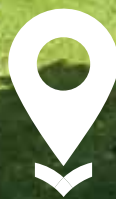




County Kildare  
Tourism Strategy  
2022 - 2026



*St Brigid's Cathedral &  
Round Tower, Kildare town*



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# Foreword



Castletown House &  
Parklands, Celbridge



**This new strategy for tourism in Kildare sets out the priorities and actions which have been put together with input from key stakeholders and industry. The County Kildare Tourism Strategy 2022-2026 is an important part of a broader vision for the County which is set out within the Economic Plan for County Kildare (to 2025) and will be articulated within the draft County Development Plan 2023-2029. Tourism will play an increasingly significant role in the growing economy of Kildare, particularly with the development of the Greenways, Barrow Blueway, and the significant potential of Peatways. Sustainability is a core focus for Kildare County Council, with tourism able to play a valuable role in the County's efforts in this regard.**

The Strategy is a practical, pragmatic and achievable plan to support the sector. This is an opportunity to plan ahead and to take a positive stance following a difficult period. There is increased optimism, enthusiasm and innovation in the tourism sector throughout the last 20 months with a shared vision to strengthen tourism offering in Kildare. The strategic vision will bring people together as part of a community, with the objective of cementing a solidarity of intent. Kildare County Council will continue to work in partnership with the Board and members of Into Kildare, with whom we currently have a productive Service Level Agreement. We are conscious that the achievement of many of the actions outlined in the plan will require input from others - including our own staff and also relevant national organisations. I am confident that, working together, we have the capacity to deliver on the ambition reflected in this document.



*Cllr Naiose Ó Cearúil*

Cathaoirleach (Mayor) Kildare County Council

**The County Kildare Tourism Strategy 2022-2026 is a concrete document that provides a clear track for ensuring that Kildare is a top destination for visitors. The industry collectively working together, alongside Into Kildare, to bring it to life. Tourism is an important contributor to the economy, social and cultural life of Kildare, with further development bringing benefits to every town and village, every business around the County. The strategy has strong foundations with Kildare people our biggest asset, providing exceptional hospitality and a warm welcome.**

There are opportunities for Kildare to celebrate its distinctive cultural heritage as part of Ireland's Ancient East. This includes the animation of the extraordinary St Brigid, particularly during the 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death in 2024. Just as we celebrate St Brigid at the start of spring each year, a time of renewal and growth, so this new Strategic Plan will play its part in forming the future of tourism in Kildare. Another famous Kildare icon will be the feature of the new Shackleton Museum project at Athy. Ernest Shackleton was a great leader and the tourism industry in County Kildare will, I know, step up to demonstrate leadership in innovation over the next few years.

Thank you to everyone who gave their time and input to the Strategy development and I wish to acknowledge the team at Into Kildare for their commitment. I look forward to working with them through the Board, as well as with Kildare County Council and other relevant bodies to deliver what I know will be a successful strategic plan.



*David Mongey*

Chair, County Kildare Fáilte

# Executive Summary

- ◆ Supporting stakeholders
- ◆ Driving economic development
- ◆ 1.3m media coverage in 2021 (a strong achievement given the restrictions of Covid-19)
- ◆ €141.6m visitor spend in 2019
- ◆ Supporting 3,823 jobs in tourism in 2019
- ◆ Providing training
- ◆ Over 100 members and stakeholders represented
- ◆ Building partnerships
- ◆ New website and brand

Into Kildare (County Kildare Fáilte) is the tourism arm of Kildare County Council. This strategy will be used to influence the priorities and work programme of Into Kildare from 2022 to 2026. It should also be used by other key stakeholders whose actions are critical to the achievement of the objectives outlined.

## The evidence

The strategy is underpinned by extensive engagement of key tourism stakeholders within the county, and at regional and national level with over 50 one to one strategic conversations held. Extensive research has been undertaken on the ground in Kildare and in terms of research into relevant policy and comparable good practice in international destinations.

## The Vision

“Kildare, a rural escape close to the city, is **recognised worldwide** for exceptional thoroughbred experiences, a place to **engage** with rich culture, **picturesque landscapes, gastronomy**, and a **warm welcome**. A sustainable ethos based around low impact regenerative tourism is at the heart of what we do. Our county is a place apart, with a blend of **fascinating history** and **modern vibrancy**; a place to **reconnect and indulge** with **friends** and family; where reviving and recharging is a racing certainty.”

## Strategic Framework

The strategy is guided by six goals and six strategic priorities designed to deliver on the vision and ensure Kildare can stand out in a crowded marketplace. Actions identified under each strategic priority will enable compelling and high-quality visitor experiences, with an increasingly resilient, competitive, and innovative industry that provides local economic benefit to the communities of Kildare. A sector based on principles of sustainable and regenerative tourism, leaving places better than they were before.



*Carton House, A Fairmont  
Managed Hotel* 

Strategic Priority		Objective
1	<b>Effective Coordination, Communication, and Collaboration</b>	Together the tourism stakeholders in Kildare will work collaboratively with a common vision, striving for a united and competitive destination, with a stronger and appropriate resourcing.
2	<b>Enable Industry Resilience</b>	The Kildare tourism industry will become increasingly resilient through digitisation support to support a smart tourism approach, support for a low carbon transition, enabling of networking opportunities and by targeted capacity building.
3	<b>Create Captivating Experiences</b>	Innovative world class visitor experiences will be created that provide an immersive, compelling reason to visit Kildare and motivate more overnight stays with an emphasis on regenerative tourism.
4	<b>Reinforce Destination Connectivity &amp; Accessibility</b>	A reimagining of the way in which visitors can access County Kildare will focus on new transport links, signage, universal design, and a wider range of visitor accommodation.
5	<b>Build Visitor Awareness</b>	Key market segments among domestic and international visitor will be targeted to raise awareness of Kildare as a rural escape with exceptional experiences through a range of digital and print media, events, packaged offers, and itineraries.
6	<b>Measure Strategy Impact</b>	A smart destination approach will drive collation and analysis of a range of tourism data to inform decision-making and to benefit Kildare communities

*Newbridge Silverware*





## 1 Vision

**“Kildare**, a rural escape close to the city, is **recognised worldwide** for exceptional thoroughbred experiences, a place to **engage** with rich culture, **picturesque landscapes, gastronomy**, and a **warm welcome**. A sustainable ethos based around low impact regenerative tourism is at the heart of what we do. Our county is a place apart, with a blend of **fascinating history** and **modern vibrancy**; a place to **reconnect and indulge** with **friends** and family; where reviving and recharging is a racing certainty.”

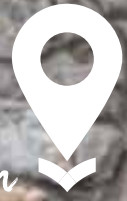
## 6 Goals

- i. Kildare developing a reputation for low impact regenerative tourism
- ii. Delivery of world class tourism experiences based on the distinctive culture, landscape, and heritage of Kildare
- iii. A measurable increase in the number of overnight stays in the county
- iv. Increased recognition of the role that Into Kildare plays
- v. Increased awareness among local, domestic, and international visitors of the County Kildare tourism offer
- vi. A more collaborative and resilient tourism industry in County Kildare

