

# County Longford Tourism Strategy

Developing a connected  
sustainable tourism  
destination



2023-2027

Wild deer in Newcastle Woods  
PHOTO: COLM MULLIGAN

# Longford's Tourism Vision

Longford will become a year-round sustainable tourism destination, providing authentic community and eco-tourism experiences, encouraging visitors to embrace slow tourism and grounded in respect for its natural and heritage assets that are protected for future generations.

Lough Ree Distillery

Drumlish Mill  
PHOTO: COLM MULLIGAN

# CONTENTS

## SECTION 1—Overview & Context

- 1.1 Background & Introduction..... 1
- 1.2 A Sustainable Tourism Approach..... 2
- 1.3 Longford Destination Profile..... 3
- 1.4 Key Tourism Assets ..... 4
- 1.5 Ireland's Hidden Heartlands..... 6
- 1.6 Policy & Plans..... 8
- 1.7 Tourism Situational Analysis (SWOT)..... 9
- 1.8 Consultation Process..... 11

## SECTION 2—Tourism Vision

- 2.1 A Tourism Vision for Longford..... 13

## SECTION 3—Achieving Our Vision: Strategy Approach

- 3.1 Strategic Objectives..... 15
- 3.2 Plan Framework..... 15
- 3.3 Seven 'A's Tourism Development Focus..... 16

## SECTION 4—Longford Tourism Vision Projects

- 4.1 Strategic Vision Projects..... 21

## SECTION 5—Promoting Tourism in Longford

- 5.1 Strategic Marketing Approach..... 25

## SECTION 6—Implementation & Measuring Success

- Strategic Vision Projects & Strategic Development Focus ..... 29

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# SECTION 1

## Overview & Context

### 1.1 Background & Introduction

This County Longford Tourism Strategy 2023–2027 represents a road map for tourism in the county aligned with an exciting five-year vision for Longford and a county-wide commitment to sustainable tourism. Central to the approach is the development of a sustainable destination, an important element of Ireland’s Hidden Heartland’s, delivering a unique destination and unique Longford experiences. The **tourism function** in Longford County Council is firmly established as an integral part of the local authority structure, responsible for the development, administration and promotion of all tourism-related activity in County Longford. The **tourism committee** comprises a mix of public and private stakeholders and is central to the capture of ideas, the formation of policy and the administration of funds for the development of tourism product.

The overarching ambition is to develop and promote County Longford as a **high-quality desirable destination within Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands** that offers **memorable visitor experiences**. To achieve this, we will continue to take a collaborative approach to tourism that enables County Longford harness the potential of its built and natural heritage to become a year-round tourism destination. This approach will be focused on **slow tourism** based around **culture, heritage and landscape** and on **outdoor recreation and adventure** that is both water and land-based.

We will continue to build on the **positive partnerships** with Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands, Waterways Ireland, the Regional USEFE group and other stakeholder groups, as well as **collaborations with the local communities** to facilitate the delivery of further products, attractions, and amenities to build up our tourism base. Our Longford communities will be at the heart of this plan and will be integral to how the visitor experiences the county and explores the rich community stories and the great people behind them. Central to past success and proposed future development in this sector is a strong **connection with all tourism providers** in County Longford to ensure that they are given every **support with their developmental and promotional needs**. The various stakeholders involved in tourism are ambitious that the sector will rebound strongly from the different challenges imposed over the last while, to include the fall-out from the global health pandemic and the conflict in Eastern Europe.

Longford Tourism has key responsibility **for marketing and promotion** of County Longford as an attractive tourism destination for visitors from home and abroad. It will build on the extensive bank of promotional material it has developed to date with particular emphasis on the tourism website [www.longford.ie](http://www.longford.ie), which enables it to promote its tourism products in a professional and accessible manner. It will continue to develop promotional videos and photography, and **social media channels** will be utilised to support our promotion of County Longford as a tourism destination. The significance of recently developed landmark trails such as the **National Famine Way** and **Royal Canal Greenway** will be recognised and promoted as important arteries to bring visitors, in particular, walkers and cyclists into the region. Importantly, we recognise that our **local population are our greatest ambassadors**. The development of product and services that contributes to the health and well-being of our local citizens will provide encouragement to them to welcome and support visitors at every opportunity.

A Longford  
welcome  
is a warm  
welcome!

Fire & Shadows Procession  
Dead of Night Festival  
PHOTO: LUKE DANNIELLS

Center Parcs Longford Forest  
Ireland’s Largest Indoor Waterpark

## 1.2 A Sustainable Tourism Approach

Sustainable tourism forms the basis of this plan accounting for the needs of visitors, tourism industry stakeholders, local communities and the environment. We are committed to tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic impacts together with its social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.

### V.I.C.E. Model for Sustainable Tourism Development



**Visitors**

Welcome, involve and satisfy visitors



**The industry that sustains the destination**

Achieve a profitable and prosperous industry



**The community that hosts the visitor**

Engage and benefit host communities



**The environment where it all takes place**

Protect and promote the local environment

Our vision for sustainable tourism will have a strong focus on slow tourism and regenerative tourism, focusing on our communities and embracing new opportunities. The rehabilitation of the peat boglands and the ambition to achieve the Biosphere Status for the Lough Ree Biosphere Reserve can have a transformative impact on Longford's destination status. This archaeological and biodiversity project will help the area to build a more sustainable eco-tourism base which will in turn provide economic benefits to the area.

A key focus of the Just Transition process is the rehabilitation of the Bord na Móna Bogs, an initiative arising from a review of the Biodiversity Action Plan 2015–2019. The company has outlined a target of at least 10,000 hectares to be rehabilitated over the next period. Plans in line with the Longford County Development Plan are advanced to extend the network of trails criss-crossing the boglands to enhance access and encourage more sustainable transport options. The challenge going forward is to ensure that all tourism-related development is done in a manner that is most sensitive to the local environment and delivers added value into the local economy. It is intended to encourage the use of sustainable tourism and, where relevant, eco-tourism principles in the development of tourism products in Longford.

These eco-tourism principles cover a wide range of practices in 8 key components of eco-tourism:

- 1 Environmentally Sustainable Practices
- 2 Natural Area Focus
- 3 Interpretation & Education
- 4 Contributing to Conservation
- 5 Benefiting Local Communities
- 6 Visitor Satisfaction
- 7 Responsible Marketing & Communication
- 8 Cultural Awareness & Respect

Climate Change is a key focus and a number of proposed actions can help to ensure that County Longford meets its obligations in this area. **Actions include:**

- 1 Collaborate with relevant state bodies, neighbouring local authorities and local communities in delivering a UNESCO accredited, biosphere for Lough Ree and the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park.
- 2 Continue to fund, improve and develop all greenways, blueways, peatways, and achieve Sport Ireland Trail Registration for all existing and proposed trails, wherever possible.
- 3 Seek funding for the responsible development of a biodiversity interpretative centre within the Commons area of Lanesborough Town.
- 4 Support opportunities for increased tourism within limits of existing infrastructure and sensitive habitats.
- 5 Prioritise tourism marketing to the domestic market across multiple media platforms.
- 6 Invest in the development of the local sustainable tourism market with zero carbon impact.

## 1.3 Longford Destination Profile

### Tourism Performance

Longford's central location in the 'Heart of the Hidden Heartlands' (see page 6) makes it a very strategic and accessible location for both domestic and international visitors. Major towns and cities in Ireland can be reached within a short period of time from County Longford making it an ideal base from which to explore all corners of the region. The county has direct links to Dublin via the M4 and N4, allowing access to and from the capital city in only 90 minutes. It is served by the Dublin–Sligo rail line and is traversed by the Royal Canal, making it accessible for visitors regardless of mode of transport.

It also has direct links westerly along the N5, opening up an important east-west corridor that connects visitors between Dublin and Mayo, Sligo and Donegal and is bordered by the mighty River Shannon that presents opportunity for all forms of water-based activity. County Longford's proximity to four international airports, namely, Dublin, Knock, Shannon and Belfast make it an axis point for the international visitor who wants to tour the country. Longford also borders Cavan, Westmeath, Roscommon and Leitrim, making it an ideal tourism hub for the North Midlands region. Strategically located in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Longford's landscape and topography means it is particularly well placed to exploit opportunities in slow and experiential tourism, offering both indoor and outdoor experiences.

In 2019, the Midlands region welcomed 411,000 visitors generating €117 million. It is estimated that Longford accounted for 24,000 of these visitors, generating €10 million (Source: Fáilte Ireland). For the year 2021, Fáilte Ireland reported that Longford had a total of 2,664 beds on offer, with the vast majority of these available in Center Parcs. In addition, data reveals that County Longford had 61 AirBnBs promoting short-term stays.

