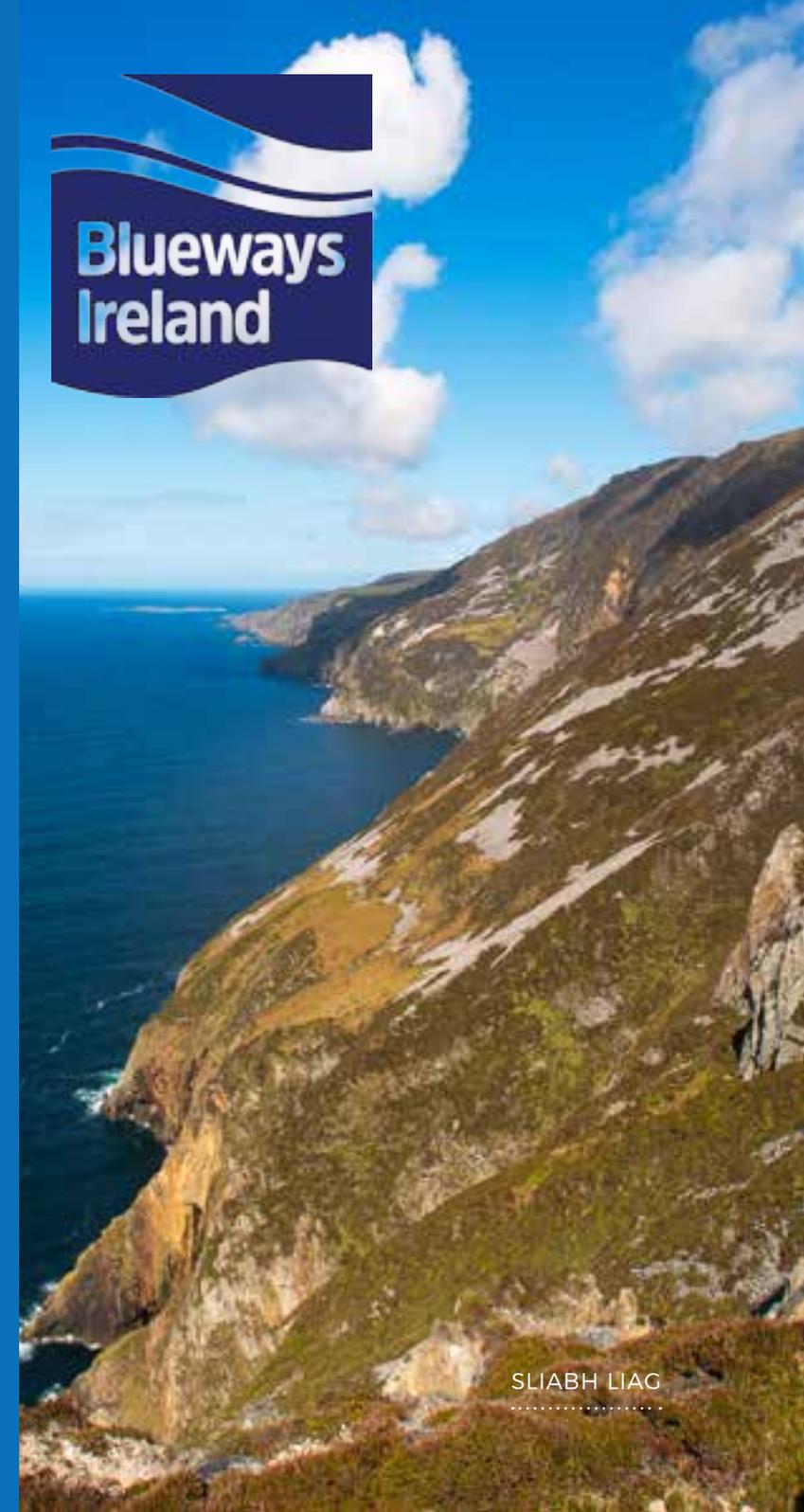
CYCLING

EuroVelo is a well established cycle route network offering sustainable Trans-European network of long distance cycle routes. EuroVelo is managed by the European Cyclists' Federation who seek to ensure all routes are of a high standard in terms of design, signage and safety. They also carry out a range of marketing and promotional activities to promote cycling across Europe. Donegal has been identified as a key location for the development of cycling routes. Donegal County Council is working in conjunction with Sligo County Council and Mayo County Council and partners in the UK, France, Spain and Portugal to further develop opportunities on the EuroVelo route.

BLUEWAY DEVELOPMENT

Blueways Ireland is a tourism initiative that focuses on developing non-motorised recreational and outdoor pursuits along the coastal and waterway areas of Ireland. Blueways are similar to Greenways in terms of the type of activities that are available including for example cycling, walking, kayaking etc. but are located close to waterways along the coast and inland along canals, rivers and lakes.

According to the Report on the Blueway Pilot 2017 a "Blueway is more than a water trail; it is a distinct place where the marine environment and community partnership collaborate to enhance the visitor's experience and support the local economy". The lead agency for the development of Blueways is Waterways Ireland and a number of locations have been piloted under the Blueway scheme including Mayo and Galway. There are opportunities for Donegal to support the development of Blueways in various locations county wide in collaboration with Waterways Ireland. Creating a Blueway would require the introduction of new facilities for visitors e.g. toilets, rest areas, identification and promotion of attractions along the Blueway, infrastructure for example a canoe trail and the introduction of a range of activities such as boating, angling, walking, cycling and wildlife watching.



9.0 THE MARINE TOURISM SECTOR

Currently the marine sector in Donegal employs approximately 3,200 full and part time people in fishing/farming, processing and service activities contributing €190 million annually to income in the county. Marine and water-based leisure activities are estimated to create an additional €25 million in Marine Tourism revenue and employ around 650 people.

County Donegal has a well established marine tradition, culture and heritage. The Marine sector in general has made a significant contribution to Donegal in terms of the economy over the years. The commercial marine sector in Donegal is varied and incorporates everything from catching, fish farming, processing of fish from a commercial fishing perspective. The fishing fleet in Killybegs and Donegal is significant with approximately 261 vessels and Donegal accounts for 25% - 40% of fishing production and product output in Ireland.

The natural marine resources in the county make it ideal for the expansion of marine leisure activities. The Donegal mainland coastline

is one of the longest in Ireland at 1,134km and constitutes over 17% of the national total. The Donegal coastline lends itself to being an ideal water-based tourism destination, a means of diversification in the marine sector to compliment commercial fishing activity.

