

A RECREATION STRATEGY FOR COUNTY LEITRIM 2023 – 2032

Volume 2/2
Recreation Strategy



Leitrim Development Company
and Leitrim County Council



Leitrim
County Council
Government of Ireland

Department of
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Planning
2040

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Glossary of Acronyms

LRF	Leitrim Recreation Forum
WGs	Working Groups of LRF
LCC	Leitrim County Council
LDC	Leitrim Integrated Development Company <i>trading as</i> Leitrim Development Company
RRO	Rural Recreation Officer (Leitrim)
LSP	Leitrim Sports Partnership
LCC-TDU	Leitrim County Council (Tourism Development Unit)
PPN	Leitrim Public Participation Network
COILLTE	Coillte Teoranta
WI	Waterways Ireland
IFI	Inland Fisheries Ireland
FI	Fáilte Ireland
SI	Sport Ireland
NPWS	National Parks & Wildlife Service
TII	Transport Infrastructure Ireland
OPW	Office of Public Works
ETB	Education & Training Board (Mayo Sligo Leitrim)
AUT	Atlantic University of Technology (Sligo)
BWI	Birdwatch Ireland
LAWPRO	Local Authorities Water Programme
IHF	Irish Heart Foundation
IWA	Irish Wheelchair Association
HI	Healthy Ireland
MI	Mountaineering Ireland
IFA	Irish Farmers' Association
INHFA	Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association
IHH	Ireland's Hidden Heartlands
WAW	Wild Atlantic Way
NORS	National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027

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SLR would also like to thank the many participants in the surveys, consultations and focus groups for their valuable time and considered inputs. Particular thanks must go to the members of the voluntary Working Groups of the Leitrim Recreation Forum for their ongoing commitment to the strategic and sustainable development of recreation in County Leitrim.

Leitrim Development Company, Leitrim County Council and Leitrim Recreation Forum would especially like to thank the many farmers and landowners who provide permissive access for walking, angling and outdoor recreation across the county.

1.0 Introduction

Leitrim Development Company CLG and Leitrim County Council commissioned SLR Consulting (SLR) to undertake an *Analysis & Development Review of the Leitrim Recreation Strategy and the Leitrim Recreation Forum and its Working Groups*, to develop a new *Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2023-2032* based on research, analysis and consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, and make recommendations for its effective implementation.

SLR Environmental Consulting (Ireland) Limited (**SLR Consulting**), in association with Alan Hill Tourism Development Ltd, was appointed by Leitrim Development Company CLG and Leitrim County Council in March 2022, to undertake an *Analysis & Development Review of the Leitrim Recreation Strategy and the Leitrim Recreation Forum and its Working Groups*. The aim is to develop a new *Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2022* based on desk and field research, review and analysis, and consultations with the existing Working Groups and a range of stakeholders across the county. The study reviewed the structures of the Recreation Forum (established in 2014) and its Working Groups to develop recommendations for the effective implementation of the new Recreation Strategy for the coming decade.

This report presents the findings of the research, analysis and related recommendations, conducted from March 2022 through to November 2022, which informed the development of the new Strategy.

1.1 Context for the Study

In 2013, Leitrim Development Company (LDC) commissioned SLR Consulting, working with Alan Hill, to develop a participative Rural Recreation Strategy for County Leitrim and to recommend a structure for its implementation. The project was funded by the RDP LEADER 2007-2013 programme.

A detailed consultative process was undertaken from May-September 2013 across the county with community activists, landowners, recreational users, enterprises, local and statutory authorities, local public representatives and national representative agencies, through one-to-one interviews, focus groups, public meetings and workshops. A detailed report and strategy was developed and concurrently, a voluntary participative structure (the Leitrim Recreation Forum) was established to implement the strategy in October 2013.

The Forum works with key stakeholders in communities and businesses, Leitrim County Council, Waterways Ireland, Coillte and Inland Fisheries Ireland across County Leitrim. In the early stages, priority projects and themes were identified and refined through a series of Working Groups, comprising members of the Forum and other stakeholders involved in land and water recreational activities. The original seven (7) working groups were later reduced to four (4) which currently operate as the Leitrim Recreation Forum. In the intervening period, the Forum has been successful in maintaining a high level of commitment from stakeholders and agencies in supporting the strategic development of recreation amenities within County Leitrim, but also at inter-county, sub regional, cross border level levels. Many new developments were initiated by the Forum, contributing to both commercial and community recreational activities to enable users to enjoy the amenities across the county.

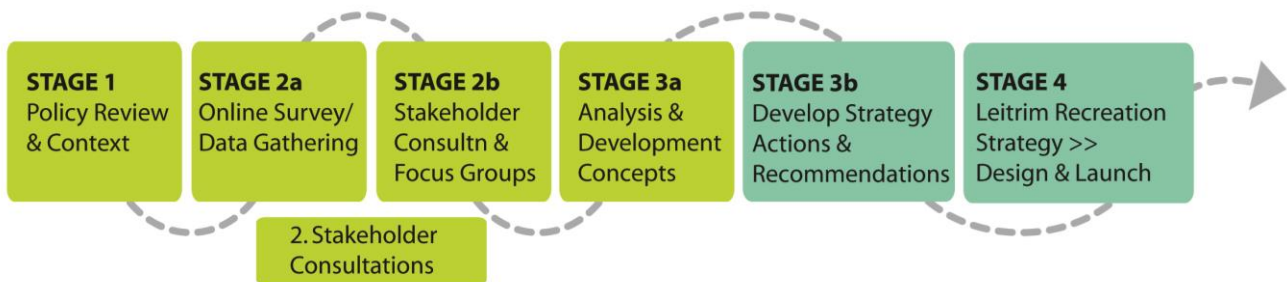
A strong collaborative and working partnership ethos has been built up through the Forum and its Working Groups, involving up to 80 people, leading to positive linkages, connectivity and alignment with existing and new recreational products/assets. Both the Forum and the implementation of the Strategy since 2014 have been ably led by two Chairpersons, Messrs. Pauric White and Mike Feeney, respectively, each of whom had executive management and international business experience and are part of the Leitrim diaspora.

In late 2016, a review of the Forum structure was undertaken by an external consultant (Sue Targett, 2017). Overall, a very high level of satisfaction was reported among Forum members, with suggestions and recommendations to enhance its operations. The Forum members and stakeholder have now agreed that a more comprehensive review and analysis of the recreation sector and activities is required to help set down a revised and robust strategy for the next five or so years.

1.2 Methodology

The following phased methodology was adopted (Figure 1):

Figure 1 Leitrim Recreation Strategy – Methodology



Due to ongoing covid-19 safety concerns, communal meetings/ workshops or internal gatherings were conducted but minimised for the project duration. Planned consultations were largely undertaken electronically where possible although small group meetings and focus groups were held.

1.2.1 Stage 1 Policy & Strategy Context

In Phase 1, a full review of European, national, regional and county policies regarding recreation was undertaken, with an overview of its links to public health and tourism development.

- Review of planning, recreational infrastructure, biodiversity policies and strategies at EU, national, regional, county and local level;
- Review of Irish and international best practice and options for recreational management;
- Review of local development plans, policies and commitments.

Data gathering through extensive desk research was undertaken to review the current and full suite of land and water-based recreational amenities in Leitrim, including lowland, hill/ mountain and coastal availability.

This research looked at the geographical, geological and environmental setting of Leitrim which varies considerably from the rivers and lakelands in the south, to a central highland zone, to a northern coastal zone. Leitrim is peppered with small lakes, rivers, canals and an array of emerging recreational infrastructure.

There are few detailed Leitrim-specific data available in terms of recreational usage of the recreational amenities, apart from anecdotal data gathered through the consultations. An assessment was made of the demographic profile of County Leitrim, using POBAL data, and future likely demand for recreational amenities.

The data gathering phase was thus supplemented by verification, where possible, through discussions with stakeholders and through professional observations.

A review of the current *Leitrim Recreation Strategy (2014-2021)* and its mid-term review by Sue Targett (2017) was also carried out.

Other relevant documents including the *Draft County Development Plan 2023-2029* were reviewed and key policy elements, including community, recreation, tourism, environment, amenity and biodiversity, were identified.

The recently published *National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2022*¹ critically informed the development of this Recreation Strategy, ensuring alignment of objectives and focus for delivery of excellent recreational infrastructure and amenities in County Leitrim.

1.2.2 Stage 2 Stakeholder Consultations

At the outset, a comprehensive list of potential stakeholders was drawn up.

- Stage 2a: An online survey was designed to capture opinion of a diverse and wide range of Leitrim stakeholders, and circulated online through the offices of the Leitrim Development Company; Rural Recreation Officer network; Leitrim Sports Partnership and through the Leitrim Public Participation Network (PPN).
- Stage 2b: In depth consultations were held with the current Chairperson of Leitrim Recreation Forum and the members of the Steering Group of this study.
- Subsequently, one-to-one discussions were held with a wide range of stakeholders, including recreation, amenity, landowners and land managers, statutory agencies, governing bodies and NGOs.
- A series of focus groups were held with members of the four Working Groups of the Forum; with elected members of Leitrim County Council; and with key officers in Leitrim County Council, respectively.
- Consultations and interviews were held mainly by in-person meetings and occasionally by digital communications such as zoom calls.
- Finally, two public meetings were held in late October 2022 in Manorhamilton and Carrick-on-Shannon to listen to wider views and feedback on the Draft Recreation Strategy for County Leitrim.

1.2.3 Stage 3 Analysis and Conceptualisation

- Following research and consultations, an analysis of the data was carried out and a SCOT matrix developed to identify strengths, challenges, gaps and possible recreational opportunities for enhancement and/or development.
- It was borne in mind that emerging opportunities must be practical and ultimately achievable, based on social, environmental and economic considerations of each priority opportunity. This allowed the identification of prioritised recreational opportunities for presentation to the Steering Group.
- Based on earlier consultations and feedback, the structures and organisational working of the Forum were reviewed critically and suggestions were made for optimised management and organisational working, as well as recruiting new participants.
- A Draft Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2023-2032 and accompanying strategic action plan formulated for implementation by the Forum.
- The Draft was circulated for comment and was presented in the two Public Consultation meetings held at the end of October 2022.
- The final Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2023-2032 was completed, based on feedback, and prepared for publication in December 2022.

¹<https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/43eee-embracing-irelands-outdoors-national-outdoor-recreation-strategy-2023-2027/>



Photo: Fáilte Ireland Content Pool

2.0 Policy Context for Recreation in Leitrim

There is an extensive international, national, regional and county policy framework to support the development of recreation, enhancing the availability and accessibility of recreational amenities. Consultations with key stakeholders informed the findings of this Stage prior to engaging in broader public consultations.

2.1 Defining ‘Recreation’

In developing the new Recreation Strategy for Leitrim, the definition of ‘Outdoor Recreation’ cited in the new *National Outdoor Recreation Strategy* was employed in assessing recreational potential and development opportunities. These focus on strengthening of existing infrastructure and identifying options for integration of a thriving recreational network across the county.

The definition of ‘Outdoor Recreation’ used in the *National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (2023-2027)* provides a clear definition as follows:

‘Outdoor recreation’...means activities that take place in the natural environment, such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming. It does not include activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches (such as golf, football, show jumping) nor motorised activities (such as quads)’.

In this definition, outdoor recreation may be seen to include the following types of activities (Table 1):

Table 1 What is Outdoor Recreation?

Land-Based	Water-Based		Air-Based
Walking	Angling		Para-gliding
Hiking/ Hillwalking	Canoeing/ Kayaking		Hang-gliding
Leisure Cycling	Rowing		
Mountain Biking	Wild swimming		
Horseriding	Surfing		
Trail/ Off-trail running	Coasteering		
Orienteering	Windsurfing, Kite-surfing		
Bouldering, Scrambling	Sailing		
Rock climbing	Diving		
Mountaineering			
Caving			

from National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (2023-2027)

Most recreational activities in Leitrim fall within the Land- and Water-based activities.

Waterways Ireland and its partners, under the *Blueways Ireland* brand, has developed a system of “blueways” along the inland navigations, some of which traverse Leitrim, which are defined as:

‘a network of multi-activity recreational trails, based on or alongside idyllic lakes, canals and rivers in Ireland. They provide scenic routes into the heart of rural Ireland by canoe, bike or on foot. Connect with friends and family as you escape to unique natural environments. Feel totally chilled out on a guided paddling trip; build up an appetite on an exhilarating electric bike trip; or gently meander on a

canal-side walk. Tranquil Blueway journeys, where the pace of life is slow, along glistening waters, softly fringed and abundant with nature.²

In Europe, the terms ‘Green’ and ‘Blue’ Infrastructure are commonly used to describe natural and semi-natural areas and features (land, vegetation and waterways) in public or private, rural, urban and peri-urban areas that deliver a broad range of eco-system services (water and air quality, biodiversity) that underpin a healthy environment, including spaces for recreation and amenity³.

A healthy network of green infrastructure provides positive benefits for citizens, visitors and biodiversity, but it requires careful planning and coordination. Green infrastructure includes biodiversity-rich natural areas such as rivers, woodlands, ponds or wildflower meadows. Across the EU, the Natura 2000 network of protected nature areas⁴ constitutes the backbone of the continent’s green infrastructure to conserve and revitalise degraded environments and to catalyse the development of wider networks of green infrastructure.

In the European sense, ‘green infrastructure’ describes what infrastructure is and what it can do. Traditionally, public ‘green areas’ were seen simply as places for leisure or forestry for example, whereas green infrastructure offers more multi-functionality at potentially lower cost. For example, planting trees and restoring wetlands may be more effective than building a water treatment plant or ever higher flood walls. Green infrastructure also provides enhanced habitats for biodiversity and local mitigation of climate change.

In Ireland, in discussing outdoor recreational infrastructure, ‘green’ typically refers to land-based activities (walking, cycling, hiking, nature viewing) and ‘blue’ refers to water based activities (kayaking, canoeing, swimming, boating, angling etc), and at best where green and blue infrastructure align as in ‘blueways’.

Although recreational tourism opportunities are not the core focus of this research, the recently published national strategy for rural development ‘*Our Rural Future, 2021 - 2025*’⁵ (DRCD, 2021) sees outdoor recreation as an increasing driver of rural tourism with a key role to play in sustaining both rural communities and enterprises. Vibrant communities with opportunities to enjoy outdoor activities also provide attractive destinations for rural tourism.

2.2 Social Context for Recreation in Leitrim

County Leitrim is situated in the northwest of Ireland and occupies an area of 1,590 square kilometres. It has the lowest population density in Ireland of c. 20 people per square kilometre (CSO 2016). However, preliminary results of Census 2022 shows that the population of Leitrim grew by 9.1% in the 2016-2022 period to a total of 35,087 persons⁶.

It is useful to assess the demographic and socio-economic profile of County Leitrim, which will inform the assessment of the future recreational and amenity needs of the population.

Based on the POBAL data for census year 2016, Leitrim is home to 12, 452 households, of relatively small size (c. 2.57 per household), of which 11% have no car. Despite a long history of emigration and depopulation in Leitrim, the 2016-2022 population upswing (+9.1%) reflects the growing vibrant and creative population now residing in the county.

²² <https://www.bluewaysireland.org/what-are-the-blueways>

³ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/benefits/index_en.htm

⁴ Natura 2000 includes the Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) network.

⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4c236-our-rural-future-vision-and-policy-context/>

⁶ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpr/censusofpopulation2022-preliminaryresults/geographicchanges/>

2.3 Environmental Context

Leitrim's natural endowments of mountains, lakes, rivers and coast means it is host to a mosaic of natural habitats and heritage which are highly attractive for outdoor recreation. This is well encapsulated in the **County Leitrim Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-2027**:

County Leitrim contains significant areas with sparse human habitation and marginal farming practices, resulting in a landscape of diverse habitat types, supporting some of Ireland's rarest species.

The county is almost landlocked, with the exception of a 2.4 km stretch of coastline at Tullaghan in the very north. The topography of the county can be divided into two sections, north and south of Lough Allen, which almost divides the county into two halves. The county contains a diversity of habitat types including peatland, wetland, woodland, grassland and coastal habitats.

The northern section of the county is hilly and dominated by the Dartry Mountain range which was formed from a glaciated limestone plateau. The county's highest point is on the southeast slope of Truskmore (631m above sea level).

The southern section of the county is flatter with drumlins, and the River Shannon being a dominant landscape feature with its associated floodplains being important habitats for many species of flora and fauna. Prominent lakes in the county include Lough Allen, Lough Melvin and Lough Rynn.

Physical description from the County Leitrim Biodiversity Action Plan 2022- 2027

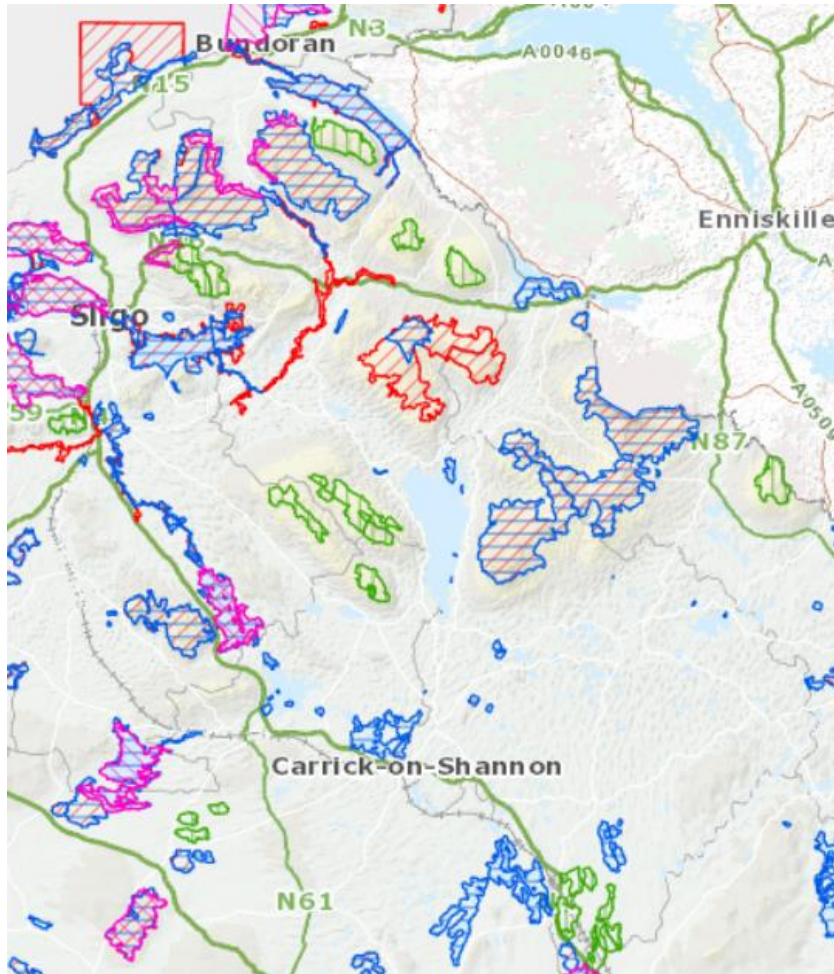
Due to the relatively unspoilt landscape, biodiversity and habitats, the county has a significant number of European designated and nationally protected sites, encompassing eight Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for habitats; one Special Protection Area for birds (SPAs); nine Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and twenty-eight proposed NHAs (pNHAs) and Nature Reserves (Figure 2)⁷.

This environmental network also means that there may be environmental and planning constraints for particular proposals to develop recreational infrastructure where there may be likely significant effects or impacts on protected sites.

All recreational infrastructure will be subject to rigorous planning and environmental approvals and consents, and in effect, to qualify for public funding of any such proposals, must meet highest national and European legal and regulatory standards.

⁷ <https://dahg.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8f7060450de3485fa1c1085536d477ba>

Figure 2 Map showing Environmental Designations, Leitrim



2.4 Recreation and Public Health

From a planning and public health perspective, It is instructive to consider the benefits associated with involvement in physical recreation, which are well proven⁸:

- It provides a major contribution to personal health and wellbeing;
- Is key to human development;
- Is essential to quality of life;
- Reduces self-destructive and anti-social behaviour;
- Helps to build strong families and healthy communities;
- Reduces health care, social service and Garda/penal costs.

Consistent research demonstrates that physical inactivity is an independent risk factor for coronary heart disease, a risk factor for type 2 diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure. According to research carried out by SLAN, it was suggested that 29% of the Irish population were inactive/sedentary (26% male; 31% female).

⁸ EU Physical Activity Guidelines (2008)

The generally accepted view is that the physical activity level required to maintain good health does not have to be strenuous to maximise the impact, rather it needs to be consistent.



Photo: Fáilte Ireland Content Pool

The national guidelines for levels of activity in Ireland⁹: suggest that

- **Adults should build up at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week;**
- **Children should build up at least one hour of moderate activity on most days of the week.**

There is also increasing evidence that physical inactivity is a ‘major causative physical link’ between ill health and social inequality (Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, 2016)¹⁰.

Physical activity has been shown to have a positive influence on mental health and wellbeing. There is strong evidence to show a 20-30% reduction in depression in adults who participate in physical activity daily¹¹, while improving the quality of life of those experiencing such symptoms. It is also clear that green space is widely viewed as a health-promoting characteristic of residential environments, and has been linked to mental health benefits such as recovery from mental fatigue and reduced stress. Additionally, exposure to natural environment can significantly reduce health inequalities.

The **Central Statistics Office ‘Pulse Surveys’** provide a snapshot of consumer patterns in Ireland.

In April-May 2022, the third Pulse Survey on ‘*Our Lives Outdoors*’ considered people’s activities in the outdoors and a snapshot of results was provided in June 2022.

⁹ Irish Department of Health. The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland. Dublin 2009

¹⁰ RCPI (2016) Physical-activity-a-wonder-drug-the-evidence.pdf

¹¹ https://www.fsem.ac.uk/position_statement/the-role-of-physical-activity-and-sport-in-mental-health/#

CSO Pulse Survey April-May 2022 - Our Lives Outdoors: Snapshot of Results (CSO, 2022)¹²

This CSO Pulse Survey explores the relationship that people (9,346 responses, aged over 18) have with the outdoors and natural spaces in Ireland. It covers the time the respondents spent and the activities they engaged in outdoors and in natural spaces. It also provides information on concerns about the protection of the environment. More than half of respondents (55%) spent more time outdoors than they did before the pandemic (2020-21) and one in three took up new outdoor activities.

The most popular activities taken up were hill walking (26%), hiking (24%), running (24%), cycling (22%), and sea swimming (21%). There appears to be a seasonal link to the level of outdoor activity undertaken.

- **Almost all respondents (98%) liked to spend time outdoors**
- **Of the respondents who liked to spend time outdoors, 87% said they used this time to get fresh air and 85% to enjoy nature**
- **Of the respondents who spent time in natural spaces over the past six months, 97% felt healthier and 93% felt happier afterwards**
- **More than 90% of participants had access to a garden**
- **Almost 60% of participants were concerned about climate change (58%) or water pollution (57%)**
- **More than half of respondents thought that while there was still time to act on environmental issues, it was unlikely to happen.**

Physical inactivity globally has critical implications for the cost of healthcare required to treat related chronic illnesses. In Sweden, it is estimated that up to 60% of all illnesses can be attributed to lifestyle choices¹³.

Therefore, it is prudent to support initiatives to encourage greater levels of physical activity across all ages and abilities by providing the requisite infrastructure to ensure access.

The National Physical Activity Plan (2016) made specific recommendations for Local Authority (LA) action:

- Development & promotion of walking and cycling strategies in each LA area;
- Ensure planning, design and development of towns, villages promote activity through a network of cycling routes and footpaths;
- Continuous professional development of those responsible for design on the role of physical activity.
- Explore opportunities for recreational in the natural environment.

2.5 Policy Context for Recreation in Ireland

A comprehensive review of current international, European, national, regional and local planning strategies, policies and plans pertaining to Recreation was undertaken to inform the strategic context for the development of the new Leitrim Recreation Strategy. These policy measures from levels have been reviewed to develop the Strategic Actions for the Leitrim Recreation Strategy.

From EU level to county plans in Leitrim, almost all policy- and decision-makers are committed to delivering extended green and blue infrastructure to meet broader health, environmental and climate objectives.

These national, regional and local policies are summarised in Table 2 and presented in full in Appendix 1.

¹² Press Statement Pulse Survey April-May 2022 - Our Lives Outdoors: Snapshot of Results
<https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2022pressreleases/pressstatementpulsesurveyapril-may2022-ourlivesoutdoorssnapshotofresults/>

¹³ http://avbp.net/docs/huddinge_map.pdf

Table 2 Policy Framework for Recreation Development

Policy / Strategy
INTERNATIONAL / EUROPEAN
United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals https://sdgs.un.org/goals
Paris Climate Agreement (International, 2016)
EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030
European Green Infrastructure Strategy
EU Territorial Agenda 2030: <i>A Future for all Places</i>
EU Europarc Federation
LEADER Rural Development Programme (RDP 2023-2027)
IRELAND – NATIONAL RECREATION & LANDSCAPE POLICIES
National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (2023-2027) Comhairle na Tuaithe and Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD)
Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands (2017-2021) <i>Coillte, NPWS, Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna, Inland Fisheries Ireland</i>
Sport Ireland (August 2022) National Sports Policy (2018-2027)
National Communications strategy to increase opportunities for physical activity (PA) and exercise in disadvantaged communities - Sport Ireland (2022)
Outdoor Rural Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) <i>Dept. Rural & Community Development, May 2020</i>
Guide to Planning & Developing of Small Vessel Water Trails in Ireland (2013) <i>Waterways Ireland, with ISC, NTO, Canoe Ireland</i>
Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future - A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020 <i>Department of Transport, 2009</i>
Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways <i>Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, 2018</i>
The National Cycle Policy Framework 2009-2020 (Department of Transport) <i>'Realising our Potential' National Action Plan for Rural Development</i> Dept. Culture, Heritage & The Gaeltacht, 2017
<i>National Strategy for Angling Development 2015-2020</i> Inland Fisheries Ireland (Dept. Agriculture, Fisheries & Marine)
<i>New Strategic Vision for Forestry in Ireland</i> Coillte, April 2022
National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015-2025) Dept. Arts, Heritage & The Gaeltacht
National Peatlands Strategy (2015)
National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017 – 2021
The All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021 – 2025 (5-year Road Map)
Status of Biodiversity (Birdwatch Ireland, 2019)
NATIONAL HEALTH POLICIES
<i>National Sports Policy (2018-2027)</i>
<i>'Get Ireland Active'</i> The National Physical Activity Plan (2016, NPAP)
<i>Healthy Ireland 2013-2025 – A Framework for Improving Health and Wellness</i> Dept. of Health, 2013
<i>Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA)</i> Irish Sports Council with the ESRI, 2013
NATIONAL TOURISM & HERITAGE POLICIES
<i>'People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025'</i> Dept. Transport, Tourism and Sport
Ireland's Hidden Heartlands (2018) Fáilte Ireland and partners
Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon (2020) - Waterways Ireland with Fáilte Ireland
Waterways Ireland - Corporate Plan 2020-2022
<i>Culture 2025 - Éire Ildánach 2025</i> Dept. Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs

NATIONAL – REGIONAL – COUNTY – LOCAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK
National Planning Framework - <i>Project 2040</i> Dept. Housing, Planning & Local Government
The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern & Western Regional Assembly - Northern & Western Region 2020-2032 <i>adopted in January 2020</i>
Leitrim County Development Plan (Draft) 2023-2029 Leitrim County Council
Leitrim Sports Partnership
Leitrim Tourism Strategy 2015 – 2021 (<i>due for update 2022</i>)
County Leitrim Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-2027
Leitrim County Development Plans Leitrim County - Local Area Plans

2.5.1 Policy Lessons for Leitrim

The policy review demonstrates an increasing alignment of policy from international to county level concerning planning, outdoor recreation, public health and access to nature and outdoor activities, landscape, biodiversity and low impact tourism. Recreation is seen as a vital component in creating opportunities for positive living in the *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (2020-2032)*.

***“Sustainable regional growth needs to improve living standards for all...
 Having a good place to live means access to education, health, employment, recreation and opportunity. Having a great place to live means people are capable of taking advantage of education, health, employment, recreation and opportunity”¹⁴***

Draft County Development Plan 2023-2029

It is the stated policy of Leitrim County Council in the (*Draft*) *County Development Plan (2023-2029)* to:

- ensure that infrastructure and opportunities for passive and active recreation are developed to contribute to vibrant villages and towns.
- protect semi-natural open spaces from inappropriate development in the interest of amenities, community well-being, flood protection and biodiversity.
- work in partnership with other agencies to develop active and passive recreational opportunities. Such a policy is conducive to healthy communities, inclusivity and accessibility to recreational amenities for all abilities.
- It furthermore underpins the growing activity tourism sector in County Leitrim.

National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027

The key lessons for strategic development of recreation in Leitrim may be reflective of the aspirations encapsulated in the *National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (2023-2027, NORS)*, where integrated coordination is required to deliver excellent recreational access and participation.

Development of excellent outdoor recreation opportunities is a cross-cutting activity that requires:

- 1. Leadership:** to create a more coordinated approach at national and county level to make best use of resources. The Leitrim Recreation Forum is a key element in providing leadership at county level to develop the county’s resources to meet the need of the people living and visiting there.

¹⁴ Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032’ (p. 248)

2. **Environment:** to protect and enhance the environment through better planning and development of outdoor recreation in keeping with best practice in management of landscape and habitats. The Leitrim Biodiversity Plan sets out clear bio-objectives and targets that will underpin the roll-out of Leitrim’s recreational infrastructure, for both large scale and local amenities.
3. **Awareness:** to create awareness of our outdoors recreation opportunities and how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly through improved, targeted and effective communications, both internally (Forum, LCC, LIDC) and externally with the Leitrim public and potential visitors to the county.
4. **Opportunities :** to increase and support the numbers of people active in the outdoors (and also to increase the economic returns from the public investment in recreation). This will require the gathering of metrics on usage of Leitrim’s considerable range of recreational amenities.
5. **Access:** to protect and improve access to the outdoors for the benefit of all. This will require renewed focus on partnerships with public land-managers (Coillte, Waterways Ireland, Inland Fisheries, NPWS, OPW, as well as private landowners and commonages.
6. **Expertise:** to improve awareness, knowledge, skills and expertise of stakeholders and partners, to build the capacity of all players in delivering world class infrastructure and supporting services. This will dovetail with Leitrim’s expanding tourism offering, to realise opportunities of *Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands* and the *Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon*, in partnership with LCC and Fáilte Ireland.

Critically, a number of key partners must work collaboratively to common goals in delivery and management of recreational amenities in Leitrim, particularly Leitrim County Council, Leitrim Development Company, Leitrim Sports Partnership and Leitrim County Council’s tourism development unit (LCC-TDU). Strategic partners include Waterways Ireland, Coillte, Inland Fisheries of Ireland, NPWS and Fáilte Ireland with voluntary inputs from the Leitrim Recreation Forum members, and wider support from communities for various actions.

The Leitrim Sports Partnership differs in its focus from the Leitrim Recreation Forum, where LSP is focused on ‘getting as many people active as possible’ through sports, while LRF is focused on outdoor recreation. However, there are natural overlaps in walking, cycling, angling and rowing, and there is significant scope for increased collaboration in the future. Indeed, the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy recommends such integrated collaboration for enhanced delivery and participation in recreation and sports at county level.

Repeated studies validate the concept that ‘*spending money now in recreational infrastructure and measures saves healthcare costs later*’ as the cost to society of physical inactivity is enormous. Investing in mechanisms to get inactive people more active leads to significant medium to long savings for both Leitrim and Irish society.

2.5.2 Integration of Recreational Delivery in Leitrim

The overarching policy framework for outdoor recreation development in Ireland, through the new *National Outdoor Recreation Strategy* and the *National Programme for Government 2020* which made significant phased funding provision through a series of dedicated funds, will support the future capital development of recreational infrastructure, as well as the operational delivery and management of the amenities.

Each of these policies supports integration of efforts across individual counties and regions. In Leitrim, this will require collaboration of effort among the Leitrim Recreation Forum, LCC, LDC, Leitrim Sports Partnership, LCC-TDU, the HSE and local community health officials to increase access to and activity among those who may not normally avail of recreational amenities. Access to and enjoyment of walking, cycling, rowing, nature viewing, angling or community gardening across Leitrim will deliver better physical and mental wellbeing for all ages and abilities.

Further details of funding opportunities to deliver the Leitrim Recreation Strategy are presented in Chapter 8.0 below.

3.0 Review of Leitrim Recreation Forum & Working Groups

The current structures and workings of the Leitrim Recreation Forum (LRF) were reviewed in the context of implementation of the Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2014, through engagement with multiple stakeholders. The review identified indicative actions to optimise the successful operations of the LRF and its Working Groups in delivery of the future Recreation Strategy 2023-2032.

3.1 Institutional Mapping of Leitrim Stakeholders

There are a number of key players involved in various aspects of outdoor recreational delivery in County Leitrim. Increasingly, as seen by the policy review, recreation is a cross-cutting theme that influences community and enterprise development; public health and wellbeing; active participation in environmental measures for enhanced biodiversity, water quality and landscape; and economically for tourism development and promotion.

The key players may be mapped as follows (Figure 3), who have been working collaboratively to deliver recreational infrastructure as recommended in the 2014 Strategy.

Figure 3 Leitrim: Key Stakeholders for Outdoor Recreation



Over the years since the first Leitrim Recreational Strategy was developed (2013-2014), there has been a very positive progression towards integrated working to deliver the objectives defined in that Strategy. This form of collaboration among stakeholders will no doubt be augmented in the coming decade given the demanding requirements for public engagement; environmental screening and impact assessment; planning approvals and consents; and securing of funding in a coherent and logical manner in advance of project development.

3.2 Review of Leitrim Recreation Forum

The current Leitrim Recreation Forum (LRF, 2022) is headed by a Chairperson, with representatives of Leitrim County Council; Leitrim Development Company; elected members of LCC; members of the Working Groups, and key Statutory Agencies involved in delivery of outdoor recreation on public lands. The forum is currently supported administratively by the Rural Recreation Officer through Leitrim Development Company.

