



Tourism

Chapter 6

'To support sustainable tourism development in Louth and strengthen the contribution that tourism makes to the local communities, culture and economy of the County. Continue to develop the role of tourism and the development of a high quality and diverse tourism product throughout the County in a balanced and sustainable manner.'

6 TOURISM

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Louth has a strong tourism product with significant potential for growth. The County has much to offer as a tourist destination, in particular its unspoilt natural environment, a rich and varied heritage and numerous cultural and man-made attractions. The County also has a wide range of quality accommodation and is ideally located equidistant between Dublin and Belfast international airports. Tourism has played a significant role in the economic recovery in recent years and is fundamental in terms of the opportunities it generates for businesses and employment throughout the Country. It is among the most important sectors of the Irish economy, employing more than 300,000 people and generating billions of euro in revenue.

According to CSO figures, the total number of trips to Ireland made by overseas visitors in 2019 saw an increase of 1.8% on 2018. The *Fáilte Ireland Topline Performance by Region 2017* estimates that there were 172,000 overseas tourists to County Louth in 2017, generating revenue of €55m. However, the tourism sector has been severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent travel restrictions to, from and within Ireland. Tourism was one of the first sectors to be hit by the pandemic restrictions and is likely to be the last one to emerge from the crisis. It will likely take a number of years for the tourism sector to recover the ground lost during the Covid-19 crisis.

Since its launch in 2015, Fáilte Ireland has been actively marketing 'Ireland's Ancient East' as a tourist destination.

The Ireland's Ancient East initiative, which includes County Louth, is designed to allow visitors peel back the layers of time and to go off the beaten track to experience thousands of years of history. It focuses on the wealth of cultural and heritage attractions in the area.

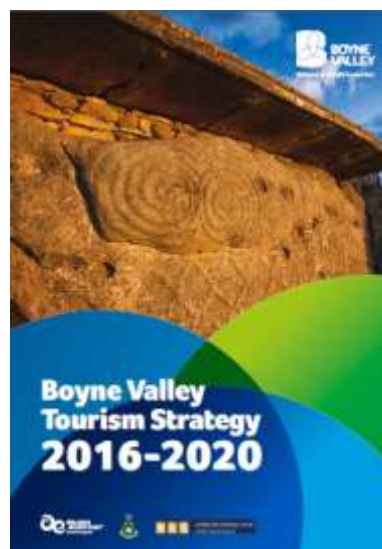
The future development of the tourism sector needs to capitalise on County Louth's unique location in relation to the Boyne Valley and the Mourne/Cooley/Gullion Regions.

A fine balance needs to be struck between capitalising on the resources of the County whilst protecting them from harm and over-development.

6.2 POLICY CONTEXT

6.2.1 Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy 2016-2020, (Boyne Valley Tourist Office 2016)

The Boyne Valley tourism region of County Louth and Meath contains the greatest concentration of national heritage assets in Ireland. The area is home to the Brú na Bóinne UNESCO World Heritage site.



The *2016-2020 Strategy* is designed to focus on areas of growth potential, identify key projects that will act as a stimulus for tourism development and bring the Boyne Valley tourism brand to the next level.

Boyne Valley Tourism represents a central destination marketing and advocacy body, however, the success of the plan will be through a collective approach with the tourism trade and other key stakeholders. The Strategy sets out a pathway for the Boyne Valley to become one of the leading tourism destinations in Ireland based on a collaborative destination marketing approach and return on marketing investment focus.

Policy Objective	
TOU 1	To co-operate with all relevant stakeholders in the implementation of the Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy 2016-2020, and any subsequent plans adopted.

6.2.2 People, Place and Policy - Growing Tourism to 2025 (Department of Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport and the Gaeltacht 2019)

Growing Tourism to 2025 is a policy framework for the development of tourism within the Country. The framework establishes the overall tourism goals of Government:

- Employment in the tourism sector will be 250,000 by 2025, compared with around 200,000 at present.
- There will be 10 million visits to Ireland annually by 2025 and
- Overseas tourism revenue will reach €5 billion in real terms by 2025.

6.2.3 Tourism Development and Innovation – A strategy for Investment 2016-2022, (Fáilte Ireland, 2016)

The *Tourism Development and Innovation Strategy* sets out a strategy which will be outcome based and will identify the types of projects to invest in that will achieve these outcomes, rather than specific projects or locations for investment.

To stimulate innovation and improve international competitiveness, Fáilte Ireland has launched a significant new Tourism Development and Innovation Fund which will be the main source of funding in the sector over the next five years. This strategy sets out the framework and mechanism for the delivery of investment to cities, towns, villages, communities and businesses across the Country.

