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# CHAPTER 5

## Tourism Development

## CHAPTER 5 TOURISM AND RECREATION

### 5.1 Strategic Aim

*The strategic aim of this chapter is to promote and facilitate a sustainable and well-managed year-round, high-quality tourism industry that generates economic benefits to all areas of the county, thereby contributing to the wider tourism industry of the region.*

#### Related UN Sustainable Development Goals



#### Related NPF National Strategic Outcomes



#### Related RSES Regional Growth Ambitions



## 5.2 Introduction

This chapter has been guided by the above strategic aim, sustainable development goals and national strategic objectives to create a sustainable tourism and recreation industry in County Mayo. The chapter has also considered the key legislative and policy documents set out in Appendix III, including the NPF and RSES for the Northern and Western region.

## 5.3 National and Regional Planning Position

To develop a sustainable tourism industry in Ireland, the NPF and RSES recognise that infrastructural investment is required to enhance our amenities including the built, cultural and natural heritage assets in both urban and rural areas. Investment in developing a well-designed public realm in settlements, recreational infrastructure and rural amenities including activity-based tourism and trails, such as greenways, blueways and peatways will significantly contribute to the sustainable growth of the tourism sector. The NPF and RSES also recognise the emerging tourism potential of the Mayo's Dark Sky Reserve at Ballycroy National Park, as an alternative tourism experience.

The RSES identifies the potential to develop additional tourism attractions of scale, building upon a significant number of outstanding natural assets and existing recreational attractions, as key to enabling the region to become a prominent destination for tourism, leisure and recreation activities. The strategy highlights the need to build on the significant tourism potential of Ballina through investment in tourism-related infrastructure, such as the Monasteries of the Moy Greenway from Belleek to Killala. The strategy further identifies the need to build on the significant tourism potential of Castlebar. This is through investment in tourism-related infrastructure, including improved cycle and walking tourism/recreational infrastructure and connectivity to the Great Western Greenway at Castlebar to Westport and the Wild Atlantic Way. The RSES also notes that the future, strategic potential of Westport is best achieved by building on the existing economic, commercial and social links with Castlebar. This will enable Westport to further develop its existing strong tourism base.

## 5.4 Mayo in Context

Tourism is an important driver of economic activity in Ireland. This sector is our largest indigenous industry and provides income and employment to all areas of the country, including urban, rural and coastal. Mayo has a lot to offer as a tourism destination and has great potential to further develop its tourism industry as a key economic sector for the county. A wealth of natural resources, unspoilt environment, scenic and sensitive landscapes as well as internationally renowned destinations such as Céide fields, Wild Nephin Ballycroy National Park, Croagh Patrick, Downpatrick Head, Knock Shrine, Westport/Clew Bay, Achill, Cong, Ballina, Pontoon and its offshore islands allow for the further development of a wide range of tourism products. These include heritage and culture, activity and adventure and religious and pilgrimage tourism. The Great Western Greenway from Westport to Achill has proven to be a very successful walking and cycling amenity and tourism product for the county.

A number of established walking and cycling routes have been developed which allow local communities to access and enjoy the natural environmental assets, such as the Turlough Greenway and cycle network in Castlebar and the Railwalk walking and cycle route in Westport. The recent branding of Ireland's Atlantic coastline as the Wild Atlantic Way touring route, offers unprecedented opportunities to showcase the attractions and activities along the Atlantic coast of Mayo to a receptive

global audience. Mayo has been identified as ‘The heartbeat of the Wild Atlantic Way’ - an exceptional opportunity for the county.

The tourism industry makes a significant contribution to the vitality and sustainability of a wide variety of local enterprises, particularly in rural areas. The Plan seeks to facilitate and enable an integrated and sustainable high-quality, year-round tourism product, guided by, but not limited to *Mayo County Council a Tourism Strategy, Destination Mayo 2016-2021*. Mayo County Council recognises that the realisation of the strategy (or superseding version of the strategy) will require investment in supporting infrastructural development to meet the needs of both resident and visitor populations.

### 5.4.1 Destination Mayo 2016-2021

*Mayo's Tourism Strategy, Destination Mayo 2016-2021*, identifies tourism as a key economic sector for Mayo, with the potential for significant job creation. Its vision is to develop Mayo as a premier tourism destination, in conjunction with world-class activities, exceptional heritage attractions, cultural attractions and high-quality experiences attractive to domestic and international visitors alike. The tourism strategy highlights that Mayo has significant potential for a new high quality, innovative product development, ranging from the Wild Atlantic Way, Monasteries of the Moy Greenway, expansion of the highly successful Great Western Greenway, Blueway Water Trails, VeloRail, Wild Nephin Wilderness Park and the Mary Robinson Centre in Ballina. Initiatives such as interpretation of the Sacred Landscape, Pilgrim Trails across the county, the famine history of Mayo and facilities for adventure activities both land and water-based, offer unique ways for a wide range of visitors to engage with Mayo’s landscape, heritage and people.



**Figure 5.1: Key elements of Wild Mayo - Destination Mayo Tourism Strategy**

The tourism strategy identifies key assets, attractions, and activities that can be further developed and promoted under the branding of Wild Mayo. The strategy, supported by a Tourism Action Plan, is based around the development of the key tourism pillars identified earlier.

