

10.1 INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

“It is vitally important to maintain and improve on the strength of Ireland West’s Regional identity. The diversity of the regional identities on the island of Ireland has been and will be the catalyst for the sustainable development of tourism in the future. Roscommon’s unique location in the Ireland West region along the Shannon coupled with its tradition of culture and heritage should form an integral part of the Ireland West regional identity.”¹

The main aim of this County Development Plan regarding recreation, leisure and tourism is to provide for the future wellbeing of the residents of the County by:

- Promoting the growth of economic activity and increasing employment opportunities in Tourism
- Protecting and improving the quality of the built and natural environments
- Ensuring the provision of necessary infrastructural and community services.
- Sustaining traditional rural communities and rural activities.
- Promoting a balance of development across the county, by developing a hierarchy of high quality, vibrant urban centres and clearly delineated areas of growth.
- Utilising the surrounding natural environment and natural resources, to the benefit of the County, in a managed way that does not compromise these resources.
- Providing for a vibrant, environmentally sustainable and well-managed agricultural and related enterprises, horticultural, forestry and bloodstock sectors and to support alternative enterprises, farm diversification and agri-tourism projects to ensure the continued development of sustainable rural communities.
- Encouraging the continued sustainable development of rural communities without compromising the physical, environmental, natural, cultural and heritage resources of the County.

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) places County Roscommon in the West Region, which has as its goal to promote economic activity and balanced regional development by building on the dynamic role of Galway as a gateway and expanding its influence. The RPG’s recommend the development and expansion of towns such as Ballaghaderreen, Boyle and Castlerea through effective promotion and marketing in association with larger towns, hubs and gateways. It also recommends identifying key assets and presenting or assembling a quality tourism package relying on the natural and cultural heritage of areas, such as those located along the Shannon River, enhancing hotel facilities, improving regional road access and improving awareness through marketing.

“Ireland must continue to trade on its ‘green’ image, a mark of quality, which is attractive for tourism and all investment. Protecting this environmental quality will be crucial”.²

The NSS highlights the importance of developing sectors such as tourism, enterprise, local services and other sources of off-farm employment, which will be the mainstays of a strong rural economy. Efficient agricultural, marine and natural resource sectors are also vitally important. The rural landscape is also central to Ireland’s Tourism Industry and in response to the decline in agriculture in rural areas it is proposed to support these affected communities through promoting diversification in enterprise, local services and tourism. In developing a tourism product it is important to build the following things; the central locations of the key towns at the intersection of national road and rail routes; the attractiveness of the village structure; and the natural resources of the rural areas.

The Regional Planning Guidelines 2004-2016 (RPG’s) recognise the importance of ensuring that the natural and built heritage is conserved and enhanced, and state that preservation of the quality of

¹ Submission made by the Western Regional Tourism Authority (Ireland West Tourism) on behalf of tourism interests in the region to the Tourism Policy Review Group

² National Spatial Strategy

heritage is also a major element in sustaining an identity for the region and maintaining biodiversity, educational, amenity, tourism and leisure values. They advocate the importance of encouraging a stronger tourism market; diversified farm production and encouraging large-scale developments such as Lough Key Forest Park development.

The NSS indicates that tourism potential should not be maximized at the expense of the natural assets of County Roscommon and supports the promotion and marketing of the inland waterways, walking and cycling trails, and the historic assets of the County as well as the provision of the necessary support infrastructure and access.

10.2 OPEN SPACE AND SPORTING PROVISION

It is the aim of the Planning Authority to facilitate the provision of improved amenities throughout the county and to promote the renewal and environmental improvement of neglected areas.

Open space is an important consideration in the plan making process, whether it is a regional facility; open space to serve a town; or open space which is provided as part of a residential development. Open space is important for the health and well being of the entire community and particularly youth. The main function of the County Development Plan in relation to open space is in ensuring that sufficient land is allocated for such use and that development control standards require its provision as part of new development.

The NSS sets out considerations for enhancing quality of life and an emphasis is given in this context to the quality of open spaces, public parks and amenity areas as features that can make a key contribution to a good quality of life. The Planning Authority supports the provision of high quality sports centres, public spaces and parks throughout the county in order to provide people with opportunities for outdoor recreation within relatively easy reach of where they live and work. The Planning Authority also recognises that public open spaces must be maintained and those facilities such as Loughnaneane in Roscommon Town must be retained. In addition, green belts and walks along canals, rivers and lakes should be maintained, where appropriate, for their amenity and tourist values and adequate open space and playground facilities should be provided throughout the county. In this regard the Planning Authority supports the development of clear criteria regarding the utilisation of these areas as well as correct servicing.

New urban developments must provide and maintain public open space. Existing healthy trees should be retained where possible and developers are encouraged to plant trees and hedgerows, which are native to the area.

“Roscommon Common Vision”, the County Development Board (CDB) Strategy 2002–2012 encourages the development of all sports activities and new sports facilities. This will be achieved through the Roscommon Sports Partnership Strategic Plan 2006-2011. Roscommon Common Vision focuses on the following aspects:

- Catering for a life long relationship with sport;
- Attending to the needs of high performing sports persons within the county;
- The development of a Sports Partnership and developing a Regional Sports Infrastructure Plan; and,
- The Irish Sports Council, the statutory development agency for sport in Ireland, has as an objective to increase opportunities to participate in sport at local level and to enhance access to sports and recreation for all, with the support of organisations such as local authorities.

RCC supports these initiatives with a view to ensuring that the facilities are there for those who desire to play sports, to encourage more locals to become involved in sports within the County, as well as attracting more visitors to the county.

It is vital that important green areas, open spaces, sports and other recreational facilities be identified and mapped so that they can be protected; and in order that locals and visitors alike may be made aware of them. RCC recognises that there is a need for a comprehensive open space and recreation policy incorporating policies for the provision of recreational space and facilities to meet the variety of needs that exist in the County. It is considered that sports and recreational facilities are important for enabling people to live a full and active life and these should therefore be provided in line with population growth and residential development.

In relation to providing facilities, the development contribution scheme will enable some support for the provision of public open space throughout the county.

Policy for Open Space and Sporting Provision

- Policy 303** Develop a hierarchy of multifunctional active and passive recreational spaces and facilities to serve all ages.
- Policy 304** Strengthen, extend and consolidate green belts at both strategic and local levels.
- Policy 305** Consider the community's overall need for open space provision and take this into account in relation to its zoning functions.
- Policy 306** Ensure that public open space provided as part of new development is of high quality and designed and finished to ensure its usability, security and cost efficient maintenance.
- Policy 307** Provide for the needs of young people at suitable locations through supporting youth groups, youth sports and arts activities and providing facilities to encourage the involvement of young people in activities and gatherings.

Objectives for Open Space and Sporting Provision

- Objective 309** Support the implementation of the County Play Policy in providing for and facilitating play throughout the County.
- Objective 310** Utilise standards for the provision for public open space within new residential developments to assess development applications.
- Objective 311** Implement the Council's Development Contribution Scheme as it relates to the improvement of existing recreation and leisure facilities and the funding of new recreation and leisure facilities in tandem with new developments.
- Objective 312** Ensure that fully equipped playgrounds to appropriate standards are provided within all new housing developments of in excess of 20 units.

10.3 INTEGRATED TOURISM AND RECREATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Integrated Tourism is tourism that is linked to the economic, social, cultural, natural and human structures of the region where it occurs. Integrated tourism seeks to make the most of these structures. Integrated Tourism aims to retain local ownership and control of resources and activities with maximum benefits to the area. It encourages tourism that is based on local physical, economic, social and cultural resources and local relationships so that tourist experiences are place specific. It is also sensitive to scale, which is appropriate to local circumstances and supports sustainability of resources and activities in ecological, economic and cultural terms. It encourages complementary components within tourism, between tourism and other economic and social activities and encourages local

empowerment through local participation, decision-making, control and self-confidence.³ RCC supports these aspects of integrated tourism and sustainable tourism development by facilitating greater inter-agency cohesion and better targeting of resources enabling the protection of the resources which currently attract visitors and upon which future tourism can be based.

Roscommon has a long-established tourism industry that displays integration with the natural and cultural environments as is experienced in Lough Key Forest Park, the Una Bhan Rural Tourism Co-op, the Cruachan Ai Heritage Centre and the Athleague Angling and Visitor Centre in addition to Loughnaneane Park and public facilities such as swimming pools and libraries. RCC recognises the need to build on these facilities and support niche markets for example cycling holidays, archaeological and nature tours, English language learning tours, and specialist markets such as activity holidays, environmental or cultural based tourism.

RCC supports the development of a Strategic Spatial Plan for Tourism within the County identifying the following:

- Existing and proposed tourism features,
- Existing and planned transport routes and linkages,
- Settlement hierarchy including functions relative to tourism and other economic drivers and activities, and
- Sensitive environments.

Policy for Integrated Tourism and Recreational Development

Policy 308 Provide for the sports and recreational needs of the County, by upgrading and maintaining existing facilities and providing for new facilities as required. Facilities provided should be designed with flexibility in mind so that they are multifunctional and ensure maximum usability by a variety of groups and members of local communities. Facilities should be widely accessible to ensure that sports and recreation may provide a forum for social inclusion and integration and the Council will work with sporting organisations and clubs to achieve widespread availability of facilities.

Policy 309 Ensure that recreational activities are safe places for all users and that one group of users do not enjoy public facilities at the expense of the safety of others or the quality of the environment.

Objective for Integrated Tourism and Recreational Development

Objective 313 Identify strategic locations where public open space and parks should be provided, so that they may be useable by a large proportion of the local community and so that they may facilitate the enjoyment of other amenities such as rivers, lakes, canal, picturesque landscapes, views or features of our natural heritage, or to retain areas of ecological interest and biodiversity value

Objective 314 Support the development of a Cultural Plan for the county to include arts, heritage, language and sports in order to raise awareness of the quality of life available to locals and visitors and the development of a method of profiling artists, performers, sports personalities and friends of Roscommon to promote the county at home and abroad.⁴

³ Teagasc-Integrated rural tourism development in the west of Ireland: Learning from tourists and tour organisers

⁴ County. Roscommon County Development Board's review "Roscommon Common Vision"

10.3.1 Walkways/Cycleways

An important component of an integrated tourism strategy is sustainability and the use of more sustainable forms of transport. There are a number of walking/cycling routes as well as walking clubs throughout the County. Walking Clubs include the Cloonfad Walking Group, The Suck Valley Walkers, The Boyle Curlew Walkers, The Ballaghaderreen Mountaineering and Walking Club. Walking routes include Sli na Sláinte, National Waymarked Ways including the Suck Valley Way and The Miner' Way and The Derrylahan Loop

There is a need to recognise the importance of walking and cycling in County Roscommon from a local as well as tourism perspective. RCC supports the development of tourist walks and cycle routes which consider local requirements as well as economic potential and endeavour to meet these needs on an ongoing basis. RCC recognises that improvements need to be made to walking routes throughout the county and cycle paths need to be provided along public roads where possible. Walking and cycling routes should be designed to incorporate current thinking and best practice from experience in other locations in order to create more people friendly places. Road safety for pedestrians and cyclists is an important issue in tourist areas and lower speed limits and priority over motorized transport should be provided, where appropriate.

