



Comhairle Contae Mhaigh Eo
Mayo County Council



FÁILTE IRELAND
PLATFORMS FOR GROWTH
A Programme for Tourism Investment
2019 – 2025

**PROJECT EXPLANATORY REPORT ON PROPOSED
FACILITY CENTRE FOR WATER SPORTS ACTIVITIES AT
KEEL, ACHILL, CO. MAYO.**



Introduction

'Platforms for Growth' is Fáilte Ireland's new multi-annual capital investment programme designed to support Fáilte Ireland's strategic imperative of Building Brilliant Visitor Experiences. Platforms for Growth is part of the Grants Scheme for Large Tourism Projects 2016 – 2020. It is Fáilte Ireland's intention to base our future investments in large-scale capital projects on 'platforms' over the medium term. This is the second 'platform' to invite applications under the Platforms for Growth Investment Programme. This platform will enable sector growth and support the recovery of Irish tourism.

Background

In order to be recognised internationally as a best-in-class activity destination, it is crucial that Ireland invests in compelling activity infrastructure, the visitor experience and building the capacity of the activity providers to ensure the Irish experience meets and exceeds visitor expectations. With a temperate climate, Ireland has the potential to offer high-quality outdoor experiences for a minimum of nine months of the year, however, the quality of activity experience currently lags behind international standards due to the lack of adequate visitor facilities and an ad hoc approach to the delivery of activity experiences.

This scheme is designed for Local Authorities only and is anticipated to deliver an appropriate range of new activity visitor facilities around the country via a collaborative approach. The outcomes Fáilte Ireland is aiming to achieve with the addition of activity visitor facilities are all-weather changing facilities at existing water sports locations, the key components of which will be;

- sustainable and accessible design
- toilet provision
- shower provision
- changing provision
- secure storage
- induction space
- external terrace
- equipment washdown facilities
- orientation points and security

The facilities are likely to be a combination of new builds or appropriate repurposing of existing facilities on the identified sites.

Audit of Activity providers

In order to align the scheme with the strategic objectives of investment in activity tourism infrastructure and experiences, Fáilte Ireland conducted a spatial mapping exercise to identify potential priority locations and suitable sites for the development of an Activity Facility Centre. This mapping identified a range of 'activity hotspots' and clusters across the country that are considered to have the potential to become significant 'activity hubs'.



When conducting the spatial mapping, a series of criteria were applied to the exercise. It was a requirement that the potential locations and sites identified comprised or displayed particular features and characteristics. These included (but were not limited to) the following:

- Candidate locations should include two or more commercial water sports activity operators.
- Candidate locations must be at or in close proximity to Blue Flag or Green Coast beaches or a Blueway or well-established destinations for water sports activities.
- Candidate locations should be in close proximity to other visitor provision such as accommodation facilities, food and beverage outlets/services, visitor attractions and other visitor experiences, and other things to see and do in the locality

Site shortlisting process

Fáilte Ireland initially identified 136 eligible locations. This long list was distilled down to a shortlist of 22 locations. This was done in consultation with three key stakeholders; Fáilte Ireland's local programme team, Industry representatives and the Local Authorities. Please note that there are now 21 perspective sites.

Programme Team Consultations

The "long list" of potential locations was shared with and discussed with Fáilte Ireland programme Teams to reinforce and verify the list of identified locations, taking into consideration the local knowledge, alignment with VEDP's, destination priorities and Local Authority capacity. This engagement further refined the list and identified a number of locations for further investigation and formed the basis for the Local Authority consultation phase. Ongoing dialogue continued with the Programme Teams throughout the design of the scheme.

Industry Engagement

A representative sample of industry providers specialising in water sports in the candidate locations were interviewed to ascertain the gaps and opportunities in the delivery of best-in-class water-based visitor activities. At least two letters of support from water sport operators, from each candidate location, were included in the Local Authorities' initial application.