The successful implementation of Mayo’s Tourism Strategy will ensure a wider distribution of tourists to a range of tourist options that the County has to offer. It will also help extend the tourism season and reduce pressure on existing infrastructure in the more traditional tourist destinations. Mayo County Council seeks to maintain a balance between sustainable development of tourism and the preservation of the environment.

### 5.4.2 Regional Tourism Strategies (RTS’s)

Fáilte Ireland are in the process of preparing Regional Tourism Strategies for each of the four Regional Experience Brands (Dublin, Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland’s Ancient East and Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands). The purpose of the Regional Tourism Strategies is to identify the sustainable tourism development priorities that will help to unlock the commercial potential of the region bringing benefits to all stakeholders and industry. Each strategy will be prepared based on the VICE model which is a methodology for working towards sustainable tourism that seeks to strike an appropriate balance between the needs of the Visitor, the Industry and Community and the Environment. The strategy will be for the period to 2022-2026 and will be grounded in the Fáilte Ireland’s new Corporate Strategy. There will be a strong spatial element to the strategies which will seek to identify where development should take place in order to unlock the tourism potential of the region.

Fáilte Ireland has created a framework to develop and deliver visitor experience development plans (VEDPs). This approach identifies the ‘hero’ products for an area and provides a framework to present the experiences and stories of that area in a way that tourists can readily and easily understand. It clearly identifies tangible actions and a process for businesses to shape their respective tourist experience in line with the overall experience brand proposition and the key motivating themes for their area. There will be two VEDP’s delivered in Mayo over the next number of years, Clew Bay and North Mayo/Erris. These will enable clusters and geographies to amplify their local tourism offering in a compelling and motivating way for international tourists and encourage increased visits, dwell time and spend in the locality.

Strong character & sense of place	Rich diversity of functions and activities	Adaptable urban structure to accommodate longer term changes	Well-connected network of streets
Priority In town centre for pedestrians	Coherent, legible and attractive streetscapes	Good quality and attractive public realm <sup>5</sup>	Survival of the main street
Unlocking under-used and vacant sites	Ensuring clean and safe environment	Addressing traffic and congestion	Integration of green spaces & linkages, within and around the town

Figure 5.2 Quality Tourist Destination Factors (Fáilte Ireland)

Fáilte Ireland’s Destination Towns initiative highlights the importance of maintaining and enhancing the quality of place that visitors experience during their stay (See Figure 5.2 above). Attractive towns and villages are a key motivator for holidaymakers in choosing Ireland as a holiday destination.

However, nationally and regionally, the challenge is to unlock the economic potential of the visitor for local businesses and communities. This will be realised through the delivery of high quality ‘destination town’ experiences for visitors, that still capture local distinctiveness and support thriving local communities. The best approaches to unlocking this potential is innovative and multi-layered, integrating tourism, urban planning, community development and conservation. Béal an Mhuirthead (Belmullet) has been designated as a Destination Town. The destination town initiative aligns with Mayo County Council’s goal of making the County a high-quality place in which to live, work and visit.

## General Tourism Policies

<b>TRP 1</b>	To work in partnership with local, national and international agencies/bodies to promote County Mayo as a tourist destination and to support and encourage cohesion and linkages between the relevant agencies/ bodies to implement the key tourism objectives of this Plan.
<b>TRP 2</b>	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.
<b>TRP 3</b>	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.
<b>TRP 4</b>	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.

<p><b>TRP 5</b></p>	<p>To support the delivery of high quality ‘destination town’ experiences for visitors by supporting expansion in accommodation and facilities within Destination Towns and supporting infrastructural investment, including improvements to the public realm, transport links, accommodation, the night-time economy and the sustainable development of our natural and built heritage.</p>
<p><b>TRP 6</b></p>	<p>To promote and support the continued strategic development of Westport, Ballina and Castlebar as tourist destinations through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Supporting the enhancement of Westport as a major tourism centre in the West of Ireland, building on its reputation as one of Ireland’s premier visitor destinations along the Wild Atlantic Way, as a heritage town and gateway to areas of outstanding natural and built heritage.</li> <li>(b) Supporting the development of Westport’s key assets e.g. Westport House Demesne, Quay area, extension of the Great Western Greenway and additional greenway linkages e.g. Westport-Cong Trail and National Coastal Path.</li> <li>(c) Exploration of the development potential of Westport and Ballina harbour areas in terms of marine related tourism and extensive marine resources.</li> <li>(d) Promote the significant tourism potential of Ballina and its location as a prominent stop on the Wild Atlantic Way, a gateway to Northwest Mayo, the Céide Fields, and internationally renowned salmon fishing, through investment in tourism related infrastructure, including Monasteries of the Moy Greenway from Belleek to Killala, incorporating EuroVelo1 Atlantic Coastal Route, Mountain Biking Trail via Ballina connecting the Wild Nephin Ballycroy National Park to the National Mountain Bike Trail at Coolaney and ongoing development of the Wild Atlantic Way, including Discovery Points at Crockets Town.</li> <li>(e) Promote the development of Castlebar as a nationally important Sports Tourism and Adventure Hub, including leveraging existing sports assets and existing natural and built facilities at Lough Lannagh Holiday Village.</li> <li>(f) Promote the development of Castlebar as a nationally important events, conference and business tourism hub, including through leveraging existing local assets such as Galway Mayo Institute of Technology, Castlebar Campus, Castlebar Regional Training Centre, Breaffy House Resort, the Royal Theatre, and expanding the scale and capacity of hotel and other accommodation within the town.</li> <li>(g) To support the implementation of the feasibility study entitled Moy estuary, A Development Strategy, where appropriate.</li> </ul>
<p><b>TRP 7</b></p>	<p>To encourage the clustering of tourism products and services within identified hubs, to facilitate the sharing of infrastructure and services where possible, to increase linkages within and reduce leakage from the local economy.</p>