ACCOMMODATION SUPPLY	Co. Longford	Properties	No. Rooms/Units	Bed Spaces
	B&Bs	3	12	33
	Guesthouses	2	17	40
	Holiday Camps	1	932	2,330
	Hotels	3	92	225
	Self-Catering	2	3	18
	Irish Welcome Standard	1	6	18
	<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1,062</b>	<b>2,664</b>

Source: Fáilte Ireland Database 2021

Longford is a small county in geographical size and population. The population of County Longford has however grown significantly in recent years, with a 4.8% increase in 2011–2016 to 40,873, and a 14.09% increase to 46,634 in 2022. The increase to 2021 is the largest percentage increase in any county in Ireland mainly because of net inward migration from a broad range of new communities. Significantly many of these new communities seek employment in the tourism/hospitality sector as a first career step.

## 1.4 Key Tourism Assets

### Center Parcs: Longford Forest

Longford's Center Parcs has now become well established as the county's leading short-stay tourism attraction. It is **an iconic tourism resort and an iconic brand** and it has played a transformative role in putting County Longford on the tourism map. Longford is now a tourism destination where once it was a county traversed by tourists. This is a direct result of Center Parcs establishing its base in the county.

The resort employs over 1,200 employees leading to economic and social benefit across a wide catchment area. In 2022 it surpassed 1 million visitors and is currently attracting over 3,500 visitors to County Longford weekly. Center Parcs has ambitious plans to increase its capacity further and it operates a very successful business model based on shared family time and experiences.

The magnetic pull of Center Parcs as a tourist attraction, particularly in the Irish domestic market, presents opportunity for all local stakeholders to benefit from the increased footfall in the region. The challenge for the authorities and the different providers is to find best approaches to encourage visitors to stay in the region beyond their Center Parcs stay and experience some of the other amenities or attractions available in the area.

### Longford's Slow Tourism Landscape

Longford's rural and relatively flat topography, its natural and unspoilt landscape, make it a prime location for outdoor recreation and 'Slow Tourism' experiences. It is home to many fishing lakes dotted around the county and is bordered on its western side by the River Shannon and Lough Ree, which form part of the most important blueway artery in the country. Opportunity for fishing, leisure sailing, kayaking or swimming all exist and a number of designated blueway trails are already in place such as the 10km Kayaking Camlin River Loop centred in Cloondara.

The **Royal Canal Greenway** is the most significant greenway crossing the county and is supplemented with a series of beautiful walking trails that allow for gentle exploration of many different parts of County Longford. The Royal Canal Greenway is 130km of level towpath—ideal for walkers, runners and cyclists. It was officially opened in 2021 and has the capacity to bring thousands of visitors to Longford each year. It has two trail heads in County Longford. It intersects with the River Camlin at the beautiful village of Cloondara while a spur brings you into the heart of Longford Town.

The **National Famine Way** is a trail of historical significance, tracing the route walked by emigrants from Strokestown to the quays in Dublin during the time of the Great Famine. It follows the route of the Royal Canal Greenway and captures the story of that ill-fated journey with its captivating layers of history and culture, presenting a truly immersive and reflective experience.

The extensive Bord na Móna peatlands give the county a canvas that appeals to many visitors, including ecologists and environmentalists and now reclaimed, it will become a significant biosphere that will allow for responsible exploration, but also contribute significantly to our climate change agenda. All our towns and villages are served with local parks and walking trails that support local well-being but also form an important part of the public realm fabric that encourage visitors to a locality. The recently developed EZxploring trails offer a fun way to explore our towns, villages and the Royal Canal.

### Heritage & Culture in Longford

Another key to the tourism offering in Longford is the county's rich heritage and culture. There are numerous things to do and places to see in Longford that showcase our proud history. The small, picturesque villages and their rural settings intrigue visitors upon arrival. The town of Granard has a traceable history dating back to 236AD. One of Granard's leading tourist attractions is the **Granard Motte and Bailey**, which was built in 1199 by a Norman knight and is one of the best examples of an Anglo-Norman fortification in the country.

Another popular heritage attraction in Granard is the **Knights & Conquests Heritage Centre**. This attraction allows visitors to learn about Ireland's Norman ancestors via a walk on an interactive journey through time. The beautiful village of Ardagh is planned around a triangular green, bounded on the north by the grounds of Ardagh House and on the east by the Protestant parish church. Grouped to the south and west are the detached single and two storey cottages whose picturesque appearance gives Ardagh much of its charm.

Other popular heritage sites include **St. Mel's Cathedral** in Longford Town which was completely restored after a great fire in 2009 and the portal tomb and dolmen accessible from the village of Aughnacliffe. This impressive megalithic tomb is located in a shallow valley, among the rolling hills of north Longford.

The **Maria Edgeworth Centre** presents the rich and colourful history of the Edgeworth family, a gentry family from the 1800s that were full of philosophers and inventors and of course are best remembered for the famous novelist Maria Edgeworth.

Hidden away in the boglands of Longford is an inspiring relic, a togher (an Iron Age road) built in 148 BC. Known locally as the Danes' Road, it is the largest of its kind to have been uncovered in Europe. Historians agree that it was part of a routeway of great importance. It may have been a section of a ceremonial highway connecting the Hill of Uisneach, the ritual centre of Ireland, and the royal site of Rathcroghan. The trackway was built from heavy planks of oak, which sank into the peat after a short time. This made it unusable, of course, but also ensured it remained perfectly preserved in the bog for the next two millennia. Inside the **Corlea Trackway Visitors Centre**, near Keenagh village, an 18-metre stretch of the ancient wooden structure is on permanent display in a hall specially designed to preserve it. Longford has a variety of unique attractions that have potential to offer immersive experiences and attract visitors from home and abroad.

### Infrastructure in Longford

The period of the last county tourism plan saw great strides in improving and embedding a more robust tourism infrastructure in County Longford. Development of hard infrastructure, in particular walking and cycling trails, improved signage, improved facilities in or near trail heads, increase in access points and child-friendly facilities such as playgrounds, have all helped to create a more connected and accessible tourism experience for the visitor.

Importantly the infrastructural improvements have led to a greater awareness among the inhabitants of Longford on what we have to offer in the county, and this has been followed by much higher levels of use of the different amenities by locals. This in turn creates local ambassadors for our tourism products and a sense of belief that County Longford can hold its own against any other county in Ireland. We believe that the best marketeers for Longford are Longford people themselves.

### Longford's Arts Scene

County Longford has a small but **dynamic local arts scene** with strength across the board from performance arts such as theatre and dance through to traditional and country music to visual and literary artists. The county has one of the most successful regional theatres in Ireland in the **Backstage Theatre** which showcases national and local productions. A busy Arts Office within the local authority supports the development of the whole arts sector.

### Festivals and Events in County Longford

The county has a number of unique festivals that appeal to visitors including **Cruthú Arts Festival** (Longford), **Still Voices Film Festival** (Ballymahon), **Dead of Night Festival** (Longford), **Maria Edgeworth Literary Festival** (Edgeworthstown), **Oliver Goldsmith Festival** (Ballymahon) and **The Marquee in Drumlish Festival** (Drumlish). Longford Tourism will continue to work with festival committees to help build capacity and support expansion plans. Longford Tourism is committed to producing a monthly event guide to keep the visitor informed. The festival calendar continues to grow with an interesting and varied offering.

## 1.5 Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands

Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands was launched in 2018, to provide an alternative to other regional brands, The Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland’s Ancient East and Dublin.

Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands embraces the heart of the country from Leitrim southwards to North Cork, extending through Roscommon, Cavan, Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, East Galway, East Clare, East Limerick and parts of Tipperary. Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands promises a bold and ambitious strategic focus on the tourism potential of Ireland’s midlands with the Shannon as its spine. It promises to bring to life for visitors, the Midlands rich natural assets including its many lakes, greenways and blueways.

The 10-year vision is that *‘Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands is one of Europe’s leading regenerative tourism destinations, where visitors can reconnect with nature while taking time out to reconnect with family and friends.’*

The strategic objectives set out to achieve this vision are:

- 1 Raising awareness and recognition of the region and brand among domestic and international visitors and increase the duration of visitor stays, particularly within the domestic market.
- 2 Enhance the range and quality of our visitor experiences to underpin the Hidden Heartlands brand proposition, leveraging the natural and cultural assets of the region in a sustainable way with a focus on eco-tourism.
- 3 Grow the economic impact of tourism and create jobs in local communities by supporting the tourism industry (private, public and community sectors) to develop its capacity and capability.
- 4 Establish the region as one of the leading regenerative tourism destinations in Europe with nature and community at its heart.
- 5 Build a committed industry and stakeholder coalition to guide sustainable destination development across the region.