It identifies priorities to support innovation in the sector to retain and grow the Country's competitiveness in the marketplace.

Its ultimate aim is to strengthen the appeal of Ireland for international visitors. The strategic objectives of the Tourism Development and Innovation Strategy are:

- To successfully and consistently deliver a world class visitor experience;
- To support a tourism sector that is profitable and achieves sustainable levels of growth and delivers jobs;
- To facilitate communities to play an enhanced role in developing tourism in their locality, thereby strengthening and enriching local communities; and
- To recognise, value and enhance Ireland's natural environment as the cornerstone of Irish tourism.

6.2.4 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, 2019-2031

The *Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES)* highlights the importance of tourism to the regional economy and seeks to support Fáilte Ireland to deliver greater tourism benefits to the region.

The significant heritage and tourism potential of Drogheda is highlighted in the RSES, both within the town itself where its rich urban heritage is evident in the archaeology and architecture within the historic town core, and also as a gateway to heritage sites outside the town in the Boyne Valley.

The River Boyne is identified as the most important natural amenity of Drogheda, with the potential for the River to be a focal point of any regeneration projects highlighted. The benefits of developing parklands in the west of the town in improving links to the Brú na Bóinne World Heritage Site are also acknowledged. Regional Policy Objective 4.15 provides specific detail in the promotion of Drogheda as a tourism destination.



6.2.5 County Louth Tourism & Heritage Action Plan 2016 - 2021

The County Louth *Tourism & Heritage Action Plan 2016 -2021* was published as part of the Louth Economic Forum 10 Point Economic Action Plan overall strategy.

Task groups were formed to drive each of these areas including Tourism and Heritage.

Louth Economic Forum consulted with stakeholders at a Regional and Local level, to ensure that the *Tourism and Heritage Action Plan* is in line with National and Regional tourism strategies, and to optimise the spirit of industry partnership which has underpinned the Tourism and Heritage Forum's approach from the outset.

It seeks to capitalise on Louth's opportunities and enhance local economies throughout the County. To achieve this, a partnership approach between the Louth Tourism Office and other sectoral players, including Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Tourism Board is required.

The vision of the Action Plan is to increase the number of visitors to the region by working in partnership to develop a world-class sustainable tourism experience. This vision will be achieved by:

- Increasing the number of bed nights and 'dwelling time' in order to generate further tourism revenue, create associated tourism employment and enhance local economies;
- Maximising revenue funding to achieve commercial advantage and sustainable tourism growth;
- Marketing and promoting Louth's unique heritage, arts and cultural strengths; and
- Leveraging off Louth's 'Green' county reputation, its quality environment credentials and its recreational, sporting and other activities.

Policy Objective

TOU 2	To support the implementation of the County Louth Tourism & Heritage Action Plan 2016 -2021 (or subsequent plans).
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Policy Objective

TOU 3	To support the implementation of the National Climate Action Plan 2019, Climate Action Charter and by the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for County Louth by integrating climate change action measures into future tourism plans.
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Policy Objective

TOU 4	To promote and facilitate tourism as one of the key economic pillars of the County's economy and major generator of employment and to support the provision of necessary significant increase in facilities, visitor attractions and improvement in public spaces to promote attractive and vibrant town centres as key places for tourists.
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6.2.6 Boyne Valley Strategy Working Group

The Boyne Valley forms part of Fáilte Ireland's national destination strategy. The Boyne Valley draws together the tourism industry of County Louth and County Meath. Since 2012 Louth and Meath County Councils have taken a collaborative approach to tourism whereby both councils have been working together to jointly market and develop the Boyne Valley as a tourism destination. A Boyne Valley Tourism Development Officer has been appointed to work closely with the relevant stakeholders to promote and develop the Boyne Valley destination.

Louth and Meath County Councils have established a Boyne Valley Strategy Working Group with representation from the tourism trade and relevant bodies across both Counties, with the purpose of overseeing the preparation of a new strategy to guide tourism development.

This strategy's core objective is to make the Boyne Valley a leading tourism destination.

Policy Objective

TOU 5	To support the work of the Boyne Valley Strategy Working Group and its core objective of making the Boyne Valley a leading sustainable tourism destination.
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6.2.7 Boyne Valley Food Strategy 2016-2021

The development of a Boyne Valley Food Strategy was formulated to enhance the good work already commenced in the Region.