<b>TRP 8</b>	To work with the relevant authorities to promote the concept of creating Ireland’s first “National Marine Park” in Killala Bay, from Easley Head to Kilcummin Head. This would enhance the Economic, Environmental and Social values of Killala Bay and promote the understanding and enjoyment of those special qualities by the public.
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## General Tourism Objectives

<b>TRO 1</b>	To work with all relevant stakeholders and Fáilte Ireland to facilitate the erection of standardised signage for tourism facilities and tourist attractions as part of national and regional initiatives.
<b>TRO 2</b>	To enable, facilitate and encourage the growth and sustainability of the tourism sector, through supporting the provision of tourism enterprise developments in rural areas including open farms, subject to the provision of adequate infrastructure and compliance with normal planning considerations.

### 5.4.3 Key Tourism Pillars

To provide for the continued expansion of the tourism sector in Mayo, three key tourism pillars have been identified. Firstly, the continued development and enhancement of our tourism product and the various categories of tourism that bring visitors to Mayo. Secondly, ensuring that high quality services and accommodation are accessible and available for our visitors and thirdly, the identification of priority infrastructure designed to provide new and innovative activities and flagship products, as set out in Table 5.1. These projects will help differentiate the Mayo tourism offering from those in other areas of the country. Additionally, these projects will provide the necessary platform from which small tourism enterprises can operate and grow, helping to create jobs and regenerate rural areas throughout the county.

Tourism Categories	Infrastructure, Services and Accommodation	Priority Infrastructure - Flagship Projects
Activity, Adventure and Sports Tourism	Greenway expansion and improvements	Wild Atlantic Way – Discovery Points
Spiritual and Pilgrimage Tourism	Facilities - camping and camper vans sites.	Walking
Cultural and Amenity Tourism	Access to tourist sites for all	Greenways
Food and Culinary Tourism	Visitor centres	Marine
Festivals and Events	Accommodation – glamping, pods, hotels, B&B’s, guesthouses, hostels.	Lakes of Mayo
Wild Atlantic Way and Wild Mayo	Services – toilets, showers etc	Adventure