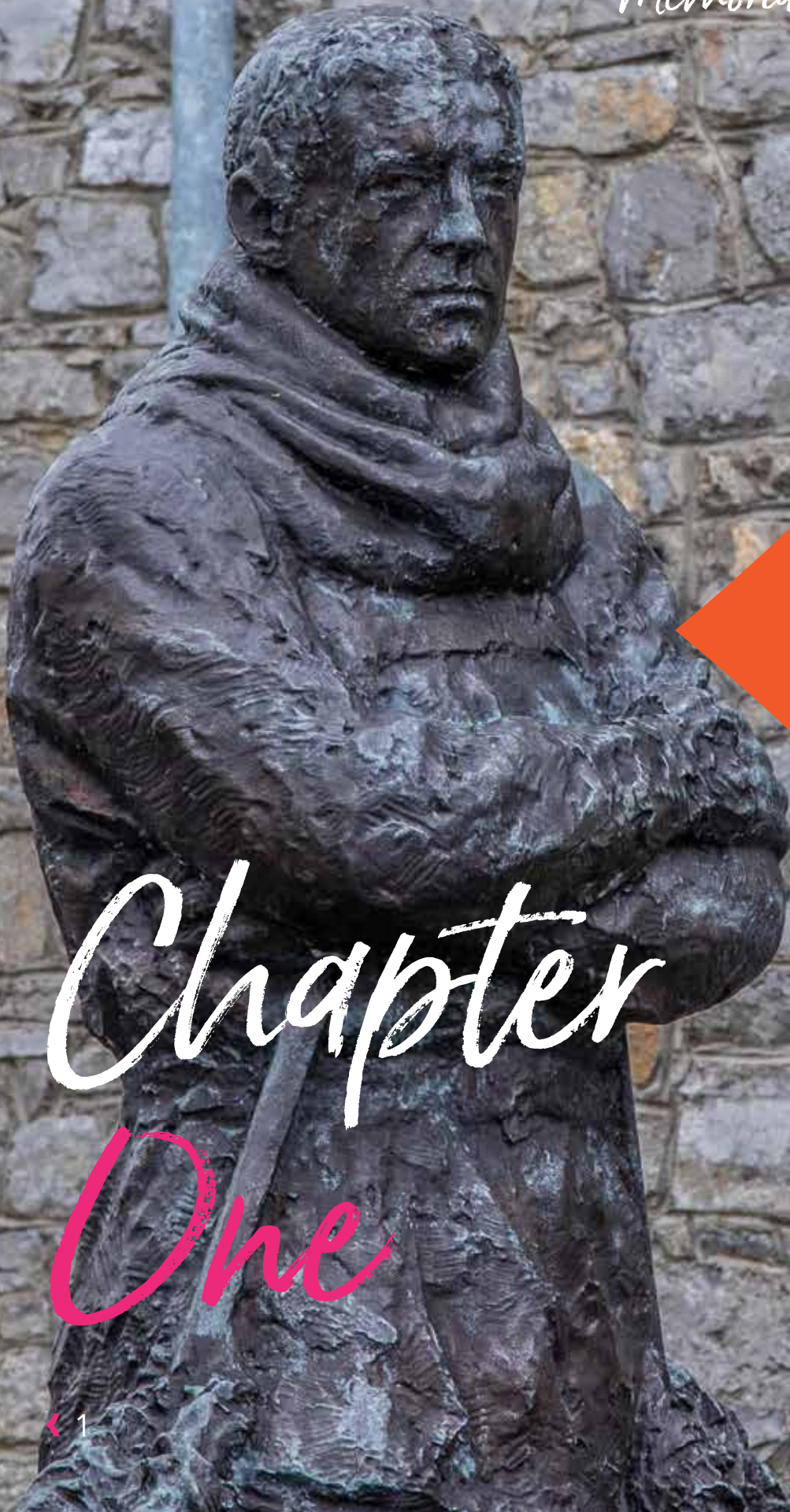
## 6 Strategic Priorities

## 27 Actions

SP1	<b>Effective Coordination, Communication, and Collaboration</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seek to enhance tourism project coordination</li> <li>2. Progressively increase operational funding for tourism in Co. Kildare</li> <li>3. Explore opportunities to work with tourism partners outside Kildare</li> <li>4. Review benefits of retaining membership model for Into Kildare</li> <li>5. Continue to build the Into Kildare team</li> </ol>
SP2	<b>Enabling Industry Resilience</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Implement focussed advisory programme</li> <li>7. Maximise collaboration opportunities within Kildare</li> <li>8. Elevate level of service offer</li> <li>9. Prepare Kildare Sustainable Tourism Policy and introduce Kildare Green Oak Leaf Initiative</li> </ol>
SP3	<b>Creating Captivating Experiences</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Strengthen Kildare’s tourism offering of Blueways, Peatways, and Greenways</li> <li>11. Support the implementation of the Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan</li> <li>12. Support existing and new opportunities for exceptional visitor attractions</li> </ol>
SP4	<b>Reinforcing Destination Connectivity &amp; Accessibility</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Support new transport infrastructure to enhance access</li> <li>14. Commission and implement new signage strategy</li> <li>15. Encourage the adoption of principles of universal design</li> <li>16. Undertake accommodation study</li> </ol>
SP5	<b>Building Destination Visibility</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. Commission new high-quality marketing collateral as needed</li> <li>18. Continue to develop ‘Distinctively Kildare’ Food Strategy</li> <li>19. Work collaboratively to bring exceptional conferences and events to Kildare</li> <li>20. Continue to engage with Fáilte Ireland on Ireland’s Ancient East</li> <li>21. Support development of packaged/bundled offers</li> <li>22. Ensure key Kildare County Council tourism projects are supported through targeted marketing campaigns</li> <li>23. Attend key overseas tourism events</li> <li>24. Continue to strengthen existing twinning and diaspora relationships</li> </ol>
SP6	<b>Measuring Strategy Impact</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>25. Identify data led KPIs and source destination data</li> <li>26. Position Kildare as a smart destination</li> <li>27. Undertake mid-point evaluation of strategy</li> </ol>



Ernest Shackleton  
Memorial Statue, Athy



# Chapter One

# 1.1 Introduction

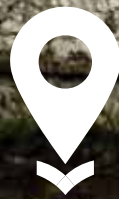
This strategy is intended to guide the activities and work programme of Into Kildare in the promotion and development of tourism in County Kildare from 2022 to 2026. Building upon the previous strategic plan, Vision 2020, that covered the period 2017-2020, this strategy provides clear direction and an enabling framework for all tourism stakeholders in the county for the next five years.

The strategy is underpinned by extensive engagement of key tourism stakeholders within the county, and at regional and national level; as such it seeks to balance local aspirations and understanding with regional and national strategic priorities, to ensure available opportunities are maximised to support tourism development in the county.

The tourism industry worldwide has been severely impacted by Covid-19 with a collapse in international visitors to Ireland and in turn County Kildare. However, against this backdrop the local and domestic market have rediscovered their local areas and indeed the wider Irish offer, with an opportunity to build upon this increased awareness. The impact of Covid-19 on the industry has increased the importance of building resilience and of local networking, both of which are addressed in this strategy.



Wonderful Barn in  
Celbridge Co. Kildare



## 1.2 Into Kildare Progress Overview

The remit of Kildare Fáilte/Into Kildare is to develop and promote tourism in the county. The company is limited by guarantee, and is essentially the tourism arm of the County Council as well as a membership organisation. The company has a service level agreement with Kildare County Council in return for which it receives the major part of its funding.

It also relies on its membership for funding and works closely with members in the establishment, development and enhancement of tourism attractions and facilities in the county so as to optimise the value of its many natural assets.

The Board Members are all volunteers - eleven in total, and this includes three nominees of the Chief Executive of KCC, an elected member, and seven others nominated by the Chief Executive, two of whom are current members of the company with relevant experience in the sector.

Into Kildare have undertaken a wide range of initiatives that seek to raise the profile of County Kildare as an exceptional visitor destination and to support the industry. These include a focus on product and experience development, marketing and promotion, industry support and training, community linkages, collaboration, and impact monitoring.

### Product and experience development

- » Represented the County on the marketing steering committees for the following: Royal Canal Greenway, Grand Canal Greenway, Barrow Blueway, and the Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan;
- » Supported development and promotion of new proposed and recently launched experiences including: Living Legends, Irish Racehorse Experience, and Umeras Peatlands Park;
- » Aligned heritage products with the Ireland's Ancient East campaign, with installation of Ireland's Ancient East signage around Kildare and branded historic signage for Naas.

### Marketing and promotion

- » Developed a new state of the art website for Into Kildare including embedded video and events calendar;
- » Developed festivals and events including the Derby Festival, St Brigid's Trail, Arthur's Way Heritage Trail, Taste of Kildare;
- » Introduced 'We Care in Kildare' as a response to Covid-19 and;
- » Hosted Rose of Tralee pre-tour for three years;
- » Promoted Kildare across all mediums – press, radio, digital and social as well as representing Kildare overseas at events and trade shows and hosting international, press and blogger familiarisation trips.

### Community linkages

- » Supported local tourism groups, through hosting of Destination Newbridge and as part of the Destination Town Kildare working group as well as meetings with various community and heritage groups.

### Collaboration

- » Collaborated with stakeholders including KCC, OPW, LEADER, LEO, Sports Partnership, Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, DTTS, tourism and hospitality industries and community groups.

### Impact monitoring

- » Instigated a new project to assess tourism assets in the county with a view to being able to track visitor numbers and revenue.

### Industry support and training

- » Provided Digital Training and facilitated networking sessions, workshops and industry events for members. Carried out annual surveys to assess sentiment of members and identified supports needed.