One of the main pillars of the strategy is to create a Louth/Meath food network, which supports and facilitates the growth of the local food community in both Counties and to develop the Boyne Valley Region as the Food Champion within Ireland's Ancient East.

While the strategy sits under the Boyne Valley banner, it is written with all parts of both Counties in mind, on the basis that the tourist or consumer does not necessarily recognise geographic boundaries.

The overarching strategic vision of the *Boyne Valley Food Strategy 2016-2021* is for the Boyne Valley region to be recognised as the leading national food and drinks destination and to be the stand out food region within Ireland's Ancient East.

Policy Objective	
TOU 6	To support the implementation of the Boyne Valley Food Strategy 2016-2021 (or subsequent strategies).

6.2.8 Mourne-Cooley-Gullion Geotourism Project

The Mourne-Cooley-Gullion Geotourism project is a cross border project that aims to develop a competitive, internationally recognised tourism destination taking advantage of the prized landscape and related cultural heritage of the Mourne-Cooley-Gullion area, improving visitor infrastructure and services while raising awareness of and protecting this natural resource.



The project covers the upland areas of the Mourne Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Ring of Gullion as well as the Cooley peninsula and adjacent areas within County Louth.

The project promotes the unique aspects of the region, its geology and the related fields of archaeology, mythology and heritage.

Policy Objective	
TOU 7	To promote and co-operate with all relevant stakeholders to facilitate the development of the Mourne Cooley Gullion Geotourism Project.

6.3 TOURISM ATTRACTIONS WITHIN COUNTY LOUTH

County Louth includes an array of tourism amenities and attractions, which span the entire county, from the Mourne /Cooley/ Gullion to the Boyne Valley Region:

- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Areas of High Scenic Quality;
- Boyne Valley Region: UNESCO World Heritage Site Brú na Bóinne and Site of the Battle of the Boyne;
- Archaeological sites and monuments including Mellifont Abbey and the Tentative World Heritage Site of Monasterboice;
- Mourne /Cooley/ Gullion Region incorporating the Geotourism project;
- Historic walled towns of Drogheda, Ardee and Carlingford;
- Historic houses and designed landscapes;
- Dundalk Stadium - all-weather horse racing track;
- Inland and sea fishing;
- Identified walks and cycle routes;
- Equestrian activity;
- High quality golf courses;
- In excess of 70 kilometres of clean coastlines including 3 blue flag sites and 1 green coast site (2019);
- High quality range of independent and multi-national retailers;
- Excellent hotels and conference facilities;
- Arts, crafts and food festivals;

- Places of recreation including cinemas, pubs, restaurants and theatres; and
- Ornithological opportunities.

6.3.1 Greenways - Walking and Cycling Routes

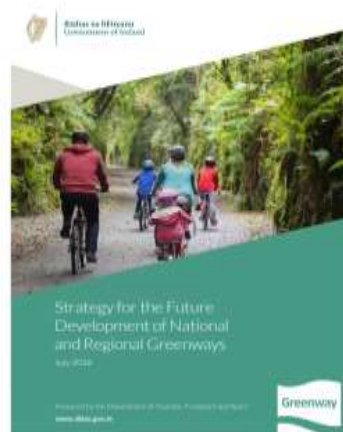
A greenway is a recreational or pedestrian corridor for non-motorised journeys, developed in an integrated manner, which enhances both the environment and quality of life of the surrounding area. Many greenways have been developed along abandoned rail lines, utility corridors or other natural linear open spaces, such as river banks and canals. Their development has occurred in scenic locations that were not previously accessible for pedestrians or cyclists.

These trails are proving to be popular entry points to a more active lifestyle and are also greatly enhancing the tourism attractiveness of these areas.

Figures from Fáilte Ireland indicate that there has been a significant upward trend toward walking and cycling tourism in Ireland.

The number of tourists coming to Ireland on walking and cycling holidays has grown exponentially in recent years, from 371,000 in 2012 to 1.8 million in 2017. Last year, 46% of all overseas holidaymakers to Ireland engaged in walking and cycling as part of their holiday experience. Harnessing the potential of this tourism sector can have significant economic benefits. An *Economic Impact Case Study* undertaken in 2011 by Fáilte Ireland on the Great Western Greenway in Mayo found that there was an estimated local economic impact of about €6.3 million. 50% of businesses surveyed indicated that the Greenway has led to an increase in business turnover.

The Department of Tourism, Transport and Sport has published a '*Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways*'.