The development of walking and cycling trails should be encouraged as well as local enterprise such as bicycle renting and walking/cycling tours. The introduction of a Walking Festival, including a programme of walks, cultural and social events, should be considered in order to attract visitors and celebrate the diverse landscape and heritage of County Roscommon.

Roscommon is justifiably renowned for walking and has some fabulous walks such as The Suck Valley Way and The Miners Way and Historical Trail which both form parts of the 31 way-marked ways which are marked through www.walkireland.ie. Failte Ireland also has a network of trails available to walkers.

However, Ireland has seen a rapid decline in the number of cycle tourists, with the number of overseas visitors in this market declining from 130,000 in the year 2000 to just 60,000 in 2005. Research has found that this is, in part, due to the lack of safe and traffic free cycling routes as well as lack of facilities for cyclists. It should be noted that Failte Ireland has a Cycling Strategy for the Western Region.

Walking Routes in County Roscommon

Slí na Sláinte is a health promotion initiative introduced in 1996 and aimed at encouraging people of all ages and abilities to walk for pleasure and good health. There are four main Slí na Sláinte trails in County Roscommon.

The Suck Valley Way is a 100km walk, which crosses the lowland farms, boglands and callows of the River Suck with their numerous lakes and drainage channels.

The Miners' Way and Historical Trail is a route, which passes north of Lough Allen, meanders through the coal mining territory of the Arigna Mountains, on to Lough Key Forest Park, Boyle and over the Curlew Mountains into Sligo.

The Derrylahan Loop is a circular walk along a series of grassy pathways, bog tracks and old boreens or 'green roads' into the heart of ancient Cloonfad.

Policy for Walking and Cycling Routes

Policy 310 Facilitate the establishment of a register of all walking and cycle routes within the county and support the preservation, protection and adding of additional walking and cycle routes, including way-marked ways

Policy 311 Facilitate the improvement and development of walkways and cycle ways throughout the county, through promotion of routes such as the Suck Valley Way and Slí na Sláinte and through the provision of new routes where appropriate. Routes should take full advantage of existing amenities such as riverbanks and lakeshores so as to facilitate their enjoyment and exploit their tourism value.

Policy 312 Facilitate the upgrading of the Sli na Sláinte walking routes throughout the county.

Policy 313 Facilitate the provision of cycle paths along public roads and in tourist areas, where appropriate.

Policy 314 Encourage walking and cycling by ensuring that a network of safe, well-marked and maintained rights-of-way, walking, cycle ways and footpaths are provided in mountainous, lowland and tourist areas and throughout the county.

Policy 315 Support and promote national programmes to develop walking and cycle routes including the Irish Trails Strategy and the Cycle Strategy for the Western Region

Policy 316 Support the investigation of the potential for off-road walking and cycling trails in the county; and for the development of linkages between existing trails and others in adjoining counties; and support national trail development policy including the Irish Trails Strategy

Cycling Routes

1. **The Kingfisher Cycle Trail** is a 300-mile waymarked cycle trail covering Roscommon, Leitrim, Cavan, Fermanagh, Monaghan and Donegal.
2. **The Green Heartlands Cycle Route** from Roscommon town to Athlone.
3. **The Táin Cycling Trail.**
4. **The Lough Ree and the Shannon Cycling Tour.**

Objective for Walking and Cycling Routes

Objective 315 Promote walking, rambling and cycling as appropriate recreational and tourism activities within the County.

Objective 316 Promote the co-operation with representative bodies, local groups and landowners in order to support in a sustainable manner the development of walking and cycle routes as a tourism based economic resource.

10.3.2 Public Swimming Pools

Swimming pools are not only an important recreational activity for locals and visitors alike but have additional health and fitness benefits. At present there are two public swimming pools in County Roscommon, one in Roscommon town, the other in Castlerea. In addition to public swimming pools, many of the larger hotels, such as the Hodson Bay Hotel in Kiltoom and the Abbey Hotel in Roscommon, now have leisure facilities including swimming pool, gym facilities, sauna, steam room, jacuzzi and various fitness classes. This offers additional choice to the paying public. The Planning Authority recognizes the benefits public swimming pools provide for the local community, particularly children, and also those provided for tourists and visitors. The Planning Authority

supports the development of new swimming pools within County Roscommon and the establishment of local swimming clubs as well the provision of swimming lessons in schools.

Policy for Public Swimming Pools

Policy 317 Support the provision of new public and private sector swimming pools in appropriate locations throughout the County.

10.3.3 Arts and Theatre

County Roscommon has a lot to offer the visitor with regard to Arts and the Theatre. There are three arts venues owned by RCC, which are either arts venues or have the arts as a core function; the Roscommon Arts Centre in Roscommon, King House in Boyle, and the Old Courthouse Theatre in Frenchpark. There are a number of other non-arts buildings throughout the county that host arts events occasionally such as Strokestown Park House and the Angling and Conference Visitor Centre in Athleague.

Each year many local communities organize events throughout County Roscommon as part of Heritage Week with the aim of building awareness of our built, natural and cultural heritage thereby encouraging its conservation and preservation⁵ as well as acting as a draw for tourists.

Annual Arts Festivals/Summer Schools

1. **The Boyle Arts Festival,**
2. **The Strokestown Poetry Festival,**
3. **The O'Carolan Harp Festival** in Keadue,
4. **The Douglas Hyde Conference** and
5. **The Douglas Hyde Summer School** in Ballaghaderreen a week-long festival of traditional Irish music including tuition in tin whistle, flute, fiddle, button accordion, banjo, concertina, sean nós singing, comhrá Gaeilge and a full programme of recitals, lectures and concerts and runs during early summer.

The County Arts Plan 2003-2009 sets out policies and objectives for the promotion of a wide variety of arts and encourages participation in the arts. Its four strategic objectives are as follows:

1. Awareness and appreciation – Promote public awareness and appreciation of the value of the arts.
2. Access – Provide access to the arts for the entire community.
3. Participation – Promote and enable participation in the arts for the entire community.
4. Professional Development – Develop the capacity and capability of the arts sector.

The Arts Plan sets out policies and objectives for the promotion of a wide variety of arts and to increase participation in the arts. The Council will support the implementation of the Arts Plan including the “percent for art schemes”, which will enable the funding of artistic enhancement of public capital projects such as roads, bridges and housing by commissioning art works for such projects or channeling funds towards the development of the Arts in the County e.g. Youth Orchestra. It is considered that all areas as they develop should have an artistic element, be it through imaginative architecture, design of the public realm or through quality landscaped open spaces for example. It is considered that all areas as they develop should have an artistic element, be it through imaginative architecture, design of the public realm or through for example quality landscaped open spaces.

Annual Community Festivals

1. **The Castlerea Festival,** and
2. **RosFest** in Roscommon town.¹

⁵ <http://www.heritageweek.ie>

Policy for Arts and Theatre

- Policy 318** Support the development of artistic tourism throughout the County including the facilitation of new festivals and other events including ‘rainy day’ events for visitors such as exhibitions, musical entertainment and theatre.
- Policy 319** Promote and nurture the arts throughout the County through supporting the implementation of objectives contained in the County Arts Plan and working with those involved in the Arts throughout the county to develop community and traditional art initiatives.
- Policy 320** Support the initiatives set out in “Roscommon Common Vision” particularly the development of a more co-coordinated and strategic approach to cultural development in the county including the integration of arts and cultural plans into operational plans for public services in the county. The development of a cultural plan for the county to include arts, sport, heritage and language as well as utilising artists, performers, sports personalities and friends of Roscommon to promote Roscommon at home and abroad.
- Policy 321** Provide for artistic elements in new and existing development by encouraging the use of the “percent for art schemes” and other initiatives.
- Policy 322** Improve arts and cultural facilities throughout County Roscommon.
- Policy 323** Foster and develop arts information networks.
- Policy 324** Promote initiatives to develop new audiences and provide access to arts for all.
- Policy 325** Promote the involvement of the wider community in the arts.
- Policy 326** Encourage the development of artists.
- Policy 327** Support arts and culture events and activities.

Objectives for Arts and Theatre

- Objective 317** Work with Fáilte Ireland, the Arts Council and other relevant bodies to promote and develop the arts and tourism sectors in Roscommon.

10.3.4 Access to recreational lands

The issue of access to recreational lands is becoming of increasing importance.

Policy regarding access to recreational facilities

- Policy 328** It is the policy of RCC to preserve and enhance the existing public rights of way to recreational areas including upland areas, lakeshores, river-bank areas and heritage sites, in accordance with the sustainable management practices and the overall amenity of these areas and where necessary to establish new ones in co-operation with landowners and the local community.

10.4 TOURISM

10.4.1 Introduction

The island of Ireland has long had an image of a less crowded and green environment, beautiful scenery, welcoming people and a distinctive and accessible heritage and culture. Tourism based upon these natural and cultural resources has in turn provided an economic and social benefit. However, there are challenges in ensuring that these natural resources, upon which tourism depends, are maintained and enhanced in the future.

Sustainable tourism provides a high quality product based on, and in harmony with, a high quality natural environment. Adverse impacts upon local communities, built heritage, landscapes, habitats and species are minimized while the economic benefits accruing to local communities are maximized. Tourism is continually evolving and the product offered must reflect this evolving market.

Nationally there has been a general increase in leisure time and expenditure in leisure, recreational and tourism-related activities. This has been accompanied by increased participation in a wider range of sport and leisure activities. County Roscommon possesses extensive natural resources and an environment of nationally significant scenic value. This, combined with its attractive towns and vibrant cultural heritage, provides a major opportunity for the development of tourism.

It is the aim of the Council to ensure that the full potential of tourism as an economic and social force is achieved in a sustainable manner with due regard to the impact on local communities and the natural environment.

The NSS identifies three broad areas:

- Established tourism areas - containing premier international tourism destinations ranging from cities such as Dublin and Galway, to the highly developed ‘tourism districts’ in parts of County Kerry and the Mid West.
- Developing tourism areas – containing high amenity areas close to the main cities and certain inland areas associated with water-based recreation where tourism is beginning to have a significant effect.
- Undeveloped tourism area – containing inland river valleys, many parts of the canal network like the Royal and Grand Canals, where significant potential for tourism based development exists but has not developed as yet.

County Roscommon contains several developing tourism areas such as Lough Key in the North and Hodson Bay in the South, as well as undeveloped tourism areas such as the Lecarrow, Boyle and Jamestown canals, and areas along the River Shannon and the River Suck. The NSS advocates the enhancement of already successful areas by building up their tourism capacity. It also promotes the development of tourist potential in undeveloped areas by encouraging strategic opportunities in tourism niches, for example new tourist centres, heritage and natural landscapes, inland waterway circuits, tourism clusters and urban generated rural recreation.

Tourism in Roscommon tends to be a relatively underdeveloped resource and relies heavily on natural resource based tourism, especially waterways and their inland location. Tourism is small-scale and based on limited and special interest markets mainly inland cruising, angling and to a lesser extent walking.⁶ The county has seen recent investment in recreational facilities with the County Council’s development of the water based activity centre at Hodson Bay and investment in the private sector in new spa and hotel accommodation developments.

The number of visitors in Ireland continues to rise with over 7.4 million overseas tourists visiting Ireland in 2006, of which 1.4 million visited the Western Region providing €469m of revenue.