As a Local Authority in the Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands Region, Longford County Council’s Tourism Strategy will be aligned and compliant with all of the policies and objectives contained within Fáilte Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023-2027. Longford County Council and its tourism team will collaborate with Fáilte Ireland, other Local Authorities and key stakeholders in the region to help deliver on the Hidden Heartlands mission.

**This Longford Tourism Strategy will align and comply with Fáilte Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023-2027 policies and objectives in the following ways** (subject to compliance with all of the relevant environmental legislation, including the **Habitats Directive**):

- 1 Grow the tourism sector in Longford to become a key contributor to the **Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands experience** and appeal to both domestic and international visitors.



- 2 Develop new visitor experiences and build on the quality of our existing experiences in Longford, linked to our natural and cultural assets across the county.
- 3 Ensure a county-wide approach to tourism development, ensuring a distribution of economic benefits to all local communities.
- 4 Contribute to the ambition to become a leading regenerative tourism destination and demonstrate how the authentic Longford community experience will become a core element of the visitor experience.
- 5 Establish County Longford as a sustainable tourism destination through the quality of our outdoor amenities; account for the needs of our visitors, industry and communities aligned with protecting our environment for future generations.
- 6 Support Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands to raise awareness and recognition of the region and brand among domestic and international visitors.

## 1.6 Policy & Plans

The formation of the Longford tourism strategy is guided by the hierarchy of plans, national, regional and local that shape tourism policy across the country.

The Government's **Growing Tourism to 2025 Plan** was supplemented by the **Tourism Recovery Plan 2020–2023** necessitated by the impact of the global pandemic. The latter plan recognised that *'tourism is as integral to the national economic recovery now, as it was in the jobs led recovery after the last recession. The sector is uniquely positioned to contribute strongly to job creation and reversing unemployment in communities and among the young throughout the country. This recovery provides an opportunity to strengthen the tourism industry and reaffirm the importance of the sector as an economic driver and an export-led industry.'*

**Fáilte Ireland Corporate Plan and Regional Tourism Strategies 2022–2026** will be used as the basis for national tourism development, supported by Regional Tourism Strategies (2022–2026) for each of the four regional brands.

**Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Development Strategy 2023–2027** is a road map for the tourism industry and all stakeholders involved in tourism in the region and has undergone full Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive. The plan sets out a strategic approach to unlocking the commercial potential of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. It will ensure focus on tourism development that is sustainable and regenerative and where the benefits accrue to local communities and to nature. The Longford County Council's Tourism Strategy will help to deliver Ireland's Hidden Heartland's Regional Tourism Development Strategy objectives in Longford and will be aligned and compliant with all of the policies and objectives therein.

**Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021–2025** is a policy that provides a framework for the development of rural Ireland over a five-year period. The role of tourism in local and regional economies is recognised as being of an importance that *'cannot be understated'*. The aim of growing the tourism offering and developing outdoor activity tourism are highlighted in the policy. **Particular relevant policy measures include:**

- Further development of the Fáilte Ireland Experience by strengthening Ireland's image as an outdoor activity holiday destination for both domestic and international markets.
- Investment in greenways, blueways, walking trails and other outdoor recreation infrastructure to support the growth in outdoor recreation tourism.
- Explore the potential for the development of further tourist trails and expand the Walks Scheme to achieve a target of at least 80 trails.

**The Midland's Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024** aims to build on the strong progress achieved to date with a renewed emphasis on collaboration and delivery of measurable actions. It has a range of objectives designed to *'strengthen the attractiveness of the Midlands as a destination to visit'* emphasising the importance of the different local authorities working in collaboration with Waterways Ireland, National Parks & Wildlife Services, Fáilte Ireland and Bord na Móna. It sees opportunity to capitalise on the region's unique environmental assets, wetlands and habitats in respect of emerging blueways and greenways networks with the Shannon Corridor, Lough Ree and the islands at its core to establish a Shannon Wilderness Corridor.

**The Longford County Development Plan 2021–2027** aims to encourage and provide for the continued expansion of the tourism sector in the county. This shall be achieved by the continued development and enhancements of visitor attractions and activities, capitalising on Longford's natural and cultural assets in a regenerative and sustainable manner.

**The County Longford Local Economic & Community Plan 2016–2022** aims to promote and support both the economic and community development of the local authority area, both by itself and in partnership with

other economic and community development stakeholders. The reform of local government has created an opportunity to start working collaboratively to achieve the vision of a County Longford as a strong, sustainable and a vibrant place to live, work and invest.

**The Shannon Tourism Masterplan 2020–2030** was prepared on behalf of Waterways Ireland in strategic partnership with Fáilte Ireland with the support of the ten local authorities adjoining the River Shannon and the Shannon Erne Waterway. The Shannon Tourism Masterplan sets out a bold and integrated framework for sustainable tourism development along the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway, repositioning the region as a key tourism destination within Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, with world class visitor experiences based on the region's natural and cultural assets. Implementation has already begun. Fáilte Ireland has identified the Shannon as the spine and one of two *'transformational signature products of scale'* in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands that are key to unlocking the region's potential. This recognises the value and potential of both the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway, and their associated lakes and canals, as a critical corridor for water-based and land-based tourism activities.

The hinterlands of the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway offer exceptional opportunities to explore the peatlands of Longford, with its network of trails, the Iron-age interpretative Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre, the National Famine Way and potential destination hubs of Lanesborough and Cloondara. New opportunities to explore the unique ecology and rewilding measures of publicly-owned peatlands will emerge as Bord na Móna ceases commercial production in the lifespan of the Masterplan. Tourism will contribute to vital economic regeneration in the post-peat period.

**Strategy for Future Development of Greenways** objective is to assist in the strategic development of nationally and regionally significant greenways in appropriate locations constructed to an appropriate standard to deliver a quality experience for all greenway users. It also aims to increase the number and geographical spread of greenways of scale and quality around the country over a 10-year period, with a consequent significant increase in the number of people using greenways as a visitor experience and as a recreational activity.

**National Just Transition Fund (JTF)** is a key pillar of the Government's plan for the Midlands region. The objective of the fund is to facilitate innovative projects that contribute to the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of the wider midlands region and have significant employment and enterprise potential. The fund supports projects that take a whole-of-midlands strategic approach and complement other sources of public funding. Supported projects are diverse and cover a range of opportunities for the region. They include new enterprise hubs, supporting local business development, research and exploratory studies, tourism and heritage projects and opportunities for reskilling.

## 1.7 Tourism Situational Analysis

### Strengths:

- **Strategically located** in Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and the centre of Ireland.
- Location, **accessibility and connectivity** to national routes.
- Rural **unspoilt natural beauty** and flat landscape.
- **Good trail network** through bogs and along the waterways for walking and cycling.
- **Waterways** for boating, angling and recreational activities.
- **Rich history, heritage, literature and cultural** offerings.
- **Niche product offerings** linked to regenerative and eco-tourism.
- **Proactive community engagement** across the county.

- **'Hidden Gems'** that remain relatively unexplored e.g. Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre.
- **Food:** Good network of artisan food and beverage producers including a cookery school.
- **Value for money** attractions, activities and accommodation.
- The success of **Center Parcs** in attracting visitors.
- Good **amenities** for the visitor such as retail, theatre, bars, restaurants, events, etc.
- Quality of our **festivals:** Still Voices, Oliver Goldsmith, Maria Edgeworth, etc.
- **Authentic experience:** The people of County Longford are warm and welcoming.

### Opportunities:

- Become a **slow tourism centre of excellence**.
- Further activation of **greenways/blueways**.
- Development of an extensive **wetlands** land mass.
- **Niche markets** development—fishing, literature, music, etc.
- Develop and improve the **accommodation offering**.
- Develop **events** with national/international appeal.
- Increased **spin off from Center Parcs** visitors across the county.
- Attract adventure tourists and become an **adventure hub**.
- Enhance Longford's reputation as a tourism county through **niche eco-experiences**.
- Improve the **public realm** throughout the county.
- Develop **tourism clusters**.
- Develop **regenerative tourism and community tourism experiences**.
- Exhausted peatlands to become a significant **biosphere** that will allow for exploration but also contribute significantly to the climate change agenda.

### Challenges:

- Consolidate County Longford's reputation as a **tourist destination** rather than *'a pass-through destination'*.
- Identify new approaches to **encourage visitors to stay** in the region beyond their Centre Parcs stay.
- Provision of a critical mass of **family-friendly activities**.
- Attract **accommodation providers**, addressing the lack of accommodation in the county.
- **Collaborate** more productively with industry stakeholders.
- **Network development** through cross promotion and collaboration between tourism assets.
- Early stage of destination life cycle—increase **brand awareness**.
- Lack of signature/hero attractions to draw people to the area apart from Center Parcs.
- Need for **better public transport** links throughout the county.
- Lack of industry **confidence** and belief in their product.
- Need for more **positive tourism ambassadors** to support our promotional efforts.
- Implementation of **signposting** around the county.
- Poor **access infrastructure to the water** courses.
- **Insufficient budget** to rival marketing activities of other counties.