**Table 5.1 Priority Infrastructure - Flagship Projects and required Infrastructure, Services and Accommodation.**

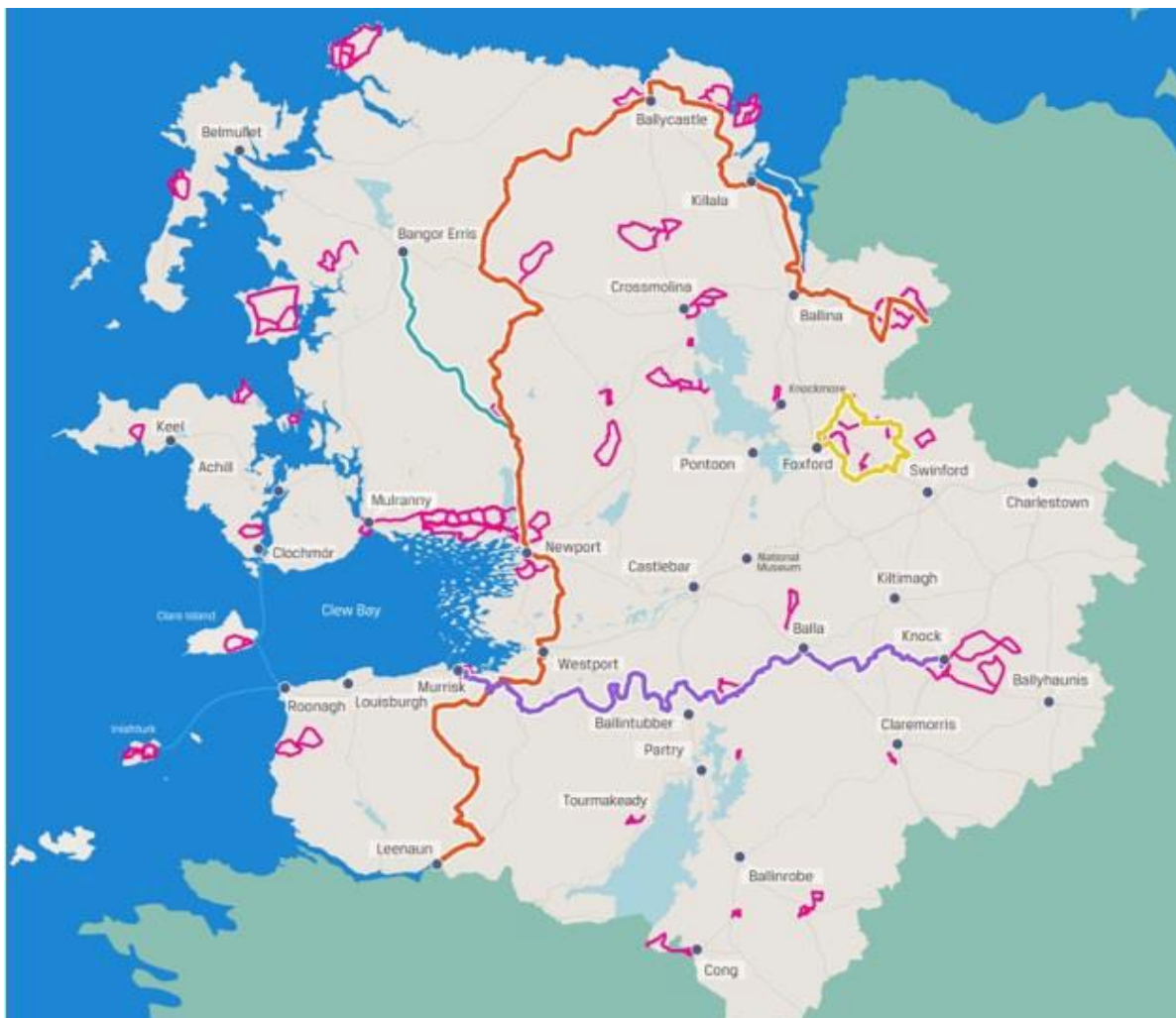


### 5.4.3.1 Key Pillar 1: Tourism Categories

In planning their trip, visitors need reassurance that there will be plenty of quality opportunities both to see and do in the daytime and evening, along with a range of accommodation options and restaurants. Mayo has five key categories of tourism under which the various tourism offerings are set out.

#### Activity, Adventure and Sports Tourism

Mayo lends itself well to adventure activities and sports tourism due to its impressively wild landscape, rugged coastline and the wide availability of an adventure and activity product in the county. Mayo has the most extensive network of recreational greenways and tracks and trails for cycling and walking in Ireland, most notably the Great Western Greenway, while Lough Lannagh in Castlebar has been identified as a sports tourism and adventure hub. Map 5.1 below shows the existing network of trails in County Mayo. The county also has a number of nationally known Adventure Centres at Delphi, Achill and Westport and there has been a surge in participation in activity challenges around the county such as Gaelforce, Sea2Summit, Pink Ribbon, Achill Roar and Race to Glory. Mayo also has strong reputation as a golfing destination, with 14 golf courses within the county. Horse racing, horse riding and bird watching are also popular activity-based tourism products in Mayo.



**Map 5.1: Existing Trails in County Mayo**

Water sports activities are also very popular across coastal, lakes and river locations, including swimming, surfing, canoeing, kayaking, scuba diving and sailing. Other popular water tourism activities are fishing and angling due to the abundance of productive lake, river and sea angling fisheries, with high Salmon fisheries located at Carrowmore, Errif, Beltra and Furnace and the Moy being the most productive salmonoid river in Ireland. The county has some of Ireland’s greatest lakes in Conn, Cullen, Mask and Corrib all with excellent quality angling. Additionally, the availability of sea angling produce in the waters of Killala Bay, Clew Bay, Achill and Béal an Mhuirthead (Belmullet), all contribute to a large variety of angling products to suit the different preferences of the angling markets.

## Activity, Adventure and Sports Tourism Policies

<b>TRP 9</b>	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.
<b>TRP 10</b>	To support the implementation of the strategy for Greenway development in Ireland - “Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways” in relation to the development and extension of greenways throughout the county, in conjunction with the Tourism section of Mayo County Council and other relevant stakeholders.
<b>TRP 11</b>	To promote Mayo as a premier walking/cycling destination in the Country and support the further development of walking routes and trails within the county and the integration and linkage of these with other existing / proposed routes and trails both within and outside of County Mayo, in accordance with national walking strategy guidance and in conjunction with the Tourism Section of Mayo County Council, Fáilte Ireland and other relevant stakeholders. Opportunities to enhance ecological connectivity should be integrated as part of any linking of routes to strengthen and support green infrastructure.
<b>TRP 12</b>	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.
<b>TRP 13</b>	To support local, national and international tourism agencies and bodies in their work to promote Mayo as a unique tourism destination and build on the ‘Wild Mayo’ adventure brand and to continue to position itself as ‘The Heartbeat of the Wild Atlantic Way’ through an interagency approach, utilising available funding streams to implement the tourism objectives of this plan.
<b>TRP 14</b>	To work with the National Transport Authority, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and all stakeholders to develop a coordinated approach to the selection, delivery and servicing of future greenways, blueways, trails and routes throughout the county.

## Activity, Adventure and Sports Tourism Objectives

<p><b>TRO 3</b></p>	<p>To explore a feasibility study, including the development of route options, for the creation of a coastal walking/cycling route along the western seaboard, in collaboration and partnership with the NWRA, other relevant local authorities and stakeholders, including the public, to enhance access to our tourist assets along the route of the Wild Atlantic Way.</p>
<p><b>TRO 4</b></p>	<p>To investigate the development of bike trails and sites at Keenagh/Ballycastle/Bunnyconnellan Bike Trail and the Mountain Bike Centre at the Wild Nephin site, in conjunction with the Tourism Section of Mayo County Council.</p>



**Map 5.2: Proposed Spiritual Trail and Timber Trail in County Mayo**

### Spiritual and Pilgrimage Tourism

Mayo has considerable appeal as a spiritual tourism destination, with 1.6 million people travelling to Mayo annually to visit Knock Shrine. Added to this, Mayo has a rich sacred landscape with many religious heritage sites and pilgrimage walks, from the Monasteries of the Moy to Caher Island, Ballintubber Abbey, Tochar Padraig and Croagh Patrick among the key offerings. Map 5.2 above shows

a proposed spiritual trail route from Croagh Patrick to Knock Shrine and Cong.