Table 3 Composition of the Leitrim Recreation Forum (2022)

Role	Current Member	Note
Independent Chairperson	Mike Feeney	Appointed in 2019, to replace first Chairperson, Padraic White (2014-2019)
Rural Recreation Officer	Bryan Fennell	Appointed to new role of Leitrim RRO in 2019 – provides direct admin support; coordination of meetings; agenda & minutes; advisory to WGs
Leitrim Development Company	Brian Smyth	LIDC commissioned the original Leitrim Recreation Strategy
Leitrim Co. Council		
Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Economic Development, Planning & Infrastructural Services	Joseph Gilhooley	Highly supportive of the Recreation Strategy – sees potential for recreation to add value for rural, socio-economic and tourism development.
Engineering/ Planning	Shay O'Connor	
Economic Development Officer	Sarah Duffy	
LCC Tourism Development Officer	Sinead McDermott	
Leitrim PPN	<i>To be appointed</i>	
Statutory Agencies /Farmers/ Landowners		
Fisheries Ireland	Michael Kelly	Working strongly in partnership with LRF, LCC and LDC to achieve objectives
Waterways Ireland	Michael McCauley Brian McGrath	
Coillte	Paul Jordan	
NPWS	<i>To be appointed</i>	
IFA/ landowners	Jim Brennan	
Representatives of Working Groups at LRF plenary		
Greenways	Rosemary Kerrigan	Representatives of the WGs attend the quarterly plenary sessions of the Forum and provide feedback on plans and progress. They represent the interests of communities, farmers, enterprises and agencies at all levels.
Angling	Michael Fitzpatrick	
Walking/Cycling	Ann O'Neill	
Shannon Erne Waterway/ L. Allen	Eileen Gibbons	

Consultations were undertaken with the Chairperson and a representative number of the Forum members to understand how the forum works, what is working well and what could be improved upon. In the years 2014-2019, the Forum met formally on a Quarterly basis, but during the 2020-2021 pandemic, the meetings were held online. This happened to coincide with the appointment of a new Chairman and also with the appointment of the first Rural Recreation Officer for County Leitrim. This created a challenge to keep everyone motivated, but good leadership has retained the commitment of the Forum members. The following observations may be made (Table 4):

Table 4 Issues identified: Leitrim Recreation Forum (2022)

Issue	Current	Feedback
Leadership	Meetings are chaired by the voluntary Chairperson, appointed just before covid pandemic. Some concerns were voiced about the 'passing of the baton' from the first successful Chair to the next.	Satisfaction was expressed in the ongoing leadership, The positive transition from the past-Chairperson to the new Chairperson was particularly well received by members.
No. of Meetings	The Forum convenes quarterly, although this cycle was disrupted by the pandemic of 2020-21, when meetings were held online by Zoom.	Members deemed that quarterly meetings are sufficient. Positive response to return to physical meetings in June 2022.
Functioning of meetings	Meetings chaired by Chairperson, organised by Leitrim RRO, communications, presentation of activities and minute taking.	Satisfaction was expressed in running of the meetings.
Communications	Communications by email – conveying notices of upcoming meetings, agenda, sharing of Minutes. No mechanism in place for ongoing/irregular communications / updates. Suggestion that each member of Forum should be issued with a dedicated tablet. Informal networks are working well, but Forum's work needs to be promoted more widely externally.	Some would prefer more communications between meetings. Simple technologies to achieve this e.g. Whatsapp for group messaging in real time. However, this is highly costly both in capital expenditure and in IT support and maintenance. External communications of the work of the Forum need to be enhanced.
Over-reliance on Chair and RRO	The Chair attends all meetings of the Forum as well as all meetings of the Working Groups. The RRO support all of these minutes with organisation, admin and minute taking.	There may be an over reliance on Chair & RRO, whereby members of the Working Groups could rotate the chairing of their own meetings, with local note-taking. However, this issue may be resolved by the allocation of additional administrative role to support the work of the Forum.
Volunteer Commitment / Burn-out	Many of the LRF volunteers have been active for almost a decade – potential for burn-out.	The volunteers themselves were happy to continue to serve the Forum, but there needs to be a refreshing of the membership to bring new energy. A succession strategy would be useful to ensure continuity of the work of the Forum.
Exacting Challenges	Planning landscape is challenging with requirement to have planning, EIA/ AA screening, resources etc in place	Planning requirements, regulations, access, create challenging conditions for delivery of recreational infrastructure.

3.3 Review of Forum Working Groups

The original Leitrim Recreation Strategy envisaged that seven separate Working Groups would be established to address specific projects and key recreational activities within the county. However the Forum agreed subsequently to reduce this number to four Working Groups (Figure 4).

A review was undertaken of the current four working groups of the Forum, their composition, structure, modus operandi and effectiveness. Focus groups were held with the four Working Groups, as well as a fifth Focus Group with the public representatives involved with the Forum.

Figure 4 Working Groups of Leitrim Recreation Forum



3.3.1 Issues Raised by Working Groups

Discussions were held directly with each of the Working Groups to understand how effectively the groups are working: their challenges, achievements, future focus and requirements. Issues included the following:

- Structures
- Leadership
- Governance/ Ethics
- Rotation/ election/ representation/ attendance
- Functionality: meetings, workshops, public events
- Communications - tools, use of ITC
- Communications - internal, external , public
- Use of technology/ GDPR
- Metrics – use of, how measure
- Succession planning
- Achievements: success – KPIs – measure

The results varied slightly across each of the groups, depending on their core focus. The primary issues raised are captured and aggregated from the five focus groups in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Issues Raised among Working Groups of Recreation Forum

ISSUE	RESPONSES
Structure / Leadership	Leadership of Forum excellent; Chairperson transition worked well RRO convenes meetings/ minutes and circulates - happy to have resources Working groups: adopt internal flexibility; Chair & RRO convene & support
Governance / Ethics	Open, rotational; minutes internal; share Forum minutes Respect/ positive engagement across all groups, Note could improve gender balance
Function / No. of Meetings/ Efficiency/ Attendance	No of meetings good; not onerous. Enhanced use of technologies would help to improve attendances Pandemic >> pause button; need to regroup and re-engage Rotation of roles internally could be considered
Rotation/ Election/ Representation	Same people – very organic – positive participation – Note potential for burn-out, need to refresh with new members
Communications – internal & external; social media	Pandemic very difficult for communications with landowners re. Greenways Need to improve engagement with landowners/ farmers/ communities Need enhanced comms: newsletter; ezines; articles in local media Community talks – profiling of work of the Recreation Forum Challenge to engage (time is short). Suggestion to invite LO Journalist to Quarterly LRF meetings
Use of ITC / technology	Email / Text only – very little use of WhatsApp Limited use of social media - need training in its effective / selective use Maybe develop Apps for Leitrim trails (AllTrails or similar?)
Achievements since 2014	Proud of advancement of Greenways in Leitrim from ‘standing start’ Significant Blueway progress / cycling / e-biking Demo sites (SLNCR /Cavan Leitrim Railway) & projects keep motivation up
Metrics / KPIs	No measurement of recreational demand – not have the tools/ time No regular measurement of recreational usage (apart from Waterways Ireland on the SEW Blueway (numbers/ bed nights etc). Not got resources to engage with accommodation providers to compile data
Succession Planning/ Recruitment	RRO has been great boost - in WGs, co-option works best. Skills Audit required – what do we need? Then recruit by direct approach LCC has more staff to support now (liaison officer) – very welcome Need more direct engagement and links with Tourism / SMEs – invite them Angling working group requires renewed energy.
Opportunities / Resourcing	Larger scale projects e.g. SLNCR, LCC taking it on >> moves to demanding planning and regulatory requirements is beyond capacity of volunteer WG Grant/ funding / supports / Access; LCC Officer supports positive Environmental issues – huge resource drain AA/ EIA /Archaeo etc Could approach local philanthropy; business support; Walking groups could be approached to support voluntary work of LRF

3.4 Review of the Implementation of Recreation Strategy 2014 - 2022

In order to appreciate the future potential of the Forum it is essential to examine the Leitrim Recreation Strategy which was developed in 2013 and issued in 2014. It is worth noting that the operating environment and the national debate of the time was entirely negative in the wake of the global financial crisis. This created a 'pall of gloom' over the country and offered little hope or resourcing to local activists trying to develop a recreational framework in Leitrim, within which to provide accessible outdoor amenities for the public good.

In 2022, the national mood is significantly different and despite current international events, the policy and institutional outlook for outdoor recreation is strong (see Policy Review Section 2.5, Appendix 2). Additionally, many people who had never/rarely engaged in outdoor activities did so during the various pandemic lockdowns of 2020-2021 and realised the physical and mental benefits of taking regular exercise on one's doorstep.

A continuous system of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has not been developed to monitor the progress of the delivery of the Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2014. Thus, to put the future strategy into context, it is important to review both the mid-term review and the implementation of the Strategy 2014 to date.

3.4.1 Mid Term Review (Sue Targett 2017)

A mid-term review was carried out in 2017, three years after the launch of the Strategy and the establishment of the Working Groups, by consultant, Sue Targett. She noted:

"Substantial progress has been made on many of the actions identified in the Strategy. This has required considerable effort by members of the Forum and its working groups who have contributed their knowledge across a wide spectrum of specialist fields, key amongst these are:

- *Knowledge of Leitrim's natural assets and sensitivities around their use for recreation*
- *Technical expertise to propose the infrastructure necessary to enjoy these assets*
- *Best practice in environmentally sustainable development to protect assets into the future*
- *Knowledge of relevant regulations to ensure projects are compliant*
- *Marketing completed projects so that they are widely used by residents and visitors.*

Targett noted that the Forum depends on the positive engagement of its members to deliver actions, resolve problems and overcome obstacles.

Key Findings:

There was general satisfaction with the workings of the Working Groups and in particular with the leadership provided by the Chairperson. The numbers of meetings (quarterly) was considered to be sufficient and having four working groups was considered to be effective. However, almost 50% considered that more skills were required in business, marketing and eco-tourism.

Some respondents suggested that existing Working Groups could include additional elements:

- Sailing on Lough Allen
- Potential in Drumsna/Dromod/Rooskey and the Waterways
- Formation of a cycling group, giving the growing popularity of cycling.

- Inclusion of field sports such as GAA, Ladies Football, soccer etc¹⁵.
- Food, including foraging and gardening
- Heritage, given its attraction for visitors.

“I think the Forum works very well and is an example of how the strategic development of recreation can best be achieved”
Working Group respondent to mid-term review, 2017

The members felt there was no need for a written constitution/ legalisation or formal terms of reference, except where it could improve access to financing.

It was considered by 80% of respondents that the recruitment of Forum members and subsequent step-down process could be improved; a suggestion was made for a 3-year limit. Additionally, the attendance rates of some individuals could be improved to show long term commitment. Some concern was expressed about the level of commitment from the statutory agency representatives and Leitrim Co Council to the Forum. Members were proud of their achievements and progress made on access and dealings with landowners. There was room to improve communications with the public and potential partners.

In considering future actions, it was felt that some of the ‘Cross-Cutting Themes’ in the Strategy required more attention. One suggestion was to conduct a study visit to another recreational zone such as Mountains of Mourne.

Overall, a very high level of satisfaction was expressed by Forum members. Targett suggested that “this indicates that there is little to address in terms of the Forum’s operating processes and procedures”.

The report recommended that the mid-term review could be used to prioritise efforts for the subsequent three years, with particular attention to:

- How to maximize the contribution from public bodies / state agencies to the implementation of actions prioritised by the Forum; and
- Clarifying the role of the tourism sector regarding marketing and commercialisation of completed recreational projects.

3.4.2 Review of Implementation of Strategy 2014 - 2022









The following ‘Score Card’ evaluates the primary actions identified in the original Leitrim Recreational Strategy (2014/ Table 8.1 / p.99) and rates them in terms of delivery, at a high level. They are evaluated as follows with supporting commentary (Table 6):

Table 6 ‘Score Card’ Review of Recreation Strategy 2014-2022

Significant Work Delivered  Work in Progress  Little Progress/ Work to Do 

¹⁵ Note if these field sports were to be included in the future Recreation Strategy, then the definition of ‘Recreation’ in Leitrim needs to be widened with respect to the definition in the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (2023-2027).

Leitrim Recreation Strategy – Review of Implementation Progress 2014-2022

Action	Score	Comment
Leitrim Recreation Forum Leadership, vision, engagement, clarity of role		A recognised 'success' since its foundation helping galvanise many disparate voices and agendas through good strategic planning, capable leadership, and agency collaboration.
Working Groups Identify priorities, specific themes, landowner and access agreements and recreational mapping.		Some very significant achievements over last eight years, but considerably more work to be done in key areas. Participant burn-out and fatigue may become factor in their operation. Need to recruit new volunteers to generate new energy and ideas.
LRF Key Issue Resourcing		The arrival of the RRO has had a transformational impact on the working of the Forum. The continued support of LDC and LCC should not be undervalued. New national funding sources should strengthen this element.
Environmental and Safety		Lack of tangible action across many aspects from safety, signage, car parking and 'Leave No Trace' protocols in the outdoors. Require biodiversity / biosecurity to be considered in all aspects of recreation planning, esp. Greenways, Blueways, Trails. Improvement in this area since appointment of RRO in supporting the work of the Forum.
Realising Economic Potential		As this can be viewed as a 'cross-cutting' theme, it has likely suffered through lack of ownership by anyone entity. The emphasis has largely been about 'let's build it' while the question about how we best capitalise upon the recreational asset in terms of jobs and economic development has gone unaddressed in a coordinated manner. Scope to collaborate more at County level with Tourism development & marketing.
Communications		Some recent signs of improvements particularly in relation to new media however overall (internally and externally) considerably more work is required. Recruit volunteer to address social media communications.
Connectivity and Alliances		A mixed bag with considerable synergy emerging within the county especially through public bodies and agencies co-working effectively. However, except for SLNCR, there is little tangible evidence of inter-county or cross-border co-working.
Monitoring and Evaluation		Mid-term review conducted by Targett (2017) presented a full and healthy picture of the early years of the Forum's work. However, a belief exists that evaluating progress using KPIs especially in relation to the Working Groups' programmes, would benefit the overall strategy and allow measurement of both performance and recreational usage/ benefits.

3.5 Leitrim Recreation Forum Today: Issues & Options

During extensive consultations with members of the Recreation Forum and its Working Groups, several factors were identified, which are synthesised into ten key issues, with options flagged for action. This presents an independent operational and strategic ‘snapshot’ of the Forum in 2022.

Table 7 Recreation Forum: Issues & Options

Issue No.	Key Issues	Comments	Options
1	Structure & Composition of Leitrim Recreation Forum	<p>The current participants in the LRF appear to be quite happy with the way it is functioning.</p> <p>The Targett (2017) mid-term review recommended that there was little to adjust in the workings of the Forum.</p> <p>There was resistance expressed to formalisation of the structures through a written Articles of Association/ Constitution</p> <p>Covid-19 disrupted the working flow of LRF through 2020/2021 with sessions moving online. Need to re-build and invigorate for next term.</p> <p>General satisfaction with Quarterly meetings of the Forum.</p> <p>Cross-county representation and gender balance.</p>	<p>Retain LRF structure, composition and timing of meetings.</p> <p>Consider expansion of membership to include OPW/ NMS</p> <p>Consider development of Guidance for LRF members, on participation, roles & responsibilities, recruitment, governance based on good organisational practice:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition of the role of the Chair of the Forum, • Role & responsibilities of members of the Forum; • Recommended length of service for members • Recruitment process of new members; • Succession planning to ensure continuity and institutional memory is retained
2	Leadership of the LRF	<p>There was a general expression of satisfaction with the current leadership of the Forum with concern that this ‘professionalism’ continues.</p> <p>Concerns were voiced over the handover from the original Chair to the current Chair. All those interviewed were happy with the transition period of the new Chair and look forward to returning to full meetings of the Forum.</p> <p>There may be an over-reliance on the Chair to actually chair the Forum, but also each of Working Groups.</p>	<p>Develop Succession Plan for Chairperson at 5-year intervals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewed Terms of Reference to be developed for the Chairperson, with clear definition of role and responsibilities. <p>Continue to build excellent partnership among LDC, LCC, Statutory Agencies as leaders in recreational development</p>

Issue No.	Key Issues	Comments	Options
3	Appointment of the Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) for Co. Leitrim	<p>High level of satisfaction expressed at the appointment of the RRO in 2019.</p> <p>The RRO is supporting the work of the Forum and Working Groups, while managing core relationships with landowners along waymarked ways and trails.</p> <p>There may be an over-reliance at present on the RRO to organise and minute the meetings of the Working Groups, as well as plenary LRF.</p>	<p><i>On interim basis, a member of the Working Groups take ownership of minuting the individual WG meetings.</i></p> <p><i>Option: Appointment of Admin support to RRO given expanding workload.</i></p>
4	Functions & Number of Working Groups	<p>Satisfaction with numbers of meetings of WGs</p> <p>Many did not use technology during covid, low participation</p> <p>Expression of satisfaction with four Working Groups, but Angling WG requires to be strengthened / refreshed.</p> <p>Need for high level strategic working group to address cross-cutting themes, such as communications, financing, governance, monitoring & evaluation (M&E), setting of key performance indicators (KPIs) etc</p>	<p><i>No need for change – frequency of meetings approved.</i></p> <p><i>Use of zoom has worked effectively at LRF level and could be used further to reduce travel/ carbon emissions for WGs</i></p> <p><i>Creation of new Linkage Working Group to oversee strategic and cross-cutting themes: communications, financing, governance, M&E, KPIs.</i></p> <p><i>Merge Angling Working Group into the SEW/ Lough Allen/ Water activities WG.</i></p>
5	Weak communications among members of the Forum and the Working Groups	<p>The LRF has lacked an integrated approach to communications, with ‘individually based’ use of available technologies.</p> <p>Intra-WG communications are weak in some groups, relying solely on email.</p> <p>One suggestion to issue tablets to all LRF members. However, the cost of deployment, cybersecurity, GDPR and IT maintenance cannot be justified.</p>	<p><i>Cannot justify wide deployment of hardware</i></p> <p><i>Use simple (encrypted) apps such as Whatsapp for increased efficiency and timeliness of shared internal communications.</i></p> <p><i>Provide training as required in use of simple technologies (apps/ Zoom / online workshops using Teams/ Zoom etc).</i></p>
6	Lack of public awareness of the work of Leitrim Recreation Forum and its Working Groups across County Leitrim	<p>LRF has lacked a singular, integrated approach, as well as resources, to conduct external communications and promotion of its work. Improved use of available technologies could assist hugely in delivering consistent messaging and communications to the residents of Leitrim.</p>	<p><i>Invite a local journalist to plenary Forum as an ‘observer’. If confidential matters need to be discussed, this can be arranged prior to the arrival of the observer.</i></p>

Issue No.	Key Issues	Comments	Options
			<p>Appoint an internal ‘Communications Officer’ (PRO) to carry out messaging and promotion on social media. A part-time (youth) volunteer may be initially sufficient.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a monthly article in the Leitrim Observer and other local newspapers; conduct interviews on local radio. • Quarterly local ‘media-briefings’ for local journalists to inform them of LRF work completed and preview planned work • Prepare short blogs/ features on social media. • Creation and management of a LRF Photo Library for the use of all stakeholders. • Register with Fáilte Ireland Content Poll to access free photographs. • Recruit local members of Foróige Clubs to join the Forum and assist in undertaking this role, under supervision of RRO and Working Groups (see below)*. <p><i>*Foróige Clubs in Kinlough, Manorhamilton, Carrick, Carrigallen, Mohill, Drumsna, Kiltoghert, Ballinamore, Dromahair</i> https://www.foroige.ie/foroige-map%20</p>
7	<p>Succession Planning/ Recruitment of new Members to the Forum</p>	<p>Many of the current members have been working with the Forum for almost a decade. Although there are rare complaints of overload or ‘burn-out’, many members continue to be willing to serve on the Forum.</p> <p>While gender balance is generally good within the Forum, it is clear that a wider age range and also ethnic composition would be beneficial to the Forum to represent the needs of other groups in the county.</p> <p>Best practice suggests that new energies are required for key roles.</p>	<p>Develop active recruitment mechanism for the Forum and WGs to ensure that new ideas and energies are being introduced to the Forum regularly (say at least every two years).</p> <p>Conduct skills / gap analysis among existing members of LRF & WGs – Recruit through co-options/ direct invitation to fill gaps</p> <p>Engage with Leitrim Volunteer Centre/ Leitrim Foróige/ Walking & Cycling Clubs to recruit active new members to Forum and WGs</p> <p>Direct invitation is a more effective way to seek new recruits vs waiting for volunteer e.g. invite members of ‘new Irish’ communities to join the Angling Working Group.</p>
8	<p>Potential to enhance networking with tourism sector (SMEs, trade),</p>	<p>LCC’s Tourism Development Unit is represented on the Forum and in WGs, and there is scope to enhance the connectivity from</p>	<p>Invite tourism MSMEs to join the Leitrim Recreation Forum WGs and the proposed Linkage Working Group</p>

Issue No.	Key Issues	Comments	Options
	LCC-Tourism Development Unit and agencies	<p>the Forum to micro- and small-to-medium enterprises (MSMEs) across Leitrim engaged in recreation.</p> <p>Current LRF engagement with the tourism trade in the county is weak and could be improved. Suggestions were made to form a fifth WG called Recreation and Tourism; or to invite Tourism reps to each of the WGs.</p> <p>Leitrim has plenty of outdoor recreation to offer; a key target will be alignment with Hidden Heartlands brand to realise value adding activities.</p> <p>Creation of a vibrant, active network among recreational providers/ enterprises and communities will enhance the Leitrim offering and ultimately its capacity to attract visitors to enjoy the unique recreational opportunities available in unspoilt surroundings.</p>	<p>Alignment of the Recreation Strategy and Leitrim Tourism Strategy & branding;</p> <p>Alignment with core ‘Active in Nature’ themes of ‘Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands’, Shannon Tourism Masterplan (via LT, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland teams) and Wild Atlantic Way initiatives.</p> <p>Link to Fáilte Ireland ‘Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands’ and ‘Wild Atlantic Way’ teams, present the work of Recreation Forum periodically; and avail of training opportunities presented in marketing & promotion of recreation.</p>
9	Capacity Building for members of the Leitrim Recreation Forum and its Working Groups	<p>Capacity building is a core element in furthering the work of the LRF and its members in the WGs..</p> <p>A key element is ‘learning by doing’ but also in conducting study visits to related amenities and recreational infrastructure to see what ‘best in class’ looks like in Ireland.</p> <p>Leitrim ETB may have a role to play in design and delivery of specific courses that will support the LRF and its members.</p>	<p>Alignment with Fáilte Ireland networking and training for SMEs and communities offering recreation opportunities in Leitrim – with scope for tourism enterprises and network building with like-minded communities and SMEs along the SEW, Shannon River and canals/ lakes network.</p> <p>Organise study visits for LRF / WGs to key locations e.g. MacGillycuddy Reeks, Kerry; Great Western Greenway, Mayo; Mountains of Mourne; Slieve League, Donegal; Castlecomer, Kilkenny; Waterford Greenway; among others, to see what & how they are organised and identify the key success factors.</p> <p>Approach ETB re design of bespoke training programme to meet the needs of the LRF and WGs</p>
10	LRF ‘Agenda’ Setting	<p>Positive feedback on the level of detail and professional presentation at plenary meetings.</p>	<p>Consider ‘tweaking’ the normal LRF session agenda e.g. every third meeting dedicates 75% of its time to one key issue/threat or opportunity:</p>

Issue No.	Key Issues	Comments	Options
		<p>Some observations about the flow of 'longish presentations' back-to-back without adequate plenary discussion time.</p> <p>Noted that pre-circulated LRF progress reports not being read.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>incorporating biodiversity / water quality/ environmental interpretation and recreation in the county;</i> • <i>Recreation supporting local micro economic development.</i> <p><i>A variation may be to invite a renowned national 'guest' to speak to the Forum on a particular topic once or twice a year e.g. recreational entrepreneur, a disability activist, fundraiser, a commentator, experienced officer of Sport Ireland or CARA.</i></p> <p><i>Meetings could be shortened if people read ahead of meetings; with less presentation time, and more discussion / Q&A time.</i></p> <p><i>Each WG to present short progress report (10 minutes) at meetings (i.e. not over-rely on RRO to do all the presentations).</i></p>

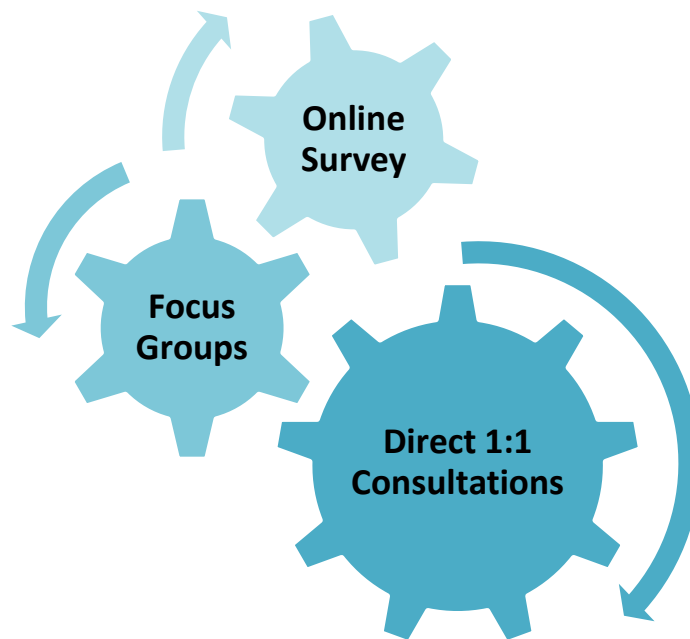
These issues and options are further addressed in Chapter 7 Strategic Action Plan below.

4.0 Stakeholder Engagement & Findings

4.1 Stakeholder Consultation Process

A range of methods was used to engage widely with a full spectrum of stakeholders. Consultations were held with Leitrim County Council officers; elected members of Leitrim County Council; Leitrim Development Company officers; key officers in Statutory Agencies, farmers and landowners, many of whom are involved directly in the Leitrim Recreation Forum, and representatives of national sports governing bodies.

Figure 5 Stakeholder Engagement Process



4.2 Direct Consultations

A matrix of potential consultees and their contact details was drawn up to arrange interviews (observing GDPR requirements at all times).

Initially, key consultees who are strategically involved in recreational development in Leitrim were contacted and interviewed, including representatives of the statutory agencies.

Subsequently, interviews were held with stakeholders involved in various aspects of rural, tourism and recreational development.

Semi-structured conversational interviews were scheduled with key interviewees. During consultations, consultees frequently referred to others who may be open to consultation, which were followed up. This ensured the 'snowball effect' of speaking to a variety of stakeholders with different perspectives.

Responses were noted and aggregated for final analysis.

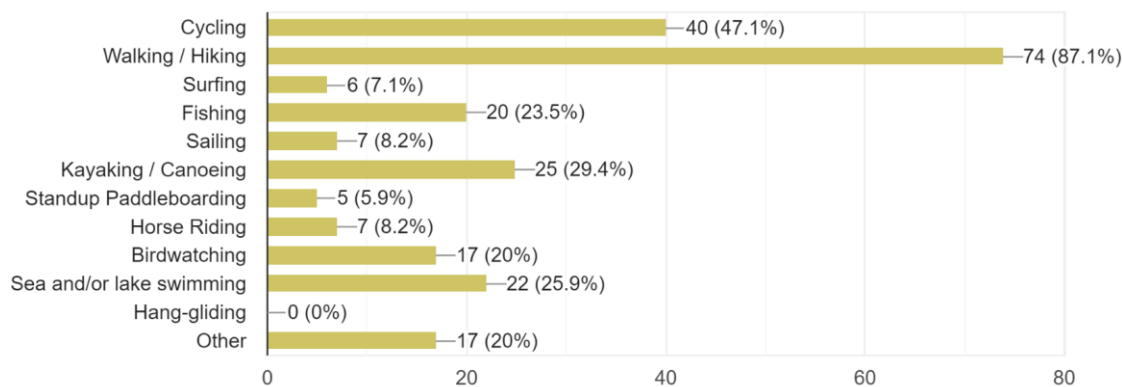
4.3 Online Survey

An online survey questionnaire was devised and launched to a wide range of consultees across Leitrim to get a sense of recreational usage and future needs. The survey was launched in mid-April 2022 and ran through to mid-May 2022.

Survey links were sent to the recreational community, clubs, community groups and to Leitrim’s Public Participation Network (PPN) to reach others who may not normally engage with recreational projects. Responses were collated, aggregated, and analysed to derive key findings from respondents.

Overall 86 responses were received, which is positive given the norms of online external surveying¹⁶. The majority of the respondents were rural dwellers (67%). Despite the potential for digital bias in an online survey, there was a good spread of age groups among the respondents, but there was a notable lack of response from those under the age of 39 and particularly those under the age of 29. This may be due to the fact that the survey (and Strategy) focus on outdoor recreation and did not include non-pitch-based recreation, which is where most young people engage with recreation.

Walking/Hiking (87%) is the highest scoring ‘favourite form’ of recreational activity, followed by *Cycling* (47%) as the second most popular activity, then *Kayaking/Canoeing* as third (29%). *Sea and/or Lake Swimming, Angling* and *Birdwatching* are also popular among respondents (23 – 25% participation).

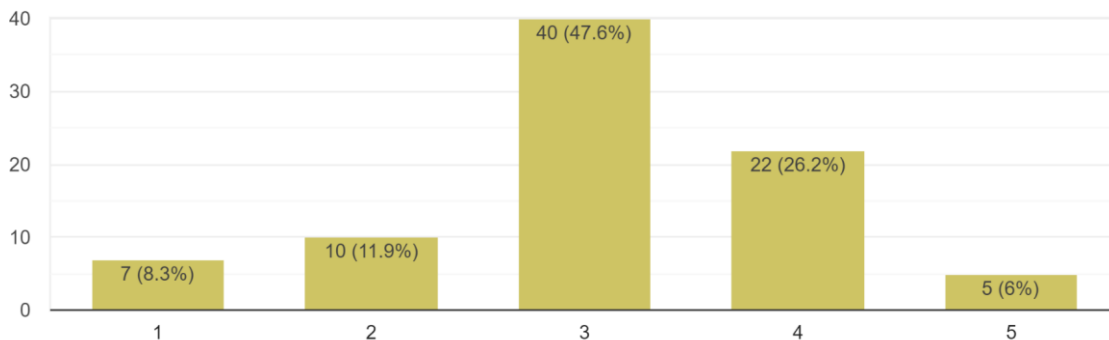


Most respondents participate regularly in outdoor recreation, with a significant minority (35%) reporting that they engage more than three times per week, and almost 50% take activities *1-3 times a week*. This indicates an active population in which outdoor recreation plays a big role in their lives, be it socially or physically. Less than 20% (1 in 5) respondents engage/participate in recreational activity *less than once a week* which is a relatively low proportion.

The most common way respondents participate in recreational activity is *with family/friends*, suggesting that many people may walk / cycle together, which enhances social connectivity and supports social cohesion in a very rural county. Over 40% of respondents stated that they engaged in recreational activity alone which reflects the popularity of walking as an activity in the county.

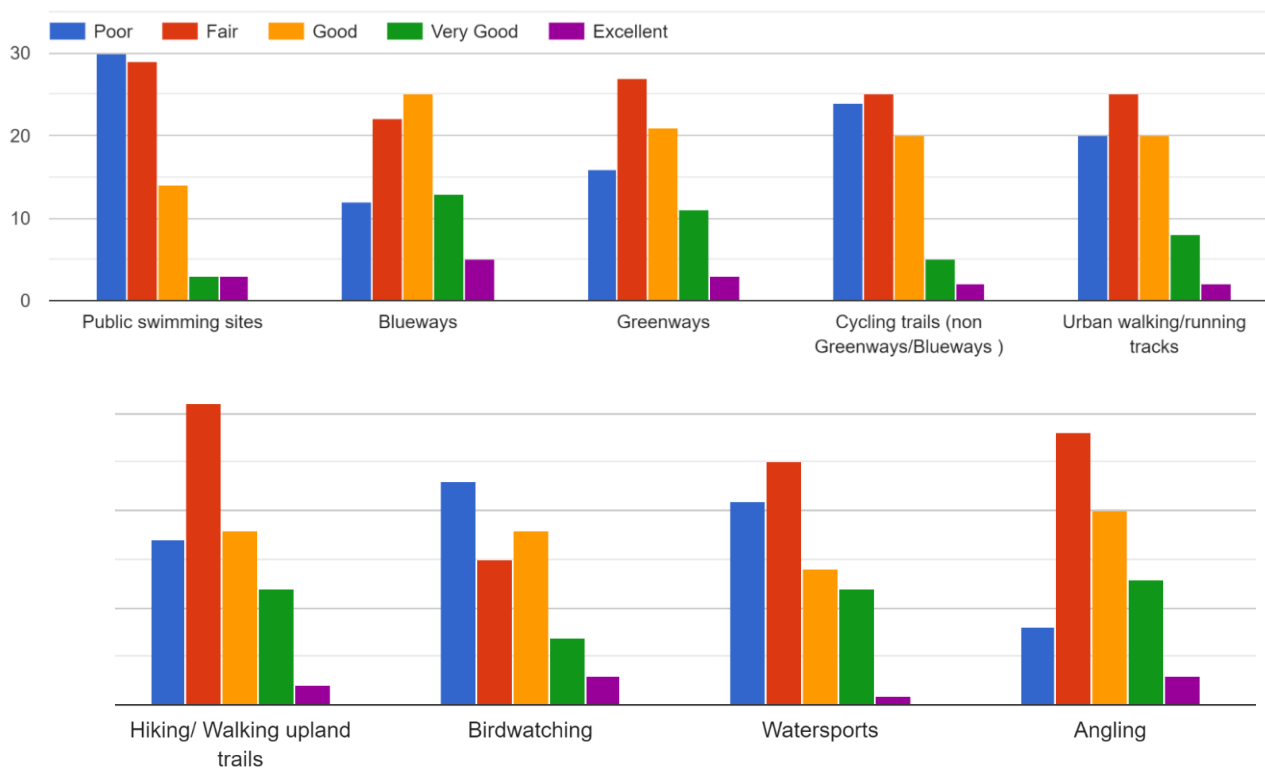
In relation to the provision of recreational amenities in the county, the results reflected a classic ‘bell curve’ response. Almost 40% rated provision as ‘3’ (on a scale of 1-5, where 5 is excellent) and a further 26% rated it as 4 on the scale.

¹⁶ Surveys that are distributed internally (e.g. to employees) generally have a higher response rate than those distributed externally (e.g. customers). Internal surveys generally receive c. 30-40% response rate, compared to a 10-15% response rate for external surveys - <https://www.surveygizmo.com/surveyblog/survey-response-rates/>



1= Poor and 5= Excellent

However, for specific activities, the results provided a more nuanced perception of provision of amenities:



The respondents reported that while there are many organised formal/semi-formal activities on offer, the groups are usually based in towns, not in rural areas, and there is little done to promote these groups (promotion on social media may exclude older generations). Other issues raised included lack of funding, insurance liabilities and access to lakes, mountains etc, with comments on lack of public transport to public amenities. It was commented that more organised recreational activities are needed during the weekdays, not only at the weekends.

Notably, respondents felt there was inadequate provision of facilities for people with disabilities or lower mobility in the county (72% ranked this issue 1, 2) particularly in provision of accessible bathrooms, safe access points and hoists were raised. Universal access needs to be at the forefront of design and development of public recreational spaces.

Crucially, there was very low awareness of the work of the Leitrim Recreation Forum, a recurring theme throughout all of the consultations. Almost half of respondents had *no knowledge* of the Leitrim Recreation Forum, while only 13% had *considerable knowledge*. There is a need to further promote the work that the Forum does and to communicate how local people can get involved at community level.

In response to a question on how respondents would like to see recreational offering in Leitrim improved, a large number of responses were received, which focused mainly on issues of (i) improved access; (ii) keep any new developments green and low impact; (iii) more communication and collaboration with and between community groups; (iv) more linking of public transport to recreational amenities; and (v) communications – keeping information up-to-date and widely available.

These data provide a very useful snapshot of Leitrim citizens' perceptions of recreational access, barriers to participation and the standards of a range of recreational amenities across the County. The feedback was used to inform the recommendations presented in the Strategic Action Plan (Chapter 7).

4.4 Focus Groups

Focus groups were held with diverse recreational interests, particularly members of the four Working Groups of the Recreation Forum; relevant officers in the Local Authority; local representatives; and officers of Leitrim Development Company, many of whom have been involved in the Recreation Forum since its inception.

Six focus groups were held with members of these groups between March – July 2022.

All of the consultees are commended for their time and considered inputs to the development of the Strategy. The findings are presented in Section 4.6 below.

4.5 Public Meetings

Two public were held in Manorhamilton and Carrick-on-Shannon on 24th and 25th October 2022, respectively, to present the proposals and Draft Strategic Action Plan for the future development of Recreation in County Leitrim.

The events helped to promote public awareness of the Draft Strategy and to garner public support for the implementation phases of the Recreation Strategy for County Leitrim in the coming decade.

Key issues raised in the public consultations included the need for integrated environmental planning and protection of biodiversity; that access to outdoor recreation is essential for public health and wellbeing; and that more needs to be done to realise the value adding potential of outdoor recreation to the rural economy of county Leitrim, particularly in provision of suitable accommodation and related services in rural areas. Suggestions were also made that recreational infrastructure such as greenways and blueways need to be age friendly and accessible for those living with disability.

