

A RECREATION STRATEGY FOR COUNTY LEITRIM 2023 – 2032

Volume 1/2
Executive Summary



Leitrim Development Company
and Leitrim County Council



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Community Development

Leitrim
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LCDC
Leitrim County Development Company



Comhairle Chontae Liatroma
Leitrim County Council

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Glossary of Acronyms

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

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

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

Introduction

In March 2022, Leitrim Integrated Development Company CLG (LDC) and Leitrim County Council (LCC) commissioned the development of a new **Recreation Strategy for County Leitrim (2023-2032)** by consultants, SLR Consulting Ireland and Alan Hill Tourism Development Limited. The aim is to deliver enhanced access to highest quality outdoor recreational amenities for its citizens that will also position Leitrim as a recreational destination of choice for visitors.



Photo: Fáilte Ireland Content Pool

The **Leitrim Recreation Forum**, a voluntary community-based partnership, was established as a core recommendation of the first Leitrim Recreation Strategy in 2014. The Forum provides a participative, integrated framework for the strategic development of Leitrim's outdoor recreational assets and is integral to the sustainable development of recreation across Leitrim with full community support. Through research, consultations, review and analysis with Recreation Forum members and an extensive range of committed stakeholders, a new ten-year Recreation Strategy 2023-2032 was developed based on the principles of leadership, collaboration and partnership and policy alignment.

The proposed framework for the new Leitrim Recreation Strategy centres on the core themes of the *National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027*). Delivery will require concerted efforts among the Chairperson and volunteers of the Leitrim Recreation Forum, LCC Tourism Development Unit, the statutory agencies Waterways Ireland, Coillte, Inland Fisheries, Sport Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and NPWS, as well as local health officials, to increase participation in outdoor recreation.

This report presents the **Executive Summary (Volume 1)** while a second more detailed report **Volume 2** of the Leitrim Recreation Strategy 2023-2032 presents the full findings and recommendations of the Strategy. Both volumes are available on the websites of Leitrim Development Company (www.ldco.ie) and of Leitrim County Council (www.leitrimcoco.ie).

The Context for Outdoor Recreation

'Outdoor Recreation' is defined in the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (2023-2027), as:

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

In discussing outdoor recreational infrastructure in Leitrim, land-based activities include primarily walking, cycling, hiking and nature viewing, while water based activities include kayaking, canoeing, swimming, boating, angling and surfing.

Social Context for Recreation in Leitrim

County Leitrim occupies an area of 1,590 square kilometres. Based on POBAL socio-economic analysis of CSO data for census year 2016, Leitrim is home to 12,452 households, of relatively small size (c. 2.57 per household), of which 11% have no car. Although it has the lowest population density in Ireland, preliminary results of Census 2022 shows that the population of Leitrim grew by 9.1% in the 2016-2022 period to a total of 35,087 persons¹. Despite a long history of emigration and depopulation in Leitrim, the recent upswing reflects the growing vibrancy and confidence of the population now residing in the county.

¹ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpr/censusofpopulation2022-preliminaryresults/geographicchanges/>

Environmental Context

Leitrim is host to a varied mosaic of beautiful natural habitats and heritage which are highly attractive for outdoor recreation, including mountains, lakes and rivers. This is well encapsulated in the Draft County Development Plan and the County Leitrim Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-2027.

Due to Leitrim's low population and relatively unspoilt landscape, the county has a significant number of European designated and nationally protected conservation sites for habitats and birds. This superb natural network will require that environmental, biodiversity, climate, flood risk and related planning requirements must be considered for proposals to develop recreational infrastructure within or close to protected sites.

Health Benefits of Outdoor Recreation

From a public health perspective, there are many positive benefits associated with involvement in physical recreation. These include personal health and wellbeing; building of strong families and healthy communities; improved longevity and quality of life; and reduced costs of health care, social services and policing. The physical activity level required to maintain good health does not have to be strenuous to maximise the impact, rather it needs to be consistent, which can be supported by access to outdoor recreation amenities.

Repeated studies validate the axiom that 'spending money now in recreational infrastructure and measures saves healthcare costs later' as the cost to society of physical inactivity is enormous. It is clear that investing in outdoor recreation allowing more people to be active will lead to significant medium to long term social and economic benefits for County Leitrim.

Economic Context for Outdoor Recreation

Vibrant communities with opportunities to enjoy outdoor activities also provide attractive destinations for rural tourism. This is reflected in the national strategy for rural development 'Our Rural Future, 2021 - 2025' (DRCD, 2021), which sees outdoor recreation as an increasing driver of rural tourism with a key role to play in sustaining the economic health of rural communities and enterprises.

Policy Context for Recreation in Ireland

There is an extensive international, national, regional and county policy framework to support the development of outdoor recreation, to enhance the availability and accessibility of recreational amenities. There is an increasing alignment of planning, public health, landscape, biodiversity and sustainable tourism policies, to meet broader health, environmental and climate objectives, linked to outdoor recreation and access to nature. Recreation is seen as a vital component in creating opportunities for positive living in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (2020-2032) and in Leitrim's (Draft) County Development Plan (2023-2029).

The policy lessons for strategic development of recreation in Leitrim are reflective of the objectives encapsulated in the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy (2023 - 2027) where integrated coordination is required to deliver excellent recreational access and participation. It suggests that delivery of excellent outdoor recreational opportunities is a cross-cutting activity that must address Leadership, Environment, Awareness, Opportunities, Access and Expertise, respectively. These key elements will underpin the delivery of the new Leitrim Recreation Strategy, through enhanced leadership, collaboration and partnership among communities, authorities, agencies and enterprises. Access to and enjoyment of walking, cycling, rowing, nature viewing, angling or kayaking across Leitrim will deliver better physical and mental wellbeing for citizens and visitors of all ages and abilities, while protecting Leitrim's biodiversity and wonderful environmental assets. The rollout of the new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy will provide the strategic framework to support county-level recreational delivery, through integrated effort, focused plans and operational support.



