

## **CHAPTER 9          TOURISM**

### **9.1          BACKGROUND**

Tourism continues to be an important contributor to the economy of Donegal. Donegal's striking landscape, over 400kms of coastline and cultural uniqueness combine to make the region truly distinct as a tourist destination.

Tourism has been identified as a key Sector for the County in *an Stratéis*, the County Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development.

The Council has taken a pro-active approach to the development of Tourism in the County in recent years. Support is provided both directly and indirectly to assist in tourism product development and marketing. The Community, Culture & Enterprise Directorate co-ordinates a range of actions and projects, with the objective of assisting the County in developing as a modern tourism destination. Through the Tourism Sectoral Forum of the County Development Board, views of the various stakeholders in tourism in the County are taken and work co-ordinated. The Council is also a key partner in Donegal Tourism Ltd., a collaborative venture set up under the auspices of the County Development Board to assist and co-ordinate in the marketing of the County.

#### **Changing Trends**

Reports carried out point to a growing level of regional imbalance within the Country as a whole. Many tourists are entering the Country via Dublin and staying in the Eastern region or heading to the South West of the Country. It is estimated that only 6% of overseas visitors to Ireland visited the North West region, and between 1998-2003 visitor numbers to the County fell by approximately 30%. It is vital for the County to encourage visitors to the Northwest and to ensure ease of movement through areas by providing quality access, communications and focal points.

It is envisaged that Tourism will continue to play an important role in the economy of Donegal, both in generating revenue and in providing employment. The Council recognises this and seeks to work in partnership with interested bodies to promote the County in a sustainable and successful manner. The Council acknowledges the many and varied challenges facing the County with regard to tourism and aims to work in partnership with such interested bodies to overcome any issues which may arise that would have a negative impact upon the future of tourism in the County.

#### **GOAL**

To support the development of sustainable tourism as a key element of an overall economic development strategy at both County and Local levels.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

- To manage, conserve, promote and enhance the natural, built and cultural heritage, which provides a core resource for the industry.
- To support the development of a quality environmental image for the County.
- To support the development of product based tourism packages within the County.

## County Donegal Development Plan 2006-2010 (as Varied)

- To promote strong tourism identity areas, via interagency consultations, and create all ancillary facilities necessary for a quality holiday destination.
- To support the development of areas with strong tourism potential which will lead to a sustainable tourism economy for the County and Region.
- To facilitate and manage quality infrastructural supports, necessary to ease travel within the County including roads, signage, broadband, transport initiatives and accommodation.
- To support the educational institutions that assist in the development of tourism in the County.

### **9.2 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT**

In order to diversify and encourage growth of the existing tourism product and the sustainable management of the County's unique assets, it is proposed to focus on specific sectors for development. The Council will seek to work in partnership with interested bodies to establish frameworks for the development of particular tourism niche products. A list of specific projects will be drawn up in partnership with Elected Members, interested bodies and state agencies. The Council aims to encourage a diverse range of activities in order to act as a means of attracting tourists into the County as well as providing recreation opportunities for local people.

Donegal offers a wide variety of attractions including Festivals and Events, Marine Leisure, Mountain based activities, Island attractions, Heritage parks, Castles, Abbeys, Forests, National Parks, Equestrian activities, Fishing, Golfing, Walking trails, Cultural Activity events, Eco-Tourism events, Rallying, Surfing and Diving etc.

In recognition of Donegal's unique landscape and natural features, it is proposed to establish, in partnership with Elected Members, interested bodies and agencies, a list of specific projects for development.

Outside this partnership approach, the Council will consider the development of resource related tourist projects in the County (both within control points and outside control points) other than standalone accommodation wherein the core of the proposal is the tourism product and the harnessing of the resource. Any accommodation element of the development proposal must be ancillary in nature to the overall resource related tourist project so that the product is the dominant element. The development proposal shall also be required to accord with normal development management considerations including location, siting and design.

