



**Roscommon Outdoor Recreation Strategy**  
**2023-2028**

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## 1 Introduction

The importance of outdoor recreation, as a key asset in improving the nation's health and well-being, building stronger, more cohesive and inclusive communities, and generating economic growth through activity tourism, continues to be recognised.

Although the landscape and waterscapes of Co. Roscommon currently presents rich opportunities to explore and engage with the outdoors, there is a need for an Outdoor Recreation Strategy to provide an effective and sustainable framework to maximize current and future opportunities for the participation of outdoor recreation across the County up to 2028. Given the special qualities of the area, it is important that any such Strategy takes a balanced approach to ensure that the very resource which provides the opportunities for recreation and enjoyment, is protected and managed appropriately.

Adopting such a strategic approach to outdoor recreation will not only play a significant role in the future prosperity and well-being of the County and its citizens, but also in attracting visitors who can avail of the diverse range of outdoor recreational opportunities across the area.

In November 2022, Ireland launched its first Outdoor Recreation Strategy – 'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors: National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (NORS) 2023-2027'. Roscommon's new Strategy has taken cognisance of NORS, as reflected in several recommendations proposed in the Action Plan.

## 2 Outdoor Recreation defined

The term outdoor recreation invokes many different images. For some it automatically triggers a stereotype of activities such as canoeing and climbing whilst for others it has a much wider connotation including general leisure activities such as walking and cycling. Within the context of this Strategy, outdoor recreation is defined as 'physical activities that take place in the natural environment'.

The definition includes 10 land-based activities, 9 water based activities and 2 air-based activities (Fig.1). In addition, 'passive enjoyment of the outdoors' is included and straddles all three activity columns. The definition does not include activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches e.g., golf, football, show jumping or motorized activities e.g., quads/scramblers, except for motorized mobility aids. This aligns with the definition in the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy for Ireland (2022).

Outdoor recreation activities:

- are usually undertaken by people in their leisure time - however this can include organized activity through clubs /groups (e.g., coastal rowing club, guided walking group)
- involve physical human power/effort – however this can sometimes involve equipment (e.g., surf board, canoe, bike, boat, ropes), or passive enjoyment of the natural environment
- require access to green and/or blue spaces in rural, peri-urban and urban environments
- are not primarily focused on competitive outcomes
- sometimes use purpose-built facilities in the natural environment to facilitate participation (e.g., construction of walking, mountain biking and horse-riding trails, development of canoe steps)

Land-Based	Water-Based	Air-Based
Walking	Paddle sports -includes canoeing, kayaking and Stand Up Paddleboarding (SUP)	Para gliding
Hill walking/hiking	Rowing	Hang gliding
Leisure cycling	Wild swimming	
Mountain biking	Surfing	
Horse riding	Coasteering	
Trail/Off-road running	Wind surfing/kite surfing	
Orienteering	Sailing	
Bouldering, scrambling, rock climbing, mountaineering	Diving	
Caving	Angling	
Adventure/Nature Play		
Passive enjoyment of the outdoors		

Fig.1 Outdoor Recreation Activities included within the Strategy.

### 3 Justification for an Outdoor Recreation Strategy

It is well documented that participation in outdoor recreation realises significant benefits both in personal terms to individual participants, and in wider terms to society, the economy and the environment. Numerous academic studies have considered the positive outcomes for individuals and

communities of participating in outdoor recreation. Over 3,500 of these studies were reviewed and collated into one document<sup>1</sup>. The benefits are summarised in Fig. 2.

	<p>Mental health and wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General mental health status</li> <li>- Quality of life and over wellbeing</li> <li>- Combating mental illnesses and disease</li> <li>- Reducing negative affective states</li> <li>- Control and coping</li> <li>- Self-development</li> <li>- Positive experiences</li> <li>- Active and happy ageing</li> </ul>
	<p>Physical health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General physical health and related factors</li> <li>- Combating diseases like stroke, heart attack and cancer</li> <li>- Low injury rates and extended life expectancy</li> <li>- Healthy ageing</li> <li>- Subjective health perception</li> <li>- Sun exposure effectiveness</li> </ul>
	<p>Active citizenship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community benefits</li> <li>- Integration and inclusion</li> <li>- Volunteering</li> <li>- Bonding Capital</li> </ul>
	<p>Education and life-long learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (Intra) personal development</li> <li>- Interpersonal development</li> <li>- Educational motivation and achievements</li> <li>- Cognitive aspects to improve learning</li> <li>- Environmental awareness and behaviour</li> </ul>
	<p>Crime reduction and anti-social behaviour</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase of prosocial behaviour</li> <li>- Prevention and reduction of crime</li> </ul>
	<p>Additional benefits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lifetime physical activity</li> <li>- Accessibility</li> <li>- Cognitive functioning</li> <li>- Other multiple effects</li> </ul>

Fig. 2. Summary of Outdoor Recreation Benefits

<sup>1</sup> Benefits of Outdoor Sport for Society <http://outdoorsportsbenefits.eu/resources/> (European Network of Outdoor Sports, 2018)

These well documented benefits have resulted in outdoor recreation becoming recognised as an important element in helping deliver national, regional and local policies and strategies.

#### 4 Strategic Context

The importance of outdoor recreation within Government policy continues to grow and is acknowledged and recognised in the following National and Regional plans and policies (see Appendix A for detail).

- Project Ireland 2040
- Programme for Government-Our Shared Future (2020)
- Our Rural Future – Rural Development Programme (2021-2025)
- Tourism Development and Innovation Strategy (2016-2022)
- Sport Ireland Policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the Outdoors (2020)
- National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021)
- Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan (2021-2025)
- Draft Ireland Hidden Heartland Regional Tourism Development Strategy (2023-2027)
- The Shannon Tourism Masterplan (2020-2030)
- Tourism Masterplan for the Beara Breaifni Way (2020)

In addition, to aligning with several national and regional strategies, this Outdoor Recreation Strategy will also facilitate delivering the County's Development Plan (2021-2027) and the Council's Local Economic and Community Plan (2016-current) and Tourism Strategy (2017-current).

The County Development Plan sets out the overall strategy and vision for the proper planning and sustainable development of the County from 2021-2027. Key objectives and Council policies within the Plan that relate to outdoor recreation are included within the chapters on, rural development and natural resources, economic development, infrastructure, transport and communication, natural heritage and social, community and cultural development.

The Council's Tourism Strategy recognises the importance of key recreation sites in contributing to the County's overall tourism proposition e.g., Lough Key Forest Park, The River Shannon, Lough Ree and surrounding peatland/wetland areas whilst the Local Economic and Community Plan recognises the importance of supporting the Shannon corridor development/collaborative tourist trails.

## 5 Outdoor Recreation Strategy Methodology

To facilitate the Strategy process, a Stakeholder Group comprising relevant stakeholders for outdoor recreation across the County was established. The Group acted as a source of information for the audit, contributed to the formulation of the Strategy's vision, mission and priority work areas and agreed the Strategy's recommendations.

Throughout the Strategy process both primary and secondary research techniques were employed. Extensive desk research together with information received from the consultation process was used to inform the audit stage of the Strategy, resulting in a GIS mapping database of all existing and proposed outdoor recreation provision across the County. Consultation included 1-1 consultation and on-line workshops with Council members and members of the public. An on-line questionnaire was also administered with 158 responses received. Site visits to key recreational sites were also made during the Strategy process to allow familiarization and validate consultation responses.

In putting together this Strategy, an important part of the methodology has involved giving cognisance to the external environment and emerging trends in which the Strategy will operate (see Section 7). This has ensured recommendations are future proofed across the required lifetime of the Strategy.

## 6 Current position

Roscommon's diverse range of landscapes and waterscapes including rivers, loughs, canals, forests, woodlands and bogs provides a wealth of opportunities for outdoor recreation participation. This is complemented by its rich biodiversity, heritage and archaeology e.g., Rathcroghan.

The extensiveness and diversity of the resource base lends itself to the provision of opportunities for a wide range of outdoor recreation activities for both the local population and an increasing number of visitors to the area.

Across Roscommon, five key state landowners/land managers provide most of the land and water used for outdoor recreation namely, Coillte, Waterways Ireland, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Bord na Mona and the Council. Private landowners also play an essential role providing access for many of Roscommon's walking opportunities, especially the area's three long-distance National Waymarked Ways. 173 landowners are in receipt of an annual 'Walk Scheme' payment for the on-going maintenance of these trails.