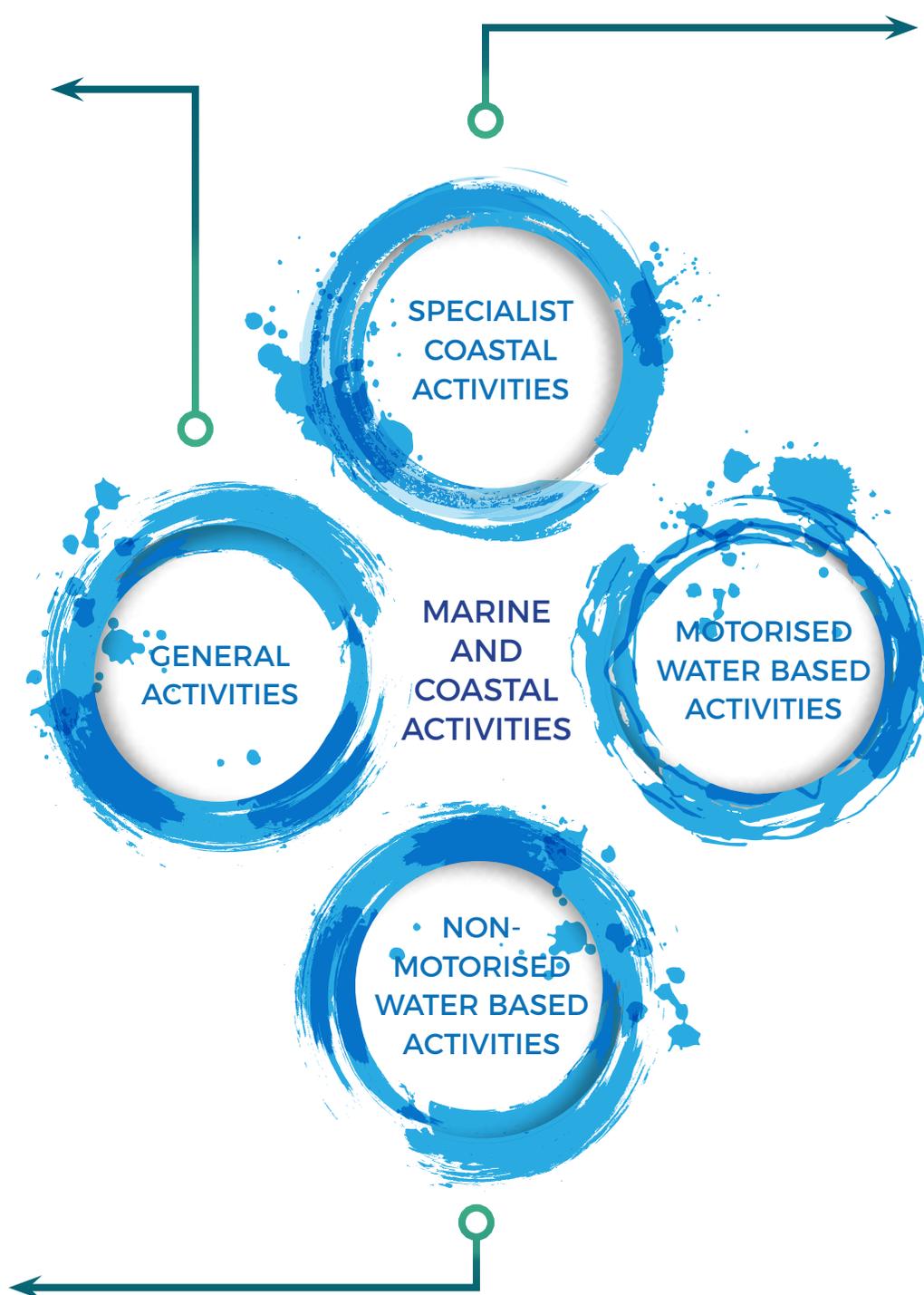
This Strategy provides for an analysis of Marine Tourism in County Donegal to consider the future of water-based tourism in the County which will take place at a critical time for the future of Marine Tourism in light of the launch of Fáilte Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way.

There is a rich, active and renewed interest in maritime heritage and history throughout Donegal as a consequence of its rich and impressive range of maritime heritage attractions and offerings. Collective marketing and complementary product development will create a useful platform on which to develop the sector.

Donegal offers a wealth of coastal and marine tourism activities that enrich our tourism offering in coastal areas.



- Coastal and waterside walking / exploring
 - Swimming and beach activities
 - Coastal drives, the Wild Atlantic Way, Maritime Heritage Trail
 - Scenic boat trips / visits
 - Ferry trips e.g. to Arranmore
 - Cruise ship visits (as passengers and local visitors)
 - Going to visitor centres e.g. Greencastle Maritime Museum
 - Maritime-related events, regattas and festivals e.g. Greencastle Regatta, Foyle Sailability Regatta, Sea Sessions, Swell Festival
 - Marine health & beauty therapy e.g. seaweed treatments & spas.
-
- Sail boarding/Windsurfing
 - Sea kayaking and Paddle boarding
 - River canoeing and kayaking
 - Keelboat sailing/cruising/racing
 - Dinghy sailing/cruising/racing
 - Rowing and Gig racing
 - Rafting and Surfing
 - Kite surfing/boarding
 - Shore access sub aqua diving
 - Snorkelling



- Sea stack and cliff climbing
 - Coastal horse riding
 - Kite boarding at beaches
 - Shore based sea angling
 - Game angling (bank or wading), Coarse fishing
 - Marine archaeology e.g. marine wreck diving
 - Wildlife and Bird watching
-
- Boat trips - wildlife watching e.g. dolphins, adventure, rib trips etc.
 - Boat access - sub aqua diving
 - Angling Charter Boats
 - Waterskiing and wakeboarding
 - Jet skiing
 - Power boating and Power Boating

FIGURE 1: MARINE AND COASTAL ACTIVITIES

BLUE FLAG BEACHES

Visitors to Donegal are spoiled for choice when it comes to the range, extent and access to beautiful clean beaches. The Tourism Strategy will include provisions in the action plan to maximise the potential of promoting Donegal beaches as among the cleanest, safest and most beautiful in the world.

DESIGNATED BATHING AREAS

The Designated Bathing Water Regulations applies to beaches and bathing areas where 'a large number of people are expected to bathe' and provides for the identification, monitoring, classification and management of those waters and the provision of information to the public. Donegal County Council has 21 of the 136 Designated Bathing Areas (DBAs) nationally. With 15% of such areas, Donegal is by far the lead Local Authority (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: THE DESIGNATED BATHING AREAS IN IRELAND IN 2016:



FIVE FINGER STRAND, INISHOWEN

BEACH PROMOTION INITIATIVES

Of the 21 Designated Bathing Areas in Donegal tested for water quality, a number receive additional management, adhering to strict promotional initiatives such as Blue Flag or Green Coast awards. Figure 3 details these beaches and their promotional initiatives. Designated, Blue Flag and Green Coast beaches all must meet the same excellent water quality standard.

GREEN COAST BEACHES

An Taisce is responsible for the operation of the Green Coast and Blue Flag programmes in Ireland on behalf of the Foundation of Environmental Education. The aim of the Green Coast Award is to recognise beaches of high environmental quality. To achieve the award, beaches must have 'excellent' water quality and have effective and appropriate management to ensure the protection of the natural environment. These beaches are often more remote and will not necessarily require the same infrastructure as Blue Flag standard beaches.

MARRAM GRASS TRANSPLANTING

A section of the Carrickfinn beach dune which had suffered erosion and subsequent blow-out was replanted with marram grass in February 2017 assisted on the day by up to 30 volunteers. In time, it is hoped that the work undertaken will assist the dune to recover and rebuild. This is a very important collaborative initiative taken by Donegal County Council, An Taisce and community volunteers who seek the preservation of our beaches. Such positive approaches to protecting our valued beaches, for local communities and for visitors into the future are an integral and important part of future strategy.

FIGURE 3: THE DESIGNATED BATHING AREAS, BLUE FLAG AND GREEN COAST BEACHES IN DONEGAL IN 2016

BALLYHERNAN	○		○
BUNDORAN	○	○	
CARRICKFINN	○	○	
CULDAFF	○	○	
DOOEY	○		○
DOWNINGS	○	○	
DRUMATINNEY	○		○
FINTRA	○	○	
KILLAHOEY	○	○	
LADYS BAY	○		
LISFANNON	○	○	
MAGHEROARTY	○		○
MARBLE HILL	○	○	
MURVAGH	○	○	
NARIN, PORTNOO	○	○	
PORT ARTHUR	○		○
PORT NA BLAGH	○		
PORTSALON	○	○	
RATHMULLAN	○		
ROSSNOWLAGH	○	○	
STROOVE	○	○	

BEACH | DESIGNATED BATHING AREA ○
 BLUE FLAG ○ | GREEN COAST ○

BLUE FLAG BEACHES

The Blue Flag is one of the world's most recognised eco-labels. The programme aims to raise environmental awareness and promote sound environmental practices and behaviours among beach users. There are 4154 Blue Flag beaches in 49 countries across the world. Donegal currently has 13 of Ireland's 79 Blue Flag beaches in Ireland; the joint highest held by a Local Authority in 2016. To achieve the flag an application is made to An Taisce, scrutinised by a National Jury and, if appropriate, awarded by an International Jury (see Figure 4).

