



SUBMISSION BY THE DEPARTMENT OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY  
DEVELOPMENT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON TOURISM, CULTURE,  
SPORTS, ARTS AND MEDIA

ON

DEVELOPING RURAL TOURISM IN TIRELAND

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*October 2022*

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## 1. Introduction

The Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) welcomes the opportunity to submit our views to the Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media on the topic of developing rural tourism in Ireland.

Tourism, culture, arts and sports all play an important role in enhancing the lives of people living in communities right across the country. Rural areas hold much of Ireland's natural resources, biodiversity and visitor attractions and rural communities are important guardians of our heritage, culture and natural capital. Tourism is a significant employer and contributor to local economies in rural areas. DRCD welcomes any initiatives to further develop regional tourism offerings to attract additional visitors to rural parts of Ireland, and bring about further sustainable benefits to rural communities.

Outdoor activity tourism is a key growth sector worldwide and Ireland is well placed to capitalise on this trend. The development and promotion of this sector provides opportunities for employment growth in rural areas in particular.

Sport also plays a significant role in rural communities and Covid-19 highlighted that more than ever. DRCD acknowledges the benefits for health and social interactions that sports provides, and supports the consideration of diversity and the provision of age-appropriate facilities in rural sport activities, to encourage all cohorts, particularly young people, to participate.

Our language is an intrinsic aspect of our culture and our Gaeltacht areas are primarily located in rural areas, particularly in our Island and Coastal communities. We support the establishment of any measures to protect and promote the Irish language and strengthen use of the language by individuals, community, and businesses in these areas.

The content contained in this submission to the Joint Committee further outlines our views on the development of rural tourism in Ireland.

## **2. Executive summary**

### **2.1 Diversifying the rural tourism offering: attractions, activity tourism, creative tourism, screen tourism, and the night-time economy**

#### **Our Rural Future**

Our Rural Future, Ireland's rural development policy 2021 - 2025 is forward looking and ambitious and addresses both the challenges facing rural areas and the opportunities which rural economies and communities can benefit from in the coming years. It comes at a time of unique, generational change.

The policy is being implemented through more than 150 measures for delivery across Government Departments, State Agencies and Local Authorities over the lifetime of the policy. Our Rural Future is the most ambitious and transformational policy for rural development in decades and highlights the Government's commitment to rural development.

Our Rural Future seeks to ensure rural areas are vibrant and attractive for workers, families and visitors alike. In that regard, some of the actions contained in Our Rural Future which support sustainable rural tourism include continued investment in the development of natural resources such as walking trails (including cross-border initiatives), blueways and greenways; provision of support for outdoor recreation activities, for example walking, cycling, canoeing and angling; and the publication of new, dedicated strategies such as the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, a Tourism Strategy for the Gaeltacht and a Dark Skies Strategy.

Our Rural Future has a strong focus on the potential for remote working in rural areas, which represents another important offering for longer-stay visitors in particular. Our Rural Future is underpinned by the Government's objective of achieving balanced regional development and strengthened rural economies and communities. The investment afforded by the National Development Plan, together with the rollout of the National Broadband Plan, provides an unprecedented opportunity to support the progress of

diversifying the tourism offering, to benefit rural communities and make a lasting impact on rural Ireland.

### **LEADER Programme**

The LEADER Programme is a key element of Our Rural Future, and is a rural development programme co-funded by the EU, which operates a locally led, bottom-up, approach to meeting the needs of local communities and businesses. The programme supports private enterprises and community groups in rural areas. The LEADER programme forms part of Ireland's multi-annual Rural Development Programme which is co-financed by the EU and is part of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP).

The 2014-2020 LEADER programme had a total allocation of €250 million and the Transitional LEADER Programme, which came into effect from 1 April 2021 and will run to the end of 2022, has a total allocation of €70 million. This programme is delivered by 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs) in their sub-regional areas. These groups are partnerships of public and private entities from a defined geographical area. LAGs are responsible for identifying and helping to develop local projects that support the themes of Economic Development (including enterprise development and job creation), Social Inclusion and Rural Environment and sub-themes, like Rural Tourism.

The Rural Tourism sub-theme focuses on providing support for actions that have the potential to make an area more attractive for local, national and foreign visitors.

In order for tourism projects to be eligible for funding, they must be compatible with the actions outlined in the approved Local Development Strategy for the relevant LEADER area, and must comply with the Operating Rules and EU Regulations in place for the programme. The decision to approve projects, or otherwise, is a matter for the LAG that administers the programme in each LEADER area.