Local Authority Engagement

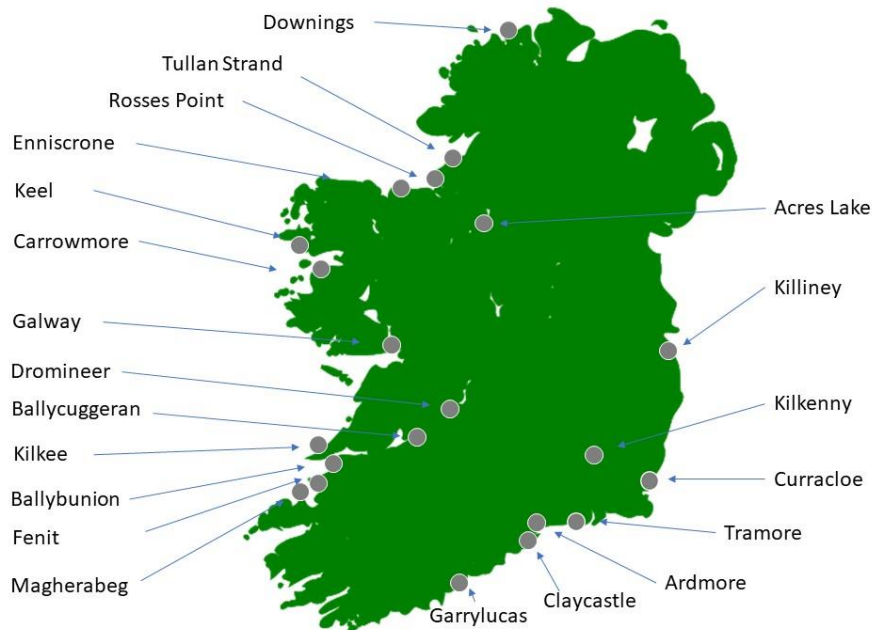
Conversations were had with a number of Local Authorities as part of the scoping phase of the scheme. This confirmed the need and appetite for the scheme. More detailed engagement with Local Authorities examined each prospective site in detail. In December 2020 the Local Authorities were invited to formally nominate sites which were subsequently evaluated against eligibility criteria by Fáilte Ireland's Investment Analysis Division.

Environmental Constraints & Opportunities

Fáilte Ireland developed a four phased environmental assessment approach to contribute to the site selection process. Further details on this approach can be viewed under "Environmental Assessment"



Final site locations



Exemplar Design

The concept and strategy behind the scheme's design-led approach was to appoint one design team (procured by Fáilte Ireland) that developed universal and standardised design options for all of the Activity Facility Centres delivered under the scheme, but which can be adapted to suit individual location and site specifications (size, dimensions, capacity, etc.) as well as the surrounding environment and landscape.

The design-led approach is anticipated to deliver the following benefits:

- A consistent approach to activity visitor product, service, and experience provision across the country (including minimising possible variance in provision between different locations and sites)
- A readily recognisable facility by way of its physical structure and composition and associated branding
- An 'off-the-shelf' exemplar design solution informed through stakeholder consultation and engagement and 'proof of concept'
- A collaborative approach with Local Authorities, Activity Operators and key stakeholders with robust, ongoing support and expertise from Fáilte Ireland
- Cost savings due to economies of scale and efficiencies in delivering the Activity Facility Centres

Design development

An outline brief was created by Fáilte Ireland which informed the project aspirations. MCA were awarded the contract. Three sample water sport operators were consulted by MCA in order to inform practical elements of the design. A concept design was created based upon a number of clear project aspirations including;

- Structural requirements, robustness, life cycle and reduced maintenance over time
- Sustainable service provision and low running cost
- Universal access – fully accessible regardless of ability or disability
- An aesthetic design which had a clear relationship to and was complementary to its environs



MCA concept design sample

The concept design was presented back to the local authorities for further consultation and a cost check performed by external quantity surveyors in order to ensure that the concept design was affordable within parameters of the Platforms for Growth scheme.

This Exemplar Design was shared with the Local Authorities along with a works document which outlines how Fáilte Ireland envision the design to be used. The level of detail shared with each authority constitute design intent. It is intended that each authority adapt the Exemplar Design to each site context. A set of design points within the works document specifies key features which are to be retained irrespective of any other adaptations. This will help to ensure a level of brand consistency across all site locations.



Environmentally Sustainable principles of Design/Build

As a condition of the investment grant scheme, all new build facilities are required to conform to nearly zero energy building standards and be appropriately and sensitively designed to integrate with the site's natural environment and surrounding location. The facility should be built to the highest possible environmental specifications, including the following solutions:

- The development of carbon neutral buildings
- The use of sustainable building materials that are sourced locally (projects should use recycled building material where possible)
- The use of solar heating panels for hot water
- The use of windows and natural daylight to reduce the need for electricity usage
- Being sympathetic to the environment and landscape of the selected location and site
- Planting trees and native plants on the site
- Installing high efficiency utilities
- Construction stage environmental management plan
- Consideration for innovative and sympathetic construction methodologies e.g., floating foundations

The above solutions are not an exhaustive list, and Local Authorities are encouraged to adopt any further appropriate and environmentally sound actions and measures for the ongoing management and operation of the facility.