## Spiritual and Pilgrimage Tourism Objective

**TRO 5**

- (a) To explore the development of a long-distance Spiritual Trail linking Croagh Patrick, Ballintubber Abbey and Knock Shrine. Investigate the potential of linking this trail to Burriscarra, Cong, Turlough and the Monasteries of the Moy through the Tourism Section of Mayo County Council and other relevant stakeholders.
- (b) To explore a range of spiritual walking and pilgrimage events to showcase Mayo as a spiritual tourism destination, with particular emphasis on generating overnight stays for visitors to Knock Shrine.
- (c) To support and facilitate the development of Knock as a world-renowned religious tourist destination.
- (d) To investigate the delivery of pilgrim trail improvements and upgrades on the Croagh Patrick trail and Tochar Padraig trail.

Opportunities to enhance ecological connectivity should be integrated as part of any linking of routes to strengthen and support green infrastructure. SEA and AA measures relating to the above were identified in the Destination Mayo Plan and should be adhered to and integrated to any project level assessments.

### Cultural and Amenity Tourism

Mayo is a county with a rich heritage. The remote and rural nature of the county has resulted in much of this heritage surviving today, intact and authentic. Mayo boasts numerous museums and buildings of interest including the Jackie Clarke Museum, Museum of Country Life, Westport House, Moore Hall, and Enniscoe. Investment in the visitor attraction sector in the last twenty-five years has led to the development of these facilities and a number of other landmark attractions that capture and showcase Mayo’s heritage. Coupled with this, Mayo’s Arts, and Cultural Centres add a cultural dimension, including diverse evening entertainment.

Mayo is renowned for its unspoilt and richly diverse landscape and is home to Ballycroy and Nephin National Park and the Dark Sky Park. It boasts many forests and woodlands, lakes and rivers including Loughs Conn, Corrib and Cullen. Mayo’s islands, coastal areas, marine resources and activities are major natural assets and significant components of the county’s overall tourism offering. The natural beauty and unspoilt environment of Mayo’s coastal locations are also important factors in bringing tourists to these areas and generate business opportunities for coastal areas. The county boasts a large number of Blue Flag and Green Coast Beaches, which have become important centres for water sports activities, such as surfing, kite-surfing, swimming, paddle boarding, kayaking, etc. and for activities such as walking, jogging and general enjoyment of the coastal area. Mayo also has many islands, all with their own individual histories, culture and communities. Managed appropriately and developed sustainably, coastal and marine tourism and recreation can deliver sustainable products, services and jobs. The protection of the coastline and marine areas is imperative to ensure long-term benefits from tourism activities that are based on this enviable natural asset. This includes maintaining good environmental conditions and good water quality.

## Cultural and Amenity Tourism Policies

<b>TRP 15</b>	To support the implementation of the opportunities and actions identified in the Mayo Tourism Strategy and Action Plan – Destination Mayo 2015-2021, SEA and AA, regarding the development of cultural and amenity tourism and the Wild Atlantic Way in Mayo, in conjunction with the Tourism section of Mayo County Council and other relevant stakeholders.
<b>TRP 16</b>	To support the protection and enhancement of Mayo’s historic buildings, gardens and museums as cultural tourist attractions.
<b>TRP 17</b>	To support developments which will enable and encourage countryside recreation in appropriate locations to foster an increased appreciation of, and access to, the natural environment.
<b>TRP 18</b>	To work in partnership with Coillte to identify opportunities for tourism and recreation facility development within commercially managed forests, where appropriate, and to promote and continue to be involved in the NeighbourWood Scheme (2017).

## Cultural and Amenity Tourism Objectives

<b>TRO 6</b>	To encourage access to forestry and woodlands, including private forestry, in cooperation 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.
<b>TRO 7</b>	To investigate the development of Moore Hall Estate and walled garden in conjunction with the Tourism Section of Mayo County Council and relevant working groups.
<b>TRO 8</b>	To investigate the further potential of the Wild Nephin Ballycroy National Park and Dark Sky initiative in a sustainable manner. This approach should demonstrate good practice in terms of eco-tourism and wilderness and seek to gain recognised accreditation on same.
<b>TRO 9</b>	To explore the development of community walks, off road trails/rural trail developments, parks, other outdoor amenities and recreational infrastructure, and work with relevant landholders and recreational/tourism agencies to increase access to the countryside and our coastal areas, subject to proper planning and sustainable development principles.

<b>TRO 10</b>	Encourage sensitively designed and located development which provides for the appreciation, interpretation, upgrade and provision of access to natural habitats, scenic vistas and heritage and geoh heritage features for the benefit of rural tourism, subject to normal planning and nature conservation consideration.
<b>TRO 11</b>	To utilise Mayo’s natural and heritage resources to foster the development of tourism as a viable sustainable sector of the economy, in a sustainable manner, which complements the scale, quality and unique features of the county.

### Food and Culinary Tourism

Mayo with its clean waters, natural scenery and untamed wildness has great food and hospitality at its core. Over seventy producers have been identified around the county with products ranging from seafood, sausages, meats, mountain lamb, farmhouse cheese, farmhouse butter, pesto, sea salt, hedgerow infused vinegars, chocolate, nougat, natural still and sparkling water, green tea sparkling water to craft beers. A number of food trails and festivals have been established included the Gourmet Greenway, Feile na Tuaithe, Westport and Ballina food festivals.