Currently over 5,478 projects have been approved for funding of €230.4 million. Some 1,243 projects under Rural Tourism sub theme have been approved for LEADER funding representing a value of over €39.8 million.

Some examples of Projects LEADER funded under the Rural Tourism theme are

LDS	Project Name	LEADER Grant
Cork North	Mount Hillary Holiday Pods	€36,869.07
Donegal	Napoleonic Gun Battery Rathmullan - Conservation and Restoration Works	€193,800.90
Cork West	Whiddy Island Hostel	€88,260.94
Cork South	Electric Bikes for Youghal Bike Hire	€13,617.89
Galway East	POD UMNA VILLAGE and DICKS BIKE HIRE EXPANSION WORKS	€37,477.50
Kerry	Driftwood Tearooms and Artisan Food Hub	€36,746.53
Kilkenny	Riverboat Adventures	€12,381.50
Leitrim	Tourism Access @ The Food Hub	€147,375.00
Limerick	Tourism Accommodation - Templeglantine	€30,649.50
Louth	Skypark Upgrade	€76,125.00
Sligo	Wild Roots Music and Arts Festival Sligo	€35,000.00
Tipperary	Lough Derg Gateway Experience A&D	€28,987.50
Tipperary	Fitzgerald's Open Farm	€196,737.50
Westmeath	Hidden Heartlands Water Tours	€25,500.00

Work is currently under way on developing the next LEADER programme, which is due to commence in 2023. As part of the new CAP Strategic Plan, the Government has committed significant funding to the LEADER 2023-2027 programme, bringing its allocation including the co-financing element provided by the EU up to €180m. This allocation was agreed by Government in October 2021. The CAP Strategic Plan was approved by Government on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2022.

As is the case for the current LEADER programme, the next programme will have a number of themes including a theme of Economic Development and Job Creation, this theme will encompass rural tourism. The need to support the development of the rural economy has been identified as a critical challenge in both the needs analysis carried out as part of the stakeholder engagement for the new LEADER programme and Ireland's five-year rural development policy - Our Rural Future (2021-2025).

Tourism plays a very significant role in the rural economy and it is essential that Ireland continues to develop its tourism sector in a sustainable way. Areas such as outdoor rural recreation, outdoor activities, cultural and heritage initiatives, festivals, and other events have all been identified as areas of significant potential that require investment in order to contribute to sustainable development of rural tourism.

### **Rural Regeneration and Development Fund**

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) provides funding for the development and construction of ambitious capital projects in towns and villages and rural areas across Ireland. Since the establishment of the RRDF in 2018, funding of €280 million has been approved for 191 projects worth €380 million.

The funding from the RRDF is provided to further the aims of Our Rural Future, which highlighted the need to build strongly on existing investment and to strive for even greater ambition to achieve significant and rapid progress on the objective of balanced regional development.

The projects supported by the RRDF will deliver town and village regeneration, repurpose derelict, disused or heritage buildings, deliver remote working and enterprise spaces, build or transform libraries, deliver tourism infrastructure and generally support greater activity, footfall, business and residency in rural town and villages and their hinterlands.

RRDF funding of over €118 million has been approved for projects that have a strong focus on developing tourism including projects that will better position our strong existing tourism offerings and improve infrastructure for existing tourism trails and amenities.

Examples of Tourism related projects funded under the RRDF:

Year Funding Approved	County	Project Title	Lead Party	Location	RRDF funding approved
2018	Carlow	Borris Railway Viaduct	Carlow County Council	Borris	€654,820.00
2019	Clare	The Seaworld Project	Clare County Council	Lahinch	€2,860,000.00
2019	Clare	Vandeleur Estate	Clare County Council	Kilrush	€1,725,000.00
2019	Clare	Multifunctional Performance Auditorium at Cnoc na Gaoithe Cultural Centre, Tulla	Clare County Council	Tulla	€900,000.00
2019	Clare	Loop Head Visitor Attraction	Clare County Council	Loop Head	€868,500.00
2018	Donegal	Swan Park	Donegal County Council	Buncrana	€1,728,042.00
2019	Donegal	Killybegs 2040 - Town Centre Regeneration Project	Donegal County Council	Killybegs	€3,631,758.00
2019	Donegal	Ailt an Chorráin (Burtonport)/ Oileán Árann	Donegal County Council	Burtonport, Arranmore Island	€3,089,199.00