## 1.3 Kildare Tourism Development Initiatives

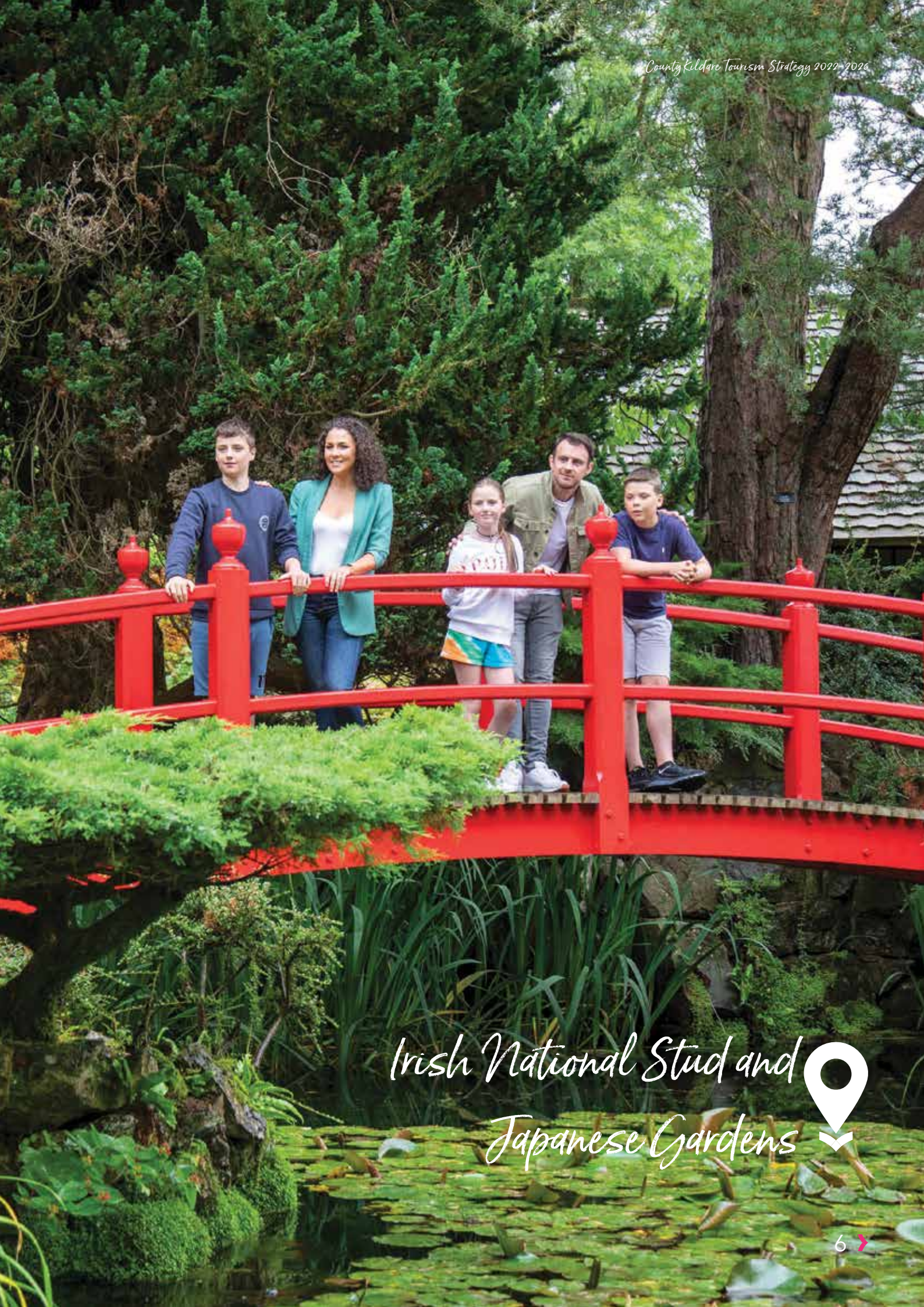
Over the coming years the existing range of tourism product and attractions, the things to see and do in the county, are to be expanded through a range of initiatives currently at planning or funding stage, the majority coordinated by Kildare County Council in partnership with agencies such as Waterways Ireland and Fáilte Ireland, and with Into Kildare represented on steering committees.

These include initiatives focused on placemaking (such as Naas Canal Quarter, Naas Castle Quarter and Kildare Town Market Square), visitor attractions (e.g. Shackleton Museum, St Brigid's Well development), and recreation (e.g. Grand Canal Greenway, Royal Canal Greenway, Barrow Blueway). Together these projects have an approximate investment value of €65m.

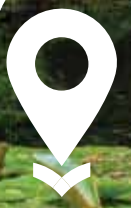
## 1.4 Turning Opportunity into Success

Successful implementation of the actions identified within this strategy will see:

- » **Kildare developing a reputation for low impact regenerative tourism**, tourism that celebrates the heritage of County Kildare and provides local economic benefit;
- » **Delivery of world class tourism experiences based on the distinctive culture, landscape, and heritage of Kildare**; encouraging visitors to stay longer, spend more, wish to return, and recommend visits to others;
- » **A measurable increase in the number of overnight stays in the county**, which in turn will provide local economic benefit, particularly in key visitor hubs;
- » **Increased recognition of the role that Into Kildare plays**, with public and private sector buy-in and a partnership-based approach;
- » **Increased awareness among local, domestic, and international visitors of the County Kildare tourism offer**, through enhanced digital engagement and coordinated promotional campaigns;
- » **A more collaborative and resilient tourism industry in County Kildare**, with readily available supports and capacity building opportunities.



*Irish National Stud and  
Japanese Gardens*



# Chapter Two

Maynooth University Campus





# Situation Analysis

## Where we are now

### 2.1 Tourism Context

*This section of the strategy reviews the context within which tourism in County Kildare takes place. This begins with analysis of the international, regional, and local context for tourism with a focus on the impact and recovery from Covid-19. A summary of recent destination performance is outlined along with discussion of tourism projections and targets. Market analysis and promotion discuss the targeting of key market segments, as well as digital marketing activity and cooperative marketing.*

#### 2.1.1 INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

In 2018 international tourism continued to outpace the global economy. There was a 5% growth in international tourism arrivals, reaching the UNWTO's forecast of 1.4 million international tourist arrivals two years ahead of schedule. There was an additional 3% growth in global tourism receipts, bringing tourism receipts to USD 1.4 billion. The UNWTO 2019 report puts this growth down to a favourable economic environment including a

growing middle class in emerging economies, digital innovation, affordable travel costs and visa facilitation (UNWTO, 2019). Although 2019 was a slower year in economic growth, international tourist arrivals continued to grow by 4%, and tourism receipts grew a further 3% (UNWTO, 2020).

Covid-19 has severely impacted tourism worldwide. While there has been some rebound in January 2022 compared to the low levels of January 2021, UNWTO data indicates international arrivals to Europe were still around half of pre-pandemic levels (-53%). International tourism is expected to continue to recover in 2022, however high uncertainty from the war in Ukraine, along with uncertain economic trajectories and some continued travel restrictions may disrupt confidence and impact on continued upward trends<sup>1</sup>.

While the impact of Covid-19 has been and will continue to be severe the impact of climate change is recognised as having far more long-term potential impacts. In 2015, the United Nations Assembly approved 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In that context, the UNWTO developed the Tourism for Sustainable Development Goals platform, with recommendations for all stakeholders to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, which have informed recommendations in this strategy.

1- <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/abs/10.18111/wtobarometereng.2022.20.1.2>

Into Kildare have a particular focus on SDG's 10, 11 and 15 which align with the actions in the strategy.

- » Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
- » Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
- » Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Further detail on work undertaken by Into Kildare under each SDG is outlined in section 2.1.

### Maximising Domestic Tourism

In response to the fall of international travel due to COVID-19, the UNWTO released their briefing note in September 2020 on how to maximise the benefits of domestic tourism, Understanding Domestic Tourism and Seizing its Opportunities. The UNWTO identified best practice around the world for promoting domestic tourism, including

**1. Financial Incentives** in the form of vouchers, fiscal incentives or 'long weekends'.

**2. Marketing and promotion** New communication campaigns, digital promotion efforts and heavy use of social media channels have been popular strategies in global country initiatives to promote the domestic tourism market.

**3. Joint tourism initiatives** with the participation of public stakeholders at different levels (national and local) and the involvement of the private sector are widely used initiatives to boost domestic tourism, according to UNWTO.

Municipalities are partnering with DMO's to develop new tourism products at the destination level, enhance and adapt the product offer at the local level, improve infrastructure in specific destinations, and promote domestic marketing initiatives (UNWTO, 2020).

## 2.1.2 NATIONAL CONTEXT

Ireland as a destination is increasingly popular, with **significant growth in overseas and domestic visitor volume and revenue over the 2013-2019 period.**

Indeed, tourism is one of Ireland's most important economic sectors and a critical component of the state's employment base. In 2019 the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport reported that the sector supports approximately 325,000 jobs on the island of Ireland, with many more part-time seasonal workers within the industry.

Fáilte Ireland reported some emerging challenges in the tourism industry as 2019 progressed. While North America and long-haul markets continued to show consistent growth (with the CSO's 'Overseas Travel' showing that North American visitors to Ireland increased by 4% between January and September 2019), visitor numbers from Britain flatlined. Despite this, the CSO reported that in 2019, a total of 10.8 million overseas trips were made to Ireland compared to 10.6 million trips in 2018 (+1.8%). CSO data indicates 2019 saw a stagnation of growth for the industry, estimated at €5.6 billion that year. Overseas tourists from Britain grew by 0.2% while North America declined by -3.%. However, Mainland Europe recorded a 2.8% growth and accounted for 37.3% of Irish overseas tourists, with revenue equating to 35.8% of overseas tourism revenue. Of that same year, Britain accounted for 36.0% of overseas tourists to Ireland, and 19.7% came from North America. Revenue from Britain and North America equated to 19.8% and 33.0% of overseas tourism revenue, respectively (Fáilte Ireland, 2021). Mainland Europe continued to be Ireland's primary market in 2019, accounting for 37.3% of overseas visitors responsible for 35.8% of overseas visitor spend in Ireland (Fáilte Ireland, 2021). Germany, France, and Spain are the top three visitor sources to Ireland from Mainland Europe.