- Develop a new festival or grow an existing festival that has the potential to attract a national or **international audience**.
- Grow the **night-time economy** to deliver a more substantial visitor experience in our key towns and villages.

## 1.8 Consultation Process

The Longford Tourism team adopted a systematic and phased approach to preparing this strategy which involved the following stages:

- **Stage 1:** Data gathering in the form of surveys for the public community groups through the Public Participation Network, the tourism industry, the tourism committee and visitors.
- **Stage 2:** Stakeholder consultation workshops and submissions.
- **Stage 3:** Analysis of data to identify the strengths, opportunities and challenges.
- **Stage 4:** Analysis of data to categorise the key projects identified through the consultation process under the headings of Attractions, Accommodation, Activity, Amenities, Authentic Events, Accessible Outdoors and Active Industry.
- **Stage 5:** Preparing the strategy.
- **Stage 6:** Design and print.



Saint Mel's Cathedral, Longford Town  
PHOTO: COLM MULLIGAN

# SECTION 2

## Tourism Vision

### 2.1 A Tourism Vision for Longford

Longford will become a year-round sustainable tourism destination providing authentic community and eco-tourism experiences, encouraging visitors to embrace slow tourism and grounded in respect for its natural and heritage assets that are protected for future generations.

It is anticipated that over the next five years Longford will grow as:

- A **year-round, slow-tourism destination** where visitors will explore the county through unique Longford experiences.
- A county with an **exciting group of attractions** developed out of Longford's rich culture and history.
- A county that **cherishes sustainable tourism** and presents its **rich biodiversity** to nature lovers from around the world.
- A county with a **variety of high-quality accommodation** options.
- A **greenway capital of Ireland**—a destination offering a wealth of activity propositions to compliment the already well-established greenway/blueway trails throughout the county.
- A county with **strong amenities and services** to enable visitors to optimise their journeys and better enjoy their experiences.
- A **connected county** where towns and villages develop as tourism hubs linked through its trails and key tourism assets.
- A well-established destination with a **vibrant evening time economy** where quality evening time experiences are delivered through food, music and culture.
- A destination where **cultural innovation** motivates visitors to explore authentic Longford events, hear its stories and engage with locals.
- A contributor to Ireland's Hidden Heartland's ambition for **regenerative tourism**, offering unique eco-experiences.

Horse Lantern in Valentine's Bar  
**Longford Lights Festival**  
 PHOTO: UGNIUS BRAZDIUNAS

# SECTION 3

## Achieving Our Vision: Strategy Approach

### 3.1 Strategic Objectives

To achieve this vision, we will focus on the following strategic objectives, subject to compliance with the policies and objectives contained within the *Faite Ireland Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Strategy*, and all relevant environmental legislation, including the *Habitats Directive*:

- **Support the development of new and existing tourism products** to increase County Longford's attractiveness as a visitor location through its focus on sustainable tourism.
- **Collaborate locally and regionally with key partners** who can support improvement in tourism infrastructure, products and experiences.
- **Identify and maximise all possible funding opportunities** that can facilitate product and service development linked to sustainable and regenerative tourism.
- **Raise awareness** of the county as a tourism hub within Ireland's Hidden Heartlands through effective marketing and promotional campaigns.
- **Grow the number of visitor experiences** linked to strategic projects.
- **Grow the accommodation stock** across the county to increase visitor spend and dwell time.
- **Disperse visitors** across the county with particular emphasis on visitors already attracted to major attractions e.g. Center Parcs, greenways, etc.
- **Create excellence** in all customer service offering, working with providers to enhance their capacity and capability to meet market demands.
- Work with the **County Longford Tourism Committee** on the implementation of the new strategy (2023–2027).
- **Communicate effectively** with our key target audiences through the tourism office, media, both online and off-line, with particular emphasis on the website [www.longford.ie](http://www.longford.ie).
- Be a champion for sustainability and sustainable tourism especially all forms of tourism that involve exploration or enjoyment of our natural environment.

### 3.2 Plan Framework

The objectives of this strategy are framed below within the internationally recognised sustainable tourism **VICE** model. This identifies sustainable tourism as the interaction between **Visitors**, the **Industry** that provides services to them, the **Community** and culture that hosts them and their collective impact on and response to

the **Environment** where it all takes place. Developing Longford as a connected sustainable and slow tourism destination in Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands is the strategic goal.

This goal will be achieved through a strategic intent in 7 categories, identified as Longford’s 7 ‘A’s’:

- 1 **A**ttentions
- 2 **A**ccommodation
- 3 **A**ctivities
- 4 **A**menities & Services
- 5 **A**uthenticity
- 6 **A**ccessible Outdoors
- 7 **A**ctive industry

These provide the basis for destination and experience development. It will also guide future investment, training and development. Overarching strategic vision projects will strengthen County Longford’s claim to be a tourism destination of significance. Enhanced Regional Connectivity, Knights & Conquests Heritage Centre and Proposed Heritage Village, Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park (Lough Ree Biosphere Reserve), Enhanced Greenways, Lanesborough & the Wider County supported by Just Transition, and the enhancement of Longford’s Driving Trails are the Strategic Vision Projects to be delivered over the five years of this plan.



### 3.3 Seven ‘A’s Tourism Development Focus

#### 3.3.1 Attractions

Longford’s rich culture and history provides the county with many unique attractions that offer appeal to a wide target audience. Attractions such as the Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre are drawn from the land while others such as the Knights & Conquest Visitor Centre reflect our colourful past. Longford’s many attractions, such as the **Cloughan Farm & Cookery School, Midlands Karting & Paintballing** and the **Shawbrook Dance Studio** are other examples of unique attractions that have potential to offer immersive experiences and attract visitors from both home and abroad. The challenge with all our attractions is to create or tell a story that is interesting and informative for our visitor. Good progress has been made in this regard and **digitalisation** offers further opportunity to enhance the appeal of the different attractions. To encourage visitors to dwell for longer in Longford, **stronger alliances** need to be created between different local attractions and between attractions, accommodation and service providers. It is anticipated that the period of the next plan might see the development of new sustainable attractions that appeal to different market segments.

ATTRACTIVE DEVELOPMENT FOCUS	Action	Areas of Development Focus
	1	Explore the development of a history / county museum in Longford Town.
	2	Regeneration works in Connolly Barracks.
	3	Enhancement of the Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre.
	4	Explore the completion of a new distillery and visitor centre in Lanesborough.
	5	Completion of the Knights & Conquests Heritage Village experience in Granard.
	6	Explore the development of an interpretive centre for the Wetlands Park in Lanesborough.
	7	Explore further expansion of Center Parcs resort.
	8	Explore the development of an Abbeyshrule Airfield experience.
	9	Build stronger alliances / partnerships between local attractions.
	10	Ensure that all attractions are making best use of digital technology.
	11	Support promoters who bring forward ideas for new attractions.
	12	Develop strong links with tour operators both for general and niche markets.
	13	Accreditation of heritage sites.

#### 3.3.2 Accommodation

County Longford **suffers from a lack of visitor accommodation** of all types but particularly hotel accommodation, which is a seriously limiting factor in growing the potential of the tourism sector to be a key economic driver for the county. Longford’s central location means the potential to host large tours, regional and national conferences/events is currently lost to the county and the lack of appropriate accommodation was identified as the number one issue across all consultation that took place in preparation of this strategy. The potential for high-quality group or flagship hotels, country houses and B&Bs, and campsite/caravan sites are all possible areas for future exploration, as well as the development and upgrading of the current accommodation offering in the county.

ACCOMMODATION DEVELOPMENT FOCUS	Action	Areas of Development Focus
	1	Continue efforts to attract 4 or 5-star accommodation to the County.
	2	Explore the development of a Caravan / Campervan Site in the County.
	3	Explore the development of serviced RV sites.
	4	Explore the development of a Country House and Gardens.
	5	Explore the development of hotel accommodation with an event space capacity.
	6	Support for accommodation providers seeking to develop value-added packages.
	7	Explore the development of niche accommodation offerings i.e. glamping, pods etc.
	8	Create a supportive environment for potential accommodation operators to encourage future investment in accommodation stock in the County.
9	Support for existing accommodation providers to enhance their accommodation.	

#### 3.3.3 Activities

The county of Longford offers a **wealth of activity-based propositions**, particularly in the outdoor arena. Longford’s ideal topography and natural landscape provides opportunity for further development of the already well-established walking and cycling trail network. There is also scope for the development of further activity-based attractions in various parts of the county that will appeal to different market segments.