"We need balance in developing recreation, but also need to realise opportunities for rural tourism and related job creation, that should encompass biodiversity and the environment".

Some concerns were expressed about the lack of consideration of motorboating as recreation. Others expressed the need to balance competing interests such as recreation, tourism, forestry and renewable energies. However, it was noted that the County Development Plan statutory process is separate from the non-statutory Recreation Strategy development. The core focus of the Leitrim Recreation Forum is protection of biodiversity and landscape, and all RDP/ LEADER funded projects require the recognition of biodiversity.

A full report of feedback at these meetings is presented in Appendix 03.

4.6 Key Findings of Consultations

The following section provides a synthesis of the extensive discussions and feedback emerging from the key consultation phases conducted between April and July 2022. They include: -

- **Online Survey**
- **One-to-One Consultations**
- **Focus Groups (x 6) and**
- **Engagement with the Steering Group**

To help the analysis of the broad range of responses, the lens of the six primary objectives of the new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (NORS) was used to frame the detailed and extensive responses, presented in Table 8 below, noting there may be potential 'contradictions' among the various responses given the perception and experience spread of respondents.

Table 8 Synthesis of Consultation Feedback through the lens of NORS Objectives

Objective Criteria NORS (2022)	Online Survey	Consultations	Focus Groups (X 5)	Steering Group	Discussion Points
1. Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The strong chairing of the LRF has been one of its most significant achievements. Acknowledgement that recreation is likely outpacing broad tourism development within the county currently given the signature projects underway or about to commence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Succession planning for the next Chair is important. Can more discussion time at forum sessions be allowed? There is possibly too much formal presentation time? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is it fair to expect the chair of the Forum to also chair the Working Groups? Is this sustainable? Need new ‘voices’ on both the Forum and within the Focus Groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> With exception of the Greenway WG, it is unclear who may be capable/ prepared to step into group Chairing RRO’s time in servicing the Working Groups is a resource issue. Is it sustainable into the longer run as the workload increases? Online forum sessions during Covid ensured no disruption in recreational delivery within the county. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning for smooth transition of Chair. Devolve some leadership to WGs Build on strong leadership in LCC What ‘gaps’ can be easily addressed, by whom and at what cost? RRO requires additional assistance to deliver the expanding recreational remit.
2. Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need stronger practical alignment being made between recreational development and biodiversity targets Potential of the SLNCR/ CLR to embrace green corridors rather than just linear routes. Excess afforestation and wind turbines and their impact on landscape and communities was noted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All partners stressed importance of biodiversity and need for responsible recreational planning Need to ensure that Leitrim uplands are not ‘overrun’ with unwelcome visitors at peak times. Important to reference the new Leitrim Biodiversity Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LCC keen to stress the dovetailing of tourism and recreational development – the new strategies for both sectors should be carefully aligned. Public access and promotion of wild swimming and public bathing sites although very welcome come with administrative, sampling and resource requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NORS and related national planning frameworks all signal need to ensure Strategy adheres to guidelines and good practice. Although ‘environment’ is a cross-cutting pillar it should not overplay its hand at the expense of sustainable recreational development i.e. block development unnecessarily. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biodiversity and environmental protection needs to be at the heart of the strategy. Leitrim Recreational Strategy should align with environmental objectives of NORS and Shannon Tourism Masterplan (<i>focus on sustainable outdoor activities</i>) Could LRF be a ‘leader’ i for best environmental practice? Is the LRF well enough informed on the strategic, operational and partnership implications?

Objective Criteria NORS (2022)	Online Survey	Consultations	Focus Groups (X 5)	Steering Group	Discussion Points
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental requirements add complexity to planning of future routes/trails/blueways -pre-planning is now critical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we need robust benchmarks in relation to national biodiversity/ climate targets?
3. Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work of LR Forum is invisible to roughly 50% of survey respondents, thus need for improved communications. No obvious social media presence; but improving (via RRO). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of recreation <i>awareness</i> among LRF partners is low – except for Forum sessions there is little opportunity to profile the impressive work being undertaken through the county. Possible cooperation is being overlooked. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links with local media virtually non-existent, needs to be addressed. Annual ‘recreation themed’ conference desirable. Could a medium be created to showcase examples of public funding & good practice in recreational delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No one formally responsible for communications planning and execution. Remain mindful the LRF has a ‘good news’ story to tell. The role of the RRO was acknowledged in helping address complex local issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LRF needs ‘skills and experience’ to plan and execute a smart communications plan that will make a positive difference. Is communications of a high enough priority to see significant actions being delivered in the short to medium term?
4. Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can communities on the ground access greater recreational funding from agencies and government? Little or no appreciation for the links between recreational provision and creating jobs in rural areas. No promoted Leitrim ‘recreational brand’. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need investment in critical services: accommodation, food camping/ glamping, guiding, transport to support ‘value adding’ of rural recreation. Scope for more cross-border and intercounty joint working. This needs to be formally represented in the new strategy. Don’t underestimate the degree of buy-in and usage of existing recreational offerings throughout the county especially during Covid. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater alignment with the Leitrim Sports Partnership important ... considerable ‘shared’ coworking possible. The input of a multidisciplinary LCC approach to supporting recreational development was acknowledged. Development of a nationally significant agri-recreational ‘pilot’ project desirable and achievable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to develop the ‘Big 6’ recreational projects over the coming decade but not at the expense of smaller and more local recreational projects. Smaller trails at local scale needed Greater alignment of Recreation / Tourism and Sport in planning. Practical ‘supports’ for RRO to help drive the implementation of LRS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Important that the new strategy dovetails and supports the rollout of Leitrim Tourism Strategy; the Shannon Tourism Masterplan and Wild Atlantic Way initiatives. Can we do more to foster N-S co-operation via rec. amenities (SLNCR/ SEW/ Melvin-Arney-Glenfarne) How will such cooperation be treated in funding, branding & marketing?

Objective Criteria NORS (2022)	Online Survey	Consultations	Focus Groups (X 5)	Steering Group	Discussion Points
5. Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of the Strategy in opening new routes was acknowledged. However, the landowner/farming community's input/agreement was also recognised. Dialogue was seen as the way forward. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused support for minorities to access recreation e.g. people with disabilities & migrants A more 'assertive' role by the local authority to help overcome access issues was proposed. Universal design should underpin all recreation developments to ensure access for people living with disability/ low mobility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More tailored public information on guidelines and good practice was recommended. Enhanced signage and freely available maps (hard and downloadable). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More public education is needed – the levels of awareness on personal responsibilities from dog control to parking to litter was acknowledged – <i>Leave no Trace</i> Need for more measurement of all aspects of the county's recreational infrastructure and performance, currently inadequate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could farming / landowners be better represented on LRF? Could a 'National Mountain Access' model be applied in Leitrim Uplands? Could a waymarked ways style of 'Memorandum of Understanding' help to establish future LRF-farmer relationships? Will national insurance indemnity for pilot areas be beneficial for Leitrim? Does the Strategy address the needs of a range of users across the county?
6. Expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A perception exists that the development agencies will <i>drive</i> the county's recreational development on a day-to-day level. The levels of expertise within these agencies are acknowledged and appreciated. However, more new faces from the private and community sectors are needed on the Forum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No formal training delivered through the LRF since its inception-needs to be addressed in a coherent manner. Outside agencies like the ETB, LEO and to a lesser extent FI need join conversation on capacity building. Could Leitrim Forum be a model for good practice nationally? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does 'good practice' look like in this space across the country? Needs to be a formal 'inception process' with supporting literature for existing and new LRF members. Succession planning for new members / rotation of existing members plus a future chair needs to be adopted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links between recreation provision and economic development are slim – commercialisation of the Leitrim recreational offering needs to be more significant. The integration of the new LRS with County Development Plan and new LDC Plan is important. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on recognisable training, needs, LRF could coordinate bespoke training in Leitrim with ETB/ LEO/ FI Is there sufficient engagement with business (investment) community to create new enterprises and jobs within Leitrim? Can national lessons be adapted to ensure SME impact is delivered on Leitrim's greenways?

5.0 Recreational Asset Base in Leitrim

Leitrim is endowed with a wonderful natural heritage of mountains, lakes and rivers, as well as the shortest coastline in Ireland. These assets provide a superb base for development of outdoor recreational amenities and potential for nature viewing in tranquil, scenic surroundings.



Photo: Fáilte Ireland : Ireland's Content Pool - Swans at Glencar Lake

Over the past two decades, Leitrim has developed an impressive array of outdoor recreational amenities for walking, cycling, angling, boating, rowing, canoeing, kayaking, surfing and hillwalking, as well as the infrastructure to support these activities (see Figure 6 below).

These developments have been significantly augmented by the work of the Leitrim Recreation Forum, providing a central forum for coordinated development of key infrastructure since 2014, among a range of authorities, agencies, enterprise and community players. The ongoing and positive collaboration with farmers and landowners is critical in providing permissive access to the countryside for outdoor recreation.

The voluntary work of the Recreation Forum's Working Groups in advancing many recreational projects to this stage is both formidable and admirable, and the proactive engagement of the local development company (LDC), the local authority (LCC) and the relevant statutory agencies provides a model for integrated development.

Figure 6 Multi-Activity Recreation Base of Leitrim



5.1 Signature Projects

Project consultations confirmed that the significant advances of the past decade require to be taken to completion in the coming decade. Six signature (1-6 below) infrastructural projects were identified that should provide the core development focus for Leitrim Recreation Forum and its partners in the coming years.

Greenways are central to Leitrim’s repertoire of signature recreational projects for development:

1. The **Sligo-Leitrim Northern Counties Railway (SLNCR)** and
2. The **Cavan-Leitrim Railway (CLR)**.

The revitalisation from ‘rails to trails’ in both instances has been driven by the work of the Forum with critical community baseline activity and engagement with landowners along the ways, in partnership with LDC and LCC. This has led to the successful development of pilot sections of the greenways in both cases.

However, planning and environmental regulations mean that completion of Greenways development will require a professional body to project manage and deliver the complex planning, environmental and financing requirements in the coming decade. Leitrim County Council, working in partnership with colleagues in Cavan, Sligo and Roscommon County Councils, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council in Northern Ireland, and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, has made substantial strides in development of the SLNCR, while LCC with Cavan County Council is working, to develop the CLR as a recreational link from the River Shannon to County Cavan. Community support and landowner access are critical elements of the final delivery of these greenways.

Blueways development in Leitrim has been driven primarily by Waterways Ireland, with the support of LCC and Fáilte Ireland. The signature amenities are:

3. The **Carrick on Shannon to Battlebridge Blueway**: Leitrim County Council has initiated the development of a unique walkway and cycleway on the River Shannon from Carrick on Shannon to Battlebridge, which will deliver a 'must-do' recreational link with the Lough Allen Blueway. The project is currently at design and planning stage. It is also envisaged that the Council will be working collaboratively with Waterways Ireland to include the delivery of a number of key interventions in the Battlebridge to Lough Allen and Leitrim Village to Kilclare sections of Blueway to address road crossings and related issues as part of this development.
4. The **Shannon Erne Blueway** stretches from Leitrim Village to Belturbet, following the trace of the international Shannon Erne Waterway (SEW). This 65km+ blueway is nearing completion by Waterways Ireland and will provide a fully integrated boating-walking-cycling amenity through this beautiful stretch of the county.

There is also scope for connecting recreational links to the proposed Cavan-Leitrim Greenway also, providing an extensive 'green-blue' off-road walking-cycling trail for all to enjoy.

The Shannon Erne Waterway (SEW) opened in the early 1990s as a major cross border tourism/recreational investment on the island of Ireland. It transformed the tourism economy, while opening the unspoilt scenery to all-comers. Towns and communities like Ballinamore, Keshcarrigan and Leitrim village are unrecognisable today to a generation before. The SEW traverses about 70km of lake, river and refurbished canal along a route linking the Shannon to the Erne navigation systems. The navigation is managed by Waterways Ireland (WI) with modest 'shoreline' access for the purposes of maintenance, under the ownership of the OPW. In recent years, WI have invested significantly in developing the SEW Blueway to enhance the recreational amenities both on-water and shoreside. There remains the stated intention to develop a 'parallel' greenway along the towpath and related routes for locals and visitors alike. The success of canal-related Greenways for walkers and cyclists can be witnessed in the Grand and Royal Canals and along the Barrow, Nore and Suir Rivers. However, to replicate these recreational assets in Leitrim, more detailed technical scoping work will be required over the coming years, including landowner and farmer consultation. The magnitude of the task remains unclear (e.g. numbers of foot-bridges, underpasses etc) until feasibility analysis is complete. The Recreation Forum has a role to play in supporting this work.

Forest Parks have seen a renaissance in Ireland in recent years, becoming hubs of recreational activities that are suited to families and all age groups. They combine recreation with adventure and appreciation of nature and biodiversity, largely within publicly owned forests.

5. **The Glenfarne Forest Park** is a signature amenity zone under development between Coillte and Leitrim County Council, which will provide recreational walking, cycling and a range of recreational amenities within this historical forest demesne on the shores of Lough Macnean. The forest park will provide a direct link to the SLNCR Greenway, with potential to link onwards to the Cavan-Burren Geopark and Marble Arch Caves, creating a recreation destination of scale straddling Leitrim, Fermanagh and Cavan.

Water Activity Hubs

6. Reflecting the long tradition of rowing in County Leitrim, the **Lough Rinn Rowing Hub** has been developed successfully by Leitrim County Council over the past eight years, becoming a significant facility on the national rowing circuit. It has the potential to expand as a water-based recreation hub to include rowing, canoeing, kayaking, gym-based rowing among others, to attract national training and competitive events, as well as training for scouts, guides and school groups.

The water-hub at Lough Rinn could provide a safe zone for such activities with relatively modest investment in additional parking, water craft storage areas, and general amenities along the foreshore of the lake (subject to environmental and planning considerations).

Planning permission is typically required for car parks or services toilet/shower block. However, slipways, canoe steps and quays may also require planning permission.

5.2 Walking Infrastructure

In addition to these signature projects, which over the coming decade will provide a full range of recreational opportunities, local amenities are also required for walking and hiking.

Leitrim enjoys access to three national waymarked ways: the **Leitrim Way**, the **Miners Way & Historical Trail** and parts of the **Cavan Way**. With the ongoing permissive access and support of the relevant landowners/farmers and land managers, each trail has been admitted to the national waymarked ways network.

The **Beara Breifne Way**, although not a national waymarked way, extends to and terminates in north County Leitrim.



Photo: Fáilte Ireland Content Pool

There is scope to expand the Leitrim Way northwards to reach the Atlantic coast, to create a 4-5 day walking experience (vs. the current 2-3 days) with a definitive 'end'. There are also possibilities to investigate linking trails from the emerging Greenway and Blueway infrastructure in Leitrim.

Issues of confusing signage are clear where the trail routes overlap and there requires to be a policy of integrated signage (design, colour, branding etc for each route) that aligns with the County's tourism development strategy, as well as Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and the Wild Atlantic Way regional brands.

Local Walking Amenities

While the focus for recreational development in Leitrim has concentrated on signature projects that can deliver highly strategic and economically stimulant infrastructure, it is important not to forget the needs of the largely rural population of Leitrim who require access to recreational amenities in their home localities (see responses from consultations in Sections 4.3, 4.6 above).

Recent **trail and amenity developments** by Leitrim County Council, Waterways Ireland and Coillte serve this purpose well, while also creating beautiful attractions for tourism:

- Glencar Waterfall
- Acres Lake, with onshore amenities
- O'Rourke's Table
- Fowleys Falls, with trail links to Rossinver and the Organic Centre
- Derrycarne Forest trails, and

Others that may emerge, including

- Kiltyclogher to Lough Melvin,
- Tawley Bog Walk, and
- Active travel links from rural settlements to key amenities.

There is scope to expand the **lakeshore walking network**, alongside Lough Melvin, Garadice, Gulladoo and Lough Boderg, all of which would require integrated services such as parking, picnic spots, viewing points, as well as standard services such as WC and waste management.

The development of walking trails is increasingly challenging for many community-based trail planners and managers, with particular reference to access, management, maintenance and insurance.

Successful delivery of new trails requires extensive pre-planning of routes to adhere to rigorous planning and environmental requirements; safety standards; heritage conservation; identification of ownership of (often complex) land parcels; extensive and iterative consultations with the landowners; and compliance with national trail development and management standards to gain formal accreditation and insurance cover.

However, there are new opportunities emerging which, utilising publicly accessible tracks, can be developed to create local trails suited to residents and visitors alike. A good example is potential development of trails in north Leitrim, taking advantage of publicly accessible turbarry tracks to create scenic, safe off-road walks.



Potential turbary trail at Tawley, north Co. Leitrim (photo: Alan Hill)

Capacity building will be required to support community groups in trail planning, development, management and maintenance in line with Sport Ireland/ National Trails guidance, to ensure highest quality in future trail development in Leitrim. Some work has already commenced in this regard where the Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) is running workshops for community-led trail management, and this work should be supported in the coming years through the Forum. An ultimate objective may be to develop a national centre of excellence for training in the development and management of trails.

Figure 7 Map showing Recreational Infrastructure of Leitrim



5.3 Cycling/ e-Biking

Cycling is a growing recreational activity across Ireland and increasingly for tourists to these shores also.

The National Climate Action Plan commits to expansion of the Active Travel and sustainable transport (SusTrans) networks, creating an integrated network of safe cycling routes to encourage greater use of cycling for commuting, recreation or leisure.

The emerging Greenways and Blueways will provide a significant off-road base for cycling in Leitrim, but there is also scope to extend the current cycling trail network and to further expand the Leitrim Sportive routes. These should aim to create links from services centres, recreation hubs (see signature projects above) and sites of heritage interest.

e-Biking has similarly increased exponentially and the potential to expand this network for recreational and active travel is enormous. Leitrim has already the Electric Bike Tours enterprise engaged in e-biking for more than a decade, centred along the Shannon Erne Waterway/ Blueway.

5.4 Water Based Activities

Leitrim's rivers and many lakes are currently used for angling, rowing, swimming, boating and kayaking forms of recreation. Bathing waters are required to meet stringent water quality standards and LCC designate specific areas suited to swimming.

With increasing recreational usage, it is clear that care needs to be taken of our waterways. The development of enhanced recreational amenities must consider the range of natural and cultural constraints.

- *Natural Constraints* include designated areas such as SACs and SPAs, Natural Reserves, Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and proposed variants of each of these, which prohibit certain types of developments. Invasive species are a major risk to native aquatic species and must be planned for and measures taken to prevent introduction of such species to protect native species and habitats¹⁷. Practical measures could be taken such as providing directional signage to nearby wash-down facilities along our waterways.
- *Cultural constraints* include lack of access to private lands for angling or launching of boats, as well as weak infrastructure for parking and picnics. There is a shortage of designated quays, pontoons or safe landing places outside of a few older facilities, many of which are in poor repair. This will require redress in partnership with the relevant statutory authorities.

Kayaking/ Canoeing Trail Opportunities

Water trails provide a unique way to engage with the natural and cultural heritage of lakes and rivers. The maintenance of water quality is vital and any development proposal should consider measures to avoid adverse impact on the receiving environment through proactive planning from the outset.

Guided canoe trails are available commercially in Leitrim, through the Adventure Gently and Way to Go enterprises, but there is tremendous scope to expand kayak and canoe trails along the rivers-lakes network of the county. The Northwest Canoe Club at Lough Melvin notes the potential to develop kayak trails along the Shannon, and / or through the rivers network to Sligo. There is also scope for cross-border trails through community trail collaborations from Lough Macnean in Leitrim to Arney in Co. Fermanagh.

¹⁷ **Biosecurity:** The quality of the local water environment and the need to protect it is paramount. At an early stage trail developers should consult with River Basin Management Plans and engage with their local LAWPRO Water and Communities Office – Community Water Officers <http://watersandcommunities.ie/community-water-officers>.

Inland Fisheries Ireland www.fisheriesireland.ie where any trail development works are proposed alongside, or close to a river or watercourse, consultation should take place with IFI. A new slipway or canoe step at a watercourse should also be discussed with IFI, who can advise on precautions to be taken to prevent any discharges of silt or soil. IFI has developed a Guidance Document to the IFI Environmental Assessment Process describing the process & procedures to facilitate development and conservation works within Ireland’s inland and coastal waters. <https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/NSAD/environmental-assessment-process.html>



Kayaking on the Shannon: Photo: Fáilte Ireland – Content Pool

Wild Swimming

‘Wild swimming’ is becoming increasingly popular across Leitrim in lakes and rivers. Bathing waters are required to meet stringent water quality standards and LCC designate specific areas suited to swimming.

If this network is to be expanded, then further resourcing will be required by LCC to assure the public of highest quality bathing waters.

Angling in Leitrim

Leitrim is renowned for its salmon, grilse and wild brown trout fishery. However, the future development of angling nationwide and in Leitrim is challenging due to declines in fish stocks linked to water quality, inadequate conservation measures, migratory challenges, global warming, as well as changes in the marketplace of visiting anglers (demographics, age profile, etc).

Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) developed the National Strategy for Angling Development in 2018¹⁸, which aimed to make angling attractive and accessible; increase angling activity, to re-engage with ‘lapsed’ anglers and

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<https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/sites/default/files/migrated/docman/2015/nsad/NationalStrategyforAnglingDevelopment.pdf>

introduce more of the population to angling for recreation and leisure. It also outlined a number of measures to be taken to develop angling as both a recreational and an economic activity.

Central to this was the sustainable development of the natural angling resource, ensuring protection and conservation of fish stocks. IFI also emphasise the need for stakeholder engagement, highest standards in amenity development and a coherent approach to marketing and promotion of angling.

The economic contribution of angling is considerable, being valued at €836 million in 2019, supporting 11,350 jobs. Over 446,000 individuals engaged in recreational angling in Ireland in 2014, of which 273,000 live in Ireland. Most visiting anglers come from UK (33%) and Germany (24%). The proportion of visitors to Ireland that participate in angling while here is c. 2% of the total (Fáilte Ireland, 2014). Critically these visitors frequently go to rural areas to enjoy angling, offering distributed spend away from 'honeypot' tourist destinations.

The development of the Angling resource as a recreational / tourism pursuit in Leitrim requires:

- A fully integrated approach among Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), Leitrim Recreation Forum, LCC-Tourism Development Unit (TDU), the Angling Clubs and service providers to promote the angling offering.
- Explore the establishment of **Centres of Excellence for Angling**, both game and coarse angling.
- Inland Fisheries Ireland conducts a significant amount of angling training and engagement with young people, largely through 'Go Fishing' (with Foróige) and its 'Something Fishy' www.somethingfishy.ie programme. It would be advantageous for LRF to combine with IFI and local Angling Clubs to engage with Foróige clubs in the county through this programme.
- LCC-TDU is developing **promotional videos** to showcase the angling resource in County Leitrim as this has been a traditionally strong component of Leitrim's tourism market.
- Another initiative for the LRF may be to work to recruit new membership through the 'New Irish' communities from eastern Europe who enjoy fishing to join Angling Clubs and become involved in conservation and promotion of angling.



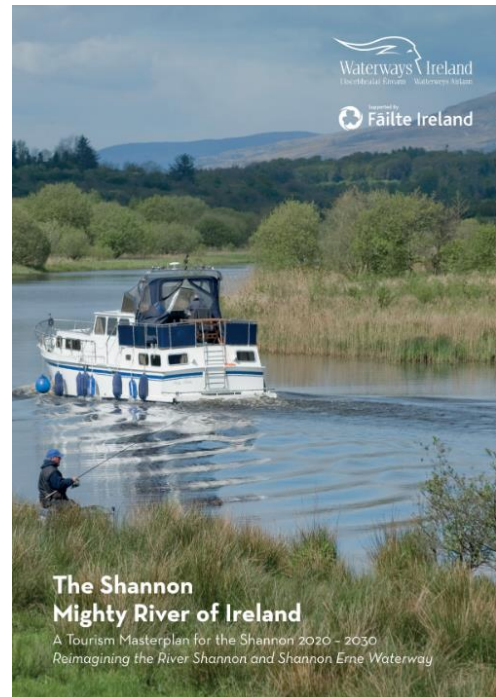
Photo: Fáilte Ireland :
Ireland's Content Pool -
Tooman's Angling,
Carrick on Shannon

Recreational Boating

In the course of the consultation process, it emerged that there is scope for further integration of recreational boating (including barges and cruisers) into the outdoor recreational offering in Leitrim. This is a key component of the outdoor tourism offering in Leitrim and is central to the proposals contained in the Shannon Tourism Masterplan to develop ‘active in nature’ tourism propositions.

See: <https://www.waterwaysireland.org/shannon-masterplan>

The engagement by Leitrim Recreation Forum with members of key bodies including Waterways Ireland, the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland (IWA) and Fáilte Ireland is recommended in the coming term of the Strategy.



Conclusions

The potential for land- and water-based recreational amenity development in Leitrim using the asset base is enormous but will require very significant commitments from all parties to deliver.

In addition, key service deficits in rural Leitrim such as accommodation, food outlets, camping/ glamping, guiding and transport connectivity will be required to realise the very considerable economic opportunities arising from the delivery of the Strategy. It is in this regard that the real ‘value adding’ by micro-small-medium enterprises will be seen in rural villages and towns.

A Strategic Action Plan is presented in Chapter 7 below to provide a ‘road map’ for development of these various ‘signature’ to local initiatives that will position County Leitrim as a ‘must see must do’ recreational destination on the national outdoor recreation map.

5.5 Metrics of Recreational Use in Leitrim

During the course of the study, it became clear that there are very few numerical data available in relation to recreational usage of the full spectrum of amenities in Leitrim.

In the course of consultations, it became clear that some data are available numerically and anecdotally, which were collated and tabulated to provide some idea of the level of usage, and potentially the value, of the infrastructure (Table 9 overleaf).

These preliminary data certainly suggest that there is significant scope to capitalise on the value adding potential of the signature and local recreational infrastructure to the economic development of County Leitrim.

Table 9 Estimate of Current Recreational Usage in County Leitrim

Location	User Numbers	Value € Actual /Estimate	Comment/ Source
Walking and cycling volumes at 11 locations on Shannon Navigation & Shannon Erne Waterway (Mar-Aug'20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases of between 91% and 126% in five locations. Overall usage of walking/cycling routes increased by 19% 		Waterways Ireland Corporate Plan 2020-2022 h
Shannon Erne Waterway Blueway		Est. spend €60/ day/ pp	(Waterways Ireland)
Albert Lock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7,500 pa. 	No data	No data re. stop-off/spend
Acres Lake Lough Allen Blueway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 150,000 (2021) 	National data suggest day-walker spends c. €7/day – but estimate €3.50 conservatively: Est. €525,000 to economy.	Potential to increase value with new coffee-shop/ canoe hire, and new 'Woodland Hideaway' cabins at Drumherney Woods (accommodation/café/walks)
Boating/ Cruising on Shannon Navigation	2020: every Boat Hire company was 100% booked to end-August 2020, with 80-90% bookings for September 2020.		IBRA 2020. Demand was solely generated by the domestic market post-covid, but plans are afoot to renew the fleet and to refresh the pitch to international market.
Lough Rinn	1 event x 50 pax x 5 weeks National Rowing events 2022	2,000 competitors, meet every week over 2 months (8 lanes)	Potential to be National Sports Hub , to incl. rowing, kayak, canoe, with upgraded amenities (subject to planning permission)
Angling General observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 500 anglers on regional waters every month Angling tourism attracts visitors to rod and line fishing. 33% engage in sea or game fishing; 19% in coarse fishing. The remaining visitors being unspecified. In market distribution 58% of tourist anglers come from UK, while 40% travel from Europe (France, Germany, and Holland) ESRI (2017) estimate anglers are willing to pay €867 for 1 day on Galway and Moy fisheries, c. x2 the costs incurred. Tourist anglers are price sensitive, with elasticity close to unity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> International visitors – av.10 days, value of c. €1,000 pp Angling tourism worth €100 million to Irish economy, with appx. 142,000 visitors (2008) Angling dividend €750m pa. Corrib/Moy anglers contribute €22-€31 p.d. to local incomes 	IFI – anecdotal data - where up to 70% of region's anglers originate from E. Europe Angling Tourism value: CSO, Failte Ireland 2008 <i>Socio-Economic Study of Recreational Angling in Ireland</i> (IFI, 2013), quoted in ESRI (2017)
Ballinamore Angling Festival 2022	70 pax / weekend 45 pax/ all week	70 x €100 x 2 = €14,000 45 x €100 x 5 = €22,500	Week-long festival worth €36,500 to Ballinamore economy
Cycling - e-bike hire business, Leitrim Village	3-4 fulltime employees 7 part-time in summer		Growing demand for e-bikes along the SEW and Lough Allen Blueway

5.6 SWOT Analysis

Based on the extensive consultation and review process, a SWOT analysis was carried out of the Leitrim Recreation Forum and delivery of recreation in the County (Table 10).

Table 10 SWOT Analysis –Recreation in Co Leitrim

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Beautiful unspoilt and varied scenery, offering multiple recreational opportunities, on land, forests, lakes, coast ✓ Emerging capital projects of national scale in Greenways and Blueways; Glenfarne Estate; Lough Rynn Rowing Hub ✓ Representative Leitrim Recreation Forum; strong leadership, efficient structure; committed Working Groups ✓ Direction & focus offered by new Rural Recreation Officer ✓ Delivery of main elements of Recreation Strategy 2014 ✓ LDC/LCC lead partnership in delivering outdoor recreation. ✓ Strong partnerships with Agencies: Coillte, WI, IFI, NPWS, FI ✓ Increased policy & financial supports available for outdoor recreation at national, regional and county levels. ✓ Increased participation in outdoor recreation among all age cohorts (trend enhanced during & since covid pandemic) ✓ Brand recognition of Leitrim as aspiring ‘recreational destination’, aligned with Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands and Wild Atlantic Way themes. ✓ Small cohort of capable micro-SME recreation operators.. ✓ Growing recreational connections with Fermanagh / NI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gaps in recreational infrastructure remain: for walking trails in uplands; beside- & on-water activities; defined places to access/ view nature in the wild; lack of camping /glamping amenities; decline in the traditional angling offering; Lack of visibility of new minority / soft adventure activities ○ Lack of signature recreational events & festivals ○ Weak communication of LRF and its recreational development work to Leitrim’s citizens ○ Environmental and biodiversity assets overlooked in favour of development of recreational assets ○ Fatigue among participants in LRF/ Working Groups ○ Weak engagement with younger recreational users ○ Absence of systematic data collection on recreational usage and profile of users. ○ Lack of skills audit & training needs analysis to inform planning & delivery of excellent recreation ○ Lack of market-ready packages & branded material. ○ Weak alignment between recreation and tourism. ○ Few new business operators in recreation space. ○ Failure to capitalise on brand/ messaging of green/wild Leitrim within IHH/ Shannon branding.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Leitrim Recreation Forum & Working Groups: develop guidelines for participation, recruitment & governance; proactive succession planning; formal ‘Induction’ for all members of LRF & WGs ; training and study visits ❖ Growing collaboration among leaders, agencies and communities for successful delivery of signature recreational projects over next decade: completion of SLNCR/ Cavan-Leitrim Greenways and development of Glenfarne Forest ❖ Blueways developments for kayaking, boating, walk/cycling, with access to Shannon Erne Waterway, Lough Allen, Shannon, and collaboration with IWAI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Contentious land access issues result in lost time, bad will and negative public relations. ● Lack of effective communications with landowners will exacerbate access issues. ● Onerous regulatory & planning constraints may increase costs & limit development ● Failure to secure requisite resourcing & funding to realise recreational opportunities ● Insurance costs threaten project development, maintenance & SME operators. ● Inadvertent biosecurity threats through angling/ boating/ kayaking /rowing activities.

- ❖ **Enhanced communications with Landowners as key partners;** their voices must be adequately heard and represented.
 - ❖ **Enhanced communications with communities;** promotion of participation in recreational activity for all
 - ❖ **Enhanced biodiversity & nature viewing focus** e.g. biodiversity/ nature trails & viewpoints; bird hides and bat walks
 - ❖ **Expanded use of forests** for recreation, Derrycarne, Lurganboy
 - ❖ **Cross-Border** collaborations for ambitious recreational links
 - ❖ **Increased funding availability** by government/ agencies
 - ❖ **Unified branding & communications** linked to Tourism
 - ❖ **Enhanced capacity (training, networking, marketing) of Micro-SME recreational enterprises:** collaboration & bundling, working with key agencies
 - ❖ Establish **5-year Leitrim Recreation Conference**, focus on progress, achievements, best practice, enterprise.
 - ❖ Increased development of **outdoor recreation festivals and events** throughout the county.
 - ❖ **Accredited recreational guide development** for land and water activities; promotion of guides as statement of 'quality'.
 - ❖ **Pilot use of the Local Link transport service** to provide sustainable transport (Sustrans) links to recreational amenities across the county.
- **Conflicting signage** among different walks/ trails requires integrated signage strategy
 - **Lack of signage/ up-to-date interpretation/ parking/ WC facilities** at trailheads/ car parks
 - **Potential burn-out of long serving LRF & WG participants;** failure to recruit new volunteers
 - **Lack of investment in building human capacity** to deliver the strategic Vision.
 - **Slow roll-out of broadband** across the rural and upland areas of the county.
 - **Lack of investment in mobile technology** solutions compared to competitor recreational destinations.
 - **Litter/ dumping** 'eyesores' at recreation amenities



Photo: Deirdre Lewis - Leitrim Skies

6.0 The Future of the Leitrim Recreation Forum

6.1 Introduction

The Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2022 -2031 is focused on developing the recreational asset base, skills and capacity, and securing of resources for ongoing and sustained development of recreation in the county.

Based on the review, it is clear that the Forum’s work is an ongoing programme and that the process has been largely effective in delivering the objectives of the 2014 Strategy.

However, the landscape is different today than it was when the initial strategy was adopted in 2014. Not only has the coalition of partners proved its worth, but external factors such as increased government funding, a wider societal conversation around the role of physical exercise for positive mental health, and responsible environmental practice are now in the mainstream national conversation. Enhanced regulatory requirements impact all aspects of recreational delivery, as well as issues of access, insurance, GDPR and governance.

Thus, the work of the Forum in the coming term will require a significant and consistent investment of both human and financial resources. One of the challenges influencing the sustainability of the Forum will be its ability to secure the funding required to deliver the ambitious new strategy.

The phrase *crosscutting themes* has been employed to illustrate the need for integrated and inter-disciplinary working to deliver the future recreational offering within the county (including intercounty and cross-border). All this should be seen within the context of the new County Development Plan.

The Forum has been focused on ‘getting the job done’ to the extent that much its work is hidden from public view. A more active and integrated communications plan needs to be rolled out using all available digital and media tools to showcase the Forum’s work and to gain broad public support for the strategic objectives.

6.2 Strategic Objectives

The following strategic objectives will underpin the delivery of the Recreation Strategy and Action Plan for County Leitrim for the coming decade, aligned with the strategic framework of the **National Outdoor Recreational Strategy**:

1. **LEADERSHIP:**
2. **ENVIRONMENT:**
3. **AWARENESS:**
4. **OPPORTUNITIES:**
5. **ACCESS:**
6. **EXPERTISE:**

Each recommended action in the Strategic Action Plan (Chapter 7, Appendix 3) will be aligned directly to these Strategic Objectives and the sub-objectives (Table 11) below).

