

OFFALY TOURISM STRATEGY 2023-2027





OFFALY
TOURISM
STRATEGY
2023-2027



Contents



6	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
12	1 INTRODUCTION
12	1.1 Overview
13	1.2 Approach
13	1.3 Structure of Report
15	PART ONE: SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS
16	2 CONTEXT
16	2.1 Strategic Context
20	2.2 Progress Since Last Strategy
22	2.3 Tourism in Offaly: Key Performance Metrics
23	2.4 International Trends
25	3 MARKET ASSESSMENT
25	3.1 Demand-Side Review: Markets, Segments & Consumers
26	3.2 Supply-Side Review: Tourism in Offaly
38	4 GAP ANALYSIS
41	PART TWO: STRATEGIC RESPONSE
42	5 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK
42	5.1 Sustainable Tourism Development
43	5.2 Strategic Priorities & Vision
45	5.3 The Strategic Framework
50	6 RISK ASSESSMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION
50	6.1 Risk Assessment
52	6.2 Implementation
53	6.3 Measurement
54	7 ACTION PLAN
57	Strategic Area 1: Infrastructure Development And Maximisation
60	Strategic Area 2: Gateway, Cluster And Attraction Development
69	Strategic Area 3: Industry Development And Support
72	Strategic Area 4: Marketing And Communications



Tables and Figures



9	Fig. 1:	Strategic Framework for Offaly Tourism
17	Fig. 2:	Strategic Context
18	Fig. 3:	Destination Development Based on Maturity
21	Fig. 4:	Mapping Relevant Public Investment, County Offaly
24	Fig. 5:	Key Consumer Trends for Tourism
27	Fig. 6:	Main Routes, Towns and Villages in Offaly
29	Fig. 7:	Key Natural Features
30	Fig. 8:	Key Recreational Amenity Trails
31	Fig. 9:	Key Tourist Sites & a Attractions
32	Fig. 10:	Key Heritage Assets
37	Fig. 11:	Main Accommodation Hubs in Offaly and Surrounding Counties
42	Fig. 12:	The VICE Model for Sustainable Tourism Development
45	Fig. 13:	Strategic Framework for Offaly Tourism
22	Table 1:	County Offaly's Comparator Benchmark Set
28	Table 2:	Relevant Tourism Locations' Distances to Tullamore and Birr
33	Table 3:	Key Offaly Visitor Attractions
36	Table 4:	Accommodation Capacity in County Offaly
38	Table 5:	Markets and Segments





Executive summary

Background

County Offaly has an abundant variety of natural environment and heritage, and is, as yet, relatively undiscovered in tourism terms - which lays the foundation for a wide range of authentic nature and heritage related experiences. It can be both a playground for those looking for the adrenaline thrills of the mountains and water while also offering slower paced experiences for visitors seeking rest, retreat and rejuvenation.

Tourism has a valuable role to play as a driver of economic growth and as a contributor to the sustainability of rural communities in Offaly. Currently in the County, over 1,000 jobs are supported by tourism¹, and there is considerable potential for this to increase as well as for tourism to play a pivotal role in wider regeneration, innovation and social enhancement.

This Tourism Strategy builds on, and integrates, the extensive work that is ongoing in the County, not only in relation to tourism but also in other areas that help support the development of the County as a successful tourism destination. These include investment projects in infrastructure, public realm, recreation and heritage.

Most importantly, this Offaly Tourism Strategy 2023-2027 provides a framework for a shared understanding of the key factors that can support sustainable tourism growth and an action plan for shared delivery.

The report is structured in two main parts: Part 1 presents an overview of key findings from the situational analysis, while Part 2 presents the strategic response and concludes with a detailed Action Plan.

¹ Based on Fáilte Ireland tourism data. Fáilte Ireland estimates that every 1,000 overseas tourists support approximately 20 jobs.

Context

At an international level, Ireland is a signatory of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which places sustainability at the heart of planning and development, and frames all agendas and policies to 2030 - including the Offaly Tourism Strategy.

At a national level, the Strategy has been developed in the context of a number of overarching Strategies and Plans that set the direction for national, regional and county development. These include Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework, the National Development Plan, The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region, and the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027, Offaly Economic Strategy & Action Plan. Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy was also critical in providing context and direction.



Progress to Date

Despite the intervention of Covid and allied restrictions for almost half the period of the expired Tourism Strategy, significant progress has been made and is ongoing in relation to the development of tourism in the County. The following are some of the key areas of progress.

- **Clonmacnoise** - a Masterplan is currently being developed for the site, including enhancing the visitor experience at the site, transport links and visitor services at Shannonbridge.
- **Birr** - There has been ongoing development of the visitor experience at Birr Castle Demesne as well as development of Birr as a Tourism Destination Town.
- **Tullamore DEW** - The new Distillery Visitor Experience and distillery tour opened in 2022.
- **Lough Boora Discovery Park** - There has been ongoing development of the visitor experience, including enhanced access to the Grand Canal Greenway.
- **Slieve Bloom Mountains** - There is ongoing work in delivering a planned 100km mountain bike experience.
- **River Shannon** - The delivery of the River Shannon Tourism Masterplan continued, including: a Masterplan for Banagher as an activity hub on the river, and a number of projects at Shannonbridge.

In addition to the above, there has been significant progress over the period of the last Strategy in the development of outdoor recreation infrastructure, in particular the ongoing delivery of the **Grand Canal Greenway**, where 46km have been completed to date and works are continuing to complete the Offaly section in total (68.6km) before the end of 2023. Additional cycleway linkages to Boora and Kilbeggan, for example, further integrate other parts of the County with the new Greenway. There have also been many public realm and town/village enhancement projects that further contribute to the County's appeal for visitors.

Finally, there has been notable progress in the marketing of County Offaly as a tourism destination with the active support of Offaly County Council for tourism through the establishment of the Tourism Team within the Council in 2018, the opening of the Tourist Office in 2019, strong publicity and media coverage, and a new attractive tourism marketing website, www.visitoffaly.ie.

The Current Opportunity

Offaly County Council and the Municipal Districts have many ongoing projects that will impact the tourism experience across the County. These relate to Greenway development, public realm, regeneration and other works funded through a variety of funding streams. These projects, along with the actions and initiatives identified in the Offaly County Development Plan and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy, are integrated into this new Offaly Tourism Strategy in order to ensure full synergy as well as optimisation of opportunity and resources.

In addition, the growing and urgent need to address issues relating to climate change, and the associated emphasis on the rapid transition from carbon-based to more sustainable forms of energy generation, establish a particularly critical context for tourism growth in County Offaly. Tourism - as a tool of social and economic regeneration - offers an opportunity to provide for a more balanced transition to sustainable living for communities and businesses. Regenerative tourism clearly offers an opportunity for the County.

The Strategic Framework

The focus for this Offaly Tourism Strategy 2023-2027 is on establishing a strong base for future growth. This will be done through maximising recent and ongoing investment, creating new opportunities, harnessing technology where appropriate, supporting industry growth, and marketing.

It is evident from the context analysis that a core strength of Offaly lies in its natural environment. Outdoor recreation appeals to most of the key segments and there are opportunities to maximise and integrate ongoing investment and development in this area through the following three priorities.

1. Ensuring full delivery of planned recreation infrastructure and tourism initiatives
2. Enhancing connectivity between trails, trail towns/villages, gateway hubs/towns and attractions/sites
3. Activating infrastructure

It is also evident that there is limited tourism product/experiences for almost all visitor segments, while there are opportunities to maximise Offaly's strengths in filling this gap through prioritising the following.

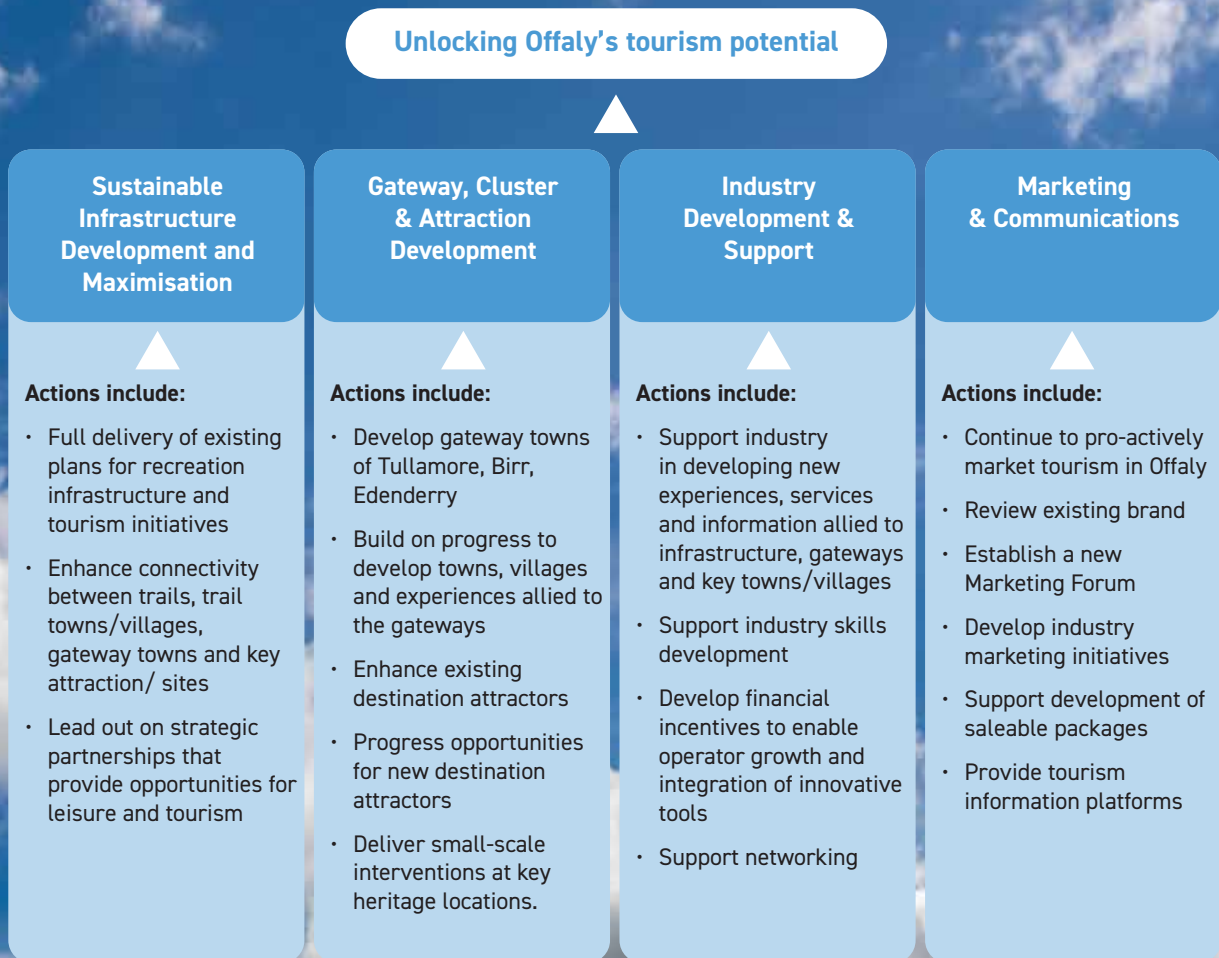
4. Enhancing existing destination attractors
5. Progressing opportunities for new destination attractors
6. Developing key hub/gateway towns
7. Developing clusters allied to the hubs/gateways
8. Delivering small-scale interventions at key locations to 'open up' heritage stories
9. Collaborating with strategic partners to deliver new products

These nine areas are the Strategic Priorities for tourism in Offaly for the coming five years. Actions related to delivery of these Priorities are detailed in the Action Plan, Section 7, and underlying them is a commitment to people, planet and prosperity - the pillars of a resilient tourism economy.

The Strategic Framework provides a practical structure that will guide Offaly Tourism Marketing CLG and partner departments in Offaly County Council in delivering on the Strategic Priorities identified above. The Framework also includes additional key areas without which the Strategic Priorities will not be fully delivered and which are essential in providing a solid foundation for future growth, such as:

- industry support and development
- marketing
- management
- implementation
- and measurement

Fig. 1: Strategic Framework for Offaly Tourism



Foundation: strategic collaboration with key stakeholders and communities; and sustainable principles

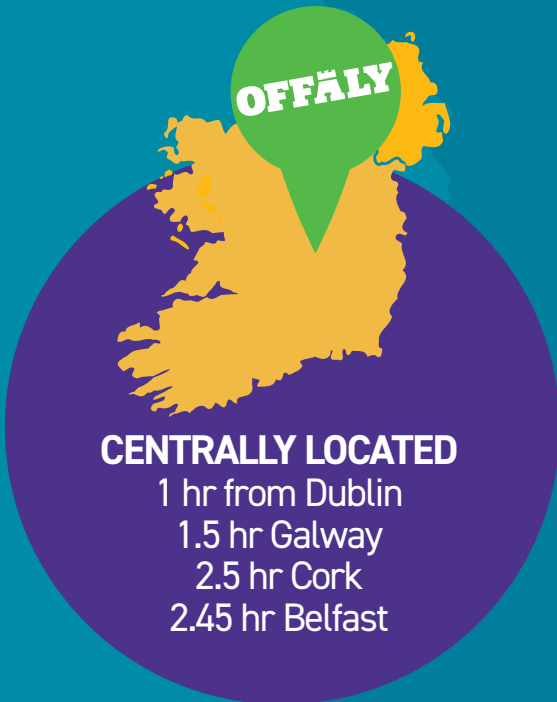


OFFALY

IRELAND'S HIDDEN GEM



Clonmacnoise
 Birr Castle Demesne
 Lough Boora Discovery Park





WALKING TRAILS

355kms

of Waymarked Walks

UNIQUE EXPERIENCES



Foraging
Glass Making
Skydiving!

Ireland's largest one-day show




TULLAMORE SHOW

MIGHTY SHANNON



Boat Tours
Water Sports
Cruising Experiences

SLIEVE BLOOMS



2,300 Hectares
16 Looped Walks

Ireland's largest state owned
Nature Reserve



1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

Tourism has a valuable role to play as a driver of economic growth and as a contributor to the sustainability of rural communities in Offaly and Offaly County Council has played an active role in developing tourism. Currently in the County, over 1,000 jobs are supported by tourism², and there is considerable potential for this to increase as well as for tourism to play a pivotal role in wider regeneration, innovation and social enhancement.

In 2022, Offaly Tourism Marketing CLG issued a public tender for the development of a new five-year tourism strategy for the County that would build on Offaly County Council's Tourism Statement of Strategy 2017-2022. The Objectives for the new strategy were identified as follows.

- A five-year tourism strategy to guide the recovery, sustained growth and development of tourism
- The strategy is expected to contribute to economic growth and wellbeing in the County
- It must ensure sustainability as a fundamental principle
- It must also have particular regard to offering world-class experiences in culture/heritage, outdoor activities, and health and wellbeing
- It will remain focused on the needs and motivations of key domestic and international markets, and maintain an integrated approach with the needs of local communities.

The strategy builds on, and integrates, the extensive work that is ongoing in the County not only in relation to tourism but also other areas that help support the development of the County as a successful tourism destination. These include investment projects in infrastructure, public realm, recreation and heritage.

² Based on an analysis of Fáilte Ireland tourism data. Fáilte Ireland estimates that every 1,000 overseas tourists support approximately 20 jobs.

Most importantly, this Offaly Tourism Strategy 2023-2027 provides a framework for a shared understanding of the key factors that can support sustainable tourism growth in the County and an action plan for shared delivery. After several difficult years of a decline in international tourism and restrictions on domestic travel, it presents a roadmap that sees a consolidation of effort and a return to modest growth by the end of the five-year period.

1.2 Approach

During the period July 2022-June 2023, CHL Consulting Co. Ltd. supported the development of this new strategy, the results of which are published here. The approach taken included thorough desk and market research, public surveying, individual and group consultations, and detailed discussion with key stakeholders³. The programme was overseen by a Steering Group that included representation from Offaly Tourism Marketing CLG, Local Enterprise Office Offaly, Offaly County Council, Fáilte Ireland and the tourism industry. The project team is grateful for all those who took time to respond to the survey, contribute to discussions and provide information.