## Food and Culinary Tourism Policy

<b>TRP 19</b>	To support the development of Mayo as a ‘Foodie Destination’ through the implementation of the Fáilte Ireland ‘Food Tourism Development Strategy 2018-2023’ and the Mayo County Council Food and Drink Strategy 2020-2025 and the opportunities and actions identified in the Mayo Tourism Strategy and Action Plan – Destination Mayo 2015-2021 regarding the development of food tourism in Mayo, in conjunction with the Tourism section of Mayo County Council and other relevant stakeholders.
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## Food and Culinary Tourism Objectives

<b>TRO 12</b>	To explore the development of a Mayo food network and market signature food experiences around the county, including artisan food trails such as the Gourmet Greenway and Edible Greenway and other food trails, at appropriate locations throughout the county.
<b>TRO 13</b>	To facilitate Féile na Tuaithe and the Westport and Ballina food festivals and other food and drinks tourism events at appropriate locations throughout the county.

## Festivals and Events

150 festivals and events are held annually in Mayo. Largely attributable to successful community engagement in tourism in Mayo, many of these festivals have long histories and have become part of the fabric of life in Mayo’s towns and villages, often playing an important role in drawing Mayo’s diaspora home on holiday. These festivals offer an authentic experience and a genuine engagement opportunity for visitors. Festivals are predominantly small, community managed and range from historical/heritage themes to music, arts, horseracing, regattas, walking festivals and agricultural shows. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in activity challenge events including marathons, duathlons, triathlons and adventure challenges involving various combinations of cycling, running and water-based activities.

### Festivals and Events Policies

#### TRP 20

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 festivals and events in Mayo, in conjunction with the Tourism section of Mayo County Council and other relevant stakeholders by:

- (a) supporting community groups and festival committees to identify and access new sources of funding for festivals and events in the county.
- (b) promoting the development of a variety of new festivals, including Mayo Dark Skies International and sporting events, to appeal to a wide range of visitors and to increase the profile of the county as a key tourism destination.

#### TRP 21

To support and promote existing festivals and sporting events, in conjunction with the relevant tourism and sporting agencies to increase the cultural, heritage and lifestyle profile of the county, and to facilitate the establishment of new events where viable, subject to the satisfactory location, access, parking provision and protection of the surrounding environment.

#### 5.4.3.2 Key Pillar 2: Infrastructure, Services and Tourist Accommodation

The provision of sufficient, appropriate and high-quality infrastructure, services and accommodation to meet the needs of visitors is fundamental to Mayo reaching its potential for a thriving tourism sector.

##### Infrastructure and Visitor Services

The provision of sufficient, appropriate and high-quality infrastructure to meet the needs of visitors is fundamental to Mayo reaching its potential for a thriving tourism sector. Future provision will be based on current and future projected needs. Services and infrastructure should be clustered in visitor destination towns and villages where possible, providing for a suitable range and critical mass of services that will strengthen visitor destinations. In terms of infrastructure provision, the expansion of inter-urban and town greenways has been identified as a priority by the Tourism Section of Mayo County Council, in conjunction with facility improvements along existing greenways. Visitor centres, services, car parking and facilities at key tourist sites have also been identified for development.

The Council recognises the potential for pressure being placed on the County’s natural and heritage amenities through increased tourism. In this regard, it is important that the provision for increased tourism activity is in line with the provision of the required infrastructure to support such development. The Council will use the full range of its statutory procedures, particularly in relation to waste management, water and air pollution, to ensure that natural amenities remain unpolluted and visually unspoiled.

Tourism-related development proposals will be required to demonstrate a high standard of design, with strong consideration given to a proposal’s potential impact on its surroundings, in terms of scale and intensity and the potential for the proposal to add significantly to the quality of the visitor experience.

## Infrastructure and Visitor Services Policies

<b>TRP 22</b>	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.
<b>TRP 23</b>	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.
<b>TRP 24</b>	To encourage the clustering of tourism products and services within identified hubs, to facilitate the sharing of infrastructure and services where possible, to increase linkages within and reduce leakage from the local economy.

## Infrastructure and Visitor Services Objective

<b>TRO 14</b>	To identify opportunities for funding for infrastructural projects and facilities, including LEADER, national and European funding schemes and seek to maximise the benefit of such funding opportunities for County Mayo.
<b>TRO 15</b>	To work with key stakeholders, including transport providers, to promote, support and facilitate the provision of sustainable rural transport modes to key tourist locations within the county.



## Tourism Accommodation

Tourism can generate immense benefits to the local economy, and it is therefore considered appropriate to maintain, improve and increase the provision of high-quality accommodation for visitors and encourage longer term stays in the county. While it is an objective for new tourist accommodation to locate in towns and villages, in close proximity to services and amenities, it is also recognised that some forms of tourism developments, due to their scale or nature, may require a location outside of settlement boundaries. Such developments and their requirement to locate outside of an established settlement, will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, having regard to their nature, scale, site suitability and normal planning considerations.