Of course **Center Parcs** offers a unique activity-based short break experience that currently draws over 3,000 visitors to County Longford each and every week of the year. This is a captive market that has already made the

decision to travel to Longford and now needs reason to extend their stay beyond the time spent in the Center Parcs resort. The opportunity for providers to build product that compliments the Center Parcs offering exists and the different support agencies will concentrate resources on operators who bring forward activity-based projects.

ACTIVITIES DEVELOPMENT FOCUS	Action	Areas of Development Focus
	1	Explore further enhancement of the Royal Canal Greenway and the Táin Trail in line with the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Development Strategy.
	2	Support existing providers to further develop product offerings that are unique or compliment current offering, e.g. bike hire in Cloondara and Ballymahon.
	3	Maximise opportunities through unique water experiences such as the River Camlin / Shannon 10km kayaking loop.
	4	Develop sustainable on-the-water usage through slow tourism activity, e.g. kayaking, paddle-boarding etc.
	5	Development of an activity base / hub in the County.
	6	Explore the development of community amenities, such as a skate park to benefit locals and visitors.
	7	Explore further development of the National Famine Way as a signature trail and linking complimentary activities.
	8	Support new activity-based projects that are on brand.
	9	Creation of designated safe-swimming areas across the County.
	10	Expansion of the network of designated walking and cycling trails in line with the Longford County Development Plan 2021–2027.
	11	Refocus on the potential for fishing to become a key tourism segment.
	12	Create stronger connections between tourism providers, allowing for enhanced tourism experiences.
	13	Support the development of eco-tourism based on the bio-diverse nature of our natural peatlands.
	14	Support the promotion of all tourism activities in the County.

### 3.3.4 Amenities & Services

The attractiveness of a place is very much dependent on the availability of amenities and services that add to the visitor experience. Longford Tourism will continue to identify gaps in amenity provision and will work with stakeholders to ensure that amenity provision is enhanced. A key principle over the next period will be one of **universal accessibility**, where access to our attractions and experiences is available to everyone and barriers to accessibility are removed or modified. Improvements to the public realm in our towns and villages help to make the county more appealing to visitors and regeneration of physical infrastructure will support the tourism effort. Across many consultations it was noted that public amenities could be improved and developed around the county.

AMENITIES & SERVICES DEVELOPMENT FOCUS	Action	Areas of Development Focus
	1	Build on existing transport provision around the County to ensure that our tourism facilities are accessible by public transport.
	2	Present Longford's natural amenities in a manner that appeals to the visitor, e.g. rest shelters, picnic tables, way-signage, showers etc.
	3	Universal accessibility points at all tourism locations.
	4	Explore stronger and more consistent tourism signage that helps inform the visitor.
	5	Explore more accommodation solutions for the walking / cycling market segment.
	6	Explore better rest facilities / support facilities for activity visitors.
	7	Explore provision of more marina facilities on the River Shannon.
	8	Enhancement of public realm in town / village centres.
	9	Explore repurposing of under-utilised assets into tourism-based products e.g. repurposing the former greyhound track site into a tourism attraction.
	10	Support the development of trail heads or hubs in our smaller urban centres.

### 3.3.5 Authenticity

Giving the visitor a real and authentic experience is one of the key strengths of holidaying in County Longford. The county is rich in culture and history with an abundance of some of Ireland's most beautiful natural landscapes. Visitors who are looking to find and explore the essence of the Hidden Heartlands and create strong and meaningful memories, will find this unique authenticity in County Longford. Our greatest ambassadors are our local people who can charm visitors and help them to immerse themselves in the local culture. Authentic experiences such as visiting the Maria Edgeworth Centre offer the opportunity to create authentic events, in particular events that appeal to unique market segments. A key focus will be to identify and develop those events that have capacity to expand and to appeal to a wider audience.

AUTHENTICITY DEVELOPMENT FOCUS	Action	Areas of Development Focus
	1	Develop niche festivals throughout the County.
	2	Build annual festivals / events from our country music tradition.
	3	Build annual conferences / symposia based on our literary tradition.
	4	Stronger promotion of our Arts, such as theatre and dance schools.
	5	Create tourism itineraries that enable the visitor to see the real Longford.
	6	Creation of artisan food and craft trails that celebrate local talent.
	7	Develop festivals and events that celebrate our proud history and culture.
	8	Explore performance spaces such as an amphitheatre in Lanesborough to blend nature and performance.
	9	Development of an annual tourism calendar of activities and events that help inform the visitor.
	10	Develop a Tourism Ambassador Programme.
11	Support a continuous improvement plan for our cultural and performance centres to include capital investment upgrades.	

### 3.3.6 Accessible Outdoors

Trail development across the Hidden Heartlands is one of the key building blocks in provision of a holistic tourism experience in the Midlands. A key focus over the next period is support for the Just Transition process that will help deliver further expansion of the trail network, opening up the beautiful rural landscape in a safe and accessible manner. County Longford is a key cog in both Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland's vision for an accessible outdoors that appeals to many market segments. Additional development work on the lattice of greenways and blueways that criss-cross the county will be a catalyst for further tourism opportunities.

ACCESSIBLE OUTDOOR DEVELOPMENT FOCUS	Action	Areas of Development Focus
	1	Explore the development of an iconic project such as a Boardwalk across the Shannon.
	2	Connecting trails to the heart of nearest towns and villages.
	3	Promotion of our signature trails to draw visitors into the region.
	4	Seek to attract Biosphere status for the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park.
	5	Better utilisation of our industrial heritage to enhance outdoor experiences.
	6	Support for service providers who can facilitate exploration of the outdoors.
	7	Support for delivery of smart transport solutions to facilitate visitor movement.
	8	Improved connectivity from Dublin to West / North-West Greenways.
	9	Explore the development of Greenway and Blueway potential of the Camlin River.
	10	Explore the creation of more on-water experiences.
11	Completion and activation of the Royal Canal Greenway / National Famine Way.	

### 3.3.7 Active Industry

Businesses are key to the success of the destination. Service providers are the key stakeholders to help ensure that visitors have an enjoyable and memorable visit. New and existing service providers must be supported through guidance, training and direct supports to ensure that they can strive to be best in class. Strong networking, collaboration, and marketing are all critical factors to ensure the continued development of the tourism sector in County Longford. Stakeholders, both public and private, have adopted a collaborative approach to build a stronger tourism industry in Longford and the fruits of that labour are beginning to appear. The various regional and sectoral plans provide us with a clarity of purpose that will ensure that all industry efforts are cohesive and designed to support continued growth and development.

ACTIVE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT FOCUS	Action	Areas of Development Focus
	1	Development of an evening economy, particularly in Longford Town to enhance its appeal as a destination hub.
	2	Develop and strengthen tourism networks across the County.
	3	Develop a series of tourism clusters across Longford where peer learning and collaboration can be facilitated.
	4	Continue to facilitate communication between all tourism stakeholders through the County Tourism Committee.
	5	Concentrated support and guidance for promoters wishing to develop new tourism-related enterprises.
	6	Establish mini clusters in food, accommodation, travel and service provisions that lead to market-ready packages.
	7	Create partnerships with local communities to enhance stories such as the famine story of the National Famine Way.
	8	Support capacity development of existing service providers through training, mentoring and direct financial supports.
	9	Support appropriate accreditation of all service offering.
	10	Establish a process to facilitate cross-referral, industry partnerships and alliances, and connected itineraries.
	11	Continue to support the Hidden Heartlands and Longford Tourism brands.
	12	Grow the role of the Longford Tourism Office in terms of visitor engagement and industry support.
13	Develop a range of promotional materials in a way that allows for maximum impact on target audiences.	



Fabiani, Main Street, Longford Town



Fiona Egan Cloughan Farm & Cookery School, Abbeyshrule

# SECTION 4

## Longford Tourism Vision Projects

### 4.1 Strategic Vision Projects

The vision projects outlined below are the destination catalyst projects, with the capacity to transform and grow tourism in the county. These vision projects are subject to compliance with the policies and objectives contained within the Fáilte Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Strategy, and all relevant environmental legislation, including the Habitats Directive.

#### Project 1: Enhanced Regional Connectivity

In the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy, County Longford is a member of the **Mid-Shannon and Midlands Destination Development Group** with counties Westmeath, South Roscommon and Offaly. Longford will be a stakeholder in the delivery of the Strategic Initiatives for Visitor Attractions and Activities for the Mid-Shannon and Midlands region. This strategic initiative aims to develop and activate the greenways and blueways including the Royal Canal Greenway and the Shannon Blueway with the establishment of key hubs to include County Longford. This activation will ensure that the industry is availing of the opportunity to leverage these assets to create new enterprises and jobs. This is all in line and support of the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023–2027.