1.3 Structure of Report

The report is structured in two main parts, with a detailed roadmap for strategy delivery provided in the Action Plan in Section 7.

Part 1 presents an overview of key findings from the situational analysis, providing an understanding of the current dynamics of tourism in County Offaly as well as more generally, and establishing a robust basis for future measurement. It concludes with a Gap Analysis.

Part 2 presents the strategic response and introduces the key objectives for the next five years along with a framework structure for the implementation of actions that will deliver on those objectives. It also identifies partnerships, implementation factors and risks that are to be considered in successfully delivering the new strategy. It concludes with a detailed Action Plan.



³ Approximately 25 individual consultations were undertaken and 130 responses were received to the survey, including one submission.



J.J. HOUGHS

SINGING PUB

Authentic Irish

MUSIC



TONIGHT

PART ONE

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS



2. CONTEXT

2.1 Strategic Context

At an international level, Ireland is a signatory of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which places sustainability at the heart of planning and development and frames all agendas and policies to 2030.

At a national level, the Offaly Tourism Strategy has been developed in the context of a number of overarching Strategies and Plans that set the direction for national, regional and county development, and it is informed by them. These include Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework, the National Development Plan, The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region, and the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 - as illustrated in Figure 2.

Fig. 2: Strategic Context



The Offaly County Development Plan sets out a large number of actions and guiding principles that will impact the attractiveness of the County from a tourism perspective. These include actions relating to:

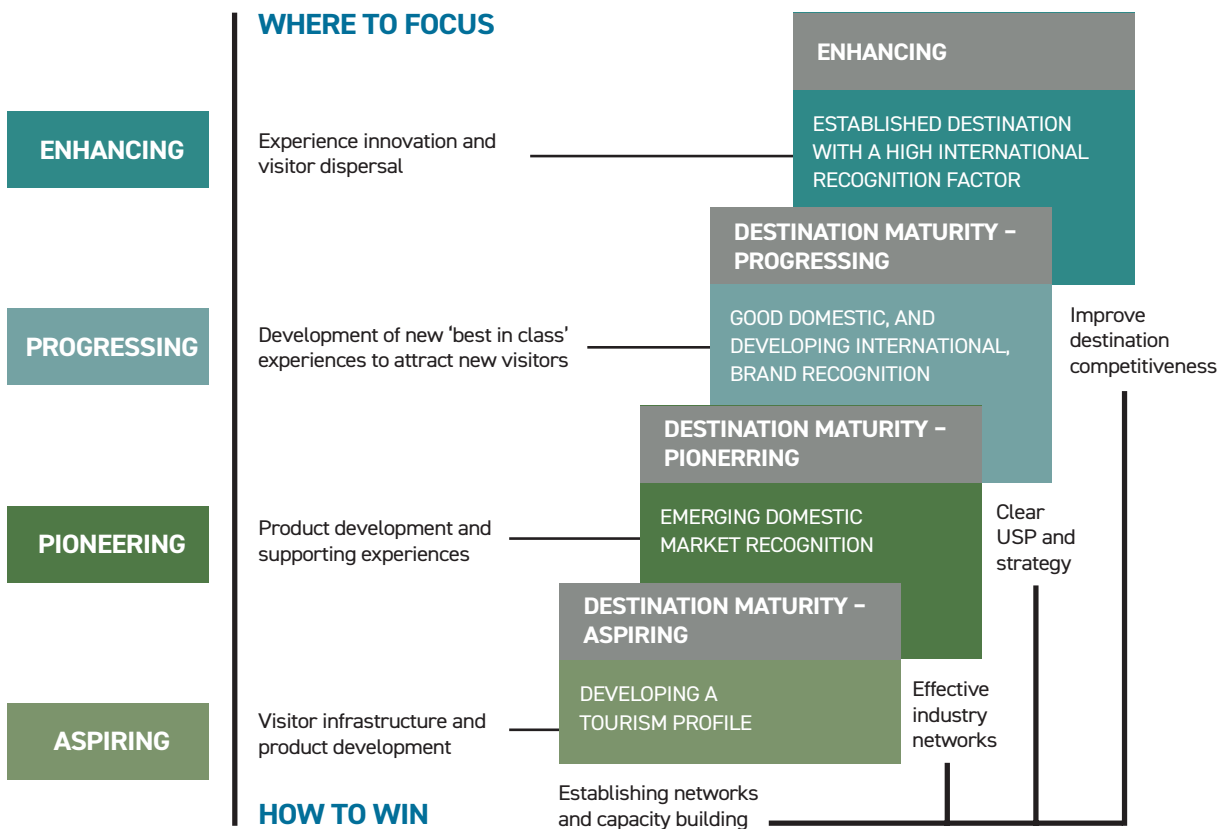
- the co-ordination of tourism projects with strategic partners
- tourism planning
- accommodation
- experience development
- destination development and management
- sustainability.

In addition, two regional tourism strategies provide further context for the development of tourism in Offaly: Fáilte Ireland’s Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands

Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023-2027 and the Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030 - both of which were subject to full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA) which provide further environmental protection measures.

Offaly is now entirely within Fáilte Ireland’s regional tourism brand Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands, and the Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy introduces a new destination maturity model that identifies the level of maturity of the various destinations in Ireland. Offaly is identified as ‘aspiring’ and ‘pioneering’, meaning that it is only developing a tourism profile in most areas and needs to focus on infrastructure and product/ experience development, with attention to capacity building and the establishment of effective industry networks.

Fig. 3: Destination Development Based on Maturity⁴



4 Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023 – 2027, Fáilte Ireland

The Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy also identifies initiatives that provide opportunities for coordinated development in County Offaly, including initiatives relating to:

- sustainability
- industry and skills development
- destination development and management, including a new Mid-Shannon and Midlands Destination and Experience Development Plan⁵
- accommodation
- experience development
- transport
- marketing

The new Offaly Tourism Strategy is also informed by a large number of other plans not mentioned in Fig. 2. These include the following.

- Offaly Arts Strategy 2018-2022
- Offaly Heritage Plan 2023-2027
- Offaly Culture and Creative Strategy
- Offaly Sports Partnership Plan
- Local Area and Town Plans
- The Shannon River Tourism Masterplan
- The Beara Breifne Way Tourism Masterplan
- The Regional Food and Drink Strategy
- The Slieve Blooms Tourism Development Plan
- Offaly Digital Strategy
- Offaly Climate Change Adaptation Strategy
- Night Time Economy Task Force
- Tourism Strategies for Neighbouring Counties
- Feasibility Study for a Major Cycling Destination in the Midlands
- Creative Ireland
- Just Transition Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme for Ireland's Midlands 2023-2026
- Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan

Offaly County Council and the Municipal Districts also have many ongoing projects that will impact the tourism experience across the County. These relate to Greenway development, public realm, regeneration and other works funded through a variety of funding streams (e.g. Just Transition, URDF, RRDF, Towns and Villages, ORIS⁶). These projects, along with the actions and initiatives identified in the Offaly County Development Plan and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy, are integrated into this new Offaly Tourism Strategy in order to ensure full synergy as well as optimisation of opportunity and resources.

In addition, the growing and urgent need to address issues relating to climate change, and the associated emphasis on rapid transition from carbon-based to more sustainable forms of energy generation, establish a particularly critical context for tourism growth in County Offaly. Tourism - as a tool of social and economic regeneration - offers an opportunity to provide for a more balanced transition to sustainable living for communities and businesses. Regenerative tourism clearly offers an opportunity for the County.

Given the timing of this new Tourism Strategy and the announcement of the EU Just Transition Fund, particular attention has also been paid to the short to medium term opportunities presented by Fáilte Ireland's delivery of the new Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme for Ireland's Midlands 2023-2026⁷.

Finally, the Strategy will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment, Ecological Impact Assessment and requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting. Actions arising from the Strategy will demonstrate compliance with the environmental protection measures in the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027, and the accompanying SEA Environmental Report and Natura Impact Report.

⁵ Due to commence late 2023

⁶ URDF: Urban Regeneration and Development Fund; RRDF: Rural Regeneration and Development Fund; ORIS: Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

⁷ The EU Just Transition Fund is one of the pillars of the Just Transition Mechanism under EU cohesion policy and aims to mitigate adverse effects of the green transition by supporting the most affected territory and workers and to promote a balanced socio-economic transition. Fáilte Ireland is delivering the Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme for Ireland's Midlands 2023-2026 as part of the EU Just Transition Fund.

2.2 Progress Since Last Strategy

Offaly County Council's Tourism Statement of Strategy 2017-2022 had two main priorities, namely developing a range of tourism attractions on public land and marketing Offaly as a tourism destination. In addition, Offaly Tourism Marketing CLG focused on highlighting the 'Big 6' tourism attractors (Clonmacnoise, Birr Castle Demesne, Tullamore Dew, Lough Boora Discovery Park, Slieve Bloom Mountains and the River Shannon) as these offer the greatest potential to draw visitors to the County.

Despite the intervention of Covid and allied restrictions for almost half the period of this expired Strategy, significant progress has been made and is ongoing in relation to the development of tourism in the County and with particular regard to the 'Big 6' - as listed below. The following are some of the key areas of progress.

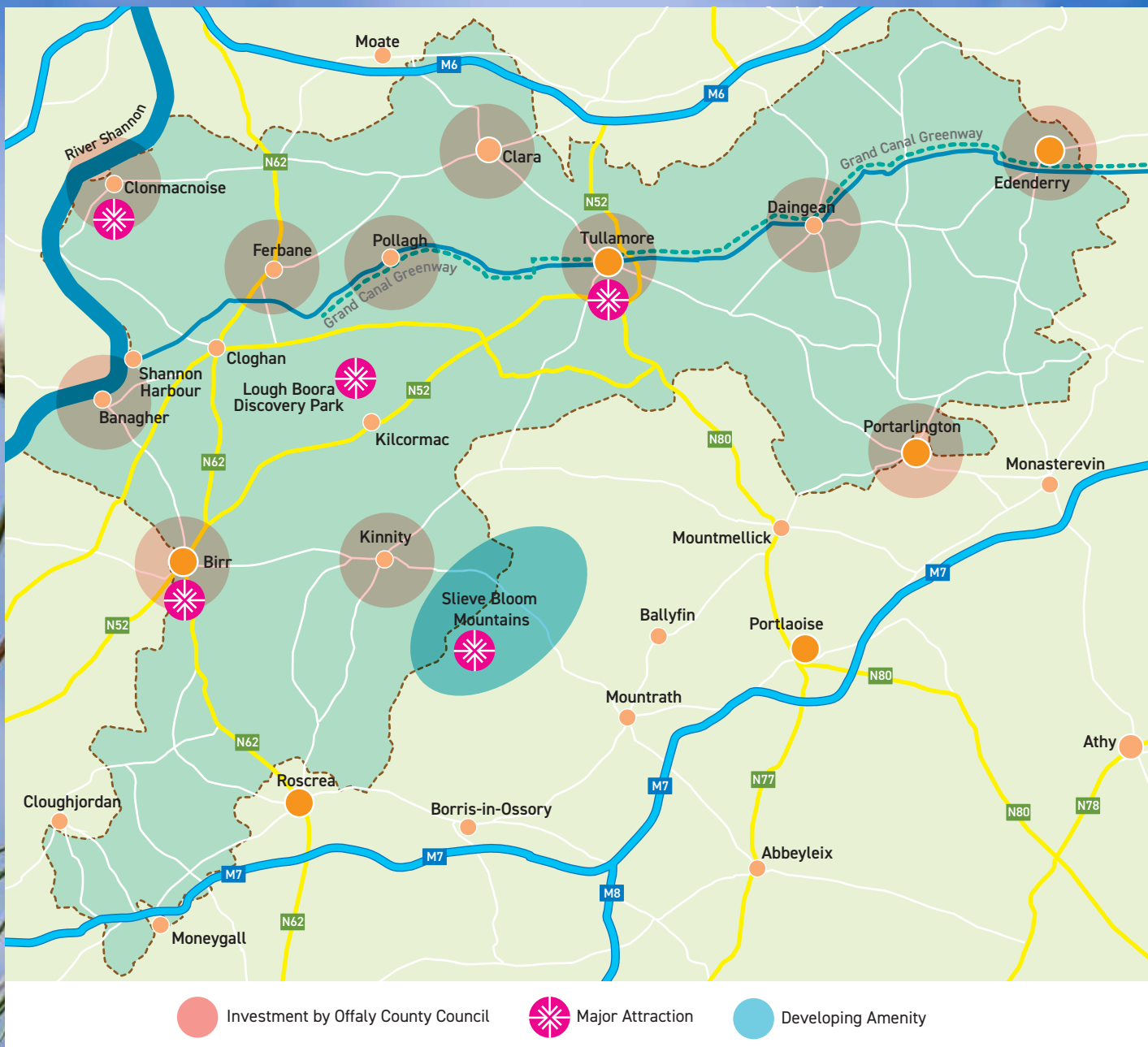
- **Clonmacnoise** - a Masterplan is currently being developed for the site, including enhancing the visitor experience at the site, transport links and visitor services at Shannonbridge.
- **Birr** - There has been ongoing development of the visitor experience at Birr Castle Demesne, including improved access from the town (in development), as well as development of Birr as a Tourism Destination Town.
- **Tullamore DEW** - The new Distillery Visitor Experience and distillery tour opened in 2022, with the old visitor centre in Tullamore town now open as The Old Warehouse, a destination venue bar and restaurant, part-owned by Shane Lowry.
- **Lough Boora Discovery Park** - There has been ongoing development of the visitor experience, including enhanced access to the Grand Canal Greenway.
- **Slieve Bloom Mountains** - There is ongoing work in delivering a planned 100km mountain bike experience.
- **River Shannon** - The delivery of the River Shannon Tourism Masterplan continued, including: a Masterplan for Banagher as an activity hub on the river, and a number of projects at Shannonbridge (potential hub for Clonmacnoise, Just Transition project, Shannon Monastic Greenway feasibility and potential for the Dublin-Galway Greenway to pass through Shannonbridge).

In addition to the above, there has been significant progress over the period of the last Strategy in the development of outdoor recreation infrastructure, in particular the ongoing delivery of the **Grand Canal Greenway**, where 46km have been completed to date and works are continuing to complete the Offaly section in total (68.6km) before the end of 2023. Additional cycleway linkages to Boora and Kilbeggan, for example, further integrate other parts of the County with the new Greenway. There have also been many public realm and town/village enhancement projects that further contribute to the County's appeal for visitors. Figure 4 is an illustration of the spread of public investment in projects across the County between 2019-2021 that have a contribution to make to tourism development.

Finally, there has been notable progress in the marketing of County Offaly as a tourism destination with the establishment of the Tourism Team within Offaly County Council in 2018, the opening of the Tourist Office in 2019, strong publicity and media coverage, and a new attractive tourism marketing website, www.visitoffaly.ie.



Fig. 4: Mapping Relevant Public Investment, County Offaly⁸



⁸ Source: Offaly County Council, 2019 & 2022

2.3 Tourism in Offaly: Key Performance Metrics

Assessing tourism performance in County Offaly currently depends on national published data as provided by the CSO and Fáilte Ireland. However, there are several limitations with this approach to measurement.

- There is a lack of published data at a county level due to small sample sizes in some cases, including for County Offaly
- There is a delay in publishing data at a county level, which limits the ability of the industry to pivot if required during the season
- Daytrips have not been captured to date (although will be available from 2023) - these are an important part of the mix for a County whose tourism base is at an earlier stage of development than more established destinations
- The national methodology for collecting tourism data has changed and comparisons to 2019 are no longer relevant⁹

As a result, there is currently no firm basis for establishing targets and benchmarks at the moment for Offaly.

There is potential to better measure tourism performance through full participation in existing national surveys (for the hotel and visitor attraction sectors) and through the introduction of new County-wide tools. This will be discussed in Part 2 and will form the basis of establishing performance metrics for the future.