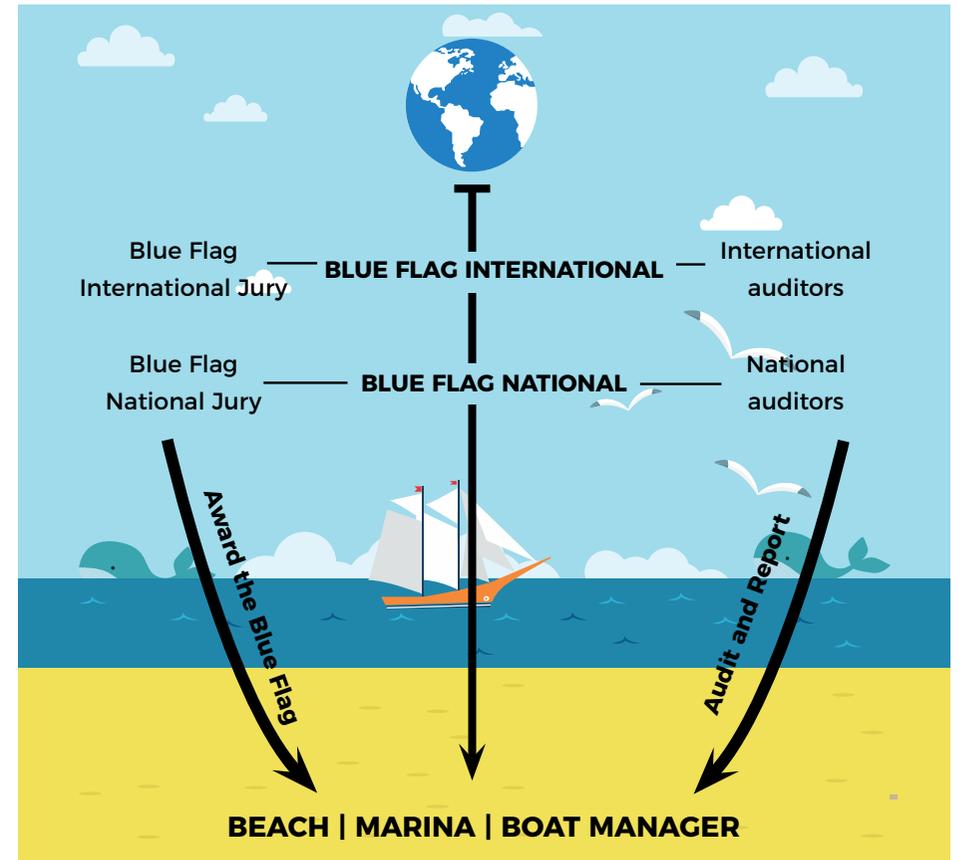
The Blue Flags are judged on 33 criteria based on Environmental education activities, water quality, ecosystems, water safety, codes of conducts, etc. The TripAdvisor table of Travellers' Choice award-winners are determined based on traveller reviews. These are subjective and the awards influenced by numbers of reviews received.

OUR ISLANDS

The islands off the coast of County Donegal are a major asset to Marine Tourism. Our islands are home to some of the most beautiful and varied coastal landscapes in the world. The vibrant heritage, culture and Irish language traditions of our islands are what make the island visitor experience truly unique. Development and marketing of the Donegal islands forms a key part of the overall Tourism Strategy.



FIGURE 4: BLUE FLAG AWARDING STRUCTURE



FEDETON

Donegal County Council is a member of FEDETON (Federation of European Nautical Tourism Destinations). Created in 2009, the FEDETON is an initiative of the French and Spanish networks of Nautical Destinations. Together FEDETON covers 20 regions, 300 municipalities and over 2,500 companies along the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, Channel, Northern Sea and overseas. The model for these networks aims at improving the competitiveness and sustainability of Tourism in marine and coastal destinations and responds to the challenge arising from the fragmentation of the tourism value chain.

FEDETON promotes the collaboration among stakeholders at destination level in order to realise their potential as nautical destinations, develop specialised products and services, and make them available to the public in general and particularly to actual and potential tourists. FEDETON's national and local networks including Donegal fulfil that role in support of nautical tourism. The General Assembly meeting of FEDETON took place in Donegal Town in July 2016.



EUROPEAN FEDERATION
OF NAUTICAL TOURISM
DESTINATIONS

“

FEDETON COVERS
20 REGIONS, 300
MUNICIPALITIES
AND OVER 2,500
COMPANIES
ALONG THE
MEDITERRANEAN
AND ATLANTIC
COASTS, CHANNEL,
NORTHERN SEA
AND OVERSEAS.

”





ANGLING

Angling is an important tourism activity for Donegal. Sea angling, game, coarse and pike are just a few of the many types of angling opportunities available in Donegal set in wonderful scenic locations both in coastal regions and inland. There is potential for economic growth in the angling sector. Angling has particular importance for rural areas both in coastal and inland regions as it brings significant local economic value to the area. Anglers require accommodation, food and entertainment, boat hire and equipment, an estimated value of over €105 million to the overall economy in Ireland. Working with organisations such as the Donegal Angling Tourism Alliance (DATA), Inland Fisheries Ireland, Bord Iascaigh Mhara and the Loughs Agency among others will help deliver on an integral angling strategy for Donegal. The World Sea Angling Championships took place in Donegal and Sligo collectively in 2015 and it would be of benefit to bid for other major angling events in the future.

DIVING

Diving is becoming an increasingly popular marine activity in Donegal and recognition of the wide range of world-class diving opportunities is gradually reaching dive enthusiasts worldwide. The offering includes the magnificent ship wreck diving off our coast and the marine eco-systems in locations such as St. John's Point which are attracting divers of all skill levels and experience from around the world. Donegal Tourism Ltd attended the promotional dive show DIVE 2016 at the NEC in Birmingham where Donegal was promoted at a dedicated 'Dive into Donegal' stand. Interest in diving in Donegal was phenomenal at this event. Plans to continue to develop infrastructure and marketing activities in relation to diving are underway, while at the same time being mindful of the delicate nature of our dive locations and the need to conserve and protect them.

CRUISE TOURISM

Cruise Tourism in Donegal has grown significantly in the last number of years with Killybegs Harbour being the main port taking the lead in this initiative. Cruise tourism figures have increased in recent years. Two major cruise ships have been confirmed to visit Killybegs in 2018. These are the MS Queen Elizabeth with 2,048 passengers and

MS Queen Victoria with 1,988 passengers. Cruise tourism passenger numbers have increased in the last number of years as shown in the following table:

year	passenger numbers
2013	5760
2014	6037
2015	6319
2016	7935

Greencastle is now developing its cruise offering looking towards a collaborative approach to marketing s a Cruise Destination of Excellence. Cruise tourism is an area of marine tourism that has great potential for the future.

Projects such as MalinWaters seek to develop cruise tourism by a collaborative approach to marketing including working with partners in Sligo, Donegal, Northern Ireland and Scotland to promote the MalinWaters regions as new

cruise destinations to cruise operators who are experiencing high demand for new itineraries.

There is great potential to develop links with Scandinavia and further afield promoting Donegal as an exciting new addition to any cruise itinerary. Luxury cruise tourism and super yachts are lucrative areas of cruise tourism currently being researched. Donegal County Council is now a member of the Cruise Ireland which seeks to develop and promote all aspects of cruise tourism on the island of Ireland.

ALL-IRELAND ROWING CHAMPIONSHIPS, BALLYSHANNON



ROWING

Rowing was a sector that had declined in previous years, however is now seeing a significant growth in the number of rowing clubs being created and revived county wide. Rowing is an important marine activity and Donegal and can deliver both benefits for tourism and the local community in terms of health and wellbeing and social inclusion. The All Ireland Coastal Rowing Championships have chosen Donegal as their venue for 2016 and 2017. This shows that Donegal has the necessary infrastructure and facilities to host such an important event for the Irish Rowing Federation, but improvements can be made. Participants and spectators at this event provided feedback to say that Donegal was a fantastic place from a tourism perspective; the people were warm and welcoming. Donegal can bid for major marine sporting events such as this in the future with good success.

SAILING AND BOATING

Donegal County Council has been involved in sailing and boating tourism for a number of years. Primarily the Sail West project, which Donegal County Council led and launched in 2010 has delivered a significant improvement to sailing and boating tourism in Donegal with provision of infrastructure in several key locations. The Sail West project delivered the MalinWaters brand and the partnership consortium that originally made up Sail West is going from strength to strength. The Cool Route project, led by CIT (Cork Institute of Technology) in which Donegal County Council is a partner also seeks to develop sailing from Cork further north to Norway and the Faroe Islands. There is still much work to be done in the sailing and boating sector in Donegal, as a priority there is still a need for capital works and infrastructure improvements to continue to seamlessly link the necklace of marinas, pontoons and moorings along the coast of Donegal.

DONEGAL TOURISM STRATEGY 2017 - 2020



PORTNOO, DONEGAL

SURFING

Surfing in Donegal has become one of the fastest growing leisure sports of the past number of years with hundreds of surfers converging on the county on a weekly basis to experience the famous Atlantic waves along golden beaches and reefs that the county has to offer. It continues to grow in popularity and has helped reduce seasonality in Donegal as it is an all year round activity enjoyed by surfers from around the world. While most of our visiting surfers would be “weekend warriors” making their way west from the capital or north in search of the perfect barrel, a number have made their home here, be it in the Bundoran, Rossnowlagh, Dunfanaghy or Portnoo areas.