⁶ Teagasc-An approach to developing tourism in rural areas: Lessons learned from a regional case study

Between 2001 and 2006, the number of overseas visitors to Roscommon has increased from 54,000 to 58,000. County Roscommon's proportion of overseas visitors to the Western Region has decreased from 4.8% to 4.1%. Despite the many attractions that the county has to offer, the number of overseas visitors in 2006 remained very low in comparison to Galway with 1,179,000 visitors or Mayo with 308,000 visitors.

Given the importance of tourism to the local economy it should be highlighted that the revenue share of the County has increased from 4.1% in 2001 to 4.5% in 2006. In addition, revenue per visitor was relatively high at €362 per visitor (Visitors to Galway spent €399 per person and to Mayo €116 in 2006).

Table 37 : Tourism Statistics for Roscommon and the Western Region (Overseas Visitors)

| Area/Year | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Roscommon | | | | | | |
| Visitors (000's) | 54 | 45 | 38 | 44 | 49 | 58 |
| % of Regional Visitors | 4.8% | 3.8% | 3.3% | 3.5% | 4.0% | 4.1% |
| Revenue (€m) | 17 | 14 | 13 | 13 | 16 | 21 |
| % Regional Revenue | 4.1% | 3.3% | 3.0% | 2.8% | 3.6% | 4.5% |
| €per visitor | 315 | 311 | 342 | 296 | 327 | 362 |
| Galway | | | | | | |
| Visitors | 997 | 970 | 951 | 1029 | 1019 | 1179 |
| Revenue | 305 | 307 | 326 | 350 | 347 | 356 |
| Mayo | | | | | | |
| Visitors | 314 | 306 | 290 | 303 | 283 | 308 |
| Revenue | 94 | 98 | 95 | 98 | 78 | 92 |
| Western Region | | | | | | |
| Visitors | 1120 | 1190 | 1159 | 1250 | 1235 | 1412 |
| Revenue | 416.2 | 419.7 | 434.2 | 460.4 | 441.1 | 469.2 |
| Visitor nights | 6302 | 6132 | 6256 | 6603 | 6345 | 6829 |
| Nights/visitor | 5.63 | 5.15 | 5.40 | 5.28 | 5.14 | 4.84 |

Note: Although Fáilte Ireland collates regional domestic visitor number/revenue data, this data is currently not collected at county level.

While the total number of visitors to the Western region in 2006 was 2.7m almost half of these, or 1.23m, were domestic visitors i.e. visitors from Ireland. Roscommon has traditionally benefited from the domestic tourism market, particularly for short visits and this market is likely to become increasingly important. The challenge for the future is to attract greater numbers to the county, provide better facilities and attractions and to foster a longer stay and greater regional and seasonal spread holiday product. Coupled with this, organizations that manage tourism need to work together with the common aim of sustainable tourism development.

Sustainable Tourism is defined as:

- socially and environmentally considerate;
- drawing on the natural beauty and character of the area;
- small in scale and developing slowly;
- supporting the local economy and employing local people;
- caring about quality;
- bringing conservation and recreation benefits; and,
- developing at a pace and scale which ensures that the assets of the area, both natural and cultural, are not diminished in the long term.

Policies for Tourism

- Policy 329** Encourage and assist development and tourist bodies in the provision of adequate recreational and tourism infrastructure as well as tourist oriented facilities in the County
- Policy 330** The Council shall also co-operate with neighbouring LA's and other agencies to promote and establish sustainable tourism initiatives in less –developed tourist destinations, particularly marginalised rural areas. Although rural tourism remains a relatively small niche in the overall tourism industry it can play a vital role for local communities including the farming community throughout the County.

Objectives for Tourism

- Objective 318** Support the sustainable increase the volume of visitors, revenue per visitor, their average length of stay and seasonal spread; whilst protecting and conserving those natural, built and cultural features that form the resources upon which the County's tourist industry is based.
- Objective 319** Advance the development of Tourism by the provision and extension of, amongst others;
- existing amenities particularly water based activities;
 - the provision of medium and long-distance walking routes in collaboration with land owners; and,
 - the provision of accommodation including self catering and local services, the enhancement of towns and villages including the increase in bed numbers, the provision of key infrastructure including parking, public facilities and access to scenic areas.
- Objective 320** Facilitate the provision of the following:
- further flagship enterprises,
 - ecologically-sensitive access to the county's lakes and rivers,
 - improved access into the county
 - the development of cycle and walking routes
 - outdoor activity-based tourism, and,
 - the encouragement of public and private investment in such facilities

Tourism encompasses two broad types: Rural Tourism and Urban Generated Tourism. Rural Tourism is based on local amenities, natural heritage and farm diversification projects to enhance the local rural economy and involves rural activities and services including accommodation facilities. Urban Generated Tourism focuses on the urban environment and includes built heritage such as; the theatre and arts; civic tours; art galleries; cultural events and festivals with accommodation; as well as amenity based tourism in an urban setting. Interconnectivity between Urban Generated Tourism and Rural Tourism, where visitors wish perhaps to stay in a rural area, but visit the urban setting or vice versa, must be accommodated. RCC acknowledge the need to facilitate Rural Tourism as well as Urban Generated Tourism within the County of Roscommon.

The NSS observes that tourism activity is often focused on areas with an otherwise weak economic base and as a result can have a positive influence on regional development. It indicates factors that drive this including:

- The tourism resource base in an area - including natural resources like climate, topography, culture entertainment facilities and shopping.
- Access - in terms of ease of and cost effective international access via ports and airports, local access through road and rail/bus networks and information about attractions and facilities.
- Visitor preferences – current preferences in holiday experiences and how this alters over time.

Key issues affecting tourism in the county are; a lack of investment; difficult access; national and international marketing and promotion of tourism in the county; and a lack of countrywide; and cross-country co-operation.⁷ Examples of initiatives which can be undertaken include; the need for there to be joint cooperation between Boyle and Carrick-on-Shannon for tourism promotion in the area; and the need to promote economic development linkages and enterprise parks etc in Boyle and Carrick-on-Shannon.

Policies for Tourism

- Policy 331** Support the promotion and marketing of tourism within the county, nationally and internationally in order to encourage increasing numbers of visitors.
- Policy 332** Encourage the development of tourism centred on culture, language and heritage.
- Policy 333** Seek the best balance between permitting developments, which facilitate the expansion of the industry and protecting the eco-systems and cultural ethos, which is uniquely attractive to visitors.

Objectives for Tourism

- Objective 321** Support and promote, with the co-operation of private landowners, public access to heritage sites and features of archaeological interest, coastal areas, mountains, rivers, lakes and other natural amenities.

10.4.2 Roscommon Tourism Strategy

Failte Ireland

Fáilte Ireland - Tourism Development Strategy 2000 – 2006 indicates that tourism in Ireland is a growing sector with earnings growing from £1,3bn in 1993, £2,5bn in 1999, and almost £4.3bn in 2005. It has identified the need to adopt a policy in relation to the carrying capacity of the most popular destinations and spreading tourism to other parts of the country. It also identifies the Environment as a key product and that there is a need for constant vigilance to protect the key assets of tourism, and in particular our scenic landscapes.

The Strategy has objectives to facilitate the development of a number of new tourism growth-poles around the country and to develop, in a sensitive way, the untapped potential of some of our least developed tourism areas. The strategy identifies opportunities for the development of the middle Shannon centering on Athlone as the hub of a comprehensive tourism development of the Shannon Corridor; development of a strongly branded “Lakeland” product; and using the assets of heritage, golf, equestrian, walking and cycling routes, ecology and waterways to develop strong centres for special interest activities and rural tourism. RCC supports the objectives of the Fáilte Ireland - Tourism Development Strategy 2000 – 2006 and subsequent strategies. The Council also recognises and supports the work done by the many agencies such as Fáilte Ireland and the Roscommon County Development Board, in promoting tourism in County Roscommon.

Roscommon County Development Board

“Roscommon Common Vision” sets an overall framework within which public bodies in the county will deliver their range of services over the next decade. A Strategic Goal for Roscommon is:

- “To develop and enhance the economic well-being in County Roscommon so as to facilitate existing and future economic growth, in line with balanced regional development.”⁸

⁷ Roscommon County Retail Strategy 2002-2008

⁸ County. Roscommon County Development Board’s review “Roscommon Common Vision”

It highlights Tourism among its key issues and indicates the need for a marketing strategy of tourism in the County. Its objective is to ensure tourism becomes a key productive sector activity through the implementation of the County Tourism Strategy. Strategic actions include:

- Implementing the Roscommon Tourism Strategy
- Developing a marketing plan for the county
- Developing a tourism labour-force recruitment network; promote and support the development of one project of scale
- Encouraging good environmental practices e.g. through the Tidy Towns Network
- Developing and maximizing the tourism potential of the Shannon River
- Investigating the potential of places of record, archaeology, and genealogy.

Roscommon County Tourism Strategy

Roscommon County Tourism Strategy 2002-2007 indicates that any Integrated Tourism Marketing Programme should include the dispersal of tourism throughout the Region away from large urban centres and the large accommodation providers. This would serve to centralise tourism in particular sectors of the market and particular geographical areas and not to discriminate against the smaller tourism and accommodation providers who may have less to offer the visitor.⁹ There may be a need to survey every small town and village in the County in terms of what they can provide for the visitor. In North Roscommon the opportunity exists to develop Lough Key and its environs as a natural amenity and major tourist attraction as well as the potential to develop a major tourism trail in the Rathcroghan area based on the untapped archaeological significance of the area. In addition in the South there is potential for angling; archaeology and tourism to be further developed along the River Shannon corridor as well as the River Suck in this area.

RCC supports the policies and actions of the County Tourism Strategy. The Council agrees that the role of Tourism is of growing importance in Roscommon, in particular, in light of the need to diversify the rural economy and to strengthen the tourism industry in accordance with National and Regional Policy and Guidance. The council supports the promotion of our tourism product and the provision for development that will allow the industry to flourish. The Council also recognizes and supports the work done by the many agencies such as Failte Ireland and RCDB in promoting tourism in County Roscommon.

Policies regarding the Tourism Strategy

- Policy 334** Support the initiatives of the Roscommon County Development Board, the Cultural Implementation Group, other agencies such as Failte Ireland, and individuals involved in promoting tourism in the county.
- Policy 335** Encourage and support increased coordination, cohesion and linkages between agencies such as Failte Ireland, Roscommon County Council and Roscommon County Development Board (RCDB)
- Policy 336** Support the Regional Tourism Authorities and other bodies that enable counties to work together on joint marketing, clustering, transport and tourism infrastructure.
- Policy 337** Promote the development of new locations offering unique attractions and experiences that respond to the market demand for “getting away from it all” and have authentic cultural experiences.

⁹ Submission made by the Western Regional Tourism Authority (Ireland West Tourism) on behalf of tourism interests in the region to the Tourism Policy Review Group

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- Policy 338** Support the establishment of a Tourism Forum in order to provide a platform for people and organisations involved in cultural activities to discuss and showcase their activities and achievements.
- Policy 339** Support the development of a marketing strategy as outlined in “Roscommon Tourism Strategy 2002-2007”.
- Policy 340** Provide a platform for revised marketing programmes by presenting ‘new features of Roscommon’ or the West to visitors, which is based on originality and builds on that which is ‘uniquely Roscommon’.
- Policy 341** Involve the community extensively in the development of tourism products for the county.
- Policy 342** Support the compilation of a new 5-year Tourism Development Strategy for County Roscommon
- Policy 343** Assure an advocacy role within our limits, for example;
1. Marketing Roscommon to its own community,
 2. New product development,
 3. Special events and festivals such as sporting, cultural and arts.
- Policy 344** Influence, facilitate and encourage tourism product development through;
- i. Attractions, events, sports and entertainment,
 - ii. Upgrading of existing properties and infrastructure by both private and public sectors,
 - iii. Working closely with Fáilte Ireland and private enterprise to create and environment for investment in new and existing tourist development.