However, there are a number of factors against which Offaly can currently be benchmarked, and a comparator set has been established based on a number of characteristics:

- comparable population size and/or tourist¹⁰ numbers
- inland location
- lack of a national 'top' attraction (e.g. Kilkenny Castle, Rock of Cashel)

The results of this analysis are presented in Table 1 and in the commentary that follows.

Table 1: County Offaly's Comparator Benchmark Set¹¹

County	Population	O/seas tourists 2019 (proportion of national)	Domestic trips 2022	Total bed capacity 2022	No. of hotels	Hoatel bed capacity	Hotel bed capacity as % of total bed capacity	No. of attractions	No. of attractions > 100k visitors
Offaly*	82,668	<1%	N/A	1,047	6	890	85%	8	2
Laois*	91,657	1%	N/A	1,612	10	1,437	89%	6	1
Roscommon*	69,995	1%	N/A	1,371	7	654	48%	14	1
Carlow*	61,931	1%	N/A	1,814	9	1,378	76%	6	0
Cavan*	81,201	1%	N/A	3,009	14	2,182	73%	7	0
Westmeath	95,840	1%	295,000	3,090	14	2,539	82%	8	0

⁹ "The (new) *Inbound Tourism* series is compiled using a very different sampling methodology and a very different mode of data collection. Therefore, the results of the respective series are not directly comparable. The *Inbound Tourism* series should be seen as a completely new and different statistical series rather than a continuation or update of the *Overseas Travel and Tourism and Travel* series." CSO

¹⁰ Note that the term 'visitor' designates a person visiting a place other than that of their normal residence and for a period of less than a year, whereas 'tourist' designates a person who spends at least one overnight in the area they are visiting.

¹¹ Sources: Population data - CSO. Tourism and accommodation data - Fáilte Ireland (2017 for overseas, 2019 for domestic). Attraction data - Fáilte Ireland, AVEA and CHL (2019; note, does not include Athlone Castle).

A number of points are worth noting in relation to Offaly's comparative position.

1. Offaly experiences a similar level of international tourism as its benchmark counties, none of whom attract more than 1% of the total overseas tourism market to Ireland.
2. Offaly has the lowest total accommodation capacity of the comparators. In particular, it has less than half the number of hotels when compared to Westmeath and Cavan - an important point given that hotels are important economic drivers for their locations. But it also has a lower proportion of non-hotel beds than most other benchmark counties, indicating potential for further development in smaller forms of accommodation.
3. It is interesting to note that visitor attractions do not appear to have a correlation with visitor numbers. Only Roscommon has significantly more attractions but most of these are small in scale. The most visited attractions in neighbouring Laois and Roscommon are parklands and these have strong demand by residents of the local catchment area, i.e. Emo Court and Lough Key Forest Park.
4. Neighbouring Westmeath has two significant towns with larger populations than either Tullamore or Birr. Mullingar and Athlone both have populations in excess of 20,000, with the level of supporting amenities and facilities that a larger population would support, including restaurants and hotels. These would all support its higher levels of domestic tourism, which includes business travel.

2.4 International Trends

The period 2020-2022 saw three challenging years in tourism resulting from Covid19 and associated restrictions - a period during which international tourism arrivals to Europe dropped 68% in a single year from 2019 to 2020.

At the time of writing, Irish industry and agency projections¹² are for a full return to 2019 levels of tourism by 2025/26, if not earlier, and early indications for 2023 are that this is on track. International arrivals to Europe for Quarter 1 2023 were down only -10%¹³ on 2019, with arrivals to Ireland down an estimated -19%¹⁴. However, a number of issues are likely to impact Ireland's performance, most notably: the weakness of the British economy and its impact on disposable income; the shortage of hire cars; and the reduction in accommodation capacity due to the temporary use of tourism accommodation for refugees.

Emerging from this recent period, a number of consumer trends have developed and/or grown in importance in terms of potential to impact tourism. These are captured in Figure 5 and present opportunities to be optimised in this new Strategy. In particular, Offaly's position as a County that has remained unspoilt by over or poor development, and that has yet to come fully into its own as a tourism destination, means it is well-positioned to take advantage of these trends.

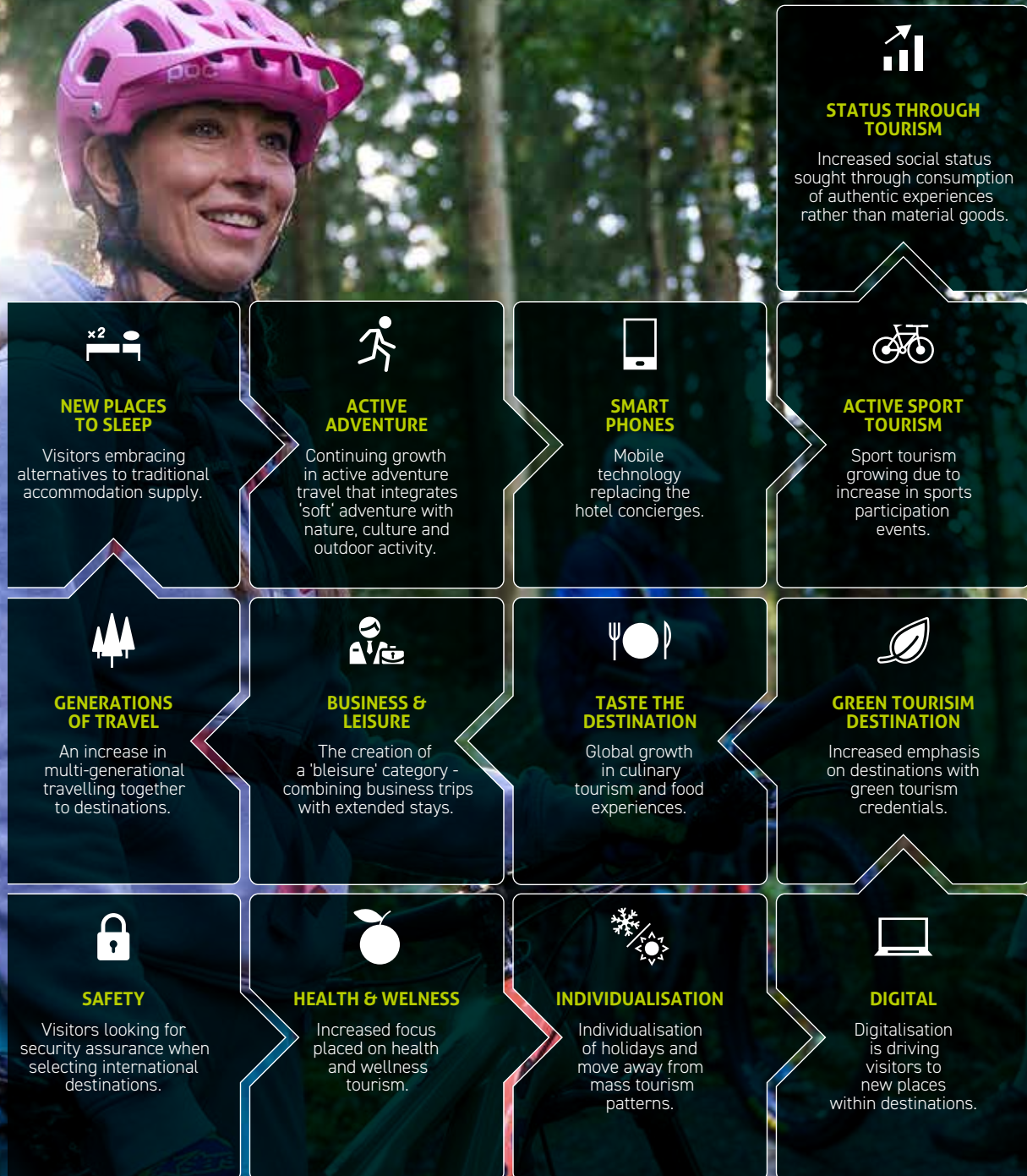


¹² Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC), Fáilte Ireland.

¹³ United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)

¹⁴ Due to methodological changes in the collection of data by the CSO, it is not appropriate to make direct comparisons with 2019, which was the last full pre-Covid year.

Fig. 5: Key Consumer Trends for Tourism



3. MARKET ASSESSMENT

3.1 Demand-Side Review: Markets, Segments & Consumers

Currently less than 1% of overseas tourists to Ireland visit County Offaly, and Offaly/Laois between them account for about 257,000 domestic trips¹⁶.

3.1.1 Characteristics and Segmentation: Overseas Tourism Markets¹⁷

While detailed analysis of tourism at a county level is not available, as noted previously, it is possible to assess the characteristics and behaviours of tourists to the wider Ireland's Hidden Heartlands region. The following are a number of critical points to be considered in the development of tourism in Offaly

- While half of all overseas tourists are in the region primarily for a holiday, 40% are in the region to visit friends or relatives (VFR). This emphasises the importance of word of mouth promotion in Ireland and also suggests that marketing that targets local residents will be important in reaching international tourists.
- Tourism in the region is a seasonal business, with two thirds of all tourists visiting between June and September. Initiatives that enhance shoulder and off-season tourism will be important in supporting sustainable tourism businesses, as will marketing to segments with greater flexibility to travel year round, e.g. digital nomads.
- Tourists to Ireland's Hidden Heartlands also visit other regions: two thirds visit the Wild Atlantic Way and 61% visit Dublin during their stay in Ireland. Promoting Offaly as a central location from which other regions can be readily visited will be a strength for the County.
- Length of stay is strong - with overseas tourists spending an average of six nights in the region. This is a valuable characteristic that needs to be fostered.

Three key segments and four key global markets have been identified by Tourism Ireland as offering the best potential for Irish tourism. The markets are **Britain, France, Germany** and the **United States**, and the two segments that offer a good fit for Offaly are as follows.

- **the Culturally Curious** are motivated primarily by culture, are well-educated, and are interested in authentic experiences that allow them to get under the skin of a destination. They are mainly older adult couples touring independently.
- **the Great Escapers** are motivated by opportunities to spend time in the natural environment with loved ones and are seeking primarily rural experiences and outdoor recreation. They can be travelling with children or as an adult couple.

Other relevant, but niche, segments include: general coach tours, special interest groups, dedicated activity participants and MICE (meetings/incentive/conference/events).

3.1.2 Characteristics and Segmentation: Domestic Tourism Markets¹⁸

As noted, the domestic market is the largest source of tourists for Offaly and the following are some of its primary characteristics.

- Holiday (44%) and VFR (38%) are the main motivators for visiting Ireland's Hidden Heartlands region.
- The region has a particular appeal for families with young children and for couples less than 45 years of age.
- The region also attracts visitors more likely to participate in multiple outdoor activities and to use self-catering accommodation.
- Unlike the overseas tourism markets, domestic tourism has a better seasonal distribution - with a quarter visiting between October and December, and a similar proportion between January and March. This means it plays an important role in supporting the sustainability of businesses, although the strength of the VFR segment means that an increased drive may be required to encourage these visitors to engage with experiences they view as being primarily 'for tourists'.
- Again, unlike the overseas markets, the length of stay is quite short with domestic tourists only staying approximately two nights.

¹⁶ Overseas tourism data relates to 2019 and domestic trips data relates to 2022, Fáilte Ireland.

¹⁷ Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy, 2023-2027

¹⁸ Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy, 2023-2027

Fáilte Ireland's new Motivations Segmentation suggests that the three most important motivators for domestic tourists to Ireland's Hidden Heartlands are:

- **bonding**, the nurturing of relationships with family and loved ones;
- **social energy**, the enjoyment of the atmosphere, vibrancy and energy of a place;
- **adventure**, being active in the outdoors and pushing beyond comfort zones.

Niche domestic segments also include special interest/ needs groups, dedicated activity participants , daytrippers and MICE.

3.2 Supply-Side Review: Tourism in Offaly

3.2.1 Location and Connectivity

County Offaly is located strategically within the centre of Ireland, sharing boundaries with counties Meath, Kildare, Laois, Tipperary, Galway, Roscommon and Westmeath. Tullamore is the County town and the administrative centre, and is designated as a Key Town¹⁹ under the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

The county is well served by road. The M6 Dublin-Galway and the M7 Dublin-Limerick-Kerry are popular routes for domestic and international tourists, presenting both a challenge and an opportunity. The motorways facilitate direct connections, making it easy to bypass Offaly entirely. But they also make Offaly an ideal holiday base from which other destinations can be reached on daytrips, provided the County has sufficient tourism infrastructure and experiences to support its growth as a tourism base. See Fig. 6 and Table 2 for main road network and distances.

¹⁹ Defined by the Settlement Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly as "Large economically active service and/or county towns that provide employment for their surrounding areas and with high-quality transport links and the capacity to act as growth drivers to complement the Regional Growth Centres" (the latter being Athlone in this case)

Fig. 6: Main Routes, Towns and Villages in Offaly



Table. 2: Relevant Tourism Locations' Distances to Tullamore and Birr

Location	Distance to Tullamore	Distance to Birr
Athlone Castle	36mins - 41kms	43mins - 45kms
Kildare Town	46mins - 47kms	1hr 5mins - 95kms
Center Parcs	45mins - 43kms	1hr 5mins - 67kms
Limerick City	1hr 36mins - 116kms	1hr 8mins - 78kms
Bunratty Castle & Folkpark	1hr 37mins - 131kms	1hr 10mins - 93kms
Rock of Cashel	1hr 19mins - 108kms	1hr 11mins - 75kms
Kilkenny	1hr 26mins - 87kms	1hr 16mins - 82kms
Galway	1hr 36mins - 123kms	1hr 29mins - 96kms
Dublin City Centre	1hr 34mins - 101kms	2hrs 9mins - 140kms

There is a good rail service to the north and east of the County, although none to the southern and western areas. In addition, Offaly County Council has an ambition to improve the frequency of trains between Athlone and Dublin, which also serve Portarlinton, Tullamore and Clara. It is also considering the development of Tullamore and Clara Train Stations as transport nodes that would integrate local bus services to the wider catchment, and the possible reopening of Geashill Station²⁰.

For other areas of Offaly, bus services are important for visitors who wish to choose public transport and there are long distance bus routes serving the main towns. At a more local level, Laois Offaly Local Link operates 24 bus routes in Offaly that are valuable in connecting a considerable number of towns and villages²¹. Local Link also runs two Explorer Experience routes during the summer that connect Tullamore and Lough Boora Discovery Park with either Clonmacnoise or Birr and Banagher.

3.2.2 Natural Features

Offaly is well-endowed with a variety of natural landscapes which provide the context and opportunity for sustainable tourism. From a tourism perspective, key natural features are identified in Figure 7. (Green infrastructure is considered separately.)

The County's natural landscapes and its current transition to renewable energy is also creating an opportunity for greater synergy with green renewables, both in terms of the provision of recreational and other tourism amenities as well as for funding.