Year Funding Approved	County	Project Title	Lead Party	Location	RRDF funding approved
		Mhór (Arranmore Island) - Harbour to Island Regeneration			
2021	Donegal	Ailt an Chorrain (Burtonport) Harbour Redevelopment Phase 2 Harbour Buildings	Donegal County Council	Burtonport	€1,854,677.00
2018	Kerry	Valentia Trans- Atlantic Cable Station	Kerry County Council	Valentia Island	€1,270,000.00
2019	Kildare	Athy/ Ernest Shackleton Project	Kildare County Council	Athy	€2,707,500.00
2018	Kilkenny	Callan Town Regeneration	Kilkenny County Council	Callan	€561,750.00
2018	Laois	Emo Court	Office of Public Works	Emo	€1,200,000.00
2018	Limerick	Limerick Greenway	Limerick City & County Council	Abbeyfeale, Newcastlewest, Rathkeale, Ardagh	€2,724,657.00
2021	Limerick	Foynes Flying Boat & Maritime	Limerick City &	Foynes	€1,500,000.00

Year Funding Approved	County	Project Title	Lead Party	Location	RRDF funding approved
		Museum - Expanded and Enhanced Museum	County Council		
2021	Monaghan	Ulster Canal Restoration, Phase 2	Waterways Ireland	Clones	€5,577,764.00
2019	Multi- County	International Mountain Biking Project	Coillte	Ballyhoura, Coolaney, Ticknock, Ballinastoe, Slieve Blooms	€10,262,900.00
2019	Multi- County	Barrow Blueway, 46km	Kildare County Council	Barrow Blueway	€5,067,941.00
2019	Multi- County	National Parks	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage - NPWS	Clare, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Mayo, Wicklow	€3,915,000.00
2021	Roscommon	Energising Boyle Town Centre and King House	Roscommon County Council	Boyle	€1,872,900.00
2019	Roscommon	Boyle Regeneration	Roscommon County Council	Boyle	€1,705,705.00

Year Funding Approved	County	Project Title	Lead Party	Location	RRDF funding approved
2018	Sligo	National Centre of Excellence for Surfing	Sligo County Council	Standhill	€615,752.00
2018	Sligo	The Yeats Trail	Sligo County Council	Yeats Trail	€500,000.00
2019	Waterford	Ireland's Global Garden - Mount Congreve Estate	Waterford City and County Council	Kilmeaden	€3,726,000.00
2019	Wexford	Wexfordia - the New Ross Tourism Transformation	Wexford County Council	New Ross	€5,560,000.00
2019	Wexford	Johnstown Castle & Gardens	Teagasc	Johnstown Castle	€658,696.00

### **Town Centre First**

Town Centre First represents a new approach to the development of our towns where local communities and local businesses can be central to reimagining their own towns and planning their own futures, including in the area of tourism.

Our town centres are a key consideration for Fáilte Ireland and are a core element of the experience of any overseas or domestic visitor. The Town Centre First Policy will support the alignment of local investment with tourism focused priorities within the town/region based on quality place-making principles.

The Night Time Economy is also central to the offering of many towns. The implementation of the Report of the Night Time Economy Taskforce notes the synergies with the Town Centre First policy, and the need for shared delivery in some areas.

Similarly, funding for Night Time Economy projects is catered for under the Town & Village Renewal Scheme to help make our towns and villages more vibrant, attractive places to live work & visit.

### **Town and Village Renewal Scheme - Marketing Measure**

In 2021 the Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS) allowed for projects to produce a marketing campaign targeted at attracting remote workers and mobile talent to their county/region; and promotion of specific town/villages to attract new customers and /or business investment.

Donegal Local Authority submitted an application to develop and execute an integrated relocation marketing campaign showcasing Donegal as the ideal location for remote working, and encouraging relocation to rural towns and villages across the county. This application was successful and received funding of €90,000. From this funding the Donegal.ie website has been expanded on to include information on all the remote working opportunities available in the county and pushed out a remote working holiday in Donegal campaign.

Building on this, in 2022 a new Marketing Measure was introduced, on a trial basis, to fund marketing campaigns targeted at attracting remote workers and mobile talent to individual counties, in line with commitments under *Our Rural Future*. Each local authority was permitted to submit one application for up to €50,000 in funding under this measure.