The objective of this strategy is to assist in the strategic development of nationally and regionally significant greenways in appropriate locations, constructed to an appropriate standard, in order to deliver a quality experience for all greenways users.

6.3.1.1 Great Eastern Greenway

The purpose built greenway between Carlingford and Omeath is a section of 'The Great Eastern Greenway' currently being developed between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The 6km stretch of Greenway, which primarily utilises disused railway line between Omeath and Carlingford, opened in 2013.

The stretch of completed greenway between Carlingford and Omeath has seen over 50,000 users per year.

Since then Louth County Council and the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council in partnership have successfully secured over €3 million in funding to complete a 20km section cross-border Greenway project from Newry to Carlingford.

The Carlingford Lough Greenway, when completed, will link with the previously completed Portadown-Newry element resulting in a total length of scenic, safe and attractive cross-border greenway measuring approximately 52km.

Figure 6.1 Great Eastern Greenway



Figure 6.2: Boyne Greenway



Figure 6.3: Boyne Greenway Route



6.3.1.2 Boyne Greenway

Running from Dominic's Park on the south bank of the River Boyne near the Bridge of Peace in Drogheda, the Boyne Greenway takes you along the river close to the Mary McAleese Cable Bridge and then along the Boyne Canal to the Battle of the Boyne Visitor Centre at Oldbridge. It is envisaged that the Boyne Greenway will extend eastward along the Boyne estuary to Mornington (presently the subject of a Part 8 application).

The walking and cycling facility utilises sections of boardwalk to create a riverside resource connecting Drogheda's town centre to the Oldbridge Estate, via the existing ramparts. Along the boardwalk are a number of heritage signs with information about Irish Mythology relevant to the Boyne Valley.

There are also a number of self-guiding walks to be enjoyed through parkland at the Battle of the Boyne site, Oldbridge Estate.

The Boyne Greenway has the potential to capitalise not only on the scenic nature of the route but also the significant heritage assets within its environs.

It offers an opportunity for a unique visitor experience and a differentiation in visitor interpretation of the Brú na Bóinne UNESCO World Heritage site and the iconic heritage trail.

Policy Objective

TOU 8	To promote and facilitate the development of walkways and cycleways at appropriate locations throughout the County utilising disused transport links where feasible. ¹
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Policy Objective

TOU 9	To protect the integrity and scenic quality of existing and future walking and cycling routes and their setting. ^{1 above}
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Policy Objective

TOU 10	To work in conjunction with adjoining authorities including Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and Meath County Council to extend and design new walking and cycling routes, including the Great Eastern Greenway and the Boyne Greenway. Ensure all proposals include appraisal of environmental impacts and take full account of the potential for negative impacts on European Sites through the process of Appropriate Assessment Screening. ^{1 above}
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Policy Objective

TOU 11	To continue the development of a network of greenways in County Louth in accordance with the Strategy for Future Development of National and Regional Greenways.
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¹ The above policies TOU 8 - 10 shall all be subject to compliance with all relevant EU policies such as the Water Framework, Birds, Habitats SEA & EIA Directives.

6.3.2 Heritage Tourism

County Louth has an array of heritage assets, ranging from the historic ruins at Monasterboice in the south of the County to the walled medieval town of Carlingford to the north of the County. Heritage Tourism is a branch of tourism that involves visiting historical, industrial or natural sites, and which is oriented towards the cultural heritage of a location. It is recognised as one of the most important and fastest growing aspects of the tourist industry and one of the pillars, which underpin the Ireland's Ancient East initiative.

Tourism based on the heritage assets of a destination can provide an additional opportunity to increase the length of time visitors stay in the county, as well as reinforcing cultural identity by creating revenue to conserve built heritage and support cultural heritage.

County Louth has a rich and varied culture and heritage, which forms the basis of much of the County's tourism industry.

Many of the heritage sites within County Louth have significant tourism potential. Such sites include Mellifont Abbey in Drogheda, King John's Castle in Carlingford, Ardee Castle and the heritage site of Monasterboice. In addition, Dundalk has a rich wealth of industrial heritage assets including the former Carroll's factory and the Great Northern Brewery site, as well as medieval sites such as Castletown Motte.

Carlingford, in particular, possesses the greatest concentration of heritage and natural assets within the County.

There is the potential to further enhance tourism development in Carlingford through the integration of activities, the natural and heritage assets and the local history and myths associated with the area. It is the Council's aim to protect and enhance these assets for the betterment of the tourism sector.