20 Offaly County Development Plan

21 Full details on routes: www.localinklaoisoffaly.ie

Fig. 7: Key Natural Features

- The Slieve Bloom Mountains:** Approximately 36,000 hectares straddling the borders of counties Offaly and Laois. The area of the County has a number of special environmental designations assigned to it as a Special Protection Area and is currently under sensitive development for recreation.
-
- The River Shannon and its Callows** are of international significance for supporting a diverse range of habitats and species and the area is designated as a Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area. It is currently under sensitive development for recreation. The potential of the River extends beyond on-water recreation to include the towns, villages and sites that lie along the River. Key among these are Banagher, Shannon Harbour, Shannonbridge and Clonmacnoise.
-
- The esker system**, especially Eiscir Riada, is a unique feature and has been mooted as having potential for Geopark development in the longterm. Parts of the system are designated as Natural Heritage Areas.
-
- The Grand Canal:** In addition to opportunities for water-based recreation, especially around key towns of Edenderry, Tullamore and Daingean, the new multi-use Greenway considerably enhances to potential of this nature-based feature. The Grand Canal is a designated proposed Natural Heritage Area.
-
- Croghan Hill:** An extinct volcano and unique feature on the north-eastern Offaly landscape, this Hill is already popular with local residents for walking and appreciating the panoramic views, and is recommended for designation as a geological heritage area.
- Extensive peatlands:** There is a vast peatland network in the County under a variety of ownerships. These include areas that have been developed for visitors, e.g. Lough Boora Discovery Park and Clara Bog Nature Reserve, but there is also an extensive area yet to be developed under the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Bord na Móna management. At the time of writing, €57 million is being allocated under EU Just Transition funding (Priority 2) to private peatlands restoration, and a Bord na Móna strategy for peatlands amenity development is expected in late 2023. These peatlands also feature a night sky that has less light pollution than other areas, providing an opportunity for dark skies experiences.
-
- A range of ecosystems and biodiversity:** wetlands, woodlands, grasslands, rivers, hedgerows.
-
- Protected landscapes:** Natural Heritage Areas (NHA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) - particularly the River Shannon, Slieve Bloom Mountains and peatlands.
-
- Areas of High Amenity (AHA):** These are areas worthy of special protection/enhancement due to their uniqueness and scenic/amenity value. These designations are additional to statutory national and European designations. They include waterways, wetlands, uplands, eskers, peatlands and archaeological/historical landscapes (Clonmacnoise and Durrow).



3.2.3 Activities and Outdoor Recreation

Offaly has a wide diversity of recreational and sporting activities available to locals and tourists. These include: golf, angling, canoeing/kayaking, cruising, equestrian, swimming, bird watching, parachute and skydiving club, playgrounds, gyms, shooting centre, adventure centres, track and field, and the GAA network.

In a County with a significant proportion of natural habitat and landscape, trails are important not only as a recreational amenity for locals and visitors alike, but can also play a vital role in supporting sustainable low-carbon tourism and in developing a network that connects sites, landscapes, towns and villages. By encouraging visitors to walk and cycle (or, indeed, ride or paddle), tourism is distributed across the County and the benefits of tourism can trickle into rural communities. This is well-recognised by Offaly Tourism Marketing CLG and Offaly County Council, and efforts are continuing to develop and promote a variety of trails across the County - see Figures 8 and 9.

Fig. 8: Key Recreational Amenity Trails

- **The Grand Canal Greenway**, which provides a multi-use trail, runs east-west through the northern part of the County, including Edenderry, Daingean, Tullamore and Shannon Harbour, and connecting to Lough Boora Discovery Park.
- There is also a proposal to route the **Athlone-Galway Greenway** through Shannonbridge, which would provide the opportunity for a link to Banagher via Meelick Weir.
- **Slieve Bloom Mountains** is implementing a strategy to provide 100km of mountain bike trails across Offaly and Laois, as well as walking trails and opportunities for horse riding.
- **Long distance walking trails:** Slieve Bloom Way, Offaly Way, Slí Mór Pilgrims' Path
- **Smaller local walks**, e.g. Slí na Sláinte in Cloghan, Tullamore and Clonbullogue.
- Work on a new **Midlands Trails Strategy** to be funded under Just Transition (with an allocation of €30 million).
- **Peatlands and associated railway lines.** There are also significant stretches of land that were formerly in use as railway lines that also provide opportunities for development as trails.
- **Lough Boora Discovery Park** has 50km of trails and connects back to the Grand Canal Greenway, and is part of the Offaly Way.

Also important are the businesses that provide organised outdoor activities as well as equipment hire and instruction. These provide a welcome

for visitors, a destination and point of orientation, and facilitate their connection with Offaly's natural environment and green infrastructure.

Fig. 9: Key Tourist Sites & Attractions





3.2.3 Heritage and Visitor Attractions

County Offaly has a rich heritage that includes a particular strength in early Christian monastic sites, which are scattered across the County, and a concentration of industrial heritage in certain areas, particularly around Clara. Figure 10 presents a summary of these.

Fig. 10: Key Heritage Assets

- Monastic Heritage:** Sites include Clonmacnoise, Leamanaghan, Durrow, Rahan, Killeigh, Seir Kieran, Croghan Hill, Gallen Priory, St. Manchan's Shrine at Boher, Lynally, Letter, Drumcullen, Birr and Kinnitty. Clonmacnoise is currently the subject of a new Masterplan which is being developed by the Office of Public Works (OPW) in partnership with stakeholders. Two of these sites - Clonmacnoise and Durrow - have been identified by Offaly County Council as having potential as prospective UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
- Industrial Heritage:** Offaly's past as a centre for milling and textile and drink production means it has a legacy of historic mills, distilleries and associated structures and sites. In some areas, there is a concentration of such heritage assets and they are sufficiently significant scale to offer good potential for redevelopment for tourism, e.g. in Tullamore, Clara, Birr and Banagher. There is also potential for the redevelopment for tourism of industrial heritage associated with peat production as part of a strategic approach to the peatlands.
- Castles/Stately Homes:** Offaly has up to 200 castle sites but only a handful have potential to be tourism attractions. Of these, Birr Castle Demesne is highly accessible, with the Castle itself open for booked tours during the summer season. Durrow Country House, Charleville and Leap Castles have limited access but potential for further development.
- Historic and Vernacular Architecture:** More broadly, Offaly also has a variety of other historic structures, sites and streetscapes that play a role in creating an attractive destination for visitors, providing opportunities to engage with Irish history and heritage, and offering spaces for events and activities. These include courthouses, houses large and small, original streetscapes and street furniture, canal locks and harbours, and other structures.

In terms of more developed visitor attractions, Offaly has a relatively limited offer when compared to other counties. The main attractions along with their associated level of visitor demand, are listed in Table 3. It should be noted that 2019 was the last

'normal' tourism year as 2020-2022 were impacted by Covid19 restrictions and a pattern of tourism demand that was heavily skewed towards the domestic market.

Table 3: Key Offaly Visitor Attractions

Attraction	Visitor Numbers 2019	2021	2022
Clonmacnoise	141,969	43,325	94,000
Lough Boora Discovery Park	101,000	75,170	N/A
Birr Castle Demesne	97,000	111,000	101,401
Tullamore DEW Experience	37,761 (old centre)	-	New centre opened 2022
Charleville Castle	14,500	-	N/A
Durrow Church & High Cross	4,736	322 (not open to the public)	N/A
Clara Bog Visitor Centre	4,500	Closed	Closed



3.2.4 Towns, Villages and Communities

Offaly's towns and villages, and their resident communities, have potential to play a vital role in the development of the County as a tourism destination. Larger towns, such as Tullamore, Edenderry and Birr, can act as gateways to the County and a base for tourists. These need to offer a wide variety of supporting services and experiences, including accommodation, food, day and evening entertainment, equipment hire and information. Smaller towns and villages can encourage exploration and provide opportunities for tourists to experience authentic rural life and to interact with local people. They can also be destinations in their own right, connecting tourists with local heritage, trails, food, arts and crafts, and essential services.

As noted previously, there has been considerable investment in recent years in towns and villages across the County, and the work of Tidy Towns Groups has also been evident. Most towns and villages are attractive and well-presented, and many have interesting architectural and historical details, e.g. Geashill Village, which is an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA).

3.2.5 Arts, Culture, Festivals and Events

Arts and culture encompasses a variety of genres and forms, including performing arts, film, music, literature and visual arts. A vibrant arts scene will contribute to the attractiveness of Offaly for tourists as well as providing a reason to visit year round. A number of specific aspects of arts and culture are worth noting as having particular potential for tourism:

- The new Tullamore Community Arts Centre and its associated programmes and talent
- Birr Theatre and Arts Centre
- Film Offaly
- High quality arts and community festivals, e.g. Hullabaloo, OFFline Film Festival, Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival, Tullamore TradFest, Shakefest Cultural Dance and Music Festival
- Public art, including Lough Boora's Sculpture Park





The recently-established Birr Festivals' Collective - incorporating Birr Festival of Music, Scripts Ireland's Playwriting Festival, Birr Vintage Week and Arts Festival, OFFline Film Festival and Hullabaloo! Offaly's Children's Arts Festival - is strengthening the position of Birr as a year-round cultural destination and as a major festival location in the midlands. In addition, the sharing of promotion and production resources may, in time, be a model that can be extended to include other events and/or duplicated in other areas. In this context, ensuring an adequate base of accommodation to support events in Birr is an important consideration in consolidating and growing this reputation and strength (see 3.2.6 below).

Other events that offer an opportunity for further tourism promotion and development include the Slieve Bloom Walking Festival and Slieve Bloom MTB Festival, the Tullamore Agricultural Show and the Edenderry International Coarse Angling Festival - all of which have potential for greater integration into their communities and for the development of additional or 'fringe' activities during the period of the events.

3.2.6 Accommodation

Offaly has a lower level of tourism accommodation capacity than surrounding counties, with just over 1,000 beds registered in 2023²² - the majority of which is accounted for by six hotels, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Accommodation Capacity in County Offaly²³

Type	Premises	Rooms	Beds
Hotels	6	359	890
Guesthouse	1	9	21
B&B	9	34	83
Welcome Standard	10	17	53
Total	26	419	1047
Marina		44 Berths	
Airbnb		93 Entire Homes	

Most capacity is clustered around Tullamore and Birr, with limited capacity across the County. This is a critical point in the further development of tourism, as accommodation helps to drive overnight tourism but also without tourism there is no business case for investment in accommodation. A sustainable approach to growing bed capacity is required, with an eye to the development of non-mainstream forms of accommodation that are currently seeing particular demand from tourists, e.g. glamping, unique self-catering, Airbnb, small non-chain

boutique hotels as well as camping and RV parks. There is also potential to make more of the Grand Canal and River Shannon and the use of barges, cruisers and other boats that offer accommodation as well as recreation.

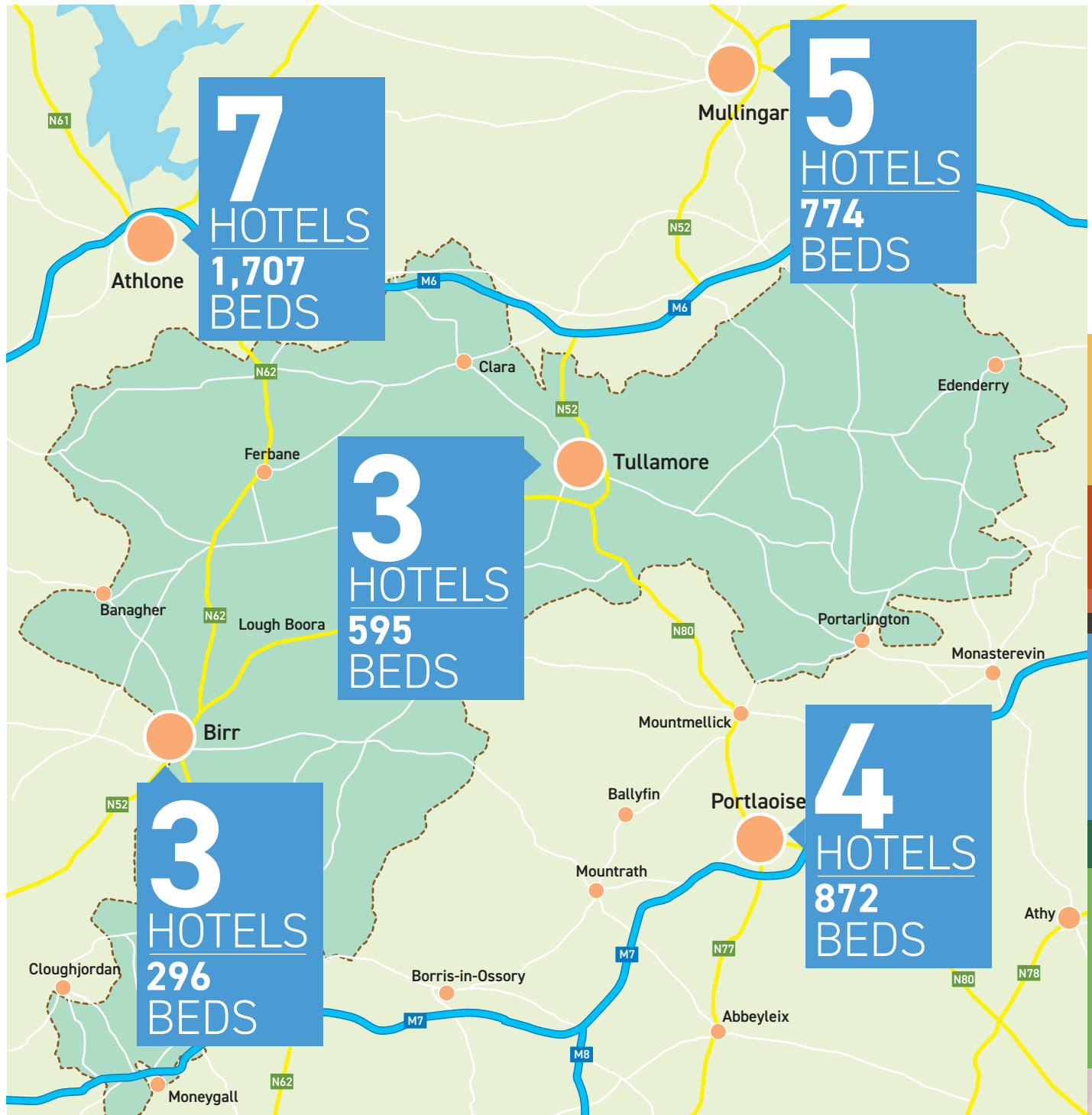
By comparison, Westmeath - with only a slightly larger population than Offaly - has approximately 3,277 beds, Kildare has 3,876 and Laois has 1,562 - see Figure 11.



²² This is the registered bedstock with Fáilte Ireland but it is to be noted that not all capacity is available for tourists at the time of writing due to the use of a significant proportion as emergency accommodation for refugees.

²³ Source: Fáilte Ireland 2023, except Airbnb

Fig. 11: Main Accommodation Hubs in Offaly and Surrounding Counties



3.2.7 Food and Craft

A growing number of artisan food producers and eateries across the County are showcasing high quality local produce, which is also a strategic goal of the Midland Food Strategy. Local food producers, experiences and organisations include Carroll Cuisine, Glenisk, Feighery's Farm, Wild Irish Foragers, Island Farm Foods, Neighbourfood Tullamore, Tullamore Food Fayre, and Ferbane Food Campus. There is potential to collaborate with many of these in showcasing food in a variety of ways across the County.



4. GAP ANALYSIS

Having considered what Offaly has to offer and what the main market opportunities are, we are in a position to assess how the County fares in terms of meeting the needs of the various market segments.

As outlined previously, the domestic market remains the primary source market of tourists to Offaly - which means that opportunities for bonding with loved ones, outdoor adventure and social energy are important motivators. In addition to the

natural environment, culture remains an additional motivator for overseas tourists.

Table 5 breaks these more general motivational segments down into more specific segments from a needs perspectives, and identifies key gaps in Offaly's current tourism offer.

Table 5: Markets and Segments

Primary: Markets/Segments	Needs	Gaps?
Outdoor Actives (casual participants, all markets)	Opportunities for self-guided walking, hiking, cycling, watersports and other outdoor activities - including infrastructure, equipment hire, orientation, parking, dining and accommodation.	Not all infrastructure is fully delivered yet and there could be greater connectivity between trails and with sites/towns/villages. More supports needed to grow this segment: equipment hire, orientation, parking, dining and accommodation.
Domestic Families	Plenty of shared all-weather things to do for a wide range of ages and abilities. Family-friendly dining and accommodation. Equipment hire, taster lessons, camps, 'edutainment' opportunities	Improvements needed in provision and co-ordination of outdoor activities for families, including: equipment hire, locations for water access, lessons. More child-focussed and rainy day product needed for this segment, e.g. arts, culture, heritage, and more family accommodation.
Independent Overseas Tourists	Attractive towns, villages and scenery. Independent discovery. Authenticity. High quality accommodation and dining. An opportunity to get off the beaten track and under the skin of a destination. Culture and heritage.	There is limited tourism-relevant product to support these segments, e.g. accommodation, attractions, activities, retail, dining, and tourism supports in key towns and villages. Opportunities for new destination scale attractors to further attract this segment(e.g. heritage and/or landscape-based attractors of sufficient scale to hold visitors for at least a half day).
Domestic Adult Urban Weekend Breaks	Good value and good quality accommodation and dining, primarily in easily-accessible towns, with things to do during the day (e.g. outdoor activities, boat trips, shopping, wellness).	More development of town-based experiences needed and development of surrounding clusters of towns, villages, sites and experiences.