Table 11 Summary of Strategic Objectives – Leitrim Recreation Strategy

Action	Strategic Objectives	Indicative Strategic Actions / Leitrim
1	Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue development of outdoor recreation in Leitrim by key partners through the Leitrim Recreation Forum (LRF) in association with relevant agencies and actors. • Support the crucial role of the Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) through additional human/ financial resourcing.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure clear understanding of roles & responsibilities in delivery of outdoor recreation among all partners in LRF • Embed leadership training for LRF and its Working Groups • Undertake proactive succession planning for LRF • Foster cross border / inter-county co-working and inclusion at community level, utilising the expanded RRO network. • Proactively identify new funding opportunities. • Measure and monitor progress of the Leitrim Recreation Strategy and its key actions annually/ bi-annually (pending resources), based on targets set in the Strategic Action Plan.
2	Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed best environmental practice into design of all recreational infrastructure, amenities, and programmes. • Integrate the Leitrim Biodiversity Plan into recreational planning for the outdoors. • Provide guidance on trail development (land and water), including measures to enhance biodiversity, water quality, and visitor interpretation. • Develop integrated recreational signage strategy for Leitrim, working in partnership to avoid 'signage pollution' of the outdoors.
3	Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an integrated web portal through Leitrim County Council website for Recreation, Sports, Tourism, with adequate resources to see it properly promoted and managed. • Develop, or partner with others, on development of user-friendly apps (trails, recreation activities, services). • Pro-active public information campaigns to increase recreational awareness across all ages & abilities incl. older, young, marginalised, and 'new Irish' cohorts. • Unify the messaging & communications (internally and externally) across all participating partners in recreation.
4	Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add value and practically support the new set of significant capital recreation projects being delivered within the county e.g. Greenways and Blueways. • Increase recreational participation through targeted programmes/ initiatives, working with others incl. Leitrim Sports Partnership, to ensure effective use of resources. • Develop positive environmental recreational initiatives, including birdwatching, nature viewing, dog management, as intrinsic elements of 'active recreation and learning' • Enhance the commercialisation of Leitrim's recreational amenities with tourism SMEs and agencies • Support the angling fraternity by engagement with new communities in fisheries, conservation, competitions etc. • Seek opportunities to develop Social Enterprises linked to outdoor recreation. • Investigate avenues to utilise the rural road network for the provision of a rural cycling network.
5	Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro-active engagement and relationship management with landowners/ farmers & their representative bodies. • Ongoing engagement with public landowners and land managers to assure recreational access to public lands.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for ‘Mountain Access’ pilot in the Leitrim hills to enhance partnership and access to extensively farmed/ commonage uplands. • Promote handbook / campaign on ‘Code of Responsible Activity in Outdoors’ (link to national ‘Leave No Trace’, Sport Ireland, Comhairle na Tuaithe guidance) • Review communications and enforcement mechanisms for sanctioning of irresponsible / antisocial behaviour in the outdoors, through e.g. volunteer corps of ‘engagement officers’. • Continue to promote the principles of ‘universal access’ in the design and operational management of recreational infrastructure within the county.
6	Expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct early training needs analysis among user groups across Leitrim. • Bespoke training in guiding/ enabling for leaders in recreation activities, linked to Leitrim Sports Partnership¹⁹, Sport Ireland²⁰, Irish Heart Foundation²¹, Mountaineering Ireland²² outdoor recreation training initiatives. • Development of Community Toolkit for trails/ amenity development and management in Leitrim, based on national Sport Ireland guidance for development, management and maintenance of trails for communities/ voluntary groups²³. • Bespoke training for participants (swim, kayak, hiking/ map-reading etc) offered by governing bodies. • Delivery of a Leitrim Recreation Conference during term of strategy to showcase developments and achievements. • Enhanced micro-business training / supports in tourism and recreation, linked to IHH, Sport Ireland and NORS.

6.3 Proposed Structure of the Forum

Following the review of the workings of the Forum, it is clear that most participants are happy with the overall structure, numbers of meetings and the level of collaboration among the various working groups. The positive leadership and support of the Chair and RRO are universally recognised.

However, it is timely to identify new means of delivering aspects of the work programme, given the complexity and volume of work forecast for the coming decade. All primary stakeholders need to be represented, proactive and innovative if opportunities are to be realised.

To improve the efficacy of key elements of the Forum, in particular the intangible cross-cutting actions, it is recommended that the Forum be slightly restructured as follows (Figure 8):

¹⁹ <https://www.sportireland.ie/participation/lsp-contact-finder>

²⁰ https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/walking_trail_development.pdf

²¹ <https://irishheart.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/WLT-Information-level-1.pdf>

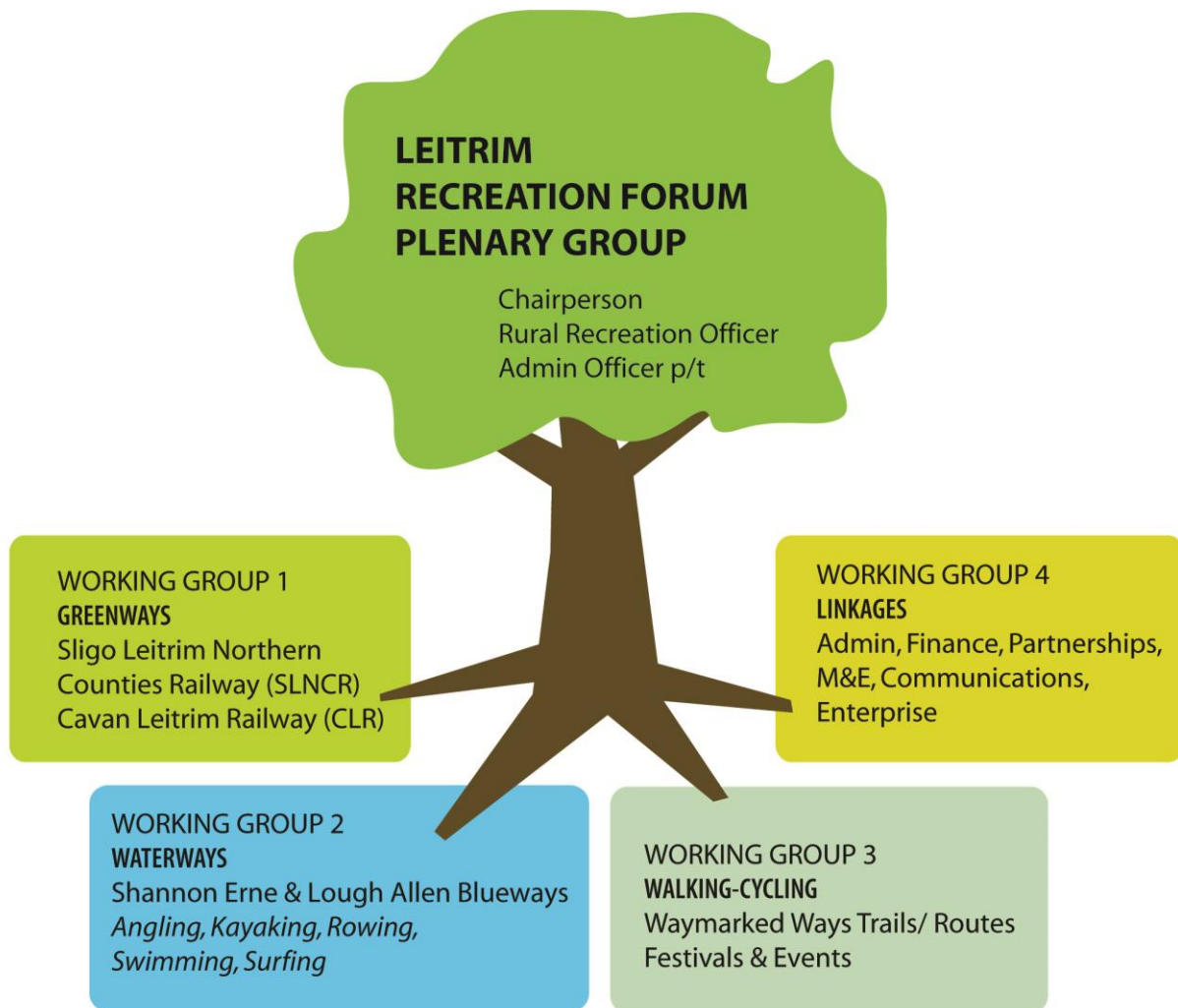
²² www.mountaineering.ie/TrainingAndSafety/LeadershipTrainingAndAssessmentSchemes/WalkingGroupLeaderAward/default.aspx

²³ <https://www.sportireland.ie/outdoors/publications-resources>

<https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2021-10/walking-trails-criteria-for-ireland-october-2021.pdf>

https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/a_guide_to_planning_and_developing_recreational_trails_in_ireland.pdf

Figure 8 Proposed Structure of Leitrim Recreation Forum



Leitrim Recreation Forum – Plenary Group

It is recommended that Plenary Group will coordinate the high level delivery of the strategic actions of this Strategy, chaired by the voluntary Chairperson, to support the Working Groups’ activities; to ensure actions are being delivered and targets are broadly met. The Plenary will continue to meet on a quarterly basis (in person or online).

Partnership: The local authority, Leitrim County Council (LCC), Leitrim Development Company (LDC), farmers, landowners, Local Authorities Water Programme (LAWPRO) and the statutory agencies, particularly Coillte, Waterways Ireland, Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Fáilte Ireland, will continue to play a critical role at all levels of the Forum, including the Working Groups, given their remit for recreational planning & development, water quality, forestry, inland waterways, fisheries, tourism and environmental protection.

Chairperson: The voluntary Chairperson will provide strong leadership and strategic direction to the Leitrim Recreation Forum. The role should be clearly defined with terms of reference and time constrained (e.g. five-year term, or as agreed by the Plenary). This is a critical role in coordinating the actions of key players and in ensuring delivery of the strategic objectives of the Recreation Strategy.

Rural Recreation Officer : The RRO will continue to provide critical advice and support to the Forum. However, given the expansion of the role from the core management of waymarked ways in the County, a (part-time) Administrator is urgently required to support the workings of the Forum.

Administrator: A (part-time) Administrator would support the effective workings of the Forum, in administration, meetings planning, minute-taking and communications to and among Working Groups. The administrator could also support the Working Groups in improving online communications (social media/ website updates).

Working Groups (WG): Four working groups (WG 1, 2, 3, 4) are recommended, as previously functioned, but with slight changes in composition. The community and SME enterprise participants in the Working Groups are voluntary, supported by the LCC and statutory agency officers who provide professional inputs.

Working Groups tend to set their own meeting schedules, but monthly meetings are recommended at a minimum, either in-person or online. Use of digital communications between meetings by email or digital apps (such as Whatsapp) to share information and progress reports are recommended.

The recommended appointment of the Administrator (part-time) will provide admin and communications supports to the working groups.

Working Group 1 will provide critical community and landowner support to the development of the two signature greenway projects in County Leitrim, namely the Sligo Leitrim & Northern Counties Railway (SLNCR; to be renamed/ branded) and the Cavan Leitrim Railway (CLR; also likely to be rebranded at a later date).

LCC and the statutory authorities, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) and cross-border partners will be required to assume project management for delivery of these signature projects, given the regulatory, planning environmental and financial requirements of these projects. However, the input and support of the community and landowners are critical in delivery of these signature projects, that will be transformative for Leitrim.

Working Group 2 will deal with all water-based activities, including Shannon Erne Waterway (SEW), Lough Allen and the Shannon, and the development of Blueways along these assets. The growth in small craft activity, rowing, kayaking, canoeing, paddleboarding etc. and the development of water trails will also be included in this group. Rowing has a strategic position in Leitrim's recreational asset base, and the Lough Rinn signature project will be addressed in this WG. Finally, it is proposed to merge the original Angling WG into the WG3 Waterways to provide greater strategic engagement across all water-based activities and provision of related amenities.

Working Group 3 will address the development of walking and cycling trails, both waymarked ways (part of the national network) and local walking and cycling trails for amenity provision across Leitrim This will be a critical element in meeting the needs of the citizens based on survey feedback, as well as delivering tourism trails and experiences embedded in the community. This WG could also include focused 'active in nature' trails for biodiversity enhancement and nature viewing, working with the LCC Biodiversity Officer. The group could also address walking and cycling events as fundraising elements for local recreational endeavours.

Working Group 4 is a new proposition to create an 'Linkage Working Group' to address the multiple cross-cutting themes identified in the consultations, as the work of the Recreation Forum continues to expand.

WG4 will address such themes as resourcing, administration, funding and communications (external in particular), as well as building collaborations in partnership with Leitrim Sports Partnership, Local Enterprise Office (LEO), Tourism interests; Landowners, Cross-Border, etc.

WG4 should be chaired by the Chairperson of the Recreation Forum, under the ultimate direction of the representative plenary Recreation Forum. Further details of the role of WG4 are presented in Section 6.4 below and a draft Terms of Reference is presented in Appendix 04, which may be refined once established.

6.4 Delivery of Cross-Cutting Themes

The proposed WG4 Linkage Working Group (LWG) will address cross-cutting themes such as resourcing, administration, funding, partnership building and communications:

- ✓ **Adequate resourcing** (human and financial) to deliver objectives over the term of the Strategy. The Forum will require access to considerably more funding resources over the coming decade as a priority to deliver the objectives of the Strategy. A particular focus is required to prepare multiple applications to specific funding calls. It would be wise to store centralised data on a secured database or shared online platform, to avoid replication of common elements for each subsequent application.
- ✓ **Operational efficiency:** to ensure optimal efficiency in delivery of the strategy, the LWG could focus on integrated IT services for core administration, with online tools for data sharing and storage, training, marketing, use of social media; and learning packages under one portal.
- ✓ **Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation** - establish and monitor Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), with systematic collection of metrics, review, and analysis for continuous improvements in delivery of recreational activities. Such work could be supported by partnering with academic or other institutions (see below).
- ✓ **Continue to build partnership at the heart of the Forum** where relevant authorities, agencies, farmers, landowners, land managers and communities are invited to contribute meaningfully to the design and integrated delivery of world class outdoor recreation amenities in Leitrim. Enhanced collaboration and partnership with Leitrim's tourism enterprises and networks should be central to this function to add value to the recreational asset base where possible.
- ✓ **Effective communications of sports & recreational activities** – across relevant print, digital and social media platforms, in partnership with LDC, LCC (SP and TO), WI and other partners.
- ✓ **Recruitment, Training & capacity building** for public, community, and private sector actors, to optimise the social and economic benefits of recreation, sports, and related tourism. The group could also develop a Volunteer Recruitment and Training programme to bolster the numbers of volunteers to deliver the objectives of the strategy (see Section 6.6 below).

The following indicative components could also be addressed by the Linkage Working Group:

Monitoring, Evaluation & Research

Academic partnerships should be considered to support monitoring, evaluation and research, relevant to the roll-out of the strategy. These may take the form of:

- Student research, work placements or internships to carry out specific monitoring, measuring or research tasks for the Forum.
- Participation in national research projects with bodies such as Sport Ireland, Healthy Ireland, CARA, research institutions or data integration.
- EU PEACE PLUS, INTERREG or Transnational programmes pertaining to recreational linkages, events and management best practice, or public health.

Corporate Social Responsibility

There is potential to seek support from FDI companies operating in Leitrim to offer professional services under their Corporate Social Responsibility remit – e.g. systems IT advice; research, measuring or monitoring of recreational activity; or strategic case-making for funding.

6.5 Value Adding: Delivery of Soft Infrastructure

In this strategy, actions are proposed to develop “soft infrastructure” to overlay and to add value to the recreational infrastructure (‘hard’) asset base.

- To develop and deliver unique recreation-led initiatives for rural regeneration and place-making on a landscape scale, focused on the natural attractions and recreation infrastructure of Leitrim. This will require building on existing collaborations and partnerships to deliver the signature actions.
- Proposed projects and programmes include showcasing of Leitrim’s natural heritage and biodiversity along the various trails and ways, as well as exposition of local cultural heritage that will enhance the experiences of citizens and visitors to the county.
- A focus on enhancing the ‘commercialisation’ of recreational development (and investment) with a view to job creation and animation of new micro-businesses and SMEs in the recreational sphere, as a cornerstone of Leitrim’s unique tourism offering.
- Linked to the above is a need for building of capacity and training at all levels of participation to enhance the capacity to deliver the projects and tourism experiences to emplace Leitrim as a ‘must see must do’ place to visit in the heart of ‘Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands’ and ‘Wild Atlantic Way’.

6.6 Volunteer Recruitment

The **Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2023-2032** is an ambitious roadmap to position Leitrim as a recreational destination of national and international renown.

Central to the delivery of the Recreation Strategy is a need to bolster the numbers of volunteers involved at all levels of the Forum, particularly in the four Working Groups. There is an enormous pool of volunteers in Ireland, contributing very significantly to society and the economy.

Research by the CSO on volunteering in Ireland (2013)²⁴ suggests that over 28% of all adults over the age of 15 volunteer time to a selection of social and community efforts. This includes *inter alia* sporting organisations, church, social / caring work and community development. The CSO calculated that almost 233 million hours of voluntary work was worth €2 billion to the economy, based on national minimum wage per hour. Research by Donoghue et al. (2006) estimated that the average Irish volunteer contributes 21 hours per month, although more than half contributed less than 10 hours per month.

People of higher social incomes tend to be more likely to volunteer. However, ‘new Irish’ immigrants report an 8% contribution to volunteering, which reflects efforts to positively integrate in society.

Additional research in UK and Europe suggest that volunteering is good for mental health and saves up to £956 per person per annum in the National Health Service in the UK²⁵.

Recruiting Volunteers

It is recommended that the Leitrim Recreation Forum through WG4 (LWG) develops a *Volunteer Recruitment Strategy* to tap into this supply of volunteers to bolster the number of active members of the Working Groups.

Where a specific skills gap(s) arise(s) in a particular Working Group, it is recommended to identify potential candidates, with the right skills, and approach them directly to volunteer to fill the role. Most people respond positively to such an approach, and many organisations adopt this approach vs waiting for volunteers to come forwards unilaterally.

²⁴ Central Statistics Office (2013). QHNS Volunteering & Wellbeing in Ireland (Q3/2013). See <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/q-vwb/qnhsvolunteeringandwellbeingq32013/>

²⁵ Haldane, Andy, CEO of Bank of England (2014). www.proboneconomics.com

The Leitrim Volunteer Centre is part of the national network of Volunteer Ireland www.volunteer.ie which provides resources and supports to voluntary organisations in recruiting new volunteers. These too could be approached, notwithstanding the shortage of volunteers reported in Leitrim.

Given the numbers of people in the immigrant community who are keen to become involved in their host communities, direct approaches to individuals to get involved could also form part of the strategy. This may be particularly effective for walking and angling activities, both of which are popular among our new citizens. Such engagement also acts as a socially inclusive measure by including all community volunteers in our recreational development.

6.7 Forum Communications

The priority communication actions that are recommended to be undertaken by the LRF over the duration of the strategy are presented below, with the following considerations: -

- One experienced person should have responsibility to oversee communications for the LRF.
- Administrative and managerial supports are limited; therefore, actions need to be prioritized and achievable.
- LRF communications should dovetail with those of its core partners to avoid duplication or confusion, while aiming to generate economies of scale.
- Communication design and messaging should be as simple and clear as possible, avoiding unnecessary additional *clutter* in the public space.
- A modest annual budget should be secured for the delivery of the key actions identified below.

6.7.1 Communications Plan

The three key elements of the communications plan relate to:

- 1) Communication Planning
- 2) Media Management and
- 3) Communications Materials.

In Table 12 below, key actions are prioritized within a timeframe beginning with 'immediate'.

6.7.2 Annual Review

In relation to managing the communications process, the proposed Linkage Working Group (see Section 0 above) should adopt this as a distinctive strand of its work programme, with the support of the LRF membership, RRO and others associated with delivery of specific facets of the plan.

The delivery of the plan should be reviewed annually as an evolving management tool, aiming to improve all aspects of internal and external communications.

6.7.3 Branding & Marketing

There is a significant work programme to be delivered and monitored over the lifetime of the strategy. There are additional considerations pertaining to a future Leitrim Recreation brand, aligned with the emerging Leitrim Tourism Strategy and its related marketing strategy.

An additional issue to be addressed in this context is the need for an integrated signage strategy across the county, avoiding multiple signage, messaging and entities occupying the public sphere.

Collaboration is required among all the players to achieve an effective resolution on signage for Leitrim.



Leitrim- a paradise of land of and water

Photo: Fáilte Ireland Content Pool

Table 12 Leitrim Recreation Forum: Communications Plan

Action	Responsibility	Time/Schedule	Comment
1 Internal / External Communications Planning			
1.1 Begin the practical coordination of an integrated internal and external Media/Communications Plan	LRF and supports.	Q1/ 2023	Adopt the comms plan within the overall strategy and begin to coordinate and resource its delivery.
1.2 Communications Database – design & manage a database of participants and partners -	RRO and supports.	Q1/ 2023	RRO has an active database – could be expanded to embrace the LRS e.g., online ‘feedback’ surveys of stakeholders and users. The more fields of information the more useful the tool as is ongoing pro-active management and upkeep. This ensures the LRF is being informed by relevant and ongoing research to help with future decision making.
1.3 Web / Email / Mobile / Smart Strategy	LRF / Linkage Working Group	Immediate and ongoing	Rolling initiative requiring regular updating. Investigate channels and platforms (e.g., WhatsApp / newer and evolving social media) as primary tools for making/retaining contact with participants. New web site should be clean and simple, responsive to needs, well managed on a weekly basis, fully aligned with partner sites/links and be easily identified as being part of an evolving LRF ‘brand’ or identity. The chief portal for all aspects of the LRF’s work.
1.4 Direct Email Contact Communications and One-Off Campaigns - use mostly for communication to LRF members, potential partners, and agencies.	Linkage Working Group and supports.	Q1/2023	Offshoot of the Database initiative above - it is important to put in place measures to always ensure effective communications among stakeholders. Remain compliant with GDPR rules.

Action	Responsibility	Time/Schedule	Comment
1.5 Research and Benchmarking - Consultations/ engagement with stakeholders	Linkage Working Group and supports.	Q1/2023 and ongoing	Decide on a) research priorities and b) who needs to be consulted and c) how. Share findings to help refine existing actions and improve the effectiveness of case making and prioritization.
2 Media Management			
2.1 Local Media Relationship Building - opportunity to get the local media enthused and knowledgeable about the rollout of the strategy and the functioning of the LRF.	Linkage Working Group and supports.	Immediate and ongoing (should be established for the 'launch' of the new strategy as a 'line in the sand')	This will be driven by direct 'one to one' contact with press and local radio. Identify 2-3 regionally located people to do regular media interviews representing the LRF. Communications support could be valuable in establishing this relatively simple 'process'. It would be wise for the Chair to consider doing at least one local print and radio interview per year to review the past twelve months and preview the work over the coming year.
2.2 Communication Print and Related Formats – e.g. establish formats for all internal and external comms including branded posters for hard copy + pdf (downloadable) and internal report information to members and partners. including formal reporting of progress by LRF.	Linkage Working Group and supports.	Ongoing	Establish a simple and uniformly employed 'branded' style - recycle/update copy to ensure consistency - think economy and readability. Posters for events should be simple and within again the 'house' style. One point of contact for all enquiries needs to be established.
2.3 Generic Local Press advertisement - can also be altered for special events or time of the year.	RRO and supports	Ongoing - may be altered to suit events.	Where appropriate build upon the LDC / LCC project 'house' style - obvious economies for regular use and/or minor editing to fit purpose. Also the likes of the Sports Partnership who conduct significant amounts of 'communications' with stakeholders will have insights to share and possibly joint initiatives to co-promote with the LRF.

Action	Responsibility	Time/Schedule	Comment
2.4 Design and agree Enquiry Protocol - what happens when someone makes contact from media, user, or agency body.	RRO and supports	Q1/2023	One <i>point person</i> agreed from the get-go. Important to capture information in a systematic manner - this work needs to be integrated with the design and management of the Database above – efficient and prompt customer service is essential.
2.5 Press Releases - Generate template releases to agreed format for specific events, announcements, strands, public meetings/ workshops etc.	Linkage Working Group and supports	Ongoing	Advisable to have one informed ‘voice’ generate all the press relates e.g. om average of one per month. Releases over time should become easier to generate. A bank of quotable material from Chair/ LRF members/ WGs/ LDC / LCC should be secured in advance for inclusion. Establish regular media circulation list.
2.6 Image / Photo Bank - captured, archived, and managed for employment in all LRF material.	Linkage Working Group and supports	Ongoing	Only capture and employ quality images / sound pieces - This should be a substantial legacy from the LRF. This library will also be a tangible record to help with future case making. Software is freely available to help today with this task. Copyright regulations are important to be mindful of – where appropriate it would be helpful to adopt a policy of all LRF images being open source.
3 Communications Materials			
3.1 LRF / LDC/ LCC Meeting Backdrop – use multiple mobile backdrops (i.e. pop-ups) for use at seminars/workshops/events and launches.	RRO with supports.	Ongoing for use at relevant workshops, photoshoots and related, throughout the programme.	In keeping with core (agreed) message and ‘house style’. To be held by one person and ‘signed out’ when needed. Maintenance of same will be important – kept clean and safe.

Action	Responsibility	Time/Schedule	Comment
3.2 Information Packs - produce the necessary number of attractive A4 packs for Workshops / Events	RRO with supports.	Q1/2023 and ongoing.	Creation of LRF A4 full color folder, multiple uses from PR to specialist training material. Employ for seminars/ conference and media promotion - ensure it is designed to be flexible and not time-limited. Carries LRF 'branding' look and messaging.
3.3 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Formally employ communication tools to help with regular monitoring and evaluation exercises.	RRO with supports.	Ongoing from Q1/2023	M&E reports should be circulated at least quarterly to all relevant stakeholders and LRF members. All documents have the same formatted look and feel. This should transfer over to online communications as discussed above.
3.4 Media Coverage File Establish a system where all media coverage of the LRF and related is recorded and stored.	RRO and supports.	Immediate and ongoing.	Include local and specialist press coverage – appoint person/officer as 'eyes and ears' on the ground capturing local/regional press coverage of all things 'Leitrim recreation related' - also hard copies of ALL communications material generated throughout the programme e.g. flyers, feedback sheets, posters, radio interviews (recorded after the event from web), press releases and photographs. The archive should present a valuable resource recording the programme. It will also aid in future 'case making' for funding.

6.8 Training & Capacity Building

The Recreation Strategy aims to build on current achievements to deliver the highest quality recreational amenities across Leitrim over the coming years. To realise the economic opportunities offered by 'hard infrastructure', collaboration will be required among a range of enabling partners, enterprise and communities, to deliver the requisite 'soft' services and experiences to engage recreational users and visitors to the county. The evidence from the consultation phase illustrated the need for improved capacity and resources to deliver the full spectrum of the Forum's remit.

Expertise is identified as a 'strategic objective' of the new Recreation Strategy where the building of capacity among all stakeholder groups is essential for the successful delivery of the strategy. Capacity building (including training and mentoring) will be a cross-cutting theme as it embraces aspects of leadership, communications, viability and sustainability, as well supporting commercialisation of recreational opportunities. The responsibility for this integrated strand should lie with the proposed *Linkage Working Group* (LWG).

As a new Leitrim Tourism Strategy emerges (2023+), there will be significant synergies between tourism and recreation in terms of amenities, service opportunities, branding and communications. Likewise, Leitrim Sports Partnership (and Sport Ireland) are currently delivering impressive sports-orientated training across Leitrim, where a collective 'team approach' should be embraced. Several other agencies are likely to conduct recreational, enterprise and community development training programmes, thus courses should be integrated as much as feasible with LDC, LEO, Fáilte Ireland, ETB and IFI to avoid replication of scarce resources.

6.8.1 Proposed Capacity Building Stages

Five inter-locking and sequential stages are proposed for the systematic enhancement of skills and capacity across the recreation sector in Leitrim. The timing of these interventions should be aligned with the requirements of the LRF work programme over the coming years.

Stage 1 – Initial Training Needs Analysis (year 1)

Training needs analysis (TNA) should be carried out for all active recreational partners across Leitrim to provide a snapshot of their current and future training, capacity, experience, and skills requirements. This may best be achieved through a simple online survey distributed to the extensive database of Leitrim contacts held by the Forum. Analysis of these data will provide a 'gaps and needs' requirements and consequently opportunities for Forum interventions.

As well as the TNA, practical issues such as availability for training, locational and timing preference, accreditation issues, commercialisation (for micro-small businesses); use of online/ or face-to-face learning, cost implications and course composition, should be considered.

It would be wise to see this critical piece of research completed by mid-2023 as it will support case making for new funding to deliver a bespoke training programme.

Stage 2 – Detailed Partnership Engagement (year 1)

Inclusive discussions between LDC, LCC, ETB, Sports Partnership/Sport Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and Inland Fisheries Ireland should be convened by the Forum to discuss options for collaborative training measures to meet specifically identified training needs.

There is clear justification for 'pooling' of resources to provide an integrated, county-wide training programme for the next three years. The core aim is to enhance the sustainability of recreational investment and value adding in Leitrim over the coming decade. This could be developed initially as a 'pilot' project and pending success, rolled out more widely (or even at inter-county or cross-border levels).

Stage 3 – Scoping and Detailed Design (year 1-2)

The detailed design of the capacity building programme will examine the mix of available accredited programmes (one-day or multi-day). It will also examine training *supply* (trainers, locations, and course composition) and *demand* side issues (likely participants, their expectations, needs both in knowledge, social and networking).

This stage will also identify and help secure the necessary public funding required. The LWG will be responsible to project manage the design of the courses, locations, and the recruitment of participants through effective targeted communication. One person (answerable to the LWG) should take this responsibility (or contracted to do so).

Stage 4 – Focus on Delivery (years 2, 3)

It is currently unclear how expansive the initial programme may be until clear ‘needs’ are identified in Stage 1. However, it is desirable that up to 4-5 individual training programmes will be on offer in the early years for up to ten participants per programme. The bespoke design of these should be as ‘participant friendly’ as possible in relation to cost, standard, location, timing and site visits.

In relation to ‘cost’, evidence suggests that a minimal financial contribution per participants is wise.

Stage 5 – Monitoring and Evaluation (ongoing)

Formal on-going monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should focus on both the participants’ feedback and the impacts in terms of practice / implementation of learnings. Ideally, an annual report should provide M&E analysis with a view to learning from the initial programme to modify/ tailor a subsequent enhanced roll-on initiative.

6.8.2 Potential Training Themes

The research conducted in developing this Strategy identified the following themes for consideration as programmes by the LWG and its partners (*non-exhaustive; others may emerge with time/ needs*).

Course content may include: -

- *Community Trail/Route Development & Management* – including policy and trends, route design & planning, standards (planning, environment), permissive access, public safety, signage & interpretation, management, maintenance and financing. Continue the work started by the RRO in Leitrim, aligned with national Sport Ireland guidance in this arena.
- *Community Leadership in Recreational Excellence*– train and network the next generation of recreational ‘leaders’ across the county to include integrated servicing as well as infrastructure.
- *Communicating, Servicing and Engaging with the Recreation User* – how best to deliver a world-class experience and build lasting relationships with the recreational user.
- *Funding Preparation, Case Making and Research Methodology* –the consultations indicate a clear need at community/ M-SME level for a recreation focused programme to meet the exacting requirements of funding applications. Training could address profiling of suitable funds; having key documents ready in suitable format; drafting applications and building the case. Practical drafting of actual applications by the participants could form part of the training outputs.
- *Innovation and Good Practice* – this is an external-looking programme examining ‘real life’ case studies of what has worked in building sustainable recreational projects in Ireland and beyond. A key aspect of this course would be to invite speakers from successful projects around Ireland to speak to the participants, potentially allied to a follow-on study visit to each by the course participants.
- *Recreation Familiarisation Programme* – formal programme of ‘rolling’ site visits (e.g. one per month) to introduce the LRF and enterprise sector to all the primary and developing recreational ‘assets’ in the county. This could be the responsibility of the RRO, supported through the LRF (LWG).

7.0 Leitrim Recreation: Strategic Action Plan

Based on research and analysis, a Strategic Action Plan has been developed to meet the multivariate needs of the citizens, reflected in the vision and actions to be delivered over the coming decade.

7.1 Vision of Leitrim Recreation Strategy

The overarching vision for the Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2023-2032 is as follows:

Leitrim Recreation Forum will facilitate and pursue accessible, high quality outdoor recreational amenities, engaging best practice for sustainable environmental, tourism and economic development through a partnership with all stakeholders.

7.2 Strategic Objectives of the Recreation Strategy

As outlined above, the following strategic objectives will underpin the delivery of the Recreation Strategy and Action Plan for County Leitrim for the coming decade, mirroring the strategic objectives of the *National Outdoor Recreational Strategy (in prep.)*

- 1. LEADERSHIP:** To provide integrated Leadership, management, and resourcing to deliver the objectives of the Strategy, in partnership with Leitrim Recreation Forum, Leitrim County Council, statutory agencies, cross-border bodies, communities and recreational enterprises.
- 2. ENVIRONMENT:** To deliver signature recreational infrastructure and amenities at county, local, inter-county, and cross-border levels, based on highest standards of design, planning, environmental management; biodiversity enhancement and interpretation.
- 3. AWARENESS:** To optimise awareness of the full range of Leitrim's recreational opportunities through ongoing communications and promotional campaigns, dedicated web portal and tailored applications (showcasing greenways, blueways, trails, events & activities, services), with unified communications among recreation, sports, and tourism interests in the county.
- 4. OPPORTUNITIES:** To actively encourage and facilitate recreational participation of people of all ages and abilities, through targeted programmes and initiatives, for enhanced health & wellbeing; immersion in nature and learning outdoors; inclusivity across all segments of society, while fostering opportunities for local enterprise, commercialisation, and job creation in the recreational sphere.
- 5. ACCESS:** To foster enhanced access to the 'great outdoors', through positive partnerships with landowners and land managers to gradually expand Leitrim's permissive trails network; and by active promotion, training, and maintenance in responsible use of the countryside.
- 6. EXPERTISE:** To build capacity in delivery and enabling of recreation across the County, through training needs analysis to inform design of bespoke leadership courses (guiding, group activity) and tailored training for participants (swimming, kayaking, hiking/ map-reading, cycling etc); while offering micro-business training /supports in tourism and recreation linked to Sport Ireland/Leitrim Sports Partnership and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands/ Wild Atlantic Way initiatives.

Each recommended action in the Strategic Action Plan are aligned directly to these Strategic Objectives and the sub-objectives (Table 13 below).

7.3 Strategic Recreation Action Plan for Leitrim

The Strategic Action Plan for Co. Leitrim is built on a number of influences including:

- Comprehensive consultations process (including focus groups, online survey, and public meetings).
- Appreciation of the strategic aspirations of all relevant partners.
- Reference to the objectives of the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (2023-2027) and
- Best practice in recreational development and delivery building upon the structures and early successes of the Leitrim Recreation Forum.

The Leitrim Recreation Forum will not deliver all of the measures proposed. Many of the proposed projects will require collaboration and partnership with other agencies to deliver the requisite infrastructure and value adding initiatives.

The **Strategic Action Plan** is presented in summary in Table 13 overleaf.