Objective regarding the Tourism Strategy

- Objective 322** Participate in the development of a series of brochures for Roscommon, which are information rich, build on its uniqueness, and focus on aspects such as heritage, archaeology, water-based tourism etc.

10.4.3 Economic Development and Employment

The NSS identifies Roscommon town as the County Town and indicates that the County has a combination of weak and remote areas. Ballaghaderreen, Boyle, Castlerea and Strokestown are identified as ‘Urban Strengthening Opportunities’ and it is recommended that their physical attraction and heritage conservation be utilized as selling points. It also recommends that in areas of ‘Weak Urban Structure’ such as Elphin and eastern parts of the County, key assets should be identified and quality packages assembled for marketing. In ‘Weak and Remote Areas (with population decline)’ such as many rural parts of the County, including some Clár areas, new rural tourism resources and natural resource based development should be promoted.

The RPG’s recommend a focus on decentralisation, economic development, tourism in Roscommon and East Galway, which include Roscommon Town, Ballinasloe and the areas covered by the Athlone Environs Plan.

The Job Creation Strategy for Roscommon (2002-2007) indicates that there are approximately 1200 persons employed in the tourism and hospitality sectors in the County. However it has the second lowest figures for bed nights. It is an objective of this strategy to increase the market size of the Retail and Tourism sectors in County Roscommon. The county’s tourism structure and visitor share are both weak but the current development of flagship projects will help to directly increase numbers and bed

nights as well as act as a catalyst for further private investment.¹⁰ RCC supports the initiatives contained in the Job Creation Strategy (2002-2007) and recognises that new concepts to encourage private sector investment should be created through clustering, such as the Tourism Enterprise Zone in Lough Key Forest Park.

Policies in relation to Economic Development and Employment in relation to Tourism

- Policy 345** Support the provision of tourism related developments that promote the redevelopment of derelict sites. However, such development, as with all tourism proposals must be capable of being satisfactorily screened and assimilated into the landscape. It shall not be located in areas, or close to areas, where an unsatisfactory level of visually unsympathetic development has already taken place.
- Policy 346** Enhance economic development through community based tourism initiatives.
- Policy 347** Assist in opening up opportunities for job creation and promotion of small, medium and micro enterprises.
- Policy 348** Encourage growth in the tourism industry, which will contribute to future employment growth and income creation whilst ensuring balanced development and environmental sustainability throughout the County.

Objectives in relation to Economic Development and Employment in relation to Tourism

- Objective 323** Promote the provision of small business management courses for tourism service providers.

The Council will work to develop the potential for growth in sustainable Tourism in County Roscommon in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland and local communities. The County Development Plan aims to facilitate tourism wherever possible without compromising the environment or the natural and built heritage. The goal is to support skills development for the native population and other workers by facilitating home-based economic activities where appropriate, but which does not impact negatively on the quality of life in the vicinity.

Investment in infrastructure such as water and roads must be maintained in order for economic development to take place. RCC aims to provide flexible zonings within the County Development Plan and Local Area Plans in order to facilitate economic development and achieve sustainable transport patterns.

Policies in relation to Economic Development and Employment in relation to Tourism

- Policy 349** Support the marketing of a tourism package for Roscommon in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland.
- Policy 350** Identify, target and provide support to “Champions” and entrepreneurs who could drive and become involved in tourism related projects in the short, medium and long term.

Objectives in relation to Economic Development and Employment in relation to Tourism

- Objective 324** Facilitate the drafting of “How to” brochures to assist those wanting to become tourism service providers.

¹⁰ Roscommon Job Creation Strategy 2005-2007

10.4.4 Tourist Facilities and Infrastructure

County Roscommon has significant natural and cultural heritage attractions such as landscape, inland waterways and historical artifacts. The County has many tourist facilities such as fishing, boating and swimming and cultural infrastructure as well as beautiful countryside and natural amenities. Roscommon's low lying nature allows for the development of golf courses and there are three 18-hole courses in the County, in Roscommon town, Carrick-on-Shannon and Athlone, and two long established 9-hole courses at Strokestown and Castlerea. There are also 9-hole courses at Ballaghaderreen and Boyle.

Examples of other facilities within the County include those in, amongst others, Roscommon Town. These facilities include Roscommon Racecourse, which hosts one-day and two-day meetings in between May and October each year. Loughnaneane Park is a 14-acre recreational area situated northwest of Roscommon town and bordered by the ruins of Roscommon Castle, a dramatic and imposing 13th Century Norman Castle.

The Park includes a crannog known locally as the Hill o' Bones, a wildflower meadow, bird walk, lake feature, mounds, children's playground and car park. The playground is a special facility within the Park. It has been designed to cater for children up to twelve years.¹¹

Roscommon County Library has branches in Roscommon, Ballaghaderreen, Boyle, Castlerea, Strokestown and Ballyforan and provides opportunities for exhibition and readings, on a limited basis. It administers a substantial collection of Archives and Local Studies material relating to the history and heritage of the county and co-operates with a number of local and national organisations and groups to deliver a programme of events every year including Seachtain na Gaeilge, Bealtaine, Heritage Week and Science Week.¹² Libraries are an important access point to the Internet and email, which are becoming more important in the distribution of information on artists, arts events and opportunities; as well as in providing information for locals and visitors. The library also provides Internet access for all.

Roscommon Museum has a unique collection of artifacts relating to the history of the county, the town and its people. It is run by the County Historical and Archaeological Society on a voluntary basis and generally opens during the summer months. At present the museum occupies an area within Roscommon Tourist Office, which also opens during the summer months. RCC recognises the need to establish a designated County Museum, which will house the historic and archaeological artifacts of the County, facilitate access to National Museum artifacts and return them to public display in Roscommon. The Council also recognises the need to establish a permanent designated Tourist Office to be a "One-stop-shop" providing a full range of services for the visitor including accommodation listings and bookings, maps and information on the natural and built amenities of the county and places of historic interest, tour itineraries, book and local art and craft sales and exhibitions of local art. RCC support the establishment of a County Tourism body to help promote the County.

Museums Around the County

1. The **Derryglad Folk Museum** in Curraghboy, an award-winning museum with over 2,000 items on display dealing with farm and folk life in Ireland.
2. **Hell's Kitchen Museum & Bar** in Castlerea, is a Railway Museum which includes a collection of bells, lamps, shunting poles, signal equipment, staffs and station boards. It is a treasure-trove for enthusiasts and anyone interested in by-gone days.
3. The **Claypipe Visitors Centre** is located in Knockcroghery, the village famous for over 250 years for the production of the tobacco clay pipe, or duidin.

Roscommon Abbey is a 13th Century Dominican Priory ruin and the burial place of the last High King of Ireland, Phelim O'Connor.¹

¹¹ <http://www.roscommoncoco.ie/services/recreation/recreation.html>

¹² Roscommon County Council Development Plan 2006-2010

The tourism industry is based upon products which are marketed and sold to visitors. As well as accommodation and transport (and arguably landscape and culture) these may include: “paying” attractions such as museums; and recreational facilities such as walks and cycle tracks, which are also used by the local community. New and repeat visits are encouraged by ensuring that the quality of the tourism product remains high and diverse. It is also essential that visitors are aware of the products on offer and that signage is appropriate and reliable.

Keadue won the National Award in the Tidy Towns in the 2003 Competition, being declared Ireland's tidiest town and best-kept village.

Policy in relation to Tourist Facilities and Infrastructure

Policy 351 The Council shall investigate funding opportunities for the further development of flagship tourism products; suggested products for further expansion would be the new Forest and Activity Park at Lough Key, Boyle, including the tree top canopy walk and other activities and Strokestown Park House. Medium term funding and marketing will be focused on one such flagship project.

Policy 352 Support the development of a designated County Museum to display our rich history and heritage.

Policy 353 Support and facilitate the development of new tourism facilities and services throughout the county.

Lough Key, in the north of the County, is one of the most beautiful lakes in Ireland including an observation tower, ice-house, wishing chair, underground tunnels and beautiful wooded islands. Its immense range of habitats encourages a huge diversity of wildlife and birds such as summer visitors; the cuckoo, tern, willow warbler, whitethroat and blackcap. Lough Key is also home to a number of historical and archaeological treasures such as the 19th century ruins on Castle Island, ruined churches on various islands, Trinity Bridge and the Bog Garden. Tourist facilities include a fully serviced and landscaped caravan park, tearooms and shop.¹

Objectives in relation to Tourist Facilities and Infrastructure

Objective 325 The Council shall facilitate the creation of golf courses, pitch and putt courses and driving ranges in the countryside provided that such development does not contravene any other policies or objectives of this Plan

Objective 326 Establish a full-time tourism information centre in Roscommon Town and identify towns within the County where information centres could be opened, within the lifetime of this plan.

Objective 327 The Council will encourage resort type development and the upgrading of former demesnes and estates, heritage properties and products subject to good planning practice

Objective 328 Co-operate in the compilation of tourism brochures, which can be distributed via tourist information offices, key retail outlets and at tourist information signboards.

The re-development of Lough key Forest Park, in Boyle Co. Roscommon is a joint venture between Coillte Teo. and Roscommon County Council. This unique partnership has allowed this project to avail of National Development Plan Funding through the Tourism Product Development Scheme.

The redevelopment of Lough Key includes a tree canopy walk, the only one of its kind in Ireland which allows the visitor to experience trees at a height. The “pay to play” facility and the interpretative centre offer up to date tourism facilities for visitors. The Boda Borg is a Swedish Technology Puzzle House and its incorporation in to this project ensures that even in wet weather visitors have activities to entertain them.

Lough Key Forest Park was at its height of activity in the 1970’s. Since then it has declined but this redevelopment will put Lough Key Forest Park back on the map as a major tourism attraction in the West of Ireland. We expect visitor numbers to increase steadily over the coming years and feel that that capital investment in this project will prove extremely worthwhile.

The Regional Planning Guidelines (2004) encourage large-scale developments such as the Lough Key Forest Park Development. It should be noted however that the Council emphasises that the development of Flagship Projects should not be promoted as the single most important necessity for tourism growth. Emphasis should be placed on tourism development throughout the entire Lough Key area and sustainability is paramount in this regard. RCC supports the upgrading of facilities, where appropriate; the promotion and marketing of the area within the county, nationally and internationally; the development of new tourism facilities and services that enhance the natural and unique qualities of the area, promotes health and well being; and the regeneration and conversion of buildings along river for tourism related uses should be encouraged. The Council also supports the development of sustainable tourism within the region through initiatives such as the Greening Irish Hotels Programme, which aims to develop and implement environmental best practice structures across the hospitality industry by encouraging hotels etc. to become greener by saving energy and making better use of their resources such as waste energy and water conservation.