Secondary: Target Markets/Segments	Needs	Gaps?
Outdoor Actives (dedicated participants, all markets)	As the focus for this segment is on the activity, the primary need is access to the physical space to engage in the activity, e.g. water, trails, mountains. Accommodation and food need to align to, and support that, primary focus.	See also casual participants above. Additional gaps for this segment include clarity over right of access to land and water, downloadable information, easily discoverable specialist guides (people & information) and luggage transfer arrangements.
General Coach Tours (overseas)	Attractive scenery, good road network, hotels that can cater for groups and interesting stops/locations suitable for groups, with coach parking, adequate toilets and refreshments.	Further development of key attractors to hold and grow this segment. Opportunities for new destination scale attractors to further attract coach tours. Additional accommodation.
Special Interest Group Tours (all markets)	Needs depend on interests, e.g. heritage, biodiversity, social. General needs relate to having interesting places to visit, good quality accommodation and food, and available expertise on area of interest.	Small scale development at key heritage sites; availability of information and local guides.
Daytrippers (all markets)	Easy access to locations where there is something interesting to do and see.	Further development of these destinations, including ensuring connectivity with surrounding towns and villages, and provision of equipment hire and refreshments/dining/retail.
Meetings, Incentive, Conferences and Events (all markets)	Interesting, authentic, vibrant locations with suitable venues that can cater for large and small groups with attention to detail and high quality in all aspects. Easily accessible from international arrival point for overseas groups.	Marketing and coordination; identification of interesting venues and operators who can provide high-quality experiences; add-on experiences for business travellers.
Visitors with Disabilities/Limited Mobility (domestic)	Needs depend on interests - this segment can be considered a sub-segment of all the others. Common needs included facilities, services and experiences that are universally accessible.	More universal access experiences and services. Supporting marketing and information. Principles of Universal Design should be integrated in place making and public realm projects.



PART TWO

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

5. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

5.1 Sustainable Tourism Development

The approach taken in this Strategy respects the inter-relatedness of all the various components that combine to deliver tourism. It acknowledges that for tourism to fully have the regenerative impact it is capable of, it is necessary to ensure that development happens in a manner that balances the needs of local residents and the environment with the needs of businesses and of visitors.

This is illustrated by the international VICE Model shown in Figure 12, which has been adopted by Fáilte Ireland and others responsible for tourism development in Ireland.

Fig. 12: The VICE Model for Sustainable Tourism Development



Sustainable tourism takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.

(UNWTO)

5.2 Strategic Priorities & Vision

The focus for this Offaly Tourism Strategy 2023-2027 is on establishing a strong base for future growth - growth that will most likely happen towards the end of this coming five-year period and into the following strategy. This will be done through maximising recent and ongoing investment, creating new opportunities, harnessing technology where appropriate, supporting industry growth, and marketing.

It is evident from the context analysis that a core strength of Offaly lies in its natural environment. Outdoor recreation appeals to most of the key segments and there are opportunities to maximise and integrate ongoing investment and development in this area through the following three priorities.

1. **Ensure full delivery of planned recreation infrastructure and tourism initiatives.** There has been considerable momentum behind the development of and delivery of key projects that will have longterm beneficial impacts on tourism in the County. It is imperative that this momentum continues. Key projects include the Grand Canal Greenway (which is almost fully delivered) and the ongoing delivery of the River Shannon Tourism Masterplan and associated River Shannon town plans.
2. **Enhance connectivity between trails, trail towns/villages, gateway hubs/towns and attractions/sites,** creating unity across a county that has previously appeared at times as split into two distinct areas. This encourages exploration, supporting rural living as well as providing more to do for visitors.
3. **Activate infrastructure,** once in place, by providing support services, experiences and information for users. Infrastructure is an important component of tourism but it is only by facilitating and encourage visitors in its usage that it can fully benefit the County.

It is also evident that there is limited tourism product/experiences for almost all segments, but there are opportunities to maximise Offaly's strengths in filling this gap through prioritising the following.

4. **Enhance existing destination attractors.** The most significant attractors for the County are: Clonmacnoise, Birr Town and Demesne, Lough Boora Discovery Park, the Slieve Bloom Mountains, Grand Canal Greenway and

the River Shannon. These are the subject of important ongoing developments that will provide for additional tourism growth across the County.

5. **Progress opportunities for new destination attractors.** There are a number of opportunities for new attractors of significant scale that would enhance existing towns and/or provide new business in key areas that are currently without a significant attraction. These opportunities are at Durrow Abbey and estate, Charleville Castle and Demesne (both enhancing Tullamore as a gateway town), and Derryounce as a recreation destination and trail hub.
6. **Develop key hub/gateway towns** that provide a concentration of key infrastructure and experiences, e.g. accommodation, dining, retail, activities and attractions. Two towns currently provide the main accommodation stock in the County - Birr and Tullamore - and together with Edenderry they offer the best opportunity for the development of anchor hubs/gateways that would draw visitors into the County and hold them there.
7. **Develop clusters allied to the hubs/gateways** above can create combined value from smaller attractors, sites and experiences - providing more reasons for visitors to stay in Offaly while also dispersing the benefits of tourism to rural communities in a sustainable manner.
8. **Deliver small-scale interventions at key locations to 'open up' heritage stories.** Offaly has a wealth in monastic heritage in particular, as well as in pre-Christian and industrial heritage. Making these sites more accessible in a sustainable manner for visitors - physically, intellectually and emotionally - needs to be a priority.
9. **Collaborate with strategic partners to deliver new products,** particularly with a view to development and repurposing of peatlands and industrial heritage sites. Key partners include Fáilte Ireland, Bord na Móna, Waterways Ireland, OPW, NPWS and Coillte,

These nine areas are the Strategic Priorities for tourism in Offaly for the coming five years, guided by the longer term vision articulated below. Actions related to delivery of these Priorities are detailed in the Action Plan, Section 7, and underlying them is a commitment to people, planet and prosperity - the pillars of a resilient tourism economy.

A Vision for Tourism in Offaly 2027

The ancient Slieve Bloom Mountains and River Shannon border Offaly, offering immersion in nature for those who come looking for relaxation as well as those inspired by the spirit of adventure.

In 2027, Offaly is now a county that champions innovation and sustainability, and encourages its visitors to do likewise. Small local businesses pioneer new approaches to adventure, experience and accommodation, offering unusual and unexpected solutions that surprise and delight visitors: unique off-grid accommodation; off-road trails that connect attractive villages and historic

sites; waterways that offer a variety of activities as well as scenic locations to dine, play and rest.

Local communities are guardians and interpreters of their heritage, willingly sharing it with visitors eager to know more. Digital interpretation and orientation support independent discovery while also contributing to the protection of the rich landscapes.

Nourished by experiences in Offaly's natural environment, good local food, music, culture and engaging events, visitors recharge...naturally.



5.3 The Strategic Framework

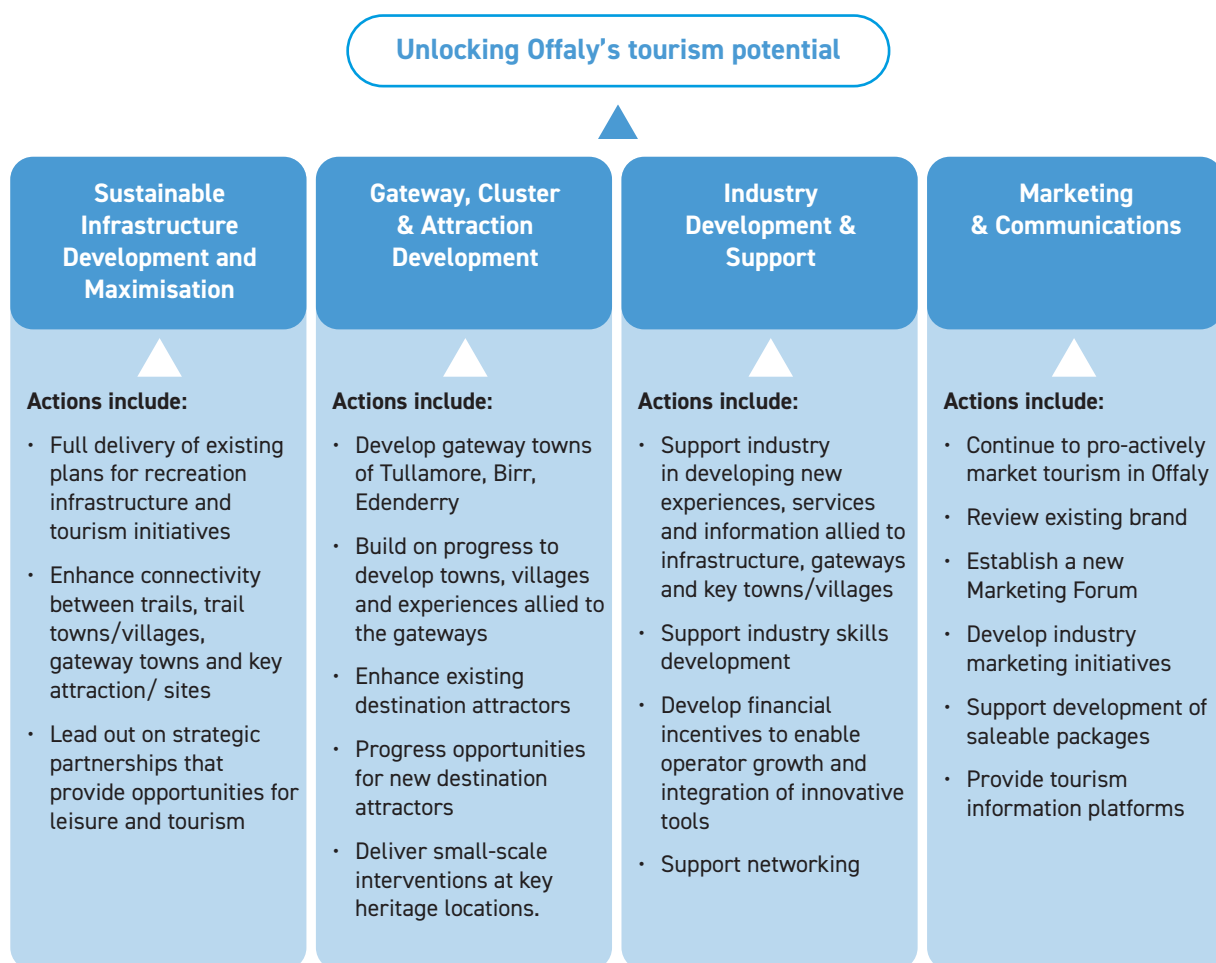
5.3.1 Introducing the Framework

The Strategic Framework, as illustrated in Figure 13, provides a practical structure that will guide Offaly Tourism Marketing CLG in delivering on the Strategic Priorities identified above. The Framework also includes additional key areas without which the Strategic Priorities will not be fully delivered and which are essential in providing a solid foundation for future growth, such as:

- industry support and development
- marketing
- management
- implementation
- and measurement

The Plan will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment, Ecological Impact Assessment and requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting. Actions arising from the plan will demonstrate compliance with the environmental protection measures in the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027, and SEA Environmental Report and Natura Impact Report, as well as the Shannon Tourism Masterplan and Hidden Heartlands SEA ER and Natura Impact Reports as appropriate and relevant.

Fig. 13: Strategic Framework for Offaly Tourism



Foundation: strategic collaboration with key stakeholders and communities; and sustainable principles

5.3.2 The Strategic Framework in More Detail

Pillar 1: Sustainable Infrastructure Development and Maximisation

Infrastructure by itself rarely attracts tourists on its own - although it can do, if it is sufficiently different and unique. However, it provides some of the core building blocks in which tourism is built as well as a very necessary basis for industry and community initiatives which, in turn, offer attractive tourism experiences.

Across the County there has been significant momentum in the development of infrastructure, from Greenways and trails to public realm projects and the provision of new facilities. This Strategy recognises the critical importance of these and therefore the focus of this Pillar relates to the ongoing development of this foundation for future tourism growth.

The priority actions under this Pillar fall primarily within the remit of Offaly County Council and state agencies, but with the cooperation of communities and attractions. Due to the dependency on collaborative efforts there is also therefore an emphasis under this Pillar on the leading and management of strategic partnerships.

As a result, actions under this Pillar are centred around:

- Full delivery of existing plans for recreation infrastructure and tourism initiatives
- Enhancement of connectivity between trails, trail towns/villages, gateway towns and attractions/sites
- Leading out on strategic partnerships that provide opportunities for leisure and tourism in Offaly.

The over-arching objective of these actions is the delivery of a destination that is well-connected through off-road trails that encourage sustainable tourism and which is supported by an integrated approach to tourism development and management.



Pillar 2: Gateway, Cluster and Attraction Development

This Pillar encompasses the core area of experience development. It focuses on the development of towns, villages and visitor attractions, strengthening the tourism experience and providing a greater variety of reasons to visit, and stay in, Offaly.

This Strategy recognises the strategic role of the larger towns in the County - Tullamore, Edenderry and Birr - in providing a base for tourists through the provision of essential services: accommodation, retail, dining, entertainment and orientation. As with Pillar 1, the development of these towns will also create opportunities for businesses to develop new tourism products and experiences (see also Pillar 3). In addition, it recognises the continuing importance of destination attractors in raising awareness of Offaly as a destination and in providing visitors with the motivation to visit.

Further development of towns, villages and attractions will be integrated with one or more gateway towns in order to: create clusters that can be readily explored by tourists, can generate a sense of there being a wider variety of things to do and see, and stimulate tourism flow to smaller and lesser-known locations.

There will be a focus on the use of smart and sustainable solutions where possible, i.e. for orientation, interpretation and visitor information. This is for a number of reasons. Firstly, smart solutions can minimise intrusion of signage on landscapes and streetscapes. Secondly, smart technologies aid the updating of information on a more regular basis. Thirdly, they support the provision of information in multiple languages and also align with increasing consumer use of technology. Finally, smart technology aids data capture - which leads to more responsive, timely and informed tourism destination management.

The delivery of actions under this Pillar are dependent on a variety of stakeholders, including communities, businesses, private landowners and state agencies, and integration of these partners in delivery will be important.

As a result, actions under this Pillar are centred around:

- Development of the three key gateway towns: Tullamore, Birr and Edenderry
- Building on progress to date in developing towns, villages and experiences, allied to the gateway towns
- Enhancement of existing destination attractors: Clonmacnoise, Birr Castle Demesne, Lough Boora Discovery Park, Slieve Blooms, Grand Canal Greenway and the River Shannon
- Supporting delivery of a new major 'Peatlands and People' attraction
- Progression of opportunities for destination attractions at Derrycastle, Durrow Abbey estate and Charleville Castle and Demense
- Delivery of small-scale interventions at key heritage locations.

The over-arching objective of these actions is the delivery of three destination gateway towns that provide vibrant hubs for tourists to visit and/or stay in, a number of high-profile and high-quality tourism attractions that are associated with Offaly, and a wealth of smaller atmospheric heritage sites that encourage exploration of the County.