### **9.3 POLICIES AND PROPOSALS**

The Council will focus on areas of tourism product development based on the cultural, natural and built environment. It will also aim to work in partnership with interested bodies to promote awareness and develop frameworks for the formation of development projects creating strong product identities and enabling interested bodies to develop individual projects within an area. The main product development areas shall include:

- Marine Leisure
- Walking Routes
- Angling Projects
- Flagship Projects
- Festivals & Cultural Events
- All weather facilities

## County Donegal Development Plan 2006-2010 (as Varied)

- Island Development
- Heritage/ Culture
- Tourist routes including an examination of the potential to designate/open up new routes e.g. Croaghs-Edeninfagh
- Sports activities and facilities

### **POLICY TOU 1:**

It is the policy of the Council to establish Product Development Action Plans for new projects throughout the County. It is anticipated that this can be achieved by:

- (1) Working in Partnership with Elected Members, interested bodies, state agencies and local people to create a priority list of projects, which is to be established and reviewed by the Council at regular intervals in order to create a clear understanding and direction of product development in the County.
- (2) Adopting the Model of Best Practise method in order to achieve maximum benefits from all projects, for both users and the environment and by regularly reviewing projects to ensure that they are catering for the widest market possible.
- (3) Developing a critical mass of walking routes throughout the County, during and beyond the lifetime of the Plan, to incorporate Bealach na Gaeltahta, the Bluestacks Way, the Ulsterway (Donegal Section) and the Slí na Slaínte Walkways and others in conjunction with relevant organisations and groups. These walking routes will also have the dual purpose of local amenity use.

### **POLICY TOU 2:**

It is the policy of the Council to seek long term provision for access to the Off Shore Islands in the form of sheltered harbours, regular ferry services and airstrips along with the provision of roads, water, sewage, waste management and a modern efficient telecommunications system in order to allow Islanders to create and maintain a sustainable tourism product.

### **POLICY TOU 3:**

It is the policy of the Council to support Resource Related Tourism Product Development, other than standalone accommodation, of both existing and new developments, wherein the core of the proposal is the tourism product and the harnessing of an existing resource.

This policy shall apply throughout the County, except in Especially High Scenic Amenity areas (EHSA's).

It shall be a requirement of this policy that any such development shall: Harness an identified tourism resource whilst respecting the existing environment (e.g. natural, cultural, heritage).

The tourism product proposed must relate to and harness the existing resource with which it is associated, and shall have close linkages and dependencies on that resource (e.g. hotel, marina, outdoor pursuits centre).

Holiday home development may be considered in an ancillary capacity to the above, but the Tourism Product must remain the dominant element. Any such holiday home development must be physically close and related to both the Resource Related Tourism Product Development and the resource that Product is harnessing.

Any application for planning permission for a Resource Related Tourism Development Product will be required to clearly demonstrate the resource to be harnessed and how the proposed Resource Related Tourism Product is associated with the primary resource. If ancillary holiday home development is proposed, the onus shall be on the applicant to demonstrate how the Resource Related Tourism Development Product is to remain the dominant element.

Any application submitted for a Resource Related Tourism Development Product, must also accord with all other policies and technical standards of this Development Plan.

#### **9.4 TRANSPORT, COMMUNICATIONS & ACCESS**

One of the most important aspects relating to Tourism development in the County is the access into, from and around the County. The provision of adequate transport, signage and related facilities within the County is a major issue for visitors to the County. These issues are dealt with in detail in Transportation and Communications Chapter 3.

##### **(1) Roads**

Roads receive the highest priority in Donegal's transport hierarchy. The main issue relating to the road network is the provision of a safe and effective method of transportation throughout the County. The Council recognises the need to upgrade and maintain numerous local and regional roads as well as maintaining national routes.

##### **(2) Airport**

Donegal is served with two airports offering National and International services, with the East and North of the County served by the City of Derry Airport and the West of County Donegal by Donegal Airport in Carrickfin. The importance of these airports for internal and British/European flights is noted. Additionally, the importance of Dublin Airport and Belfast International Airport in an International and Transatlantic context is key in supporting the Economic Development objectives of the County, including tourism. The County recognises the need to improve linkages to and from all airports including those on regional and cross border basis.

##### **(3) Sea Access**

The last five years have seen rapid development of sea accesses in Donegal. The Council in conjunction with Limavady Borough Council launched the Greencastle to Magilligan car ferry service in 2001. This service has proved to be very popular and in 2004 a new route to link Buncrana and Rathmullan was introduced which has also proved to be a great success. The final phase in the linking of peninsulas is the Mulroy Bridge project, which will link the Fanad and Rosguill peninsulas.

##### **(4) Cruise ship market**

The development of a multi-million pound harbour in Killybegs offers a unique opportunity for tourism in the North West. The harbour enables cruise ships to berth overnight in Killybegs. Greencastle has promoted this sector for the past number of years. The Council recognises that this is a unique opportunity for Killybegs or Greencastle to establish a niche market which could sustain a seasonal Cruise Ship Centre.