### Examples of Tourism related projects under TVRS:

- 2017 Carlow Borris €95,680 for the development of a tourism product
- 2018 Carlow Ardrattin €100,000 for Digital hub, Marketing and tourism info etc.

- 2020 Carlow Bennekerry €93,625 for the provision of a Tourism Information Point and the development of footpaths to connect key assets in the village to each other (currently awaiting final claim)
- 2016 Cork Blarney € 47,500 for Tourism initiative – interactive sculpture of Chieftain McCarthy
- 2019 Donegal Maghera €64,400 for the provision of a suite of innovative amenities which will promote adventure and activity tourism (pending final drawdown, ext to end Q2 2022)
- 2018 Dublin Fingal Lusk €200,000 for the development of a Tourism hub
- 2021 Project development measure for Galway Woodford €50,000 for pre-development works to develop Woodford cinema and Courthouse and surrounding area into a community/heritage/tourism amenity for the village.
- 2020ACM Laois €36,000 for the upgrade of Laois tourism signage
- 2021 Limerick Bruree €50,000 under the project development measure for a masterplan for the DeValera Museum and Bruree Heritage Centre.
- 2020ACM Roscommon Dysart €25,000 for enhancing the recreational tourism product in the area, outdoor seating, community centre enhancements, bike racks etc.
- 2019 Sligo Enniscrone €100,000 for expansion and further development of the tourism product in Enniscrone.
- 2019 Sligo Riverstown €100,000 for the upgrade of Sligo Folk Park Heritage museum.
- 2020 Waterford Aglish €68,509 for pedestrian safety measures, upgrades to the community hall and installation of finger posts and tourism and heritage signage.
- 2020 Westmeath €40,000 for the development of an App which will support self-guided tourist trails and walks in towns and villages in Westmeath (check returns if using)
- 2018 Wexford Fethard-on-sea €82,008 to develop a social enterprise in handcrafts /tourism merchandise.

## **PEACE Plus**

It is anticipated that the new PEACE Plus programme 2021 – 2027 will be launched in Autumn 2022. The combination of the PEACE and INTERREG type activities in a single programme represents the inclusion of wider economic, social and environmental activities.

The core programme area includes Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland, namely Counties Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo, however, there is flexibility to include partners or activities outside of the core Programme area, provided the benefits of the projects are significant for the programme area itself.

The new programme will provide investment of over €1 billion over the lifetime of the programme, which will provide immense opportunities and will deliver considerable investment in the region over the coming years that will have a lasting impact.

Actions supported under the Rural Regeneration and Social Inclusion thematic investment area will include the development of green infrastructure to promote active lifestyles and support rural enterprise and tourism within rural areas (including those on a cross-border basis) and the interconnection of rural and urban areas.

## **Community Services Programme**

The Department of Rural and Community Development's Community Services Programme, or CSP, is delivered nationally through over 430 community-based organisations, with a 2022 funding allocation of €48.9 million.

The programme is managed by Pobal on behalf of the Department and the aim of the CSP is to support community organisations to provide employment opportunities for specific disadvantaged individuals and to provide local social, economic and environmental services to disadvantaged communities and target groups, through a social enterprise model.

The CSP focuses on communities where public and private sector services are lacking, for example either through geographical or social isolation.

CSP funding is provided as a fixed annual co-funding contribution towards the costs of employing a specified number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions and a manager, where warranted. CSP currently provides an annual contribution of €19,033 for each FTE position and €32,000 for each manager position.

There are a vast range of community services delivered under the CSP some of which focus on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sports and Media, including

- 13 community radio stations;
- 13 community Theatre/Art Centres;
- 5 Craft services;
- 4 Equine services;
- 2 Heritage/Genealogy centres;
- 5 services delivering hostel accommodation;
- 39 sporting facilities/halls;
- 5 services delivering magazine publications/media/digital print;
- 10 services provide Tourist/Recreational Amenities; and a further
- 32 Tourist/Heritage/Exhibition Centres

The programme has national reach, with all ten tourist/recreational amenities located outside of Dublin, while all five craft services were located in the West and South West of the country. Other service types such as community radio, theatre and arts services and sports facilities are relatively evenly spread across counties.

The Government of Ireland's 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities' Strategy 2019-2024 sets out a long-term vision for community and local development and is part of a suite of policy initiatives to support not-for-profit organisations and social enterprises, alongside the Social Enterprise Policy 2019-2022.