Pillar 3: Industry Development and Support

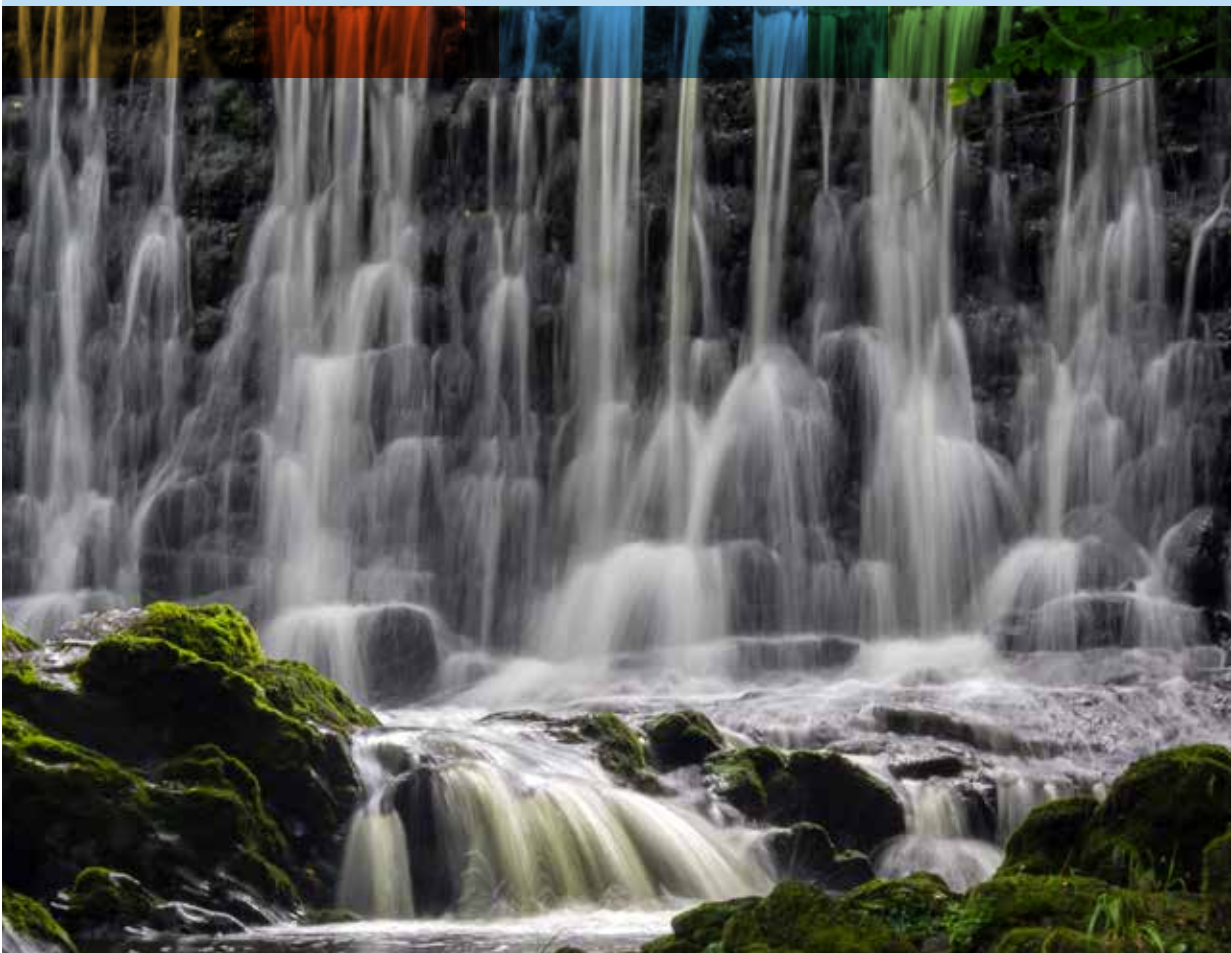
As the key providers of tourism experiences and services, it is of vital importance that the tourism industry is supported in operating sustainable businesses, successfully catering to customers' needs and marketing to potential visitors. It is also important that it is supported in the adoption of smarter technologies and sustainable operational models. Therefore, this Strategy places a specific focus on this area.

The work of Fáilte Ireland is of particular relevance here, as the agency responsible for the development of the tourism industry. Local Enterprise Office Offaly and Offaly Local Development Company are also particularly relevant in the delivery of actions under this Pillar as they provide training and supports for industry generally.

Actions under this Pillar are centred around:

- Supporting industry in developing new experiences, services and information - allied to infrastructure (e.g. the Greenway), key attractors, gateway towns and key towns/villages
- Supporting industry skills development and capacity building (see Pillar 4 for marketing support)
- Development of financial incentives to enable operator growth and particularly the integration of innovative tools, digital and future tech
- Supporting networking and familiarisation

The over-arching objective of these actions is to ensure that Offaly's tourism industry have the requisite skills, knowledge and supports to operate successful and sustainable businesses, and that they are well-networked in order to maximise shared opportunities.



Pillar 4: Marketing & Communications

Raising awareness of Offaly as a tourism destination and encouraging tourists to visit is a priority in supporting the growth of tourism as a driver of economic sustainability across the County. The marketing and tourism branding of the County as a destination, and the coordination of industry marketing activity, falls within the remit of Offaly Tourism Marketing CLG in association with Offaly County Council. The direct marketing and sales of specific saleable tourism experiences and services, on the other hand, are the responsibility of the tourism industry.

With the recognition that Offaly is a County in transition, and the establishment of a new tourism vision that also recognises the opportunity to maximise its growing strengths in innovation, future tech and sustainability, it is timely to review the market positioning of the County. There is little doubt that the natural landscape will remain the core attraction of Offaly for tourists but it is the maximisation of this rich natural environment through sustainable and new solutions that is proposed as the new market position for the destination. Offaly is a destination that values its heritage while acknowledging the creativity, innovation and future-focus of its industry and communities.

Actions under this Pillar are centred around:

- Visitor servicing and communications, including provision of tourism information platforms
- Continuing to proactively market tourism in Offaly
- Reviewing the existing tourism marketing brand
- Further development of the marketing forum
- Development of cooperative industry marketing initiatives and a common sales platform
- Supporting the development of saleable packages that incorporate activities, particularly walking, water-based activities and golf.

The over-arching objective of these actions is to firmly establish Offaly on the domestic market as an appealing destination for the key market segments of family, adult outdoor actives and adult short breaks. It also has as an objective raising awareness of Offaly among overseas tourists, particularly by association with the top visitor attractors and through the promotion of saleable packages.



6. RISK ASSESSMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 Risk Assessment

Given the complex nature of tourism development and delivery, there are a number of risks that need to be mitigated for to ensure the successful delivery of the new Offaly Tourism Strategy 2023-2027 - the most important of which are identified below.

RISK:

Insufficient funding. There are a number of investment-heavy capital projects identified within this Strategy that do, or will, require funding from a variety of sources to fully deliver them. While the economic climate is currently supportive of such investment, and this climate is expected to continue in Ireland over the coming years, availability of public funding is never certain.

MITIGATING ACTIONS:

Review progress on an ongoing basis; re-align available funding according to strategic priorities if necessary; consider alternative partnership approaches to delivering the same outcomes.

RISK:

Insufficient staffing. Without adequate staffing, projects cannot be delivered.

MITIGATING ACTIONS:

Increase core tourism staff; distribute actions broadly across relevant agencies and bodies; hire temporary support when necessary.

RISK:

Non-delivery and/or significant time slippage of key projects. The Strategy requires the delivery of key infrastructural and other foundation projects on which industry initiatives and marketing builds, and without which progress in tourism growth is unlikely.

MITIGATING ACTIONS:

Review progress on an ongoing basis and adjust timeframe of Action Plan if necessary; account for any non-delivery by developing alternative project that can deliver the same strategic outcomes.

RISK:

Change of key personnel within Offaly Tourism Marketing CLG, the Local Enterprise Office, Offaly County Council and key partner agencies. Frequently, the success of projects depends on the dynamism and determination of key personnel, and a change or departure of such personnel can result in lack of progress or engagement.

MITIGATING ACTIONS:

Ensure key staff within Offaly Tourism Marketing CLG, Offaly Local Enterprise Office and Offaly County Council are replaced promptly if required; ensure agency (rather than individual) buy-in to projects from other key agency stakeholders; establish in-house implementation working group for Tourism Strategy; cross-departmental communication to feed into strategy implementation; establish inter-agency working group(s) for key projects.



RISK:

Lack of engagement by tourism industry. The tourism industry are critical to the activation of infrastructure, and to the marketing and delivery of tourism experiences. Without a follow-through from the industry on public investment, the destination will fail to attract growth.

MITIGATING ACTIONS:

Actively engage the industry through supports, networking and familiarisation; provide platforms for industry marketing; share feedback and ensure ongoing communication.

RISK:

Lack of engagement by key stakeholders. The participation of key public stakeholders is a key component of this Strategy. Their involvement in unlocking state-owned land and sites for tourism and recreational use, as well as in empowering and supporting industry and communities in providing engaging tourism experiences, are critical to its delivery.

MITIGATING ACTIONS:

Ensure agency, rather than individual, buy-in to projects; establish inter-agency working group(s) for key projects.



6.2 Implementation

The successful delivery of a tourism strategy depends on a wide variety of stakeholders. In the case of the Offaly Tourism Strategy 2023-2027, Offaly Tourism Marketing CLG will be dependent on a variety of key partners - as identified below.

- Offaly County Council
- Tourism Industry
- Communities
- Chambers of Commerce
- Other allied sectors: food, arts, craft, retail
- Offaly Local Development Company
- Fáilte Ireland
- Waterways Ireland
- Bord na Móna
- Office of Public Works
- The National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Coillte
- Neighbouring County Councils
- Transport for Ireland
- Government Departments
- Local Enterprise Office Offaly

It will also require significant funding and current sources of funding include the following:

- Offaly County Council Funding
- Rural Recreation Development Fund (RRDF)
- Urban Recreation Development Fund (URDF)
- Town and Village Renewal
- Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS)
- Just Transition Regenerative and Placemaking Scheme for Ireland's Midlands 2023-2026
- Creative Ireland
- Fáilte Ireland: various funds including Tourism Destination Towns, Re-Imagining Urban Spaces, Platforms for Growth
- Night Time Economy Support Scheme
- ERDF
- Leader 2023-2027

The €68 million Just Transition Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme for Ireland's Midlands 2023-2026²⁴ - delivered by Fáilte Ireland and co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the EU Just Transition Fund - is a particularly significant opportunity for County Offaly. It supports a series of funding programmes, including:

- an Investment Grant-Aid Scheme for Private and Community SMEs that considers five categories: sustainable visitor experiences, sustainable tourist accommodation, capital projects, digital transformation and accessibility enhancement;
- Trail Network Development Scheme (delivered primarily through Bord na Móna);
- Investment Scheme for Local Authorities and certain State Agencies;
- Appointment of County Tourism Activators to Local Authorities;
- Enterprise Supports Scheme.



²⁴ There are two main elements to the overall scheme: €38m towards the diversification of the regional economy through the sustainable development of tourism, and €30m towards the regeneration and repurposing of peatlands through the development of a network of trails.

6.3 Measurement

A sustainable destination needs to have metrics around a number of factors to ensuring it is measuring impact on the four fundamental aspects identified in the VICE Model (see Section 5.1):

- **visitor**, e.g. numbers, expenditure, behaviour, satisfaction levels
- **industry**, e.g. metrics relating to capacity, occupancy, economic sustainability, business sentiment
- **community & culture**, e.g. engagement, social sustainability,
- **environment**, e.g. as currently measured through a variety of mechanisms at County and national level

Currently, there is a dependency on existing published data from the Central Statistics Office and Fáilte Ireland which primarily report on a national level and with limited data at a county level due to small sample sizes. In addition, given that it can take some time to process data, inevitably published statistical information is always retrospective.

With this Strategy there is an opportunity to implement new measurement tools, both quantitative and qualitative. These would require the cooperation of the tourism industry and could include the following:

Accommodation occupancy survey: The hotel sector should be encouraged to fully participate in Fáilte Ireland's hotel survey which provides detailed occupancy, revenue and source market data by county . In addition, a dedicated County-wide survey for all accommodation could be set up as a confidential online portal where room and bed capacity and occupancy can be easily entered by businesses. Additional metrics relating to main market of origin and party composition of visitors could also be captured. However, the survey would be kept simple and very brief in order to encourage participation.

Visitor attraction survey: As with the hotel survey above, visitor attractions should be encouraged to fully participate with existing national surveys carried out by the Association of Visitor Experiences and Attractions (AVEA) and Fáilte Ireland.

Visitor survey: In order to capture first-hand feedback from visitors in the County, a peak season survey at key sites and towns with sufficient footfall would provide valuable information relating to satisfaction levels, holiday behaviours and interests.

Industry survey: An annual survey of the industry would help identify any issues and opportunities, while also contributing to the development of each year's activities.

It might be possible for new surveys above to be developed and implemented as pilot projects in conjunction with third level institutions that have tourism modules and whose students are seeking work experience projects under academic supervision, e.g. TÚS tourism courses.

Without at least some of the measures above being implemented, future Tourism Strategies will not have a baseline from which to measure performance.

The implementation of this Strategy will also be routinely accompanied by a performance review and assessment of outcomes that are based on the key performance indicators identified in the Action Plan. This internal measurement is a matter for internal management within Offaly Tourism Marketing CLG and will be built into their own monitoring and measurement systems.



7. ACTION PLAN

The 'Vision for Tourism in Offaly 2027' outlined in section 5.2, sets out how Offaly will be understood as a County in which innovation and sustainability are intrinsic aspects of the visitor experience.

The actions set out in the detailed Action Plan that follows here are based on the current position, and represent a realistic approach to planning and delivering tourism development within the five year life cycle of this strategy. Through investment in infrastructure, initiatives that expand the range and quality of experiences, and the acceleration of skills, capacity and marketing in the tourism sector, Offaly will be ideally placed to embed innovation and sustainable best practice.





Recommended actions such as the development of a minimum impact signage strategy, which utilises personal technology to make interpretation and animation a choice for the visitor, new off-grid accommodation and low-carbon events are within the timeframe of this strategy and they also establish a strong precedent for the next tourism strategy and County Development Plan. Those later plans that are beyond our current five year horizon will be considering a very different kind of landscape, as tourism markets recover, Bord na Móna lands come into alternative use, communities strengthen around the green agenda, and working hubs and tech communities continue to set up outside of urban centres.

The Plan will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment, Ecological Impact Assessment and requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent granting. Actions arising from the plan will demonstrate compliance with the environmental protection measures in the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027, and SEA Environmental Report and Natura Impact Report.

Partnership and funding are key to the successful delivery of the actions that will achieve the objectives of the Offaly Tourism Strategy 2023 – 2027. While the Plan is located under tourism, it is a cross-departmental plan with actions that either build upon or suggest direction for all departments and external partners that are active in the delivery of the Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027 and/or in tourism. The full delivery of the actions outlined in the following Action Plan will be contingent on appropriate resourcing.