Essential to the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities across Roscommon is also the role performed by local community groups. In many areas these groups are leading the development of

outdoor recreation, through the provision of walking and cycling trails, management of tourism attractions, play areas, café facilities, changing facilities and car parking areas.

Of the 21 activities defined as ‘outdoor recreation’ in Fig. 1, twelve take place across Roscommon. Six are land based (walking, hill walking, leisure cycling, trail running, orienteering and horse riding) and six water based (paddle sports, angling, sailing, wind surfing, open water swimming, rowing). The most popular activities taking place are walking, paddle sports, trail running, angling, cycling and open water swimming<sup>2</sup> with the most popular sites for participating in these activities including Lough Key, Lough Ree, River Shannon, Lake O’Flynn, Cavetown Lough, Hodson Bay, Lough Lea, the National Waymarked Ways, Slieve Bawn, Mote Park, Strokestown Park and Bord na Mona land. Enjoying outdoor recreation activities across Roscommon is mostly done with family members<sup>3</sup> a few times a week<sup>4</sup>.

Two of Roscommon’s most significant outdoor recreation assets are the River Shannon and the Beara Breifne Way. These assets account for two of Failte Ireland’s key visitor propositions for the Hidden Heartlands area which encompasses Roscommon. The Beara Breifne Way is made up of three National Waymarked Ways namely, the Miner’s Waymarked Way, the Lung Lough Gara Waymarked Way and the Suck Valley Waymarked Way, whilst three of Ireland’s Blueways flow through Lough Key and the River Shannon. Detailed Plans for the River Shannon and the Beara Breifne Way are already in place and ready for implementation.

In addition to the three National Waymarked Ways, Roscommon also has an abundant wealth of shorter walks including walks in forests, town parks, peatlands, around loughs and along canals. Many have been developed by active community groups.

Cycling across Roscommon is provided through the Tain Cycle Trail, Green Heartland Cycle Route and more recently through the Lough Key-Boyle cycleway. Both walking and cycling are promoted by the Council through a printed and online publication. In addition, information on other activities is provided by individual landowners and community associations using various media including websites and social media channels<sup>5</sup>

Within Roscommon there is an abundance of Loughs and Rivers for angling including Lough Ree, the River Suck, the River Shannon, Lough Lea, Tulsk system, Cavetown Lough, Kilglass Lough, Hillstreet

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<sup>2</sup> c. 55% of those who completed the online questionnaire walked, 27% did paddle sports, 17% running, 14% angling and 8% swimming

<sup>3</sup> c. 33% of those who completed the online questionnaire participated with family

<sup>4</sup> c. 34% of those who completed the online questionnaire participated a few times a week in outdoor recreation activities

<sup>5</sup> 58% and 37% of those who completed the on-line questionnaire used social media and websites respectively to source information on the outdoor recreation opportunities across Roscommon

Lakes, Lake O'Flynn and Lough Erritt. These later lakes also provide opportunities to undertake paddle sports and open water swimming.

Roscommon's two most popular outdoor recreation sites lie at opposite ends of the County. Lough Key Forest Park, one of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands key attractions, welcomed 150,000 visitors per year pre COVID, whilst Hodson Bay in the south, home to Ireland's largest inflatable waterpark, welcomed 91,000 visitors in 2021. Lough Key Forest offers the user an array of land and water-based activities including 'Zip It', a high-level ropes course, Tree Top experience, orienteering, play, biking, kayaking and Stand-Up Paddle Boarding. A 10-year Development Plan was completed in 2020 for Lough Key and a feasibility study is currently on-going for the Hodson Bay area. Several other significant outdoor recreation sites of note across Roscommon include Mote Park beside Roscommon Town and the Sliabh Bawn Recreation Area (beside Strokestown), a partnership between Bord na Mona, Coillte, the local community and a windfarm company.

Although Roscommon's central location in the Midlands can be considered advantageous, many people 'drive through' Roscommon on their way to better known and further developed outdoor recreation destinations in Ireland, particularly the west coast.<sup>6</sup>

It is challenging retaining visitors for longer than two/three days and this is exacerbated by a lack of suitable accommodation that appeals to activity tourists e.g., campsites, glamping, pods and Air-de-Service.

Although Roscommon offers a myriad of outdoor recreation opportunities, gaps exist in the central north-south belt and in the south-west, (Fig.3) and not all existing outdoor recreation sites are reaching their true potential in terms of the outdoor recreation proposition offered e.g., Lough Key Forest Park, Beara Breifne Way, Mote Park and the shoreline of the River Shannon. Despite Roscommon having 140kms of the River Shannon's shoreline, direct access to the shoreline for walking and cycling is limited.

Through public consultation, it was noted that activities for families and young people such as off-road cycling, family mountain biking, adventure play, pump /scooter parks<sup>7</sup> were under-provided for, as well as opportunities for those with accessibility issues. Mote Park and Lough Key Forest Park were

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<sup>6</sup> 20% of those who answered the on-line questionnaire left the County once a week to participate in outdoor recreation

<sup>7</sup> 29% of those who completed the on-line questionnaire said the opportunities for those with families and multi-generational participation were under provided.

identified as two accessible sites for wheelchair users<sup>8</sup> . In addition, Donamon offers 32 wheelchair accessible angling stands with parking bays and toilets.

Through consultation it was noted that the quality of the visitor servicing was poor at several sites including directional signage to the site, visitor welcome on-site, toilets, waymarking of trails and trail surfacing, the latter the result of inadequate trail planning, design and construction experience. It was also evident that the outdoor recreation infrastructure at several sites did not blend comfortably within the natural landscape, its design being more appropriate for an urban than rural setting.

As the trend for both open water swimming and for 'doorstep' walking opportunities continues to increase, meeting the demand for safe places to open water swim as well as providing a geographical spread of community trails across Roscommon will be challenging for recreation land managers.

State Agencies and community groups are very competent at securing capital funding to develop new outdoor recreation facilities. However, a lack of co-ordination between all stakeholders involved directly or indirectly in outdoor recreation has resulted in ad hoc development taking place across Roscommon with development often 'funding led' rather than led by strategic need.

Whilst excellent at securing funding, a lack of understanding and skill set required to navigate the complex process of taking a project from concept through to delivery on the ground is challenging for many passionate community groups. Often landowners are unaware that funding was being sought and following completion are left to manage the project as the capacity doesn't exist within the community to maintain the facility.

For all stakeholders involved in developing outdoor recreation across Roscommon, the greatest challenge is the on-going maintenance costs associated with providing outdoor recreation facilities. Most funding programmes exclude the on-going costs of maintenance resulting in key stakeholders responsible for developing outdoor recreation not wishing to do so, and existing sites becoming rundown creating ultimately a reduced visitor experience for those visiting. Justifying an on-going maintenance programme is difficult however, as few sites across Roscommon can provide evidence of use and social return of investment.

Given the existing low footfall across Roscommon, few opportunities exist for the private sector to run viable outdoor recreation businesses. Notable exceptions however include Zipit Forest Adventures and Electric Bike Trails based in Lough Key Forest Park, Baysports and Shannon Adventures, Rooskey.

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<sup>8</sup> 32% of those who completed the on-line questionnaire said that opportunities for those with disabilities were under provided.