The CSP supports the development and marketing of community based rural tourism initiatives and activities, which bring economic activity to the area.

The ten organisations providing tourist/recreational amenities include:

- Vandeleur Walled Garden Enterprises Limited in County Clare;
- Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park Limited in County Kildare;
- Castlecomer Demesne Company Ltd in County Kilkenny;
- The Outdoor Activities Hub in County Kilkenny;
- Ballyhoura Development CLG in County Limerick;
- Riverstown Enterprise Development (Sligo) Ltd;
- Tramore Development Trust in County Waterford;
- Villierstown Education & Culture Project CLG in County Waterford;
- Midlands Amenity Park Limited in County Westmeath; and
- Irish National Heritage Park T/A Wexford Heritage Trust.

The CSP contribution is not aligned to the minimum wage and does not meet the full salary cost of supported posts. The contribution must be co-funded by the organisation concerned from other sources, for example, from income received from the public use of their facilities and services. There are currently over 1,700 FTE positions supported under the CSP. It should be noted that there are a number of CSP supported organisations currently in a position to pay their staff the living wage rate of €12.90 per hour.

Following an independent review of the CSP, the programme is currently being redesigned. As part of the restructuring process, a new funding rate allocation model was designed for the CSP programme, as an alternative to the current flat rate payment model. This will provide a sustainable funding model for the CSP Programme, taking account of the earning potential of the funded organisations. The revised funding rates to apply from January 2023 under the restructured programme have not yet been finalised. The funding rate increase is subject to budgetary provision. It is anticipated that all existing organisations will transition to the new programme in January 2023 following an on-line application process which is currently open and will run to 14 October.



## **2.2 Outdoor recreation and outdoor recreation infrastructure, including sustainable outdoor- and nature-based tourism**

The outdoor recreation sector can greatly impact and enhance the rural tourism offering that is why DRCD has invested over €100m since 2016 under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme.

Project Ireland 2040 recognises *“the development of Greenways, Blueways and Peatways offer a unique alternative means for tourists and visitors to access and enjoy rural Ireland.”*

Our Rural Future recognises that *“Outdoor activity tourism is a key growth sector worldwide and Ireland is well placed to capitalise on this trend.”*

### **Outdoor Recreational Infrastructure Scheme**

The development and promotion of this sector provides opportunities for employment growth in rural areas in particular, through local businesses and entrepreneurs using the tourism assets in their area in a sustainable way to support recreational activities such as walking, cycling, canoeing and angling. There has been significant Exchequer investment in recent years in supporting the development of outdoor recreation infrastructure, including through funding for walking trails, greenways, blueways and angling infrastructure.

It is clear that appreciation of the wonderful assets available for outdoor recreation has increased since the global pandemic. Activity-based holidays are among the fastest-growing in the industry.

The Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) provides funding under *Our Rural Future* for the development of this key infrastructure in rural areas. It funds the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure as well as the necessary repair, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure in countryside areas across Ireland. ORIS was co-funded by Fáilte Ireland up until 2021.

ORIS complements larger scale investment in greenways by Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) in strategic national routes such as the *Waterford Greenway* and *Great Western*

*Greenway*. The experience from Waterford and Mayo has been extremely positive. There has been a transformative effect on many small towns along and adjacent to those Greenways.

Greenway projects funded under ORIS are of a local nature (under 20km). In addition, spurs to link local towns/ villages to national greenways are considered. ORIS provides funding under a number of different measures. The 2022 measures are:

Measure 1 (*small scale projects*) up to €30,000;

Measure 2 (*medium scale project*) up to €200,000;

Measure 3 (*large scale projects*) up to €500,000; and

Project Development Measure up to €50,000 (*Development costs for strategic large scale projects*)

This scheme helps to make use of the resources of the countryside that contribute to healthy active lifestyles. It supports the development of rural communities and job creation in the rural economy. It also supports the protection and promotion of natural assets and biodiversity.

Since the launch of the Scheme, over €100 million of funding has been approved for projects across Ireland. This includes funding of almost €14m to Coillte who have a strategic partnership with the Department of Rural and Community Development for the development of outdoor recreation facilities that Coillte provides across its recreational sites.