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Acronym	Full Title
AC:	The Arts Council
BI:	Birdwatch Ireland
BnM:	Bord na Móna
CDP:	County Development Plan
DEDP:	Destination Experience and Development Plan
DHLGH:	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
DRCD:	Department of Rural and Community Development
DSI:	Dark Skies Ireland
FI:	Fáilte Ireland
FO:	Film Offaly
GCC:	Galway County Council
HC:	The Heritage Council
KCC:	Kildare County Council
LCC:	Laois County Council
LOETB:	Laois Offaly Education and Training Board
LP:	Laois Partnership
NPWS:	National Parks and Wildlife Service
OCC:	Offaly County Council
OLDC:	Offaly Local Development Company
OPW:	Office of Public Works
ORIS:	Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme
PCDA:	Portarlington Community Development Association
RRDF:	Rural Regeneration and Development Fund
SI:	Sport Ireland
TFI:	Transport for Ireland
TII:	Transport Infrastructure Ireland
URDF:	Urban Regeneration and Development Fund
WI:	Waterways Ireland

Strategic Area 1: INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND MAXIMISATION

Key Priorities:

- Full delivery of existing plans for recreation infrastructure and tourism initiatives
- Enhancement of connectivity between trails, trail towns/villages, gateway towns and attractions/sites
- Leading out on strategic partnerships that provide opportunities for leisure and tourism in Offaly

Strategic Area 1: INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND MAXIMISATION						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
1.1 Ensure full delivery of approved/consented Greenways and support planned Greenways	Greenway development is a core objective nationally as well as for the county, and delivery of the full extent proposed will remain a priority, including: Edenderry-Kildare, Turraun-Shannonharbour.	High	OCC	TII; WI	Ongoing	KPIs as identified in the Greenway projects themselves.
1.2 Extend and integrate Greenways	Ensuring linkages between the Greenways and other key trails, villages/towns, attractions and settlements needs to also be a priority in order to bring economic benefit to communities and encourage extended dwell time and overnight stays. Ensure they support and enhance existing ecological resources, habitats and species including European Sites and Natural Heritage Areas, in line with Offaly CDP TRP -08	High	OCC	WI; TFI:TII; BnM; Coillte; OPW; NPWS; communities	Ongoing	Number of locations added to existing network
1.3 Work with BnM to deliver land / asset use strategies	Peatlands, industrial railways and other related assets are the focus of imminent strategies by BnM and offer significant tourism potential for Offaly. This is in addition to the key attractor of Lough Boora. Developing a strong strategic and working relationship with BnM needs to be a priority for the duration of this strategy in order to build a solid foundation for the future strength of tourism in the county. Including collaborating with BnM on the feasibility of a parkland experience at Mount Lucas and connection between Mount Lucas and Grand Canal Greenway, and between Lough Boora and nearby trails and lakes.	High	BnM	FI; OCC; NPWS	Ongoing	Agreed integrated set of proposals/products

Strategic Area 1: INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND MAXIMISATION						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
1.4 Work with relevant partners on new County Recreation Strategy (this action may subsume others, depending on scope)	Under the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, it is anticipated that every county will develop its own Outdoor Recreation Plan. This may encompass some of the other activities identified here, e.g. trails strategy in Actions 1.5 and 1.6.	High	OLDC	OCC; FI; BnM	Ongoing	Scope and funding identified Strategy in development Further KPIs to be identified as plan progresses
1.5 Work with FI and key partners in the delivery of a new trail development strategy	<p>FI has identified the need for a new trail development strategy for IHH. This will provide a strategic framework for the ongoing development of trails in Offaly, and should encompass those also mentioned separately here, e.g. linkages with the Greenway, forest trail developments. It should also consider potential for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the upgrading of the Pilgrim Route as an alternative route to Clonmacnoise and a connection to the proposed Peatlands and People project location; - providing space for pop-up food and drink operators, toilets and other supporting services and infrastructure - ensuring that cycling-specific requirements are built into the new strategy as well as recommendations relating to wilderness corridors; - opportunities for Blueway development, particularly in the context of Tullamore Harbour and Banagher Marina, and for equestrian trails. <p>The development of a new trail strategy will be underpinned by recognition of key ecological and environmental resources and sensitivities. Trail identification and selection will be informed by ecological screening and be provided at locations of low ecological sensitivity that do not support mobile species of surrounding European Sites. Biodiversity Net Gain should inform the strategy development.</p>	High	FI	OCC; BnM; Coillte; OPW; NPWS; private landowners; communities; industry	Medium Term	<p>A network that works, is easy to find, easy to navigate, and has appropriate and attractive visitor services to elevate Offaly as a walking and cycling destination.</p> <p>User metrics should be set in accordance with markets and an investment in tracking repeat local use versus incoming visitor use made.</p>

Strategic Area 1: INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND MAXIMISATION						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
1.6 Review existing trails to ensure alignment with national guidelines, and upgrade if required	<p>All significant trails should be of national standard and provide essential supports, e.g. adequate parking, orientation signage/ mapboards, toilets and provision for pop-up food/coffee trucks.</p> <p>This should be done in line with the requirements of Offaly CDP 2021-2027 including BLP 01</p> <p>(This could be subsumed into the action above depending on Fáilte Ireland project scope)</p>	High	OCC	SI; OLDC; LP; industry	Short Term	<p>Identification of trails for upgrade.</p> <p>Completion of review.</p> <p>List of necessary improvements finalised.</p> <p>Improvements made</p>
1.7 Secure dedicated Rural Recreation Officer for Offaly	<p>Currently, Offaly shares its Rural Recreation Officer with Laois but the scale of current and proposed outdoor recreation development in the county requires the support of a dedicated resource.</p>	High	OLDC	DRCD; FI	Short Term	<p>Funding sought.</p> <p>Appointment made.</p>
1.8 Work with WI/FI to assess public mooring capacity and to expand if required	<p>Public moorings in key Grand Canal (e.g. Edenderry and Tullamore) and River Shannon towns and villages provide an opportunity to attract additional tourists, particularly domestic boat owners.</p> <p>Actions subject to adherence to requirements of the Offaly CDP 2021-2027 including BLP -01</p>	Low	WI	FI	Long Term	<p>Review of mooring capacity complete.</p> <p>Additional moorings provided, if required.</p>

Strategic Area 2

GATEWAY, CLUSTER AND ATTRACTION DEVELOPMENT

Key Priorities:

- Develop key gateway towns: Birr, Tullamore and Edenderry
- Build on progress to date to develop towns, villages and experiences allied to the gateway towns
- Enhance existing destination attractors: Clonmacnoise, Birr Castle Demesne, Lough Boora Discovery Park, Slieve Blooms and River Shannon
- Support delivery of new major Peatlands and People attraction
- Progress opportunities for destination attractions at Derrycastle, Durrow and Charleville
- Deliver small-scale interventions at key heritage locations.

Strategic Area 2: GATEWAY, CLUSTER AND ATTRACTION DEVELOPMENT						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
<p>2.1 Tullamore:</p> <p>Full delivery of URDF regeneration and place-making projects, the Regeneration Framework and the Tullamore Harbour development.</p>	<p>Tullamore is identified a Key Town in the RSES and is also a key tourism gateway. The further development of the town, including improved connectivity with the surrounding area, is critical to its growth as a tourism town.</p> <p>There is also a need for more activity operators/hire, e.g. expansion of Moby Bike Hire; more obvious link to Tullamore DEW; animation programmes with the Arts Centre - see related actions under Strategic Areas 1 and 3.</p> <p>(See also actions relating to Charleville and Durrow Estates and actions under industry support)</p>	High	OCC	DHLGH; DRCD; WI	Ongoing	KPIs as identified under the various project plans.

Strategic Area 2: GATEWAY, CLUSTER AND ATTRACTION DEVELOPMENT						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
<p>2.2 Edenderry:</p> <p>Ensure full delivery of consented projects, including harbour project, link to Greenway, RRDF project in town centre, event-status pool and establishing link to Kildare</p>	<p>Edenderry has a number of strengths on which to build in order to create a tourism hub and gateway. These include recent public realm improvements, the harbour project, link to the Greenway, selection of restaurants and retail, all of which are subject to planning and consent processes. Edenderry has the potential to also be an entry point to Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and a base for domestic family self-catering holidays in the wider area.</p> <p>Seeking a hotelier for the town as it develops is a priority. Other important actions include developing meanwhile uses for underutilised buildings and assessing potential to pilot a 'smart tourism town' initiative building on the existing smart town project - which could then be rolled out to the rest of the county. Industry activation of harbour area is also required.</p> <p>See related actions under Strategic Areas 1 and 3.</p>	High	OCC	DRCD; WI; KCC	Ongoing	KPIs as identified under the various project plans.
<p>2.3 Birr:</p> <p>Ongoing delivery of public realm to complement the Destination Towns initiative</p>	<p>As one of the three gateway towns and an attraction in its own right, the ongoing development of Birr is also critically important. There are a number of initiatives ongoing in the town that can be built on. These include the TVR application submitted for Market Square; plans for the development of the courthouse as a film/animation hub and associated public realm work in the courtyard (addressing a deficit in public spaces for festivals/events); the integration of Birr Castle Demesne with the town with more visible entrance in a prominent location.</p> <p>See related actions under Strategic Areas 1 and 3.</p>	High	OCC	DRCD; FI; NPWS; Birr Castle Demesne	Ongoing	<p>KPIs as identified under various project plans.</p> <p>Alignment of delivery of these initiatives elevates Birr so that it may be better monitored for its performance as a 'destination town'.</p>

Strategic Area 2: GATEWAY, CLUSTER AND ATTRACTION DEVELOPMENT						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
2.4 Continue to work with Coillte and NPWS in the development of Slieve Blooms and Kinnitty as an outdoor recreation destination	<p>The Slieve Blooms is already developing as a key outdoor recreation destination and this should continue to be a priority. Plans for the trails, signage and facilities at Kinnitty should be reviewed to ensure they deliver for all market segments e.g. casual walkers.</p> <p>Subject to provisions of Offaly CDP 2021 -2027 including BLP 01, BLP 02 and TRP 09</p>	High	Coillte	FI; OCC; NPWS; LCC; DRCD; industry; community	Ongoing	As identified in the existing plans
2.5 Work with WI to continue implementation of the River Shannon Tourism Masterplan and its accompanying SEA ER and Natura Impact Statement	The full delivery of the visitor experience as outlined in the Shannon Tourism Masterplan remains an important factor in the tourism development of villages along the river - Banagher, Shannonbridge and Shannon Harbour (see also action relating to Banagher Masterplan)	High	WI	FI; OCC; industry; communities	Ongoing	As identified in the Masterplan and associated plans
2.6 Delivery of Ferbane regeneration projects	Ferbane has a strategic role to play given its proximity to Birr and Clonmacnoise. Existing plans include: a public realm masterplan, development of St. Joseph's Convent as a community hub, the Old Fire Station, the Heritage Centre Area, the Mass Path looped walk, urban garden and green energy projects to develop Ferbane as a Smart Town	High	OCC	DRCD; OPW; local community; OLDC	Ongoing	KPIs as per various plans
2.7 Delivery of Clara Town First plan	Clara has potential in the longer term to become a small tourism hub in its own right and the Town First plan lays the foundation for this. Actions needed include: finding new uses for existing industrial heritage sites, e.g. as accommodation, craft/retail, food experiences; expansion of visitor experience at Clara Bog and visitor centre; improved signage; linkages to local walks.	High	OCC	NPWS; DRCD; community	Short to Medium Term	Agreed prioritised list of deliverables Delivery of each element

Strategic Area 2: GATEWAY, CLUSTER AND ATTRACTION DEVELOPMENT						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
2.8 Work with OPW to develop and deliver new Clonmacnoise Masterplan	As a key attraction in the county and a gateway to the Offaly's monastic heritage, the successful development and delivery of the Clonmacnoise Masterplan is a priority. It should also address linkages with surrounding villages and towns, and provide impetus to visit other key monastic sites in the county.	High	OPW	FI; OCC	Short to Medium Term	To be identified in the final Masterplan
2.9 Delivery of Banagher Masterplan	The development of Banagher as a key activity hub on the Shannon depends on the upgrading of amenities, linking of trails and provision of accommodation - as outlined in the draft Masterplan. Banagher also has a role to play in supporting the development of a cluster around Birr. Actions in line with Offaly CDP 2021- 2027 including BLP 01, BLP 02, TRP 08	High	OCC	WI; community; OLDC	Short to Medium Term	Agreed prioritised list of deliverables Delivery of each element
2.10 Develop a new orientation and interpretation strategy that optimises future-focused technology, and pilot it in key locations	Orientation and interpretation is important in both supporting navigation as well as in awareness building and assisting visitors in deepening their understanding of Offaly's heritage and culture. There is a need for a rationalisation of signage across the county - including the removal of Ireland's Ancient East signage - as well as the development of a new strategy. There should be an emphasis on low physical impact, and the use of accessible technology should be a priority in the new orientation and interpretation strategy - helping to position Offaly as a leader in this area. A pilot scheme can be developed to test Smart solutions in key towns and sites. FI proposes to carry out an audit of signage and to develop a new strategy. The action above could be subsumed into this wider activity provided their objectives align.	High	OCC	All	Short to Medium Term	Commissioning of strategy Completion of report Further KPIs to be developed as part of plan Selection of towns and sites for pilot scheme

Strategic Area 2: GATEWAY, CLUSTER AND ATTRACTION DEVELOPMENT						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
2.11 Develop monastic and industrial heritage stories and sites	<p>Offaly has a particular strength in these areas of heritage and has potential to 'unlock' them as part of the visitor experience in the County.</p> <p>Actions should include: identify key sites, generate narratives and work with local community to make simple provisions for parking, interpretation and animation.</p> <p>Key monastic sites to include: Lynally, Rahan, Durrow, Seir Kieran, Lemanaghan monastic site and St Manchan's church at Boher.</p> <p>Key industrial heritage sites include the mill buildings in Clara, Birr, Banagher and former BnM infrastructure.</p> <p>Developments in line with Offaly CDP 2021 -2027 policies including TRP 08 and TRP 13</p> <p>See also action relating to orientation and interpretation strategy.</p>	High	OCC	OPW; NPWS; BnM; FI; HC; communities	Short to Medium Term	<p>Identification of key sites</p> <p>Agreed approach to identifying key actions, e.g. recruitment of external resource, allocation to in-house team</p> <p>Prioritised list of actions</p> <p>Actions completed</p>
2.12 Strategy for delivery of Derrynuce as a major recreation destination	<p>Derrynuce has the potential to be a significant recreation destination that would benefit the north east of the county. The development and delivery of the proposed recreation strategy should be supported, including the linking of trails.</p> <p>Strategy in line with requirements of Offaly CDP 2021 -2027 including BLO 28, BLP 01</p>	High	OCC; PCDA	LCC; DRCD; community	Medium Term	To be developed as part of plan
2.13 Work with strategic partners to develop Durrow Abbey	<p>Durrow Abbey is an important heritage site with potential for development as an attractive heritage, walking and tourism destination that would enhance the appeal of nearby Tullamore as a tourism base. It could also provide additional accommodation in the area.</p>	High	OCC	Coillte; OPW	Medium to Long Term	<p>Formation of project team that includes all stakeholders</p> <p>Agreement of agenda</p> <p>Creation of development plan</p> <p>Further KPIs to be agreed as part of plan.</p>

Strategic Area 2: GATEWAY, CLUSTER AND ATTRACTION DEVELOPMENT						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
2.14 Support provision of additional accommodation	Offaly has a low level of tourism accommodation and would benefit from an increase in supply across a range of accommodation types, with priority being given to high quality eco/off-grid accommodation, RV/camping, expansion by existing accommodation providers and accommodation in key gateways, particularly a hotel in Edenderry. As accommodation is usually a function of demand, an increase in accommodation should follow on the delivery of other elements in the first instance.	High	Industry	OCC	Long Term	Bednight capacity Occupancy rates
2.15 Establish programmes to develop the evening economy in the gateway towns	An important prerequisite to growing overnight tourism is having a variety of experiences available in the evening for visitors. Each of the three gateway towns needs to have an evening economy group in place with representation from tourism, businesses, hospitality and arts/culture. These need to be supported in creating a longterm plan for their towns that will ensure that the towns remain vibrant and attractive at night for visitors.	Medium	Chambers of Commerce; Birr 2020	FI; business sector	Medium Term	Formation of evening economy team in Tullamore, Edenderry and Birr. Finalisation of plans. Other KPIs to be identified as part of the three plans
2.16 Explore opportunities for additional water-based activities	There is scope for Offaly to develop more formal and informal sites for water-based activities, including wild swimming. These should be considered in the following areas: associated with villages on the Shannon, on flooded bogs (Noggusboy and Garryhinch), on the Canal, and at Derryounce (part of the upcoming Masterplan). Locations would be informed by ecological screening and will be provided at locations of low ecological sensitivity that do not support mobile species of surrounding European Sites.	Medium	OCC	WI; industry; communities	Medium Term	Identification of existing locations Agreed list of additional opportunities Action plan developed New locations developed