Longford will be a partner local authority in the preparation of a **co-ordinated Trail Development Strategy for the region** as outlined in the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy. It will work in association with other local authorities, Bord na Móna, Coilte, Waterways Ireland and National Parks and Wildlife Services, to deliver on a network of walking and cycling routes throughout the greater Midlands. The regeneration of the **Táin Trail** will be explored with neighbouring counties.

Regional connectivity is also important on the water with the potential of both the Shannon and Royal Canal for navigation. The terminus of the Royal Canal is in Cloondara and links up with the Shannon via the River Camlin. As the River Shannon is the spine of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, this opens the waterways for County Longford. Presently, there are 9,000 registered vessels on the Shannon and with the right proposition, there is the potential to develop **further marinas** in locations like **Barley Harbour**, Lanesborough and Cloondara to allow easier access to County Longford from the River Shannon. The Waterways Ireland and Fáilte Ireland **Tarmonbarry/Cloondara Masterplan** will also create opportunity for connectivity between visitor offerings in county Roscommon and county Longford. Phased implementation of the recommendations contained in that plan will help to increase regional connectivity.

#### Target Outcomes

- Fully integrated network of trails across the Hidden Heartlands Region.
- Destination Hub status for Longford Town, Lanesborough and Cloondara.
- More extensive range of marinas to give boat travellers better access to County Longford.

### Project 2: Knights & Conquests Heritage Centre and Park

The development and promotion of **Granard's Knights & Conquests Heritage Centre** is a community-driven project, centred around the development of a **Norman Heritage Park** that will transport visitors 800 years back in time to experience how the Normans at Granard lived, worked, and played. It will not only showcase **Granard's rich culture and history**, but it will also further add to the overall cultural offering in County Longford.

The heritage park once completed will become a **flagship attraction** for County Longford and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. Planned Public Realm improvements in Granard will support this project but also encourage the celebration of the unique attributes of Granard. Planned improvements in the design and delivery of all visitor interpretation, signage and public realm spaces will help to provide tourists with a strong '*Sense of Place*' and a memorable visit.

### Project 3: Development of the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park (Lough Ree Biosphere Reserve)

The Rural Regeneration County Policy objectives of the Longford County Development Plan 2021–2027 support the designation of the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park as a **UNESCO Biosphere candidate site** in the county.

One of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands strategic objectives in the Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023–2027 is to '*enhance the range and quality of our visitor experiences to underpin the Hidden Heartlands brand proposition, leveraging the natural and cultural assets of the region in a sustainable way with a focus on eco-tourism*'. One of the aims is to '*work with Bord na Móna, the local authorities and local communities to optimize the tourism potential of the bogs, peatlands and wetlands, particularly around a Peatlands Trails Strategy, while ensuring that their ecological value is protected*'.

The Mid-Shannon area has an outstanding combination of wetland landscapes, nature, wildlife, culture and heritage and the strategic intention was to strengthen the integration of tourism and natural heritage, and to reconcile tourism development with conservation of biodiversity. The intention was to secure environmental protection and sustainable visitor management through the creation of an innovative methodology that is of value to local communities.

The original Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park proposal has now been subsumed by Longford County Council into the proposed **Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere Reserve** proposal for South Longford, East Roscommon and Northwest Westmeath. The three relevant local authorities are working with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and other partners in the delivery of more detailed sustainable proposals for the area in keeping with climate change and nature/biodiversity enhancement principles. The concept idea for Longford County Council MSWP was included in the Longford County Development Plans 2015–2021 and 2021–2027. By its inclusion it was also subjected to SEA screening and public consultation.

### Project 4: Enhanced Greenways

County Longford has seen the development of **Signature Greenway Routes** within the County, most notably the Royal Canal Greenway. The primary function of such routes relates to tourism and recreational value for the local population in addition to visitors, however, they also form the basis as key components of an overall cycling and walking network.

The Royal Canal Greenway also provides the channel for the **National Famine Way**. The National Famine Way is a unique and historic trail that traces the footsteps of the 1,490 famine emigrants who left Strokestown in 1847. This walking/cycling artery has the potential to become **an internationally recognised greenway** and its continued development and promotion will be a cornerstone of our greenway development strategy. More extensions are planned which should provide Longford with the greatest concentration of greenways for any county in the

country. Longford will effectively be the '*Greenway Capital of Ireland*'. The overall aim is to link the Royal Canal Greenway to towns, villages and attractions in the vicinity so that they can benefit from the economic spin off from increased visitors.

### Project 5: Lanesborough & Wider County supported by Just Transition

As the **most impacted community** in County Longford resulting from the Just Transition process, it is imperative that Lanesborough receives focus in terms of design and implementation of new projects that bring economic benefit and prosperity to the South Longford area.

Funding is available under the Territorial Plan 2021–2027 to help communities execute Just Transition projects. The communities in South Longford will be assisted to identify viable and sustainable projects that can deliver employment and visitors. Many of these projects will be tourism-based, building on **Lanesborough's strategic location on the River Shannon at the mouth of Lough Ree**.

It is within this overarching context that Longford and Roscommon County Councils commissioned an **Economic and Enterprise Development Strategy** for Lanesborough-Ballyleague. This strategy includes the development of an ambitious, distinct and wholly-achievable vision for the economic development of the settlement to 2040. It aims to promote sustainable economic growth and job creation, in the short, medium and long term, while also providing an economic framework to build upon the current offerings in Lanesborough-Ballyleague and to drive prosperity in line with the defined vision. This strategy will inform future developments to be supported under the Just Transition Fund and other relevant funding programmes.

#### Target Projects

- Enhance and link recreation infrastructure by continuing to develop joint green and blue infrastructure network.
- Increase destination legibility by improving wayfinding and interpretation infrastructure.
- Develop one signature product, for example, a boardwalk across the river connecting Leinster and Connaught.
- Develop a Mid-Shannon Discovery Centre located at Lanesborough.
- The completion of the Lough Ree Distillery & Visitor Centre.
- Development of one of the country's largest natural outdoor amphitheatres.

### Project 6: Enhancement of Longford's Driving Trails

**County Longford has established 3 driving trails, developed by Longford County Council, namely:**

- The Longford Rebel Trail
- The Longford Literary Trail
- The Mid-Shannon Trail

Longford has a wonderful and unique history of involvement in insurrections and rebellions from the Normans up to the War of Independence. Ballinamuck was the site of the defeat of the joint Irish and French forces by the British in 1798. It is an amazing battlefield where you can still get a clear sense of history and feel for the battle thought the landscape.

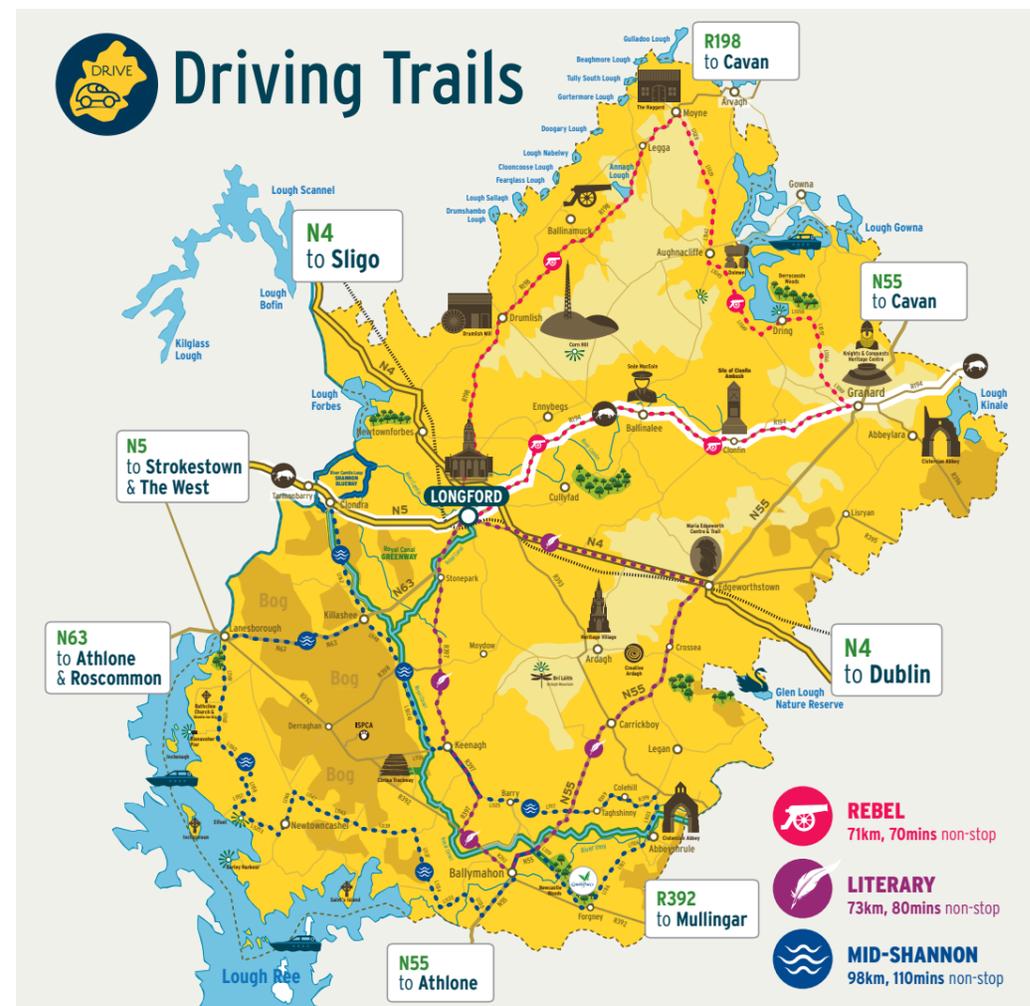
The Longford Rebel Trail experience was enhanced through the availability of an audio tour available in English, Irish and French. The trail begins and ends in Longford Town exploring the interesting history in centres such as Drumlish, Ballinamuck, Moyne, Aughnaccliffe, Dring, Granard, Clonfin and Ballinalee. This driving trail covers a distance of 71km.