Management and Maintenance

The concept behind the scheme's collaborative design-led approach is to drive innovation, create efficiencies, leverage economies of scale and deliver a consistent, world class experience for visitors. The investment grant scheme proposes that following the initial capital investment by Fáilte Ireland in the construction and fit-out of the facility centre, the Local Authority will own, operate, maintain, and reinvest in the facility.

It will be a condition of an award of investment grant funding that the Local Authority agrees to enter into a Management Agreement for the ongoing management cleaning, maintenance, and repair of the facility centre to ensure its upkeep to the highest possible standards and the facilitation and promotion of users' health and hygiene.

The Management Agreement will be put in place for the term of the investment, a period of 15 years.

Fáilte Ireland and Local Authorities recognise that these facilities should be of the highest hygiene standards to meet and preferably, exceed visitor expectations at all times. This will require a consistent approach to the day-to-day operation and maintenance of the facilities.

As such, a Standard operating procedure (SOP) for cleaning and maintenance of the facility will be established as a condition of the Investment Grant Agreement in line with industry best practice and will contain a detailed cleaning and hygiene of the facility including specifications for cleaning, minimum cleaning frequencies and maintenance responsibilities.

The facility should be visited, inspected, and cleaned in accordance with this cleaning schedule, in order to ensure compliance with the standard operating procedure and grant terms and conditions. SOP's will be developed based on environmentally sustainable best practice.



Environmental Assessment

Note : This section deals primarily with Fáilte Irelands approach to the Habitat Directive Assessment (the likely significant effects on a European Site) and all other environmental considerations beyond the Directive should be detailed as part of your application as set out in the relevant ABP Guidelines for Local Authorities. Refer to section 3.2 of the Guidelines for further information.

Fáilte Ireland developed a four phased approach to ensuring that environmental protection and promotion form an integral element of the development, assessment and implementation of this Platforms for Growth and resulting proposed facility.

An initial list of 47 potentially suitable sites were considered under this Platform for Growth and this environmental approach contributed to refining the final list of proposed sites to 21

In developing this approach, it was intended that the following are achieved:

- The Platform is in line with the VICE Model for Sustainable Tourism Development
- Compliance with all required environmental legislation & regulation
- Aid the applicants in choosing suitable sites
- Contribute to suitable design, siting, construction & operation of facilities
- Ensure full compliance with the Habitats Directive i.e. consider the requirement for Appropriate Assessment for each site that is considered under the Platform
- Develop environmental mitigation and monitoring that will be implemented during both development & operation

The following are a summary of the four phases

Phase 1 – Environmental Opportunity & Constraints Assessment

- Scope: Desktop review of initial list of sites resulting in matrix table and categorising sites through a traffic light system
- Purpose: To aid local authorities to refine site list.
- Output: Traffic Light Matrix for all sites
- Parameters Considered:
 - Ecological Sensitivities: SAC/SPA, Annex I habitats present, known threats & pressures to the ecology at that site.
 - Planning Issues
 - Archaeology
 - Landscape/ Scenery
 - Traffic
 - Water Services

A traffic light system was used to categorise the sites according to the following criteria:

Green	Mild Amber	Deep Amber	Red
No obvious ecological constraints	Ecologically sensitive site with potential to be managed appropriately	Ecologically sensitive site which may provide supporting habitat for protected species.	Clear ecological constraints are evident



Phase 2: Site Visits – Site Visit & Habitat Assessments

- Scope: Ecologist to visit sites from refined list in order to carry out detailed habitat and environmental mapping
- Purpose:
 - To determine further site constraints and opportunities
 - To gather relevant information required for future appropriate assessments
 - To review current site issues (e.g. traffic, wastewater, other site activities) beyond ecology
 - To offer input to design process –suitable locations, environmental solutions etc.
- Output 1: Habitat & Environmental Mapping for each site
- Output 2: Update & finalisation of Environmental Opportunity & Constraints Assessment

Phase 3 – Further Detailed Surveys for the Purposes of the Habitats Directive

- Scope: Complete specialist ecological surveys for sites that identify the requirement for same form Phase 1 and 2 e.g. wintering bird surveys
- Purpose and Output: To ensure all required survey work is completed on sites going forward in the scheme in order to fully inform the Appropriate Assessment (AA) process if required for that site.