Strategic Area 2: GATEWAY, CLUSTER AND ATTRACTION DEVELOPMENT						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
2.17 Develop a Community Engagement Programme, beginning with villages and smaller towns where there has already been momentum, e.g. through investment in infrastructure	<p>Local communities have a critical role to play in the development and delivery of attractive towns and villages, and in unlocking the economic potential of tourism. In turn, these towns and villages play an important role in amplifying the gateway towns as visitor hubs.</p> <p>However, there are many local plans of different levels of detail and various stages of delivery. A cohesive pilot that combines hard and soft investments for key towns and villages would generate greater momentum, make better connections between stakeholders and create an example for other areas.</p> <p>A first step should be the identification of pilot villages. Some of these are mentioned elsewhere, e.g. Banagher, Ferbane, Clara, Kinnitty. Others include: Shannonbridge, Shannon Harbour, Geashill, Daingean, Pollagh.</p>	Medium	OCC; OLDC	FI; BnM; WI; Communities	Medium Term	<p>Community Engagement Programme created</p> <p>Pilot villages agreed</p> <p>Programme rolled out</p>
2.18 Review and map food and hospitality offers	<p>Help key consumer segments generate their own trails in support of exploration, e.g. where to get the best traditional music, where to get the most memorable meals</p>	Medium	OTM	Industry	Medium Term	<p>Review commenced</p> <p>Information published</p>
2.19 Support the owners of Charleville Demesne if they wish to develop a visitor strategy	<p>Charleville Castle and Demesne are important heritage sites as well as popular for walks by local residents. The history and scale of the demesne has potential for further development as a major tourism attraction that would benefit Tullamore.</p> <p>Actions to be in line with Offaly CDP 2021 -2027 provisions including BLP 01 and TRP 27</p>	Medium	OCC	Property owner; Heritage Council	Medium to Long Term	<p>Outline agreement with property owner</p> <p>Further KPIs to be developed as part of agreed actions</p>

Strategic Area 2: GATEWAY, CLUSTER AND ATTRACTION DEVELOPMENT						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
2.20 Support Offaly's Accessibility Project and ensure sites/ locations and new projects are accessible for a range of users	There is a need and an opportunity to provide better supports for visitors with intellectual and physical disabilities.	Medium	OCC	All	Long Term	Number of suitable sites/ experiences
2.21 Address public transport linkages between towns, attractions, destinations and events	<p>The need for improved regional public transport was highlighted as an issue across Ireland's Hidden Heartlands.</p> <p>Particular attention is required to South Offaly, including Birr and Banagher which are convenient to train and bus terminus at Tullamore but disadvantaged by a lack of local transport connections.</p>	Medium	FI	TI; Local Link; other transport providers	Long Term	Increased number of links
2.22 Work with BnM to explore the potential of a dark skies experience on the expensive peatlands	<p>Offaly's peatlands feature a night sky that has less light pollution than other areas, providing an opportunity for dark skies experiences.</p> <p>There are currently two Dark Sky Reserves in the ROI (Kerry & Mayo). There is an opportunity to develop a Dark Sky Reserve in the Offaly, especially given Birr's existing strong links with astronomy.</p>	Medium	BnM	OCC, FI, DSI	Long Term	Identification of suitable location, Action plan delivered, Experience developed
2.23 Maximise Per Cent for Art scheme	Significant artwork by local artists can attract visitors, when of sufficient scale and uniqueness, and also contribute to creating a sense-of-place and engagement between residents and visitors. There is an opportunity for a county-wide approach to making the most of this scheme in collaboration with other agencies and bodies.	Low	OCC	AC	Ongoing	<p>Agreed approach to maximising the scheme</p> <p>Number of projects delivered under new approach</p>

Strategic Area 2: GATEWAY, CLUSTER AND ATTRACTION DEVELOPMENT						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
2.24 Further development of Croghan Hill as an attraction	<p>Croghan Hill dominates the landscape in parts of Offaly and has a fascinating history as well as offering panoramic vistas. The site would benefit from minimal orientation, toilets and space for seasonal mobile food operators.</p> <p>Developments in line with Offaly CDP 2021 -2027 policies including BLP</p>	Low	OCC	Community	Long Term	<p>Interventions/ actions agreed</p> <p>Elements delivered</p>
2.25 Work with FI to identify suitable sites for development for wildlife observation	<p>This is a recommendation from the IHH Strategy that will support the appreciation and protection of the environment as well as contribute to the growth in staying tourism. It should build on existing sites, e.g. Little Brosna Callows, and also on proposals in the Banagher Masterplan.</p> <p>Location and design will be subject to ecological survey and assessment to avoid disturbance to species.</p>	Low	FI	Communities; BI	Long Term	Delivery of Strategy



Strategic Area 3: INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

Key Priorities:

- Support industry in developing new experiences, services and information allied to infrastructure, gateway towns and key towns/villages
- Develop industry skills development, capacity building and marketing support programmes
- Target financial incentives to enable operator growth and integration of innovative tools, digital and future tech
- Support networking and familiarisation

Strategic Area 3: INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
3.1 Promote use of Leave no Trace by industry and visitors	<p>Leave no Trace protocols are increasingly becoming the standard for outdoor recreation. They have the advantage of both educating visitors as well as reducing the need for public provision of bins in particular areas.</p> <p>This should be adopted as the norm across sensitive natural sites and trails.</p>	High	OCC	All	Ongoing	<p>Agreement with key stakeholders (internal and external)</p> <p>Distribution of guidelines to those involved in development projects</p> <p>Annual review of test locations</p>
3.2 Support industry in transitioning to sustainable practices	The need to move to sustainable practices is a collective responsibility, and tourism must play its part. Particular groups, e.g. Green Offaly, can play a role in raising awareness and in education businesses, and should be supported in their efforts.	High	FI	All	Ongoing	KPIs to be agreed with FI under its plans relating to this area
3.3 Establish a programme of networking activities for industry and tourism community groups	Greater knowledge by industry and communities of what Offaly has to offer tourists will support improved word of mouth recommendations as well as cross-promotion.	High	OTM	Industry	Medium Term	<p>Establish programme as part of new Marketing Forum (see Strategic Area 4)</p> <p>Number of participants</p>

Strategic Area 3: INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
3.4 Encourage industry participation in third party training programmes	FI and LOETB provides a number of essential training and mentoring programmes for industry. Rather than duplicating programmes, industry should be encouraged to participate in existing programmes and use existing toolkits, including FI's Survive to Thrive, revenue generation programmes, Digital that Delivers, Tourism in the Community toolkit	Medium	OTM	FI; LOETB; Industry	Ongoing	Number of participants
3.5 Maximise leveraging of existing supports to activate key hubs and trails, and to provide additional experiences in gateway towns and cluster towns/villages	More tourism experiences (e.g. activities, markets, f&b, craft) are required but these should be connected with where the greatest opportunities are and where investment is happening. See separate Greenway action below.	Medium	OTM	LEO; OLDC; ORDC; FI	Short Term	Fund and guidelines agreed Initiative published Level of take up Data from operators
3.6 Support FI in the development of Greenway industry clusters	With the imminent completion of the Grand Canal Greenway in Offaly, there is a need to activate it through the harnessing of industry efforts and marketing. FI intend to develop industry clusters and this will be supported.	Medium	FI	Industry	Short Term	KPIs to be agreed as part of FI's work
3.7 In alignment with CDP policies, facilitate the development of rural economy through activities associated with farming and rural living	In order to sustain rural communities and provide for authentic regenerative tourism experiences, support is required for experiences, heritage, crafts, food and accommodation based in the countryside - including the repurposing of underused farm buildings	Medium	OLCD	LEO; FI	Short to Medium Term	Fund and guidelines agreed Initiative published Level of take up Data from recipients
3.8 Support FI in the creation of a new industry cluster to execute the proposed Mid-Shannon and Midlands DEDP	The development of inter-county destinations that are attractive and make sense from a consumer perspective is part of Fáilte Ireland's role. The proposed Mid-Shannon and Midlands DEDP presents an opportunity for Offaly to be part of a larger destination that will have support and direction at a national level.	Medium	FI	Industry	Short to Medium Term	KPIs to be agreed as part of DEDP

Strategic Area 3: INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT						
Actions	Rationale & Commentary	Level of Priority	Initiating Partner	External Dependencies	Timeframe	KPIs
3.9 Financial initiative for existing successful event operators to pilot low-carbon events in areas currently underserved	Offaly has a growing reputation for successful and interesting festivals and events, and there is an opportunity to harness existing expertise in this area to further animate other parts of the County while also meeting the objective of reducing carbon by providing public transport only and luggage drops for cyclists.	Medium	OCC	Festival and event organisers; OLDC; FI	Medium to Long Term	Agree and advertise initiative Select operators and areas Measurement of visitor numbers, expenditure and satisfaction
3.10 Pilot food-focused events and experiences.	There are a growing number of artisan food producers and outlets in the County offering the potential for food markets and events in key gateway towns as weekend anchor activities. Precedents are plentiful across the island from which to develop a pilot and work with an experienced market / community events specialists to establish a network of food themed events in key towns.	Medium	OLDC	LEO; artisan food producers and retail	Medium to Long Term	Identify suitable partners Discussions underway Actions agreed Actions delivered
3.11 Work with Offaly Arts and Film Offaly to promote the County as a film location	Offaly Arts and Film Offaly have been working over the last number of years to build Offaly as a viable film destination and to some success. They have recently carried out a film review for Offaly and there is an opportunity to explore the potential synergy between film and tourism, in relation both to bednights that arises during and as a result of successful productions.	Low	OTM	OCC; FO	Ongoing	Meeting held to identify opportunities Actions agreed Actions delivered
3.12 Support FI in establishment of Local Experts network	Local Experts not only have a role to play in providing valuable insight for, and engagement with, visitors but can also form the basis for ongoing visitor loyalty with communities. They can also provide a connection between agencies and communities.	Low	FI	Industry; communities	Medium to Long Term	KPIs to be identified as part of FI plan

Strategic Area 4: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Key Priorities:

- Review existing brand
- Establish new Marketing Forum
- Develop industry marketing initiatives and sales platforms
- Support development of saleable packages
- Provide tourism information platforms

Note: Offaly Tourism Marketing CLG is the Lead Partner for all actions below. External dependencies relate to industry participation in industry initiatives/platforms.

Strategic Area 4: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS				
Actions	Rationale	Level of Priority	Timeframe	KPIs
4.1 Further Adoption of Offaly brand	The Offaly tourism brand was developed in 2016 and there is now an opportunity to incorporate the 'Space to' element of the branding with OCC's new branding	High	Ongoing	Specific opportunities for incorporation identified
4.2 Alignment with IHH branding	In order to maximise opportunities associated with the marketing of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, it is important that marketing activities, the Offaly brand and River Shannon marketing are all aligned with the former.	High	Short Term	To be considered under action above
DESTINATION MARKETING				
4.3 Maintain and Develop Website	The new website is an important marketing and information tool, from both the industry and consumer perspective. It requires ongoing attention to remain relevant and accurate.	High	Ongoing	To be agreed as part of annual plan
4.4 Provide Visitor Information	Ensuring availability of tourist information through digital and in-person channels, including seasonal tourist information hubs at key locations and the availability of tourist information at main visitor attractions.	High	Ongoing	To be agreed as part of annual plan
4.5 Manage Offaly's Online Reputation	With the focus on digital marketing as the primary means of reaching potential visitors, there is a particular importance to managing the destination's online reputation. This requires daily attention to social media and third party sites.	High	Ongoing	To be agreed as part of annual plan
4.6 Ensure trade, agency and influencer contacts are continually updated	In order for Offaly to remain 'top of mind' for tour operators, media and other influencers of travel, there is a need to ensure regular and consistent flow of news on new experiences, products and developments in the County.	High	Ongoing	Press releases and trade ezines 4 x annually

Strategic Area 4: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS				
Actions	Rationale	Level of Priority	Timeframe	KPIs
4.7 Review need for print pieces	With the increase in the use of digital channels and the requirement for more sustainable marketing activities, the requirement for printed brochures and leaflets needs to be reviewed. Only those for which a strong case can be made should continue. This should be undertaken after the new Marketing Forum has been created, and should be carried out with input from the Forum.	High	Short Term	Sub-Committee established
4.8 Provide support for Fáilte Ireland trade and media familiarisation visits	First hand experience is an important influencing factor in the travel trade programming Offaly as part of an Ireland holiday for international tourists. Likewise, media coverage is a direct influencer of consumer choice.	Medium	Ongoing	Number of trade and journalists' visits hosted Number of articles published that include Offaly Number of tour programmes that include Offaly
4.9 Support industry advertising on the domestic market	As with the Promotions above, advertising is an opportunity to sell directly and is most suited to industry. OTM can add value by creating collaborate initiatives, e.g. in support of promotional editorial or for seasonal offers.	Medium	Ongoing	To be agreed annually with the new Marketing Forum
4.10 Explore potential for real-time digital port	Under the Just Transition programme, work with Fáilte Ireland to explore the potential for a regional real-time digital port.	Medium	Short Term	Actions agreed with Fáilte Ireland
4.11 Support Industry attendance at Trade and Consumer Promotions	Trade and Consumer Promotions provide an opportunity for networking and selling, and are therefore most suited to industry. OTM should present industry with opportunities for promotions and support their attendance where they see value in attending.	Low	Ongoing	Annual review of promotional opportunities with new Marketing Forum Agree level of support to industry attending promotions
ACTIVITY MARKETING				
4.12 Work with Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland to promote the Grand Canal Greenway	With the completion of the Greenway sections in Offaly, there is a need to encourage local residents and domestic visitors to use it. A collaborative marketing initiative specifically focused on the Greenway is required, and should integrate other adjacent experiences, e.g. food, attractions, accommodation.	High	Short Term	Actions agreed Actions implemented Numbers using the Greenway More detailed study of users to be carried out annually.

Strategic Area 4: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS				
Actions	Rationale	Level of Priority	Timeframe	KPIs
4.13 Work with operators to market activity experiences to specialist users	Dedicated activity participants - walkers, cyclists, golfers, riders, kayakers - are best reached through direct marketing channels. Through an activity sub-committee of the new Marketing Forum, a number of direct marketing initiatives should be agreed and supported.	Medium	Medium to Long Term	To be agreed following discussions
SUPPORTING DIRECT SALES				
4.14 Support the industry in developing saleable pilot experiences	Through the Marketing Forum, industry should be supported in developing a selection of integrated saleable experiences that combine activities with accommodation, food and other relevant experiences. Encourage off-season 'packages' with accommodation and access to digital hubs to attract digital nomads.	Medium	Medium to Long Term	Number of experiences developed Level of consumer take-up
4.15 Maximise other promotional platforms	Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland provide a number of promotional platforms and opportunities. Suitable industry should be encouraged to participate.	Low	Ongoing	Feedback from participating businesses
PUBLICITY AND PR				
4.16 Work with external PR Company	The PR company will have the expertise and connections to ensure that press releases and other news stories reach the correct audiences.	Medium	Ongoing	To be agreed as part of annual plan
4.17 Run regular consumer competitions	Competitions are a useful way of maintaining visibility as well as encouraging engagement and building a database for marketing/ research. A number of competitions can be considered: direct-to-consumer through social media (e.g. photographic competition), radio promotion (e.g. win a holiday) and Offaly produce (e.g. with Glenisk).	Medium	Ongoing	One competition per quarter Response rate
INDUSTRY COMMUNICATIONS				
4.18 Further develop the marketing forum	There is an opportunity to increase participation in the marketing of Offaly as a tourism destination through the further development of the membership model, by running regular network events and activities, and by inviting relevant speakers from food, craft and other sectors.	High	Short Term	Number of members Active participation
4.19 Roll-Out Agreed Marketing Forum Activities/Benefits	Benefits could include participation in marketing events and annual industry awards, access to network and other events, cross-selling, regular updates, access to new research.	High	Short to Medium Term	To be agreed when benefits and activities are finalised







OFFALY
IRELAND'S HIDDEN GEM

 **Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí**
Offaly County Council

 **Ireland's Hidden
HEARTLANDS**

 **Rialtas
na hÉireann**
Government
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040

**Ár dTodhchaí
Tuaithe**
Our Rural
Future 


**The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development: Europe
investing in rural areas.**

LEADER



Offaly Local Development Company

LCDC 
Coiste um Fhorbairt Pobail Ainseal Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly Local Community Development
Committee