Bundoran in the south of the County still remains Ireland’s Surf Capital with hundreds of groups and individuals flocking to the seaside town weekly to either learn to surf or improve their existing skills. Tullan Strand which was voted Red Bull’s “number one beginner beach in Ireland” in 2016 is a very popular destination. For the more experienced, the “Peak”

which hosted the European Surfing Championships in 2011 presents a more challenging experience. The Sea Sessions Surf and Music Festival which is held in Bundoran is an important event in the surf calendar. Bundoran attracts many surf professionals and last year 3 times ASP World Champion, Mick Fanning, stopped in Bundoran and included footage of the county in “Mick Fanning’s Irish Crossroads” which has amassed over 150,000 views on You Tube and almost half a million views on Facebook.

KAYAKING, SUP, COASTEERING AND OTHER MARINE ACTIVITIES

In addition to the aforementioned marine activities, Donegal has a wide range of other activities to offer such as kayaking, SUP (Stand Up Paddle boarding), coasteering, canoeing, banana boating and much more. Positioning Donegal with its location on the Wild Atlantic Way as a destination that offers something for everyone in terms of marine activities will be an important element of our tourism strategy going forward.



SURFING AT ROSSNOWLAGH



10.0 EDUCATION

Investment in educating people and developing innovative new training programmes to increase skill levels in the Tourism sector will lead to sustainable and competitive growth when applied correctly. Tourism is now developing as a year round employer which highlights the need to increase the skills and development training necessary to support same. The work of the Letterkenny Institute of Technology at both its Letterkenny campus and its dedicated Killybegs School of Tourism is greatly appreciated and is critical to the industry as it prepares for growth. The tourism sector requires skilled, qualified employees who are professional and service minded, ideally speaking some foreign languages. There is also a need for additional motivated and innovative entrepreneurs who can bring new ideas and new approaches to areas such as digital marketing in the tourism sector. Local enterprise, private sector companies, stakeholders and administrators must work together to see real and lasting success in tourism.

11.0 THE GAELTACHT

A key objective of the Údarás na Gaeltachta Strategic Plan is to 'stimulate the development of tourism as a driver of economic development in the Gaeltacht'. The Donegal Gaeltacht is the largest of the seven Gaeltacht areas in the country covering a third of the area of the County with a significant portion of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Irish is the most ancient written language in Western Europe, and is the everyday speaking language of the Donegal Gaeltacht. For visitors, it is a unique experience to hear this ancient language being spoken by the locals. The Donegal Gaeltacht contains a population of 23,783, a quarter of the total Gaeltacht population in Ireland. While language is the foremost uniquely defining feature of this area, the Gaeltacht also maintains a rich social and cultural heritage.

The geographical extent of the Gaeltacht area includes the 6 inhabited islands of Árainn Mhór, Toraigh, Inis Bó Finne, Inis Fraoigh, Oileán an Bhráighe, agus Gabhla. (Aranmore, Tory, Inishboffin, Inishfree Upper, Island Roy and Gola.) These islands support a total population of 711 inhabitants and along with the mainland Gaeltacht are of great social, economic and environmental interest and are of significant cultural value to the County, the Region and the State. Signage in the Gaeltacht is marked using Irish Place-Names.

The Gaeltacht has many assets such as its extraordinary cultural resources, however its location within areas of outstanding beauty in Donegal have led to the realisation that the Gaeltacht has extensive tourism potential, but it also faces many cultural, infrastructural and economic challenges that must be addressed.



12.0 DONEGAL TRAILS OFFICE

The Donegal Trails Office in Donegal County Council is working on the development of paths and trails in Donegal. The Council via the Donegal Trails Office works closely with other agencies and stakeholders to maintain existing walks and to co-ordinate the development of new routes. These stakeholders include Sport Ireland Trails (formerly the National Trails Office), Fáilte Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Coillte, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly National Roads Authority), National Parks & Wildlife Services, Office of Public Works, Roinn na Gaeltachta, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Donegal Local Development Company, Inishowen Development Partnership, Comhar na nOileáin and local communities.

Donegal Paths & Trails Office collects data from visitor counters at four strategic projects in Donegal at present: Malin Head, Inch Wildfowl Reserve, Errigal and Sliabh Liag. Statistics are provided to Fáilte Ireland and Donegal Tourism for analysis. Additional visitor counters are to be fitted at some strategically located walks throughout Donegal during 2017 and 2018.

Donegal County Council plans to develop a comprehensive walks and trails app/website with detailed information on all outdoor recreational facilities in Donegal. This will be promoted through the Donegal County Council's tourism development section. Donegal County Council has an important focus on improving our existing walking infrastructure and ensuring our paths and trails are of a high standard. A number of new local walks and trails are at various stages of development in each Municipal District and form the basis of the future development of our walking infrastructure.



ROUTE MAINTENANCE

Donegal County Council has been working closely with Sport Ireland Trails Office to co-ordinate route inspections for accreditation purposes and for the provision of public liability insurance. The following trails are currently covered under the Donegal County Council's public liability insurance;

- Dungloe River Walk
- Glencolmcille Loop Walks (Lúb an Túr & Lúb Droim an Oir)
- Bealach Na Gaeltachta/Slí Dhún na nGall (Four main routes – Colmcille, Rosses, Errigal & Finn and three Islands Aran Mor, Tory and Gola)
- The Bluestack Way
- Crolley Loops (Lúb an Chlocháin Bhig, Lúb Loch na Caillí and Súlóide Cois an Ghaoith), Sliabh Liag Cosán an Oilithrigh Pilgrim Path
- Inishowen Head Loop
- Siuloid an Sean Bhothar Iarainn
- Malin Head Path
- Lúb Cheann Bhaile Cruaiche, Lúb Chroicheach Mhór
- Cope Mountain Walk
- Burtonport Old Railway Walk (Creeslough to Falcaragh Section)
- Loch Chonaill Railway Walk
- Bun na Mucaise (Lúb an Iarnród, Lúb Loch na Boll & Lúb Loch Achair) under the jurisdiction of Muckish Development Group
- Glenevin Waterfall Walk & Leenan Loop under the jurisdiction of Ballyliffin Clonmany Urris Community Development

These trails need to be maintained and kept to an acceptable standard and are regularly inspected by the National Trails Office for accreditation and qualification for insurance. Donegal Trails Office has secured funding from the Rural Recreation Grants 2016 to assist with some of these existing routes and to create some new projects.





COMMUNITY TOURISM – FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Festivals and events are an important element of the tourism offering in Donegal and provide opportunities to showcase culture, people and places, enhancing the visitor's experience of the county.

Festivals and events have a huge economic impact on local regions generating the on-site, as well as off-site spending and overnight revenue. They contribute towards supporting local jobs in the tourism sector and the business sustainability in the region. The Wild Atlantic Way brings new opportunities for the County with growing numbers of visitors travelling the route. Potential visitors often look for events happening in the area and plan their holiday activities around those events.

Since 2012, Donegal Tourism Ltd in partnership with Donegal County Council has been directly involved in working with the event organisers at grassroots level. The year of The Gathering in 2013 proved to be very successful for Donegal and resulted in an increase of small community

events taking place throughout the County, bringing additional numbers of domestic and overseas visitors to areas that would not regularly receive tourists. Building on the legacy of the Gathering, Donegal County Council together with the other Local Authorities in Ireland has been involved in the Community Tourism Diaspora Initiative – a joint partnership with IPB Insurance and Fáilte Ireland, providing financial assistance and administering the fund.

In addition, Donegal Tourism supports the community festivals to continue to deliver on the incremental overseas visitors in the coming years and encourage accommodation providers to extend their season by adding listings of local events to their accommodation packages. Donegal County Council is committed to continue its work in support of local festivals and events through the Donegal Gathering website. This website continues to attract domestic and international traffic, with over 130,000 website views, over 62,000 visitors across 122 countries in 2016 and a total of over 488,000 website visits since 2012.