**Mainland Europe recorded a 2.8% growth and accounted for 37.3% of Irish overseas tourists...**



**Of that same year, Britain accounted for 36.0% of overseas tourists to Ireland**

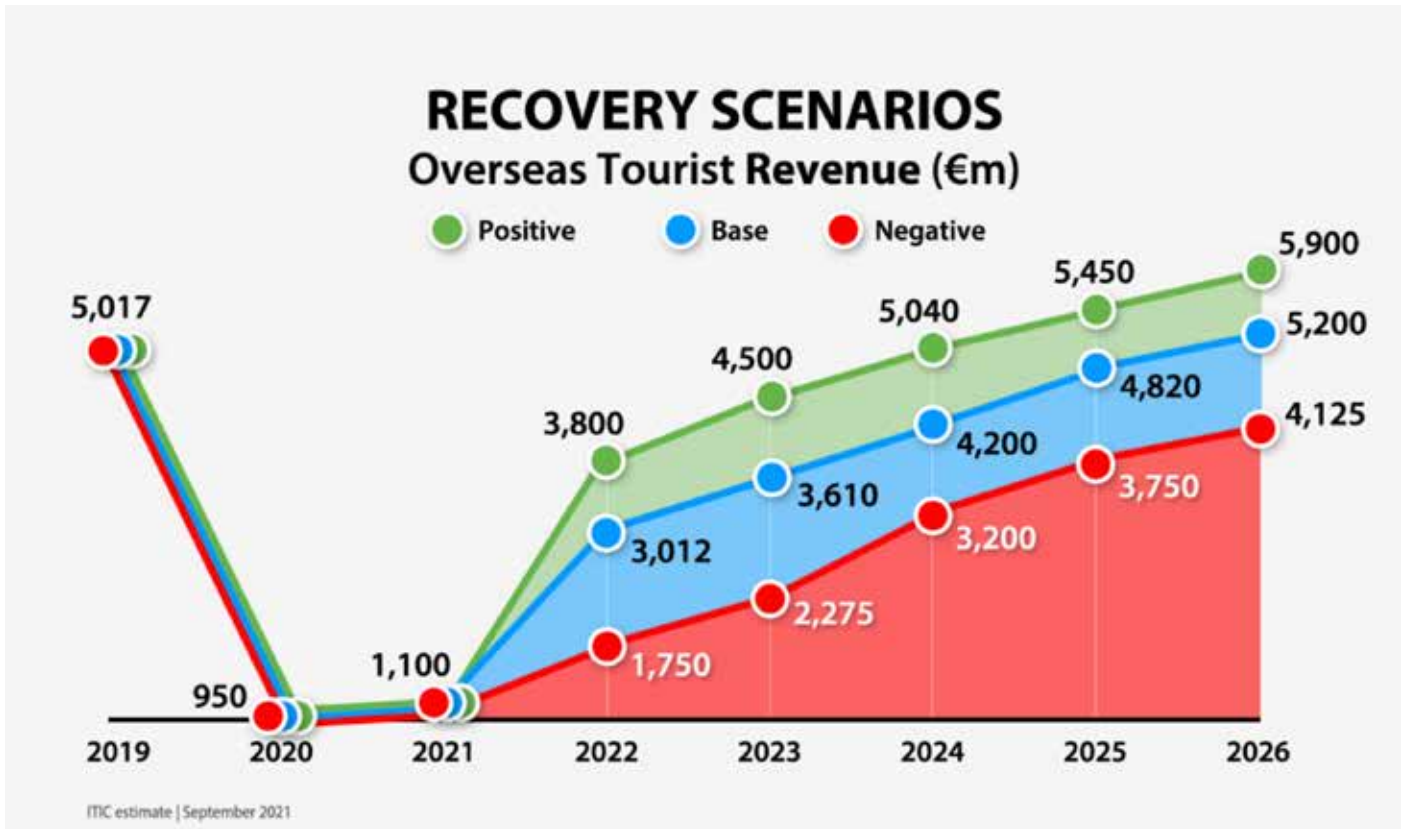


Domestic trips rose by 6.4% between 2018 and 2019, with 11.6 million domestic trips recorded in 2019 compared to 10.9 million in 2018. Of these trips, 50.1% were for leisure purposes, and 33.1% were for visiting families and friends. The revenue generated from domestic trips in Ireland in 2019 was €2.147 million (CSO, 2020).

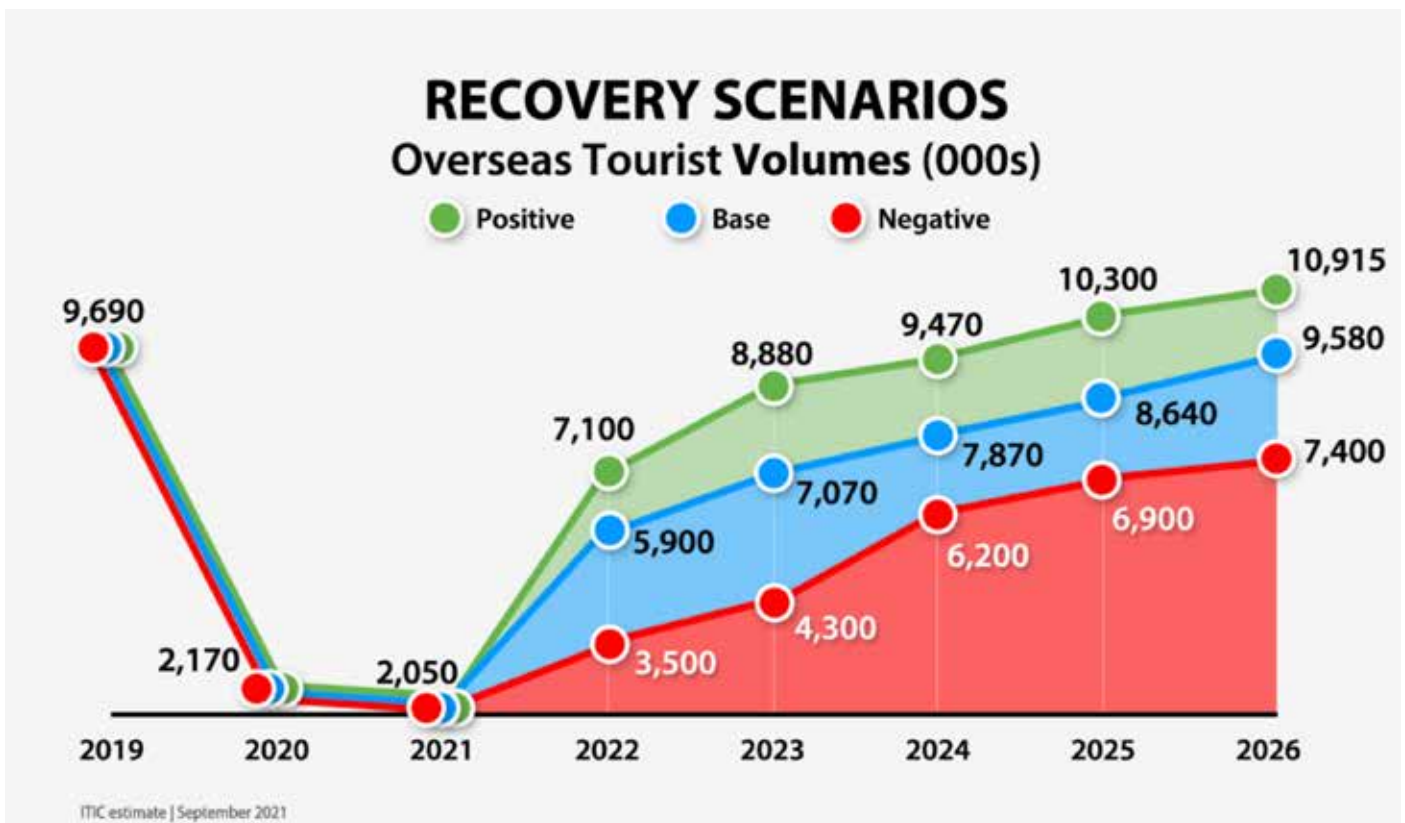
As 2020 commenced, there was an increase of 4.1% in trips to Ireland by overseas residents in February, compared to 12 months earlier. In addition, trips by residents of Great Britain increased by 9.3% to 282,100, while trips by residents of other European countries increased by 4.3%. Despite these encouraging early trends, **2020 and 2021 arrivals have been severely impacted by Covid-19 restrictions** to travel, with flights grounded on an unprecedented scale and all unnecessary domestic travel largely halted as of April 2020. Until recently the government remained positive with growth envisaged until 2025. In the context of COVID-19 and Brexit acting as a drag on recovery, the governments revised targets of the Tourism Action Plan 2019-2021<sup>2</sup> are faced with a significant decline in international visitors during 2020 and 2021, impacting revenue and employment targets. **The long-term impacts of this period are uncertain with estimations of recovery of international arrivals to Ireland and associated currently by 2026 as indicated in Figures 1 and 2.**<sup>3</sup>

2- <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7c8926-tourism-action-plan-2019-2021/>

3- Irish Tourism: from Survival to Revival, ITIC, September 2021 <https://www.itic.ie/RECOVERY/budget2022/#recoveryscenarios>



➤ Figure 1 Overseas Tourist Revenue Recovery Scenarios 2021-2026 (Source ITIC)



➤ Figure 2 Overseas Tourist Volumes Recovery Scenarios 2021-2026 (Source ITIC)

# The K Club, Straffan



The importance of helping businesses to survive this crisis and to aid recovery was recognised by the industry in the report of the Tourism Recovery Taskforce in October 2020, which stated:

“Overall, tourism is clearly in a precarious position. However, it has the capacity and the flexibility to recover strongly and quickly as it did following the last economic recession. It will need assistance in the short term but investment by the State will pay off in the long term in the form of increased employment and a strong net contribution to the Exchequer.”