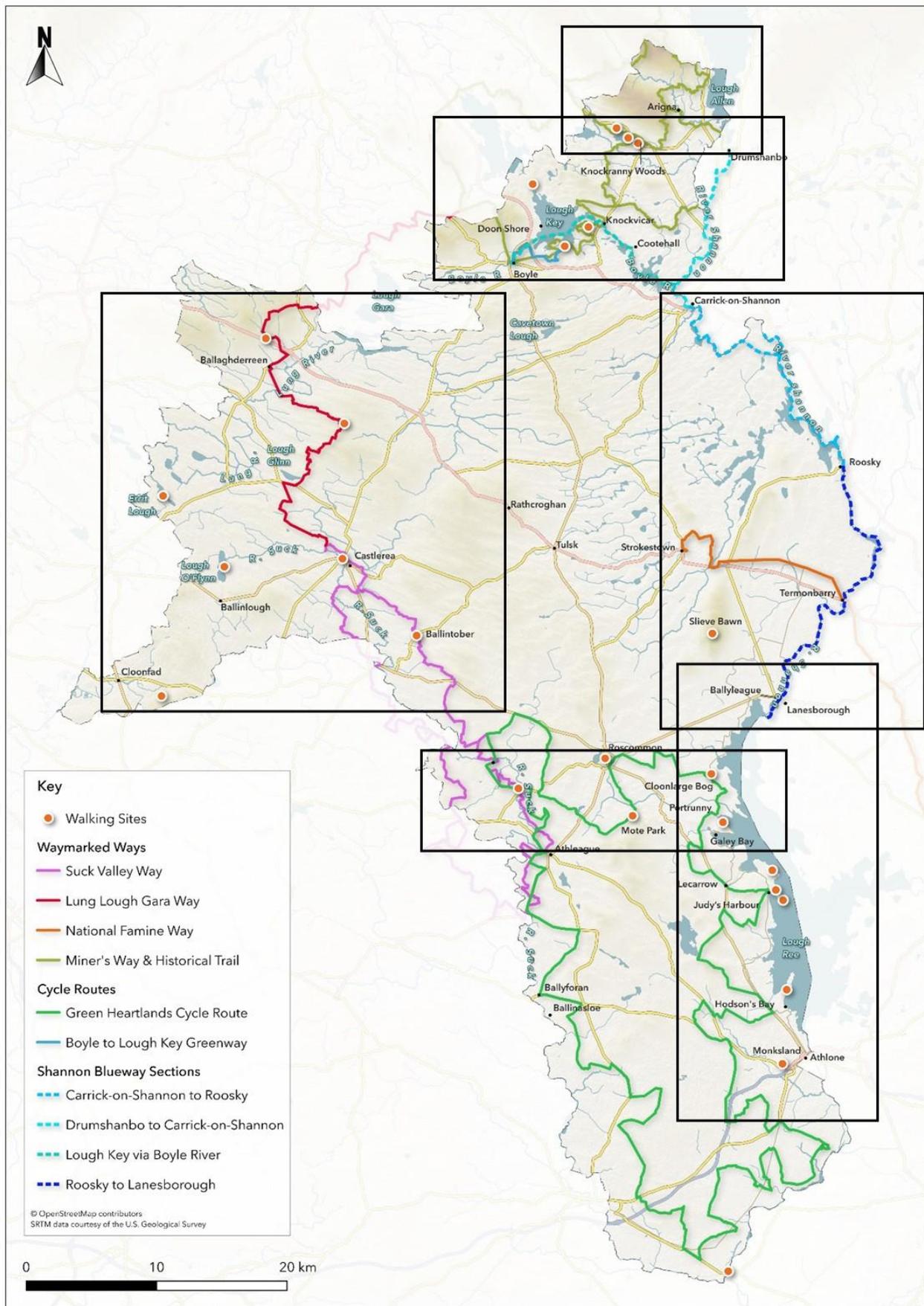


Fig.3 Geographical clusters of outdoor recreation across Roscommon

## 7 Vision and Mission

Following comprehensive consultation and SWOT analysis, the Strategy's Vision and Mission were agreed as follows:

### *Vision:*

*Accessible outdoor spaces for all to enjoy in the heartlands of Ireland.*

### *Mission:*

*Through collaborating and empowering all stakeholders involved in outdoor recreation, enhance the provision of outdoor recreation activities for all who live in and visit, resulting in increased health and well-being, economic growth and greater environmental awareness of the need to protect and manage the landscape and waterscapes of the Heartlands.*

The Strategy's Vision and Mission are immersed in the following underlying principles:

- **Partnership Working** – working with partners to manage, enhance and develop a range of recreation opportunities appropriate to the special qualities of Roscommon
- **Sustainable development** – ensuring any developments take account of the carrying capacity of the resource base and that the environment is central to all decision-making in the future planning, development and management of outdoor recreation across the area.
- **Quality experience** – ensuring that all who use Roscommon for recreation enjoy a quality experience from when they decide to visit through to returning home.
- **Widening participation** – offering a more diverse range of quality outdoor recreation opportunities to accommodate both new audiences and those currently underrepresented in outdoor recreation participation
- **Raising awareness** – promoting Roscommon to both residents and visitors as a welcoming destination to enjoy outdoor recreation activities.

To deliver the Strategy's Vision, three priority programmes of work have been identified.

### 1. Partnership Working

*Objective: to ensure that all those involved directly and indirectly in the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation in Roscommon work collaboratively to deliver the Strategy's vision.*

### 2. Planned Development

*Objective: to ensure a geographical spread of high quality, accessible, inclusive and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities across Roscommon, appropriately resourced on an on-going basis and managed in a strategic way.*

### 3. Awareness and Participation

*Objective: to create an awareness of the outdoor recreation opportunities in Roscommon and increase the number of people active in the outdoors from all communities.*

The detail of each work programme has taken account of both the results of the consultation process and wider emerging trends in outdoor recreation including:

- More people are enjoying the outdoors than ever before
- An older generation is now taking part in outdoor recreation
- Soft activities such as walking and cycling continue to be the most popular but there is a notable rise in new activities such as open water swimming, and Stand Up Paddleboarding (SUP)
- People are interested in participating in a range of outdoor recreation activities e.g., walking, cycling, adventure play
- Multi-generational participation in the outdoors has increased
- People's lives are busier but more flexible, with users wanting opportunities 'closer to home' to participate with friends and family
- There is an emerging care for sustainability
- Fully digital consumers are more demanding in terms of information as social media growth continues.

## 8 Key Priorities for Work

### 8.1 Programme 1: Partnership Working

*Objective: to ensure that all those involved directly and indirectly in the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation in Roscommon work collaboratively to deliver the Strategy's vision.*

Across Roscommon a host of organisations play an important role in providing outdoor recreation opportunities. These include Roscommon County Council, the Local Development Company, the Local Sports Partnership, State bodies and private landowners who own or manage land on which outdoor recreation takes place, community organisations and private sector businesses.

To date there has been limited partnership working between these bodies leading to an ad hoc approach to outdoor recreation provision. Working collaboratively in the future on key areas such as strategic direction, facilities planning, funding priorities, project delivery, facilities management, participation, communication, training, information and awareness and performance monitoring is critical to the future success of this Strategy.

To facilitate and lead this new strategic coordinated approach to outdoor recreation, a significant level of staff resource from what currently exists, is required.

Consequently, to help achieve the objective of working in partnership, the following recommendations, which align with the recommendations of the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, are proposed.

1. *Appoint a new County Outdoor Recreation Coordinator*
2. *Establish a new County Roscommon Outdoor Recreation Committee*
3. *Establish a new County Roscommon Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum*

#### 8.1.1 Outdoor Recreation Coordinator (ORC)

To adequately resource the work of the Outdoor Recreation Committee and the Stakeholder Forum (see 8.1.2 and 8.1.3), a dedicated Outdoor Recreation Coordinator is required. Given the size of Roscommon, it is anticipated that the Coordinator will also have responsibility for several other key areas of work including:

- Acting as the single dedicated point of contact for all outdoor recreation stakeholders in the County.
- Offering advice and expertise in areas such as access, the trail planning process, trail build and maintenance.

- Raising the skill set and knowledge of the key stakeholders involved in outdoor recreation, through training initiatives.
- Highlighting the County's strategic priorities for capital investment in outdoor recreation and ensuring all stakeholders are working collaboratively to deliver these.
- Coordinating and guiding strategic outdoor recreation initiatives in other areas such as communication, participation and education.

### *8.1.2 Roscommon Outdoor Recreation Committee (RORC)*

The key objective of the Committee is to ensure co-operation and partnership working between all key stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation across Roscommon.

The Committee will develop from the Outdoor Recreation Strategy an annual Operational Plan, which will provide a clear focus to the work of the new Outdoor Recreation Coordinator. The annual Operational Plan will prioritise work relating to new outdoor recreation developments across the County, upgrading of existing sites/trails and site/trail maintenance. The appropriate partner within the Committee will be identified to progress the work into the necessary funding applications.

The Committee's Chair will be elected from the Committee's members. Membership should include as a minimum, representatives from each of the organisations listed in Fig.4. A useful early exercise for the Committee would be to undertake an audit of all organisations involved in outdoor recreation related projects across the County e.g., active travel, healthy living etc and assess their appropriateness in joining the Committee, remembering that the Committee needs to be efficient and effective moving forward.

The Committee will establish standing subgroups and time-limited subgroups as necessary, and a MOU put in place between the Members committing to their specified contribution.

The Committee shall meet frequently until established, and thereafter four times a year.