Photo: Mark Kelly @thewateredge

The Leitrim Recreation Forum (LRF) is a voluntary partnership of representative stakeholders that provides focused and integrated effort for development of outdoor recreation infrastructure across the county. It was established in response to a core recommendation of the 2014 Strategy to provide a participative framework for the strategic development of Leitrim's outdoor recreational assets. The Forum is led by a voluntary Chairperson, with four Working Groups addressing specific aspects of recreational development, supported by the Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) for County Leitrim.

Key stakeholders in communities, farming, NGOs, representative bodies, recreational enterprises, Leitrim Development Company, Leitrim County Council, Waterways Ireland, Coillte, Inland Fisheries Ireland and NPWS and Leitrim PPN are represented in the forum. The Forum has been successful in maintaining a high level of commitment from up to 80 members in supporting the strategic development of recreational amenities within County Leitrim, but also at inter-county and cross border levels. Strong leadership and a 'can do' partnership ethos has been built up from the outset, guiding the Forum and its Working Groups.

This has contributed to positive enhancements and development of both existing and new recreational products and amenities, serving both community and commercial development across the county.

This form of collaboration among stakeholders is essential over the coming decade given the demanding requirements for public engagement, environmental assessment, planning approvals and consents, as well as securing of funding in advance of project commissioning. There has been a very positive progression towards integrated action through the Forum to deliver projects that address these key elements. This approach is very much in line with the recommendations of the NORS 2023-2027.

The Forum's performance and efficacy is critical for the delivery of the future Recreation Strategy 2023-2032 - this work requires to be maintained and supported into the coming decade. To improve the workings of key elements of the Forum, in particular the intangible cross-cutting actions, it is recommended that the Forum be slightly restructured, as follows:



The Forum members and key stakeholders have agreed that more human and financial resources are required to support its work in delivering the recommendations of the new Strategy over the next ten years.

Stakeholder Engagement & Findings

Stakeholder Consultation Process

A range of methods was used to engage widely with a full spectrum of stakeholders. Direct consultations were held with Leitrim County Council officers; elected members of Leitrim County Council; Leitrim Development Company officers and key officers in Statutory Agencies, sports governing and All-Ireland bodies, farmers and landowners, many of whom are actively involved in the Leitrim Recreation Forum and land management.

The Chairperson and voluntary members of the Leitrim Recreation Forum working groups, as well as local authority officers, were consulted through focus groups, while the general Leitrim public was consulted through an online survey which was circulated widely through recreational, community and public participation networks (PPN).

Finally, two public consultation meetings were held at Draft Recreation Strategy stage in October 2022 to garner final feedback from communities across the county on key proposals.



Photo: Holey Soles walking club

Key Findings of Online Survey

- Walking/ Hiking (87%) is the most popular form of recreational activity, followed by Cycling (47%), then Kayaking/Canoeing as third (29%). Sea and/or Lake Swimming, Angling and Birdwatching are also popular among respondents (23 – 25% participation).
- Most respondents participate regularly in outdoor recreation, with a significant minority (35%) reporting that they engage more than three times per week, and almost 50% take activities 1-3 times a week. This indicates an active population in which outdoor recreation plays a big role in their lives, be it socially or physically. Less than 20% of respondents engage/participate in recreational activity less than once a week.
- Leitrim's citizens participate in outdoor recreation mainly with family/friends, which enhances social connectivity and supports social cohesion in a very rural county. Over 40% engage in recreational activity alone, which reflects the popularity of walking and cycling as activities in the county. Almost 40% rated provision of recreational amenities as moderate in the county ('3' on a scale of 1-5), and a further 26% rated it as '4' (very good).
- Respondents reported that while there are many organised formal/semi-formal activities on offer, the groups are usually based in towns, not in rural areas, and more organised recreational activities are also needed during the weekdays.
- There is insufficient provision for disability and limited mobility users of recreational amenities.
- Potential improvements focused on issues of (i) improved access for all abilities; (ii) green and low environmental impact developments; (iii) more communications, joint-events, and collaboration among community groups; (iv) more linking of public transport to recreational amenities; and (v) communications – keeping information up-to-date and widely available.

These data provide a very useful snapshot of Leitrim citizens' perceptions of recreational access, barriers to participation and the standards of a range of recreational amenities across the County. Universal access clearly needs to be at the forefront of design and development of public recreational spaces.