The following timeframes for delivery are recommended:

I **Immediate** (6 month-1 yr) **S** **Short term** 1-2yr); **M** **Medium Term** (3-5yrs) and **L** **Longer Term** (over 5yrs)



Leitrim has a long tradition of Rowing as an outdoor recreational activity

Photo: Deirdre Lewis

Table 13 Strategic Action Plan for Leitrim Recreation 2023-2032

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	TIMING				LEAD AGENCY
			I	S	M	L	
1.	LEADERSHIP, Management, Resourcing and Partnership in delivery of Leitrim Recreation Strategy						
1.1	Continue delivery of outdoor recreation in Leitrim through the established and representative Leitrim Recreation Forum (LRF).	Continue support to leadership of the LRF by providing strategic support and direction to Chairperson Continue strengthen the partnership approach among key partners to ensure delivery of the multiple objectives of the Leitrim Recreation Strategy. Continue to engage with National Outdoor Recreation Strategy/ DRCD to ensure alignment and benefits					LDC & LCC, RRO and LSP, with statutory agencies
	Clarity of Roles & Responsibilities	Provide clear definition of respective roles and responsibilities of Chairperson, Working Groups, RRO; provide clarity in relation to roles of various players in LCC, LDC, LSP and the statutory agencies. Enhance engagement with LCC Tourism and Sports Sectors, reflecting shared interests of all.					
	Leadership Training	Provide leadership training for LRF and its Working Groups.					
	Succession Planning	Engage in pro-active succession planning of the LRF to avoid hiatus and loss of institutional memory.					
	Foster cross-border and intercounty partnerships /collaborations	Foster cross border / inter-county co-working at every level, in particular engagement at community level					
	Measure & monitor progress	Develop KPIs to measure and monitor progress of delivery of Recreation Strategy over its term					
1.2	Secure requisite human and financial resources for delivery	Secure appropriate funding to ensure delivery of the objectives of this Strategy, to support the very considerable voluntary inputs of the LRF’s Chairperson and its Working Groups.					LRF LCC RRO
	Funding recreation	Identify funding initiatives to ensure delivery of key infrastructural measures identified in the Strategy.					LCC RRO LDC
	Supporting Resources	Additional human resources will be required to deliver the Strategy. Secure additional staff to support administration, funding applications, communications, etc.					LDC LCC
	Cross-border initiatives	Identify options for enhanced cross-border initiatives , incl. PEACE PLUS + Shared Island initiatives.					LCC LRF
1.3	Support Leitrim Recreation Forum	Adopt Recreation Strategy & Action Plan to provide the road map for LRF and its Working Groups over the coming term; and encourage partner agencies to adopt it also.					LRF LCC LDC LSP
	Create cross-cutting WG	Create new ‘Linkage Working Group’ with resources to animate cross-cutting objectives of Recreation Strategy in support of work of the LRF Chair. This should comprise the Chair, WG members, RRO, Leitrim Sports Partnership Officer, Tourism Officer, tourism enterprises; statutory agencies Coillte WI IFI FI ETB					LRF LCC LDC

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	TIMING				LEAD AGENCY
			I	S	M	L	
	Working Groups	Retain three of current Working Groups, absorbing Angling WG into the SEW/ Lough Allen WG with a new fourth group (see WG4 above).					LRF LCC LDC IFI
	Support Leitrim RRO	Continued support to RRO to progress the development of the trails network with responsibility for landowner management & access/ permissive waymarked trails/ administration of Walks Scheme					RRO LCC
		Secure additional administrative /technical resources for the RRO to support the work of the LRF Chair and the Working Groups; meeting agenda, minutes, communications, promotion etc					LRF LDC LCC
	Active recruitment	Continue to pro-actively recruit volunteers to WGs through invitation, engagement with clubs, SMEs, and public information campaigns.					LDC
	Integration of Efforts	Increase collaboration of LRF, RRO and Leitrim Sports Partnership for delivery of key elements of outdoor recreation activities and capacity building.					RRO LSP LCC
2.	ENVIRONMENT: Deliver sustainable Recreational Infrastructure and Amenities at county, local and inter-county levels						
2.1	Environmental best practice underpins recreation in Leitrim: in all aspects of recreational design, planning and delivery						
	Consider the environmental sustainability of project proposals with a genuine commitment to sustainability and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure biodiversity is considered in any recreational planning, based on Leitrim Biodiversity Plan Water quality to be protected e.g. anglers, cleansing protocols for all boats to avoid spread of invasive species Bio-security – avoid contamination of waters by imports of invasive species e.g. on boats and boots Consider seasonality: development actions to be avoided during bird/ fish/ fowl breeding seasons. 					LCC LRF IFI NPWS Angling Clubs
	Data Logging/ Metrics <i>Emplace digital counters in the county.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emplace data counters at appropriate locations to systematically record use of recreation infrastructure in Leitrim (to inform environmental management, planning and investment) Capture examples of 'good practice' of environmental management and recreational planning 					LDC / LRF/ RRO
	Respect for the Environment/ Litter Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with national Leave No Trace Ireland initiatives, with potential roll out of training to build public respect for the outdoors https://www.leavenotraceireland.org/ 					LCC LRF RRO
	Volunteer Rangers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a volunteer corps of Recreation Rangers, akin to model of Dublin Mountains Partnership - volunteers present in the outdoors to advise the public on issues like 'dogs on leads', environmental information and anti-litter messages. Initially focus on 'flashpoint' areas to address ongoing issues. 					LRF LCC LDC RRO
2.2	Deliver signature Recreational Infrastructure projects for Leitrim: to form the recreational framework of Leitrim, creating a recreational destination of national and international significance						

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	TIMING				LEAD AGENCY
			I	S	M	L	
	Signature Greenways and Blueways – developed to highest international standards, with respect for Leitrim’s considerable biodiversity	(i) SLNCR: development of cross-border rail-to-trail greenway through North Leitrim, linking Sligo and Enniskillen – in conjunction with landowners, community groups, relevant authorities. Consider rebranding of Greenway to iconic brand name to signify its international importance, in line with the <i>Code of Best Practice for National and Regional Greenways</i> . ²⁶					LCC, LRF, LDC, TII with landowners & communities
		(ii) Cavan-Leitrim Railway: development of the inter-county rail-to-trail greenway, as a major recreational trail through South Leitrim and Cavan, linking the Shannon to the Leitrim-Cavan lakelands and SEW					LCC, CCC, TII with landowners & communities
		(iii) Carrick on Shannon to Battlebridge Blueway: to deliver key recreational infrastructural linkages with the Lough Allen Blueway. The project is currently at design and planning stage.					LCC with WI NPWS
		(iv) Shannon Erne Blueway: complete the full blueway from Leitrim village, through Ballinamore to Belturbet in partnership with landowners/ relevant agencies.					WI with LCC CCC NPWS
	Forest Recreation Park	(v) Glenfarne Estate: transformation of existing trails into an iconic Forest Recreation Park, offering trails, access to waterways, heritage & history, including former links to Belfast Shipyards					Coillte, LCC
	Water Sports Hub	(vi) Lough Rinn Water Sports Hub: ongoing support to development & expansion of water-based recreation hub for rowing (incl. national events), canoe, kayak, school events, gym-based rowing					LCC LSP LRF Sport Ireland
2.3	Walking /Cycling Trails - Integrated development of trail network; accelerate links to villages and towns via trails from greenways and blueways.						
	Leitrim has attractive natural and recreational assets along rivers, lakes, canals. Planned investments for signature greenways, blueways & amenities will significantly enhance the county’s offer for ‘soft adventure’ outdoor recreation, with opportunities to develop a range of linked trails from the core framework <i>Research indicates a high demand for</i>	Develop an integrated Strategy for Trails Development , including designation of trail heads, signage, servicing, parking, etc – working with landowners/ farmers, land managers and communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a strategy for Management, Maintenance & Resourcing among all parties. Integrated Signage Strategy in consultation with other delivery agents for recreation (WI NTO SI Coillte Slí na Slainte) to avoid ‘signage pollution’ Aim for more Slí Na Slainte approved walks in the County with Irish Heart Foundation Link to Active Travel/ Smart Travel initiatives across county Leitrim. 					LRF LCC RRO LDC with landowners and communities <i>Use Sport Ireland Guidance</i> LSP with LCC IHF
		Expansion of Leitrim Way (including elements of Beara Breffni Way) through engagement with local landowners/ farmers/ communities, expanding to Leitrim coast, creating 4-5 day walking experience.					LRF, RRO with LCC and relevant partners and
		Trail development to link to signature recreational amenities (2.2 above), such as:					

²⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/6b6a0-code-of-best-practice-for-national-and-regional-greenways/>

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	TIMING				LEAD AGENCY
			I	S	M	L	
	<p><i>trails by citizens of Leitrim for ease of access at local level, for all ages exemplified by Rothar Roads initiative.</i></p> <p><i>All trails will require ongoing management & maintenance schedules and related resourcing.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Glenfarne – links from village to Lough MacNea via Glenfarne Estate (and on to the Geopark) Fowleys Falls/ Organic Centre and Lough Melvin O’Donnell’s Rock/ Manorhamilton Explore options for cycle trail from Glencar Waterfall to Manorhamilton O’Rourke’s Table / Dromahair Ballinamore – Fenagh- Mohill – expand linking local trails Kiltyclogher to Lough Melvin walking trail North Leitrim Glens to De Cuellar Trail / Lough Melvin and North Sligo. Upper Lough Macnean to Arney Canoe Trail (cross border). Lough Melvin Canoe Trail Footpath leading to Milltown Woods Forest Walks in Manorhamilton Walkway from Spencer Harbour to Drumkeeran Extend existing Glencar Walking route, ensuring bridges are fit for purpose Dooagh Mountain walking trails and trail head. 					landowners LCC RCC CCC FODC Communities & landowners Coillte NPWS LCC RCC CCC FODC Communities & landowners
		Explore inter-county & cross-border trail opportunities with Roscommon, Cavan, and Fermanagh to expand N-S and E-W recreational access into Leitrim along Shannon, SEW, SLNCR & LCR greenways/ blueways - work with the expanded RRO network in adjacent counties.					LCC CCC FODC Communities Landowners
		Expansion of lakeshore Walking Trails as much as feasible: Lough Allen, Melvin, Rinn, Garadice, Gulladoo, Boderg, etc (<i>all subject to permissive access</i>), with opportunities for nature viewing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess publicly owned lakeshore lands elsewhere in Leitrim for delivery of public amenities, e.g. parking (car/ bike), serviced picnic and cold water swimming zones; camping facilities. Enhance parking, WCs and changing facilities at suitable amenity zones, designed for people of limited mobility or wheelchair users. 					Farmers LCC NPWS Coillte
		Birdwatching/ Nature viewing in Forest / Lakeshore settings: emplace bird hides at key river/ lakeshore viewing points on Shannon, Allen, Garadice, Melvin, Acres, Gulladoo, Boderg					LRF LCC BWI
		Explore options for enhanced links from three Leitrim Sports Hubs to the ‘Great Outdoors’ – develop seamless recreation to encourage more people to explore the outdoors: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Bee Park, Manorhamilton (Family Resource Centre based); Drumshanbo Hub at Acres Lake (Mayflower Centre) Lough Rinn Water Sports Hub 					LSP RRO LRF LCC LSP

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	TIMING				LEAD AGENCY
			I	S	M	L	
		Support the development of a new sports hub focused on disability provision , with LSP					LSP with LCC LRF
2.4	Cycling / e-Biking Development						
	<p>Leitrim has potential to become a cycling and e-biking hub through development of high-quality cycling infrastructure using the county’s rural road network.</p> <p><i>Cycling Infrastructure to include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenways/Blueways • County Cycling/ e-Biking both linear and looped 	Planning for future roads and public realm works should include cycle lanes, where feasible, as part of Active Travel measures e.g. segregated cycle lanes from Mohill to Lough Rinn; Fenagh to Ballinamore and SEW Blueway					LCC+ Agencies + Communities + Specialist Cycling Operators (incl. Rothar Roads)
		Cycle lanes on approaches to schools , within 30kph speed zones for 1km either side of entrances during school arrival/ pick-up hours (as per NPAP and Active Travel recommendations)					
		Actively support enhancement of the local/national cycling events delivered by clubs in the county					LCC/ LSP LCC with LRF & TO
		Consider Leitrim walking/cycling tour, with links to heritage sites and points of interest					
		Continue to develop Leitrim Glens Sportive trails.					LCC with Clubs
		Develop a series of e-biking routes throughout Leitrim, with designated charging points at key locations					LCC with e-bike operators
2.5	Blueway & Water sports / encourage collaboration with Key Partners to add value to recreational base						
	Wild Swimming Amenities	Identify new designated bathing areas (and preparatory work to bring these up to national standard). Designate suitable locations for wild swimming / family fun with associated water quality monitoring. Emplace facilities and changing amenities at key lakeshore points					LCC Water/ Planning LCC, Swim Ireland
	Rowing	Lough Rinn – expand parking, amenities, changing facilities; servicing (bike parking, WC, showers, etc.)					LCC LSP SI
		Carrick Rowing Club – proactive events calendar to organise ‘Give it a Go’ days to attract new rowers					CRC / LRF
	Kayaking / Canoeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand Lough Melvin kayaking/ canoeing hub: provision of amenities e.g. boathouse, services, training to encourage people to try kayaking; with servicing (WC, changing, bike lock-ups). • Creation of new Sports Hub on Lough Melvin with cross-border implications / opportunities. • Conduct Feasibility Study into creation of iconic Canoe Trails along the Leitrim river/ lakes network to connect to neighbouring counties to create (marketable) trails within Leitrim brand. • Establish Adventure Sports Clubs (incl. equipment storage, WC) in Ballinamore, Glenar Lake, Glenfarne Forest and Keeldra lake – supporting kayaking/canoe/paddling board clubs etc. 					LCC LSP LRF CI RRO LSP and related partners LRF LCC (FODC)
		Support development of Upper Lough McNea to Arney canoe trail –design, signage, promotion					LRF LCC FODC

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	TIMING				LEAD AGENCY
			I	S	M	L	
		Develop small craft access points to lake/ river shores (with landowner permission) to encourage exploration of Leitrim’s natural heritage in riverine/ lacustrine environments					LCC WI Landowners
	Recreational Boating	Support the development of recreational boating and amenities in association with Waterways Ireland, Inland Waterways Association of Ireland and other relevant bodies. Explore cross-border collaborations and community based celebratory heritage events.					LRF WI IWAI
	Programmed “Give it a Go Days” on Water via Sports Hubs	Schedule regular ‘ Give it a Go ’ activity days at County Sports Hub days or free Summer Water Camps . Proactive engagement with schools and Foróige youth club programmes on water safety					LCC/ LSP/ RRO with Water Safety
2.6	Angling Development						
	Leitrim has impressive 'angling assets' with established events and destinations. However, angling needs bolstering to revitalise the traditional 'fraternity'. Water quality and biodiversity, control of invasive species are critical elements of conservation of fish stocks	Explore the establishment of Centres of Excellence for Angling , both game and coarse angling.					IFI LRF LDC, Clubs LCC-TDU IFI Clubs LRF IFI LRF LCC (Envir) LAWPRO LRF LCC IFI Sligo AUT LAWPRO LSP LRF / HSE & GPs network, with Clubs
		Continued support of traditional angling clubs in attracting membership Invite ‘new Irish’ anglers to join angling clubs; become involved conservation measures, while also being a socially innovative inclusion measure, through language sensitive promotions.					
		Promotion: Work with Leitrim Tourism Officer and Angling Clubs to promote angling offering in Leitrim (video/ web/ apps); promotion of angling competitions in Ireland, UK and target European markets. <i>(monitor & evaluate the economic impact of angling tourism / recreation into the county)</i>					
		Support conservation initiatives with Inland Fisheries officers and angling clubs Work to control invasive species through extensive biosecurity measures (see 2.1 above)					
		Promote Citizen Science initiatives in Leitrim linked to national Water Day/ WaterBlitz and support related academic research					
		Programme of ‘ get started days ’ through Angling ‘ Something Fishy ’, where experienced anglers show new starters how to fix bait/ cast rod/ position for fishing etc.					
		Promote angling as a healthy outdoor pursuit for people with disabilities, or mental health issues. Referral measures should be enacted with GPs/ psychologists’ network to engage older men in social angling, under the guidance of trained volunteer club members.					

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	TIMING				LEAD AGENCY
			I	S	M	L	
3.	AWARENESS : To optimise awareness of the full range of Leitrim’s recreational opportunities through ongoing communication and promotion						
3.1	Develop a Communications Strategy						
	Planning	Develop a Communications Strategy – use of LCC / LDC web platforms; social media; apps (applications) Deliver monthly note to local papers; circulate quarterly e-zine within the county and beyond					LRF LDC with LCC(TO) LSP
	Integrated Branding	Explore integration of Recreation as a key element of the Leitrim Tourism brand with LCC Tourism Officer, with integrated messaging and communications (internally and externally).					LRF LCC Tourism and WI FI
	Comms Training	Bespoke communications training for LRF members: in basic social media and broader presentation skills					LDC
3.2	Create a new, integrated web portal for Leitrim Recreation (in tandem with Sports, Tourism)						
	Web Portal	Integrate a vibrant Leitrim Recreation & Tourism web portal with Leitrim County Council website.					LCC(TO) LCC(SP) with LRF LDC
	Recreation Apps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop supporting Apps (trails, recreation activities, services) for Leitrim using best practice models to encourage local take-up e.g. BallyhouraTrails Build links with Trails Apps such as AllTrails or IrelandWalkHikeBike to ensure broader promotion of Leitrim’s trail offerings 					LRF LDC with LCC(TO) LCC(SP)
	Promotional Campaigns for public in Leitrim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pro-active campaigns to increase awareness and activity for all sectors of Leitrim society Combine all communications (internally and externally) in recreation through one suitably resourced plan embracing as many partners as is practically possible. Build links to apps such as Get Ireland Walking Support national initiative such as the Daily Mile (Sports Ireland for schools) Build links to Angling apps and e-zines such as the weekly Irish Angling Update (IFI) 					LRF LCC (SP)
4.	OPPORTUNITIES: Increase Participation in Outdoor Recreation while creating Opportunities for Enterprise						
4.1	Increasing Participation in Outdoor Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective communications across County of ‘Whats On’ (see 3.1, 3.2 above) Develop targeted programmes and initiatives, working with LSP to optimise resources Work with GPs network to actively promote recreation as a positive health measure 					LRF LCC (SP) Healthy Ireland Sport Ireland GPs Network
	Training / Competence	• Training coaches and volunteer corps competent to deliver training in range of recreational activities					LSP, Forum, LDC, communities,
	Recreation Campaigns	• Develop Get Leitrim Walking; Get Leitrim Cycling; Get Leitrim Swimming; Get Leitrim Paddling;					

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	TIMING				LEAD AGENCY
			I	S	M	L	
4.2		<p>‘Give it a Go’ days, campaigns and work in partnership with sporting bodies to deliver</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a common template to support these “come and try /participate/ fun/ learn” days for sports such as swimming, cycling and kayaking. • Kit available free of charge for the targeted sport on the day at Leitrim’s Sports Hubs 					sports clubs and special interest partners.
	Universal Access and Recreational Participation for All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build universal design principles into design & delivery of new projects wherever feasible • Create a new Disability Sports Hub – Drumshanbo, or location in central Leitrim (see 2.3 above) • Host dedicated days for people with disabilities to engage in accessible recreational activities 					LSP and related partners
	Learning through Recreation	<p>Develop positive environmental learning initiatives, as intrinsic elements of ‘active recreation’</p> <p>Guided nature viewing, with Walk Leaders (see Section 6 below)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity notebooks ‘in your own backyard’/ in your school / environs / village etc • Birdwatching (seasonally dependent) • Bat walks (night/ evening, seasonally dependent) • Dog management in the Great Outdoors • ‘Nature Corridors’ on Greenways and Blueways. 					LRF LCC with NPWS, Coillte, Birdwatch Ireland IFA/ Farmers
	Active Nature Days for all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage active retired clubs/ schools /youth clubs to walk in nature at designated ‘safe zones’ in public amenity areas e.g. Glenfarne, Derrycarne, SEW, Lough Allen, Acres Lake, Lough Rinn etc. • • Target Men’s Sheds in the county to engage in social recreational activities – such as ‘walk and talk’ / angling on the river or lakes; guided weekly free walks from Sheds by Walk Leaders • Engage Men’s Sheds in design of bird boxes and bat boxes with Birdwatch Ireland 					LSP/ Schools / Retiree Clubs LDC with Men’s Sheds BWI
4.3	Adding Value for Enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance commercialisation of suitable recreational amenities with tourism SMEs and agencies • Build a cohort of trained walking/ cycling/ e-biking/ kayaking/angling guides, rangers and gillies - promote through the web portal as Leitrim Recreation-branded (3.1 above) • Encourage recreation SMEs/ start-ups to avail of enterprise training through Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands and Shannon Tourism Masterplan; • Explore cross-border commercial recreation opportunities (e.g. SLNCR; Melvin-to-Arney trail) • Seek opportunities to develop Social Enterprises linked to outdoor recreation 					LRF with LCC (TO) and Failte Ireland/ Waterways Ireland

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	TIMING				LEAD AGENCY
			I	S	M	L	
5.	ACCESS : Proactive Management for Permissive Access in the Outdoors						
5.1	Relationship Management for Access						
	Farming Relations & Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pro-active engagement and relationship management with farmers & their representative bodies. Invite increased landowner participation in LRF (cf. WUC/ MacGillycuddy Reeks) Develop a model project on recreational access with farmers/ IFA/INHFA (Mountain Access Project) 					LRF working with IFA/ INHFA
	Statutory Agencies: Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing engagement with public land managers to assure recreational access to public lands. Collaborate with agencies to deliver key infrastructure (Glenfarne, SEW, Lough Allen Blueway, Training for enterprises) etc 					Coillte IFI WI NPWS LRF with Coillte, IFI, WI, Fáilte Ireland
	Code of Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote handbook / campaign on 'Code of Responsible Activity in Outdoors' (link to national 'Leave No Trace', Sport Ireland, Comhairle na Tuaithe guidance) 					LRF with LDC LCC
	Education & Awareness/Sanctions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review legal enforcement mechanisms for sanctioning of irresponsible dog-owners in the county. 					LCC
5.2	Animating Volunteers to encourage responsible behaviours						
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with the Leitrim Volunteer Centre to identify animation activities to attract volunteer activity guides, with benefits of training and certification in leading groups responsibly Work to identify young volunteers through youth clubs e.g., Foróige; or Refugee Reception Centres with supported training for outdoor recreation and leadership 					LRF LCC LDC ETB LRF Foróige LSP IRC LCC
6..	BUILDING EXPERTISE						
6.1	Training Needs Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct training needs analysis across the county with community groups, establishing their needs and requirements for training in recreational development and management 					LRF with LDC support/ RRO
6.2	Training & Capacity Building						
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design of bespoke training in guiding/ enabling for all recreation sectors, for guides and leaders (swim, kayak, gillie, hiking/ map-reading etc) - linked to Sports Partnership ongoing initiatives Based on training needs analysis (6.1), develop a small cohort of Train-the-Trainers bespoke training programmes to build long term recreational capacity in Leitrim Enhanced micro-SME training in recreation and tourism, linked to IHH, Sport Ireland and NORS 					LSP / Sport Ireland and governing bodies LSP and ETB LCC with TO LEO IHH/FI SI

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	TIMING				LEAD AGENCY
			I	S	M	L	
6.3	Development of Community Recreation Toolkits for recreational amenity planning, development, and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tool-Kit to be used by all community and micro businesses in developing, managing, and maintaining recreational amenities (based on National Guidance). <i>The Tool-Kit would illustrate best practice in design, planning & environment; permissive access and management; insurance; agency roles/supports; funding and fundraising; management, maintenance; benefits of recreation development/health and wellness research and national policy; recruitment and training of volunteers; increasing participation; and communicating.</i> Present the Community Toolkit as roadshow visiting up to 6 locations throughout Leitrim 					LRF with LDC LCC LSP and Sport Ireland (NTO) LRF / RRO
6.4	Delivery of 5-Yearly Leitrim Recreation Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host 5-yearly Conference to promote Recreational development in Leitrim and beyond. Promote success stories & enterprises, including showcasing of cross-border initiatives Develop strong communications / PR strategy to attract national and international attention to recreation conference in Leitrim. <i>The potential of the SLNCR for example to cast new light on recreational provision in the country will be significant upon opening.</i> 					LRF with LCC SP and LCC TO
6.5	Integrated Calendar of Leitrim Activities & Events (with LSP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop annual 12-month calendar of Recreation & Sports Events across Leitrim. Use accessible online/ social media about all types of events across county e.g. walking, cycling; angling; water-sports; triathlons; and hiking. Identify grant supports for Festivals & Events with potential to grow (in partnership with LDC). Foster links with sponsors – helping build these relationships 					LSP /LRF with LDC LSP and related partners.
6.6	Enhanced Disability Access through design and facilitation (CSO (2016) identified Persons living with Disability as 14% of the population of Leitrim (= 4,486 people)						
	Enable access to amenable recreational activities for citizens living with disabilities, through improved design, standards <i>Example of best practice for disabled access to outdoor recreation in Co. Fermanagh;</i> https://sharevillage.org/activities-for-all/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with local disability activity groups, Leitrim Sports Partnership and CARA²⁷ to review access to current public amenities/facilities/services; assess shortcomings and points suited to remediation. Adoption of Universal Design Principles in design of recreational amenities, where amenable (4.1) Upskilling of existing coaches in the county to engage more fully with people with disabilities Enhanced communications with people with disabilities promoting activities/events available 					LSP with LRF LRF with strategic partners including Disabled Users IWA

²⁷ <https://caracentre.ie> - CARA is a national pan-disability sport organisation providing a collaborative and partnership platform to increase sport and physical activity opportunities for people with disabilities across Ireland.

7.4 Key Performance Indicators

The six proposed, inter-related key performance indicators (KPIs) will support the roll-out of the strategy across County Leitrim over the coming decade. These KPIs will inform the operational management of the programme of work, but will also provide evidence to support sustainable recreational planning, funding and related case making, and communications.

The KPIs are intended to:

- Provide a simple, expandible system of easy to source data, using as much objective data as possible;
- Be the responsibility of one person, who reports regularly to the Forum plenary and the Linkage Working Group;
- Inform the production of an annual ‘monitoring and evaluation’ (M&E) report; and
- Ensure a degree of editorial independence – not everything will be rosy and ‘on target’.

Table 14 Leitrim Recreation: KPIs for Monitoring & Evaluation

Criteria	Description	Comment
Monitoring of Recreational Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with public sector partners to gather key data regularly (quarterly) on usage of recreational amenities • Emplace counter at entrances to key amenities and trails to build a picture of regular usage and planning for future need. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waterways Ireland, Coillte, NPWS, Fáilte Ireland, others • Data loggers will be required on trail counters to provide reliable numeric data
Economic and Investment Indices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job created and employment sustained. • Money invested in existing or new recreational enterprises. • Number of people trained /upskilled in the recreational area either accredited or non-accredited courses. • Amount of sponsorship secured for recreational events and related. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align these softer economic impacts into the evaluation criteria and outputs of the Leitrim LEO (and vice versa). • Alignment with the roll-out of the Leader programme where the evaluation of both is clearly aligned (and mutually supporting). • Keep the management of this simple and transparent – less is likely more.
Community Assets and Improvement in Quality-of-Life Indices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What self-funded or publicly funded recreation facilities have been developed over the last year. • How many citizens will this like benefit and how is their profile broken down. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A possible <i>heat map</i> of where these facilities/investment has occurred would be a welcome addition to evaluating impacts.
Partnership Development Indices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are inter-community connections formed? Including cross border and inter-county connections? • Links between operators, community, private funders or sponsors. • Links between Leitrim facilities and national bodies. • Links between charities seeking fundraising opportunities and facilities within the county. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may be helpful to present this information on a simple map – spatially locate where the connections are being made. <p>Establish simple survey tools for annual update with partner communities.</p>
Environmental Impact Indices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm that recreational initiative / facility adheres to all planning guidelines, directives, regulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be important for this evaluation work to be benchmarked against the delivery

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projection (and management) of visitor impacts on especially sensitive sites (e.g. Natura network; riverine, upland habitats). • Adequate provision at trailheads for projected numbers of users e.g. car parking, informational signage especially around dogs, litter management and WCs. • Adequate landowner/farmer relationship engagement and ongoing site/facility monitoring. • Citizen science initiatives and data collection. • Conservation promotion to the recreational user community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • of the new Leitrim Biodiversity Plan. • Ensure ongoing dialogue with those responsible for the roll-out and monitoring of the county Biodiversity Plan (possibly through the Forum).
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of farmers actively engaged in Leitrim Recreation Forum working groups • Establishment of a pilot 'Mountain Access Scheme (MAS)' for permissive access to the uplands of Leitrim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive engagement with farmers groups; invite more to participate • Embrace lessons learnt from pilot MAS at McGillycuddy's Reeks in Kerry and Mount Gable in Connemara.
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular updates to social media platforms (as many as possible) • Video clips of active recreation opportunities in Leitrim on social media • Monthly bulletins in the local press • Rolling 'roadshow' of presentations of the work of the Forum to local communities (say 3-4 per annum) • 5-yearly Leitrim Recreation Conference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A single person should be responsible for external communications, with support of LCC press office.

8.0 Sources of Funding for Implementation

The delivery of the Leitrim Recreation Strategy will require significant investment over the coming decade to meet the objectives set out in this document. The level of funding available for outdoor recreational infrastructure and amenities has increased significantly in the past five years. The 2020-2021 pandemic has enhanced recognition by policy makers that citizens require access to recreation and nature, spurring developments at regional and county level, supported by various funding mechanisms.

The delivery of the Leitrim Recreation Strategy will require significant investment over the coming decade to meet the objectives set out in this document. Additional resources will be required to support the various infrastructural elements, but human resources as 'boots on the ground' will be critical in realising the vision.

A number of funding pools are available for outdoor recreational infrastructure in recognition of its positive social and economic contributions to social connectivity, public health, rural development and tourism. Outdoor recreation also contributes significantly to meeting our climate and biodiversity objectives, providing a less carbon intensive form of socio-economic development across rural Ireland.

The delivery of signature and local recreational infrastructure that will transform the recreational offering of County Leitrim. Partnership will be critical in delivery of many of these core elements. A number of funding opportunities are available as outlined below.

8.1 National Funding Framework for Recreation

8.1.1 Rural Regeneration & Development Fund

The RRDF has successfully been applied to support a range of community-based amenities and hubs as well as supporting larger scale inter-county facilities such as greenways and waymarked trails of scale. In Leitrim, Dromahair recently benefited from funding of €1.94 million towards a new public library and community facilities, while Mohill was awarded €2.52 million towards public realm enhancements within the town's public spaces.

8.1.2 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS)

A tranche of €15 million was announced by DRCD for the ORIS scheme in February 2022, intended to boost rural tourism through investment in public recreational amenities, including walks, blueways, greenways and bridleways, with a focus on outdoor 'adventure' activities. This fund is provided by the DRCD and Fáilte Ireland, building on the commitment under *Our Rural Future* to continued investment in infrastructure that caters for outdoor adventure tourism and the wellbeing of local communities.

The ORIS 2022 provides funding under four measures:

Measure 1 for small scale projects requiring funding of up to €30,000:

- Small scale repair/development/promotion and marketing
- Funding of up to €30,000 at a 90% rate of aid.
- Maximum of 7 applications can be submitted by each Local Authority.
- Maximum of 3 applications (increased from 2 in 2020) can be submitted by each Local Development Company (LDC).

Measure 2 for medium scale projects with funding of up to €200,000:

- Medium scale repair/upgrade and new trail/amenity development.
- Funding of up to €200,000 at a 90% rate of aid.

- Maximum of 3 applications can be submitted by each Local Authority.

Measure 3 for large scale projects seeking funding of up to €500,000:

- Large scale repair/upgrade and new strategic trail/amenity development
- Funding of up to €500,000 at a 90% rate of aid
- Local Authorities and State Bodies can submit 1 application each under this Measure.

Project Development Measure up to €50,000 for strategic large scale projects.

- Detailed development of projects which would enable them to reach a standard for application under Measure 2 or 3 of ORIS.
- Local Authorities and State Bodies can submit two application each under this Measure.

8.1.3 LEADER/ Rural Development Programme 2023-2027

The EU LEADER²⁸ programme is administered in Ireland by local action groups across Ireland, comprising representatives from the community, public and private sector. Each group is responsible for selecting and awarding LEADER funding to projects within their geographical area, based on a local development strategy. The total funding available under the LEADER 2014-2020 Programme was €250 million.

In Leitrim, the Leitrim Development Company (LDC) is a community-led Local Development Company providing a range of rural, social and economic programmes across the county under the LEADER programme. Their aim is to support communities, individuals and businesses to increase their economic sustainability and improve the quality of life for all. Support includes capital grant aid, technical assistance, guidance and mentoring, information and support, training opportunities and development initiatives.

LDC was the primary funder of the original Leitrim Recreation Strategy (2014) and has continued to provide critical support to the work of the Leitrim Recreation Forum since its inception, including the development of this latest Leitrim Recreation Strategy (2023-2032).

A project application for funding must be aligned with the priorities of the local development strategy. Of particular relevance to recreational development in Leitrim are 'soft' supports in the form of analysis and development, capacity building and development supports for communities and enterprises. The next phase of the LEADER /Rural Development Programme will run from 2023-2027, with applications likely open from the end of 2023.

8.1.4 EU PEACE PLUS Funding

PEACE PLUS is the latest EU programme to strengthen peace and reconciliation and cross-border cooperation between Ireland and Northern Ireland. It combines the previous INTERREG and PEACE funding strands into a new programme for the 2021-2031 period, which aligns well with proposed community-led recreational development in Leitrim.

The PEACE PLUS will target investment in six key thematic areas:

1. Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities
2. Delivering Economic Regeneration and Transformation
3. Empowering and Investing in Our Young People
4. Healthy and Inclusive Communities
5. Supporting a Sustainable and Better-Connected Future
6. Building and Embedding Partnership and Collaboration

²⁸ The term 'LEADER' derives from the French "*Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale*" which means 'Links between Activities for the Development of the Rural Economy'.

PEACE PLUS and the Leitrim Recreation Strategy

This new PEACE PLUS fund should be viewed as a potential source of co-finance in parallel with the rollout of the Strategy and its relationship with more direct funding such as RRDF (see 8.1.1 above). PEACE PLUS may be ‘matchable’ with other central government or EU programme funding, but would require clarification on details of eligibility.

As well as supporting recreational activities, PEACE PLUS will foster greater inter-community and cross-community networking and capacity building with neighbouring border counties.

The marriage of biodiversity with recreation to address climate impacts may also be fostered through the PEACE PLUS programme.

Potential PEACE PLUS Qualifying Opportunities for the Leitrim Recreation Strategy

- Cross-border SLNCR and Shannon Erne Waterway community links.
- Cross Border Recreational Training for Guides and Communities, including familiarisation visits.
- Investment in Cross-border Recreational Volunteer / Supports.
- Cross-border recreational festival and events programme, including inter-territorial angling supports.
- Cross-border ‘greening’ recreational infrastructure and support branding / messaging / signage.
- Recreational related communications and awareness raising.

8.1.5 Shared Island Initiative

The Shared Island Initiative²⁹ was launched by the Government of Ireland “to harness the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to enhance cooperation, connection and mutual understanding on the island and engage with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future.”

The Shared Island initiative involves:

- working with the Northern Ireland Executive and the British Government to address strategic challenges faced on the island of Ireland
- further developing the all-island economy, deepening North/South cooperation, and investing in the North West and border regions
- fostering constructive and inclusive dialogue and a comprehensive programme of research to support the building of consensus around a shared future on the island

A Shared Island unit in the Department of the Taoiseach acts as a driver and coordinator of this whole of government initiative. The Shared Island Fund was announced in Budget 2021, with €500m in capital funding available between 2021-25, ring-fenced for investment in collaborative North/South projects.

Already Sligo County Council, in partnership with Leitrim County Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, are conducting an Economic Visioning Study under the Shared Island fund to identify opportunities for business and job creation arising from the future Sligo Leitrim Northern Counties Railway (SLNCR) Greenway Project, as well as other supports to ensure economic benefits for the region.

8.1.6 Greenway Funding

From 2022 onwards, the DRCD indicated that funding for Greenways will be directed through Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) for a complete greenway project. Fragmental development (‘project split’) of longer (>20km) Greenway projects will not be funded through ORIS. Thus, demonstration stretches or incremental sections of greenway will not be funded individually. This is likely due to requirements under EU and Irish

²⁹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c3417-shared-island/>

environmental law to examine the potential impacts of a project in total, vs in small segments. Shorter Greenways of 20km or less may be funded so long as they are not part of a projected larger route or network.