Proposed Membership of Roscommon Outdoor Recreation Committee	
Secretariat to be provided by the Outdoor Recreation Coordinator	
Local Sports Partnership	2 x Officers
Local Development Company	Chief Executive Officer Rural Recreation Officer
Local Authority	2 x Officers involved in outdoor recreation planning, development, delivery or funding.
Private Landowner Representative	IFA/other farming body important in Roscommon
Public landowners/land managers	Coillte, Bord na Mona, Waterways Ireland, Inland Fisheries Ireland
State Agencies	Faillte Ireland
Stakeholder Forum	1 x Recreation interest 1 x Community Interest

Fig.4 Proposed membership of Roscommon Outdoor Recreation Committee.

### **8.1.3 Roscommon Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum**

The Stakeholder Forum provides the opportunity for all stakeholders in Roscommon to input to the planning and delivery of the Outdoor Recreation Strategy.

Facilitated by the new Outdoor Recreation Coordinator, it is proposed that the Forum will meet three times a year and provide opportunities for members to network with each other, share collective knowledge e.g., rising insurance costs, share their own plans, raise issues for consideration by the Outdoor Recreation Committee and receive information back from the Outdoor Recreation Committee.

Two representatives from the Stakeholder Forum will attend the Outdoor Recreation Committee meetings, one with a recreation interest, the other a community interest. Additional Forum members can be invited to participate in Committee standing subgroups and time-limited subgroups. Membership of the Forum will include a wide range of interest groups such as those detailed in Fig.5

Proposed Members of Roscommon Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Groups</li> <li>• Landowners/site managers e.g., private landowners, Rathcrochan Visitor Centre, Lough Key Forest Park</li> <li>• Commercial outdoor activity providers</li> <li>• Outdoor recreation enthusiasts, clubs etc</li> <li>• Local representatives of National Governing Bodies of Sport e.g., Mountaineering Ireland, Cycle Ireland, Swim Ireland</li> <li>• Service providers to the outdoor recreation sector e.g accommodation providers</li> <li>• Health representatives i.e., mental health, etc.</li> <li>• Outdoor recreation volunteers</li> <li>• RSS/TÚS/CE Scheme supervisors involved in outdoor recreation</li> <li>• Local representative involved in the Irish Association of Adventure Tourism</li> <li>• Trail Management Committees e.g., Suck Valley Way, Miner’s Way, Famine Way, Lough Lung Gara Way or individuals driving these where no Trail Management Committee exists</li> </ul>

Fig.5 Proposed membership of the Roscommon Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum

## 8.2 Planned Development

***Objective:** to ensure a geographical spread of high quality, accessible and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities across the County, that are appropriately resourced on an on-going basis and managed in a strategic way.*

Fundamental to any future outdoor recreation development in Roscommon is the need for all work to be done sensitively and sustainably to ensure that the very resource which provides the opportunities for recreation and enjoyment, is protected and managed appropriately. In addition, any new developments need to be future proofed for accessibility/inclusivity to allow as wide a range of people to enjoy the outdoors of Roscommon as possible.

A Product Development Framework has been created for Roscommon’s outdoor recreation facilities with facilities categorised as either iconic, signature, activity hubs, community hubs or community trails

(Fig.6). The framework highlights the relationship of each site in terms of its contribution to improving health and wellbeing, increasing community cohesion and social inclusion and economic growth through activity tourism in the County.

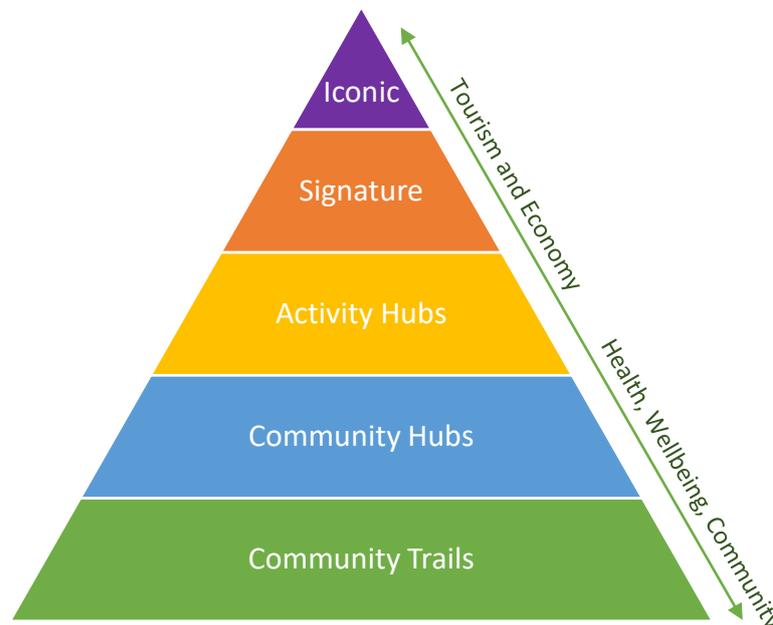


Fig.6 Product Development Framework

**Iconic** – signifies outdoor recreation products and experiences that are *key drivers for international* and domestic visitors. Iconic products will be the key reason for visitors to come to Roscommon as they celebrate and showcase the unique landscapes.

Currently the River Shannon (incorporating Lough Ree and Lough Key), is defined as iconic.

**Signature** – refers to outdoor recreation products/experiences that could form a key part of an *international visitor's wider itinerary* when visiting the County. They also hold significant appeal to domestic visitors and the local community who want to casually explore and connect with the distinctive local landscape.

The following products/experiences are defined as signature; Lough Key Forest Park, Hodson Bay, Beara Breifne Way (includes the Suck Valley, Miners and Lough Lung Gara National Waymarked Ways) and The Famine Way.

**Activity Hubs** – refers to outdoor recreation sites, with a *clustering of activities and supporting visitor services* within a confined area e.g., Forest Park or Country Park. Attractive to *domestic visitors* as part of a wider itinerary, they are *primarily used by locals*.

Sites which are defined as activity hubs are Sliabh Bawn and Mote Park.

**Community Hubs** – refers to outdoor recreation sites that provide *primarily local communities* access to high-quality green and blue-space enabling residents to be more active, therefore improving health and wellbeing and community cohesion. They usually involve the opportunity to take part in more than one activity.

The following sites are defined as community hubs; Lough Erritt, Cavetown Lough, Lough O’Flynn, Loughnaneane Park, Castlerea Demesne, Kilglass Lough, Lough Meelagh.

**Community Trails** - refers to walking and cycling trails that provide safe ‘doorstep’ outdoor recreation opportunities at a community level. They are focused on creating a ‘sense of community’ as well as improving the health and wellbeing outcomes of those who use them. They often link up two communities e.g., creating a walk along the side of a river or across a bog.

The following are defined as Community Trails; Cloonfad, Cloonlarge, Monksland Way, Shannonbridge Loop, sections of the three Waymarked Ways close to settlements, Knockvicar Wood, St.John’s Wood, Derryvunny Forest, Lecarrow, Knockranny Wood, Donamon, Ballintubber, Castlecoote Loop and Granlahan.

The key sites included within the framework have been mapped in Fig.7.

Opportunities exist in Roscommon to develop new outdoor recreation facilities and add to this Product Development Framework. This includes implementing the outdoor recreation recommendations included within other County/National plans for the area, elevating the ‘quality’ and proposition on offer, at existing outdoor recreation sites/trails and developing new outdoor recreation hubs in those areas of the County currently underprovided for.

Opportunities to increase the number of iconic and signature recreation opportunities across Roscommon will be achieved through delivering projects such as the Beara Breifne Way (iconic), the three proposed Greenways, (see Fig.8), Arigna Mines and Rathcroghan Walking Trail (signature) whilst future projects at Donamon and along the River Suck corridor could help create new community hubs.

As the desire to develop further ‘doorstep opportunities’ for walking and cycling continues, developing a network of community trails across Roscommon in a planned way is key. Taking a strategic approach to community trail development will not only help communities connect to their green and blue space through trails, but also encourage greater connectivity between existing recreation sites across the County.

All new trail development requires a better understanding of sustainable trail design and construction techniques, particularly given the sensitivity of the environment. Being able to put in place a methodology to help the Outdoor Recreation Committee prioritise which trails are funded and in what order, is also important.

Elevating the 'quality' of existing outdoor recreation sites play a key factor in the future of outdoor recreation provision across Roscommon. This will be facilitated through either upgrading or introducing new visitor services such as toilets, changing facilities, car parking, catering services, visitor welcome, signage, on-site interpretation and waymarking. Each sites' visitor servicing needs will be unique to that site and needs to be set within a framework that includes consideration of for example, main user groups, popularity of the site, site accessibility and inclusivity and proximity of other similar services.