The Arigna Mining Experience is an important example of a successful and unique initiative, which has opened up new local employment and economic opportunities by attracting tourists to the Arigna area. Arigna has a long tradition of mining dating back to the 1600s when Charles Coote established iron works at Crevelea and Arigna. The Arigna Mines began as Ironworks, which closed permanently in 1838. With the opening of Arigna Power Station in 1958, coal mining continued until 1990 when it closed following the winding down of the power station with significant loss of employment to the local people. The Mining Experience was opened in 2003 traces 400 years of mining preserving the unique history of the area as well as employing many local ex-miners.¹

Policy in relation to Large Scale Tourist Developments

Policy 354 Support the development of Lough Key and its environs as a natural amenity and major tourist attraction.

Policy 355 Facilitate the provision of facilities for tourism i.e. swimming, fishing and small boating as well as washrooms and toilets, seating and benches along the shoreline of the lakes.

It is recognised that there is a potential to develop a level of tourism and educational development around Boyle in the astronomical area and this will be facilitated and encouraged by the Planning Authority.

Policy in relation to niche tourism

Policy 356 Support the development of niche tourism and educational initiatives in the astronomical area.

Boyle, nestled at the foot of the Curlew Mountains between Lough Gara and Lough Key, is a centre of great beauty with an abundance of history and archaeology to awe any visitor. It is renowned for its trout and coarse fishing. The main street was originally the avenue leading to King House, the 18th century Georgian seat of the Kings, later Earls of Kingston. The house later served as a military barracks and now as 'King House Interpretive Galleries & Museum' contains a number of exhibitions which tell the history and elaborate pageantry of the Connaught kings and chieftains as well as the history of Boyle and the King family by means of 3-dimensional displays, audio-visual media and special effects. Boyle Abbey is a beautifully restored example of a 12th Century Cistercian Abbey with a small interpretive centre sited in the gatehouse. Frybrook House is a circa.18th Century Georgian style house situated close to the town by the river containing some of the finest examples of Georgian decorative plasterwork in existence, and an Adams fireplace. Other important houses in County Roscommon include Clonalis House in Castlerea, which has a collection of material relating to the O'Connor family, the Coronation Stone and the Harp of Turlough O'Carolan. RCC supports the provision of a local museum including an interpretive centre for the Battle of Curlews. In addition, it is acknowledged that Boyle needs to be developed as gateway to Lough Key.

Glendeer Open Farm in Drum is a 6-acre open farm with a large collection of native and exotic animals. The pet farm opened in 1991 and has won several awards. The farm also provides self-catering accommodation for those seeking a family holiday or a quiet country getaway.

There are a wide variety of other heritage products in the County, for example, Strokestown. Strokestown was declared a Heritage Town in the year 2000. It encompasses a single broad avenue leading directly to the gates of Strokestown Park House, a fully furnished Georgian Mansion with pleasure garden and the National Famine Museum, dedicated to explaining the history of the Great Irish Famine. In addition, to Strokestown Park House the town is also home to the County Roscommon Genealogy and Heritage Company which provides a valuable service to this increasingly popular visitor activity. These Heritage products throughout the County need to be supported, encouraged and upgraded.

Some existing unique tourist facilities in the county include Elphin Windmill, which is the only working windmill in the West of Ireland, Úna Bhán Rural Tourism, which gives visitors the opportunity to experience the art of cheese making, sheep shearing, brown bread making and visits to local sites, The Suck Valley Development Visitor Angling Conference Centre & Riverside Cafe in Athleague, is located on the 100km Suck Valley Waymarked Way Walk and provides angling & walking holiday packages. Another unique facility is the Dr. Douglas Hyde Interpretive Centre in Ballaghaderreen where Dr. Hyde's contribution to Ireland is highlighted in an exhibition with the use of informative charts, maps and photographs.¹³ Other facilities include Castlecoote House, the Derryglad Folk Museum, the Sean Uí Neachtain Centre and the Knockcroghery Clay Pipe Museum.

Cruachan Ai Heritage Centre has many archaeological remains, which are located close to the centre, from Stone Age to the Historic period, and are interpreted, in bright, modern exhibition rooms. The central focus of the Cruachan Aí Heritage Centre, opened in 1999, is the Cruachan site including the Rathcroghan Mound, one of the best preserved Celtic Royal Sites in Europe close to the medieval village of Tulsk. The centre was developed to highlight, interpret and celebrate the rich archaeological heritage of the area and to act as a focus for community activities.¹ It has also been successful in attracting tourism to the area and creating direct and indirect employment opportunities.

There is potential for angling, archaeology and tourism generally to be further developed along the River Shannon corridor in this area. Unlike other parts of the country there is a distinctive lack of health and wellness facilities in County Roscommon, aside from those such as the Hodson Bay Leisure Centre. The Shannon Corridor and its calling points, Shannonbridge, Hodson Bay, Lecarrow, Gailey, Portrun, Lanesborough, Cortober, Tarmonbarry, Roosky, Drumharlow, Cotehall and Battlebridge. The Planning Authority supports tourism development in these areas particularly river and boating related tourism.

¹³ <http://www.visitroscommon.ie>

Policy 357 Support the development of tourism related facilities particularly river and boating related tourism at calling points along the River Shannon.

Roscommon is an agricultural County with a beautiful natural landscape, which encourages the visitor to relax and pursue healthy aims. RCC supports the development of health and wellness facilities such as day and overnight spas as well as health farms and yoga and meditation centers within the county. There is an opportunity to develop a purpose built spa hotel with educational facilities for promoting health, located in a scenic location and benefiting from the availability of local produce. There needs to be a focus on new products, new activities and events, new links to culture and unique homegrown products in order to attract national and international appeal. The Council supports the development of eco farming, organic products and markets, eco tourism, walks within areas of natural heritage in line with the development of health and well being facilities.

Policy 358 Support the development of eco-farming, organic products and markets, eco-tourism, walks within areas of natural heritage in line with the development of health and wellbeing facilities

Objective 329 Support the expansion and maximise the potential of the Rathcroghan area of County Roscommon based on its untapped archaeological significance, in co-operation with the Community and the DoEHLG

Public Transport is important with regard to bringing visitors into the County from the rest of the Country. There are bus links to Belfast, Dublin and Galway. The introduction of new trains in 2008 and plans to increase the frequency of service on the line to a minimum of two hourly will create the potential for more visitors from Dublin and Sligo. Knock International Airport is located close by with Shannon and Galway Airports accessible, but further away. There is a need for the improvement and upgrading of transport links to and within the county. The RPG's suggest that there may be potential for an airport in South Roscommon, which requires further investigation and a feasibility study.

There is a need for the improvement and upgrading of other physical infrastructure throughout the county. RCC will continue to facilitate and be centrally involved in the upgrading of all infrastructures throughout the County; this includes the provision of facilities within tourist areas such as toilet facilities, accommodation, access to amenities, and signage, where appropriate and, as required.

The County has a wide range of existing social and community infrastructure available to residents and visitors to the area. However, there are new and additional facilities that are required to help achieve balanced sustainable development at local level. The provision of such facilities and social infrastructure is key to establishing communities and promoting quality of life, social inclusion and sustainable settlements. RCC supports the provision of services for the community, community tourism and heritage projects, and is dedicated to providing equality of access for everyone to cultural activities for both passive and active participants and the promotion of multi-culturalism through programmes, festivals and arts events involving people for various backgrounds and cultures. The Council is committed to the promotion of disability awareness, to proofing policies against their impact on equality / disability and providing people with disabilities access to the social and physical services as well as to services in accordance with the Barcelona Declaration of 2002.

Policy in relation to Tourist Facilities and Infrastructure

Policy 359 Facilitate the development and expansion of existing and new tourist routes throughout the County, to include historical and cultural elements, environmental and recreation, general interest and amenities, which will satisfy the needs of the domestic and international visitors.

Policy 360 Facilitate the provision of increased mooring facilities at 4/5 chosen locations along the Shannon and allow select types of commercial/tourism development along the riverside to provide for an economic gain from the Shannon.

Policy 361 Facilitate and be involved in the upgrading of all infrastructure, including the provision of facilities within tourist areas, throughout the County.

Many overseas and domestic tourists rely on private motor vehicles to access tourist attractions and recreational facilities. Innovative transport methods can reduce reliance on such forms of transport and increase the use of other, more sustainable, means of transport such as buses and bicycles.

Policy 362 Evaluate public transport provision and, where appropriate, provide support for alternatives to the use of private cars to access visitor attractions

Policy 363 Support the development of improved linkages throughout the county in order to facilitate future economic development including, amongst others, the upgrading of the N63 and N61 as one of the major transport linkages within the county.

Policy 364 Promote cycle and pedestrian-friendly development layouts, infrastructure and facilities, in all new tourism development.

Objectives in relation to Tourist Facilities and Infrastructure

Objective 330 Facilitate the development of access/routes and appropriately designed public/tourism facilities by the Office of Public Works at monuments in State Care in the County.

Objective 331 Identify tourist routes through the County in co-operation with the County Development Board, Fáilte Ireland and local communities, and facilitate their establishment within the lifetime of this plan.

The following are some of the places of interest/visitor attractions within County Roscommon. See Map no. 34).

| Places of Interest/Visitor Attractions | Examples in County Roscommon |
|---|---|
| Amenity Areas (open space amenity areas utilized for recreational purposes) | Hodson Bay Amenity Area Lough Key Forest Park Amenity Area Strokestown Park Loughnaneane Park, Roscommon Portrunny Amenity Area Keadue Heritage Park Castlerea Demesne Lake O'Flynn Amenity Area Ballaghaderreen Town Park, Ballaghaderreen Knockranny Wood Amenity Area Cavetown Lake Amenity Area Lakeside Amenity Area, Ballinlough Lakeside Amenity Area, Lough Allen |
| Places of Interest | Elphin Windmill Frybrook House, Boyle Roscommon Jail, Roscommon Town Roscommon Arts Centre, Roscommon Town Roscommon Town Race Course Angling & Visitors Centre, Athleague Theatre Company, Frenchpark Arigna Mountains Curlew Mountains |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Great Houses | Clonalis House, Castlerea Strokestown Park House, Strokestown Castlecoote House, Castlecoote Woodbrooke House, Carrick on Shannon |
| Abbey/Castle | Boyle Abbey, Boyle Lough Key Forest Park, Boyle Galey Castle, Knockcroghery Rindoon Castle, Lecarrow Fuerty Abbey, Fuerty Ballintober Castle, Ballintober Kilronan Castle, Boyle |
| Archaeological/Monastic Site | Ardcarn Monastic Sites, Ardcarn Rathcroghan & Glenballythomas earthworks, Rathcroghan |
| Heritage Centers/Museum | King House, Boyle Arigna Mining Experience, Arigna Roscommon County Museum, Roscommon Drum Heritage Centre, Drum Strokestown Famine Museum, Strokestown Roscommon Heritage & Genealogical Centre, Strokestown Derryglad Folk Museum, Curraghboy Claypipe Visitors Centre, Knockcroghery Hells Kitchen Rail Museum, Castlerea Cruachan Ai Heritage Centre, Tulsk Una Bhan Rural Tourism, Boyle Dr. Hyde Interpretative Centre, Frenchpark |
| Important Flora/Fauna | Lecarrow Curraghboy Suck Callows Lough Funshinagh Shannon Callows |
| Golf Course | Roscommon Golf Course, Roscommon Strokestown Golf Course, Strokestown Athlone Golf Course, Hodson Bay Castlerea Golf Course, Castlerea Carrick-on-Shannon Golf Course |
| Viewing Points | View of Roscommon Town from Mote Park View of Lough Allen View of Drumharlow Lake View of Kilglass Lake View of Lough Ree, Hodson Bay |
| Horse Riding Centers | Situated in/close to: Roscommon Town Ballymacurly, Ballaghaderreen, Ballyleague, Creagh |
| Pet/Animal Farm | Glendeer Pet Farm, Athlone Tullyboy Animal Farm Visitor Centre, Tullyboy |

| | |
|--|---|
| Cross/Stone/Grave | Emlagh Cross, Emlagh Castlestrange Decorated Stone Grave of Turlough O'Carolan, Keadue Castlestrange Decorated Stone, Athleague Rock of Doon, Boyle |
| Farmers Market | Boyle Farmers Market, Boyle Roscommon Farmers Market, Roscommon |
| Cathedral/Church | The Sacred Heart Church, Roscommon Ardcarn Church Elphin - ruined 13th century Cathedral, Elphin St. Nathy's Cathedral, Ballghaderreen |
| Forest/Woodland | Mote Park Forrest, Roscommon Lough Key Forest Park, Boyle St. Johns Wood, Lecarrow |
| Water-based Activity/Activities | Lough Ree River Suck River Shannon Kilglass Lake Lake O'Flynn Drumharlow Lake |