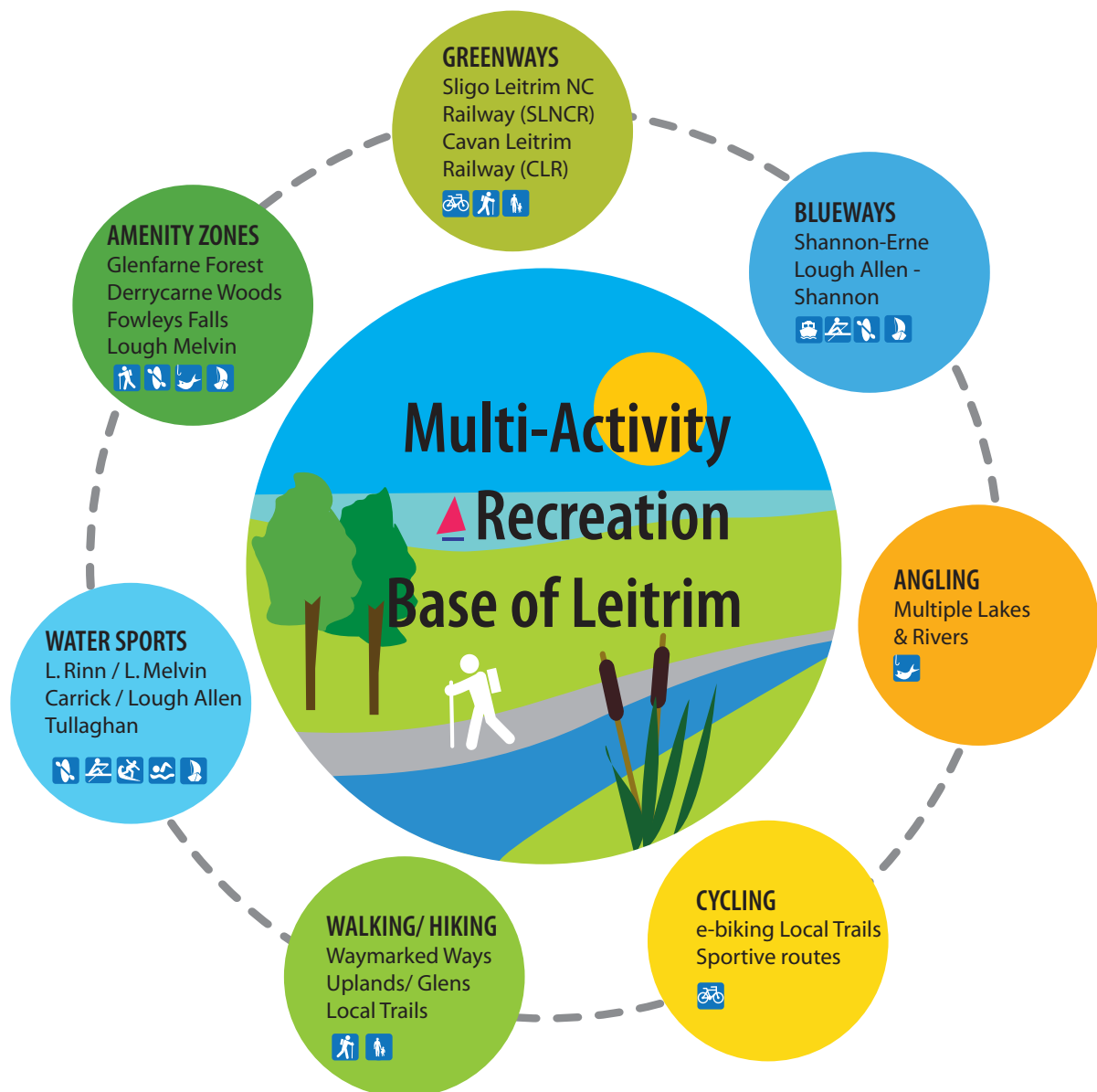
There is a need to further promote the work that the Leitrim Recreation Forum does and to communicate how local people can get involved and become active at community level.

Recreational Development in Leitrim

Leitrim is endowed with a beautiful array of mountains, lakes, woodlands, canals and rivers, as well as the shortest coastline in Ireland. These assets provide a superb base for development of land- and water-based recreational amenities, while 'being in nature' in tranquil, scenic surroundings.

Leitrim's Recreational Amenities

Over the past two decades, Leitrim has developed an impressive array of outdoor recreational amenities for walking, cycling, angling, boating, rowing, kayaking, canoeing and hillwalking. These amenities have been significantly augmented by the work of the Leitrim Recreation Forum and proactive efforts of the local development company (LDC), the local authority (LCC) and the relevant statutory agencies. The ongoing and positive collaboration with farmers and landowners is critical in providing permissive access to the countryside for outdoor recreation, which is generously acknowledged.



The 'Big 6' Signature Projects

The past decade has seen significant progress in development of key recreational infrastructural projects across the county. Six signature (1-6 below) projects were identified that should provide the core focus for Leitrim Recreation Forum and its partners to be taken to completion in the coming decade.

Two Greenways are central to Leitrim's array of signature recreational projects for development:

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

The revitalisation from 'rails to trails' in both instances has been heavily supported by LDC and LCC through the work of the Forum, with critical community baseline activity and engagement with landowners along the defunct railways. This has led to the successful development of pilot sections of the greenways.

Leitrim County Council, working in partnership with colleagues in Sligo and Cavan County Councils, Fermanagh & Omagh District Council in Northern Ireland and Transport Infrastructure Ireland, has made substantial strides in development of the SLNCR. Leitrim and Cavan County Councils are working to develop the CLR as a recreational link from Dromod on the River Shannon to Belturbet in County Cavan. Community support and landowner access, as well as intensive environmental, economic and planning appraisals are critical elements of the final delivery of these two greenways.

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

3. The Carrick on Shannon to Battlebridge – Lough Allen Blueway

Leitrim County Council has initiated the development of a unique walkway and cycleway along the River Shannon from Carrick on Shannon to Battlebridge, which will deliver a 'must-do' recreational link with the Lough Allen Blueway. The project is currently at design and planning stage. It is also envisaged that the Council will be working collaboratively with Waterways Ireland to deliver a number of key interventions in the Battlebridge-to-Lough Allen and Leitrim Village-to-Kilclare sections of the Blueway to address road crossings and related issues as part of this development.