A more cohesive quality experience, as well as instilling a sense of place for users could also be achieved moving forward at Council owned/managed sites through creating an overall outdoor recreation 'identity' translated on the ground through signage, waymarking, interpretation panels etc

Opportunities also exist to develop specific activities to increase the offering across the area. Whilst the development of the proposed Greenways will help address the deficit in off-road cycling opportunities, short term opportunities should be considered within those sites already offering outdoor recreation provision e.g., Mote Park, Lough Key Forest Park, as well as exploring new sites. Any consideration of off-road cycling should also consider the opportunities for family focused provision and include consideration of other fun facilities such as pump tracks, adventure play areas.

With open water swimming continuing to increase in popularity, opportunities exist across Roscommon to develop the activity formally by identifying and promoting safe swim areas and providing the necessary services required by those participating.

Fundamental to the future development of outdoor recreation in Roscommon is learning from others who are recognised as 'best in class'. Administering a robust training programme including training led by national organisations e.g., Sport Ireland right through to developing training programmes to meet a very specific local need is essential.

Being able to produce evidence in the form of numbers using specific sites and trails is fundamental in securing future funding for new projects. Trail counters/traffic counters should be installed as a matter of course during the development of any new project going forward.

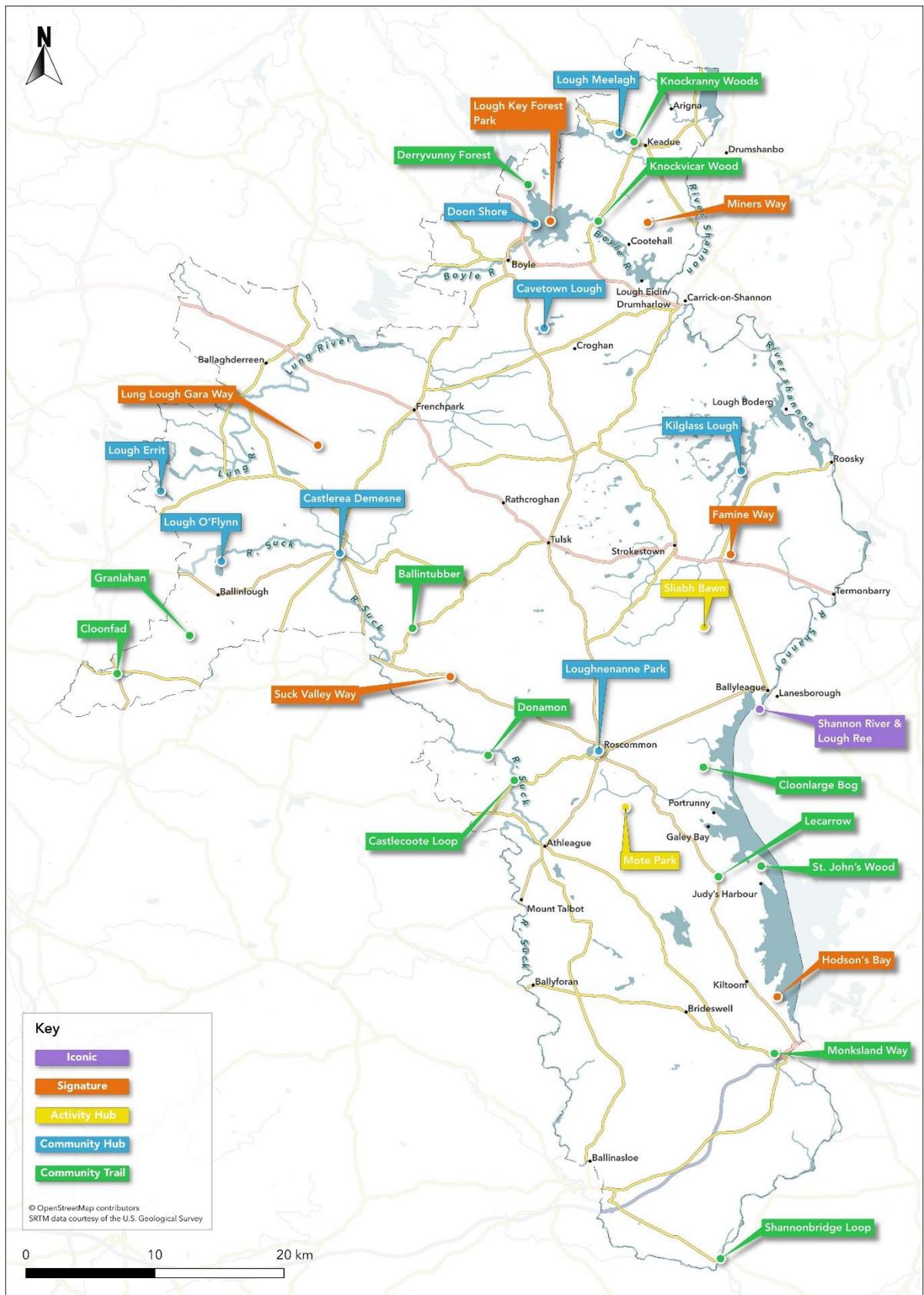


Fig.7 Product Development Framework for key outdoor recreation sites in Roscommon

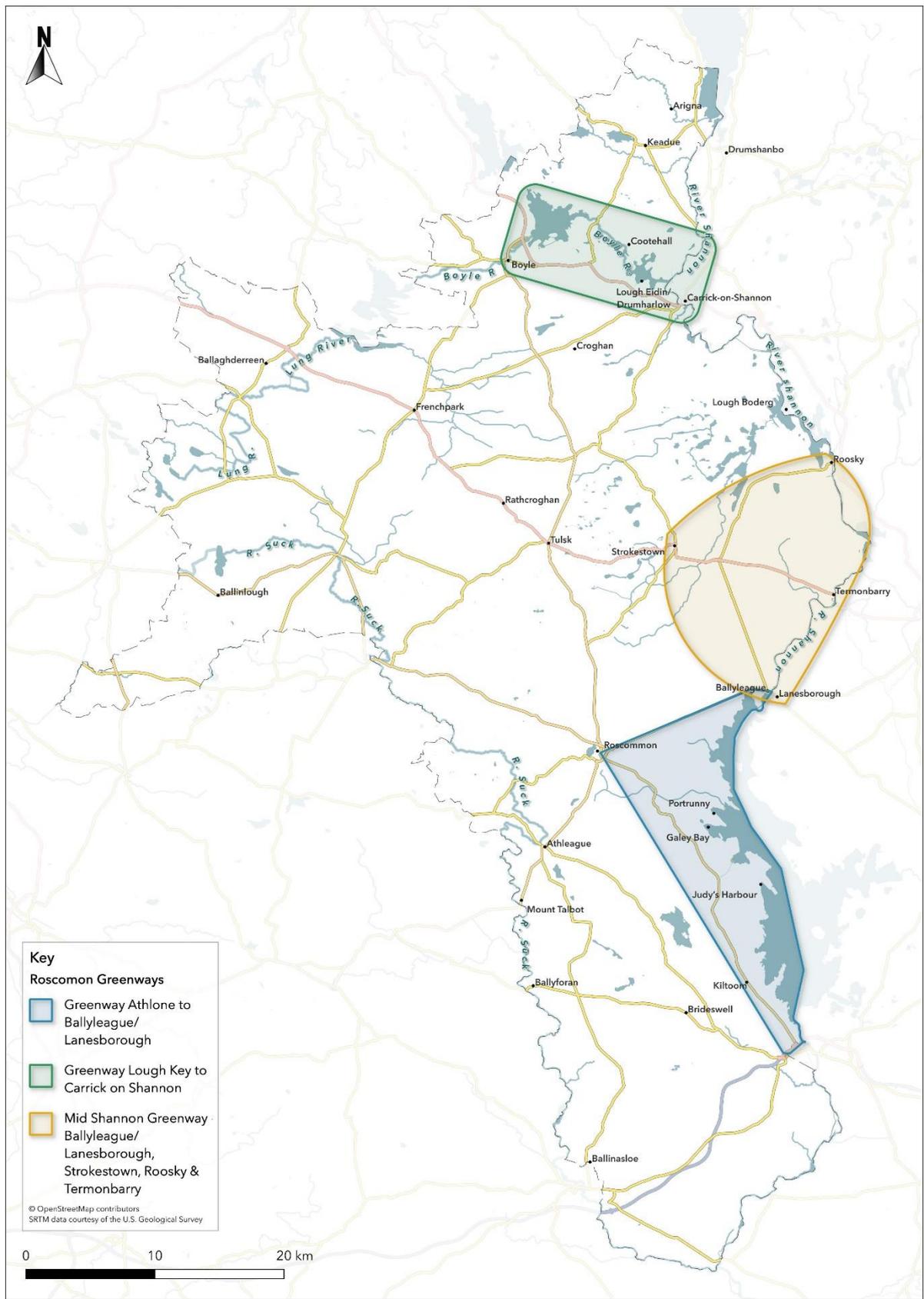


Fig.8 Proposed Greenways in Roscommon

To help achieve the Planned Development objective, the following recommendations are proposed.