Phase 4 – Appropriate Assessment

- Scope: Having consideration for Phase 1, 2 & 3 and for the application sites consider requirements under the Habitats Directive e.g. AA Screening & possible full Appropriate Assessment.
- Purpose:
 - To ensure the scheme is compliant with the requirements of the Habitats Directive
 - To develop where required compliance requirements through mitigation & monitoring
 - To aid in streamlining the consent process for each applicant
- Output 1: Appropriate Assessment Screening – Screened Out - Part 8 Planning
- Output 2: Appropriate Assessment Screening - Screened in - Full Appropriate Assessment Report – Section 177AE – Application to the Board.

Policy context

National Level

Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) The NPF is the overarching planning policy for the state (published in February 2018 under Project 2040) and contains ten National Strategic Outcomes and 75 National Policy Objectives. This planning framework sets out where development and investment should be guided to shape the national, regional and local spatial development in economic, environmental and social terms to 2040. A National Strategic Outcome prescribed in the NPF is 'Enhanced Amenities and Heritage' with the objective to;

Invest in and enable access to recreational facilities, including trails networks, designed and delivered with a strong emphasis on conservation, allowing the protection and preservation of our most fragile environments and providing a wellbeing benefit for all.



National Tourism Policy 2015: 'People, Place and Policy: growing Tourism to 2025'

The Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport published national tourism policy in March 2015 entitled "People, Place and Policy: growing Tourism to 2025".

The National Tourism Policy notes that to provide an effective tourism product, there must be a diverse range of activities for visitors. While much of our attractiveness as a tourism destination is down to the natural environment, since the early 1990s, the State has supported the development and improvement of our place by investing in our physical visitor attractions, visitor infrastructure, and facilities for visitor activities.

Policy Proposal 1.3.3 states: The design of future supports for capital investment in tourism will recognise the need for investment in both physical assets and in other areas that provide a lasting improvement in the overall quality of the visitor experience.

In order to be recognised internationally as a best-in-class activity destination, it is crucial that Ireland invests in compelling activity infrastructure, the visitor experience and building the capacity of the activity providers to ensure the Irish experience meets and exceeds visitor expectations. It is considered the proposed development is critically important to implementing on a key national tourism policy.

National Marine Planning Framework

The NMPF contains a vision, objectives, and planning policies for all marine-based human activities. It outlines how those activities will interact with each other in an increasingly pressured ocean space. It is to be the key decision-making tool for Government departments, State agencies, regulatory authorities, and policy makers for decisions on marine activities up to 2040.

The NMPF has numerous objectives and planning policies which supports the development of tourism, tourism facilities and improved access.

Key Objectives of the NMPF are to;

- Increase participation in a range of water-based sports and recreation activities for the benefit of public health and wellbeing, as well as developing our tourism offering.
- Position Ireland as a world-class sustainable coastal and marine tourism destination through the sustainable development of coastal and marine recreation activities and industries in Ireland.



A number of planning policies support the proposed development

Tourism Policy 1

Where appropriate, proposals enabling, promoting or facilitating sustainable tourism and recreation activities, particularly where this creates diversification or additional utilisation of related facilities beyond typical usage patterns, should be supported.

Sport & Recreation Policy 1

Proposals that promote sustainable development of water-based sports and marine recreation, while enhancing community health, wellbeing and quality of life, should be supported, provided that due consideration is given to environmental carrying capacities and tourism pressures.

Sport & Recreation Policy 4

Proposals that improve access to marine and coastal resources for tourism activities, and sport and recreation should be supported, where appropriate, at the applicable scale and aligned with existing development plans.

Access Policy 2

Proposals demonstrating appropriate enhanced and inclusive public access to and within the maritime area, and that consider the future provision of services for tourism and recreation activities, should be supported, subject to the outcome of statutory environmental assessment processes and subsequent decision by the competent authority, and where they contribute to the policies and objectives of this NMPF.