4. The Shannon Erne Blueway stretches from Leitrim Village to Belturbet along the international Shannon Erne Waterway (SEW). There is scope for links to the Cavan-Leitrim Greenway also, providing connecting recreational infrastructure. This 65km+ blueway is nearing completion and will provide a fully integrated boating-walking-cycling amenity through this beautiful stretch of the county.

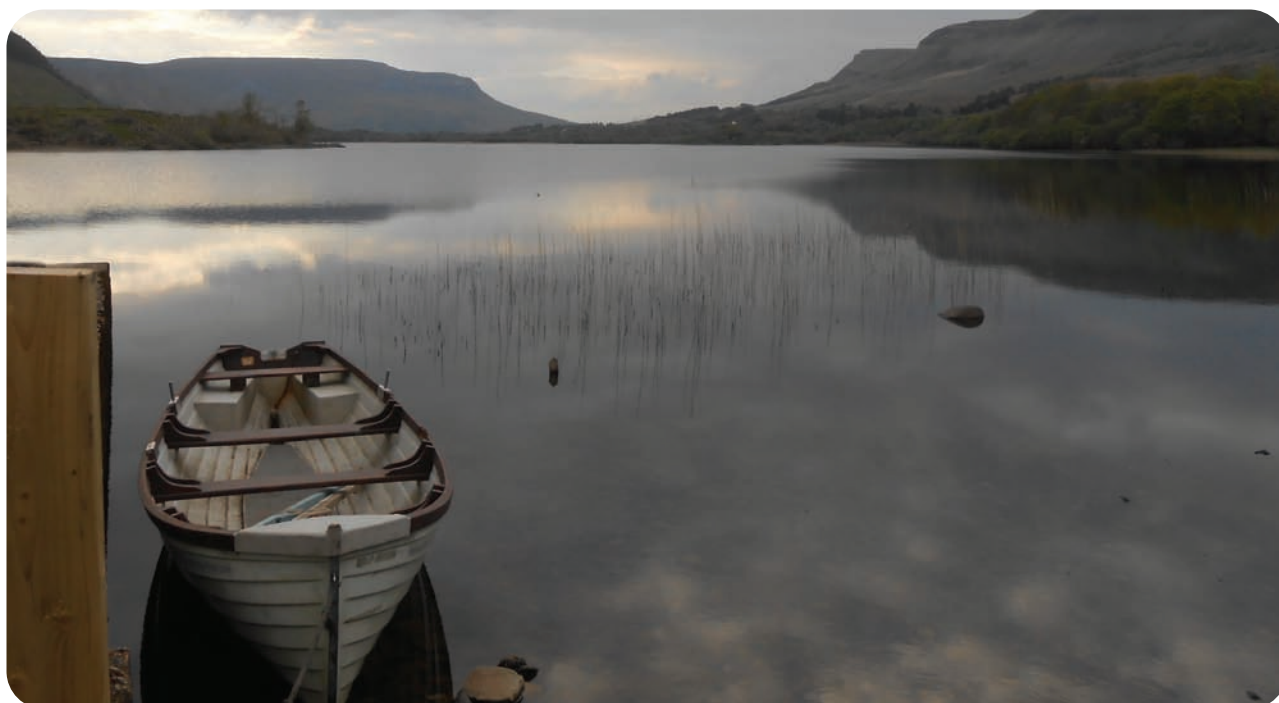


Photo: Aideen Connolly





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

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

There is scope to further enhance Coillte's forest estate for recreation at local level, for example such as Derrycarne Woods near Dromod, in association with local communities.

Water Activity Hubs

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

The water-hub at Lough Rinn could provide a safe zone for such activities with relatively modest investment in additional parking, water craft storage areas, and general amenities along the foreshore of the lake (subject to full environmental and planning considerations). The nearby town of Mohill has much to contribute to the development of this recreational asset, providing essential services and wider transport links.



Walking Infrastructure

Leitrim enjoys access to three national way-marked ways: the **Leitrim Way, the Miners Way & Historical Trail** and parts of the **Cavan Way**, based on permissive access of the relevant landowners/ farmers and land managers. The Rural Recreation Officer manages these routes and relationships through the offices of Leitrim Development Company. There is potential to expand the Leitrim Way northwards to reach the Atlantic coast, to create a 4-5 day walking experience through some of the most beautiful areas of the county.

The **Beara Breifne Way**, although not a national waymarked way, terminates in Blacklion in County Cavan, just over the border from County Leitrim, and also offers links southwards through Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. Issues to be addressed include ambiguous signage where different trail segments overlap. A policy of integrated signage is required that aligns with the County's tourism development strategy; Waterways Ireland and regional Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Wild Atlantic Way brands.



Local Walking Amenities

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

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

- Glencar Waterfall
- Acres Lake, with onshore amenities
- O'Rourke's Table
- Fowleys Falls, with trail links to Rossinver and the Organic Centre
- Derrycarne Forest trails, and Others that may emerge, including
- Kiltyclogher to Lough Melvin,
- Tawley Bog Walk, and
- Active travel links from rural settlements to key amenities.

There is scope to expand the lakeshore walking network, alongside Lough Melvin, Garadice, Gulladoo and Lough Boderg, all of which would require integrated services such as parking, picnic spots, viewing points, as well as standard services such as WC and waste management. It is notable that the development of walking trails is increasingly challenging for many community-based trail planners and managers, with particular reference to permissive access,



Potential bog trail at Tawley, North Co. Leitrim

Photo: Alan Hill, Aideen Connolly

management, maintenance and insurance. New opportunities are emerging, however, using publicly accessible tracks to create local trails suited to residents and visitors alike. Integrated capacity building is required to support community groups in trail planning, development, management and maintenance in line with Sport Ireland guidance and NORS guidance, to ensure highest quality in future trail development in Leitrim.