EU, NATIONAL AND LOCAL FUNDED TOURISM PROJECTS

Donegal County Council is proactive in developing and participating in a wide range of projects across a variety of disciplines. Tourism projects are a key dynamic in the overall tourism strategy for Donegal. Donegal County Council is involved in a number of EU, national and local funded tourism projects that address several key aspects of the tourism sector including marine tourism, activity based tourism, geographical mapping, history and culture and much more. Accessing a number of funding streams from EU, national and local sources over the next five years will greatly assist in the achievement of the core aims and objectives set out in this strategy.



13.0 TOURISM PROGRAMME PROJECTS

MALINWATERS

The MalinWaters project is funded by 12 partners following the completion of EU funding. Membership of the MalinWaters project consortium is reviewed on an annual basis. This project aims to develop marine tourism within the shared maritime regions of North West Ireland, Northern Ireland and Western Scotland.

Website statistics from MalinWaters.com have shown a continuous increase in traffic during 2016 in comparison with previous years. Figures show over 40% increase in visitor traffic to MalinWaters.com in 2016. The MalinWaters project provided significant funding and marketing support for a number of strategic marine themed festivals and events. The MalinWaters Marketing Plan is agreed by partners on an annual basis and contains a detailed digital marketing strategy which will see the deployment of the latest digital enablers to increase MalinWaters brand awareness and increase business for tourism partners in the regions.

ASCENT

Donegal County Council is a partner in the ASCENT Project (Promoting Sustainable Access to Uplands & Natural Environments)

which aims to Apply Skills and Conserve our Environment with New Tools. It brings together Local and Environmental Authorities to collectively address the environmental challenges facing seven Areas of Natural Beauty, in five partner regions within the Northern Periphery and Arctic area of Europe. Due to increased visitor numbers, unregulated access and natural erosion these areas are experiencing degradation, loss of unique biodiversity and bio-resources.

In response, ASCENT sets out to develop an environmentally sustainable approach to access uplands and natural environments through the development of management plans and the implementation of innovative measures to restore habitats and limit further damage. ASCENT strives to explore new concepts for balancing tourism with cultural and economic interests and environmental needs; thereby promoting a sense of civic pride among communities and ensuring the long term sustainable management of Areas of Natural Beauty for future generations to come.

The main focus of Donegal's participation in the ASCENT project stems from its desire, working with the community, to establish a sustainable approach to the successful management of the ever increasing visitor numbers to Errigal as an iconic destination within Donegal.



BASKING SHARK IN MALIN WATERS

HIKING EUROPE

Hiking Europe is a public private co-operative effort supported by the European Union (COSME programme). Its main objective is to promote a transnational network of rural touristic routes structured in several hiking itineraries across Europe. The partnership gathers 8 members from 6 different EU countries: Spain (Catalonia), Italy (Emilia-Romagna), Croatia (Dubrovnik-Neretva), Ireland (Donegal), Austria and Germany. In total, this represents 1,170 km of hiking routes in 4 different EU countries.

To date project partners including Donegal County Council have completed the mapping of natural and cultural resources and have identified the list of the most relevant stakeholders in the four target regions. Donegal County Council chose the Bealach na Gaeltachta National Way. Marked ways and looped walks comprising of: Sli an Earagail, Sli na Rosann, Sli Cholmcille and Sli na Finne as well as the three island walks on Aran Mor, Tory and Gola.

Sample holiday packages from local service providers along these routes are to be marketed through the network and local stakeholders have an opportunity to include their interest / asset on the route maps by visiting Donegal County Council's website and finding Hiking Europe where you can follow the simple steps to register your interest.

WILDSEA EUROPE

Donegal County Council is a partner in the successful Wildsea Europe tourism project. Funding for this project from the EU EASME programme ended in 2016, however the partners have agreed to continue support for this project into the future. Wildsea Europe is a very successful Sustainable Tourism Route connecting European coastal destinations that host a rich marine biodiversity, unique places where tourists and visitors will be able to experience marine wildlife through water sports and outdoor activities. The Project is a European, public-private cooperation effort that is supported by the COSME programme of the European Union through the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME).

Whale watching, Snorkelling, Kayaking, Birding, Trekking, Wildsea Europe delivers great travel hints on unique adventures that can be experienced in coastal destinations allowing tourists and visitors to make responsible contact with marine species in the wild, while learning about their ecology and efforts to preserve them. The Route also offers valuable information on Europe's best coastal destinations, natural sites of interest, flag species, important habitats, as well as on-going scientific efforts and projects aimed at their conservation.

MALIN HEAD
.....



HERICOAST PROJECT

The Hericoast project supported by Interreg Europe will examine Europe's maritime and fluvial regions which exist in great diversity, yet show parallels in spatial political challenges. The Cultural heritage of these regions form an essential part of our coastal landscape, heritage which may be particularly vulnerable; exposed to spatial changes in transport, industrialisation of fisheries and use of coastal zones for tourism. This project aims to improve regional policies for heritage management in maritime and fluvial regions by facilitating policy learning and supporting exchange of experience. In this way, the regions will achieve an evidence based more successful result in informing the management and redevelopment of coastal landscapes. Regional policy instruments will be improved through new projects, improved governance and structural change. Internationally the number of visitors to cultural heritage sites is expected to increase and public access to these sites expected to improve. The partnership covers eight partners from six countries: Norway, Romania, Italy, Spain, Netherlands and Ireland. (NO, RO, ES, IT, NL, IE) and officially commenced on the 1st April 2016.

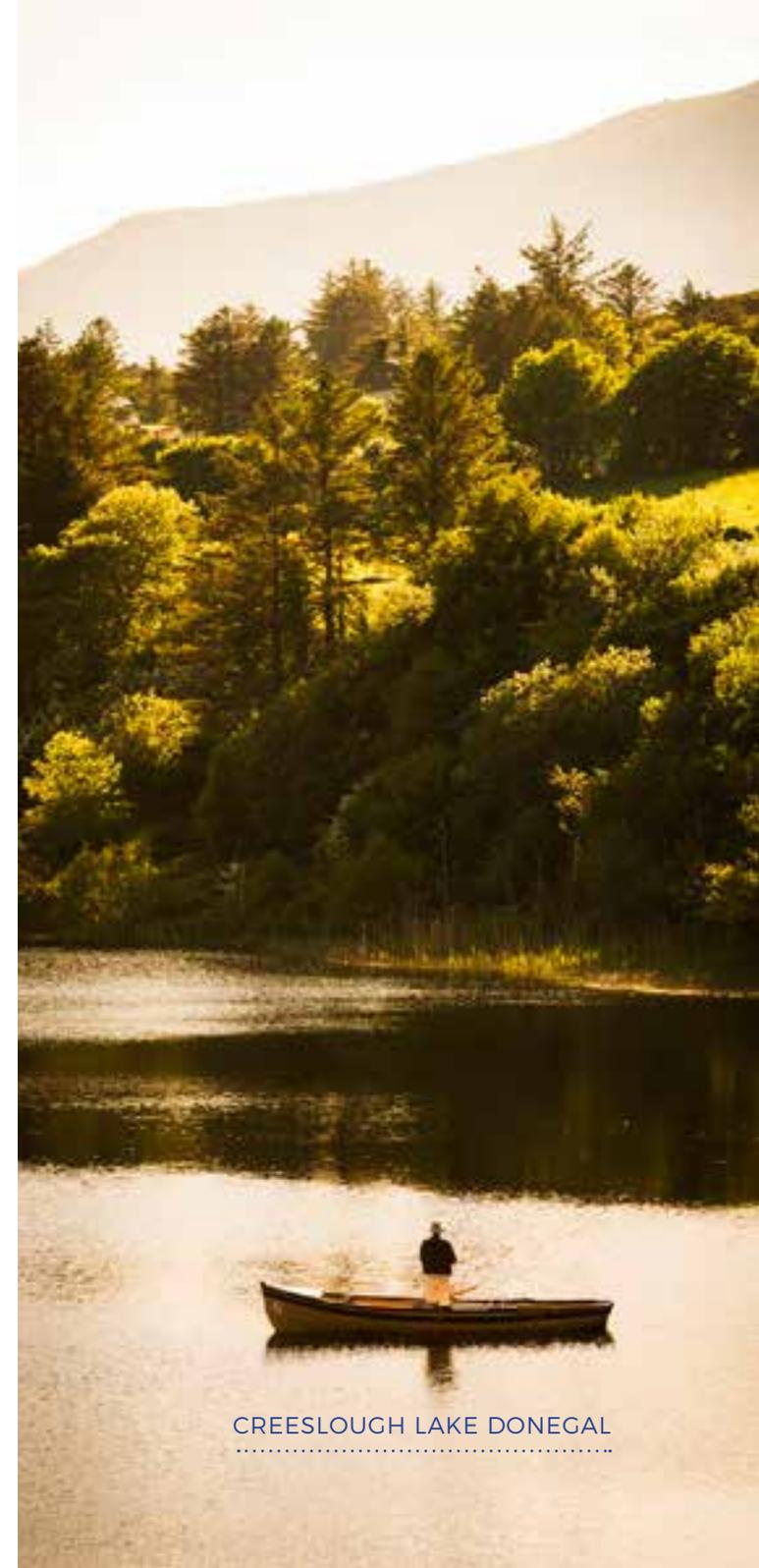
In Donegal Hericoast will examine coastal settlements in the county of unique character, and examine the built, cultural ,non-renewable, manmade and natural resources,