However, ORIS funds create significant opportunities for each local authority and projects identified in the recreational strategy may qualify for funding under some of these measures.

8.1.7 Community Trail Management Funding

The Department of Rural & Community Development (DRCD) announced funding of almost €1 million destined for 175 Community Trail Management Organisations (CTMO) for maintenance of 446 walking trails across Ireland in August 2022, including for the Leitrim Way³⁰. Projects were awarded up to €3,000 for equipment purchase. There is no indication if this allocation will be repeated in the future.

8.1.8 Active Travel

Significant funding for ‘**Active Travel**’ is available through the National Roads Authority as Government targets walking and cycling infrastructure to provide safe transport options nationwide.

The allocated budget for Active Travel has been expanded to €360 million, so it is clear that walking, cycling and public transport are now firmly on the national agenda³¹. However, a recent report (August 2022) suggested that 2021 funding for active travel remains underspent in many local authorities³² suggesting that more integrated strategic planning is required for effective delivery, particularly in rural counties.

8.2 Multi-Annual Funding for Recreation

Multiple funds are opened on a yearly or multi-annual basis, which could contribute to delivering specific projects, if targeted appropriately. It is recommended to utilise a mix of all available funding sources, suited to specific projects and measures (outdoor recreation, tourism, heritage, capacity building, community, networking, etc) in concert with LCC, state agencies, local communities, Tidy Towns and clubs – see Table 15.

³⁰ <https://www.pobal.ie/minister-humphreys-announces-almost-e1-million-in-funding-to-support-and-improve-446-walking-trails/>

³¹ <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-style/2022/09/24/walking-is-the-invisible-transport-mode/>

³² <https://www.irishtimes.com/environment/2022/08/16/more-than-half-of-cycling-and-walking-infrastructure-funding-unsent-nta/>

Table 15 Potential Sources of Funding for Implementation

Target of Funding	Potential Source of Funding
Recreational Infrastructure	Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) - greenways Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) – administered via Local Authority Rural Recreation Development Fund The Walks Scheme (currently being expanded) LEADER/ Rural Development Programme 2023-2027 PEACE PLUS
Rural Regeneration/ Town & Village enhancement	Rural Regeneration Funds Town & Village Renewal Scheme Municipal grants
Active Travel	National Roads Authority (NRA)
Tourism Development	Fáilte Ireland – capital grants Capacity building & networking for SMEs
Heritage	Heritage Council grants Dept Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht Built Heritage Investment Scheme Historic Structures Fund
Cross Border Initiatives	Shared Island Initiative EU PEACE PLUS International Fund for Ireland (IFI)
Co-Funding Opportunities	Coillte IFI PEACE PLUS funding Dept. Transport, Tourism & Sports Failte Ireland – Platforms for Growth
Skills, Capacity Building & Training	LEADER/ Rural Development Programme 2023-2027 Education & Training Boards (ETB) Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)
Community Development	LEADER/ Rural Development Programme 2023-2027 Dept. Rural and Community Development POBAL Leitrim Public Participation Network (PPN)
Marketing & Related	LEADER/ Rural Development Programme 2023-2027 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) Fáilte Ireland – Wild Atlantic Way Fáilte Ireland – Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands
Rivers Trust / LAWPRO	For specific initiatives/ learnings related to water quality and citizen science initiatives.

APPENDIX 01

Review of Policy Framework for Recreational Development

Appendix 1: Policy Framework for Recreation Development

Policy / Strategy	Key Elements
INTERNATIONAL / EUROPEAN	
United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals https://sdgs.un.org/goals	<p><i>The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development</i>, adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, is a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for the planet. At its heart are seventeen (17) <i>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</i>, with an urgent call for action by all countries in a global partnership. The SDGs recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth, while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. The SDGs address issues of <u>water, energy, climate, oceans, urbanization, transport, science and technology</u>. In order to make the 2030 Agenda a reality, broad ownership of the SDGs must translate into a strong commitment by all stakeholders to implement the global goals at national, regional and local level.</p>
Paris Climate Agreement (International, 2016)	<p>Climate change is a global emergency that requires coordinated solutions at all levels and international cooperation to help countries move toward a low-carbon economy. To tackle climate change and its negative impacts, 197 countries adopted the Paris Agreement at the COP21 in Paris on 12 December 2015.</p>
EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030	<p>The European Commission adopted the new EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and an associated Action Plan (annex) - a comprehensive, ambitious, long-term plan for protecting nature and reversing the degradation of ecosystems. It aims to put Europe's biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030 with benefits for people, the climate and the planet, underpinning EU's contribution to international negotiations on the global post-2020 biodiversity framework. The Biodiversity Strategy aims to build resilience to future climate change impacts, forest fires, food insecurity or disease outbreaks, including by protecting wildlife. It contains specific commitments by 2030:</p>
European Green Infrastructure Strategy	<p>The EC adopted an EU-wide strategy to promote green infrastructure, to restore the health of ecosystems and ensure that natural areas remain connected together, and allow species to move across their entire natural habitat, so that nature keeps on delivering its many benefits to us. The strategy promotes the deployment of green infrastructure across Europe as well as the development of a Trans-European Network for Green Infrastructure in Europe, a TEN-G network.</p>
EU Territorial Agenda 2030: <i>A Future for all Places</i>	<p>The <i>EU Territorial Agenda 2030</i> was adopted at an informal meeting of the Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development, in December 2020, under the German Presidency. It builds upon the Green Deal and constitutes a high level commitment to principles of place-based sustainable development and territorial cohesion.</p>
EU Europarc Federation	<p>Established as an EU funded LIFE programme in 1995 to examine sustainable tourism in protected areas. EuroParc published a charter in 2000 that commits signatories to implement a local strategy for sustainable tourism defined as: <i>'Any form of development, management, or tourist activity which ensures the long-term protection and preservation of natural, cultural, and social resources and contributes in a positive and equitable manner to the economic development and well-being of individuals living, working or staying in protected areas'</i>.</p>

IRELAND – NATIONAL RECREATION & LANDSCAPE POLICIES	
<p>National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (2023-2027) Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and Comhairle na Tuaithe and</p>	<p>A public consultation on the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (NORS) was launched in 2021 to allow the public to contribute to how outdoor recreation should be developed in Ireland in future. A second short consultation was held in May 2022, and the final NORS was issued in November 2022.</p> <p>The NORS adopts six strategic themes for the integrated development of Outdoor Recreation in Ireland:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leadership: to create a more coordinated approach at national and county level to make best use of resources 2. Environment: to protect and enhance the environment through better planning and development of outdoor recreation in keeping with best practice in management of landscape and habitats 3. Awareness: to create awareness of our outdoors recreation opportunities and how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly 4. Opportunities : to increase and support the numbers of people active in the outdoors 5. Access: to protect and improve access to the outdoors for the benefit of all. 6. Expertise: to improve awareness, knowledge, skills and expertise of stakeholders and partners. <p>Under each Strategic Objective, a number of key actions were identified within specific timeframes (1-5+ years), for delivery by key partners in recreational development countrywide, including DRCD, statutory agencies, local authorities with inputs from national organisations, recreational governing bodies and communities for various actions. The NORS provides an overarching framework for the development of outdoor recreation in Ireland, creating a shared approach for the many strategies, programmes, agencies and elements in Ireland’s outdoor recreation sector. In particular, it will seek to focus integrated delivery in a coherent fashion, with clearly articulated objectives, actions and responsibility for delivery. Application of best practice, common standards, sustained resourcing and funding will aim to increase participation of citizens of all abilities in outdoor recreation for societal wellbeing over the next five years.</p> <p>The contribution which outdoor recreation makes to our physical and mental wellbeing has been recognised in the public response to ‘lock-down’ during the global pandemic of 2020-2021. This cohesive National Outdoor Recreation Strategy has the capacity to benefit the economy, while proactively promoting responsible use of the countryside.</p>
<p>Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands (2017-2021) <i>Coillte, NPWS, Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna, Inland Fisheries Ireland</i></p>	<p>The national for public lands and waters was developed by five public landowning organisations (Coillte, NPWS, Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna and Inland Fisheries Ireland, respectively), as a strategic development plan for recreation on public lands and waters, comprising 15% of Ireland’s land surface. The plan focused on seven strategic themes including: managing & maintenance of recreational infrastructure; improving recreational facilities; developing consistent standards; promotion of outdoor recreation; and maximising the benefits to communities.</p>
<p>Sport Ireland (August 2022) National Sports Policy (2018-2027)</p>	<p>Sport Ireland is the authority tasked with the development of Sport in Ireland, including participation in Sport, high performance Sport, anti-doping, coaching and the development of the Sport Ireland National Sports Campus. Sport Ireland’s remit of work is guided by the National Sports Policy (2018-2027), Sport Ireland’s Statement of Strategy and the</p>

	<p>National Physical Activity Plan. Of particular relevance to the Leitrim Recreation Strategy and Forum is the fact that Sport Ireland is establishing a National Database of Sport & Recreation Amenities.</p> <p>SI commissioned a Feasibility Study into the potential of developing a National Base Registry (Database) of Sports & Recreation Amenities in Ireland, funded by Healthy Ireland, and carried out by ESRI Ireland in July 2019. The study's report finds that an integrated national database has the potential to facilitate and transform how recreational amenities are planned, used and managed in Ireland, as well as how the public search and interact with them, and protocols on sports amenities to provide and update the information regularly to agreed standards. Thus, future recreational developments in Leitrim should be linked to this national database to ensure maximal exposure to highest standards of management and related marketing opportunities.</p>
<p>National Communications strategy to increase opportunities for physical activity (PA) and exercise in disadvantaged communities Sport Ireland (2022)</p>	<p>Sport Ireland is developing a National Communications strategy to increase opportunities for physical activity (PA) and exercise for adults living in disadvantaged communities. This is targeted to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women aged over-40 living in disadvantaged areas and • Men aged over 45 living in disadvantaged communities and the place of sport and physical activity in their lives. <p>These Physical Activity programmes will be supported by a targeted communications campaign in these communities, with possible alignments to the Healthy Communities initiative, to provide wider supports to access physical activity and recreation. Following development of targeted proposals, programmes will be refined by the Local Sports Partnerships.</p>
<p>Outdoor Rural Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) <i>Dept. Rural & Community Development, May 2020</i></p>	<p>ORIS contributes to the strategic objective of strengthened rural economies and communities as set out in the <i>Project Ireland 2040</i> strategy. The objective is to provide funding for new outdoor recreational infrastructure and for necessary repair, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreational infrastructure in countryside areas. The scheme invests in physical infrastructure that underpins sporting and recreational activities based on the use of the resources of the countryside; contribute to active lifestyles while building on the economic and tourism potential, and so are to the benefit of both local communities and tourist visitors alike. The scheme may also provide some limited funding for the marketing and promotion of such infrastructure, typically as part of a wider project involving capital supports.</p>
<p>Guide to Planning & Developing of Small Vessel Water Trails in Ireland (2013) <i>Waterways Ireland, with ISC, NTO, Canoe Ireland</i></p>	<p>This practical guide sets out the general considerations for planning and development of a small vessel water trails for kayaking and canoeing, including snorkelling, exemplified by case studies. The guide proposes practical considerations of requisite trail attributes, safety, strategic planning & partnership, development costs, as well as responsibilities for longer term management & maintenance. Key considerations are issues of ownership rights in relation to the navigation, as well as fishing rights and the need for landowner consultation and agreement to gain permissive access.</p>
<p>Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Transport Future - A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009-2020 <i>Department of Transport, 2009</i></p>	<p>This strategy sets out a vision for how Ireland's sustainable travel and transport system can be achieved. The policy recognises the vital importance of continued investment in transport, including cycleways and walkways, to ensure an efficient economy and continued social development. The Government reaffirms its vision for sustainability in transport and sets out five key goals: i. to reduce overall travel demand ii. to maximize the efficiency of the transport network iii. to reduce reliance on fossil fuels iv. to reduce transport emissions v. to improve accessibility to transport</p>
<p>Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways</p>	<p>Aims to assist in strategic development of nationally and regionally significant Greenways in appropriate locations constructed to an appropriate standard to deliver a quality experience for all users. It also aims to increase the number</p>

<p>Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, 2018</p>	<p>and geographical spread of Greenways of scale and quality around the country over the next 10 years resulting in a significant increase in the number of people using Greenways as a visitor experience and as a recreational amenity.</p>
<p>The National Cycle Policy Framework 2009-2020 (Department of Transport)</p>	<p>The NCPF is derived from Smarter Travel policy document sets out a national policy for cycling, to create a stronger cycling culture, a safer environment for cycling and improved quality of life.</p>
<p>'Realising our Potential' National Action Plan for Rural Development (Dept. Culture, Heritage & The Gaeltacht, 2017)</p>	<p>The National Action Plan for Rural Development commits to delivering funding for recreational infrastructure, training and jobs creation, using our natural assets. It identified a number of pillars to promote rural development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pillar 3 '<i>Maximising our Rural Tourism and Recreational Potential</i>', focuses on the development of greenways and blueways, and other recreational opportunities, and to support sustainable rural jobs through targeted tourism initiatives. 1. Pillar 5 <i>Improving Rural Infrastructure and Connectivity</i> includes improvement of connectivity of rural areas through broadband connection and improved transport links.
<p>National Strategy for Angling Development 2015-2020 Inland Fisheries Ireland (Dept. Agriculture, Fisheries & Marine)</p>	<p>The National Strategy for Angling Development (NSAD) is the first comprehensive national framework for the development of Ireland's angling resources. Within an overarching conservation ethos and focus, the <i>Strategy</i> sets out three strategic objectives for angling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To make angling accessible and attractive through information, infrastructure and support. - To develop tourism through the promotion of our angling resource. - To recognise angling as a key leisure and recreation pursuit. <p>DAFM provided €2 million directly for capital projects and a further €537,000 under the Action Plan for Rural Development (to 2020). Total funding available to Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) to date is €3.437 million across all aspects of fisheries development, which are to be delivered under the umbrella of NSAD. Drawdown of funds is subject to all governance, environmental and other project requirements, such that delivery could take up a three year period reflecting the complex nature of fisheries projects.</p> <p>IFI officers promote capacity building and collaboration with voluntary organisations in delivering projects and to progress projects through governance and into delivery phase.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding has been allocated to 174 fisheries development and management projects nationwide; - 45% of the projects have been completed to date; - Angling access has been upgraded in 78 locations with a further 22 due for completion in 2019; - Over 20 Information and Education initiatives supported, introducing approximately 1000 people to angling and informing visiting anglers; including equipment to value of €60,000 for angling events, signage, marketing. - Riparian enhancement, conservation and regeneration work completed on river channels; - Anti-poaching equipment purchased and installed; - 10 organised angling events funded to encourage positive social inclusion in communities; - Over 5,000 hours of engagement from IFI local staff to provide support, information, assistance and advice.

<p>New Strategic Vision for Forestry in Ireland</p> <p>Coillte, April 2022</p> <p>https://www.coillte.ie/coillte-launches-new-forestry-strategic-vision-to-optimize-its-contribution-to-irelands-climate-targets/</p>	<p>Coillte aims to deliver multiple benefits from its forests and to focus to climate action, biodiversity and recreation, as well as developing the forest and wood products industry. Coillte aims to grow 100,000 ha of new forests by 2050, supporting the delivery of >30% of Ireland’s afforestation target. The company aims to create a carbon sink of 18 million tonnes (Mt) of CO₂ in new forests and to manage its existing forest estate to capture an additional 10 Mt of CO₂ by 2050.</p> <p>Coillte intends to increase the area of its forest estate managed primarily for nature from 20% to 50% in the long term, by enhancing and restoring biodiversity and planting new forests, half of which will be native woodlands. In terms of recreation, Coillte will enable investment of €100 million to create world class visitor destinations by 2030, aiming to double the number of recreation areas nationally to 500, to support local communities and the Irish tourism sector. The new strategic vision will be underpinned by Coillte’s commercially successful business, aiming to enable creation of 1,200 direct and indirect jobs in rural communities to support the just transition to a low carbon economy in Ireland. Coillte reported in 2016 that it provides over 2,000km of waymarked trails, 180 recreation sites and 12 forest parks in the estate attracting 18 million visits annually.</p>
<p>National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015-2025)</p> <p>Dept. Arts, Heritage & The Gaeltacht</p>	<p>The <i>National Landscape Strategy</i> (NLS) obliges Ireland to implement policy changes and objectives concerning the management, protection and planning of the landscape. The NLS is used to ensure compliance with the European Landscape Strategy and to establish principles for protecting and enhancing our landscapes while positively managing its change.</p>
<p>National Peatlands Strategy (2015)</p>	<p>The <i>National Peatlands Strategy</i> was prepared in 2015 to guide the national approach to peatlands management and conservation, underpinned by consideration of land management/ peatland conservation and restoration, and protection of habitats/ hydrology</p>
<p>National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017 – 2021</p>	<p>Objective 1 – Mainstream biodiversity into decision-making across all sectors;</p> <p>1.1.3. All Public Authorities and private sector bodies move towards no net loss of biodiversity through strategies, planning, mitigation measures, appropriate offsetting and/or investment in Blue-Green infrastructure;</p> <p>1.1.6. Local Authorities will review and update their Development Plans and policies to include policies and objectives for the protection and restoration of biodiversity; 1.1.7. Develop a Green Infrastructure at local, regional and national levels and promote the use of nature based solutions for the delivery of a coherent and integrated network;</p> <p>Objective 6 – Expand and improve management of protected areas and species;</p> <p>6.2.1. Increase connectivity of the protected areas network using appropriate buffer zones, corridors, stepping stones and/or flyways.</p>
<p>The All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021 – 2025 (5-year Road Map)</p>	<p>The 2015-2020 Pollinator Plan made it clear that 33% of Ireland’s bee species are threatened with extinction due to reduced amounts of food and safe nesting sites in our landscapes. The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan for 2021-2025 is a new five-year road map that aims to help bees, other pollinating insects and our wider biodiversity – as part of better management of our whole landscape to permanently support our struggling biodiversity. It is more ambitious with</p>

	<p>multiple partners coming together to deliver coordinated actions and encourages farmers, local authorities, schools, gardeners and businesses to create habitats where pollinators can survive and thrive.</p> <p>The AIPP 2021-2025 has 186 actions spread across six objectives. It has a 16-person steering group who provide oversight, with implementation coordinated by the National Biodiversity Data Centre. Responsibility for delivering the actions is shared out among the main partner organisations, who have committed to taking action and funding them. There are 6 core objectives.</p>
<p>Status of Biodiversity (Birdwatch Ireland, 2019)</p>	<p>https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2020/05/BWI-collated-data-on-status-of-biodiversity-1.pdf</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two thirds of Ireland’s regularly occurring wild bird species are Red or Amber-Listed Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland. Farmland birds in particular are continuing to show declines and no recovery from the catastrophic and steady crash in population since the 70s. Habitat loss & and change in farming practices are leading causes of losses. <p>Reports on catastrophic decline of bird species on agricultural lands from 1970 – 2010 and onwards to the present – <i>due to other categories, with the incidence predicted to increase over the next 12 years; this has been linked to the threat from fertiliser and pollution on selected fish species³³</i></p>
<p>NATIONAL HEALTH POLICIES</p>	
<p><i>National Sports Policy (2018-2027)</i></p>	<p>The policy underpins all sports and recreational-related development in Ireland. It starkly estimates that 4,000 deaths a year are attributable to Irish people not engaging in enough physical activity. Physical inactivity has been estimated to cost Ireland approximately €1.5 billion per year.</p>
<p><i>‘Get Ireland Active’</i> The National Physical Activity Plan (2016, NPAP)</p>	<p>The NPAP made specific recommendations for Local Authority action to get citizens active:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development and promotion of walking and cycling strategies in each LA area Ensure planning, design and development of towns and villages promote activity through a network of footpaths and cycling routes; Continuous professional development of those responsible for design on the role of physical activity Explore opportunities for recreation in the natural environment.
<p><i>Healthy Ireland 2013-2025 – A Framework for Improving Health and Wellness</i> Dept. of Health, 2013</p>	<p>The vision is “<i>a Healthy Ireland, where everyone can enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing to their full potential, where wellbeing is valued and supported at every level of society and is everyone’s responsibility</i>”. Improved access to recreation is an integral part of the strategy. Greater community connections and cohesion are critical to a successful delivery “<i>the impact of positive social interaction cannot be underestimated. Social interaction and supporting social connectedness and involvement in community life are a keystone in empowering people and building strong communities for health and wellbeing.</i>”</p>

³³ NPWS (2019). The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland, p. 90 - <https://www.npws.ie/publications/search?title=article+17&keyword=&author=&series=All&year=&x=31&y=8>

<p>Children’s Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA) Irish Sports Council with the ESRI, 2013</p>	<p>The CSPPA study aimed to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) provide a national database of physical activity, physical education and sport participation levels of children and youth in Ireland, ii) assess indices of health and fitness in a sub-sample of the target population, iii) collect and analyse information on the factors influencing participation ... all with a view to getting Irish children more active more often.
<p>NATIONAL TOURISM & HERITAGE POLICIES</p>	
<p>‘People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025’ Dept. Transport, Tourism and Sport</p>	<p>The Government’s vision for tourism is that Ireland will have a vibrant and attractive tourism sector that makes a significant contribution to employment across the country, as set out in <i>People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025</i>. The objective of investing in, and developing the tourism proposition will seek to maximise tourism’s potential to support regional economic and social development.</p>
<p>Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands (2018) Fáilte Ireland and partners</p>	<p><i>Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands</i> is the key experience tourism proposition for Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands, launched in 2018, alongside <i>The Wild Atlantic Way</i>, <i>Ireland’s Ancient East</i> and <i>Dublin – Surprising by Nature</i>. <i>Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands</i> embraces the heart of the country from Leitrim southwards to Lough Derg, through Roscommon, West Cavan, Longford, East Galway, East Clare and parts of Westmeath, Offaly and Tipperary. The IHH brand promises a bold and ambitious strategic focus on the tourism potential of Ireland’s midlands, with the Shannon as its spine. The brand promises to ‘bring to life for visitors the Midlands’ rich natural assets including its many lakes, walkways and blueways’. Fáilte Ireland has identified the Shannon as one of two ‘transformational signature products of scale’ in <i>Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands</i>, that are key to unlocking the region’s potential (the second being the <i>Beara Breifne Way</i>). This recognises the value and potential of the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway, and associated lakes and canals, as a critical corridor for water-based and land-based tourism activities. These are essential elements of Leitrim’s recreational and tourism offering.</p>
<p>Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon (2020) Waterways Ireland with Fáilte Ireland</p>	<p>Waterways Ireland, in association with Fáilte Ireland and the Local Authorities within the Shannon region launched the <i>Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon</i> in 2020. The objectives are to reposition the combined Shannon Navigation and Shannon Erne Waterway (collectively referred to as ‘The Shannon’), identifying world class visitor experiences based on the region’s natural and cultural assets. The Masterplan sets out a co-ordinated strategy and development framework of scale to guide sustainable development of the Shannon as a compelling tourism destination within <i>Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands</i>. It serves as a roadmap for future tourism investment and resources, all of which should be directly aligned to the core proposition and experience development themes for the Shannon. The overall aim of the Shannon Masterplan to grow tourism in <i>Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands</i> also aligns strongly with national rural development policy to drive rural development through tourism.</p>
<p>Waterways Ireland Corporate Plan 2020-2022</p>	<p>Waterway Ireland’s (WI) is in the process of developing a longer term plan to 2030. In the meantime, its 2020-2022 Corporate Plan aims is to increase the use of the North-South inland waterways to provide high quality recreational</p>

	<p>amenities, well used by all the people who live near them, whilst also attracting increasing numbers of visitors, bringing jobs, creating new and sustaining existing businesses, and delivering prosperity. At the core of the Corporate Plan is delivery of maintenance and active management of the waterways. Many of the navigation features are now over 200 years old and are in need of significant investment. WI will continue to focus on ensuring public safety, water control, and investment in critical infrastructure in areas of greatest use. Funding grants for current and capital expenditure are allocated from the Irish Government, while 15% current expenditure is matched funding and capital allocation from the NI Executive. Five strategic themes (Management & Maintenance; Environment and Heritage; Affinity and Participation; Development and Income; and Organisation and People) form WI's broad strategic goals.</p>
<p>Culture 2025 Éire Ildánach 2025 <i>Dept. Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs</i></p>	<p><i>Culture 2025</i> sets out an overarching vision and framework for the future and outlines the priorities for action over the coming years. Through this policy framework, the Government seeks to nurture creativity, boost citizen participation, help more people to follow a sustainable career in the cultural sector, promote Ireland's cultural wealth and ensure a cultural contribution to wider social and economic goals.</p>
<p>Heritage Act 1995</p>	<p>The definition of heritage in the Act includes monuments, archaeology & related objects, architectural heritage, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, landscapes, seascapes, wrecks, geology, heritage gardens and parks and inland waterways. Heritage can also intangible, including local history, folklore, place names, culture, collective memories, traditions, historic documents, language, rituals, symbolism, fashion, literature, song and music, spiritually and genealogy. It consists of objects, structures, and processes that are passed from generation to generation as they have a distinct historic, social, cultural or environmental value.</p>
<p>NATIONAL – REGIONAL – COUNTY – LOCAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK</p>	
<p>National Planning Framework <i>Project 2040</i></p>	<p>The NPF sets out ten (10) National Strategic Outcomes (NSO) or priorities to guide future development: Compact Growth; - Enhanced Regional Accessibility; - Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities; - High Quality International Connectivity; - Sustainable Mobility; - A Strong Economy supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills; - Enhanced Amenities and Heritage; - Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society; - Sustainable Management of Water and other Environmental Resources; - Access to Quality Childcare, Education and Health. Community and Recreation are key issues in providing facilities and amenities that support Community, Economy and Environment. As a key enabler to support the objectives of the NPF, the Government approved four funds, with a total allocation of €4bn over the 10-year period of the NDP, of which €765m is allocated for 2020-2023. All four are competitive bid-based funds, to support innovative, collaborative projects in relation to Urban Regeneration and Development (€2bn), Rural Regeneration and Development (€1bn), Climate Action (€500m) and Disruptive Technologies (€500m), each to be overseen by the relevant Government Department. A key focus for all four funds will be on collaboration between organisations and sectors, and on projects that will deliver impactful and transformational change.</p>
<p>The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern & Western Regional Assembly</p>	<p>The RSES sets out regional policy for the growth of the Northern & Western Region for the next 12 years. It seeks to support the regeneration and growth of high quality mixed-use sustainable and transformative projects, meeting</p>

<p>RSES Northern & Western Region 2020-2032 <i>adopted in January 2020</i></p> <p><i>“Sustainable regional growth needs to improve living standards for all. Having a good place to live means access to education, health, employment, recreation and opportunity. Having a great place to live means our people are capable of taking advantage of education, health, employment, recreation and opportunity”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>RSES p. 248</i></p>	<p>national and international standards in innovation, quality design, based on exemplary place making. Furthermore, the RSES seeks to revitalise the region’s towns, villages and rural areas.</p> <p><i>“The landscape of the Northern and Western Region is internationally renowned for its Mountain Ranges, dramatic coastline, beaches and inland waterway networks, including the Shannon and Corrib. The region is home to half of the State’s National Parks, with many other outstanding assets, including 34 Blue Flag Beaches, Forest Parks, Trails and a growing number of established Greenways and Blueways.” RSES p. 191</i></p> <p>In recognition of these exemplary assets, the Assembly supports, through Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RPO 5.3, the consideration of the zone of: (i) North Sligo/North Leitrim (Benbulbin and its hinterland); and (ii) area surrounding and including Lough Arrow/Lough Key as potential National Parks/National Recreation Areas. It supports collaboration in this regard with stakeholders including NPWS, Local Authorities and relevant Departments (DCHG, DCRD). • RPO 5.4 encourages the prioritisation of <i>Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCO)</i> for all sites of Conservation Value, designated in EU Directive (i.e. SACs, SPAs) to integrate with the development objectives of this Strategy. • RPO 5.22 To protect and conserve our designated peatlands and bogs for reasons of biodiversity, ecosystem services, carbon sinks, areas of habitat importance, amenity and landscape value. • RPO 5.23 To establish Regional Fora that shall prepare an audit of worked out bogs and peatlands within our region and to identify strategic sites and propositions of regional value, including but not limited to areas such as renewable energy, tourism, biodiversity, climate mitigation, education, recreation and amenity. <p>Facilitating a modal shift to more sustainable transport options, including walking and cycling is a key element in promoting healthier lifestyles, better traffic management and assisting in mitigating climate change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RPO 6.26 The walking and cycling offer within the region shall be improved to encourage more people to walk and cycle, through: (a) Preparation and implementation of Local Transport Plans for Metropolitan Area, Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns, which shall encourage a travel mode shift from private vehicular use towards sustainable travel modes of walking, cycling and use of public transport. (b) Safe walking and cycle infrastructure shall be provided in urban and rural areas, the design shall be informed by published design manuals, included the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) and the NTA Cycle Manual. (c) Development of a network of Greenways. • RPO 6.29 The management of space in town and village centres should deliver a high level of priority and permeability for walking, cycling and public transport modes to create accessible, attractive, vibrant and safe, places to work, live, shop and engage in community life. • RPO 6.32 Invest in transport networks and services in the region that are socially inclusive and provide a quality of service, connectivity and facilities to meet all societal needs, disabilities (including mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments) and meet the needs and opportunities of an ageing population.
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- **RPO 6.51** Promote values and policies that make it **easy to commute** between home, work and school across the region in a way that contributes to a **healthy, attractive and climate-friendly** region.

The RSES notes (p. 255) that “**Communities that are designed in a way that support physical activity, such as generously sized footpaths, safe cycle lanes, safe attractive stairways and accessible recreation areas, all encourage people to make healthy choices and live healthier lives. Countries with extensive cycle infrastructure report higher levels of cycling and lower rates of obesity.**”.....” Recreation and amenity facilities contribute to the quality of life of the communities they serve. The provision of facilities that cater to the demands of an increasing population and which are accessible to all sectors and age groups is a key component in the creation of successful sustainable communities”

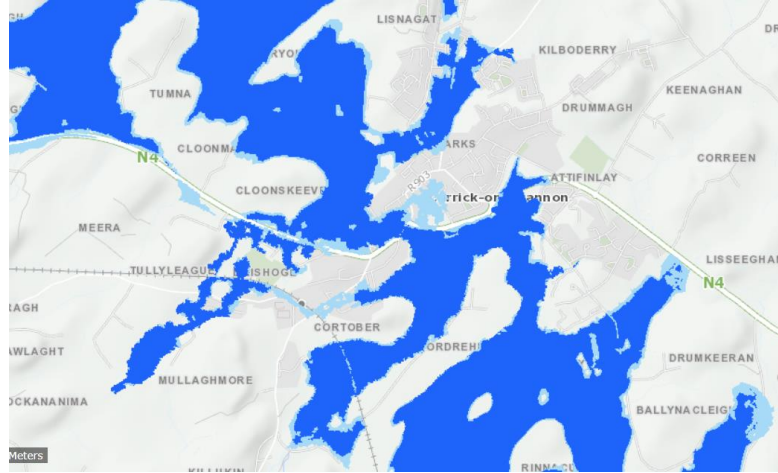


- **RPO 7.9** Promote the provision of high-quality, accessible and suitably proportioned areas of public open spaces and promote linkage with social, cultural and heritage sites and buildings. In this process prioritise access for walking and cycling.
- **RPO 9.1 Various...** d) Valuing Cultural Heritage by creating appealing places through attractive and imaginative building design, street layout, civic space and public realm design; Developing new offerings in support of existing ventures in the **tourism sector, such as greenways, walking trails and other inter-urban connections**, based on the wealth of natural and cultural heritage assets and providing links to the **Wild Atlantic Way** etc..

The **Irish Central Border Area Network** provides a platform for collaboration between local authorities north and south, including Leitrim, Fermanagh. Tourism is a key area of opportunity for the cross-border area and extensive networks exist on an all-island basis that needs to be nurtured and grown to meet its potential.

- **RPO 9.6** To establish a Cross-Jurisdictional Working Group which collaborates on projects such as Blueways, Greenways, Walking/Hiking Trails/Peatways to foster improved local and regional links.

The policy objectives as set out in the RSES are highly supportive of a holistic approach to development of outdoor recreation and amenities, both for citizens and visitors to the region. These objectives recognise that access to recreation provides additional social, economic and environmental benefits for all:

“Recreation and amenity facilities contribute to the quality of life of the communities they serve”

<p>Shannon Catchment Flood Risk & Management Plan Studies (CFRAM) Office of Public Works (OPW)</p> <p>CFRAM Flood Maps are produced through the CFRAM Programme with the Local Authorities in accordance with the definition of Flood Zones as set out in 'Guidelines on the Planning System and Flood Risk Management' (DHPLG/OPW, 2009) - www.floodinfo.ie/</p>	<p>LCC is committed to managing flood risk in accordance with Government guidance</p> <p>Flood risk has significant implications for planning of recreational infrastructural development the Shannon and its lakes and in Leitrim.</p> <p>For example, the OPW's flood risk highlight areas that are likely inundated in short to medium scenarios, meaning that infrastructure should be according to flood risk management and mitigation avoid losses in the future.</p>  <p>implications alongside tributaries risk maps to be term risk recreational planned principles to</p> <p><i>OPW - Flood risk scenario mapping for Carrick-on-Shannon</i></p>
<p>Leitrim County Development Plan (Draft) 2023-2029</p>  <p>DRAFT LEITRIM COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2023 - 2029 VOLUME I – WRITTEN STATEMENT</p>  <p><i>Under consultation</i></p>	<p>Leitrim County Council is in the process of preparing its new County Development Plan for the period 2023-2029. A Draft CDP has been prepared and the public, stakeholders and interested parties are invited to make submissions to be taken into account before the Plan is finalised. Key policy elements and objectives pertaining to Recreation are contained in Chapters 8 and 9, as summarised below.</p> <p>Chapter 8 Draft CDP WALKING & CYCLING Walking and cycling are the most sustainable modes of transport and are key components to movement and accessibility in urban and inter-urban areas. Benefits accruing for both the environment and population include reducing air, noise & traffic pollution & healthy active lifestyles. Encouraging and promoting walking and cycling as a sustainable mode of transport will depend on providing well connected and integrated pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. Pedestrian and cycle facilities will be most successful where they form a coherent network. Policies and objectives of particular relevance include: (Draft CDP - Chapter 8/ pp. 161)</p> <p>Selected Policies</p> <p>WC POL 1 To promote walking and cycling as efficient, healthy and environmentally friendly modes of transport by securing the development of a network of direct... and safe cycle routes and footpaths, particularly in towns and vicinity of schools.</p> <p>WC POL 3 To design pedestrian and cycling infrastructure in accordance with the principles, approaches and standards set out in the National Cycle Manual, the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets and international best practice.</p>

WC POL 4 To require that consideration be given to sustainable transport at the earliest design stage of development proposals, to ensure accessibility ... and promote provision of parking space for bicycles in development schemes.
WC POL 5 To work with the National Trails Office, Coillte, the DHLGH, the DTTs and other relevant stakeholders, to improve on the existing level of infrastructure and facilities for walking and cycling in Co. Leitrim.

Selected Objectives

WC OBJ 1 To support the establishment of a network of interlinked cycle ways and walkways in the county and linking with the adjoining counties, having regard to best practice standards....

WC OBJ 3 To improve the streetscape environment for pedestrians, cyclists, and people with special mobility needs ...

Chapter 9 Draft CDP: BLUEWAYS & GREENWAYS

It is LCC policy to continue to expand and create an integrated network of Blueways and Greenways across the county and maximize pedestrian and cycle access to same.