**(5) Rail**

It is a long-term strategy of the Council to maintain and develop rail links to and throughout the County. In the interim period, the Council supports the retention and upgrading of the rail link between Belfast and Derry and the re-development of the Western Rail Corridor through Connaught and into Munster.

**(6) Communications**

Access to advanced information and communications infrastructure is essential for economic development. Tourism is viewed as an essential contributor to the County's economy, therefore, the development of a modern communications system is considered critical. The Council has embarked on the roll out of broadband across the County. Policies and proposals relating to Telecommunications are contained in the Transportation and Communications Chapter 2.1 and are also applicable here.

**GOAL**

To ensure the provision of safe and effective transportation and communication systems into and around the County.

**POLICY TOU 4:**

It is Council policy to:

- (1) Seek the provision and maintenance of a high quality transport network including all supporting infrastructure such as lighting, signage, picnic areas, roadside parking areas and other necessary facilities.
- (2) Work in partnership with interested bodies to overcome issues arising in specific areas such as rural transport initiatives, Island access, car and caravan parking areas and ancillary facilities.
- (3) Encourage the development of the cruise ship market in Killybegs by providing a range of facilities and attractions, which will encourage the development of a sustainable tourism market in the area.
- (4) Support the development of transport initiatives, which facilitate movement around the County and encourage and support the development of sea access initiatives and the construction of Mulroy bridge.
- (5) Support both Donegal Airport in Carrickfin and City of Derry Airport, in recognition of the important role they have in the development of the County.
- (6) Encourage and facilitate the development of retailing within the tourism sector.

**9.5 MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION**

Donegal is a land of breathtaking natural beauty with a rugged coastline, mountains, hills and unspoilt natural habitats that are home to innumerable species of flora and fauna. Whilst encouraging others to share in the delights of the County, great care must also be taken to protect the environment, which has remained unspoilt for centuries. Details of Conservation policies are contained in Chapter 8 The Built and Natural Environment.

## County Donegal Development Plan 2006-2010 (as Varied)

A Beach Management Pilot Project was initiated in Rossnowlagh in 2003 and it is anticipated that the project will be extended to a number of other beaches that are experiencing pressure from natural and man-made forces. The Project deals with issues ranging from coastal erosion to recreational activities and how best to achieve a balance between the enjoyment and conservation of the beaches.

At present Donegal has 11 Blue Flag beaches along the coast (Inclusive of Bundoran Town Council)

- |                |               |                  |                 |
|----------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Culdaff     | 4. Lisfannon  | 7. Fintra        | 10. Rossnowlagh |
| 2. Carrickfinn | 5. Marblehill | 8. Narin-Portnoo | 11. Bundoran    |
| 3. Shroove     | 6. Portsalon  | 9. Murvagh       |                 |

Blue Flag beach status means that bathing water quality, cleanliness of surroundings and toilets will be supervised, and that general information will be available to the beach user regarding environmental matters. It also requires regular monitoring of the water for bacteria. Development proposals that could damage Blue Flag status shall be carefully controlled by the Council in order to protect the status of the beach and the Council will explore the designation of further Blue Flag beaches within the County

### **Protected Sites**

The diversity and complexity of sites and associated activities set within the scenic landscapes and heritage areas of Donegal require a holistic response by the Council rather than uniform policy and simple land use zonings. The Council seeks to protect all landscapes, especially those designated as Special Protection Areas (SPA's), Special Areas of Conservation ( SAC's), National Heritage Sites (NHA), and Especially High Scenic Amenity Areas (EHSA) and views and prospects. All policies in Chapter 8 relating to the Built and Natural Heritage shall also apply here.

### **GOAL**

The Council seeks to protect and conserve the environment, whilst achieving a delicate balance which allows for the continued sustainable growth, maintenance and enjoyment of natural assets.

### **POLICY TOU 5:**

It is Council policy to:

- (1) Seek the undertaking of Beach Management Projects on a number of other beaches around the County.
- (2) Aim to increase the number of Blue Flag Beaches through out the County.
- (3) Work in partnership with interested bodies and promote the sustainable use of landforms to meet the needs of the present without compromising landscape quality.

## **9.6 EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES**

The Council acknowledges the role of third level institutions and their vital contribution to the development of the tourist sector, particularly from the perspective of training, education and research. In particular Donegal County Council recognises and supports the important role played by the Tourism College Killybegs, Letterkenny Institute of Technology, The National Fishery College Greencastle, Tuath, (The Donegal Lifelong Learning Centre) and a variety of Community Education Initiatives, which support the growing tourism sector.