The Longford Literary trail celebrates Longford’s Literary Roots delving into the lives of Oliver Goldsmith, Maria Edgeworth, Padraic Colum and John Keegan Casey. The literary tradition in Longford is very strong and includes connections with Jane Austin and Oscar Wilde. This driving trail, identifying the important Literary locations along the route is a distance of 73km.

The Mid-Shannon Trail explores the south of the county, taking in the Royal Canal, the Shannon and beautiful views of Lough Ree from Saints Island and Barley Harbour. This driving trail, identifying the Mid Shannon locations along the route is a distance of 98km. All trails can be joined at any point on the trail. It is our ambition to continue with the enhancement of Longford’s Driving Trails in the lifetime of this strategy.

Explore other potential developments as strategic projects for their hinterland including:

- Completion of the Aughnacliffe Heritage Trail.
- Completion of the Old Bog Line Linking Granard and Arva in County Cavan.
- Completion of the Rose Cottage in Ballinalee as a trail head for the North Longford Rebel Trail.
- Completion of the Latin School in Moyne as an important cultural interpretive centre.
- Completion of regeneration works to the public realm spaces in Longford Town, enhancing its appeal to locals and visitors.
- Support of the Cranleymore Lissard Walkway.



# SECTION 5

## Promoting Tourism in Longford

One of Ireland’s Hidden Heartland’s strategic objectives in the Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023–2027 is to *‘raise awareness and recognition of the region among domestic and international visitors and increase the duration of visitor stays, particularly domestic’*.

Longford Tourism will support this objective emphasising the key role that County Longford will play in **enhancing the appeal of the region to visitors**. As County Longford continues to build tourism products and infrastructure, Longford Tourism must also continue to build Longford Tourism brand awareness which has been established in the lifetime of the last strategy (2017–2022).

We must focus on **effective promotion and marketing** to maximise impact in the marketplace. The increasing influence of **digital and social media marketing** offers opportunity to reach a much wider audience and strategic cost-effective marketing campaigns offer potential to **educate and influence the uncertain traveller**. County Longford has scope to appeal to different market segments, in particular **‘great escapers’** who are most motivated by the desire to spend quality time together, enjoy the outdoors, learn about other cultures and explore new places together to create lasting memories.

### 5.1 A Strategic Marketing Approach Linking to our Development Focus

The strategic framework for this plan provides the context for growing visitor demand.

Our marketing and communications will align with our 7 ‘A’s of Longford Tourism development:

- 1 Attractions
- 2 Accommodation
- 3 Activities
- 4 Amenities & Services
- 5 Authenticity
- 6 Accessible Outdoors
- 7 Active industry

County Longford, with its abundance of natural resources, is the ideal location for those interested in travelling unhurriedly and leisurely and enjoying slow tourism at its best. Slow down, get active in the outdoors, enjoy the many activities and spend valuable time meeting locals, exploring its restaurants and bars and discovering its cultural wealth.

Longford Tourism will target both the domestic and international visitor with niche market campaigns focusing on:

- The culturally curious, interested in what the county has to offer in **history and literature**.
- **Anglers**, both river and lake anglers who enjoy coarse fishing.
- **Water-based enthusiasts** who seek adventure through boating, kayaking, etc.
- **Walkers and cyclists**, with an abundance of trails to choose from; over 100km in County Longford alone, bordering canals, rivers, across peatlands, in woodlands and urban centres.

Longford Tourism’s marketing and communications will be implemented through the following mechanisms supported by key actions to maximise impact.

### 1. Internal Marketing

- Ensure all material and information available is up to date, in line with our ever-changing environment.
- Build on and **enhance the Longford Tourism brand** to help compete with other destinations.
- Adopt a **holistic approach** to tourism by working with other council departments to ensure a cohesive approach in planning tourism-related activities and events.
- Continue to build up a **bank of imagery** through quality photography and videography that can be supplied to support campaigns across various media channels.
- Continue to build on **dedicated hashtags** for County Longford and encourage tourism providers to use them also.
- Ensure tourism staff receive appropriate **training** to keep abreast of the latest techniques, strategies and technologies that are driving the industry forward.
- Continue to provide information and support to visitors through Longford Tourism Office.

### 2. External Marketing

- Create **strategic links** with other relevant websites to help maximise exposure to County Longford and its tourism offering, e.g. **MidlandsIreland.ie**.
- **Design and implement effective promotional campaigns** to help grow visitor numbers to County Longford and continue to engage our target audiences to generate greater awareness of County Longford as a tourism destination.
- Selective magazine advertising to create appeal among selected targeted audiences.
- Radio advertising to deliver support information and promotion campaigns.

### 3. Digital Marketing

- Embrace digital as the basis for **destination marketing innovation and brand development**.
- Ensure our online activity is engaging and unique to County Longford—include the use of social media channels, which will be utilised to support our promotion of County Longford as a tourism destination.
- Ensure our **tourism website www.longford.ie** is maintained to a high standard and updated to ensure a user-friendly experience for every visitor.
- Communicate with our key target audiences through the various media channels online.

### 4. Regional Marketing

- **Collaborate with Fáilte Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands team** to deliver on their strategic objective of raising awareness and recognition of the region among domestic and international visitors and increase the duration of visitor stays, particularly domestic.
- Work with **Inland Fisheries** on its remit to market and promote angling which involves angling tourism activities such as the production of guides, web content and the organisation of media visits to promote the excellent pike and coarse angling resources County Longford has to offer.
- Work with **Waterways Ireland** on the promotion of water-based experiences.
- Work with Strokestown House, Waterways Ireland and other local authorities on the development and promotion of the **National Famine Way/Royal Canal Greenway**.
- **Partner in promotional campaigns** with as many stakeholder groups as necessary which have responsibility for regional promotion, to include County Longford.

### 5. Partner Collaboration & Positive Longford PR

- The **Longford Tourism brand must be adopted by the industry** to reinforce the Longford Tourism destination message. The continued implementation of the brand message must include a strong focus on industry adoption and foster industry pride in the collective tourism approach for County Longford.
- Support the promotion of each facility identified as a tourism asset for the county and encourage promotion of their products and **cross promotion** of each other’s products.
- Support tourism providers by providing consistent and **up-to-date promotional material** so that all of County Longford is conveying the same strong marketing messages.
- Encourage tourism providers to focus on positive online reviews on Trip Advisor and other review platforms.
- Represent or have County Longford represented at trade events that provide the appropriate platform to engage with its target audience.
- Capture and promote good news stories about County Longford.
- Develop the profile of Longford Tourism among the tourism industry through continuous engagement at an individual level and the development of **tourism clusters**.
- Ensure **sustained communications with all key tourism influencers**, travel media and online influencers.
- **Continue to promote festivals and events** in County Longford, focusing on those that have the potential to attract a larger audience, both domestic and international.
- **Bundle various activities and attractions** from the county to create marketable tourism packages that appeal to tour operators.
- Continue to connect with the **Longford Diaspora** abroad as key ambassadors for County Longford spread throughout the globe.

# SECTION 6

## Implementation & Measuring Success

The strategic vision projects represent the areas of focus over the five years of this strategy. The projects will be examined on an annual basis and monitored to avail of strategic and funding opportunities that may arise over the course of this plan.