Blueways are a network of multi-activity recreational trails, based on or alongside lakes, canals and rivers - by walking, cycling, canoeing, kayaking or paddle boarding. LCC, with Waterways Ireland, have developed a Blueway between Battlebridge and Drumshanbo along the **Leitrim Canal** including the floating boardwalk at Acres Lake and onwards to connect to Lough Allen at Currachuill, Drumshanbo. Recent work has been completed on sections of the **Ballinamore-Ballyconnell Canal** between Leitrim Village and Kilclare along the former towpath. Carrick-on-Shannon and Drumshanbo form part of the **Shannon Blueway** with Leitrim Village and Ballinamore forming part of the **Shannon Erne Blueway**. The Council is currently undertaking environmental feasibility studies of options to link **Carrick-on-Shannon to Leitrim Village and Battlebridge** by way of dedicated Blueway, a project listed in the Shannon Master Plan within the Hidden Heartlands area.

Greenways are off-road routes for walkers, cyclists and are often created along abandoned rail lines. There are proposals to develop the former **Sligo Leitrim Northern Counties Railway (SLNCR)** between Collooney and Enniskillen (through Dromahair, Manorhamilton and Glenfarne) and the **Cavan and Leitrim** rail line between Dromod and Belturbet (through Mohill, Fenagh, Ballinamore and Garradice) as greenways. Demonstration stretches have been developed along the SLNCR at Dromahair, Manorhamilton and Glenfarne whilst one is under construction linking Ballinamore with Corgar Lake on the former Cavan and Leitrim rail line. It is planned to extent the latter demonstration stretch onwards to Aughawillan. LCC received confirmation of funding from Department of Transport to bring the **SLNCR Greenway** project through the planning process, detailed design and get the project ready for construction. This project requires the co-operation of four Local Authorities – Sligo, Leitrim and Cavan County Councils along with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. The **Cavan Leitrim Greenway** project requires the co-operation of Cavan County Council and a preliminary feasibility study including screening for Environmental Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment has been completed. The Council will continue to work with Cavan County Council and local rail to trail groups to bring this project to planning and design stage.

Selected Policies

BG POL 1 To continue to support the develop an integrated and connected network of sustainable greenways, blueways and green routes within Co. Leitrim and into adjoining counties.

BG POL 2 To support the implementation of the strategy for Greenway Development in Ireland in relation to the development and extension of greenways throughout the county.

BG POL 3 To progress the expansion of the National Cycle Network.

BG POL 4 To protect established Greenways and Blueways within the county against inappropriate new vehicular accesses and increased traffic movements.

BG POL 5 To engage in the Compulsory Purchase Order process, when required, to facilitate the timely delivery of the Greenway and Blueway programme within the county.

Selected Objectives*

BG OBJ 1 To facilitate and lead in the delivery and completion of the **SLNCR Greenway** along/adjoining the former railway between Collooney and Enniskillen in co-operation with Sligo and Cavan County Councils and FODC subject to rigorous planning consent and approvals.

BG OBJ 2 To advance the design and necessary planning consent to construct a Greenway along/adjoining the former **Cavan & Leitrim Rail line** in co-operation with Cavan CoCo.

BG OBJ 3 To develop, in conjunction with local communities, demonstration stretches along/adjoining the former **Cavan & Leitrim Rail line** subject to necessary agreements, assessment, approvals & consents.

BG OBJ 4 To deliver a Blueway linking **Carrick-on-Shannon to Leitrim Village to Battlebridge** subject to obtaining the necessary planning consents and approvals

BG OBJ 5 To complete the Blueway from **Kilclare to Ballinamore** subject to obtaining the necessary planning consent and approvals.

BG OBJ 6 To promote Co. Leitrim as an unsurpassed walking destination and support the further development of walking trails in the county, augmenting the experience through enabling infrastructure and visitor interpretation along trails, including storyboards, artworks and other media, to create a greater sense of place, connecting and immersing visitors in our local heritage and stories.

BG OBJ 7 To support the provision of services for visitors using walking and cycling trails which are appropriate to the location and activity, including bike rental and service points, picnic benches at scenic locations, public toilets, and other ancillary services in remote areas.

BG OBJ 8 To promote the principles of ‘*Leave no Trace*’ in all trail information panels, promotional materials and events and use all statutory procedures to deter negative environmental impact resulting from use of our trails and outdoor recreation amenities.



BG OBJ 9 To encourage access to forestry and woodlands, including private forestry, in co-operation with key stakeholders for walking routes, bridle paths, mountain biking, nature walks, orienteering, hiking, recreational areas and other similar facilities and to retain existing public rights of ways through forest lands where such rights of way exist.

BG OBJ 10 To maximize both pedestrian and cycle connectivity to the network of existing greenways and blueways within the county.

BG OBJ 11 To work with the Active Travel Initiative of the National Transport Authority and other stakeholders such as Fáilte Ireland and Waterways to develop a co-ordinated approach to the selection, delivery and servicing of future greenways, blueways and trails throughout the county.

BG OBJ 12 To support and facilitate the development of a **greenway linking Spencer Harbour to Drumkeeran** subject to obtaining the necessary planning consents and approvals.

***All proposed developments shall be in accordance with the Birds and Habitats Directives, Water Framework Directive and all other relevant EU Directives.**

<p>Leitrim Sports Partnership https://www.leitrimsports.ie</p> 	<p>The Leitrim Sports Partnership operates under the auspices of LCC in association with the Sport Ireland network of Sports & Recreation officers nationwide. Its primary aim is to increase the number of people involved in sport or physical activity in Leitrim, working with clubs, schools and sports centres in getting citizens active in sports, walking, cycling, kayaking, disability mobility etc.</p> <p>The LSP also aims to increase the participation of people with disabilities in sport, fitness and physical activity throughout the county. These aims are achieved through working in partnership with statutory agencies, sports clubs, community groups, facility providers, schools, disability service providers and people with disabilities.</p>						
<p>Leitrim Tourism Strategy 2015 – 2021 <i>(due for update 2022)</i></p>  <p>A growth strategy for tourism in Leitrim 2015-2021</p>	<p>The Leitrim County Development Plan 2015-2021 states “... there are plenty of opportunities to double the size of the tourism sector in Leitrim”. Future growth is projected from a low base and is targeted at segments and markets with a clear fit between motivations and Leitrim’s key selling points.</p> <p>The county scores highly on many attributes that make a tourism destination successful but there are several challenges to sustainable future growth. A cornerstone of the strategy is the development of experiences that capitalise on Leitrim’s strengths. The strategy and action plan are modelled on research, consultation and best practice.</p> <p>The strategy will be driven by the Leitrim Tourism Growth Alliance (LTGA), requiring a cohesive approach in implementing the action plan.</p> <p>Current tourism performance is estimated at 144,000 visitors who generate €34million of revenue annually, with almost 50% derived from domestic tourism.</p> <p>Most of Leitrim’s accommodation is located in the south of the county, and limited elsewhere.</p> <p>The Leitrim brand consumer research identifies Leitrim’s key highlights as; friendly people, landscape/scenery, water (the Shannon, lakes, canals), family connections, culture and atmosphere/pace of life. The components of the Leitrim brand are:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Brand promise:</td> <td>Memorable holiday experiences, friendly and authentic people, natural and scenic landscape</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Brand values (who is Leitrim?):</td> <td>Memorable, friendly, warm, intriguing, proud of our heritage, proud of our unspoilt environment</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Brand essence (core of Leitrim brand):</td> <td>Gracious, authentic</td> </tr> </table> <p>Reflecting the brand promise, the target markets that represent potential are GB, USA, Germany and Domestic / NI.</p> <p>It was envisaged that Centres of excellence would be established, based on Leitrim’s strengths where the brand promise would be consistently delivered through enhancements and upgrades, where tourism trade would have a clear focus on their target segments with experiences tailored to meet segment needs.</p> <p>Much of the future tourism focus is aligned to national policy (and from 2018, specifically to Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands) where experiences that allow visitors to be ‘active in nature’ are the primary promotional catch cry. However, Leitrim requires “capital investment that will recognise the need for physical assets and areas that provide a lasting improvement in the overall quality of the visitor experience”. The outstanding product base will comprise Leitrim’s key selling points that are market-ready or near market-ready. In the short to medium term, “some tourism products will need capital investment in</p>	Brand promise:	Memorable holiday experiences, friendly and authentic people, natural and scenic landscape	Brand values (who is Leitrim?):	Memorable, friendly, warm, intriguing, proud of our heritage, proud of our unspoilt environment	Brand essence (core of Leitrim brand):	Gracious, authentic
Brand promise:	Memorable holiday experiences, friendly and authentic people, natural and scenic landscape						
Brand values (who is Leitrim?):	Memorable, friendly, warm, intriguing, proud of our heritage, proud of our unspoilt environment						
Brand essence (core of Leitrim brand):	Gracious, authentic						

physical assets e.g. walkways, cycle paths, slipways, fishing pgs etc” – all with an outdoor recreational flavour. All products and product owners/managers need investment in capacity building, networking, experience development and marketing. Public investment in infrastructure and facilities will create opportunities for private sector investment.

	Product	Rationale	Investment in physical assets	Investment in other areas
Market-ready or near market-ready	Shannon Blueway	Aligned with Lakelands proposition	X	X
	Northern Glens Experience	Aligned with Wild Atlantic Way proposition	X	X
	Cruising	Aligned with Lakelands proposition	X	X
Market leading potential	Angling	Regain market leading status	X	X
	Walking	Capitalise on market demand	X	X
	Cycling	Capitalise on market demand	X	X
	Lough Rinn rowing facility	Secure market leading status	X	X
	Adventure Tourism	Capitalise on market demand		X
	Eco tourism	Regain market leading status		X
	Diaspora and genealogy	Capitalise on Diaspora potential		X
Add value to key selling points	Festivals and events	Adds value to key selling points		X
	Heritage and culture	Adds value to key selling points		X
	Business tourism	Adds value to key selling points		X
Other	Accommodation	Gaps in supply in parts of the county	X	X

These focal areas in the 2015 Strategy include a number of outdoor recreational ‘drivers’ of tourism, including the

- Shannon Blueway
- Northern Glens
- Angling
- Walking
- Cycling
- Lough Rinn Rowing
- Adventure Tourism

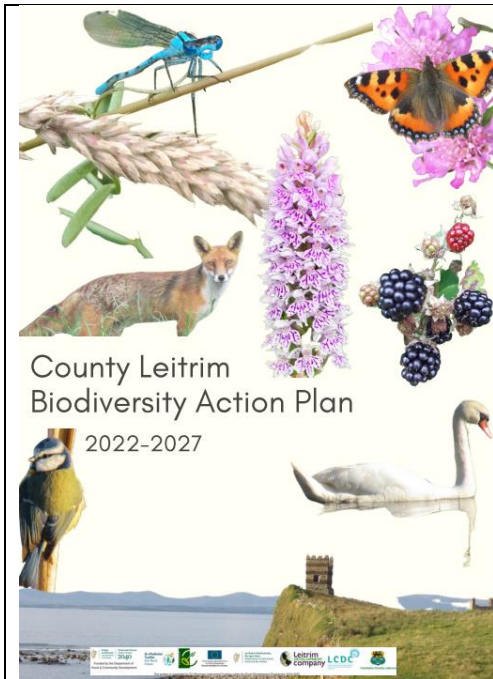
It is notable that there is no mention of ‘Active in Nature/ Biodiversity’ in these focal areas – largely because the Strategy preceded the development of the Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands brand that is rooted in ‘active in nature’ experiences.

The Strategy is focused on developing compelling, memorable experiences, built on product excellence, story and service, closely aligned to the defined needs of visitor segments. A programme of experience development will be underpinned by a commitment to customer centricity, capacity building and collaboration. A collaborative approach built on leadership from the Leitrim Tourism Growth Alliance, and communication between stakeholders, will generate trust in working towards a common goal. Working with stakeholders in neighbouring counties will also be important.

This commitment to collaboration is critical in terms of developing the recreational experience at the heart of the Tourism Strategy, playing to Leitrim’s natural strengths and aligning with the Recreation Strategy 2022+.

County Leitrim Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-2027

The Leitrim BAP was developed to reflect the critical role that Biodiversity plays in the wellbeing and everyday life of the citizens of Leitrim, and in recognition that it must be valued, protected conserved and used sustainably to ensure our future healthy environments. The Plan provides a community-based strategic roadmap for the protection of the natural environment through integrated local community projects, biodiversity training and awareness raising events. This plan also supports the decision making



processes relating to the environment / biodiversity within the county and the leveraging of funding towards environmental and biodiversity related projects.

The BAP is centred around five Core Themes including:

1. Improving our Knowledge of Biodiversity Resource
2. Protection of Wildlife Corridors & Biodiversity Hotspots
3. Awareness, Education & Training
4. Tackling Invasive Species
5. Responding to Biodiversity & Climate Change

Each theme has defined, integrated Actions and identifies potential leaders/ drivers for each one. Of particular relevance to the new Recreation Strategy are the following Actions embedded within the Themes³⁴:

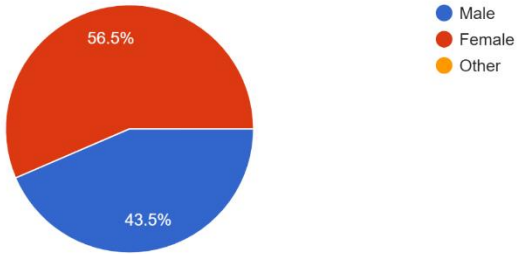
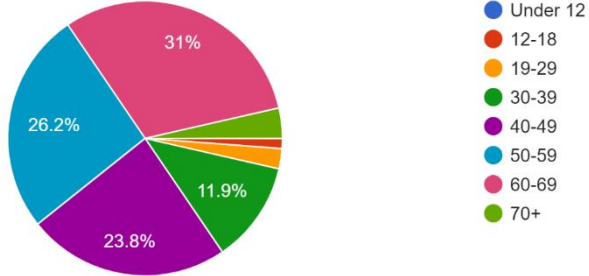
1E *Green Infrastructure	Identify and map Green Infrastructure in County Leitrim	LDC/LEADER, RRO, LRF, LT, LCC, WI
2B Recreation Projects	Consideration of biodiversity to be mainstreamed into proposals for development of recreational infrastructure in the county	LDC/LEADER, RRO, LRF LCC, NPWS, WI, IFI
2C Incorporate Biodiversity into public trails	Encourage the creation of wildlife corridors and biodiversity enhancement along existing and new recreational trails in the county	LDC/LEADER, RRO, LAWPRO, LRF, LCC Farmers, IFI, NPWS
3D Healthy & Vibrant Outdoor Environment for Community Based Projects	Work with community groups and individuals to encourage biodiversity and Leave No Trace principles in their community-based projects	LDC/LEADER, RRO, LRF Leave no Trace, LCC
4B Biosecurity	Promote and raise awareness of biosecurity measures amongst communities, water-based recreationists and angling community through focused training	LDC/LEADER, LAWPRO, RRO, LRF, IFI LCC, WI, Canoeing Ireland, Rowing Ireland, Sailing Ireland

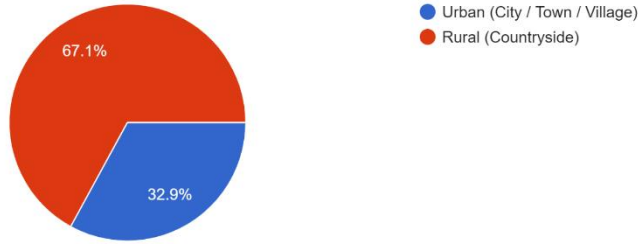
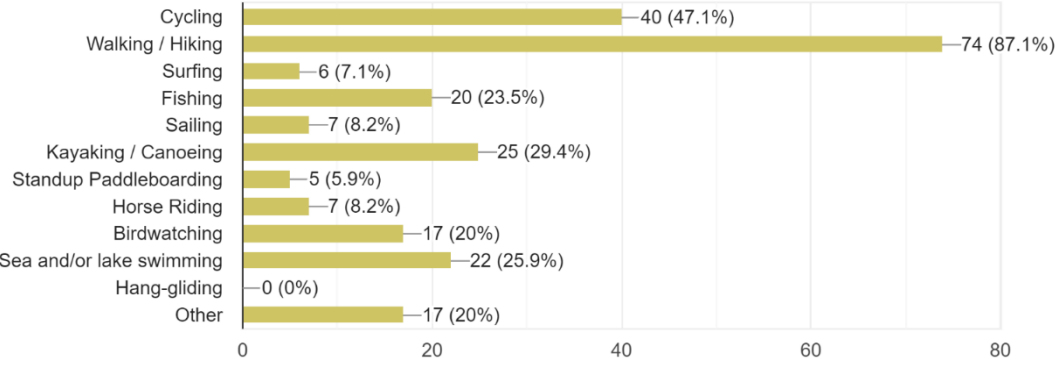
³⁴ Green Infrastructure is a strategically planned network of seminatural and natural habitat features including wetlands, watercourses, woodlands and hedgerows. Green infrastructure features can be used to help mitigate the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss and to improve the flow of ecosystem services from nature to us, improving our quality of life.

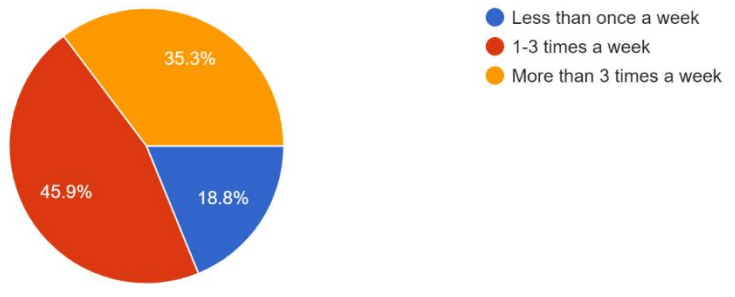
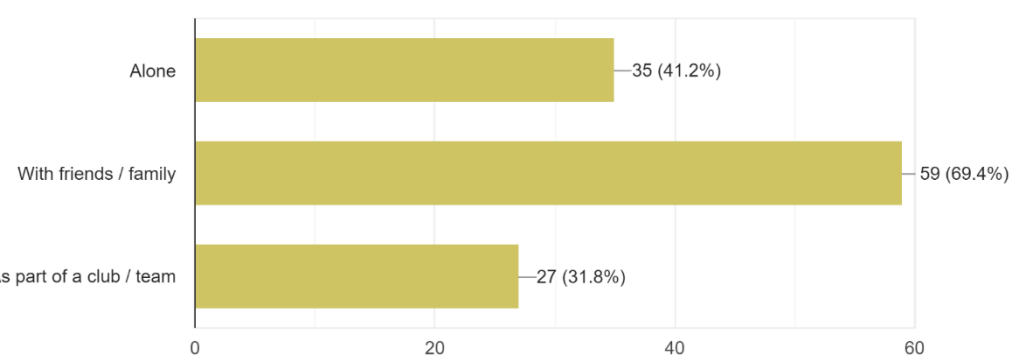
	<p>Finally the Biodiversity Action Plan proposed a management, monitoring and evaluation framework for the County. The BAP is highly relevant to the future development of sustainable networks of recreational trails, greenways, blueways and angling in particular. There is scope for collaboration among the key drivers in the delivery of some of the Actions and the Recreation Strategy.</p>
<p>Leitrim County Development Plans Local Area Plans</p>	<p>The importance of community and green infrastructure in Local Area Planning.</p> <p>National and local policies recognise the importance of community infrastructure and recreational opportunities to creating a vibrant community.</p> <p>Local area plans seek to ensure that community infrastructure and a range of open space opportunities for passive and active recreation contribute to vibrant, prosperous locations. This supports the principles of healthy communities, inclusivity and accessibility to facilities for all abilities, and sustainability to ensure Leitrim is a greener, cleaner, more welcoming place to live, work, visit and attract investment.</p> <p>The collective well-being of any settlement or place is correlated with the quality of its environment. Open spaces assist LCC and the community achieve the wider objectives articulated in the Draft County Development Plan and Local Area Plans for recreation, amenities, biodiversity, health and well-being, placemaking and identity. Open spaces can contribute to the intangible values of a community’s sense of pride, civic activities and engagement, and collective ownership. Attractive and vibrant places are also attractive for visitors to County Leitrim.</p>

APPENDIX 02

Results & Analysis of Online Survey 2022 among County Leitrim residents in preparation of Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2023-2032

Section 1 – Profile of the Recreational Participant	
Question	Response/ Comment
1. What is your gender?	<p>Q1) What is your gender? 85 responses</p>  <p>Objective: The aim of this question is to see what the gender break-down is of the survey respondents. The goal would be an even split to have a balance of perspectives.</p> <p>Comment: There is a good representation of both male and female participants in this survey. This split (roughly 55/45) is quite typical of exercises in community engagement in rural Ireland today.</p>
2. What age are you?	<p>Q2) What age are you? 84 responses</p>  <p>Objective: to determine the age distribution of the survey respondents. It would be optimal to achieve a healthy balance across the different age groupings. However, as this survey was distributed mostly through professional and community databases most respondents are likely to be within the adult cohorts of the population.</p> <p>Comment: There is a good balance here of respondents over the age of 40, almost equally split between the 40-49, 50-59 and 60-69 age cohorts. The results likely reflect the perspectives of these age groups equally. However, there is a notable lack of response from under-39 and particularly under- 29 age cohorts. This may be due to non-inclusion of non-pitch-based recreation in the survey, where most young people engage with recreation. Typically, outdoor trails and leisure cycling are by their nature more frequented by older cohorts.</p>

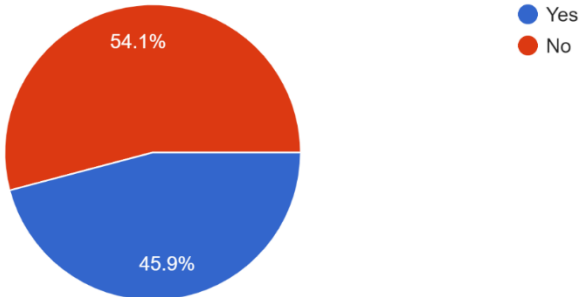
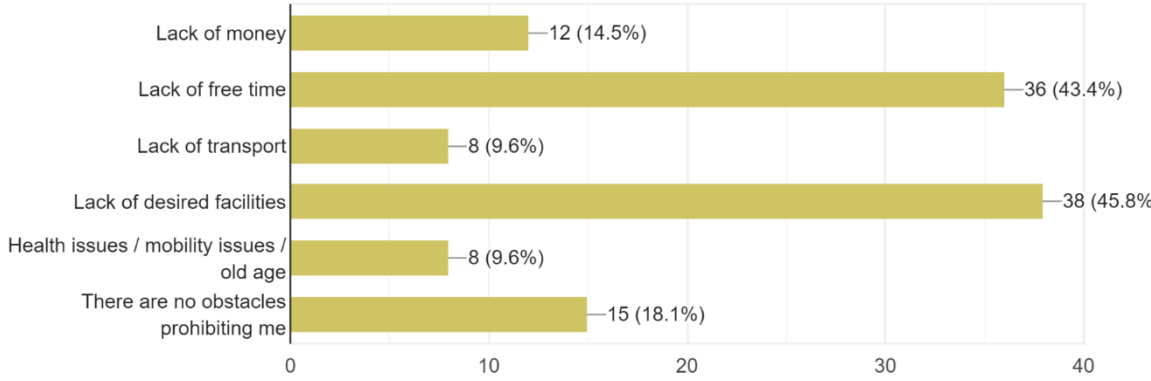
<p>3. Do you live in an urban or rural area?</p>	<p>Q3) Do you live in an urban or rural area? 85 responses</p>  <p>Objective: to find out what proportion of the survey respondents live in either 'urban' or 'rural' areas of the county, to add another layer of understanding of the results of this Survey. Comment: there is almost a 70/30 split in the response to this question which is not unexpected given the rural nature of the county. It would be expected that people living in rural areas would have different perspectives and priorities in relation to the recreational provisions in the county and vice versa. The low-population density in Leitrim is also a consideration, although the county experience a +9% population increase in the period 2016-2022 (CSO, 2022, preliminary census results).</p>
<p>4. What are your favourite forms of recreational activity?</p>	 <p>Objective: to see what recreational activities people enjoy and therefore, likely partake in most regularly. This question also attempts to see what recreational facilities they avail of if any. Comment: <i>Walking/ Hiking</i> is the highest scoring recreational activity for the surveyed population. This may be expected given that respondents were largely middle-aged to elderly residents and mostly from rural areas. <i>Cycling</i> is the second most popular activity, along with <i>Kayaking/Canoeing</i> as third. <i>Sea and/or Lake Swimming, Angling</i> and <i>Birdwatching</i> appear to be increasing in popularity which is also reflected in these results.</p>

<p>5. How often do you engage in recreation?</p>	<p>Q5) How often do you engage in recreational activity? 85 responses</p>  <p>Objective: This is a follow-on question from Q4 and aims to determine how often respondents engage/participate in these recreational activities.</p> <p>Comment: Most people (almost 50%) responded <i>1-3 times a week</i> which indicates regular participation. More than 35% of people are participating in recreational activity <i>more than 3 times a week</i> which indicates an active population in which outdoor recreation plays a big role in their lives, be it socially or physically. Less than 1 in 5 respondents said that they engage/participate in recreational activity <i>less than once a week</i> which is a relatively low proportion.</p>
<p>6. Do you usually participate in activity.... Alone, with Friends, as part of a Club?</p>	<p>Q6) Do you usually participate in recreational activity 85 responses</p>  <p>Objective: to identify whether respondents participate in recreational activity through formal or informal settings/arrangements, or whether respondents engage in recreational activity alone or with other people. Participants were able to answer with more than one response.</p> <p>Comment: The most common way respondents participate in recreational activity is <i>with family/friends</i>. This means that most people would participate either with people from their own household or perhaps with people from their immediate area. Considerably less people engage in</p>

	<p>recreational activity <i>as part of a club/team</i> which would be expected as this study does not include pitch-based sports. These results reflect the fact that many people may walk / cycle together which enhances social connectivity and supports social cohesion in a very rural county. Over 40% of respondents stated that they engaged in recreational activity alone which would fit with <i>walking/hiking</i> being the most popular activity.</p>																		
<p>Section 2 – Recreational Provision in County Leitrim Today</p>																			
<p>7. How would you rate recreational provision in Leitrim today?</p>	<div style="text-align: center;"> <table border="1"> <caption>Recreational Provision Rating Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Rating</th> <th>Number of Responses</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>7</td> <td>8.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2</td> <td>10</td> <td>11.9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3</td> <td>40</td> <td>47.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>22</td> <td>26.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>5</td> <td>6%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><i>In this context 1= Poor, 5= Excellent.</i></p> <p>Objective: This question aims to get a sense of the respondents’ overall perception of recreational provision in Leitrim. Comment: The response is a relatively positive one with roughly 80% of respondents giving the recreational provision in County Leitrim a score of 3 or higher. However, it is often noted that when people are posed with a question that they don’t know the answer to (or don’t have an opinion on), they tend to pick the middle option, as seen here in this classic bell-curve graph. This could potentially explain the high response for number 3 (the middle option), or the high response could indeed just signify that many respondents viewed the recreational provision as average. We can interpret this result as “much done, more to do”.</p> </div>	Rating	Number of Responses	Percentage	1	7	8.3%	2	10	11.9%	3	40	47.6%	4	22	26.2%	5	5	6%
Rating	Number of Responses	Percentage																	
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3	40	47.6%																	
4	22	26.2%																	
5	5	6%																	
<p>8. In your opinion, is there adequate provision of formalised/ semi-formalised group recreational activity on</p>	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>85 responses</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Adequacy of Recreational Provision Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>28.2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>38.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not Sure</td> <td>32.9%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Objective: This question aims to find out whether the survey respondents are happy with the number of formal/semi-formal group recreational activities available to them.</p> </div>	Response	Percentage	Yes	28.2%	No	38.8%	Not Sure	32.9%										
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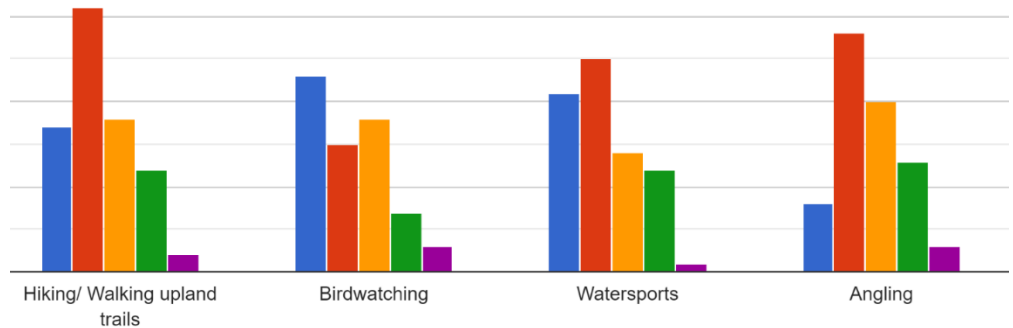
<p>offer in Leitrim?</p>	<p>Comment: There was almost an equal split here among respondents. However, a slim majority indicated that they did not believe that there was an adequate provision of organised formal / semi-formal group recreational activities on offer. A third of respondents also responded with <i>not sure</i> which indicates that people either weren't sure if there was enough on offer, or they weren't sure what exactly was on offer, or maybe both. This suggests that communication is an issue.</p>
<p>Please expand on your response to Q. 8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A lot keep, fit yoga, Pilates - We require a well-stocked lake or pond with good access for juniors to be able to learn the sport of angling.. - Hike group's Locally, fishing group I have a son he's 18. Would love to have a group to go fish with so he can learn about fishing - Good to see greater linkage between GP Surgery's and organised recreational offerings in the locality for all age groups from mothers with toddlers to seniors. - Would like to set up a walking/hiking group but would be weary of the insurance implications, there's none in Ballinamore. - If you are not an avid user of social media I feel you are missing a lot. - Unless you live in town there is very little on offer - Not aware of any organised formal groups. - There is not enough of semi formal groups - Very little group activities e.g. hiking - A member of northwest canoeing club - There are different groups covering a wide variety of activities, but as an elder user of some sports the ease of access in those areas is very poor. - For me there are plenty of clubs. community events and natural attractions - No activities for young people from 12 years to 16 years especially if they are not involved in Sport - There are some good facilities! But - private transport is the only realistic way to access these. I know people who can't participate due to being a one car household, or prohibitive fuel costs. I feel the lack of an archery club, personally. - Very few dedicated groups, mostly private businesses - There are the usual GAA, Irish Country Women's Association etc. but little organised walking, bird watching, outdoor pursuits. Villages need assistance to support rural people to pursue outdoor activities. More children's recreational facilities in small villages required. - Everything requires memberships or transport at odd hours, out of reach of public transport i have no looked for any or joined any so I don't know. Walking clubs/organisatoin has been weakening in recent years I think - More activities should be offered during holidays in summer not just weekends, family themed activities are scarce, summer camps for kids comes only for a week through private organisers. - Most activities are run by one or two individuals on informally basis. - Facilities are limited, poorly maintained, or ruined by insurance - Very little group recreational activities available within the county especially for my age group. Need personally to manage/ plan activities in rural areas - I would like to see more outdoor organised activities such as rowing, sup, walks. - Adequate groups but hard to get volunteers to help run clubs/groups - Very few walking clubs, and those that exist usually operate / have outings at times which clash with other interests / commitments. - Carrick needs a good recreational Park where teenagers and kids can play with their scooters, BMX, skateboards, etc. and spend hours of fun making friends - Not enough classes in different rural areas - Reduction in access to recreational angling venues - I had to go to Northern Ireland to get my training In as a Mountain Leader.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No community facilities only GAA, need community Astro turf pitch sim all villages, canoe trails on all Rivers and cycle Tracks on old railways lines - I'm sure there is but more could be done to promote these groups - Only see off events during week mainly - I have kayaked and hiked in many areas in Leitrim and thoroughly enjoyed it. - Very little semi formal activities - Often the provision is during working hours. - Activities available for all ages e.g. walking, running groups. - Clubs are demand based, as our population base is low this is an issue. Lots of clubs/activities for kids but not for adults. Poor tradition outside of GAA really and poor use of our abundance of lake amenities - Could be more for teenagers - Certainly, there is a good range of groups, but it can always be increased and improved - Not enough youth clubs - There is not in my local rural area, but towns may have. - Voluntary effort is lacking in many areas, but this may reflect difficulties encountered by groups engaged in many activities, e.g. requirement for matching finance for funding applicants and onerous public liability insurance requirements. - Leadership needed - Good activities offered - some good work done by Sports Partnership - Would like to see more people involved in organised cycling / hiking in my community. - Yes, there is more variety for different sports - Would imagine Leitrim Sports Partnership would be main channel to promote events and club activities. - I feel Leitrim has great recreational potential and is under resourced and under used. - There are many Clubs and classes, but I would love to see more access to swimming in lakes around Leitrim <p>Objective: This aims to get qualitative insight into what respondents think of the current provision of organised formal/semi-formal recreational activities in Leitrim.</p> <p>Comment: The consensus is that there are some organised formal/semi-formal activities on offer but there a few issues such as –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The groups are usually in towns, not in rural areas - There is a lack of accessibility due to public transport - There is little done in way of promotion of these groups (promotion on social media may exclude older generations). - There are issues of funding, insurance liabilities and access to lakes, mountains etc. - More organised recreational activities are needed during the weekdays, not only the weekends
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<p>10. Are you able to participate in recreation as often as you would like?</p>	<p>85 responses</p>  <p>Objective: This question aims to find out whether the survey respondents are satisfied with how frequent they participate in recreational activity. Comment: This is a rather even split (55/45) and suggests that perhaps there is a large segment of the population in Leitrim who are dissatisfied with how often they engage in recreational activities, whether due to personal reasons or lack of provision and would like to do so more often. This result could reflect issues of communication, lack of access and transport issues, as raised in Q9.</p>
<p>11. What, if anything, is prohibiting you from participating in recreation</p>	<p>83 responses</p>  <p>Objective: This is a follow-on question from Q10 and aims to find out <i>what factors</i> respondents may feel are prohibiting them from participating in recreational activities as often as they would like. Comment: The two main factors cited as prohibiting respondents from participating in recreational activities as often as they would like are <i>Lack of free time</i> and <i>Lack of desired facilities</i>. The former is perhaps an issue of public messaging where time dedicated to recreational activity for the purposes of physical and mental wellbeing is not seen as a priority. The latter is an issue which will be addressed in this new recreation strategy. 10% of respondents also stated that <i>mobility</i> was an issue which reflects similar findings in this survey.</p>

12. How would you rate the provision of the following recreational activities / facilities in County Leitrim

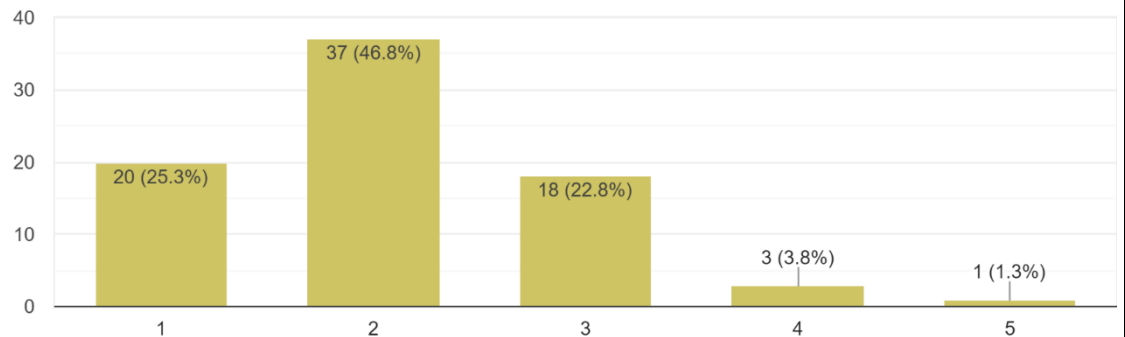
Q12) As a user, how would you rate the provision of the following recreational facilities / activities in county Leitrim



Objective: This question aims to find out how respondents view the provision of facilities in these individual recreational spaces and to see what areas/facilities need addressing in this new strategy.
Comment: *Public swimming sites* is the area which scored the lowest in this exercise and is a finding which is reflected throughout this survey. Respondents cite a lack of good access points to lakes and a lack of toilet facilities at those access points which already exist. It was pointed out that *public swimming sites* are facilities which can be used by all age groups in society throughout the year. The provision of *Angling* facilities scored the best in this exercise. However, in general the ratings fared towards the middle of the scale and very few recreational areas scored high in either ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’.