### Tourism Accommodation Policies

<b>TRP 25</b>	To promote the sustainable development of the tourism sector in appropriate locations throughout the county.
<b>TRP 26</b>	To encourage proposals to reinstate, conserve and/or replace existing ruinous or disused dwellings for holiday home purposes, subject to normal planning considerations including design, safe access and provision of any necessary wastewater disposal facilities.

### Tourism Accommodation Objectives

<b>TRO 16</b>	<p>To ensure that tourism related accommodation such as holiday homes, hotels, caravan/camping parks, glamping etc. are primarily located within existing settlements where there is existing infrastructure provision to service the development and where they can contribute to maintenance of essential rural services.</p> <p>Certain forms of low-impact tourist accommodation such as Camping and Glamping/Pod sites may also be considered outside of existing settlements where it is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposed to incorporate the reuse an existing structure as an integral part of the development.</li> <li>• Adjacent to, and capable of availing of, an existing appropriate commercial enterprise or community facility or located on an existing farm</li> </ul> <p>In all cases the facility shall be of an appropriate scale for the location and shall have a high standard of design, layout, landscape, including Sections 6.2 and 6.3 of the Development Management Standards (Volume 2), and environmental protection so as not to impact negatively on the visual and residential amenity of the area or have significant adverse effects on the environment, including the integrity of the Natura 2000 network.</p>
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<b>TRO 17</b>	To facilitate, where appropriate, the conversion of former demesnes or estate dwellings and their outbuildings into tourism facilities, subject to good planning principles and architectural practice.
<b>TRO 18</b>	To facilitate the sustainable development of a variety of quality tourist accommodation types, at suitable locations, throughout the county.
<b>TRO 19</b>	To positively consider the development of new hotels in existing settlements, with particular preference for locations in larger settlements. In rural locations (i.e village/ rural nodes), it must be demonstrated that: (i) the area proposed to be served by the new development has high visitor numbers associated with an existing attraction / facility; (ii) a need for new / additional hotel type accommodation for these visitors has been identified having regard to the profile of the visitor and the availability and proximity of existing hotels in the area; and (iii) the distance of the location from a significant settlement is such that visitors to the area/attraction are unlikely to avail of existing hotel facilities.
<b>TRO 20</b>	To positively consider the (part) conversion of existing dwellings to Bed & Breakfasts (B&Bs) and Guesthouses, to be operated by the owner-occupier of the dwelling. Applications for new build B&Bs /guesthouses will in the first instance be evaluated as private dwellings and the objectives and standards applicable in that area type (e.g. large town, rural town, rural area, etc) will be applied.
<b>TRO 21</b>	To ensure that holiday home / self-catering developments on a farm holding shall be provided by farmhouse extension or by the utilisation of other existing dwellings / structures on the property. Only where it has been demonstrated that these are not viable options, will permission be considered for new build development. Any new build development shall be in close proximity to the existing farmhouse.
<b>TRO 22</b>	To facilitate the development of hostels along established walking / hiking routes and adjacent to existing tourism / recreation facilities, subject to normal planning criteria.

### 5.4.3.3 Key Tourism Pillar 3: Flagship Infrastructure Projects

A programme of infrastructural improvements has been identified through the Tourism Section of Mayo County Council to meet gaps in the existing tourist product and to address future product needs. The programme includes the delivery of a number of flagship tourism projects throughout the county which are designed to provide new and innovative activities.

## Flagship Infrastructure Projects Policies

### 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.

## Flagship Infrastructure Projects Objectives

### TRO 23

To strategically facilitate the development of infrastructural flagship projects through the implementation of the National Tourism Strategy 'People, Place and Policy: Growing Tourism to 2025' Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Mayo County Council Tourism Strategy 'Destination Mayo'.

**TRO 24**

To identify opportunities for funding for Flagship Projects, including LEADER, national and European funding schemes and seek to maximise the benefit of such funding opportunities for County Mayo.

### Wild Atlantic Way – Discovery Points

The Wild Atlantic Way has been very successful tourism initiative by Fáilte Ireland, particularly for the West of Ireland. It showcases the natural assets and outstanding scenery of the West and has been an important economic driver for County Mayo to date. Mayo County Council recognises that the Wild Atlantic Way is essential to the future of tourism and economic growth in the county. The Wild Atlantic Way is one of the longest defined coastal routes in the world, stretching approximately 2,500km. The section of the Wild Atlantic Way which runs through Mayo is a 543km coastal drive, from Killary Harbour in the south, to Ballina in the north of the county and beyond into County Sligo. The route contains 35 Discovery Points, three of which are Signature Points (Downpatrick Head, Keem Bay & Killary Harbour). Pivotal to the success of the initiative is investment in necessary infrastructure along the way, including signage and parking facilities. Signature Discovery points are worthy of significant investment and works have been completed at Downpatrick Head. Planning and design of a Signature Discovery Point is ongoing for Keem Bay, including improved walk access and improved toilet facilities. It is intended that this Signature Discovery Point will magnetise visitors to the Wild Atlantic Way and Achill, in particular”.

### Walking and Greenways

Walking is Mayo’s signature activity product, and Mayo has successfully positioned itself as the Walking Capital of Ireland. Infrastructural developments include the consolidation, development and enhancement of trailhead facilities, combining with other activities such as cycling and water-based activities, to optimise the infrastructural investment. Ongoing investment in the maintenance and upkeep of existing trails to international best practice standard is recommended, along with the further development of long-distance iconic walking trails such as the coastal trail.