Cycling/ e-Biking

Cycling is a growing recreational activity across Ireland and increasingly for tourists also. The emerging Greenways and Blueways will provide a significant off-road base for cycling in Leitrim, but there is also scope to extend the current cycling trail network and to further expand the Leitrim Sportive routes. These should aim to create links from services centres, recreation hubs (see signature projects above) and sites of heritage interest. e-Biking has similarly increased exponentially and the potential to expand this network for recreational and active travel is enormous. Leitrim has already the Electric Bike Tours enterprise engaged in e-biking for more than a decade, centred along the Shannon Erne Waterway/ Shannon Erne Blueway.

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

Water Based Activities

Leitrim's rivers and many lakes are currently used for angling, rowing, swimming, boating and kayaking forms of recreation. Care needs to be taken of our waterways. The development of enhanced recreational amenities must consider the range of natural and cultural constraints and proposals must be carefully planned, to protect native species and habitats, with measures taken to prevent introduction of invasive species to our waterways by recreational users or small craft.

Angling in Leitrim

Leitrim is renowned for its salmon, grilse and wild brown trout fishery. However, the future development of angling nationwide and in Leitrim is challenging due to declines in fish stocks linked to water quality, inadequate conservation measures, migratory challenges, global warming, as well as changes in the marketplace of visiting anglers (demographics, age profile, etc). Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) developed the National Strategy for Angling Development in 2018, which aimed to make angling attractive and accessible and to increase angling activity. Central to this was the sustainable development of the natural angling resource, ensuring protection and conservation of fish stocks. IFI also emphasise the need for stakeholder engagement, highest standards in amenity development and a coherent approach to marketing and promotion of angling, with clubs and tourism promoters.



Photo: Fáilte Ireland Content Pool

This approach was practically supported by the Recreation Forum and Leitrim's Tourism Development Unit through the production of a comprehensive Angling Guide for the county. A lack of access to private lands for angling or launching of boats, and shortage of designated quays, pontoons or safe landing places outside of a few older facilities, will require redress in partnership with the relevant statutory authorities.

Swimming

'Wild swimming' is becoming increasingly popular across Leitrim in lakes and rivers. Bathing waters are required to meet stringent water quality standards and LCC designate specific areas suited to swimming. If this network is to be expanded, then further resourcing will be required by LCC to assure the public of highest quality bathing waters.

Kayaking/ Canoeing Trail Opportunities

Water trails provide a unique way to engage with the natural and cultural heritage of lakes and rivers. The maintenance of water quality is vital and any development proposal should consider measures to avoid adverse impact on the receiving environment through proactive planning from the outset. Guided canoe trails are available commercially in Leitrim, through the Adventure Gently and Way to Go enterprises, but there is tremendous scope to expand kayak and canoe trails along the rivers-lakes network of the county. The Northwest Canoe Club at Lough Melvin (c. 200 members) notes the potential to develop kayak trails along the Shannon, and / or through the rivers network to Sligo. There is also scope for cross-border trails through community trail collaborations from Lough Macnean in Leitrim/Cavan to Arney in Co. Fermanagh. The potential to expand Leitrim's water-based activities is very considerable, but will require very significant commitments from all parties to deliver.

Recreational Boating

There is scope for further integration of recreational boating into the outdoor recreational offering in Leitrim. This is a key component of the outdoor tourism offering in Leitrim and is central to the proposals contained in the Shannon Tourism Masterplan to develop 'active in nature' tourism propositions.

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



Photo: Fáilte Ireland Content Pool

Value Adding: Delivery of Soft Infrastructure

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

- Continue to build community and agency partnerships to deliver unique recreation-led initiatives for rural regeneration and place- making on a landscape scale, focused on the natural attractions and recreation infrastructure of Leitrim.
- Showcasing of Leitrim’s natural heritage and biodiversity along the various trails and ways, and exposition of local cultural heritage to enhance the recreational experience;
- Enhanced focus on investment and commercialisation of recreational development and animation of new micro-businesses and SMEs, as a cornerstone of Leitrim’s tourism offering.
- Building of capacity and training at all levels of participation to enhance the capacity to deliver the projects and tourism experiences so that Leitrim becomes a ‘must see must do’ place to visit in the heart of ‘Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands’ and ‘Wild Atlantic Way’.

A more detailed Strategic Action Plan is presented in the Recreation Strategy (Volume 2) to provide a ‘road map’ for development of these various land and water-based signature and local initiatives that will position County Leitrim firmly as a ‘must see, must do’ recreational destination on the national outdoor recreation map.



Leitrim- a paradise of land and of water

Photo: Fáilte Ireland Content Pool

Leitrim Recreation Strategic Action Plan

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

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

Strategic Objectives of the Recreation Strategy

The following six strategic objectives will underpin the delivery of the Recreation Strategy and 10-year Action Plan for County Leitrim, mirroring those of the National Outdoor Recreational Strategy (2023 -2027).

1. LEADERSHIP

To provide integrated Leadership, management, and resourcing to deliver the objectives of the Strategy, in partnership with Leitrim Recreation Forum, Leitrim County Council, statutory agencies, cross-border bodies, communities and recreational enterprises.

2. ENVIRONMENT

To deliver signature recreational infrastructure and amenities at county, local, inter-county, and cross-border levels, based on highest standards of design, planning, environmental management; biodiversity enhancement and interpretation.

3. AWARENESS

To optimise awareness of the full range of Leitrim's recreational opportunities through ongoing communications and promotional campaigns, dedicated web portal and tailored applications (showcasing greenways, blueways, trails, events & activities, services), with unified communications among recreation, sports, and tourism interests in the county.