DONEGAL TOURISM STRATEGY 2017 - 2020

traditions and lifestyle that form an essential part of the coastal landscape, to inform and encourage growth, particularly in the tourism sector. The project will build on the County's location within the wider maritime and fluvial regions of Europe that also exists in great diversity exploring commonalities and celebrating the unique and special appeal of the area.

COOL ROUTE

The Cool Route project has an overall value of €1.26 million and is led by the Hincks Centre of Entrepreneurship Excellence in CIT (Cork Institute of Technology). It is addressing the theme of Cruising Oceans on Latitudes above 51° North- researching all aspects of developing a yacht cruising route between Cork and Northern Norway. Donegal County Council is a key partner in this marine tourism project. The consortium includes CIT, Donegal County Council, Royal Cork Yacht Club, Derry City and Strabane District Council, Blue Sea Marinas and the Glasgow Caledonian University, in Scotland. The Port of Torshavn in the Faroe Islands and the Western Norway Research Institute are also partners. The project also greatly benefits from the participation of Associate Partners - Irish Cruising Club, Irish Sailing Association, Sail Scotland and Donegal Tourism Ltd.



CREESLOUGH LAKE DONEGAL

CEDRA – DONEGAL’S ATLANTIC COASTAL TRAIL

The launch of the ‘Donegal Atlantic Coastal Trail’ project took place in Killybegs in June 2016. Funding for this project was obtained from the Department of Food, Agriculture and Marine CEDRA funds (Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas) by Donegal County Council. This project is a partnership between Donegal County Council and Údarás na Gaeltachta.

The project seeks to develop a tourism trail focused on seafood and marine leisure activities along the coast of Donegal including the islands to compliment the Wild Atlantic Way and the work done on Go Visit Donegal. The project also incorporates a very important training element, which seeks to address some of the issues relating to training and education in Donegal as outlined in this strategy.

The Tourism College in Killybegs (LYIT) has developed a bespoke training course titled ‘Marine Tourism Marketing and Seafood Fundamentals’ for those in the food and marine leisure sector to attend free of charge. A formal recognised qualification would be awarded to students on successful completion of the course.

The first course commenced in September 2016 at full capacity with 30 students and was such a success that it is now running

again from January 2017. This course is being delivered by LYIT in Killybegs and covers areas such as marketing your business on the Wild Atlantic Way, digital and offline, seafood preparation, creating packages, selling online and much more. This project also covers a range of complimentary online and offline marketing activities to promote the trail that will be linked in with the current Donegal Tourism websites such as govisitdonegal.com and malinwaters.com.

Another element in this training opportunity via CEDRA involves the introduction of a new programme of study for Transition Year students in secondary schools in Donegal combining both training and real world experience in the marine tourism and seafood sector.



BRAND BUILDING & MARKETING

Go Visit Donegal is a consumer facing brand and has achieved a high level of recognition and awareness due to marketing activities carried out to date. The continued development of the brand is of great importance to tourism in the County in conjunction with the Wild Atlantic Way. These marketing activities complement existing national and regional and international level promotions and other initiatives.

In addition, Donegal County Council has developed projects such as Donegal Gathering and the Donegal Diaspora Project that have established worldwide connections that continue to grow and expand.

2017 -2020 will see the Donegal brand awareness continue to develop and the marketing strategy will take the brand to the next level in terms of target audience reach and conversion to real visitors as agreed by all partners. A number of different marketing activities will be used in conjunction with expert marketing personnel, the shared knowledge of the Board of Directors, Associate Members and Tourism Sectoral Forum.

14.0 CONCLUSION

The development of this Tourism Strategy has highlighted many important considerations for the future of tourism in Donegal. It is clear that much work has been done and significant progress has been made over the last number of years but there is still much vital work ahead for the tourism sector.

The Tourism Strategy covers three years from 2017 - 2020. This is a living document and will be subject to regular evaluation and monitoring. The Tourism Strategy is designed to capture the tourism sector as it currently stands and to make the most informed plans possible based on the information to hand. As outside influences and changes in market trends effect the actions set out in the Tourism Strategy, it will be necessary to adapt and to update the strategy as we progress with this important work.

Overall, tourism figures in County Donegal are increasing and there is great potential to continue to maximise the opportunities presented by the Wild Atlantic Way. Donegal County Council will seek to

put in place the resources to deliver this Action Plan and to achieve the strategic objectives and overall vision with collaboration from the tourism trade.

Donegal has a lot to offer and our strengths and opportunities provide a strong motivation to continue a concentration on the Tourism Sector. There are, no doubt, challenges ahead, such as the implications of Brexit which has particular significance for County Donegal. By implementing the Action Plan set out in this Tourism Strategy and working together across a wide range of partnerships and places, we can face these challenges in a collaborative way, finding solutions to problems and turning threats into opportunities. Together we are stronger and we look forward to delivering a successful Donegal County Council Tourism Strategy over the next three years.

Appendices / Action Plan

INFRASTRUCTURE

OBJECTIVES

To work cooperatively to further develop and promote Donegal's range of world class iconic and strategic tourism products

Fanad Lighthouse - continued works to enhance visitor centre and provide parking/café

Sliabh Liag - continued works to deliver new Visitor Centre, toilet facilities, improved parking, transport management and interpretative exhibition

Malin Head - continued works to deliver toilet facilities and also a new Master Plan for the development of Malin Head

To work with projects such as ASCENT to develop a new strategy for improving paths and trails on Errigal Mountain

To support the use of digital technology in the promotion of Donegal and the Wild Atlantic Way

Improve facilities for campervans - Aire de Service facilities in locations not currently served by existing caravan/camping sites - 3 new facilities are in development and due for launch in 2017

TIMEFRAME

S- M- L

S- M- L

S- M -L

S- M- L

S- M- L

S- M- L

M- L

PARTNERS

Donegal Tourism, DCC, Fáilte Ireland, Local Development Co's, local tourism organisations, LYIT, ÚnaG, IFI, Loughs Agency

Fanad Lighthouse Community Company, Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism, Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland, Local Development Co's, local tourism organisations, ÚnaG

Sliabh Liag Community Company, Donegal Tourism, Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland, Local Development Co's, local tourism organisations, LYIT, ÚnaG, IFI

Malin Head community groups, Donegal Tourism, DCC, Fáilte Ireland, Local Development Co's, local tourism organisations, LYIT, ÚnaG, IFI

Donegal County Council, Donegal Trails Office, Ascent project consortium, community groups, Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism

Donegal County Council and Fáilte Ireland

Donegal County Council

Action Plan

INFRASTRUCTURE

OBJECTIVES

Look at requirements for tourism signage

Identify and develop new cycle and mountain biking routes

To continue to promote and protect Glenveagh National Park and its visitor experience as a centrepiece of County Donegal's environmental quality and natural biodiversity and therefore as a critical tourism product and resource for the northwest region

To develop programmes to unlock the tourism potential of our built heritage through the regeneration and reuse of historic buildings to house and host tourist attractions and experiences

To support the implementation of the service infrastructure required to develop the Wild Atlantic Way without compromising this valuable asset

To explore with local communities, the potential of Donegal's historic railway lines in providing a unique tourism experience facilitating a range of activities including walking and cycling

To continue to improve our road network across Donegal including the N56 Dungloe to Glenties, N56 Mountcharles to Inver, N56 Coolboy to Kilmacrennan, TEN -T Improvement Project, N15 McRory's Brae, Kilty Roundabout, Mullaneiran Bridge

To support Donegal Airport at Carrickfinn with a view to increasing passenger numbers

TIMEFRAME

M- L

M- L

S- M- L

S- M

S- M

M

S- M- L

M- L

PARTNERS

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit and Roads Directorate

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit and Roads Directorate, relevant stakeholders

Glenveagh National Park, OPW, Donegal Tourism LYIT, ÚnaG, Ealaín na Gaeltachta, NPWS

LYIT, ÚnaG, local tourism organisations, Local Development Co's, DCC, Heritage Forum

DCC, Fáilte Ireland, LYIT, ÚnaG, Local Development Co's

DCC, LYIT, Local Development Co's, local community organisations, ÚnaG, Donegal Sports Partnership, IFI, Loughs Agency

Donegal County Council Roads Directorate, NRDO (National Roads Design Office).