1. *Support existing Strategies/Plans*
2. *Prepare Recreational Masterplans for specific sites*
3. *Develop a Quality Framework for all existing outdoor recreation sites.*
4. *Develop a County Community Trail Plan*
5. *Undertake a County-wide Scoping Study for off-road cycling*
6. *Deliver a County-wide training programme*
7. *Create a sense of 'identity' for Council owned/managed recreation sites*
8. *Implement a user monitoring system across all recreation sites*
9. *Put in place a rolling maintenance programme across the County*

### **8.2.1 Existing Strategies/Plans.**

Support should be given through the Outdoor Recreation Coordinator and Outdoor Recreation Committee to those organisations that already have Plans in place that encompass recommendations relating to the planning and development of outdoor recreation. This includes the Shannon Masterplan, the Beara Breifne Way Technical Trail Plan, The Lough Key Development Plan, the Hodson Bay Development Plan and the Rathcroghan Walking Trail Feasibility Study.

Support should also be given to projects starting outside the County's boundary that pass through the area e.g., Dublin-Galway Greenway and complementary projects in neighbouring Counties, e.g., Mid Shannon Wilderness Greenway, Longford County Council. In addition, on-going work regarding the potential of Lough Ree becoming a UNESCO Biosphere, and Rathcroghan a UNESCO World Heritage Site should be supported as both designations will undoubtedly impact on future recreational development.

### **8.2.2 Recreational Masterplans**

Recreational Masterplans are an essential first step for those areas identified as having the potential of becoming new community hubs, to prevent ad hoc development. This will allow for a more strategic approach to be taken to any future development of the area and will encourage collaborative working with other partners which ultimately will lead to a better recreation proposition for those using the area.

### *8.2.3 A 'quality' framework for all existing outdoor recreation sites.*

Disparity currently exists between the quality and provision of outdoor recreation infrastructure at key sites/trails across Roscommon. Whilst some sites/trails have seen significant investment, others have been neglected. These sites are now in need of development to bring their recreation provision up to a standard that makes it inviting to the user.

Putting in place a quality framework, will allow a comprehensive assessment to be made of all sites, the results of which will be used by the Outdoor Recreation Committee moving forward to prioritise sites for future capital expenditure in new products and visitor services, upgrading of existing products and visitor services and on-going maintenance.

The assessment will consider whether the 'critical factors of success' are in place at each site and of a quality that visitors expect to find. Critical factors of success will consider the visitor journey from entering a site/trail until leaving and includes visitor welcome, signage, trail surface, proposition on offer, visitor services, management, on-going maintenance and promotion. An assessment of whether the site is accommodating as wide a range as users as possible through the proposition offered e.g., multi-generational, disabled, families etc will also be assessed, as well as an assessment as to whether it has been developed sympathetically regarding its landscape setting.

### *8.2.4 Community Trail Plan*

A strategic planned approach should be taken for the development of local trails at community level for the County. The Plan will seek to connect communities to their local green/blue space through safe off-road routes and explore the opportunities of connecting existing /proposed recreation facilities in the wider area. A pilot Community Trail Plan will be considered as an initial step, the area around Cloontuskert/Slieve Bawn/Strokestown/Termonbarry should be prioritised, given the on-going work in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands by Failte Ireland and Bord na Mona on assessing the potential of developing a network of trails on former land used for peat extraction.

### *8.2.5 Off-road cycling Scoping Study*

To address the current deficit of safe off-road cycling, especially for families, a Scoping Study is recommended to consider whether any existing recreation sites could accommodate an off-road cycling proposition and/or whether there is an opportunity to develop any new sites. The Study should take cognisance of the work carried out by Failte Ireland on 'cycling friendly destinations'. The Study should also consider opportunities for other innovative family focused facilities including pump tracks/scooter parks and adventure play when assessing potential sites.

### *8.2.6 Training programme*

Disseminating information and developing best practice in the development and management of outdoor recreation will be a key role of the Outdoor Recreation Coordinator. Providing training through workshops, seminars, site visits, study trips, tool kits and conferences will encourage formal and informal networking opportunities, allow for an effective exchange of ideas and views on a wide range of outdoor recreation themes and present opportunities to learn from the 'best in class'.

The immediate priority should be implementing across Roscommon training programmes coming out of the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy to the wide range of professionals and community groups who are involved on a day-to-day basis in planning, designing and building trails particularly in sensitive environment e.g., boglands,

### *8.2.7 Brand 'identity' for County Roscommon recreation sites.*

With so many stakeholders involved in the provision of outdoor recreation across Roscommon, it is inevitable that there is no single brand/identity used to represent outdoor recreation.

Waterways Ireland and Coillte both have their own corporate recreation brand that is evident on their waymarking, signage and interpretation etc. Creating a brand for Roscommon recreation sites would help create a sense of common identity with sites becoming easily recognisable as part of a larger suite.

### *8.2.8 User Monitoring system across all sites*

Having a better understanding of the numbers participating in outdoor recreation, both land and water activities, is essential moving forward. Consideration needs to be given to the most appropriate way to count water based recreation e.g., number of boats using Lough Ree for the Mayfly angling, whilst for land based sites, installing 'people' counters will provide landowners/managers data on the numbers using the site. At some sites, a traffic counter to record the number of cars entering a site may be more appropriate. Ideally this work would be complemented by further research on-site e.g., participation surveys, social return on investment research. Co ordinating the results from all counters across Roscommon will be undertaken by the Outdoor Recreation Coordinator.

### *8.2.9 County-wide rolling maintenance programme*

Without doubt the greatest challenge facing the future of outdoor recreation across Roscommon is the on-going maintenance of existing and new sites/trails. All stakeholders involved in outdoor recreation

provision must ensure that the emphasis of capital funding should equally focus on the maintenance and renewal of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure, as much as on the development of new infrastructure. In addition, the emphasis of capital funding should equally focus on local community infrastructure e.g., community trails, as well as strategic infrastructure e.g., Beara Breifne Way. Both the Community Trail Plan and Quality Framework will help the Outdoor Recreation Committee prioritise these decisions in the future.

### 8.3 Awareness and Participation

**Objective**....*to create an awareness of the outdoor recreation opportunities in Roscommon and increase the number of people active in the outdoors from all communities.*

Several platforms and mechanisms already exist to increase the awareness of the outdoor recreation opportunities available across Roscommon including, walk brochure, [www.visitroscommon.ie](http://www.visitroscommon.ie) (sections on trails, activities, water) and [www.loughkey.ie](http://www.loughkey.ie). However, consultation identified a lack of awareness of where to go and the opportunities available and therefore priority action is required to address this.

To help achieve the objective of increasing awareness and participation moving forward, it is recommended that the platforms and mechanisms are refined through the following proposed actions:

1. *Identify which products for which audience*
2. *Local people - rationalise content and develop Promotional Plan*
3. *Visitors - rationalise content and develop Promotional Plan*
4. *Encourage participation for all, particularly underrepresented groups*

#### 8.3.1 Identify which products for which audience

Before identifying which materials are developed and which platforms are used for promotion, differentiating which products are more attractive to visitors versus the local community is essential, given their expectations and motivations are different and therefore need to be marketed accordingly.

The Product Development Framework, (Fig.7) provides a useful tool to identify which products should be promoted to which audience e.g the more iconic outdoor recreation offering is marketed to visitors whereas a wide range of products including community trails are promoted to local people. Fig.9 outlines the key characteristics of the two audiences and the recommended products to focus on.