4. OPPORTUNITIES

To actively encourage and facilitate recreational participation of people of all ages and abilities, through targeted programmes and initiatives, for enhanced health & wellbeing; immersion in nature and learning outdoors; inclusivity across all segments of society, while fostering opportunities for local enterprise, commercialisation, and job creation in the recreational sphere.

5. ACCESS

To foster enhanced access to the 'great outdoors', through positive partnerships with landowners and land managers to gradually expand Leitrim's permissive trails network; and by active promotion, training, and maintenance in responsible use of the countryside.

6. EXPERTISE

To build capacity in delivery of recreation across the County, through training needs analysis to inform design of bespoke leadership courses (guiding, group activity) and tailored training for participants (swimming, kayaking, map-reading, cycling etc). Small-and micro-business training /supports will be delivered in recreation and tourism, linked to Sport Ireland, Leitrim Sports Partnership and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands/ Wild Atlantic Way brands.



Photo: Mark Kelly @thewateredge

Integrated Strategic Action Plan

An integrated Strategic Action Plan is proposed to deliver the key initiatives of the Recreation Strategy over the ten-year period from 2023 – 2032. All of the recommended actions derive from intensive consultations and research to develop an outstanding, world class destination in County Leitrim. The following summary is an abridged version of the Action Plan; full details are presented in Volume 2 of this Recreation Strategy.

Critically, the Leitrim Recreation Forum will not be able to deliver all of the measures proposed by itself. Many of the proposed projects will require collaboration and partnership with other agencies, as well as new recruits and volunteers, to deliver the requisite infrastructure and value adding initiatives over the coming decade.



Photo: Aileen Connolly



Photo: Fáilte Ireland Content Pool

No	KEY ACTION	ABRIDGED ACTION PLAN
1.	LEADERSHIP, Management, Resourcing and Partnership in delivery of Leitrim Recreation Strategy	
1.1	Continue delivery of outdoor recreation in Leitrim through the established and representative Leitrim Recreation Forum (LRF).	
1.2	Secure requisite resources	Secure appropriate funding to ensure delivery of the objectives of this Strategy, to support LRF and its Working Groups.
1.3	Support Leitrim Recreation Forum	Adopt Recreation Strategy & Action Plan to provide the road map for LRF and its Working Groups over the coming term;
	Active recruitment	Pro-actively recruit volunteers to WGs through invitation, engagement with clubs, SMEs, public information campaigns. Recruit support for RRO admin of LRF/ support to WGs (p/t)
	Integration of Efforts	Increase collaboration of LRF, RRO and Leitrim Sports Partnership for delivery of key elements of outdoor recreation & capacity
2.	ENVIRONMENT: Deliver sustainable Recreational Infrastructure & Amenities at county, local and inter-county levels	
2.1	Environmental best practice underpins recreation in Leitrim: in all aspects of recreational design, planning and delivery	
2.2	Deliver signature Recreational Infrastructure projects for Leitrim: creation of recreational destination of national and international significance	
	Signature Greenways and Blueways– <i>developed to highest international standards, with respect for Leitrim's considerable biodiversity</i>	SLNCR: development of cross-border rail-to-trail greenway through North Leitrim, linking Sligo and Enniskillen – in partnership with landowners, community groups, relevant authorities. Cavan-Leitrim Railway: inter-county rail-to-trail greenway, as a major recreational trail through South Leitrim and Cavan, Shannon Erne Blueway: complete the full blueway from Leitrim village, through Ballinamore to Belturbet Shannon Blueway:Lough Allen(Drumshanbo) to Carrick on Shannon: complete the staged blueway in partnership with other local authorities, including board-walking of key segments.
	Forest Recreation Park	Glenfarne Estate: transformation of existing trails into an iconic Forest Recreation Park, offering trails, access to waterways,
	Water Sports Hub	Lough Rinn Water Sports Hub: ongoing support to development & expansion of water-based recreation hub