**It is critical that recovery in the sector is strategically managed and planned for.** This will be a central goal of the Kildare Tourism Strategic Plan 2022-2026, which will guide key actions to ensure a sustainable and resilient future. It will seek to build on achievements stemming from the existing 2020 Vision Strategic Plan and reimagine a pathway forward which is fully cognisant of an evolving tourism landscape.

Fáilte Ireland have provided a wide range of recovery information and supports for tourism businesses. The suite of supports has now been expanded, with the launch in 2021 of the Business Toolkit for Community Tourism Projects to help local organisations develop sustainable enterprises to support recovery in local communities.

Fáilte Ireland’s ‘From Survival to Recovery’ Industry Briefing which took place on 8th February 2022 highlighted two key priorities for the Irish tourism industry of employment and sustainability. Each of these key topics are now the subject of specific sectoral plans.

### 2.1.3 REGIONAL CONTEXT

Kildare sits within the Ireland’s Ancient East (IAE) regional brand destination. The visitor experience is based on Ireland’s rich built, natural and cultural legacy, made accessible and delivered through stories and interpretation at key historical sites. The Ireland’s Ancient East brand was launched in 2016 with an initial objective of developing a recognised brand identity. A 10-year vision for Ireland’s Ancient East will be launched in 2022, along with a 5-year action plan.

The focus for Ireland’s Ancient East will remain on heritage and history, as well the outdoor environment and lush green landscape of the region. National investment in IAE development and marketing is a significant opportunity for Kildare to harness; with many tourism products and experiences in the county aligned with the IAE brand. The goal of the investment will be to transition the east of the country from a transit and day-tripping destination to one that attracts increased numbers of international overnight visitors.

To grow international visitors, Kildare as a destination must ensure that it has defined itineraries which are saleable experiences, a tourist product that is market ready, to include attractions and a tourism offering ready for promotion overseas.

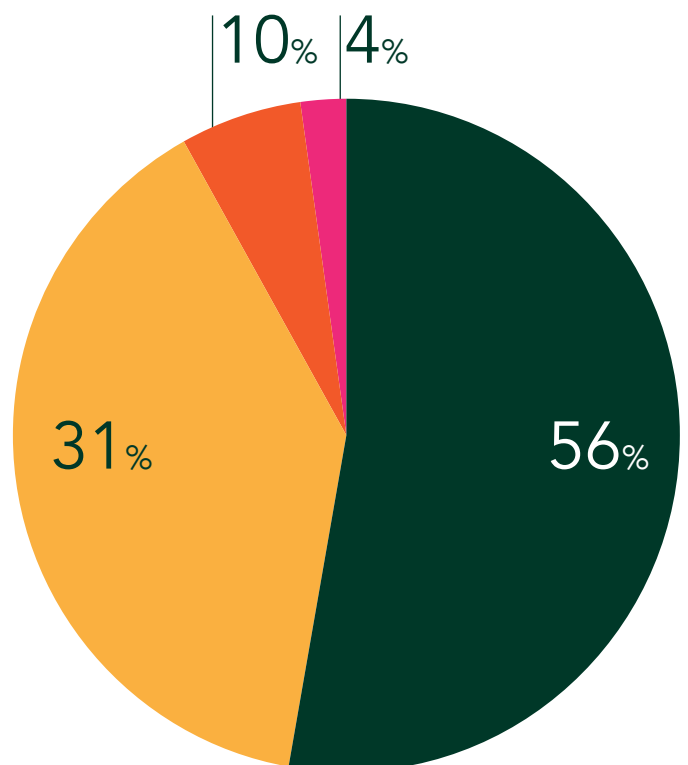
Fáilte Ireland data for 2019 indicates that there were 2.4mn overseas tourists visiting Ireland’s Ancient East that year generating €889mn in revenue. Each spent an average of 5.6 nights and €365 in the Ireland’s Ancient East region. While 56% were on holiday almost a third (31%) were visiting friends and family. There were 4mn domestic tourists to Ireland’s Ancient East in 2019 generating €663mn. They spent on average 2.3 nights and €164 per capita, clearly demonstrating both the value of domestic visitors to the area, and that overseas visitors spend twice as long as and twice as much per capita than domestic visitors in Ireland’s Ancient East. In addition, a further 269,000 Northern Ireland tourists visited Ireland’s Ancient East in 2019 generating €87mn in revenue, staying for 2.4 nights and spending €324 per capita on average.

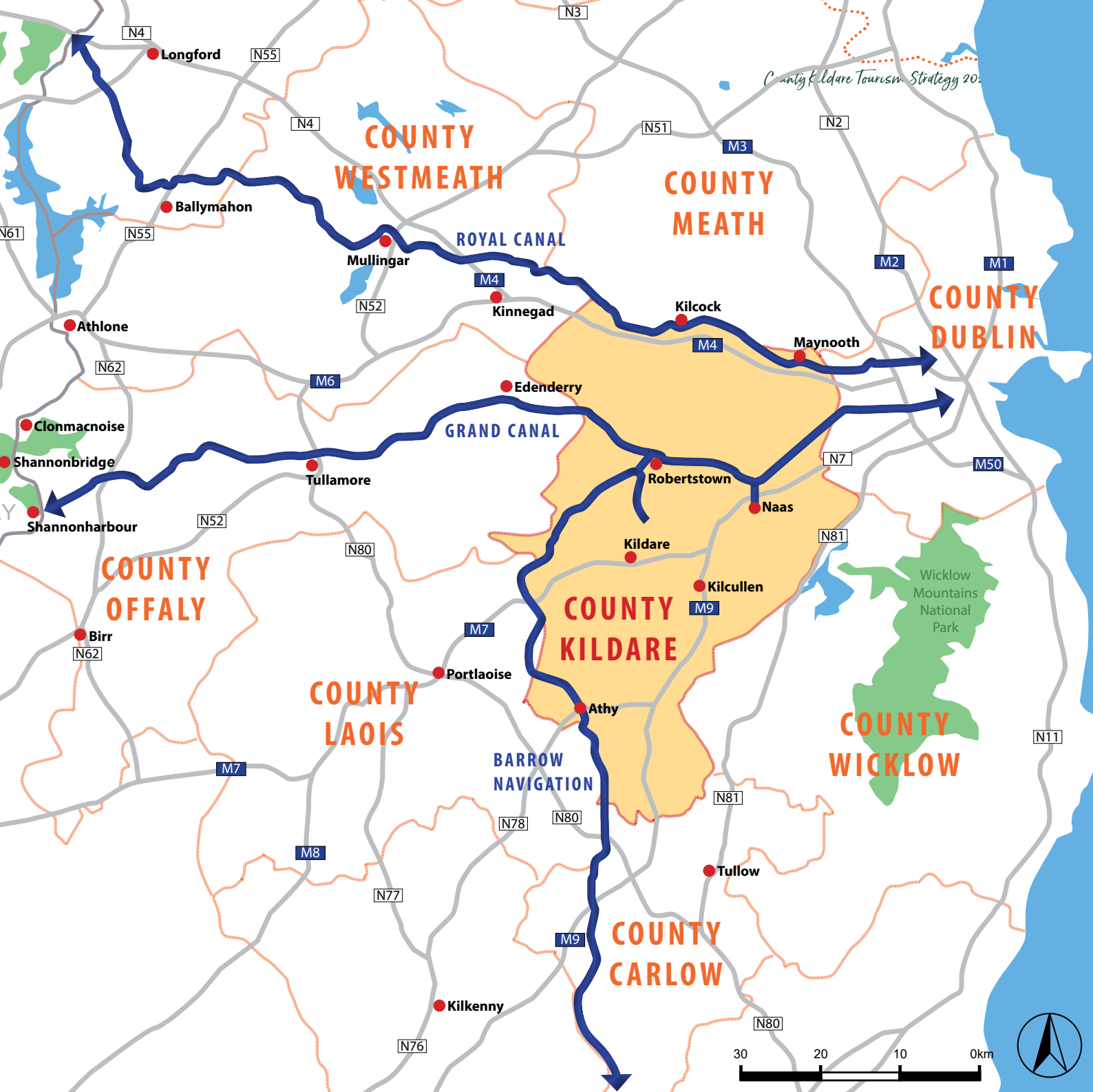
The latest Mid-East/Midlands data show the region (Kildare, Louth, Laois, Longford, Meath, Offaly, Westmeath, Wicklow) received 954,000 overseas visitors in 2019, who spent €348m (Fáilte Ireland, 2020). In addition, there were 170,000 visitors from Northern Ireland who generated revenue of €52m. In terms of domestic tourism, the Mid-East and Midlands region received 1,513,000 resident Irish visitors in 2019, generating €240m in revenue.