Coillte is the largest provider of outdoor recreation in Ireland and provides significant outdoor recreation infrastructure across its properties. Coillte manages 260 recreation sites and thousands of individual forest properties throughout the country. It also provides opportunities for businesses to operate from their facilities, for example: existing bike hire businesses at Ballyhoura (Limerick), Ticknock (Dublin) and Ballinastoe (Wicklow) and cafés in Ards, Donegal and Donadea, Kildare. This supports the local economy in these areas.

Some 260 recreational forests and 12 forest parks are being upgraded through the funding from the Department. This will result in improvements being carried out to some 3,000 kilometres of walking trails and cycleways and is a major boost to outdoor tourism and rural

communities. Coillte recorded a significant increase in visitor numbers to its Forest Parks and recreation sites over the past two years, with a doubling of visitor numbers at some of its most popular sites. This funding assists Coillte in upgrading facilities to meet the increased demand for access to these amenities.

ORIS funding supports the development of outdoor pursuits and adventure activities such as hiking/mountaineering, cycling, horse-riding, canoeing/kayaking, swimming, surfing, sailing, rock-climbing, fishing, paragliding and hang-gliding.

According to the CSO's 'Our Lives Outdoors' survey<sup>1</sup>, there has been a significant shift domestically, since the pandemic, in our behaviour and attitude to outdoor recreation. 98% reported that they liked spending time outdoors, with 62% choosing coastlines or the sea as their most visited outdoors space. Hill walking has fared most favourably among those who have taken on a new activity since the pandemic, with 26% now doing so.

ORIS supported facilities add value to the overall tourism offering, increase "dwell time" and offer increased revenue streams to guest houses, hotels, local shops and public houses. Through the multiplier effect, such facilities provide an important boost to local rural economies.

Continued investment and promotion of these amenities will benefit local communities and tourists alike. These are important attractions for domestic and overseas visitors.

### **National Outdoor Recreation Strategy**

The draft National Outdoor Recreation Strategy currently being developed by the Department in conjunction with Comhairle na Tuaithe is due to be launched before the end of the year. It will provide a vision and an overarching framework for the growth and development of outdoor recreation in Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/fp/fp-olod/pulsesurveyapril-may2022-ourlivesoutdoorsnapshotofresults/executivesummary/>

It aims to address the challenges facing the outdoor recreation sector as well as embracing the many benefits of outdoor recreation for our communities, including the mental and physical health benefits, as well as economic and social benefits.

The strategy's ambition is to increase the number of people active in the outdoors and to support a rise in physical activity, in balance with a shared responsibility to protect our landscapes, habitats and built heritage by better planning where and how we develop outdoor recreation infrastructure.

The implementation of the strategy will lead to a more strategic coordination of funding streams at a National level through the establishment of an Interdepartmental Group to ensure investment is more coordinated and impactful. It will also result in greater emphasis being placed on the management and maintenance of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure and support will continue to be provided to outdoor recreation businesses/enterprises through the local enterprise offices, local development companies and other channels.

The Strategy will also support the development of visitor management approaches for recreation sites that can be tailored for the needs of each site in order to prevent adverse impacts to the surrounding environment. It will also support the creation of guidance on the process and practices for developing outdoor recreation infrastructure sustainably to ensure a consistent, environment-centred approach.

The Strategy also sees a key role for the Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) in the strategic coordination of outdoor recreation at a county level. The LSP will be provided with a new Outdoor Recreation Position/officer who will be responsible for the establishment of the County Outdoor Recreation Committees (CORCs) made up of the various outdoor recreation stakeholders e.g. Fáilte, LDCs, Coillte etc and for the development of a County Recreation Plan. This plan will determine the focus of future investment in outdoor recreation in the county.

## **Walks Scheme**

The Walks Scheme, which is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) facilitates the development and maintenance of many of Ireland's key walking trails which are a key element of nature based tourism.

Under the scheme landholders are contracted to undertake maintenance work on National Waymarked Ways and other priority trails that traverse their lands. The landholders receive modest payments for maintenance work undertaken in line with agreed work plans.

There are currently 50 trails on the scheme, these are supported by c.2,100 landowners. The scheme is managed locally by 20 Local Development Companies (LDCs) around the country with DRCD funding Rural Recreation Officers (RROs) in these LDCs who administer the Walk Scheme.

In 2021, in light of the significant contribution of the Walks Scheme to delivering high quality trails, approval in principle was given for the addition of another 31 new trails to join the Walks Scheme. This fulfills the commitment in the Programme for Government and Our Rural Future to double the number of trails on the Scheme to 80 trails. These trails are currently in the process of joining the scheme.