Tourism Signage

Tourist signage is important with regard to the development of tourism in County Roscommon. Many tourists visit County Roscommon each year and even more pass through the county on their way to the West Coast. The wealth of natural and built heritage in the county should encourage passing visitors to stop a while and sample the delights of the county. This does not happen at present because there is little tourist information to be gathered by visitors while wandering around the countryside and towns of Roscommon. The Tourist Offices, located in Roscommon Town and in Boyle, are seasonal and there is a need to update existing maps and provide a comprehensive map of the County which would be available at various tourist establishments to guide visitors to the County. Tourism potential in County Roscommon could be aided significantly by the production of a comprehensive tourist map and the introduction of information boards at all heritage sites indicating important local as well as countywide sites. Uniform signage with one clear design format and a unique county logo, like the familiar Fáilte Ireland shamrock logo, should be produced and marketed at home and abroad.

Tour organizers and locally approved guides should be considered the 'gatekeepers'¹⁴ of local amenities. RCC encourages the recruitment of local tour guides and establishing trails including river tours as well as the development of facilities such as restaurants on boats and barges along the river to cater for river tours and visitors to the area. The Council supports the development of a permanent designated tourist office in Roscommon Town and the production of travel itineraries to guide visitors around the wonderful sights of County Roscommon. Many tourists use the Internet to gather holiday information and the updating and upgrading of existing tourism websites for the county should be a priority.

Access to heritage sites is a major issue in County Roscommon. A Heritage Access Audit of County Roscommon was commissioned by the County Roscommon Heritage Forum in order to identify heritage sites with public access, including, special needs access. The survey report and database

¹⁴ Teagasc-Integrated rural tourism development in the west of Ireland: Learning from tourists and tour organisers

contains details of 82 heritage sites around the County. Each site is described under the following headings:

- Grid reference
- 'Discovery map' series number
- Site description
- Access details
- Disabled access details
- Signage
- On-site interpretation
- Parking & facilities present
- Ownership.

Not all of the sites included in the audit have public access and improvements could be made at some of the sites. RCC supports the initiatives of the County Roscommon Heritage Forum and other agencies involved in heritage throughout the County.

It is an objective in "Roscommon Common Vision" to increase and promote knowledge of Roscommon's local history and heritage among the public agencies and visitors to the county by developing a policy on traditionally accepted, original and historical place names. RCC support the initiatives of this strategy. Structures of architectural/archaeological significance should be named, developed, clearly sign posted and protected.

The NRA is carrying out a 4-year re-signage programme from 2006-2009. The N11 will be the first road to be re-signed and will be used as a template for all other national roads. A re-signing programme must be progressed within the county as soon as possible. Signs that are designed as guides to the location of tourist facilities and attractions will be permitted under license outside built up areas subject to:

- Compliance with the Traffic Signs Manual produced by the DoE (1996)
- Being limited in number to the minimum required for that purpose
- Subject to the provisions contained within the PDA and Regulations, 2000 and 2001 respectively, as amended

Policy in relation to tourism signage

- Policy 365** Remove illegal signage, repair and replace existing signage on tourist routes and paths such as cycle paths.
- Policy 366** Encourage and support the improvement of access, signage and tourist information services including integrated welcome, directional and interpretative signage
- Policy 367** Work with Fáilte Ireland, the NRA, and other bodies to develop standardised and branded signage for tourism facilities and tourist attractions in the County.
- Policy 368** RCC will endeavour to provide adequate access and signage facilities to all publicly owned heritage sites, where appropriate and funds permit.

Objectives in relation to tourism signage

- Objective 332** Promote County Roscommon as a tourist destination and work with the tourism sector to ensure that facilities and attractions are adequately signposted.

10.4.5 Integrated Rural Tourism

Integrated Rural Tourism (IRT) is directly and positively linked to the economic, social, cultural and natural resource in rural areas. It is an approach to tourism development, which is sensitive to the

nature of local resources, traditions and opportunities and endeavours to optimise the use of resources and shares the benefits throughout the area.¹⁵

Tourism is a key sector for the county that needs to be developed to offset the effect of the decline in agriculture and the lack of Foreign Direct Investment. The RPG's recognise the need for increased employment opportunities in the west in order to sustain viable rural communities and have proposed strategies such as diversifying farm production and encouraging stronger tourism marketing. RCC recognize the need to develop an attractive environment for enterprise and enhance the entrepreneurial spirit of the county in e.g. tourism ventures, which at the same time ensures the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

In order to promote balanced regional development, in accordance with the NSS and RPG's, and boost rural tourism, an area needs to be self sufficient with a full range of services to include, for example, accommodation, farmer's markets, organic produce, activity holidays, walking/cycling facilities, golf, fishing, boating and swimming facilities. Organic local produce should be marketed for their health benefits as well as the development of local cookery schools and organic restaurants.

Policy for Integrated Rural Tourism

Policy 369 Facilitate tourism development in towns and villages. This also benefits rural development through the creation of value added enterprises and sustainable employment which attracts and directs tourists to surrounding rural areas. This will include encouraging clustering of products to increase linkages within and reduce leakage from, the local economy e.g. linkages between providers of accommodation and local farmers/niche food producers

Policy 370 Promote rural tourism in an environmentally sustainable manner which contributes to increased employment opportunities and benefits the environment

Objective for Integrated Rural Tourism

Objective 333 Work with the County Enterprise Board and others, to promote rural development and enterprise.

Opportunities for alternative and supplementary employment for farm families, such as off-farm employment, multiple activities and agri-tourism, will be crucial to the survival of many rural communities in County Roscommon. Agriculture is supported as the most important rural land use though emphasis is placed on encouraging and supporting farmers to "add an activity/area within farming that is higher up the economic value chain" e.g. rural tourism, forestry etc. RCC supports the development of farmers markets i.e. at least once weekly in each electoral area, and aims to facilitate the planning and licensing of them, in addition to the existing ones on Roscommon town and Boyle. Rural Roscommon has a lot to offer the visitor with regard to natural amenities, quality of life and local tradition. RCC supports the establishment of, for example, turf cutting courses for tourists, open farms, short stays on traditional working farms and similar rural tourism products.

Policy for Rural Tourism

Policy 371 Support on-farm tourism accommodation and supplementary activities such as, health farms, heritage and nature trails, pony trekking and boating.

¹⁵ Teagasc-Integrated rural tourism development in the west of Ireland: Learning from tourists and tour organisers

Policy 372 Encourage, where appropriate, the reuse and refurbishment of agricultural buildings for tourist facilities and accommodation. To facilitate the development of agri-tourism, consideration will be given to units of holiday accommodation on agricultural holdings which will remain an integral part of the landholding. These units shall be sited within or adjacent to the existing farm complex, appropriately designed, with safe effluent disposal and satisfactorily assimilated into the landscape.

Objectives for Rural Tourism

Objective 334 Promote the development of niche activities, such as those relating to food (particularly value-added products), forestry (e.g. wood products), crafts, eco-tourism and agri-tourism, for example farmhouse accommodation, open farms, farm holidays, health farms, equestrian activities, bird-watching holidays; painting/photography tuition, angling tourism, field studies and hill-walking (with the co-operation of the landowners).

Objective 335 Promote rural / agricultural diversification through the sustainable use of natural resources e.g. tourism, forestry, energy production.

Objective 336 The Council shall restrict development which might be detrimental to scenic and heritage assets in cSAC's , pNHA's & SPA's and within areas designated Sensitive Rural Landscapes as proposed in the Landscape Character Assessment that accompanies this Plan.

Objective 337 Integrated rural tourism shall be undertaken in close collaboration with local farm owners/local communities and their needs

Objective 338 Tourism-related development will be required to have a high standard of design, with consideration given to the potential impact on the surroundings in terms of scale and intensity. All ancillary landscaping should seek to blend in, and any signage should also be appropriately designed.

Objective 339 Due regard shall be had to the policies and objectives as outlined within the Landscape Character Assessment contained within this Plan

Objective 340 Encourage new holiday home developments to locate within either established villages or small towns and/or in distinct clusters in rural areas capable of absorbing such developments

The Greenbox is an area in the North West of Ireland including all of counties Leitrim and Fermanagh as well as parts of neighbouring counties Donegal, Sligo, Cavan and Monaghan. It is a unique region and is Ireland's main eco tourism destination.¹⁶ County Roscommon has much to offer in terms of eco-tourism including a range of walking and cycling trails and a unique natural landscape. The development of health farms, activity centers etc. in the county will enhance it as an eco-tourism destination as well as bringing increased economic benefits to rural areas.

The Bréifne project¹⁷ aims to establish an internationally recognised quality tourism brand image for the northwest of Ireland centred on the region's rich and diverse natural and cultural heritage. Roscommon, Leitrim, Cavan and Sligo County Councils and Fermanagh District Council in association with the Geological Survey of Ireland, the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland and the Academy of Irish Cultural Heritages (University of Ulster) propose to realise this through the development of a marketing strategy and the creation of a host of natural and cultural resource based products. These products will assist in the development and enhancement of sustainable tourism and rural economic development in the "Bréifne Mountains" region of northwest Ireland, for the economic

¹⁶ <http://www.ehsni.gov.uk/other-index/events/eco-eye/ecoeye-prog-content.htm>

¹⁷ <http://www.Bréifne.ie>

benefit of all parts of the region in a non-contentious manner. The concept is based on the idea of “Cultural Parks”. Products will include:

- An established, and internationally recognised and marketed brand image for the region,
- A comprehensive, GIS based natural and cultural resource inventory and database for the entire region,
- A booklet and DVD pack illustrating, and explaining the more than 600 million year history and physical evolution of the region’
- A “Bréifne Mountains” region website’
- A heritage guide overview publication,
- A series of district based walk, cycling and tour publications,
- A series of road signs and information stations,
- Guide and GIS training courses for local communities,
- A high profile, international conference within the region to launch the products,
- Extension of the Cuilcagh/Marble Arch European Geopark to include at least the rest of Cuilcagh Mountain with an intended extension to include Slieve Anierin,
- Establish a framework within which derivative products, services and activities will be developed.