#### Purpose of Visit

- Holidaymaker
- Visit Friends / Family
- Business
- Other





➤ **Figure 3** County Kildare Regional Context

## 2.1.4 Destination Performance and Impact

Kildare is one of the most populated counties in the State with a population recorded at 222,504 in the 2016 Census. It has the fifth highest population of all local authorities in Ireland and has grown rapidly in recent decades. The county's proximity to Dublin offers opportunities to expand the existing tourism offer and brand and create 'spin off' tourism from the wider city region as well as airport arrivals.

In 2017 Kildare welcomed 211,000 overseas visitors, generating €91 million. In the same year, 286,000 domestic visitors (to both Kildare and Carlow) were recorded as contributing an additional €36 million. In terms of attracting visitors, Kildare came in 12th ranking compared to other counties for 2017. However, Kildare performed much better in revenue generated, coming in 7th position, generating an estimated €91 million in 2017. Kildare was just behind County Clare, ranked 6th in terms of revenue generated and 5th regarding visitor arrival numbers.

From 2018 onwards Fáilte Ireland no longer issues figures at county level in the previous format of absolute figures, given the margin of error based on the passenger exit survey of 10,000 from which the data is derived. Fáilte Ireland figures available, for 2018, and the future format of county level metrics, show that Kildare attracted 2% of the 9,609 million overseas tourists who came to Ireland, spending 2% of the €5,217bn overseas tourism expenditure in Ireland. This equates to 192,180 overseas tourists spending €104.3m, each metric suggesting a decline on 2017's figures. However, given the change in the way figures are provided e.g., in absolute figures or in rounded percentages, data can no longer be compared between years 2018 on and 2017 and earlier.

Fáilte Ireland provide the same percentage figure of 2% share of national overseas tourist numbers and revenue for 2019 although the total volume increased to 9.7m with the revenue remaining the same at €5.2bn, meaning volume slightly increased to 194,000 and revenue remained the same, as indicated in Table 1.

› **Table 1 International to County Kildare 2016-2019 by Volume and Revenue (Source: Fáilte Ireland)**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Volume	211,000	211,000	192,180	194,000
Revenue	€115m	€91m	€104.3m	€104.3m

› **Table 2 Domestic Visitors to County Kildare 2016-2019 by Volume and Revenue (Source: Fáilte Ireland)**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Revenue	241,000	286,000	206,000	265,333
Revenue	€29.3m	€36m	€24m	€37.3m

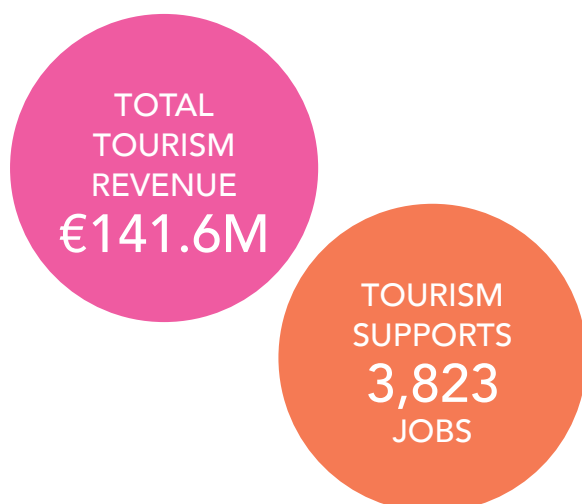


Statistics for domestic travel by Irish residents account for Kildare and Carlow as one region. Combined, both counties welcomed 309,000 visitors in 2018 generating revenue of €36 million. This increased to 309,000 trips (3% of the 10,918m domestic trips in 2018) generating revenue of €36m (2% of domestic tourism spend). This is estimated to have significantly increased to 398,000 trips and €56m in 2019. This clearly demonstrates the increasing importance of the area as a domestic tourism destination. If the same percentage split attributed to overseas tourism is applied to domestic trip i.e., 2:1 then this would indicate 206,000 domestic visitors to Kildare spending €24m in 2018, and 265,333 visitors spending €37.3m in 2019, as indicated in Table 2.

*“In particular, revenues from domestic tourism are proportionally low when compared to those for overseas tourism so there is a clear need to enhance the added value potential of domestic tourism to the county.”*

This need to enhance added value must remain a core objective within the 2022-2026 Strategy. However, while attracting domestic visitors remains an important objective, the attraction of increased numbers of overseas visitors enables growth of the visitor economy from a lower volume of visitors.

The combined revenue from domestic and international tourism to County Kildare is an estimated €141.6m. With Fáilte Ireland indicating that 27 jobs are generated by every €1m of tourism revenue, this means a total of 3,823 jobs in Kildare are supported by tourism.



## 2.1.5 Tourism Projections and Targets

A focus on more sustainable tourism development is essential to ensure that negative impacts from tourism are minimised including the impacts on Kildare’s heritage and communities, while maximising positive impacts from tourism. With a goal of more responsible tourism development many destinations at a local, regional, and national level are emphasising revenue growth from visitors over volume growth.

Were accurate figures available for future years at national level for county-based areas, then a balance between ambitions for growth and responsible tourism development suggest a model whereby projections for County Kildare over the lifetime of the strategy would focus on growth in visitor revenue and employment generation over visitor volume, boosting yield per overseas visitor and requiring increased dwell time per visitor. However as outlined earlier from 2018 onwards Fáilte Ireland is no longer issuing figures at county level in this format given the margin of error based on the passenger survey of 10,000. This new format means data cannot easily be compared to years prior to 2017, nor accurately compared to other counties.

Discussion with Fáilte Ireland identified metrics of success that could be reviewed over the lifetime of the plan, including:

- » Bed-nights: some hotels, guesthouses, bed & breakfasts and other accommodation providers registered with Fáilte Ireland provide returns on the number of bed-nights. The greatest opportunity in growing revenue generated from tourism lies in increasing the number of overnight visitors.
- » RevPAR, ARR: Revenue per available room (RevPAR) and Average Room Rate (ARR) are also demonstrative of success in driving growth. However, these only relate to hotel accommodation.
- » Visitor attractions: Fáilte Ireland monitor growth in the number of visitors going to registered attractions. However, this is dependent on visitor attractions making accurate annual returns to Fáilte Ireland. It is also important to grow the number of attractions in Kildare to provide a wider product base.

It would be important that success metrics focus on data that can be accurately measured and bed nights and visitor attraction numbers are two key metrics. An annual increase in bed nights could be a key metric in measuring growth. However, securing this data would be a difficult task for Into Kildare, as the return of occupancy levels to Fáilte Ireland is not now obligatory as it was for many years. An alternative system could be an opt-in, web-based and anonymous questionnaire, that would satisfy Fáilte Ireland criteria. This could be implemented, with results collated by a data research company, and then transmitted to Into Kildare and Fáilte Ireland.

Other counties use alternative metrics e.g., ATM transactions in the case of County Kilkenny. A further important metric of success is community and visitor satisfaction with the impact of tourism, with measures in relation to community sentiment surveys discussed in Chapter 4.

Into Kildare have currently commissioned a project in relation to data measurement for Kildare tourism businesses to address the data gap. A survey of tourism business undertaken for this project has identified that a high proportion of tourism business would be willing to submit data on a confidential basis to Into Kildare. The survey also showed that accuracy of data capture needs to be addressed, with many businesses needing support in this area. The next steps are to:

- » Define the categories of tourism businesses for measurement e.g., accommodation providers, visitor attractions and experiences, activity providers, events and festivals, venues/restaurants/bars, sporting venues;
- » Define what needs to be measured for Into Kildare e.g., revenue, employees' numbers, sales channel data, markets, business types.

## 2.1.6 Market Analysis and Promotion

### Targeting Key Market Segments

Into Kildare have a defined annual programme to target international and domestic visitors. National investment in Ireland's Ancient East (IAE) development and marketing is a significant opportunity for Kildare to harness, with much of the tourism product and experience offer aligned with the vision for the IAE brand.

To grow international visitors, Kildare as a destination must ensure that it has defined itineraries which are saleable experiences, a tourist product that is market ready to include attractions and a tourism offering ready for promotion overseas. Better utilisation by Into Kildare members of the Ireland's Ancient East brand and its platforms, which are available to trade at no cost, can ensure more heightened awareness and profile for the destination in the international marketplace.