Donegal Airport, Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland

Action Plan

INFRASTRUCTURE

OBJECTIVES

Maximise the opportunities to develop our paths & trails including Greenway development, seek appropriate funding, carry out works

TIMEFRAME

M- L

PARTNERS

Donegal County Council Trails Office, Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL & CULTURAL HERITAGE

OBJECTIVES

To explore opportunities to improve and enhance the evening and night time economy of towns in the county

TIMEFRAME

M

PARTNERS

Donegal County Council, communities, local business communities, relevant agencies, local tourism organisations, ETB, Local Development Co's

To support the establishment and growth of adventure tourism providing the immersive visiting experience

S- M- L

Donegal Tourism, LYIT, ÚnaG, Local Development Co's, local tourism organisations

To develop and implement action plans to realise the tourism potential of the county's Heritage Towns and Historic Towns

S- M

DCC, Heritage Forum, Heritage Council, ÚnaG, Local Development Co's, local tourism organisations

To optimise potential of cultural and linguistic heritage as a unique visitor experience and to develop new tourism products

S- M- L

ÚnaG, Ealaín na Gaeltachta, Donegal Tourism, DCC

To add to the county's visiting experience through the development of cultural heritage attractions

S- M

Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland, Local Partnership Companies, Heritage Council

To support community based projects aimed at preserving and protecting our environment, natural & cultural heritage

S-M-L

Donegal County Council, Donegal Tourism

Action Plan

ENVIRONMENT, NATURAL & CULTURAL HERITAGE

OBJECTIVES

To support developments at the Regional Cultural Centre in Letterkenny

To support the ongoing efforts of the Tidy Towns Committees across Donegal

To look at the development of Heritage and Culture trails across Donegal, covering various themes

Examine the possibility of areas of Donegal being designated Dark Skies Reserves

Look at the 'live music' scene in Donegal and how it can be developed to deliver a traditional music experience

Promote the Donegal Gaeltacht area as a key Irish language, culture and heritage destination. Work with stakeholders to develop an Irish Language Tourism Strategy

Work with the Donegal County Museum & Archives

TIMEFRAME

S-M-L

S-M-L

S-M-L

M-L

M-L

S-M-L

S-M-L

PARTNERS

Donegal County Council

Donegal County Council

Donegal County Council

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit, relevant stakeholders and interest groups

Donegal County Council, Local Community Groups

ÚnaG, Ealaín na Gaeltachta, Donegal Tourism, DCC, Oideas Gael, Community Groups in the Gaeltacht

Donegal County Council, Donegal Museum



LOUGH ESKE, DONEGAL

Action Plan

MARINE

OBJECTIVES

To support coastal and fishing communities to develop the tourism opportunities of our maritime economy to include fishing tradition and marine tourism

Improvements to Greencastle Harbour to develop cruise tourism

Plans are ongoing to conduct a Pier Study of over 100 piers and harbours to ensure they are safe for use by visitors and leisure users

Seek funding for more improvements to marine leisure facilities in particular marinas, pontoons and moorings

Apply to Waterways Ireland to create new Blueways in Donegal, locations to be confirmed subject to environmental assessment

Seek funding and development of Donegal coastline as a diving destination, improved diving infrastructure and promotional activity

Continue to develop Donegal as a cruise destination of excellence, work with Killybegs, Greencastle and other ports to assist in marketing activities

Support and promote key marine tourism related projects e.g. MalinWaters, Cool Route, Wildsea Europe, CEDRA

Improve toilet/shower facilities at a number of key locations across the county, seek funding sources

TIMEFRAME

S- M- L

M-L

S-M-L

M-L

S-M-L

S-M-L

S-M-L

M-L

PARTNERS

Donegal County Council Marine Tourism Unit, LYIT, ÚnaG, Local Development Co's, local tourism organisations, BIM, IFI, Loughs Agency

Donegal County Council Marine Section, Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine, Cross Border Collaboration

Donegal County Council Marine Section

Donegal County Council Marine & Tourism Unit, ÚnaG, Local Development Co's, local tourism organisations, Loughs Agency

Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Donegal County Council Marine Tourism Unit

Donegal County Council Marine Tourism Unit, Fáilte Ireland, Diving SME's in Donegal

MalinWaters Partner Consortium, Donegal County Council Marine Tourism Unit, Cruise Ireland, Fáilte Ireland

Donegal County Council Marine Tourism Unit, Project Consortiums, Fáilte Ireland

Donegal County Council, local community groups

Action Plan

MARINE

OBJECTIVES

Promote good environmental management of coastal areas including beaches, encourage further attainment of Blue Flag, retain existing Blue Flag, look at Blue Marina status, support sustainable tourism protecting our marine eco-systems

Increase the number of Green Coast Awards in Donegal

Continued membership of FEDETON to influence marine tourism legislation at an EU and national level

To work with the BIM FLAG North projects to encourage the development and delivery of marine themed tourism projects in Donegal

Seek support for passenger ferry services, maintenance of existing ferry services and develop a long term ferry strategy

Look at the possibility of Donegal becoming a Whale Heritage Site

Seek to develop Donegal as a key angling destination

Promote our Donegal islands as an important tourism assets on our coastline

To promote a wide range of marine themed activities via the Go Visit Donegal, MalinWaters and Wildsea Europe websites

TIMEFRAME

M-L

S-M-L

S-M-L

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PARTNERS

Donegal County Council Water & Environment Unit, Tourism Unit, Department of Food, Agriculture and Marine

Donegal County Council Water & Environment Unit, Tourism Unit

FEDETON, Donegal County Council Marine Tourism Unit

BIM FLAG North, Donegal Tourism, Donegal County Council Marine Tourism Unit

Donegal County Council Marine Unit

Donegal County Council, World Cetacean Alliance, Local Cetacean Groups, NPWS

Donegal Angling Association, BIM, IFI, Donegal County Council, Donegal Angling Holidays, Donegal Tourism, Northern Regional Fisheries Board

Donegal County Council Marine Unit, Island community groups, stakeholder groups

Donegal County Council Marine Tourism Unit

Action Plan

EDUCATION

OBJECTIVES

Promote the existing courses and assist the development of new courses for 'guiding' in a range of themes

Work with educational bodies to improve skill levels in the tourism sector and address areas where there is a skill set shortage

To continue work with LYIT School of Tourism in Killybegs to deliver new and innovative courses for tourism, to sustain existing courses and to look at potential funding applications for further training and education projects

TIMEFRAME

M-L

S-M-L

PARTNERS

Donegal County Council, Donegal LYIT, ETB, Fáilte Ireland and other educational bodies

Donegal County Council, Donegal LYIT, ETB, Fáilte Ireland and other educational bodies

Tourism Sectoral Forum, Donegal Tourism Associate Members Tourism Trade, local tourism organisations, Donegal Tourism, DCC, Fáilte Ireland, LYIT ÚnaG, Local Development Co's, IFI, Loughs Agency

ENTERPRISE & INNOVATION

OBJECTIVES

To continue to implement the 'Food Coast - Donegal's Good Food Initiative' and 'Donegal's Atlantic Coastal Trail (CEDRA)' and to promote Donegal as an exceptional destination for food.