The principal statutory purpose of the RSES is to support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the Eastern and Midlands, Northern and Western and the Southern Regions. The development of Regional Strategic Outcomes in the RSES is also closely aligned and supportive of both the NSO's prescribed in the NPF and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

(EMRA) Applicable for the following counties – DLRCC/Louth

Tourism is a key growth enabler for the Dublin, Core and Gateway region as highlighted in section 3.2

“Promote the Region as a key destination for tourism, leisure and recreation activities and support the development of an integrated network of greenways, blueways and peatways while ensuring that high value assets and amenities are protected and enhanced.”

The importance of investing in tourism product is clearly outlined in section 6.5 of the RSES and is supported by the following Regional Policy Objectives:



RPO 6.7: Support local authorities to develop sustainable and economically efficient rural economies through initiatives to enhance sectors such as agricultural and food, forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and extractive industries, the bioeconomy, tourism, and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting the natural landscape and built heritage.

RPO 6.8: To support the sustainable development of tourism in the Region in line with the strategic objectives of both Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands experience brand propositions.

RPO 6.16: Support working with relevant landowners and recreational/ tourism agencies to increase access to the countryside and coastal areas to ensure maintenance of the existing network.

(SRA) Applicable for the following counties:

Wexford/Waterford/Kilkenny/Tipperary/Clare/Cork/Kerry

The Southern Regional RSES highlights that the region has a significant share of Ireland's premier tourism resources – both natural and man-made. The RSES recognises that a successful tourism sector creates significant benefits for many other sectors such as agriculture, food and drinks, transport and retail. The RSES supports the Department of Rural and Community Development's Action Plan for Rural Development (APRD) which seeks to increase tourist numbers to rural Ireland, support sustainable jobs through targeted rural tourism initiatives, develop activity tourism and leverage natural and built heritage assets. (Section 4.6)

The proposed development is supported by Regional Policy Objective 53

It is an objective to:

- a) Enhance provision of tourism and leisure amenity to cater for increased population in the Region including recreation, entertainment, cultural, catering, accommodation, transport and water infrastructure inter alia;***
- b) Promote activity tourism subject to appropriate site selection and environmental assessment processes;***

(NWRA) Applicable for the following counties – Donegal/Leitrim/Sligo/Mayo/Galway

It is a strategic objective of the Northern & Western Regional RSES to ensure across the family of Fáilte Ireland Brands that this region ensures adequate investment in the following areas:

1. Visitor Experience Development: Capital investment in flagship tourism products that can create scale.
2. Visitor Awareness: Experiences, products and places are appropriately and comparably marketed and that IWAK and our key seaports are promoted as international access points.



3. Enablers: Resources, Capital Programme and Capacity Building are three requirements to address the imbalance in tourist visitor numbers.

New proposals for activity tourism, particularly in rural areas, National Park's, uplands, coasts and rivers is a key element of the tourism strategy of the RSES (section 4.4 page 154)

The proposed development is supported by the following Regional Policy Objectives;

RPO 4.1

To support working with relevant landholders and recreational/tourism agencies to increase access to the countryside and our coastal areas, and to ensure maintenance and access to the existing network of trails, paths, ways etc.

RPO 4.12

Develop the water-based leisure sector in the region in a sustainable manner making the best use of existing and planned infrastructure and resources, in a manner that is sensitive to the natural and cultural heritage resources

County Development Plan

Mayo County Development Plan 2022-2028

County Development Plan

2.3 Strategic Aims

Tourism Development - To develop Mayo as a leading tourism destination through continued sustainable expansion of the tourism sector, with a focus on creating high-quality visitor services and the continued development and enhancement of visitor attractions and activities, capitalising on our natural and cultural heritage assets, whilst safeguarding these resources for future generations.

TRP 2

To support and promote sustainable tourism development, accessible to all throughout the county and work in partnership with tourism organisations and adjoining Local Authorities, where necessary, in securing the development of tourism enterprises and infrastructure, subject to suitable locations where it can be demonstrated that the development will not have significant adverse effects on the environment, including the integrity of the Natura 2000 network, residential amenity or visual amenity.

TRP 3

To support the work of Fáilte Ireland and the strategic growth of tourism development in the county through:

(a) To support the implementation of the Wild Atlantic Way Tourism Strategy.

(b) The implementation of Fáilte Irelands Destination & Experience Development Plans (EDP's) for Clew Bay and North Mayo/Erris.



