

## **Developing Rural Tourism in Ireland**

### **Sport Ireland Submission**

**October 2022**

#### **Introduction**

Sport Ireland is the statutory authority tasked with the development of sport in Ireland. This includes participation in sport, high performance sport, anti-doping, coaching and the development of the Sport Ireland Campus.

The Outdoors function within Sport Ireland delivers on [Sport Ireland's policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the outdoors](#). Through the implementation of this policy, Sport Ireland supports the outdoor section by providing leadership, building capacity, supporting infrastructure development, and creating opportunities. Sport Ireland supports government departments, state agencies and local authorities in the development of national strategies and policies in outdoor recreation in rural outdoor settings.

#### **National Trails Register**

Sport Ireland maintains a National Trails Register of over 900 trails in Ireland. In its role in maintaining the national trails register, Sport Ireland provides a public liability insurance to private landowners and community trail organisations. This insurance policy supports landowners in providing access to private lands for trails in rural areas without any additional costs for insurance.

Sport Ireland, in conjunction with other stakeholders, has developed trail criteria to support the quality development of trails and ensure the high standard of trails on the register is adhered to. The criteria promote best practice and assists developers in establishing high quality trails in rural Ireland. In conjunction with the criteria, Sport Ireland delivers on education and training to trail developers, managers, and community groups.

Ireland is synonymous with its picturesque & green landscape. The significant number of trails included on the National Trails Register are attractive to both overseas and domestic tourists alike. Sport Ireland has partnered with other statutory agencies and specific interest groups to promote the use of accredited trails, along with partnering with national media outlets.

## National Outdoor Recreation Strategy

A National Outdoor Recreation Strategy is currently being developed by Government and is expected to be launched before the end of 2022.

The strategy will provide a vision and an overarching framework for the growth and development of outdoor recreation in Ireland, creating a shared approach for the many strategies, programmes, agencies, and elements in Ireland's outdoor recreation sector. The actions advancing from the strategy will provide support in the sustainable growth of outdoor recreation opportunities for landowners, communities, and tourists in rural Ireland.

## Local Sports Plans

In Summer 2018 the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport published the [National Sports Policy 2018-2027](#). The National Sports Policy provides the policy context in which Sport Ireland will operate over the next 10 years. Sport Ireland strongly endorses the National Sports Policy and, as the statutory agency responsible, will have a lead role in many of the key operational and strategic challenges contained within the Policy.

Under Action 8 of National Sports Policy 2018-2027, Sport Ireland has been given the directive to support Local Authorities in developing their Local Sports Plans. This action states:

***“We will establish, through Sport Ireland, an initiative to support Local Authorities in developing Local Sports Plans consistent with the overall vision and objectives of this National Sports Policy. The Local Plan will review needs and set out actions to increase participation locally. It will be developed and implemented in cooperation with Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs), clubs, communities, and partners within and beyond sport”***

It is the ambition of Local Sports Plans that each Local Authority will bring together the partners on the Local Community Development Committees (LCDC), the LSP and Children and Young People's Services Committees, with clubs, schools, leisure facility providers, community groups and other stakeholders to develop a locally led, nationally supported approach, which will be a key feature of the participation strategy. Alongside the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, the Local Sports Plans will not only be key to advancing outdoor recreation in every locality in Ireland but also play a significant role in developing the local community as a whole, including supporting local tourism.

## National Database

Sport Ireland is currently developing a National Database of Sport and Recreation Amenities in Ireland. The database will include up-to-date, accurate information on opportunities to be active in Ireland.

Through this project, Sport Ireland is working with Government Departments, Local Authorities, National Governing Bodies, and other state agencies to collect authoritative data on sport and recreation opportunities. The Database will facilitate national policies, provide benefit to data providers and serve information to the public, including tourists.

The Database will transform how recreational facilities are planned, funded, and managed in Ireland. The Database will provide rich data and useful tools for stakeholders to use in areas including

- visualisation & geospatial analysis,
- planning & needs evaluation,
- data sharing & collaboration,
- asset management & condition surveys,
- business intelligence & strategy,
- data management & policy requirements.

The public interface will allow members of the public and tourists to find suitable opportunities to be active through a user-friendly website and mobile app.

### **Blueways**

Sport Ireland is a member of the Blueway Partnership, an all-island body that provide strategic oversight, guidance, and the brand management of Blueways. The partnership is made up of Sport Ireland, Sport Northern Ireland, Failte Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland and Waterways Ireland.

Blueways are a network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites, based on, and closely linked with the water, together with providers facilitating access to activities and experiences. Blueways offer waterscape experiences, in, on or near the water for local communities and tourists, using lakes, canals, rivers and coastal environments to walk, cycle, swim, kayak, stand-up-paddle and engage with nature and heritage. The partnership develops resources and guides to support Blueway developers on the journey to establishing a successful Blueway.

### **Outdoor Events**

There is potential for major international and smaller scale national events to contribute to Ireland's tourism offering. Engagement between National Governing Bodies and Ireland's tourism development agencies should be encouraged, with a view to promoting visits and stays in rural areas.

Examples of this in action are the Redbull Diving Series taking place in Ireland on multiple occasions, the Enduro World Series taking place in Wicklow<sup>i</sup>, the European Mountain Bike Marathon Championships in Ballyhouras in 2014<sup>ii</sup>, the Irish Women's Open in Dromoland this year and the upcoming Ironman in Cork in 2023 among many others.

Significant potential exists to bring significant outdoor events to rural areas that might otherwise be quiet.

Should you require any further information. Please do not hesitate to contact Sport Ireland.

---

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.emeraldenduro.com/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.redbull.com/ie-en/2014-european-marathon-mtb-champs-in-ballyhoura>