Policy Objective

TOU 12	To work with the relevant stakeholders including the OPW, the Heritage Council, Fáilte Ireland, the Arts Council, local communities and businesses to support the development of heritage and cultural tourism in Louth.
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Policy Objective

TOU 13	To recognise the medieval and industrial heritage of Dundalk and its surrounding district through engagement with Fáilte Ireland and associated agencies.
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6.3.3 Food and Craft

The food and craft market has become a key element within the tourism sector and feeds into the continuous development of visitor experiences. This is especially evident within the Boyne Valley region where the Boyne Valley Flavours group has spearheaded growth within the sector. Boyne Valley Flavours is a collective of producers, food service and food experience providers in the Boyne Valley.

The aim is to promote local, sustainable produce, develop the use of local produce in restaurants/cafes and to develop food tourism in the Boyne Valley region. Discover Boyne Valley Flavour's is funded by joint initiative between Meath and Louth County Council.

The group was formed in 2013 when the Boyne Valley Food Series commenced, and the development of a *Boyne Valley Food Strategy 2014-2022* was formulated to enhance the good work already commenced in the region from groups such as Meath Artisan Network and Oriel Food Group in County Louth.

The Boyne Valley Food Series is run by the Boyne Valley Flavours group each year. This is a calendar of events, which celebrates the unique land, heritage, people and produce of the Region. The Food Series has helped to cement the Region as leading player on the national food stage. The success of the Food Series has led to the Boyne Valley being named as one of the world's best food destinations, in 2019, by the National Geographic.

The food and craft market has the potential to enhance the blended experience model within the Boyne Valley region. There is also potential to enhance the sector through food trails and local food story telling.

6.3.3.1 'Sea Louth' Scenic Seafood Trail

'Sea Louth', scenic seafood trail is a tourism initiative and visitor experience developed to showcase Louth's picturesque coastline and local seafood offering, therefore giving Louth a standout factor in the busy food tourism landscape in Ireland.



The initiative is driven by Louth County Council in partnership with the Boyne Valley Food Development Officer and Dundalk Tourist Officer, and is supported by the Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) for the North East Region.

The aim of the initiative is to:

- Celebrate and showcase our locally sourced seafood ingredients;
- Raise awareness of Louth's standout coastal features;
- Drive footfall into our restaurants & eateries which serve good quality seafood dishes and
- Enhance the visitor experience while in the county and increase dwell time.

Policy Objective

TOU 14	To support the development of the food and craft tourism sector within the County and the promotion of food trails which enhance and promote a blended tourism experience model.
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6.3.4 Beaches

Louth's coastline is a major asset in terms of tourism, recreation and marine leisure activities. Designated bathing areas, Blue Flag beaches and other high quality beaches within the County, are significant local amenities and are also important from a tourism and economic development perspective. Port/Lurganboy, Clogherhead, and Shellinghill/Templetown are high value beaches, which have considerable tourism potential. Each of these beaches were awarded Blue Flag status in 2020 while Seapoint beach achieved a Green Coast award in 2020 in recognition of its high environmental quality.

Identified bathing waters within the County, at all of the aforementioned locations, have achieved 'Excellent' water quality status for each of the last 4 years.

The EPA Bathing Water Quality in Ireland report commented that, "*bathing waters in Co. Louth continue to be of a very high quality with few pollution sources having been identified*"

Policy Objective

TOU 15	To protect beaches, and bathing areas as valuable local amenities and as a tourism resource and support the maintenance, protection and improvement of access to these amenities.
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6.3.5 Events and Festivals

Events and festivals are an important means of attracting additional visitors to the County thereby increasing expenditure, attracting visitors during the off-peak season and encouraging repeat visitation. The County presently hosts numerous events and festivals, which make an important contribution to the tourism and economic development of the County. Such events have included Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann which was successfully hosted in Drogheda in 2018 and 2019, Púca Festival, Carlingford Oyster Festival and the International Harp Festival.



Policy Objective

TOU 16	To support and promote existing festivals and sporting events to increase the cultural, heritage and lifestyle profile of the county, and where appropriate to promote and facilitate the development of new events and venues to host these events.
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6.3.6 Additional Tourism Experiences

Louth County Council is supportive of the development of additional tourism experiences or tourism attractions of scale, which would serve to enhance tourism and employment within the County. The Draft Plan supports the sustainable development of facilities such as outdoor activity or leisure parks at suitable locations throughout the County. Development proposals for unique tourism offerings will be considered subject to the protection of the integrity of the built and natural heritage of the County.