## **PEACE Programme**

The Department of Rural and Community Development is an accountable Department under PEACE IV and provides funding under a number of specific objectives including supporting marginalised children and young people, projects that build positive relations with people from different communities and backgrounds and the provision of new shared spaces and services.

PEACE IV is a cross-border Programme that promotes social and economic stability in the region, notably by actions to promote cohesion between communities. The eligible area for the Programme is Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland (Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo), with funding of €270 million.

Under the Shared Spaces and Services specific objective a number of outdoor recreational facilities and infrastructure were supported and developed under the Local Authority PEACE IV Action Plans.

In addition a number of capital shared spaces were supporting and are currently under development including the outdoor recreation element of the Black Mountain Shared Space Project, outdoor sporting facilities as part of the Newforge Community Development Trust, sporting complex in Waterside Shared Village Project, Forest School Retreat and sports and physical activity facilities in the Connecting Pomeroy Project and the external events space as part of the Monaghan PEACE Campus.

The new PEACE Plus programme which will be launched in Autumn 2022 has a number of thematic investment areas which are under the Department of Rural and Community Developments remit, which will support actions/projects that relate to outdoor recreation and green infrastructure over the coming years, including Co-designed Local Community PEACE Action Plans, Reimagining Communities and Rural Regeneration and Social. The Department are currently working with the Special EU Programmes Body and relevant NI Departments, presenting at pre-application support workshops, developing guidance documents and calls for applications under the PEACE Plus Programme, which will open shortly after the launch of the programme, once approved by the Programme Monitoring Committee.

### **Local and Community Development**

The Department of Rural and Community Development has statutory responsibility for the local and community development governance structures introduced on foot of the local government reform process, the Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), the Public Participation Networks and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs). This involves supporting the operation of the LCDCs and the development and implementation of the LECPs on an ongoing basis.

LCDC have primary responsibility for co-ordinating, planning and overseeing local and community development spend. They will deliver on this primarily through the

implementation of the community elements of six-year Local Economic and Community Plans. The LECP seeks to ensure effectiveness, consistency, co-ordination and avoidance of duplication in all publicly funded local and community interventions.

The LECP is an important way to set out how Government and other stakeholders can work together to ensure that their initiatives, programmes and projects support an improved quality of life for people living and working in the county.

Consultation is an important part of the development of both the LECP framework and Implementation Plans. LECPs and its Implementation Plans can support and enable other key branches of work of the Local Authorities including Tourism and Recreation. A number of counties will specify the support and development of rural tourism in their LECPs through the delivery of strategic actions with anticipated outputs/targets for this area.

### **2.3 Developing a tourism strategy for Gaeltacht areas**

The Government is committed to publishing a 10 year policy on island development with associated three year action plans. The Department of Rural and Community Developing is progressing this work and development of the policy is ongoing. Tourism on the islands is being considered in the context of the forthcoming Islands Policy.



## **2.4 Opportunities and supports for agri-tourism in rural Ireland**

Our Rural Future acknowledges the challenges faced by the agricultural sector in rural Ireland, and supports the development of new opportunities from our natural environment including through innovation, enhancement and diversification.

While agriculture will remain a key contributor to rural economies and will be a significant source of income and of direct and indirect employment in rural areas. However, the sector will need to innovate and diversify in response to the transition to a climate neutral economy.

Agri-tourism provides an opportunity for rural areas to showcase their landscape, history and culture, and for rural businesses, farmers, producers and artisans to develop their products and services, and to connect further with the community and visitors.

Our Rural Future contains a number of agri-tourism actions, mainly for delivery by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine over the lifetime of the policy.

## **2.5 Rural tourist accommodation: standards, regulation, and challenges**

The Department of Rural and Community Development's Community Services Programme, or CSP supports community organisations to provide employment opportunities for specific disadvantaged individuals and to provide local social, economic and environmental services to disadvantaged communities and target groups, through a social enterprise model, including the provision of hostel accommodation via the following five services:

- Drimarone Development CLG in County Donegal;
- Teach Solais Fhánada/Fanad Lighthouse in County Donegal;
- Tullyarvan Mill Project in County Donegal;
- Knockatallon Development Company CLG in County Monaghan; and
- The Benwiskin Centre in County Sligo.