To develop, source funding and implement a range of EU, national and local tourism projects across a range of themes and jurisdictions

Bid for important events that impact positively on tourism to be hosted in Donegal

TIMEFRAME

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PARTNERS

Donegal County Council, Food Coast, LYIT, ÚnaG, local tourism organisations, LEO, BIM, CEDRA, Department of Food, Agriculture and the Marine

Donegal County Council all Directorates, Ernact, Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism, community groups, stakeholders relevant to projects, local tourism organisations, Local Development Co's, ÚnaG

Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism, Donegal County Council, local tourism organisations, Local Development Co's, ÚnaG

Action Plan

ENTERPRISE & INNOVATION

OBJECTIVES

Work closely with the LEO to support existing businesses and help develop start-ups

Identify destination award opportunities and maximise opportunities associated with these awards

Explore opportunities for staging major sporting events. Continue support for sporting events

Look at the collection of 'Big Data' to gather valuable statistics and information specific to a range of subjects relating to Donegal including tourism. This 'Big Data' is essential for future planning in a variety of areas

Promote Donegal as a Business Tourism Destination

To identify tourist hotspots and explore potential mechanisms to provide open access to WiFi to enhance live promotion of these locations.

To work with relevant departments to make proposals for Fáilte Ireland large and small Tourism Projects

TIMEFRAME

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PARTNERS

Donegal County Council and LEO

Donegal Tourism, Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland

Donegal Tourism, Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland

Donegal County Council Information Systems Unit, Ernact

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit

Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism, Donegal County Council, LYIT, local tourism organisations, Local Development Co's, ÚnaG

Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism

CASTLE BRIDGE BUNCRANA



Action Plan

BRANDING & MARKETING

OBJECTIVES

Promote brand 'Donegal' to a target audience with a common marketing message and uniform use of branding

Revamp the current www.govisitdonegal.com website platform to include new design, functionality and internationalisation features

Encourage tourism providers package/bundle their offers to deliver a total visitor experience

Maximise the PR potential for the county through engagement with tourism influencers, international travel writers and bloggers, develop familiarisation trips

Engage with the existing and seek new Donegal Ambassadors to help build on the county profile

Continue to grow the consumer database and target with e-mail newsletters and mail shots

Focus on internationalisation in terms of promoting brand Donegal to international audiences, tailoring marketing campaigns to regions, use of language translation

Work with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to deliver new Donegal focused campaigns including promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way

To stimulate the development of tourism as a driver of economic development in the Gaeltacht

TIMEFRAME

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PARTNERS

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit, Tourism Sector Trade Representatives

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit

Donegal County Council, Donegal Tourism

Donegal County Council, Donegal Tourism, Donegal Diaspora

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit, Tourism Sector Trade Representatives

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit

Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Donegal County Council

ÚnaG, DCC, Ealaín na Gaeltacht and other Gaeltacht Stakeholders

Action Plan

BRANDING & MARKETING

OBJECTIVES

Carry out an assessment of the accommodation sector to address capacity issues, identify locations where a lack of accommodation exists, develop a plan to improve on levels of accommodation available

To work cooperatively to enhance and promote Donegal's coastal landscape along the journey of the Wild Atlantic Way including the county's Blue Flag beaches and Green Coasts and its range of world-class iconic and strategic tourism products, such as Sliabh Liag, Fanad Lighthouse, Malin Head and Glenveagh National Park, Inch Levels, Errigal Mountain

To continue to support the implementation and promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way and to generate and sustain economic opportunity and economic development through the WAW in Donegal

To undertake programmes to market and promote Donegal as a world-class tourism destination through the Diaspora Project, Go Visit Donegal website and the Donegal Tourism brochure

Explore research and development of new technologies to enhance tourism experiences such as augmented and virtual reality

To develop, design and deliver an annual Marketing Plan incorporating targeted marketing campaigns utilising a range of marketing channels including website, social media, multi-media, 3rd party, print and PR

To support the use of digital technology in the promotion of Donegal and the Wild Atlantic Way

Direct marketing campaigns to specialist interest groups

TIMEFRAME

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PARTNERS

Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism

DCC, Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism, tourism trade, local tourism organisations, LYIT, ÚnaG, Local Development Co's

DCC, FI, Donegal Tourism, tourism trade, local tourism organisations, LYIT, ÚnaG, Local Development Co's

Donegal Tourism, Tourism Ireland, FI, DCC, LYIT, local tourism organisations, ÚnaG, Ealaín na Gaeltachta

Donegal Tourism, Donegal County Council, Fáilte Ireland

Donegal County Council Donegal Tourism Unit

Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Tourism, DCC, LYIT, ÚnaG, local tourism organisations, Local Development Co's

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit

Action Plan

BRANDING & MARKETING

OBJECTIVES

TIMEFRAME

PARTNERS

Deliver two Tourism Seminars and one Marine Tourism Seminar annually

M-L

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit

Continued communication with the trade including e-mail, networking events and direct communications

M-L

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit

Develop a closed Facebook group for the tourism industry and trade representatives to network, share ideas and inform the sector

M-L

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit

Roll out a new Communications and PR campaign

M-L

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit & Communications Unit, international, national and local media

Pursue joint marketing opportunities with other Local Authorities, both cross-border and in Ireland

S-M-L

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit, Other Local Authorities cross border and in Ireland

Update and reprint of the Donegal Tourism Brochure

S-M

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit

Increase our portfolio of digital assets

S-M-L

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit

Increase and create 'partner opportunities' for representatives from the tourism trade to participate in joint marketing activities

S-M-L

Donegal County Council Tourism Unit, Tourism Sector Trade Representatives

Work with regional tourism bodies to provide collaborative marketing support

S-M-L

Donegal Tourism Ltd, Donegal County Council Tourism Unit, Regional Tourism Bodies

Pitch Donegal area as a location for TV programmes and film location

S-M-L

Donegal Tourism Ltd, Donegal County Council Tourism Unit, Fáilte Ireland, Donegal Film Office

Action Plan

COMMUNITY TOURISM, FESTIVALS & EVENTS

OBJECTIVES

Continued maintenance of the Donegal Calendar of Events online

Promote Donegal as a destination for festivals and events

Continue to support Donegal Festivals & Events through promotion via the Go Visit Donegal and Donegal Events channels

Continue to work with the Tourism Sectoral Forum to develop and share ideas for tourism

Build the profile of current events both online and in the media (radio and TV) to highlight Donegal

TIMEFRAME

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PARTNERS

Donegal Tourism, Donegal County Council, Donegal Festivals & Events Organisers and Committees

Donegal Tourism, Donegal County Council, Donegal Festivals & Events Organisers and Committees

Donegal Tourism, Donegal County Council, Donegal Diaspora Project Donegal Festivals & Events Organisers and Committees

Tourism Sectoral Forum, Donegal County Council, Donegal Tourism

Event Organisers, Communications Office, DCC, Donegal Tourism



KILLYBEGS MARINA

Appendices / Strategy Alignment

Donegal County Council Tourism Strategy seeks to align with the following complimentary strategies, plans and reports:

- Donegal County Council 3 Year Capital Budget 2016 – 2018
- The County Development Plan 2012- 2018 (as above)
- Donegal County Council Corporate Plan 2015 to 2019
- The LECP (Local Economic Community Plan) 2016 – 2022
- Cultúr – A Strategic Vision for Cultural Services 2016 – 2020, Donegal County Council
- People, Place and Policy Growing Tourism to 2025 – Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
- Fáilte Ireland, Insights and Reports
- Tourism Ireland Marketing Plans 2017
- People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025
- Údarás na Gaeltachta, Strategic Plan 2014- 2017
- Integrated Marine Plan (IMP), ‘Harnessing Our Oceans Wealth, ‘July 2012
- Bord Iascaigh Mhara Strategy 2013- 2017 and FLAG North Programme
- Fáilte Ireland’s Wild Atlantic Way Strategy
- Further Education & Training Strategy 2014- 2019, SOLAS and DES
- Active Donegal - Strategic Plan 2011-2014
- Local Development Company Plans
- The County Donegal Heritage Plan 2014- 2019
- LYIT Strategic Plan, Our Commitment to the North West Gateway Learning Region, 2014- 2017
- Donegal ETB Education Plan 2011 – 2015
- Donegal Digital Action Plan, 2015
- Strategic Action Plan for Creative Entrepreneurship in Donegal
- Energising Irelands Rural Economy- The report of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) 2014
- National Broadband Plan, DCENR, 2012
- The County Donegal Heritage Plan 2014- 2019, County Donegal





Donegal

www.govisitdonegal.com

Test drive at: www.govisitdonegal.com

Donegal has it all



Your Wild Atlantic Way starts here



Comhairle Contae
Dhóna na nGall
Donegal County Council