The areas of development focus listed within this County Longford Tourism Strategy represent areas for future project assessment under the categories of Attractions, Accommodation, Activities, Amenities & Services, Authentic Events, Accessible Outdoors and Active Industry. This will require reviewing projects in the context of feasibility, viability and strategic fit, contributing to the direction of tourism in the county. The lists do not represent a definitive list of projects to be delivered but a summary of opportunities to be considered and explored aligned with access to appropriate funding and their capacity to be viable and operationally sustainable.

The following represents the areas of focus over the five years of this strategy. **This includes the delivery of the 6 strategic vision projects in addition to the projects listed under the areas of development focus.**

### Strategic Vision Projects

- 1 Regional Connectivity
- 2 Knights & Conquests Heritage Centre and Proposed Heritage Village
- 3 Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park (Lough Ree Biosphere Reserve)
- 4 Enhanced Greenways
- 5 Lanesborough and the wider county supported by Just Transition
- 6 Enhancement of Longford's Driving Trails



Knights & Conquests Heritage Centre, Granard  
PHOTO: COLM MULLIGAN



PHOTO: FIONA WOODS  
Regional Connectivity



Knights & Conquests



Wilderness Park



Enhanced Greenways



Just Transition Support



Driving Trails

**Strategic Development Focus**

Category	Action	Areas of Development Focus
<b>ATTRACTIONS</b>	1	Explore the development of a history / county museum in Longford Town.
	2	Regeneration works in Connolly Barracks.
	3	Enhancement of the Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre.
	4	Explore the completion of a new distillery and visitor centre in Lanesborough.
	5	Completion of the Knights & Conquests Village experience in Granard.
	6	Explore the development of an interpretive centre for the Wetlands Park in Lanesborough.
	7	Explore further expansion of Center Parcs resort.
	8	Explore the development of an Abbeyshrule Airfield experience.
	9	Build stronger alliances / partnerships between local attractions.
	10	Ensure that all attractions are making best use of digital technology.
	11	Support promoters who bring forward ideas for new attractions.
	12	Develop strong links with tour operators both for general and niche markets.
	13	Accreditation of Heritage sites.
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	1	Continue efforts to attract 4 or 5-star accommodation to the County.
	2	Explore the development of a Caravan / Campervan Site in the County.
	3	Explore the development of serviced RV sites.
	4	Explore the development of a Country House and Gardens.
	5	Explore the development of hotel accommodation with an event space capacity.
	6	Support for accommodation providers seeking to develop value-added packages.
	7	Explore the development of niche accommodation offerings, i.e. glamping, pods etc.
	8	Create a supportive environment for potential accommodation operators to encourage future investment in accommodation stock in the County.
	9	Support for existing accommodation providers to enhance their accommodation.
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	1	Explore further enhancement of the Royal Canal Greenway and the Táin Trail in line with the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Development Strategy.
	2	Support existing providers to further develop product offerings that are unique or compliment current offering, e.g. bike hire in Cloondara and Ballymahon.
	3	Maximise opportunities through unique water experiences, e.g. the River Camlin / Shannon 10km kayaking loop.
	4	Develop sustainable on-the-water usage through slow tourism activity, e.g. kayaking, paddle-boarding etc.
	5	Development of an activity base / hub in the County.
	6	Explore the development of community amenities, such as a skate park to benefit locals and visitors.
	7	Explore further development of the National Famine Way—promoting it as a signature trail and linking complimentary activities.
	8	Support new activity-based projects that are on brand.
	9	Creation of designated safe-swimming areas across the County.
	10	Expansion of the network of designated walking and cycling trails in line with the Longford County Development Plan 2021–2027.
	11	Refocus on the potential for fishing to become a key tourism segment.
	12	Create stronger connections between tourism providers allowing for enhanced tourism experiences.
	13	Support the development of eco-tourism based on the bio-diverse nature of our natural peatlands.
	14	Support the promotion of all tourism activities in the County.
<b>AMENITIES &amp; SERVICES</b>	1	Build on existing public transport provision around the County to ensure that our facilities are accessible by public transport.
	2	Present Longford's natural amenities in a manner that appeals to the visitor e.g. rest shelters, picnic tables, way-signage, showers etc.
	3	Universal accessibility points at all tourism locations.

**Strategic Development Focus**

Category	Action	Areas of Development Focus	
<b>AMENITIES &amp; SERVICES contd.</b>	4	Explore stronger and more consistent tourism signage that helps inform the visitor.	
	5	Explore more accommodation solutions for the walking / cycling market segment.	
	6	Explore better rest facilities / support facilities for activity visitors.	
	7	Explore provision of more marina facilities on the River Shannon.	
	8	Enhancement of public realm in town / village centres.	
	9	Explore repurposing of under-utilised assets into tourism-based products e.g. repurposing the former greyhound track site into a tourism attraction.	
	10	Support the development of trail heads or hubs in our smaller urban centres.	
	<b>AUTHENTICITY</b>	1	Develop niche festivals throughout the County.
		2	Build annual festivals / events from our country music tradition.
		3	Build annual conferences / symposia based on our literary tradition.
4		Stronger promotion of our Arts, such as theatre and dance schools.	
5		Create tourism itineraries that enable the visitor to see the real Longford.	
6		Creation of artisan food and craft trails that celebrate local talent.	
7		Develop festivals and events that celebrate our proud history and culture.	
8		Explore performance spaces such as an amphitheatre in Lanesborough to blend nature with performance.	
9		Development of an annual tourism calendar of activities and events that help inform the visitor.	
10		Develop a Tourism Ambassador Programme.	
11		Support a continuous improvement plan for our cultural and performance centres to include capital investment upgrades.	
<b>ACCESSIBLE OUTDOORS</b>	1	Explore the development of an iconic project such as a Boardwalk across the Shannon.	
	2	Connecting trails to the heart of nearest towns and villages.	
	3	Promotion of our signature trails to draw visitors into the region.	
	4	Seek to attract Biosphere status for the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park.	
	5	Better utilisation of our industrial heritage to enhance outdoor experiences.	
	6	Support for service providers who can facilitate exploration of the outdoors.	
	7	Support for delivery of smart transport solutions to facilitate visitor movement.	
	8	Improved connectivity from Dublin to West / North-West Greenways.	
	9	Explore the development of Greenway and Blueway potential of the Camlin River.	
	10	Explore the creation of more on-water experiences.	
	11	Completion and activation of the Royal Canal Greenway / National Famine Way.	
<b>ACTIVE INDUSTRY</b>	1	Development of an evening economy particularly in Longford Town to enhance its appeal as a destination hub.	
	2	Develop and strengthen tourism networks across the County.	
	3	Develop a series of tourism clusters across Longford where peer learning and collaboration can be facilitated.	
	4	Continue to facilitate communication between all tourism stakeholders through the County Tourism Committee.	
	5	Concentrated support and guidance support for promoters who wish to develop new tourism-related enterprises.	
	6	Establish mini clusters in food, accommodation, travel and service provisions that lead to market-ready tourism packages.	
	7	Create partnerships with local communities to enhance stories such as the famine story of the National Famine Way.	
	8	Support capacity development of existing service providers through training, mentoring and direct financial supports.	
	9	Support appropriate accreditation of all service offering.	
	10	Establish a process to facilitate cross-referrals, industry partnerships and alliances and connected itineraries.	
	11	Continue to support the Hidden Heartlands and Longford Tourism brands.	
	12	Grow the role of the Longford Tourism Office in terms of visitor engagement and industry support.	
	13	Develop a range of promotional materials in a way that allows for maximum impact on target audiences.	



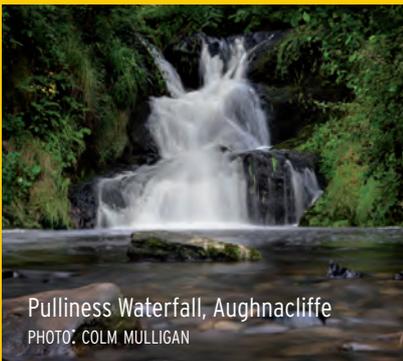
Royal Canal Greenway



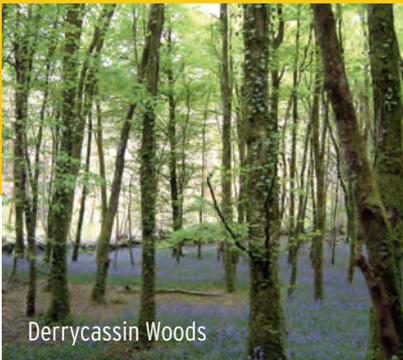
Ballinamuck Visitor Centre  
PHOTO: COLM MULLIGAN



Cistercian Abbey, Abbeylara  
PHOTO: COLM MULLIGAN



Pulliness Waterfall, Aughnacliffe  
PHOTO: COLM MULLIGAN



Derrycassin Woods



St. Brigid's Ardagh Heritage Village  
PHOTO: COLM MULLIGAN

# Longford Tourism

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