Investment in greenway development has proved extraordinarily beneficial for Mayo tourism in the past, and continued investment in greenway development is identified as an infrastructural priority in the Mayo Tourism Strategy. Flagship cycling infrastructure include creating new and improved linkages and facilities along the Clew Bay Greenway, the development of interurban greenways between Castlebar and Ballina and town greenways, so that the enjoyment of the wealth of natural heritage and amenity may be maximised and such assets for the purposes of tourism can be realised. This connectivity will also further facilitate activity tourism, the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society, improve health and wellbeing, job creation and improve settlement connectivity.

## Walking and Greenway Policies

**TRP 28** To support the implementation of the NWRA Regional Outdoor Recreation Strategy, through the extension of greenways, walking routes, tracks and trails within the county and the integration and linkage of them with other existing / proposed greenways, walking routes, tracks and trails, both within and outside County Mayo.

**TRP 29** To support the progression of long-distance linear greenways and greenway town networks, and the further development and improvements of the following walking trails and coastal paths in County Mayo - Westport/Cong Walking trail; Croagh Patrick trail upgrade; Tourmakeady Trail; Bangor trail; Céide /Downpatrick Coastal Path; and Slievemore Trail, in conjunction with the Tourism Section and other relevant stakeholders.

### Marine Facilities

The importance of Mayo’s coastline and waterways to the tourism product is immense. Infrastructural development, ranging from car park enhancements, toilet, changing and shower facilities to more comprehensive Activity Service Centres, enables these destinations to become more attractive to a wider range of activity enthusiasts. Marina, pontoon and mooring facilities are also an important addition for marine leisure/tourism hubs and their development.

## Marine Facilities Policy

**TRP 30** To support the protection and enhancement of our islands, coastline and waterways as tourism products and attractions, subject to community and environmental carrying capacity.

## Marine Facilities Objectives

**TRO 25** To identify strategic marine locations, in line with the Mayo Tourism Strategy and Action Plan, for the development of pontoon and mooring facilities.

**TRO 26** To explore the development of activity service centres in accordance with the Mayo Tourism Strategy and Action Plan.

**TRO 27** To investigate facility upgrades at Roonagh Pier.

## Adventure

Mayo is a premiere destination for adventure and lends itself well to adventure activities due to its impressively wild landscape, rugged coastline and the wide availability of adventure product in the county. A number of actions in the Destination Mayo Action Plan relate to infrastructural works which will underpin the objective of Mayo being a premiere destination for Adventure. These include the development of a National Outdoors Pursuits Centre in Castlebar, extension of the Blueway water trails and the development of “Get out there” Services centre at strategic adventure locations in the county. These proposed developments are investment heavy and will be subject to external grant funding being available to Mayo County Council.

### Adventure Policy

**TRP 31**

To support the development of an activity centre at Keel and activity hub at Lough Lannagh, Castlebar.

## Lakes of Mayo

In addition to Mayo’s lengthy coastline, Mayo’s lakes are also popular with leisure tourism and water sports enthusiasts, primarily for boating, kayaking, angling and swimming. Access to the lakes can be challenging, therefore, a series of infrastructural developments, primarily the installation of pontoons, marina and angling post facilities, are required. Mayo’s lakes also have potential for land-based activity usage too, with the potential to develop and enhance circumnavigatory cycling and walking trails. Parking facilities and lay-bys in scenic areas are also necessary to allow visitors enjoy scenic areas along themed touring routes around the county.

### Lakes Objective

**TRO 28**

To support the protection and enhancement of our counties lakes as visitor attractions, through the identification of infrastructure requirements and development of masterplans including:

- (a) the exploration of the development of the Pontoon Lakes masterplan and construction of a boardwalk in conjunction with the Tourism Section of Mayo County Council.
- (b) working with relevant landholders and recreational/tourism agencies to increase access to Mayo’s lakes.

### 5.4.4 Public Rights of Way

Public rights of way constitute an important recreational amenity for local people and visitors and their enjoyment of landscapes, natural heritage as well as providing linkages to lakes and forests. The Council recognises the importance of protecting existing public rights of way and their role in facilitating the development of walking trails in areas of high amenity value. Several walking routes exist throughout the county which provide important access networks. This is an important recreational resource, the integrity of which should be protected. The impact of any proposed development on these routes should be taken into account when considering applications for permission for developments in their vicinity.

## Public Rights of Way Policy

<b>TRP 32</b>	To preserve and protect verified public rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other places of natural beauty or recreational utility.
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## Public Rights of Way Objectives

<b>TRO 29</b>	<p>The Council, within the lifetime of this plan, aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) Identify, preserve and enhance existing accesses and public rights of way to recreational areas including the coast, upland areas, lakeshores, river-bank areas and heritage sites.</li> <li>(b) Where necessary, establish new accesses and public rights of way to recreational areas including the coast, upland areas, lakeshores, river-bank areas, and heritage sites in co-operation with landowners and the local community. When public rights of way are identified, the owners of the public rights of way shall be notified in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).</li> <li>(c) Map public rights of way in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).</li> </ul> <p>(a) and (b) shall be carried out in accordance with best sustainable management practices, any guidance from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and 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.</p>
<b>TRO 30</b>	To seek to identify and protect over the lifetime of the Plan further existing <u>verified</u> rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other place of natural beauty or recreational utility, as they become available to the Planning Authority over the lifetime of the plan. (Accompanied by mapping showing public rights of way).