TRP 4

To co-operate with Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, and any other relevant bodies in the implementation of Destination Mayo 2016-2021 by:

- (a) Encouraging investment in the tourism industry in the county with specific reference to leisure activities (including walking, cycling, equestrian and family focused activities), including connectivity to the Great Western Greenway at Castlebar to Westport and to the Wild Atlantic Way.***
- (b) Encouragement and support of the upgrading of public transport facilities in Destination Towns, including the provision of Transport Hubs/Links.***
- (c) Supporting the development of new and emerging tourism products and facilities or upgrading/extension of existing tourist facilities at tourist sites within the county, within proper planning and sustainable development principles.***
- (d) Require the preparation and assessment of all planning applications arising from the Destination Mayo strategy to have regard to the information, data and requirements of the Appropriate Assessment Natura Impact Report and SEA Environmental Report of the Destination Mayo Strategy.***

TRP 9

To support the implementation of the opportunities and actions identified in the Mayo Tourism Strategy and Action Plan – Destination Mayo 2015-2021, regarding the development of activity, adventure and sports tourism at strategic locations throughout the County in conjunction with the Tourism section of Mayo County Council and other relevant stakeholders.

TRP 12

To support the development of a regional water-based leisure sector in a sustainable manner, making the best use of existing and planned infrastructure and resources, in a manner that is sensitive to the natural and cultural heritage resources, in conjunction with relevant regional partners.

TRP22

To support the implementation of priority infrastructural developments and tourism facilities identified by the Tourism Section of Mayo County Council, including the development of new tourist facilities or upgrading/extension of existing tourist facilities at tourist sites within the county, within proper planning and sustainable development principles.

TRP 23

To support and promote sustainable tourism, accessible to all throughout County Mayo, and to work in partnership with tourism organisations and adjoining local authorities, where necessary, in securing the development of tourism enterprises and infrastructure, subject to suitable locations, where it can be demonstrated that the development will not have significant adverse effects on the environment, including the integrity of the Natura 200 network, residential amenity or visual amenity.



TRP 27

To support the promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way in its role to grow the economic contribution of tourism along its route, through the upgrade and improvement of the touring network, facilities and visitor attractions through:

- (a) Exploration of the development of signature discovery points to assist and secure Mayo's position as 'The Heartbeat of the Wild Atlantic Way'.*
- (b) Working with all relevant stakeholders and Fáilte Ireland to facilitate the erection of standardised signage for tourism facilities and tourist attractions along the Wild Atlantic Way.*
- (c) Working with relevant landholders and recreational/tourism agencies to increase access to the countryside and our coastal areas, and to ensure maintenance and access to the existing network of trails, paths, and tourist sites along the Wild Atlantic Way.*
- (d) Supporting the exploration of the development of new tourist services, parking and facilities or upgrading/extension of existing tourist services, parking and facilities at tourist sites along the Wild Atlantic Way.*
- (e) Build the concept of sustainability firmly into ongoing planning processes for tourism and outdoor recreation. In conducting tourism and recreation planning processes during the lifetime of the Mayo CDP, work towards adopting an ecosystem-based approach that assesses capacity of landscapes, communities, and natural resources to provide a basis for decision making that is firmly based on the principles of sustainability.*
- (f) Apply environmental measures as presented in the Wild Atlantic Way Operational Programme, the SEA and NIR of the Destination Mayo Strategy and support monitoring of environmental effects associated with tourism growth to ensure cumulative and in combination effects are avoided.*
- (g) To support the preparation of a masterplan and/or visitor traffic management plan at Downpatrick Head-Discovery Point.*

TRO 26

To explore the development of activity service centres in accordance with the Mayo Tourism Strategy and Action Plan.

County Tourism Strategy

The Mayo Tourism Strategy and Action Plan sets out a range of new sports tourism and recreational tourism infrastructure projects that ensure that Mayo can attract significantly additional visitor numbers to the area and create new employment in both urban and rural areas. The Strategy sets out a number of key objectives to increase visitor numbers to the County and stimulate employment opportunities in the short, medium and long term.

A Tourism Action Plan sets out a key number of actions in realisation to the development and promotion of recreational, sports tourism and adventure tourism offerings including:

- To ensure Mayo builds on the Wild Adventure Brand and continues to position itself as the Heartbeat of the Wild Atlantic Way.*
- Development of Leisure Facilities - Development of Water Sports Facilities at Carramore & Keel*

Additionally, the Tourism Strategy seeks to make Mayo the Adventure capital of Ireland, building on the natural assets of the County. The strategy sets out the strategic county walking networks, cycling routes, blueways which are aligned to national trails strategies and policies