Policy Objective

TOU 17	To facilitate the sustainable development of the tourism sector and provide for the delivery of a unique combination of tourism opportunities drawing on the network of attractions in County Louth and potential future attractions.
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Policy Objective

TOU 18	To enable, facilitate and encourage the growth and sustainability of the tourism sector through the provision of tourism enterprise developments in rural areas subject to the provision of adequate infrastructure and compliance with normal planning considerations.
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6.3.7 Narrow Water Bridge

The construction of a bridge between the Cooley Peninsula in County Louth and the southern section of the Mourne Mountains in County Down at Narrow Water would be a project of immense symbolic and historical significance.

The primary objectives of the project are to:

- Facilitate improved cross – border access to the scenic beauty on both sides of Carlingford Lough;
- Enhance the tourist potential of the cross-border region and stimulate job creation;
- Improve the leisure potential of the region for the residents as well as tourists/ visitors;
- Promote interaction between the communities north and south of the border;
- Encourage pedestrian and cyclist activity and complement other visitor initiatives in the cross border region and
- Encourage a modal shift amongst those working in the area.

Policy Objective

TOU 19	To co-operate with the relevant authorities and government agencies north and south of the Border in the provision of Narrow Water Bridge.
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6.3.8 Carlingford Lough Ferry



The Carlingford Lough Ferry operates between Greenore Port, County Louth and Greencastle, County Down. The ferry accommodates a range of vehicle types including cars, vans, camper vans, caravans, minibuses and coaches.

The service departs hourly from each terminal throughout the year and every half hour during the summer months. The service began in 2017 and provides an important tourism link for County Louth.

6.4 FÁILTE IRELAND STRATEGIES

6.4.1 Irelands Ancient East

Fáilte Ireland, the national tourism development authority, aims to guide and promote tourism as a leading indigenous component of the Irish economy.

Ireland's Ancient East was established in 2015 to offer visitors a compelling motivation to visit the east of Ireland and create a new umbrella destination similar to that of the Wild Atlantic Way which has been highly successful.

The brand is rooted in the rich history and diverse range of cultural heritage experiences that are particularly prevalent in the East and South regions of Ireland.



To date there has been a phased roll-out of the branding strategy, with investment in orientation signage and the enhancement of the visitor experience across the programme area.

The first phase of the orientation signage for Ireland's Ancient East began at the end of 2016 with a number of key visitor orientation signs now installed in the County. The signs are designed to encourage visitors to stay longer and explore the wider region and have been strategically sited at such as Drogheda Museum (Millmount), Dundalk Tourist Office, Carlingford Tourist Office, Mellifont Abbey and Monasterboice Round Tower & High Cross.

Ultimately the key strategic objective of the Ireland's Ancient East initiative is to increase the number of overnight stays by overseas visitors in the County as well as increase the tourism revenue generated and the associated tourism employment.

6.4.2 Ancient Destination Development Plan 2020 – 2024

The *Ancient Destination Development Plan* (ADDP) is a five year development plan designed to guide tourism development through a roadmap of key projects adopted by all stakeholders in the pursuit of sustained tourism growth.

Over the course of the ADDP, its success will be measured in the context of achieving growth across a range of indicators from new experience supply, visitor demand and destination development indicators.

The approach adopted within the ADDP is designed to be transformative in how the integrated approach to developing key projects will generate economic growth across the destination. It is designed to harness existing assets and develop them to provide compelling reasons to visit, while providing the tourism industry with a central focus for experience development. The target outputs from the ADDP will include a reduction in seasonality, increase visitor spend, grow visitor bed nights, employment and visitor dispersion.

6.4.3 Drogheda – Destination Town

Drogheda has been designated as a ‘Destination Town’ by Fáilte Ireland. Funding will be allocated by Fáilte Ireland under this initiative to boost the attractiveness and tourism potential of the town.

The Fáilte Ireland scheme is part of the National Tourism Development Authority’s work to drive a better regional spread of overseas and domestic visitors and spend. The scheme is funded under the Government’s Project Ireland 2040 strategy with the aim of driving sustainable growth in the Irish tourism sector and higher revenue and job creation around Ireland.

Research by Fáilte Ireland has consistently shown that attractive towns and cities are key motivators for overseas holidaymakers coming to Ireland. The ‘Destination Towns’ scheme will seek to enhance public spaces such as squares, streetscapes and markets in a way that will engage tourists and enhance their experience. This may include spaces for food and craft markets, areas for town centre events, public art displays as well as orientation and signage to help visitors explore a town’s local heritage.