<p>2.3</p>	<p>Development/ Expansion of Walking Trails Network</p> <p><i>Planned investments for signature greenways, blueways & amenities will significantly enhance the county's offer for 'soft adventure' outdoor recreation, with opportunities to develop a range of linked trails from the core framework</i></p>	<p>Develop an integrated Strategy for Trails Development, including designation of trail heads, signage, servicing, parking, etc – working with landowners/ farmers, land managers and communities</p> <p>Revitalisation & extension (northwards) of Leitrim Way (including elements of Beara Breffni Way)</p> <p>Explore inter-county & cross-border trail opportunities with Roscommon, Cavan, and Fermanagh</p> <p>Expansion of lakeshore Walking Trails as feasible: Lough Allen, Melvin, Rinn, Garadice, Gulladoo, Boderg, etc (all subject to permissive access), with opportunities for nature viewing</p> <p>Birdwatching/ Nature viewing in Forest / Lakeshore settings: emplace bird hides at key river/ lakeshore viewing points on Shannon, Allen, Garadice, Melvin, Acres, Gulladoo, Boderg</p> <p>Explore options for enhanced links from three Leitrim Sports Hubs to the 'Great Outdoors' – develop seamless recreation to encourage more people to explore the outdoors</p>
<p>2.4</p>	<p>Cycling / e-Biking Development</p> <p><i>Leitrim has potential to become a cycling and e-biking hub through development of high-quality cycling infrastructure using the county's rural road network. Cycling Infrastructure to include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greenways/Blueways • County Cycling/ e-Biking • Mountain biking trails both linear and looped 	<p>Planning Route analysis / feasibility for future roads and public realm works should include cycle lanes e.g. segregated cycle lanes from Mohill to Lough Rinn; from Fenagh to Ballinamore/ SEW</p> <p>Cycle lanes on approaches to schools, within 30kph speed zones for 1km either side of entrances during school arrival/ pick-up hours (as per NPAP recommendations)</p> <p>Actively support enhancement of the local/national cycling events delivered by clubs in the county</p> <p>Consider Leitrim walking/cycling tour, with links to heritage sites and points of interest</p> <p>Continue to develop Leitrim Glens Sportive trails.</p> <p>Scope potential for e-biking routes throughout Leitrim, including specialist mapping</p>
<p>2.5</p>	<p>Water Based Activities</p> <p>Wild Swimming Amenities</p> <p>Rowing</p> <p>Kayaking / Canoeing</p>	<p>Identify new designated bathing areas (and preparatory work to bring these up to national standard). Designate suitable locations for wild swimming / family fun with associated amenities & monitoring regime.</p> <p>Lough Rinn – expand parking, amenities, changing facilities; servicing (bike parking, WC, showers, etc.)</p> <p>Carrick Rowing Club – proactive events calendar to organise 'Give it a Go' days to attract new rowers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand Lough Melvin kayaking/ canoeing hub: provision of amenities e.g. boathouse, services, training • Creation of new Sports Hub on Lough Melvin with cross-border opportunities (events orientated)s • Conduct Feasibility Study into creation of iconic Canoe Trails along the Leitrim rivers/ lakes network • Establish Adventure Sports Clubs (incl. equipment storage, WC) in Ballinamore, Glencar, Glenfarne and Keeldra lakes <p>Support further development of Upper Lough MacNea to Arney canoe trail –design, signage, promotion</p> <p>Develop small craft access points to lake/ river shores (with landowner permission) to encourage exploration of Leitrim's natural heritage in riverine/ lacustrine environments</p>

	<p>Recreational Boating</p> <p>Encourage and support low-impact recreational boating on Leitrim's lakes and canals in association with IWAI / Waterways Ireland.</p> <p>Programmed 'Give it a Go Days' on Water via Sports Hubs</p> <p>Schedule regular 'activity days' at County Sports Hub days or free Summer Water Camps. Proactive engagement with schools and Foráige youth club programmes on water safety</p>
2.6	<p>Angling Development</p> <p>Explore the establishment of Centres of Excellence for Angling, both game and coarse angling.</p> <p>Continued support of traditional angling clubs in attracting membership Invite 'new Irish' anglers to join angling clubs; become involved in conservation measures</p> <p>Promotion: Work with Leitrim Tourism Officer and Angling Clubs to promote angling offering in Leitrim</p> <p>Support conservation initiatives with Inland Fisheries officers and angling clubs Work to control invasive species through extensive biosecurity measures (see 2.1 above)</p> <p>Promote Citizen Science initiatives in Leitrim linked to national Water Day/ WaterBlitz</p> <p>Programme of 'get started days' through Angling 'Something Fishy' (IFI)</p> <p>Promote angling as a healthy outdoor pursuit for people with disabilities, or mental health issues. Referral measures with GPs/ psychologists network to engage older men in social angling.</p>
3.	<p>AWARENESS : optimise awareness of the full range of Leitrim's recreational opportunities through ongoing communication and promotion</p>
3.1	<p>Develop a Communications Strategy</p> <p>Develop a Communications Strategy – use of LCC / LDC web platforms; social media; apps (applications) Deliver monthly note to local papers; circulate quarterly e-zine within the county and beyond</p> <p>Explore integration of Recreation as a key element of the Leitrim Tourism brand with LCC Tourism Officer, with integrated messaging and communications (internally and externally).</p> <p>Bespoke communications training for LRF members: in basic social media and broader presentation skills.</p>
3.2	<p>Create a new, integrated web portal for Leitrim Recreation (in tandem with Sports, Tourism)</p> <p>Web Portal</p> <p>Integrate a vibrant Leitrim Recreation & Tourism website with Leitrim County Council web portal</p> <p>Recreation Apps</p> <p>Develop supporting Apps (trails, recreation activities, services) for Leitrim using best practice models trail offerings</p>
4.	<p>OPPORTUNITIES: Increase Participation in Outdoor Recreation while creating Opportunities for Enterprise</p>
4.1	<p>Increasing Participation in Outdoor Recreation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communications across County of 'What's On' (see 3.1, 3.2 above) • Develop targeted programmes and initiatives, working with LSP to optimise resources • Work with GPs network to actively promote recreation as a positive health measure