Into Kildare marketing messaging, communications and promotion needs to continue to align with Ireland's Ancient East to ensure exposure in international markets and should reflect those domestic customer segments prioritised by Fáilte Ireland in coming years to ensure Kildare tourism businesses can target and influence those customers that offer the best prospects, aligning tourism product and experiences with visitor markets.

Some key points regarding Ireland's Ancient East opportunities are:

- » IAE is thought to be primed for future growth with the opportunity to meet multiple motivations;
- » Development opportunities should also look to address the strong seasonality behaviour.
- » IAE plays to families in particular and at the same time is underrepresented in both younger and older unconstrained adults.
- » While following the national seasonal profile, there is a slight positive skew in October and November. IAE is an ideal location to pick up seasonal travel for both city breaks and Dublin consumers.

## Key Market Segments

While visitors to Ireland come from around the world, there are four main countries that have played a key role in overseas tourism growth in recent years, with nearly 70% of all visitors and 60% of all overseas tourism revenue coming from Britain, USA, France and Germany in 2019. While Britain and Mainland Europe are high volume markets, the USA is a high yield market due to the high proportion of holidaymakers (rather than those visiting family friends or relatives or for business travel), their higher likelihood of staying in a hotel, and longer average stay. Around a third of holidaymakers are repeat visitors which highlights the opportunity to encourage a return visit by ensuring their expectations are exceeded and providing them with a compelling reason to return and recommend visits to others. Ireland's secondary markets include Spain and Italy, and the emerging markets include China, Gulf States (GCC) and India.

## Revenue Growth

Revenue growth is generated by encouraging overnight stays. Of the total overseas visitor spend in 2019 29% was spent on bed and board, 37% on other food and drink, 13% on internal transport, 13% on shopping, with 6% on sightseeing/entertainment and 1% on miscellaneous other outgoings. Encouraging growth in visitors staying overnight and in eating out can have a significant impact on overall revenue growth for County Kildare.

## Hotels and Guesthouses

While hotels and guesthouses each attracted 21% of overseas visitors as a category of accommodation in 2019, 25% of overseas visitors stayed with friends and relatives indicating the importance of ensuring those living in or near a destination such as Kildare are aware of the range of things to see and do there.

## Hiking and Cross-County

Hiking and cross-country walking is by far the most popular activity amongst overseas visitors with 2,392,000 engaging in this activity in 2019, with the next most popular activities being cycling (361,000), golf (237,000), equestrian (112,000), and angling (98,000). This indicates the importance of communicating the range of activities under each category to visitors when they are deciding how long to stay in a particular location i.e., at the start of the visitor journey.

Further research by Fáilte Ireland indicate that the **visitor attractions/activities engaged in on the most recent trip to IAE** were:

Shopping (39%), gardens (30%), historic houses/castle (28%), nature reserve/national park (24%), centre – visitor/heritage/interpretation (20%), farmers market/food producer (11%), museum/gallery (12%), spa treatment (10%).

The most **popular outdoor activities on the most recent trip** were:

Walking (64%), touring by car (53%), swimming (35% [pool 21%, lake/sea 17%], hiking (14%), adventure parks (11%), cycling (10%), boat trips/tours (8%), golf (7%), fishing/angling (6%), kayaking/canoeing/kite & windsurfing (5%).

The target market for IAE is the 'culturally curious'; independent active sightseers looking to visit new places and expand their experience by exploring landscape, history and culture. Culturally Curious tend to be slightly older (40+), are very independently minded and are interested in places of historic and cultural interest. Culturally Curious visitors are identified as having most potential to deliver for the Ireland's Ancient East region and are key market segments which Tourism Ireland push in the international markets. While not as high a priority for marketing as Culturally Curious, the unspoilt landscape of the county is also ideal for the Great Escapers target market segment who are likely to be attracted to the outdoor activity opportunities. Great Escapers are all about getting away from it all, renewing family bonds and spending time together in a beautiful place. They want to come home refreshed and revitalised, their batteries charged. Given the dramatic change in overseas travel patterns Tourism Ireland intend to review their overseas market segmentation model with changes expected in 2022/2023.

## Overseas market sentiment

Research into overseas market sentiment undertaken by Tourism Ireland indicates:

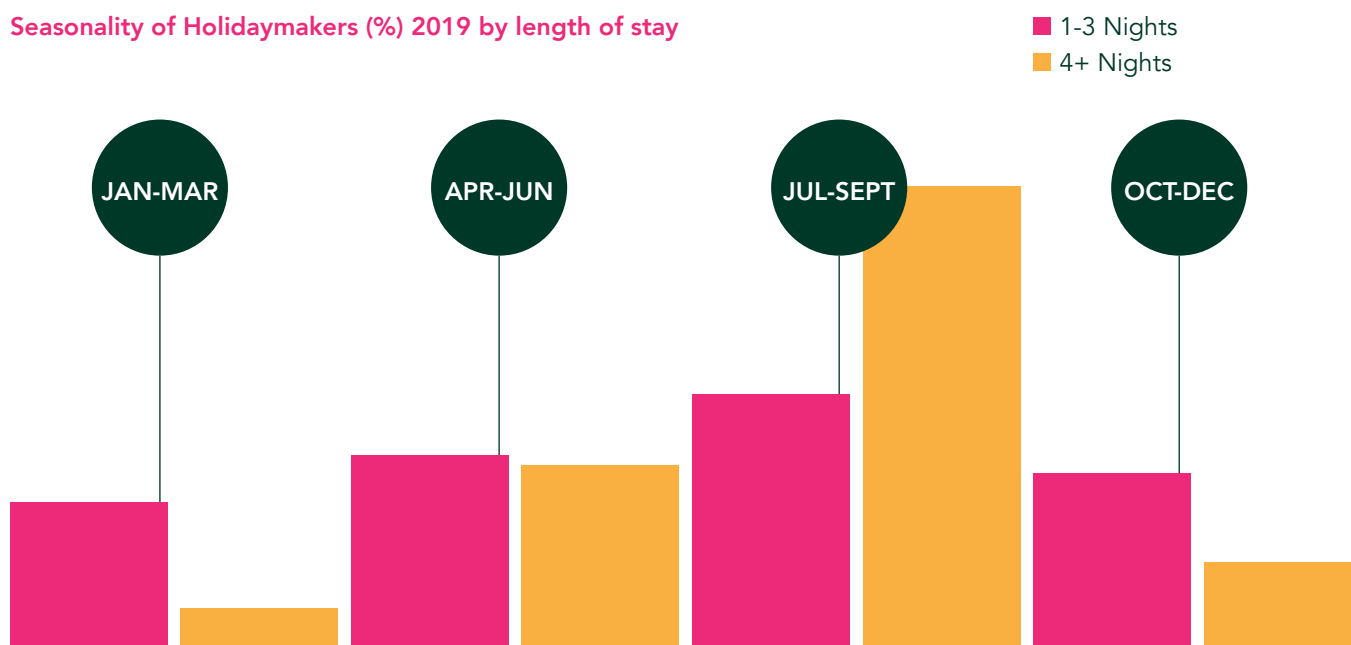
- » **There is evidence of growing confidence and comfort in travel.** The strongest comfort levels are towards European breaks. EU destinations are seeing a rise in demand for potential travellers once vaccinated, especially from the US.
- » **Barriers to travel** are mainly around the expectation of hassle while travelling (i.e., cancellation policies, a restricted experience due to Covid restrictions or changes to government restrictions when on holiday).
- » **Over half of outbound holidaymakers from the US, France and Germany are comfortable with European travel.** This is not the case for Great Britain where comfort levels are lower than the other countries.
- » While the rollout of the vaccine had people planning to take their next European trip in 2021, the more recent research has shown **timelines have shifted with a larger proportion intending to travel in 2022.**
- » **Visiting Friends and Relatives and Sun Holidays are the main expectations for holidaymaker's next trip.** Further research shows all types of breaks are equally as appealing i.e., outdoors and city breaks are showing an equal appeal and city breaks having the highest appeal. Research has shown that there is a strong desire for the 'best of both worlds' when it comes to picking a destination. Where some 15% stated they would prefer to visit cities, **53% stated they would like a mixture of cities and more rural locations and 23% would prefer a remote holiday in the countryside. This offers a strong opportunity for Kildare.**
- » **There is a relatively new phenomenon, Bleisure, where someone is combining a business trip with a leisure trip (e.g.: 3 days business and staying on after for a leisure break). As a result of Covid, this is expected to grow in popularity as more businesses have the ability for their employees to work remotely.**
- » Consumer trends revolve around travelling close to home, staycations, longer breaks with short booking windows, travellers wanting to take part in local experiences, a "safety first" mindset while travelling, the pursuit of outdoor and adventure activities.