	Local People	Visitors
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Residents within Roscommon</li> <li>Motivation is physical activity, mental health, spend time with family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visitors from outside Roscommon</li> <li>Visitors who will enjoy some outdoor recreation as part of their visit to Roscommon</li> <li>Not 'walkers' or outdoor recreation 'enthusiasts'</li> </ul>
Products	<p>All accessible sites and trails, particularly those close to home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All blue and greenspace, trails and activities</li> </ul>	<p>Identify and focus on highlights of outdoor recreation in Roscommon eg.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>River Shannon</li> <li>Lough Key</li> <li>2 unmissable short walks in Roscommon</li> </ul>

Fig.9 Characteristics of visitors and local people

Based on the differing needs of the two audiences, rationalising the content and developing an annual Promotional Plan for each audience is key.

### 8.3.2 Promoting Outdoor Recreation to Local People

Quality content for the wide range of trails, activities and waterways in Roscommon is already available on VisitRoscommon.ie and in the walk brochure. To enhance the provision of content and channel selection, four recommendations are proposed:

- VisitRoscommon.ie is a tourism focused website and includes outdoor recreation. RoscommonCoCo.ie is a website dedicated to residents of the local area yet does not contain information about the outdoors. A clear choice is required regarding the appropriate channel to communicate to local people
- develop a more holistic approach on how information is displayed online – it is important to group together, for example Lough O'Flynn's walk, marina and playground
- only promote products that are appropriate to the audience
- increase and enhance the information e.g., information on the capacity of the car park; accessibility for wheelchairs or buggies; toilet facilities opening times. This improved information will allow users to determine whether it is suitable for them.

It is recommended that an annual Promotional Plan is developed and executed targeting local people to increase their awareness of, and participation in, outdoor recreation. Key considerations in the development of the Plan should include:

- engaging and feeding into Council communications plans to residents, such as Council newsletters
- engaging with local community group, the Local Sports Partnership and Local Development Company to share information to their audiences
- seeking out and engaging with popular social media channels e.g., Roscommon Herald facebook page
- agreeing with Sport Ireland the best way to feed data for Roscommon into the National Digital Database. Based on the database, Sport Ireland will develop a website promoting all sport and physical activity which will be supported by a substantial marketing campaign. As the map will be map-based, it will also enable local people to see on a map exactly which outdoor recreation products are on their doorstep.
- agreeing to feature a 'Walk of the Week' in a local newspaper with pictures and a map

### *8.3.3 Promoting Outdoor Recreation to Visitors*

To best serve visitors coming to Roscommon, some rationalisation of current content and developing new content is required.

Visitors are predominantly interested in iconic and signature outdoor recreation products and therefore these products should be front and centre of all visitor targeted content e.g., visitors currently searching visitroscommon.ie for an outdoor recreation site must search the full listing of outdoor opportunities available including all community trails.

Additionally, it is imperative that outdoor recreation sites are promoted holistically (where applicable) as the primary outdoor destinations in Roscommon.

It is important that all materials targeted at the visitor focus fully on the iconic and signature products and in a holistic manner. It is recommended that consideration is given to:

- developing a short booklet on the iconic and signature outdoor recreation products across Roscommon
- allowing iconic and signature products to take the lead in website and marketing activity
- developing blogs, videos and other content that specifically focus on the visitor

It is recommended that an annual Promotional Plan is developed and executed targeting visitors to Roscommon. Key considerations in the development of the Plan should include:

- focusing on online, particularly key platforms of visitroscommon.ie and DiscoverIreland.ie and associated social media channels
- engaging with relevant social influencers to reach a new audience of potential visitors to Roscommon
- distributing a short booklet on highlights of outdoor recreation to primary visitor touchpoints including all accommodation, tourism attractions

#### *8.3.4 Encourage participation for all, particularly underrepresented groups*

As outlined in 8.3.3, the people of Roscommon will be encouraged to take part in outdoor recreation through increasing awareness and promotion of the opportunities. However, participation and activation programmes are critical for getting people active in the outdoors, particularly for those who do not usually participate.

The Local Sports Partnership has a remit for participation in sport and physical activity in the County and it is recommended that, where possible, it continues to increase its focus on participation in outdoor recreation.

To ensure that the opportunities for participation are truly accessible for all communities and target groups, as identified by Sport Ireland, it is the role of all stakeholders to facilitate the work of the Local Sports Partnership through:

- increased accessibility of product offering e.g., development of all-ability trails
- improved information provided so that an individual can make an informed decision if the product is suitable for their ability

There is potential for other cross-stakeholder initiatives to take place to encourage greater participation e.g., hosting an annual, 'Weekend of Getting Outdoors' by the Roscommon Outdoor Recreation Committee. The weekend would allow the local community to take part in a whole host of free-of-charge outdoor recreation opportunities.

## 9 Delivering the Strategy

Although this Strategy has concentrated on three priority work programmes to deliver its Vision and Mission, it must be acknowledged that several other key areas associated with outdoor recreation haven't been prioritised. These issues are important, featuring in the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy for Ireland, and therefore cognisance should be given to these by the new Roscommon Outdoor Recreation Committee moving forward. They include access to private land, responsible use of the outdoors and planning and delivering outdoor recreation events.

Delivering this Strategy will not be without its challenges. It will require:

- an on-going commitment from all stakeholders involved directly or indirectly in the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation across Roscommon
- a genuine willingness of all stakeholders to work together in partnership for the greater good of outdoor recreation across the County
- an ability to secure long-term revenue funding to employ the Outdoor Recreation Coordinator
- an ability to secure long-term capital funding from internal organisational budgets of the key stakeholders as well as through external funding sources e.g grant programmes
- an ability to secure budget and staff to deliver an annual rolling maintenance programme of outdoor recreation sites
- public landowners e.g., Council, Coillte, Inland Fisheries, agreeing an acceptable way forward regards management, maintenance and liability responsibilities for outdoor recreation on their own land or land managed by another.
- private landowners agreeing to allow public access across their land for existing walking trails and for new trail opportunities
- good community and industry buy-in for outdoor recreation

Successfully overcoming these challenges is essential, as the benefits of implementing the recommendations of the Strategy has a significant role to play in the future prosperity and well-being of the County and its citizens, but also in attracting visitors who can avail of the diverse range of outdoor recreational opportunities across the area.

## Action Plan

This Action Plan covers the period 2023-2028

Strategic Objective 1			
Partnership Working			
<i>Objective: to ensure that all those involved directly and indirectly in the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation in Roscommon work collaboratively to deliver the Strategy's vision.</i>			
By 2028 we will see	Action	Timescale	Lead
A partnership approach to outdoor recreation across Roscommon	Appoint a new Outdoor Recreation Coordinator (ORC) to co-ordinate all outdoor recreation activity across Roscommon	Short-term	Local Sports Partnership
	Undertake an audit of all stakeholders involved in outdoor recreation across Roscommon.	Short-term	ORC
	Establish a Roscommon Outdoor Recreation Committee (RORC) endorsing the approach of shared and collected responsibility among the various stakeholders.	Short term and continuous	ORC
	Establish an Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum for the County to allow better co-ordination, planning and development of outdoor recreation at a local level.	Short term and continuous	ORC

## Strategic Objective 2

### Planned Development

*Objective: to ensure a geographical spread of high quality, accessible and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities across the County, that are appropriately resourced on an on-going basis and managed in a strategic way.*

By 2028 we will see	Action	Timescale	Lead
A new approach to planning and developing outdoor recreation infrastructure/trails across Roscommon	Put in place a training programme for all those currently involved in the planning, development, and construction of trails. May include workshops, conference, training events, learning journeys on a wide range of outdoor recreation topics to facilitate learning, networking and sharing of good practice	Continuous	ORC
	Deliver training courses/share information on up-to-date visitor monitoring/counters and subsequently deliver a training course on 'Social Return on Investment'	Continuous	ORC
	Install visitor counters on all new recreation projects going forward	Continuous	All recreation promoters
	Coordinate across Roscommon the results of existing visitor monitoring data and report back to the Outdoor Recreation Committee and wider outdoor recreation community.	Medium - continuous	ORC
Better strategic planning of outdoor recreation infrastructure	Undertake Masterplans for key recreation hubs	Short-term – medium term	RCC, local community, RRO, State Agencies
	Develop a Community Trail Plan for the County.	Long Term	ORC, State Agencies, local community
	Undertake a Scoping Study for family-focused off-road cycling trails/pump tracks and adventure play.	Medium Term	ORC, State Agencies, local community
Better outdoor recreation opportunities available across the County for a wider audience	Support the implementation of recommendations contained within existing Strategies and Plans for the area e.g., River Shannon, Beara Breifne Way, Lough Key, Rathcroghan and Hodson Bay	Continuous	RORC members
	Develop on the ground new recreational opportunities based on the recommendations of the Masterplans	Medium – long term	RORC members, local community