	Training / Competence Recreation Campaigns Universal Access and Recreational Participation for All	Training coaches and volunteer corps competent to deliver training in range of recreational activities •Develop Get Leitrim Walking; Get Leitrim Cycling; Get Leitrim Swimming; Get Leitrim Paddling; 'Give it a Go' days, campaigns and work in partnership with sporting bodies to deliver • Build universal design principles into design & delivery of new projects wherever feasible Create a new Disability Sports Hub – Drumshanbo, or location in central Leitrim (partner contribution)
4.2	Learning through Recreation Active Nature Days for all	Develop positive environmental learning initiatives, as intrinsic elements of 'active recreation' Guided nature viewing, with Walk Leaders (see Section 6 below) • Encourage active retired clubs/ schools youth clubs to walk in nature at designated 'safe zones' in public amenity areas • Target Men's Sheds in the county to engage in social recreational activities – such as 'walk and talk' / angling
4.3	Adding Value for Enterprises	Enhance commercialisation of suitable recreational amenities with tourism SMEs and agencies (FI/ LEO/ LDC) •Build a cohort of trained walking/ cycling/ e-biking/ kayaking/angling guides, rangers - • Encourage recreation SMEs/ start-ups to avail of enterprise training including cross border opportunities.
5.	ACCESS : Proactive Management for Permissive Access in the Outdoors	
5.1	Relationship Management for Access	
	Farming Relations & Collaboration	Pro-active engagement and relationship management with farmers & their representative bodies. Invite landowner participation in LRF (cf. WUC/ MacGillycuddy Reeks) Develop a model project on recreational access with farmers/ IFA (cf. Mountain Access Project)
	Statutory Agencies: Collaboration	Ongoing engagement with public land managers to assure recreational access to public lands. Collaborate with agencies to deliver key infrastructure (Glenfarne, SEW, Lough Allen Blueway, Training for enterprises) etc
	Code of Activity	Promote handbook / campaign on 'Code of Responsible Activity in Outdoors' ('Leave No Trace', Sport Ireland, guidance)
	Sanctions	Review legal enforcement mechanisms for sanctioning of irresponsible dog-owners in the county.
5.2	Animating Volunteers to encourage responsible behaviours	Work with the Leitrim Volunteer Centre to identify animation activities to attract volunteer activity guides, Work to identify young volunteers through youth clubs e.g., Foráige; or Refugee reception centres with supported training

6.	BUILDING EXPERTISE	
6.1	Training Needs Analysis	Conduct training needs analysis across the county with community groups, establishing their needs and requirements
6.2	Training & Capacity Building	<p>Design of bespoke training in guiding/ enabling for all recreation sectors, for guides and leaders (Sports Partnership)</p> <p>Based on training needs analysis (6.1), develop a small cohort of Train-the-Trainers</p> <p>Enhanced micro-SME training in recreation and tourism, linked to IHH, Sport Ireland and NORS</p>
6.3	Development of Community Recreation Toolkits	Tool-Kit to be used by all community and micro businesses in developing, managing, and maintaining recreational amenities (Present the Community Toolkit by way of a roadshow)
6.4	Delivery of Leitrim Recreation Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Host a Recreation Conference to promote all aspects of Recreational development in Leitrim, every 5 years • Promote success stories & enterprises, including showcasing of cross-border initiatives • Develop strong communications / PR strategy to attract national and international attention to recreation conference in.
6.5	Integrated Calendar of Leitrim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop annual 12-month calendar of Recreation & Sports Events across Leitrim. • Use accessible online/ social media about all types of events across county • Identify grant supports for Festivals & Events with potential to grow (in partnership with LDC).
6.6	<p>Enhanced Disability Access through design and facilitation (CSO (2016) identified Persons living with Disability as 14% of the population of Leitrim (= 4,486 people)</p> <p>Enable access to amenable recreational activities for citizens living with disabilities, through improved design, standards Example of best practice for disabled access to outdoor recreation in Co. Fermanagh; https://sharevillage.org/activities-for-all/</p>	<p>Working with local disability activity groups, Leitrim Sports Partnership and CARA3 to review access to current public amenities/facilities/ services; assess shortcomings and points suited to remediation.</p> <p>Adoption of Universal Design Principles in design of recreational amenities, where amenable (4.1)</p> <p>Upskilling of existing coaches in the county to more fully engage with those with disabilities</p> <p>Enhanced communications with people with disabilities promoting activities/events available</p>

Key Performance Indicators

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

The KPIs are intended to:

- Provide a simple, expandable system of easy to source data, using as much objective data as possible;
- Facilitate regular reports to the Recreation Forum and the Linkage Working Group;
- Inform the production of an annual 'monitoring and evaluation' (M&E) report; and
- Allow for pragmatic tracking of projects and flexibility in delivery.

Sources of Funding for Implementation

Funding available for outdoor recreational infrastructure and amenities has increased significantly in the past five years. The 2020-2021 pandemic has enhanced recognition by policy makers that citizens require access to recreation and nature, spurring developments at regional and county level, supported by various funding mechanisms.

The delivery of the Leitrim Recreation Strategy will require significant investment of both human and financial resources over the coming decade to meet the objectives set out in this document. The National Programme for Government 2020 made significant phased funding provision for outdoor recreation through a series of dedicated funds, which will support the future capital development of recreational infrastructure, as well as the operational delivery and management of the amenities.

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

The delivery of signature and local recreational infrastructure that will transform the recreational offering of County Leitrim. Partnership will be critical in delivery of many of these core elements. A number of funding opportunities are presented based on the national funding framework for outdoor recreation, including the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF); the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS); the LEADER Rural Development Programme (RDP 2023-2027); and Active Travel.

Co-funding opportunities exist through partnerships under environment, heritage, tourism, forest recreation and biodiversity measures also, as well as opportunities under the cross-border PEACE PLUS programme.



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The Future for Leitrim Recreation

This new Recreation Strategy for County Leitrim is building on the significant work conducted by the Leitrim Recreation Forum and its many partners over the last decade.

The challenge ahead is to both consolidate the considerable gains and to build upon an impressive array of potential projects. The foundation for the next ten years will be to galvanise concerted efforts around capable people and appropriate resources, centred on a clear vision.

The hundreds of committed people that contributed to the development of this Recreation Strategy are a healthy signifier of the major strides that Leitrim can take in developing its recreational assets, while contributing proactively to sustaining rural communities and enterprises.

Positive partnership-building with farmers and landowners will be essential for future recreational access to the countryside.

Leitrim, through its past experience and future vision, can become a model for other counties on how to deliver an integrated, progressive, responsible and inclusive recreational offering for the benefit of all.



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