Policy Objective

TOU 20	To promote the sustainable development of County Louth as a quality tourist destination in partnership with Fáilte Ireland and associated agencies themed on heritage, culture and an unspoilt natural environment and support innovative tourism projects that would boost employment and promote County Louth as a tourism destination, subject to compliance with the requirements of the Development Zones as detailed in Chapter 3.
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Policy Objective

TOU 21	To seek best-practice environmental management and climate proofing of tourism related developments and activities to include the circular economy, energy efficiency, waste management, procurement and recycling.
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Policy Objective

TOU 22	To assist in the development and marketing of identified Tourism Destinations including the Boyne Valley and Mourne Cooley Gullion destinations, in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders.
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Policy Objective

TOU 23	To support and promote Drogheda as a designated ‘Destination Town’ and engage with Fáilte Ireland in developing and promoting the tourism potential of the town.
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Policy Objective

TOU 24	To support the implementation of the Ancient Destination Development Plan 2020 – 2024 within County Louth.
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6.5 TOURIST ACCOMMODATION

There is an underlying need to provide tourist and visitor accommodation which facilitates the growth of the tourism sector within the County.

The Council is keen to ensure that there is a range of high quality and affordable accommodation provided in order to meet the needs of visitors and tourists to the County.

Within the south of the County, there is an identified shortfall in tourist accommodation. This is highlighted within the *Boyne Valley Tourism Strategy 2016-2020* and has become a significant deterrent among tour operators for scheduling the area for overnight stays. However, tourist accommodation must be provided in a manner, which does not impact upon the unspoilt natural heritage of the County and does not compromise the very reason for many inward trips to the county.

Policy Objective

TOU 25	To promote and support the development of additional tourism accommodation at appropriate locations throughout the County in particularly in the Regional Growth Centres of Drogheda and Dundalk.
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6.5.1 Hotel, Guest House and Bed & Breakfast Accommodation

In 2019 there were 856 rooms and 2,097 beds available in the County across all major forms of tourist accommodation (hotels, guesthouses, bed & breakfast, hostels and self-catering), with 84% of the bed spaces provided for by existing hotels (Fáilte Ireland, Accommodation Capacity 2019).

It is also acknowledged that there has been a significant increase in short term letting and hosting across Ireland in recent years through platforms such as Airbnb. This has become a conventional option of accommodation for many tourists and visitors.

The hosting of conferences is an important element of the hotel trade and reduces the reliance upon seasonal tourism trade. Given Louth's strategic location along the Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and its proximity to international airports in Dublin and Belfast, there is significant potential for growth in this area.

Custom built guest houses should be located within existing towns and villages to avail of and support existing services. Bed & breakfast accommodation is normally provided within existing dwellings and can be accommodated in both urban and rural areas.

The Council is keen to ensure that there is a range of high quality and affordable accommodation provided in order to meet the needs of visitors and tourists to the County.

Policy Objective

TOU 26	To direct tourism-based development including Hotels, Guesthouses and B&B's to Level 1, 2 and 3 Settlements where there is adequate infrastructure to service the development, except where the proposal involves the re-use or diversification of an existing building, subject to normal planning criteria.
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6.5.2 Self-Catering Accommodation

Self-catering accommodation is defined as 'purpose built self-contained residential units, which provide accommodation on a short term basis for visitors to the area'.

In order to manage the provision of tourist accommodation in a manner that meets the needs of the tourist, while at the same time supporting the local economy, it is considered important that the provision of self-catering accommodation should be provided within the network of existing settlements and be of a scale that the settlement can sustain.

Therefore, the Council will resist proposals for the development of self-catering accommodation in the countryside, except where existing buildings of character are to be converted or where the restoration of vernacular dwellings is proposed.

Policy Objective

TOU 27	To facilitate the provision of self-catering accommodation in locations within existing towns and villages, of a scale that the settlement can sustain.
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Policy Objective

TOU 28	To prohibit proposals for the development of self-catering accommodation in the countryside except where existing buildings of character are to be converted or where the restoration of vernacular dwellings including thatched cottages is proposed.
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6.5.3 Caravan and Camping Sites

The provision of caravan and camping sites is an important element in the accommodation of holiday-makers. The provision of additional caravan and camping sites could potentially attract more tourists to the County and generate additional income. The Council recognises the need for the provision of camp sites to cater for touring holiday caravans, campervan and tents, which are appropriately located and sensitively designed.

The sector has also changed in line with consumer demand and its offering now includes accommodation such as glamping and pods. Glamping or pod units are seen as an upmarket style of camping and are usually fixed or semi-permanent structures

If situated in the wrong location caravan and camping sites along with their ancillary buildings can be obtrusive features in the landscape detracting from its overall scenic quality and amenity.