RCC supports the development of projects, which promote sustainable tourism based on cultural resources like the Greenbox and Bréifne initiatives and supports the extension of these particular initiatives into other areas of County Roscommon.

Policy for Rural Tourism

Policy 373 Support rural tourism that would meet and create demand for authentic, rural, cultural, ‘quality of life’ tourism experiences in a way that promotes and supports the environment and builds on the ‘Green Clean’ image.¹⁸

Policy 374 Promote Roscommon as an eco-tourism destination based on its extensive walking and cycling routes and natural heritage, and encourage the development of health farms, activity centers and other developments, which will sustain eco tourism.

Policy 375 Support the development of sustainable tourism initiatives like the Greenbox and Bréifne projects.

Objectives for Rural Tourism

Objective 341 Identify, in the short, medium and long term, the most viable projects to be incorporated into the tourism trails.

10.4.6 Tourist Accommodation

RCC recognises that tourism must be developed as one of the key sectors within the County. Key towns and villages act as tourist centers and the facilities and services they provide are crucial to the development of the tourist potential of the County. Appropriate tourist accommodation and facilities must be provided throughout the County for this purpose. The RPG’s emphasise the need for more tourist accommodation and facilities in the County particularly in Roscommon town and Boyle. Tourism facilities should be developed in a sustainable manner to add to the tourism potential. RCC promotes improvement in the overall appearance of these towns and villages through its Town Renewal Schemes, Urban and Village Renewal Programme, Tidy Towns Initiative and enforcement of the Derelict Sites Act. Tourist developments have a special role in revitalizing towns and villages, and

¹⁸ Submission made by the Western Regional Tourism Authority (Ireland West Tourism) on behalf of tourism interests in the region to the Tourism Policy Review Group

RCC supports the development of appropriate tourist accommodation in existing town and villages throughout the County.

Policy in relation to Tourist Accommodation

- Policy 376** Encourage tourism in the county through effective location of a full range of tourist accommodation.
- Policy 377** Direct tourism based development, where appropriate, into existing settlements where there is adequate infrastructure to service the development and where they can contribute to maintenance of essential rural services.
- Policy 378** Ensure, in all tourism related development, high standards of design and landscaping, with consideration given to the impact of the proposal on it's surrounding in terms of scale and intensity.
- Policy 379** All tourist development should be designed for and take particular consideration of the needs of the disabled and the elderly.

HOTELS

The Fáilte Ireland “West Fact Card 2005” indicates that 25% of visitors to the West of Ireland stay in hotels with 34% staying in guesthouses or B&BS and another 10% staying at tourist hostels. Although there are a number of excellent hotels in the county, additional large and high quality hotels are required, especially North Roscommon. RCC recognizes that tourism type developments should be prioritized in key areas such as Boyle, and should include the provision of appropriate hotels in key areas as well as focus on encouraging and supporting local enterprise such as B&Bs. This will boost the economy of the region as a whole and these areas in particular.

Interest in health and wellbeing has increased over the past few years with the development of spas, health promotion and education centers throughout the country and there is an opportunity to boost tourism potential by providing unique health products as part of hotel developments at key locations in the county.

The EU Flower Eco-label is an eco-label for tourism facilities that aims to contribute to sustainable tourism by awarding and promoting good initiatives. The EU Flower Eco-label aims to change the practices and behaviours of tourism actors including enterprises, authorities, guests, local communities, and to involve them in increasing their responsibilities towards their own environment.

Policy in relation to hotels

- Policy 380** Prioritise hotel development and promote the development of high quality hotels in tourist areas and in key towns and villages throughout the County.
- Policy 381** Ensure high standards of architectural and urban design in all new tourist accommodation and facilities.
- Policy 382** Encourage hotels and guesthouses to save costs and minimise environmental impacts through membership of an eco-labelling scheme such as EU Flower Eco-label

HOLIDAY HOMES

There can be high demand for tourist accommodation and holiday homes in areas of natural beauty or close to a tourist attraction. RCC aims to address holiday home development in a positive and sustainable way to revitalise rural areas whilst ensuring that such development does not prejudice the vitality, environmental quality and character of the rural community throughout the County.

Residential development will be restricted to local housing need only in areas of high natural amenity in order to help protect the natural beauty of the area. The clustering of appropriately scaled holiday homes in or adjoining small towns and villages is preferred. These developments will relate sympathetically to the scale and level of development and facilities in the locality.

Policy in relation to holiday homes

- Policy 383** Support the development of holiday homes in appropriate locations such as existing villages or small towns or in rural areas capable of absorbing them and where services are readily available.
- Policy 384** Support the development of clustered holiday homes in appropriate locations where environmental integration can be achieved.
- Policy 385** Ensure that the scale of development is of modest proportions and relates to the size of the settlement.
- Policy 386** Ensure that the design of the holiday home development is of a high standard including the preservation of boundary characteristics and site features, adequate car parking provision, waste storage area and public lighting.
- Policy 387** Accommodate small scale enterprises, such as renovation of barns, outhouses or other existing structures and the construction of one or two holiday homes for short term rental (less than 3 months at any one time) associated with an existing permanent residence or active farm/agri-tourism enterprise. It shall be a condition of permission that such holiday homes be retained within the ownership of the complex/permanent dwelling and shall not be sole to form a separate permanent residence.
- Policy 388** Individual holiday home units must be designed and sited so as not to have an adverse impact on the character or setting of settlements or the amenity for existing residents. Suburban style housing estate layouts should be avoided.
- Policy 389** Proposals to reinstate, conserve and/or renovate existing, vacant, derelict or disused buildings for holiday accommodation will be given favourable consideration subject to normal planning, environmental and engineering criteria.
- Policy 390** Accommodate appropriately sited holiday home development as they arise, subject to normal planning considerations in relation to siting and design in rural areas of low development pressure.

CARAVAN AND CAMPING SITES

The provision of sites for caravans and camping is an important element in the accommodation of holiday makers. The Fáilte Ireland “West Fact Card 2005” indicates that 2% of visitors to the West of Ireland stay in Caravan and Camping Sites. There are several caravan and camping sites in County Roscommon, the Lough Key Caravan and Camping Park, Willowbrook Caravan and Camping Park in Ballaghaderreen, Hodson Bay Caravan and Camping Park near Athlone, and the Gailey Bay Caravan and Camping Park in Knockcroghery. Caravan and camping parks can be visually obtrusive particularly in high amenity areas or areas of outstanding natural beauty. However, RCC recognises the need to provide tourist accommodation for all price ranges and a variety of lifestyles, therefore, all caravan and camping park proposals are required to ensure that the design, operation and impact do not unreasonably affect the amenity of the surrounding landscape.

While touring caravan sites tend to be less obtrusive than static sites, the provision of new facilities will be assessed against strict planning, design and environmental criteria: development will be resisted in areas already well provided for and in areas of landscape vulnerability and sensitivity.

Reference should be made to Bord Failte's "Guidelines for Development of Caravan and Camping Sites" (1982).

Policy in relation of Caravan and Camping Sites

Policy 391 Facilitate the development of "Camper Van" halting facilities at appropriate locations subject to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area

Objective in relation of Caravan and Camping Sites

Objective 342 Ensure that future caravan, camping and parking facilities in scenic areas will not be visually intrusive or impact on sensitive environments such as lakes and rivers, by requiring appropriate siting, layout, design and natural screening.

10.4.7 Retail Tourism

The retail element is one of the key factors in the development of tourism throughout the County and the continued vitality of established tourist destinations. There is a commonly held view that a retail element can downgrade the value of cultural attractions. This is a perception that needs to be changed. A retail element can enhance a cultural experience as well as bring economic benefits to an attraction. The RPG's advocate a focus on tourism, retail development, enterprise parks, roads and food production in North Roscommon including the towns of Strokestown, Boyle, Ballaghaderreen and Castlerea. County Roscommon must look to tourism as a source of potential retail income.

County Roscommon is fortunate in its location close to Galway, Sligo, Athlone and within reasonable reach of Dublin and the North. Improved connectivity and infrastructure from these cities and towns will help develop the tourism economy of County Roscommon. From a retail perspective, it is people within the County, from the West Region and within Ireland who contribute most to retail turnover in the County. Although shopping is an important part of the travel experience it is unlikely international tourists visit Roscommon to shop. It is important to provide for the requirements of tourists from home and abroad. To encourage international visitor expenditure appropriate shops and services should be facilitated, to enable the County to better exploit its tourism potential. These may include hotels, arts and crafts galleries, craft outlets/villages, tourist shops at important tourist destinations, local markets and shops specialising in outdoor pursuits, such as angling and water sports. The Retail Export Scheme is a scheme whereby visitors from outside the European Union can purchase goods to take home with them and benefit from tax relief on goods purchased.¹⁹ This scheme should be widely promoted within the County to encourage tourists to purchase more goods and to increase tourism related sales.

Policy for Retail Tourism

Policy 392 Promote collective public and private sector marketing of County Roscommon as a leisure and retail tourist destination, within Ireland and abroad.

Objectives for Retail Tourism

Objective 343 Increase understanding of and promote the Retail Export Scheme throughout the County

Events such as festivals, fairs and concerts present enormous opportunities for retailers and consideration should be given to this in encouraging the development of new events and developing a countywide programme of activities for visitors. Environmental enhancement schemes, such as improvements to streetscape and pavement, should be introduced in key towns and villages throughout the County to upgrade and enhance the public realm²⁰.

¹⁹ <http://www.revenue.ie/index.htm?/leaflets/vatexp.htm>

²⁰ Chapter 10 Policies and Actions, Draft Roscommon County Retail Strategy 2007

Policy for Retail Tourism

Policy 393 Encourage the establishment of new events such as festivals; fairs etc., in appropriate locations, to promote increased retail tourism throughout the County.

Objectives for Retail Tourism

Objective 344 Facilitate the production of a programme of activities for tourists and visitors to the County.

Objective 345 Facilitate the establishment of Environmental Improvement Schemes to upgrade and enhance the public realm in key towns and villages throughout the County.

10.4.8 Marine Tourism

“Ireland's natural endowment of marine and water-based resources is strategically important to the tourism industry, as many commercial and leisure opportunities are dependent on it. The water-based tourism and leisure sector makes an essential contribution to the overall quality and experience of the holidaymaker in Ireland, and the strength of our island image and culture is often utilised as a key attractor in overseas marketing and promotional campaigns.”²¹

Marine tourism accounts for a great proportion of the numbers of visitors to the county each year. Visitors flock to areas such as Lough Key in the north of the county, the River Suck to the west, and the River Shannon to the east, to enjoy the beauty of the lakes and rivers and to take part in many of the activities on offer. Roscommon offers extensive walks, fishing, boating and swimming. Not only do visitors come to experience these traditional activities but also the number of marine leisure users has increased dramatically in the past few years creating new focuses for marine tourism within the county.

The recreational and tourism potential of water based activities can support the reinforcement of Roscommon as a tourism destination within the Western Region. The development potential of marine resources in the context of marine tourism, marine sports and recreational activities will promote economic development at county as well as regional level. There is a need to integrate the requirements of the marine leisure sector with the needs of other marine sectors in order to provide a network of high quality marine leisure facilities throughout the whole County.