	Develop on the ground a network of Community Trails across the County based on the recommendations of the Community Trail Plan.	Medium – long term	RORC members, local community
	Develop on the ground new family focused opportunities based on the recommendation of the Scoping Study as above.	Medium – long term	RORC members
Improved quality and visitor servicing of outdoor recreation facilities	Develop a Quality Framework for all outdoor recreation sites across Roscommon	Short-term	RCC
	Deliver a rolling annual programme of site upgrades based on the recommendations of the above Quality Framework	Medium – long-term	RORC members
	Develop an 'identity' for all sites across the County	Short-term	RCC
	Deliver on a rolling annual basis a programme of site upgrades based on the development of the above brand identity	Medium – long-term	RORC members
Better managed and maintained outdoor recreation facilities	Deliver a rolling annual programme of site maintenance works based on the recommendations of the Quality Framework	Medium – long-term	RORC members

## Awareness and Participation

*Objective: to create an awareness of the outdoor recreation opportunities in Roscommon and increase the number of people active in the outdoors from all communities.*

By 2028, we will see	Action	Timescale	Lead
Better understanding of the customer	RORC will review the needs and preferences for the two key audiences, local people and visitors to Roscommon.	Continuous	RORC
Better data on outdoor recreation	In partnership with Sport Ireland support the collation and audit of data to feed into the Sport Ireland National Digital Database	Short-term	RORC
Better access to information on the outdoors online	Develop or adapt appropriate online platforms to communicate to local people and visitors.	Medium-term	RORC
A planned and targeted approach to promotion	RORC will develop a promotional plan to increase awareness for local people of where and how to take part in outdoor recreation.	Medium-term	RORC
	RORC will develop a promotional plan to increase awareness for visitors of where and how to take part in outdoor recreation.	Medium-term	RORC
Increase in participation for all, with a focus on under-represented groups	Continue to deliver participation programmes to support an increase in participation	Continuous	RORC and LSP
	Increase the number of programmes and participants engaged in outdoor recreation for all, in line with Sport Ireland's guidance and available funding	Short-term	LSP
	Facilitate the work of the Local Sports Partnership, in driving participation	Continuous	RORC members

## APPENDIX A

### Project Ireland 2040

Project Ireland 2040 is the government's long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better place for all its people and combines the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Planning Framework (NPF). Two outcomes of the NPR are 'Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities' and 'Enhanced Amenities and Heritage'. The Framework recognises the key role rural areas play in defining Ireland's identity, in driving its economy and high-quality environment and that investment is required in amenities in rural areas, such as national and forest parks, activity-based tourism and trails such as Greenways, Blueways and Peatways, linked to and integrated with built, cultural and natural heritage. The Framework also recognises the inextricable link in rural areas, between agriculture and tourism, given that in many places, agriculture creates and maintains the landscapes upon which tourism trades. It notes that the maintenance of access to landscapes and the creation of new access are dependent on maintaining good links with landowners.

### Programme for Government - Our Shared Future (2020)

Programme for Government's focus is to improve the wellbeing of the Irish people and society with the immediate challenge to recover and rebuild in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. It acknowledges the contribution of tourism in reaching its vision and intends to build on, develop and strengthen Ireland's image as an 'outdoor activity holiday destination' to the domestic and international markets. Key actions related to outdoor recreation in it relate to the development of a new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, backed up by increased investment in trails, Greenways, Blueways, cycleways, angling and other rural amenities to capitalise on the increased demand for adventure tourism, thus bringing economic benefits to rural towns and villages.

### Our Rural Future, the Rural Development Policy (2021-2025)

Our Rural Future, the Rural Development Policy 2021-2025, seeks to create a vibrant and sustainable rural Ireland, transforming the quality of life and opportunities for people living in rural areas and commits to publish Ireland's first ever National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, backed up by increased investment in trails, greenways, cycleways, blueways and other amenities, capitalizing on the increased demand for outdoor pursuits post COVID-19. It acknowledges that outdoor recreation plays a key role in achieving the ambition for rural Ireland to be a destination of choice for outdoor activities and adventure tourism and provides opportunities for employment growth in rural areas associated with activity tourism. It also recognises the community and wellbeing benefits of outdoor recreation through the development of green spaces and recreational amenities that encourages community

enjoyment and more vibrant communities, as well as supporting healthy, active lifestyles in local communities.

### **Tourism Development & Innovation 2016-2022**

Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Development and Innovation: A Strategy for Investment 2016-2022, includes ambitions to increase the economic contribution of tourism across local communities including a number that relate to engaging with the outdoors e.g., 'access to the landscape'. Fáilte Ireland is committed to supporting, directly or indirectly, projects which sustainably create or improve access to, or enhance the visitor experience of the brand propositions including Ireland's Hidden Heartlands such as the development or enhancement of outdoor amenity infrastructure such as pathways to improve accessibility and manage erosion, wildlife viewing points, coastal paths etc. Alongside this investment, Fáilte Ireland will encourage local authorities and project promoters to adopt international best practice in providing sustainable and sensitive access to the landscape and the coast.

### **Sport Ireland Policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the Outdoors (2020)**

In September 2020, Sport Ireland published its Policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the Outdoors, with a vision to create opportunities for everyone to participate in and enjoy sport and physical activity in the outdoors. The goals of the policy are built around four targets, one of which is 'supporting infrastructure development' and another 'creating opportunities'. Under the supporting infrastructure theme, two of Sport Ireland's policy goals include; support the strategic development of quality outdoor infrastructure in rural and urban settings to enable increased participation in sport and physical activity; and continue to support the development of recreational trails in Ireland by promoting quality criteria and best practice and maintain a National Trails Register. Under the theme of 'creating opportunities' one of its policy goals is to 'activate and promote existing and new outdoor recreation infrastructure in the State including Trails, Greenways, Parks, Forest Recreation Sites, Mountain Bike Trails and Blueways.

### **Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan (2021 – 2025).**

The Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan (2021-2025) provides a clear roadmap of how to work together to bring about good health, access to services, healthy environments, and the promotion of resilience and to ensure that everyone can enjoy physical and mental, health and wellbeing, to their full potential.

It includes actions related to outdoor recreation indirectly such as overseeing the implementation of 'Get Ireland Active! National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland. The National Physical Activity Plan seeks to increase population levels of physical activity which would lead to health, economic and social

benefits and contains the following two actions: Prioritise the planning and development of walking and cycling and general recreational /physical activity infrastructure and develop and promote walking and cycling strategies in each Local Authority area.

### **Draft Ireland Hidden Heartland Regional Tourism Development Strategy (2023-2027)**

Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy (2023-2027) sets out a strategic approach to unlocking the commercial potential of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands focusing on sustainable and regenerative tourism development and ensuring that benefits accrue to local communities and to nature. At the heart of the Strategy is the River Shannon and the Beara Breifne Way, and a well-connected web of Greenways and Blueways spread throughout the region. It also recognises the work of Bord na Mona, the Local Authorities and local communities to optimize the tourism potential of the area's bogs, peatlands and wetlands, particularly around a Peatlands Trails Strategy, while ensuring that their ecological value is protected.

### **The Shannon Tourism Masterplan (2020 - 2030)**

The Shannon Tourism Masterplan, led by Waterways Ireland in partnership with Fáilte Ireland and 10 local authorities, sets out a bold and integrated framework for sustainable tourism development along the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway repositioning the region as a key tourism destination within Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, with world class visitor experiences based on the region's natural and cultural assets. Implementation has already begun, and the Plan specifically mentions the importance of Lough Key, Lough Ree, Lough Key Forest Park, the Miner's Way, the Beara Breifne Way, and the Shannon-Erne Blueway, to name but a few, as key components of the overall tourism proposition in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands.

### **Tourism Masterplan for the Beara Breifne Way (2020)**

The Tourism Masterplan for the Beara Breifne Way, sets out the vision and aspirations of Fáilte Ireland and the regional destination brands, to create a long-distance walk of international significance that will attract visitors 'off the beaten track' as well as developing a 'soft' product for the masses to explore nature and cultural experiences. It sets out a framework to create significant economic and social benefits to the rural communities, towns and villages along the route through increasing visitor dwell time. The BBW section that passes through Roscommon includes the Miner's Waymarked Way, the Lung Lough Gara Waymarked Way and the Suck Valley Waymarked Way.