In order to protect the visual amenity of the countryside new caravan parks and camping /glamping sites shall normally be located within existing settlements.

Small scale camping/glamping sites outside of settlements will be considered only where it can be demonstrated that there is a justifiable tourist product/demand in that area.

In exceptional circumstances, caravan parks or campsites may be permitted where the proposal:

- Involves the re- development of a previous worked site;
- Is within a forest or woodland;
- Is within a demesne setting.

In all cases the proposal should be suitably screened, have an adequate road network to serve the development, in addition to adequate foul drainage.

Policy Objective

TOU 29	To encourage new caravan parks and camping sites to locate within existing settlements which are appropriately screened and which are served by an adequate and acceptable road network and foul drainage. In exceptional circumstances caravan and camping sites may be permitted in previous worked sites, forest or woodland or demesne setting.
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Policy Objective

TOU 30	To consider the provision of glamping/camping accommodation outside of settlements only where it can be demonstrated that there is a justifiable tourist product/demand or where it is proposed to re-use existing vernacular buildings. The need to develop in a particular area must be balanced against environmental, social and cultural impacts of the development and benefits to the local community. In such cases, documentary evidence shall be submitted to substantiate the proposed development and each individual application will be assessed on its merits.
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Policy Objective

TOU 31	To facilitate the upgrade of existing caravan parks and camping sites in approved locations and to ensure that such upgrades are climate resilient.
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Policy Objective

TOU 32	To support the provision of camper van facilities at appropriate locations in the County subject to any facilities being acceptable in terms of location, visual impact, and compliance with any environmental assessments required.
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6.5.4 Hostels

Hostel accommodation catering primarily for those travelling on a limited budget, occupies an important niche within the tourist accommodation market. Whilst the individual spend on this type of accommodation is by definition low, the ancillary spend by such tourists in the locality can be considerable.

Policy Objective

TOU 33	To facilitate the provision of budget hostels within existing Level 1, 2 and 3 Settlements ensuring high quality design and architecture, provision of adequate infrastructure, compliance with normal planning criteria and subject to the protection of the unspoilt natural environment and landscape amenity.
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6.5.5 Short Term Lettings

Under the *Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019* and the *Planning and Development Act 2000 (Exempted Development) No.2 Regulations 2019* reforms have been introduced to the short term letting sector.

These reforms are aimed at addressing the impact on the private rental market by the use of residential homes for short-term tourism type letting in areas of high housing demand. These provisions only apply to areas designated as 'Rent Pressure Zones' under the Residential Tenancies Act (as amended).

At the time of writing all of County Louth with exception of the Clogher electoral area was designated a Rent Pressure Zone.

The Short Term Letting Regulations will only apply as long as there are designated Rent Pressure Zones, which, at the time of writing is until December 2021. There is provision to extend these designations further if rental supply issues still remain in 2021.

Under the new arrangements applicable in rent pressure zones:

- Short term letting is defined as the letting of a house or apartment or part of a house or apartment, for any period not exceeding 14 days;
- Homesharing continues to be permissible on an unrestricted basis;
- Homesharers are allowed to sub-let their entire principle private residence for a cumulative period of 90 days where they are temporarily absent from their home;
- Where the 90 day threshold is exceeded, change of use permission will be required.

Homesharers in rent pressure zones who wish to avail of these exemptions are required to register with the Council.

Any property that is not a principal private residence that is to be used for short-term letting will require a change of use application.

These applications will be assessed on a case by case basis and will take account of issues such as; the demand for private housing in the area, the suitability of the property for short term letting, the car parking, access and service arrangements, and the impact of the development on surrounding residential amenities and the local environment.

6.6 VISITOR AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT

The following Policy Objectives relating to the sustainable development of tourism and environmental protection and management have been integrated into the Draft Plan through the SEA and AA processes.

Policy Objective

TOU 34	To seek to manage any increase in visitor numbers in order to avoid significant effects including loss of habitat and disturbance and ensuring that new any projects, such as greenways, are a suitable distance from ecological sensitivities, such as riparian zones.
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Policy Objective

TOU 35	To consider the potential environmental effects of a likely increase in tourists/tourism-related traffic volumes in particular locations/along particular routes shall be considered and mitigated as appropriate. Such a consideration should include potential impacts on existing infrastructure (including drinking water, wastewater, waste and transport) resulting from tourism proposals.
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