The RCDB supports the development of a National Strategy on Marine Tourism and in association with Failte Ireland West promotes the Marine Sector -Travel, Stay, Fish, and Play. RCC recognises the potential value to the tourism industry of features such as rivers, lakes, and canals. River systems and lakes provide potential for an extensive network for inland travel by water.

The Marine Institute indicates that there is a strong domestic and overseas market for boating, angling and water sports and that the best way to realise the wealth potential of water-based tourism and leisure is to work toward preserving the natural environment and freshwater resources, to improve facilities and access to water, to encourage and support young people from a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds to participate in water-based sports and leisure activities in order to benefit local communities in areas where the opportunities for development are most concentrated.²² The Marine Institute Development Strategy for Marine and Leisure Infrastructure (2002) sets broad criteria indicating suitability of areas for development as water-based leisure centers in order to assist

²¹ Speech by John O'Donoghue, T.D., Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, at the opening of 24th Dublin Boat Show, RDS Simonscourt, on Wednesday, 14th February 2007, <http://www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/publications/release.asp?ID=1872>

²² Submission by Marine Institute to Tourism Policy Review, <http://www.archiseek.com/content/attachment.php?attachmentid=3391&d=1163360713>

investment decisions. The report identifies indicative locations throughout Ireland with potential for the development of boating facilities.

RCC supports the development of marina facilities at key locations, particularly along the Shannon, for example at Roosky where dry docks facilities would allow for boat repairs and the reintroduction of the local regatta would enhance local tourism and visitor numbers. Pumping out facilities must be provided at appropriate locations with an electronic monitoring system to prevent water pollution.

Policy in relation to Marine Tourism

Policy 394 Promote the Marine Sector and all agencies, national, regional and local involved in water-based tourism.

Policy 395 Support the development of a lake management plans/lakes management plans.

Objective in relation to Marine Tourism

Objective 346 Facilitate the development of a National Strategy for Marine Tourism in conjunction with key stakeholders and the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland.

Objective 347 Support tourism type development including appropriate infrastructure and ancillary services throughout the county and particularly in areas with significant tourism amenities such as Boyle and Lough Key, and Athlone and Lough Ree.

Roscommon's network of piers, slipways and marinas are an essential part of local infrastructure and serve many sectors of the economy. There needs to be a focus on developing new facilities in key locations and upgrading existing facilities to maximise the range of marine leisure activities that can take place at each site. There is a growing national and international interest in marine leisure activities in Ireland. A good network of inland infrastructure needs to be developed to provide safe berthing and launching facilities and providing links, where possible, to other regions. and coastal areas, for example along the Royal and Grand Canals. The Grand Canal links Dublin to the River Shannon at Shannon Harbour, west of Banagher, east of Athlone and south of Roscommon, while the Royal Canal reaches Longford town and the River Camlin, a tributary of the River Shannon, at Tarmonbarry.

The Waterways Corridor Study 2004/2005 consists of a study of three areas, the area surrounding the river from Lanesborough to Shannonbridge, from Roosky to Lanesborough and the Upper Shannon including the Boyle River, Lough Allen, Lough Key and the Carnadoe Waters. The Heritage Council has identified projects for the regeneration of the waterway corridor and actions, which can be realised over a ten-year period. RCC supports the regeneration of waterway corridors throughout County Roscommon and the promotion of the unique ecology and wildlife, and activities associated with these waterways, in co-operation with organisations such as the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland, The Heritage Council and the Royal Canal Amenity Group.

Policy in relation to the Waterway Corridors

Policy 396 Support the regeneration of Waterway Corridors throughout the County.

Roscommon County Council is currently developing a Boat Training Centre and Aquarium at Hodson Bay, which will provide an additional range of tourism facilities for South Roscommon and Lough Ree. The Planning Authority supports the development of a Sailing Club in the County, in the vicinity of Hodson Bay or Portrun. The Planning Authority supports the development of sailing activities such as sail training, sailing tours, pleasure boat cruises and passenger boats as well as water sports such as wind surfing, kayaking, canoeing, water skiing and scuba diving, where appropriate, throughout the county. RCC supports the development of water-based pursuits such as angling, fishing, marine

mammal watching, swimming and the development of new facilities such as aquariums, maritime museums, interpretative centres, training and education facilities and the production of comprehensive lake and river guide/tour maps for the county.

Policy in relation to the waterways in the County

Policy 397 Support the establishment of water-based activities in the Lough Key area as well as other appropriate areas throughout the County, such as Lough Ree.

Policy 398 Support the development of a Sailing Club in the vicinity of Hodson Bay or Portrun.

In Ireland, the main concentrations of tourism, with the exception of Killarney, hug the coastline, with the inner core of the country remaining relatively underdeveloped. For this reason a new pilot tax relief scheme has been launched which provides incentives for the sustainable development of tourism in several counties along the River Shannon including Roscommon. The scheme supports the development of new tourism infrastructure or the refurbishment of existing tourism infrastructure with guidelines being drawn up by the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland and the Department of Finance.²³ While RCC supports this scheme, the Council supports the inclusion within the scheme of all areas of Roscommon that border the River Shannon.

There is an opportunity to capitalise locally on new regional, national and international markets as well as promoting healthy lifestyles and general well being through marine leisure activities and pursuits. Healthy activity has an important role to play in creating a sense of identity and belonging, and bringing people together.

Policy with regard to marinas

Policy 399 Support the development of a marina where the associated activity already exists or where there is appropriate demand for such a facility.

Policy 400 Ensure marinas provide adequate water depth, berthing arrangements for pleasure craft, navigation aids, pontoon lighting, fire safety equipment, toilet facilities, a sufficient level of road access, car parking, direct access and walkways to boats.

Policy 401 Facilitate the development and upgrading of the marina at Lough Key Forest Park.

Policy 402 Support the upgrading of facilities at Doon Shore.

10.4.9 Environmental Considerations

In pursuit of sustainable tourism it is imperative that the high quality landscape and environment which attracts visitors to Roscommon is undiminished by future development. A high quality product must be developed in harmony with a high quality natural environment, minimizing adverse impacts upon local communities, built heritage, landscapes, habitats and species. Tourism related enterprises should be encouraged to reduce their impact upon the environment by reducing their energy demand, increasing recycling and utilizing best practice procurement policy.

Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Development Strategy, 2000 – 2006, focuses on eco-tourism as a growing specialist market but notes that to benefit fully from it, an enlightened conservation policy in relation to our flora and fauna and their natural habitats, including protected sites, must be in place. All leisure and tourism activities must not impact negatively upon the environmental quality of County Roscommon or adversely affect other users of facilities.

²³ Speech by John O'Donoghue, T.D., Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism, at the opening of 24th Dublin Boat Show, RDS Simonscourt, on Wednesday, 14th February 2007, <http://www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/publications/release.asp?ID=1872>

Policy in relation to environmental considerations

- Policy 403** Protect the natural resources on which tourism is based through the enforcement of policies in relation to landscape, architectural conservation areas, inland waterways, water quality, natural heritage, rural housing, holiday home development and wind farm development.
- Policy 404** Facilitate the drawing up of visitor management plans where necessary at sensitive visitor attractions
- Policy 405** Support best practice environmental management including energy efficiency, waste management, procurement and recycling in accommodation providers and tourism enterprises in the County, through the use of accreditation and eco-labelling
- Policy 406** Ensure that the potential negative impacts of one activity over another are carefully considered at planning application stage.
- Policy 407** Ensure that the facilitation of tourism and development related tourism does not impact negatively on the environmental quality or result in the deterioration of the quality of the tourism product.

Objective in relation to environmental considerations

- Objective 348** Promote the development of tourism in a sustainable manner and encourage the provision of a comprehensive range of tourism facilities, subject to location, siting and design criteria, the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and other planning considerations.

(For additional policies and objectives in relation to environmental issues, see also policies and objectives for Rural Tourism, Section 10.4.5 above)

There is an abundance of natural heritage with tourism potential throughout Roscommon. The natural heritage of Roscommon includes raised bogs, which though plentiful in Ireland are unique in Europe and should be protected with regard to this ‘bigger picture’. Raised bogs are a flat landscape and provide views for miles with the potential for attracting tourists through unique initiatives such as turf cutting and painting weekends etc. Other natural features in the Roscommon landscape include Callows, to the south of the county along the Shannon and Turloughs, which are uniquely concentrated in Roscommon, these disappearing lakes are a haven for birds and other wildlife. Roscommon is a low county and it’s many, slow, meandering rivers and lakes provide opportunities for tourism related activities such as boating, fishing and other water related activities. Its low-lying flat farmland and undulating eskers and drumlins provide a unique landscape for tourists and visitors. Tourist initiatives could include organic farming workshops, wetland flora and fauna identification, hedgerow history and management as well as other workshops, which introduce the visitor and locals to the beauty, history and culture of the Roscommon countryside.

- Policy 408** Support alternative enterprises, farm diversification and agri-tourism projects to ensure the continued development of sustainable rural communities.

There are many unique forms of ancient and recent built heritage in County Roscommon. The County Development Board aims to build up tourism centred on culture, language and heritage. Rathcroghan, for example, is given the same importance/value as Tara. There is potential to develop a major tourism centre base in the Rathcroghan-Tulsk area of Co. Roscommon based on its untapped archaeological significance. In line with sustainability, EU and National policy, and Fáilte Ireland’s Tourism Development Strategy 2000 – 2006, no development or activity will be facilitated at the expense of our environmental quality or the preservation of the value of the principal tourism product itself, the landscape.

There is a great opportunity to develop sustainable tourism initiatives in the County. RCC recognize the necessity of reducing water pollution throughout the County, particularly that associated with disposal of wastewater and solid waste, in order to ensure that the natural heritage and wildlife of the County is maintained.

RCC is dedicated to the protection of the unique natural heritage of County Roscommon through the designation of Natural Heritage Areas, protection of Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protected Areas and Areas of High Amenity, through restricting inappropriate development in areas of high ecological, scenic and environmental importance, such as Lough Key and environs, and through the development of sustainable tourism initiatives. RCC supports the production of a comprehensive lake management plan in order to analyse the carrying capacity of the County's lakes and their immediate environs.

The Council also encourages building design, which is sympathetic to the natural environment in areas along riverfronts, canals or parklands. The EU adopted the Energy Performance in Buildings Directive in 2002, in an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. RCC supports the development of low energy buildings within the County particularly those located in areas of natural amenity.

The Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Development Strategy 2000 – 2006 notes that the conservation of our built heritage is an important environmental issue.

The unique natural and built heritage of County Roscommon must be preserved mindful of the need to facilitate the enjoyment of places of interest, natural beauty and tourist potential. Access to amenities, signage and the provision of facilities, such as toilet facilities and accommodation will be provided, where appropriate and without impacting negatively on the natural amenities of the area. The Council aims to balance protecting and enhancing such natural assets while also developing appropriate access and facilities.

Policy with regard to heritage and environmental aspects of tourism

Policy 409 Protect and conserve for current and future generations those natural, built and cultural heritage features that form the basis of the County's tourism industry, including areas of important landscape, lake and river scenery, areas of important wildlife interest, historic buildings and structures and the traditional form and general appearance of towns and villages.