13. How do you rate provision of recreational facilities for people with disabilities/ lower mobility?

79 responses



In this context, 1= Poor and 5 = Excellent

	<p>Objective: This question aims to see whether respondents think there is adequate provision of recreational facilities for people with disabilities/low mobility in the county.</p> <p>Comment: The consensus from these survey results is that respondents do not think that there is adequate provision of facilities for people with disabilities/lower mobility in the county. Facilities such as public bathrooms, safe access points and hoists were issues raised in this survey. Universal access needs to be at the forefront of design and development of public spaces.</p>										
<p>14. How familiar are you with the work of the Leitrim Recreation Forum?</p>	<p>85 responses</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Familiarity with the Leitrim Recreation Forum</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Knowledge Level</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>No knowledge</td> <td>42.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Poor knowledge</td> <td>17.6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Some knowledge</td> <td>27.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Considerable knowledge</td> <td>12.9%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Objective: This question aims to gauge public awareness of the Leitrim Recreation Forum.</p> <p>Comment: Almost half of respondents had <i>no knowledge</i> of the Leitrim Recreation Forum, while only 13% had <i>considerable knowledge</i>. This shows that there is a need to further promote the work that the Forum does and to further communicate how local people can get involved.</p>	Knowledge Level	Percentage	No knowledge	42.4%	Poor knowledge	17.6%	Some knowledge	27.1%	Considerable knowledge	12.9%
Knowledge Level	Percentage										
No knowledge	42.4%										
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<p>15. Are there any additional comments on enhancing the operations and effectiveness of the Leitrim Recreation Forum?</p>											
<p>43 responses (see below)</p>	<p>Objective: This question aims to see how respondents thought that the work of the Leitrim Recreation Forum could be improved.</p> <p>Comment: People were generally wanted to see greater promotion of the Forum and more links with other public bodies in the county. Respondents felt that communications and community engagement could be improved.</p>										

- More formal linkage with all National Schools in the county. Engage the kids and the parents will follow.
- Leitrim has some of the best angling in Europe and it's slowly disappearing due to poor access and very little investment.
- Encourage more buy in from the community and be proactive in communicating the activities and achievements of the Forum to the wider community.
- Now that Covid is dissipating maybe more public engagement
- Great facility but not always accessible to voluntary groups as meetings are always during working hours.
- Possibly a quarterly press release to emphasise the work and deliveries of the Forum
- I would like to see more promotion of the work of Leitrim recreation forum, increased awareness within schools and community groups etc. Could there be a website page for the forum developed? Some press releases to local media, the observer and radio stations.
- More variety of sports available to all

- Lots of activities would be fantastic
- A return to face-to-face meetings as soon as possible, also a representative from the O P W at the meetings would be very beneficial
- The Forum has successfully concentrated on infrastructure. A second arm needs to be grown now in the direction of the PPN, which could be harnessed to develop "soft" special interests, such as the currently revived sweatouse project; birdwatching, holy wells, sacred places, landscapes, history etc..
- Better and more regular communications, perhaps think of a quarterly e-zine for wide distribution both hard and soft format?
- The forum has worked very well as it has provided real integration, collaboration, good communication and it has strong leadership from the chairpersons and great support from LDC since the start. If that continues and there can be some more added value from this new strategy in the future, then that will be great success.
- Access to the hills and the mountains is a massive hurdle for hillwalkers, climbers, mountaineers. Improved access would enhance participation and see growth in developing sports/activities like rock climbing, hiking, mountaineering etc. I just moved to Manorhamilton, it's beautiful surrounded by many mountainous valleys but gaining access to anything more than a short stroll is near impossible without upsetting some farmer. Even when doing everything right. Not parking at gates. Not bringing dogs. Following Leave no trace policy etc. etc. I'm a qualified rock-climbing instructor and mountain leader and although I would really like to guide around these areas, access is a huge deterrent. The sport of climbing is now an Olympic sport with 3 disciplines. It would be amazing to have somewhere to climb on an artificial wall. Maybe an old unused handball alley or quarry. It's been done successfully in the north where the council bought an old quarry and now it's a popular rock-climbing location bringing many visitors to the area. Leitrim is naturally beautiful, we love it. Some mountain bike trails/sections in woodlands would be amazing too. Look what the mountain bike club did in connection with Coillte in Union Wood in Sligo. It shows there can be great partnerships with progressive thinking
- Be lovely to hear more on social media about ongoing work. It would be nice if Leitrim considered following the dark skies model, opening recreational and tourism activities in the evening to enjoy the night sky.
- Lived here for ten years, never heard of it
- Provide training free at the start and a small fee when people commit and tell them there is a fee. Nothing of value is free.
- More community engagement, open days, trialing club ideas
- Not aware as to whether there have been public meetings of the Forum. So, either publicise the Forum meeting or hold public meetings.
- Better Communications. Visit Groups to explain what you are about.
- Make people aware it's a thing
- Didn't even know they exist
- Many adults have kids, would be great if we can have areas for running n walking tracks while children have playgrounds in same place, all can have fun n be active. Also areas of activities should have some rest areas, toilets, kiosks or vendors for snacks, coffee and water...it can make people stay outdoor longer and give others some business ideas opportunity
- Need to be more visible
- I think many people doesn't know the existence of the Leitrim Recreation Forum so more publicity about what you do will help us to approach and give ideas of what we the citizen's needs.
- Advocate in each district that would recruit interested volunteers/groups
- More media information through community groups
- Please allow for dog parks future developments
- As an angler I know that one of the restrictions is that landowners are very wary to grant access to certain waters and that is the area that authorities could liaise with the owners and maybe create better access.
- Provide toilets at amenities
- Need more planning and people in communities involved in forum and people need to be heard. No water facilities available for wheelchair users I

- work with due to lack of changing facilities/ hoists etc. This can be said for all sports facilities.
- Widen the net of your questionnaire, send to schools to get parents to complete possibly
- Better distribution of leaflets and literature
- Balanced development across the county is needed a lot of investment being made in Carrick, Drumshanbo and north Leitrim, lots of other fantastic areas being ignored.
- I feel hiking groups locally. Fishing group for people who want to learn about fishing.
- Open to new members on an annual basis to keep forum motivated and help get new local communities involved e.g. less advantaged communities, people with disabilities, new communities from other countries.
- Good communication and awareness of what's happening
- Recreation options in and near towns are also important. Safe cycling, running, & walking options very poor in Carrick on Shannon. Recreation options in towns (& well linked to towns) are both accessible and sustainable.

Q.16 How would you like to see the recreational offering in county Leitrim improved? [Max 50 words]

67 responses

Objective: The aim of this question was to get ideas and advice from the respondents on how to improve the recreational offering in the county.

Comment: Those aspects most referred to were –

- Continuing to improve access
- Keeping any developments green and low impact
- More cooperation between community groups
- More links with public transport
- Keeping information up-to-date and widely available
- Get SLNCR up and running. Improved information chiefly through a dynamic new online recreational portal creating a new virtual community etc.
- Better engagement with Angling Clubs landowners and Hospitality providers. Leitrim is missing out on some serious income.
- Have more organised events. Continue to improve access to our rural sites.
- Commitment from central and local government to supporting commercial providers of tourism and recreational opportunities. likewise enabling voluntary and community interests to be more effective in forwarding their objectives.
- Better signage
- Completion of the North & South Leitrim Greenways on the old rail routes
- I would like to see a joined effort from the minister for transport and the minister for tourism to work together and bring recreation to the entire demographical status of the county
- Improved access to angling which is overlooked when it comes to Blueways & Greenways. Better facilities for novice anglers is required i.e. managed and stocked coarse fishing venue with safe access for juniors.
- None
- Increased integration of the various offerings so as to have activities for multi-generational groups.
- Increased awareness of the forum and its supports available to the people of Leitrim.
- More cycling infrastructure, greenways and more marked walking routes that are traffic free.
- Variety of sports for everyone and competition
- Always more is fantastic
- By removing the people who are responsible for creating animosity on or near to facilities by fair means or foul.
- A much more direct active role by LCC-TDU
- Better on-site maps, swimming pools Built, informational panels promotional information.

- Everything is there - people just don't know about it - keep it as natural as possible
- More cooperation with community groups instead of competition. More ambitious longer term Trail vision and strategy.
 - Get SLNCR completed.
 - Guided touring groups loads of local historic areas in Leitrim dating back to Mesolithic, on the De Cuellar trail and recent discoveries in civil war hideouts in Glenade.
 - Improving the quality of the infrastructure and keeping it green / low impact and linking or integrating it with heritage, history, attractions, biodiversity, environment, points of interest etc by adding value and interpretation. making it a richer experience
 - As above no.9
 - Focus on minority sports which really struggle for funding. No need for more GAA pitches
 - Support a Rewilding model positive for the environment/climate change & could be a more fulfilled outdoor experience for many. Less following of a more conservative IMO green way model which risks the reintroduction once again of rail, public transport badly needed in rural areas for locals, for tourism and to get cars off roads. And as above the dark sky model has been successful in Mayo
 - More lake amenities that are not fishing based
 - Have a look around and see how others do it successfully and pick the best bits. Ask them what THEY would keep/change.
 - Tapping into the natural surroundings, engaging with landowners regarding opening dedicated walking routes (mountains), more incentives to residents, more clubs. Thanks
 - Try and link the recreational offers to the local link transport network, bout in terms of timing and routing.
 - There is nowhere safe to swim in Leitrim now. Mohill is too far away for me and is the only officially designated swimming spot, but swimming was almost always banned there last year due to pollution and algae bloom. I live on Lough Allen and cannot swim in it. It is beautiful but filthy. Leitrim is a county of rivers and lakes, and we cannot swim in them because it is injurious to health. Sort this out. It's a disgrace. Stop polluting our waterways with agricultural and forestry run-off. Clean up our waterways. You'll have a hard time marketing dirty water to tourists.
 - Continued development tied in with a long-term upkeep and maintenance plans to ensure all amenities are maintained to a high standard.
 - Improved signage and parking facilities. Lots of times going hiking there is no place to park and unsure if crossing private property and farmers private grounds.
 - Organise tasters especially during the Summer. There is a cohort of young people 12yrs-16 years that are not involved in Sport. Avail of Grants for Community Centre's for social hubs. First thing that needs to be done is try and link up with these young people, as I would not be sure what they would like to do.
 - Maintenance, assistance with insurance for clubs and groups
 - From a personal point of view, I'm content with what's on offer for me... however I do volunteer with a local scout group, and I find the cost of transport very prohibitive to getting to events or doing activities outside of the local area...
 - Improve public transport hours and reach to tourist attractions. No way to get there if you don't have a car and using your own car is not supposed to be the aim of a carbon neutral town.
 - A greater spread of recourses. North Leitrim is sometimes left behind. Make more use of our mountains and lakes and provide group swimming as people are sometimes afraid to exercise on their own
 - Family theme parks n playgrounds are not a lot, we are by the river so aquaparks for children n toddlers could be fun, weekly bazars for any cause can add a spark to usual wall. Stands for art n crafts makes u walk n enjoy more with children, maybe a circus in town once a year?
 - More joined up thinking for example link King tidy town activities with recreational activities.
 - More clubs engaging young and older people. More access in each town not just in main towns
 - Improve the transport to people like me that doesn't has a car be able to enjoy more the beauty and the recreational spaces and activities in Leitrim
 - I want it to be more fun and interesting
 - Yes to have walking trails in every community in Leitrim

-
- Open water swimming spots and public pools in Ballinamore/ Mohill and other smaller towns
 - Better Communication and leadership
 - Activities for all ages and fitness/ ability levels. In general activities should be available in all areas in count, not just major towns
 - Be developed slowly in sustainable manner not just because funding available, recently Arroo mountain closure shows more farmer buying in needed and maybe community rangers ensure no dogs etc was hoping to do it this year but read about closure online but no signage driving by
 - As above in all sports it only progresses with cooperation of all parties to benefit everyone.
 - As a family with a big canoe, we cannot even get into our local river in Dromahair for the kids environment education. Lough Allen and Lough Gill access is bad too. Visitors find it appalling.
 - More locations and more options. The lakes and forests should be used more
 - I would like to see far more development into the angling infrastructure, we have had so many stands taken away and not replaced and also private landowners denying access to fishing areas!
 - Provision of organised watersports. Off road walking and cycling links from Carrick -on-Shannon to other towns and the Cavan Leitrim greenway. Focus on the Shannon-Erne waterway, cruisers have left, need more to draw people. White water rafting? Formalised Mountain biking trail instead of using informal forest tracks.
 - I would like to see some off road / forest bike trails. I would like to see more greenways developed.
 - As above
 - More facilities for over 50's using lakes and community centres. Improve facilities for adult wheelchair users including water wheelchairs, wheelchair swings, community changing facilities include suitable hoist. Have more choices for group activities and encourage local communities to be involved on forum using local media. Expand recreation further than sports.
 - Walking and cycling on country roads; clean water in lakes and rivers for swimming.
 - Additional safe cycle routes, more trails/ greenways that are safe for families to use as a whole.
 - Maps of waterways with public access and boat launching ramps clearly shown
 - More safe walking trails in and around Keshcarrigan lake...and swimming/canoe, paddle boarding, etc. both sides of river to Keshcarrigan lake being used as a dump. Biodiversity was destroyed illegally two years ago.
 - More greenways, Outdoor Swimming facilities for all towns in Leitrim. Raising awareness in the local community of local walking trails. Walking clubs through online resources like 'meet up' taking different local ways at different levels every weekend. Use local expertise - pay and upskill local guides. Properly lit up walkways that are safe for women in wintertime (probably in towns and villages). Work closer with local communities to identify amenities for development in all areas. Stop wasting money on token initiatives that don't really offer viable resources e.g. develop loop walkways and light them properly... cycle lanes coming to an abrupt end. Look at the possibility of being able to cycle to work... widen more roads within the county. Solo cycling is extremely hazardous. Have many projects developed and ready for funding as it becomes available, rather than trying to make a bit of a project to fit some funding scheme.
 - More walking trails, the Miners way and Beara Breffni are very good but perhaps look at reinstating more of the Aughcashel loop walks.
 - More for teenagers, summer camps for the older kids
 - I'd love to see a senior cycling group. Electric bikes are so heavy, so a group that could head to greenways using a bus/trailer, or local group rides on back roads. My mum is 72 and struggles walking for exercise but can ride a bike and I would feel better if she had company for safety and friendship.
 - More development walk/hike.
 - Annual fair to promote what is happening in the County and how people can get involved in development, taking part in activities etc.
 - Improved fishing stands and access,
 - Ensuring all information sources are up to date (both Carrick on Shannon and Ballinamore's websites have out of date information on recreation options). & personally - an archery club!
 - There is always room for improvement in some areas
-

APPENDIX 03

Feedback from Public Consultation meetings
held at
Manorhamilton(24/10/22)
Carrick on Shannon (25/10/22)
on the
Draft Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2023-2032

Public Consultations 24-25th October 2022: Feedback on Draft Recreation Strategy for County Leitrim (2023-2032)

The (Draft) **Recreation Strategy for County Leitrim (2023-2032)**, funded by the European Commission LEADER RDP programme 2014-2022, offers a palette of integrated greenways, blueways, lakes and forest parks, as well as a range of walking, cycling, angling, swimming, kayaking and rowing amenities in multiple localities throughout County Leitrim. There will be recreational activities and options suited to all abilities and ages. It builds on the excellent work of the voluntary **Leitrim Recreation Forum**, established in 2014, to provide a participative framework for the ongoing strategic development of Leitrim's outdoor recreational assets.

Based on recent research by SLR Consulting and Alan Hill TDL, commissioned by Leitrim Development Company (LDC) and Leitrim County Council (LCC), the partners presented the Strategy for final public consultation on 24th and 25th October 2022, in Manorhamilton (Bee Park Centre) and Carrick-on-Shannon (St George's Heritage Centre) respectively. The following is a summary of the feedback received on the nights and by email in the subsequent weeks.

LEITRIM RECREATION STRATEGY PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS – FEEDBACK FROM EVENING SESSIONS 24-25 OCTOBER, 2022

Comment By	MANORHAMILTON, Bee Park Centre, 7-9pm / 24 th November 2022	Note
<p>PERSON 1</p> <p><i>By email to consultation Process:</i></p>	<p>Thanked the presenters for the Draft Strategy which seems comprehensive. Agree that Leitrim has a real shot at being an international exemplar on sustainable recreation/tourism. There could be a long debate on environment vs economic development, but well framed in presentation.</p> <p>Noted that there is a dearth of accommodation suited to outdoor recreational users, and there is huge scope to develop glamping/ camping facilities in North Leitrim (citing New Zealand as a model for how to do this).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camping. referring to more the hiker/ biker model that exists in some countries. These would be exclusively for people who carry their own camping gear, walking/cycling, I would suggest an app based model, you pay a modest fee depending on the facility available. Examples (Happy to give further examples if helpful) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Forest clearings, Leave no trace, no facilities. 2. E.g. the camping places on the Erne canoe trail 3. Perfect example, next to Waterways Ireland facilities blocks, app or smart card to access facilities, maybe a covered picnic table/ cooking area and a tap. GAA grounds could easily set up something 4. Public spaces with toilet s 5. Good examples of successful are Scotland’s Bothy network, the alpine refuges in Europe, trekking route camping areas managed by the Dept of conservation in NZ, similar systems in National parks in Australia. • Bikepacking. Bikepacking Routes, Gear, Inspiration - BIKEPACKING.com <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Essentially off road bike touring, using adapted mountain bikes, generally short 2 to 4 day trips, you carry a lot less gear so not as comfortable as road cycle touring. This is really gaining in popularity, Leitrim is perfect with all the forest roads, you could map a few 2 to 3 days loops, joining forest tracks with back roads. Lot of potential for cross border stuff here given the level of forestry in Fermanagh. • A big step forward would be drying rooms in Accommodation, (if outdoors for a few days, often have a lot of wet gear). • Public secure Bike/Gear lockers, as at Sligo Train station. Allows people to stow bikes and gear and partake in a different activity at hub locations. • The SLNCR trail (not sure it needs a new name) will be transformative, but may bring sudden change, with scrambling to provide services and accommodation, possibly leading to a poor quality product. It will need careful planning to avoid the challenges other tourist areas such as Dingle and Westport. The ‘big 6’ model will be strategically important to make the whole county the destination rather than focus on one product such as the SLNCR. • the new CAP should provide opportunities to engage with Landowners that may not have existed in the past 	<p>Likely role for the private sector, supported by development agencies to deliver, as the recreation amenities develop (e.g. SLNCR, Glenfarne etc)</p>
<p>PERSON 2</p>	<p>Agreed there is enormous scope to develop amenities and services, especially camping & shower facilities.</p> <p>Noted ongoing access issues which will need to be resolved e.g. O’Donnell’s Rock</p> <p>Delighted to see the demonstration section of the SLNCR greenway developed, shows what can be done.</p> <p>Scope for river walk in Manorhamilton to be developed/ expanded.</p>	

PERSON 3	<p>Kiltyclogher has huge potential to support walking/ cycling trails – are emplacing a small carpark at foot of Dooagh Mountain leading to upland trail. Suggested that wind farming proposal in Dooagh will destroy the landscape – could a trail offset this?</p> <p>Asked if Leitrim Recreation Forum (LRF) receives any corporate donations to support recreational development. Suggested we should not accept corporate finance.</p>	<p>The LRF/ LCC or LCC has not received corporate donations. All wind farms/ recreational trails/other developments must secure full environmental, social and planning approvals/ consents.</p>
PERSON 4	<p>Works in tourism – Leitrim Recreation Forum and its efforts have been very positive for her business. Concerned that contradictions exist in the Draft County Development Plan regarding renewable energy (industrial scale wind farms); forestry, minerals/ mining, biodiversity and recreation. Concerned that monocultural forestry / mining and wind farms will destroy the landscape that is so attractive for tourism and recreation.</p>	
General Query (to floor)	<p>Where should priorities lie for Recreation in Leitrim?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community health & wellness 2. 'Soft' job creation via recreational tourism 	
PERSON 5 <i>By email:</i>	<p>We should be able to balance both in developing recreation – but need to be very strong in protecting the environment and our biodiversity.</p> <p>Stressed the need to consider universal access for people of lesser physical ability or living with disability in the design stages of recreational projects.</p>	
PERSON 6	<p>We need balance in developing recreation, but need to realise opportunities for rural tourism and related job creation also. That should encompass biodiversity and the environment.</p> <p>Proposes that the assembled adopt the Strategy and build on the collective strengths of Leitrim, through the Recreation Forum.</p> <p>The SLNCR will be good for Manorhamilton – will connect the Shannon, Glenfarne Forest, Geopark etc</p>	
PERSON 7	<p>Health & wellness should be to the fore, as well as environmental protection – noted that Leitrim has no noise pollution – we take it for granted but is very precious.</p>	
PERSON 8	<p>Noted that we need some wind farms (to address climate change) but not industrial scale farming at Dooagh – there are contradictions in the Draft CDP.</p>	
PERSON 9	<p>We need to delimit any further deforestation (currently 32,000ha in Leitrim), wind farming, gold mining.</p> <p>The Leitrim Recreation Forum provides a fantastic advantage for the county's development: more than 3,500 people have moved to the county, creating expectations for community amenities (but not noise and flicker)</p>	
PERSON 10	<p>Supports the recreation Strategy – walking trails are good for the county</p> <p>More than 75 farmers are now on the Walks Scheme, where they get paid to maintain the trails.</p>	
Brian Smyth LDC Programme Manager	<p>Core focus of the Leitrim Recreation Forum is protection of biodiversity and landscape, and all RDP/ LEADER funded projects requires recognition of biodiversity . The CDP statutory process is separate from the non-statutory Recreation Strategy development. The Draft CDP is subject to variations – and all councillors will be voting on these.</p> <p>Significant opportunities will drop out of the Recreation Strategy for small and micro/ start-up businesses – this was the original driver of the first Recreation Strategy ten years ago.</p>	<p>All developments are subject to planning and EIA screening /approvals/ consents (including SLNCR etc).</p>

Mike Feeney Chair – Leitrim Recreation Forum	Leitrim needs enterprise for vibrancy. The population is growing and there are hug opportunities to keep young people living and working in Leitrim, through small business and remote working. The Shannon Erne Waterway (SEW) had a hugely positive impact on mid-Leitrim when it was developed in the 1990s, and the SLNCR Greenway will likely have the same positive impact on North Leitrim. But in order to thrive, you need vitality and vibrant villages and enterprises. We need to community goodwill to deliver the Recreation Strategy and not be diverted by other issues.	
Bryan Fennell RRO Leitrim	The Leitrim Recreation Forum is and will continue to be an excellent mechanism to discuss problems and challenges and to develop collective solutions to ensure delivery of the Strategy.	
Leitrim PPN	Query was raised through PPN concerning bilingual (English-Gaeilge) signage along the SLNCR Greenway? Yes- was the answer – the Irish Language Act demands that all public signage will be bilingual.	
PERSON 11	The greenways also need to be accessible / disability and age friendly. Likewise we need more accommodation in North Leitrim (hotel, guest B&B etc) – need a Strategy for this.	
Brian Smyth LDC Programme Manager	Leitrim Development Company will be on standby to support opportunities emanating from the Strategy. LEADER funding will deliver actively and decisively to support appropriate initiatives that emerge from the Forum.	
PERSON 12	There is an issue on Coillte lands near Glencar Waterfall – two bridges have been levelled in floods cutting off the track -can these be addressed by the Forum?	Yes – report to RRO - Coillte working on strategy to redress.
PERSON 13 By email	Ballinamore Development Company have discussed the strategy consultation and wish to acknowledge the ongoing commitment given by Leitrim Development Co and Leitrim Co Council to the recreational development of Co Leitrim. The Development Company in particular support the development of blueways and greenways in the area, in particular the development of the old Cavan Leitrim railway line as a greenway between Mohill and Belturbet and also completion of the blueway from Kilclare to Ballyduff . Both of these projects, small in themselves, are part of strategically long infrastructure routes meeting national sustainable transport and tourism development criteria . Substantial stretches of both routes are already constructed. The new Junction Project at Ballinamore , currently under construction, is a first class public realm development at the old railway station. Its potential would be facilitated by new footfall from the greenways and blueways . Similarly the Shannon Erne waterway would benefit from these routes which are strongly supported by Waterways Ireland.	
Comment By	CARRICK ON SHANNON, St. George’s Heritage Centre, 7-9pm / 25th November 2022	Note
PERSON 14 IWAI Inland Waterways Assoc. Ireland	Expressed disappointment – as no mention of recreational boating in the Recreation Strategy. Heard no reference to the Shannon Tourism Masterplan Brian of Waterways Ireland noted level of collaboration to enhance the waterways for boating and other forms of recreation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy uses NORS definition of outdoor recreation-does not include motorised boating • STMPlan is referenced through Strategy.
Brian Smyth LDC	noted IWAI could join the Forum and boating could be accommodated as there are overlaps	Suggest IWAI join the Forum to ensure boating is included in future developments

PERSON 15 Waterways Ireland	Great job on the draft Leitrim Recreational Strategy, delighted to see that the SEW Blueway made the 'Big Six'. It's all very achievable – subject to the economy holding up and resourcing being put in place to support the Strategy. Regarding the SEW Blueway, note error re. 60km of terrestrial trail complete; it should say 60% complete.	<i>To be edited in main strategy – typological error</i>
PERSON 16	Cavan Leitrim Railway very positive for the area. Clondara –Longford Blueway - could Rooskey be linked northwards to Dromod as an extension of the blueway?	Waterways Ireland developing blueways - Yes – in next phases of development
PERSON 17	Felt not much for angling in the Strategy Access and insurance continue to be challenging for angling infrastructure development Fishing stands have been removed as a result Brian Smyth commented: Insurance always an issue for LEADER applications. Noted IFI lost resources in past 10 years – coarse angling declined; game angling has grown and change in Government approach to funding angling. We need local groups to get involved in the Recreation Forum and urges BATC to get involved. Small groups find it hard to pursue funding opportunities – Game anglers not chasing funds, and thus not seeing benefits. Urges them to get involved with the Forum also.	Suggest that BATC join the Recreation Forum and address these issue collectively
PERSON 18	Commented that the merging of Working Group 4 Angling with Working Group 3 SEW/ Lough Allen/ Water Activities is a positive step . Also noted that the Leitrim Recreation Forum would benefit from self-promotion - not widely known and should engage in 'blowing its own trumpet more'	
PERSON 19	Find that is very difficult to get new volunteers for the Heritage Centre – the Directors are taking on too much responsibility, with huge levels of paperwork. Based on this experience, he suggests Community Development Officer (CDO) hands-on supports are critical to delivering the Recreation Strategy	
Brian Smyth LDC	Agrees that it is very challenging to deliver, given governance and paperwork required. Thus all projects need collaboration and volunteers to work together, with clear roles and team efforts. LDC and LCC can help to a large extent but the volunteers are critical on the ground to solve problems.	Suggests that engagement with Leitrim Volunteer Centre in Carrick would benefit St George's.
PERSON 20	Suggests that the larger towns should not be forgotten in the Strategy - e.g. is hard to walk in Carrick on Shannon without having to drive somewhere to walk offroad. Need to include Active Travel measures across the county. Brian Smyth commented: Carrick will eventually be joined to Drumshanbo and Lough Key along planned greenways. Alan Hill noted: Potential for expansion of the Local Link network through Leitrim, servicing recreation zones.	

APPENDIX 04

Leitrim Recreation Forum Draft Terms of Reference for proposed Working Group 4: Linkages

to support delivery of the
Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2023-2032

Leitrim Recreation Forum

Proposed 'Linkage' Working Group 4 – Draft Terms of Reference

1. Introduction and Context

The Leitrim Recreation Forum and its partners have undertaken a comprehensive review of its internal operations and functions throughout 2022, along with charting the future strategic direction of recreational development in the County for the coming decade. Part of this review and planning exercise has been an examination of the operational efficiency of the Recreation Forum and its four Working Groups. A key outcome was a proposal to merge the Angling WG into the SEW/ Lough Allen 'Water Activities' WG and to create a fourth group to address several cross-cutting issues that require significant attention to ensure the ongoing success of the Forum.

These essential cross-cutting issues for renewed focus were identified as follows: -

1. Securing Funding and Resources
2. Capacity and Training
3. Partnership Building and Management
4. Communications
5. Research

The new **Linkage Working Group** (LWG) should address these cross-cutting issues, thus providing strategic support to the work of the plenary Recreation Forum.

The intention of this document is to define a broad 'terms of reference' for the new Linkage Working Group. It is anticipated that the new LWG can expand the details and modalities in cooperation with the Forum over the coming months.

2. Purpose

A significant amount of the feedback received from the Forum partners suggested that there was room for improvement in certain key areas of recreational planning and delivery in Leitrim. Many of these (1-5 issues above) straddle existing Working Group activities and that of the Forum itself, while several fall 'between stools' and are inadequately addressed. Also, several of the activities involve partners that may not be heavily involved with recreational development *per se*, but cover areas such as rural development funding, training, or tourism development.

This new Linkage Working Group will act as a coordination vehicle for the Forum with a smart work programme that will specifically address each of the five pillars above. It will have the capacity to co-opt members with specific skills (a 'project needs' basis). It will operate in an identical manner to the other three Working Groups, reporting its progress to the quarterly plenary sessions of the Forum.

3. Objectives

The following objectives for the LWG are proposed:

- Enhance the networking and partnership-building capacity and reach of the Forum.

- Development and delivery of a rolling Communications Plan, promoting the activities of the Leitrim Recreation Forum (both internally and externally) across all suitable media. Ideally this element would be coordinated by a single identified person.
- Securing of new *funding, matched to actions* in the new Leitrim Recreational Strategy, linked to national / regional / cross-border recreational funding calls.
- Be proactive in securing additional human resources to support the delivery of the Leitrim Recreation Strategy.
- Ensuring constant alignment with county, regional, and national initiatives that relate to sustainable recreational delivery in Leitrim and reporting in a timely fashion to the Forum.
- Remain proactive in nurturing new relationships and potential partnerships, whether they be inter-county, cross border or interdisciplinary.

4. Composition

This new LWG should follow a similar structure to the existing three groups, namely a small and flexible group (ideally max. 5- 10) initially working under the chair of the current Forum Chairperson. This will promote the flow of information while giving it the space to bed down and be effective from the outset. The LWG will require to build momentum from the beginning and grow in confidence that it is contributing valuable supports to the effective working of the Forum.

Membership can be divided into *essential and desirables*.

- Essentials – Chair LRF; LCC; LDC + RRO; Leitrim Sports Partnership: Communications specialist; and Community rep.
- Desirables – Statutory Agency; Development agency and/or Departmental rep; LCC / Economic Development Unit; ‘Big 6’ project representatives; Training needs specialist.

Note: This is only an indicative list, and the LWG /Forum can readily identify and approach the most appropriate people to sit on the group. Everything should be flexible from the outset; nothing should be viewed as being set in stone.

5. Indicative Work Programme

Below is a table of possible actions/ activities to be agreed by the Forum and undertaken by the LWG, largely based on the findings and recommendations embedded in the Recreation Strategy.

Theme	Activities May Include
Securing Funding and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing research and identification of recreational related funding opportunities (ORIS, RRDF, Greenways, Blueways, Active Travel; Smart Travel; Cross-Border, Just Transition etc) • Working with experienced partners in making submissions. • Identification of non-financial supports that may help in delivering the Recreation Strategy 2022-31 e.g. volunteer corps.
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate a simple Communications Action Plan and the managed rollout of same among the broader Leitrim communities and also external supporters, advocates, funders, and recreational tourism generators.
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify with local/regional academic partners (AUT, GMIT, other) plus contracted professional specialists to deliver an ongoing qualitative and quantitative research programme that benchmarks performance,

	tracks numbers and monitors progress against the Strategic Action Plan 2022-31.
Capacity and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with various 'training related' bodies (LCC ETB LEO FI) to put in place ongoing training opportunities across the county that relate to 'needs' identified in the new Strategy.
Partnership Building and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and reach out to existing/ potential/ new partners that directly or indirectly could benefit the Forum's work. These include the key statutory agencies who are already embedded in the work of the Forum. Generate a suitably populated and managed partner database for the use of the Forum.
Establishment and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a detailed Terms of Reference for the LWG through group discussion and present to plenary Recreation Forum. Generate a formal (simple to use) information management system (cloud based) that sets agendas, records LRF discussions and agreements of the group for good governance purposes.

6. Possible Risks

The following is a high level list of *possible risks* that could compromise the efficiency of the new Linkage Working Group. The list is intended to flag up traditional areas of potential conflict.

- Ensure that the internal Chair of the WG acts in concert with the Chair of the Forum at all times; the LWG will report to the participative Forum and is subsidiary to it.
- Ensuring that the representatives on the Linkage Working Group are 'decision makers' and 'do-ers' within their respective organisations.
- Deliver a small number of early 'quick wins' and promote their delivery.
- Ensure that the other three Working Groups don't feel that the new group is a 'super working group' and the de facto decision-making powerhouse of the Leitrim recreation Forum. Inclusivity and communications are key in this regard.
- Avoid duplication of activity with other partners.
- Have an ambitious but achievable 'work programme' that is suitably resourced from the outset.
- Remain 'fluid' in invitations issued to outside partners to attend groups meetings. The 'desirable category' should be open and inclusive.

All of the above will be subject to review and discussion by the Leitrim Recreation Forum and the relevant Linkage Working Group representatives in the early stages of its existence, to decide the final objectives and action plan. The work of the Linkage Working Group should however, link to the Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2023-2032 and its strategic action plan, as well as elements of the soon-to-be-published National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (due end 2022).



EUROPEAN OFFICES

United Kingdom

AYLESBURY

T: +44 (0)1844 337380

BELFAST

belfast@slrconsulting.com

BRADFORD-ON-AVON

T: +44 (0)1225 309400

BRISTOL

T: +44 (0)117 906 4280

CARDIFF

T: +44 (0)29 2049 1010

CHELMSFORD

T: +44 (0)1245 392170

EDINBURGH

T: +44 (0)131 335 6830

EXETER

T: + 44 (0)1392 490152

GLASGOW

glasgow@slrconsulting.com

GUILDFORD

guildford@slrconsulting.com

LONDON

T: +44 (0)203 805 6418

MAIDSTONE

T: +44 (0)1622 609242

MANCHESTER (Denton)

T: +44 (0)161 549 8410

MANCHESTER (Media City)

T: +44 (0)161 872 7564

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

T: +44 (0)191 261 1966

NOTTINGHAM

T: +44 (0)115 964 7280

SHEFFIELD

T: +44 (0)114 245 5153

SHREWSBURY

T: +44 (0)1743 23 9250

STIRLING

T: +44 (0)1786 239900

WORCESTER

T: +44 (0)1905 751310

Ireland

DUBLIN

T: + 353 (0)1 296 4667

France

GRENOBLE

T: +33 (0)6 23 37 14 14