## Domestic Key Market Segments

In 2019 there were 5,819,000 holiday trips taken in Ireland, with over 4,666,000 short breaks, defined as 1-3 nights away and 1,152,000 long breaks – 4+ nights. Activities engaged on holidays include Hiking/Walking (46% and significantly up on the figure of 26% in 2018), Houses/Castles (27%), National Parks (26%), Gardens (23%), Attending a Festival or Event (18%), Heritage/Interpretative Centres (18%), Visits to Spas (14%), Museums/Art Galleries (13%), Watersports (excluding swimming) (8%), and attending a Sporting Event (6%). Each of the motivators for domestic visitors can be found in County Kildare; the central location and proximity to Dublin allows visitors to explore nearby attractions, for example Tayto Park or Wicklow National Park on a day trip from the county and returning to accommodation the county for the evening.

A higher proportion of domestic tourists stayed in hotels than overseas visitors (36%:21%). The greatest proportion of domestic trips are taken in the months of July to September, with around a quarter taken in April to June as illustrated in Figure 4. The domestic market is important for County Kildare, particularly given its proximity to the Dublin area, with seven neighbouring counties, and presents an opportunity to extend the season and to drive regional growth. Domestic visitors are also important for Kildare for festivals and events, short breaks, weddings and for those visiting friends and relatives.

## Seasonality of Holidaymakers (%) 2019 by length of stay



› **Figure 4 Seasonality of Holidaymakers by Length of Stay (Source: CSO)**

In recent years the marketing of Ireland to domestic audiences has been based upon segmentation models such as those targeting the 'Empty Nesters' and 'Pre-Teen Families'. This segmentation model is now under review, with Fáilte Ireland currently working on a new segmentation model due out by January 2022. Future annual marketing plans developed by Into Kildare must be flexible and have regard to new segmentation models.

Fáilte Ireland research indicates:

- › IAE is already seeing a higher proportion of consumers who have never been to the region travel there than with the other brands, so it is primed for further growth. This also speaks to the opportunity to meet multiple motivations.
- › Underrepresentation in younger and older unconstrained adult target segments means that, given the variety of activities and attractions on offer, there is a need to drive penetration in the latter segments and ensure that they are aware of what there is to do.
- › Older unconstrained adults currently have less intent to take a break in IAE versus other segments
- › The region is also aligned with the national profile of the number of nights away with the bulk being in the two to three-night zone.

Undoubtedly the impact of Covid-19 will influence significant changes in travel patterns and data for 2021 onwards may not necessarily reflect that of recent years. Fáilte Ireland have identified a gap between intent and booking. Their response is to continuously communicate safety messaging and a slow re-integration of filling capacity as visitors are still cautious of being in proximity to others after a long period of social distancing. Fáilte Ireland research found that when travelling domestically people tend to return to familiar counties. Reasons for this are, the love of the place, the love of the people of a place and, the convenience of the place. Irish residents value bundles, offers and extras when planning and a clear promotion of Fáilte Ireland COVID-19 Safety Charter to show a commitment to ensuring customers safety. Fáilte Ireland recommend cross-promotion where possible, promotion of nearby outdoor experiences and options for food/equipment hire/tour guides. Where possible systems and platforms should make booking as seamless as possible with clear cancellation policies to reassure tourists.

Although both overseas and domestic market segmentation models are expected to be reviewed by Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland over the course of this strategy an indicative segmentation model can be developed that seeks to match target markets to Kildare experiences (existing, planned and potential) and assets as shown in Table 3.

› **Table 3 Provisional Kildare Target Market Segmentation Target Model (Source: Fáilte Ireland and KPMG FA)**

Segment	Matching target markets and Kildare experiences (existing and new)
<b>OVERSEAS TARGET SEGMENTS (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)</b>	
<p><b>Culturally Curious</b></p> <p>Independent active sight seekers looking to visit new places and expand their experience by exploring landscape, history and culture. Culturally Curious tend to be slightly older (40+), are very independently minded and are interested in places of historic and cultural interest.</p>	<p>Ways to experiences landscape e.g. Greenways and Blueways (interpretation and accessibility important), Curragh Plains (hub/interpretation important); Historic houses and castles and heritage attractions e.g. Castletown House, Maynooth Castle, Kildare Town Heritage Centre; Authentic attractions e.g. Irish National Stud, Newbridge Silver and the Museum of Style Icons, Shackleton Experience; Christian heritage e.g. St Brigid’s Cathedral, St Brigid’s Festival; Food offer e.g. Burtown House &amp; Gardens, restaurants and cafes, Taste of Kildare.</p>
<p><b>Great Escapers</b></p> <p>Likely to be attracted to the outdoor activity opportunities. Great Escapers are all about getting away from it all, renewing family bonds and spending time together in a beautiful place. They want to come home refreshed and revitalised, their batteries charged.</p>	<p>Greenways and Blueways (activity providers/hubs and accessibility important), Curragh Plains, Castletown House Parklands, Irish National Stud, Mondello Park, Horse-riding.</p>

› **Table 3 Provisional Kildare Target Market Segmentation Target Model (Source: Fáilte Ireland and KPMG FA)**

Segment	Matching target markets and Kildare experiences (existing and new)
<b>DOMESTIC TARGET SEGMENTS (PROVISIONAL)</b>	
<p><b>Unconstrained Adults 45+</b></p> <p>Relaxation and escapism are central drivers, as is spending time with family and reconnecting. Less focused on activities though walking and touring by car popular. Dining options are important. Hotels stays are popular.</p>	<p>Greenways and Blueways (activity providers/hubs and accessibility important), adventure activities, Irish National Stud, racing festivals and events, Food offer e.g., Burtown House &amp; Gardens, restaurants and cafes, spas based in hotels.</p>

› Table 3 Continued

Segment	Matching target markets and Kildare experiences (existing and new)
<p><b>Unconstrained Adults Under 45</b></p> <p>Low penetration for domestic travel but high travel frequency. Relaxation, an element of fun and escapism are the main drivers. Opportunity to relax and recharge is important. Under 45s engage in activities aligned to the national average – with a focus on the great outdoors.</p>	<p>Greenways and Blueways (activity providers/ hubs and accessibility important), Church of Oak Distillery (under development), Irish National Stud, Castletown House Parklands, spas based in hotels, Donadea Forest Park, proposed Umeras Peatlands Park, Curragh Plains, Solas Bhríde Centre.</p>
<p><b>Families</b></p> <p>A primary motivation for families travelling is going to places children will enjoy (37%). This sits alongside the passport factors of relaxing and unwinding (53%) and escapism (41%), which are common denominators for all life-stage segments. Families engage in activities aligned to the national average – with a focus on the great outdoors.</p>	<p>Castletown House Parklands, Irish National Stud, Lullymore Heritage &amp; Discovery Park, Kildare Maze, Donadea Forest Park, proposed Umeras Peatlands Park, Redhills Adventure Park, St Catherine’s Park, Clonfert Pet Farm, Kildare Farm Foods.</p>
<b>NICHE MARKETS</b>	
<p><b>Retail</b></p>	<p>Kildare Village, Newbridge Silverware, Whitewater Shopping Centre</p>
<p><b>Golf</b></p>	<p>Carton House, K-Club, Kilkea Castle, Moyvalley and the 20+ golf courses in Kildare</p>
<p><b>Wellness</b></p>	<p>Spas based in hotels, Solas Bhríde Centre</p>
<p><b>Business/Bleisure/Workations</b></p>	<p>Greenways and Blueways (activity providers/ hubs and accessibility important), Mondello Park, Carton House, K-Club, Kilkea Castle, Moyvalley, Racecourses and the 20+ golf courses in Kildare</p>
<p><b>Christian heritage</b></p>	<p>Solas Bhríde Centre, St Brigid’s Cathedral, St Brigid’s Festival, monastic heritage, Columbanus Trail</p>

## Consumer Trends

Fáilte Ireland have undertaken research into consumer trends in 2011 to inform decision-making. The key trends identified are indicated in Table 4.

► **Table 4 Consumer Trends (Source Fáilte Ireland 2021 and KPMG FA)**

Trend	Summary	Opportunities for County Kildare
<b>Health &amp; Wellbeing</b>	Key focus for 2022/2023 with consumers seeking more holistic approach with lasting benefits. Opportunities to grow wellness tourism, outdoor physical activities, and to build positive relationships with consumers by caring for their health.	Spas in hotels, outdoor activity providers, Greenways and Blueways
<b>Sustainability</b>	Prominent future trend with greater appreciation for nature and local products with a greater focus on supporting local communities. Opportunity for nature-based tourism; increases importance of business transparency and to avoid greenwashing; opportunity for seasonal menus for food providers; and for better communication around minimisation of waste, water and energy.	Seasonal food on menus and as part of Taste of Kildare, nature-based tourism providers, focus on sustainability communication in tourism businesses as marketing advantage, tourism and hospitality businesses receiving accreditation for their sustainability approach
<b>Outdoors</b>	Concerns over safety due to Covid-19 means many are seeking to spend more time outdoors. Flexible/ remote working means more time for many to engage with outdoors and to explore landscapes	Trend expected to stick for next 5+ years in terms of activities and social and dining experiences. Opportunity for outdoor events, glamping, outdoor dining and to reimagine spaces.
<b>Technology</b>	Greater merging and seamlessness between digital and physical worlds, augmented reality and virtual reality a way for visitor to engage at home.	Providing novel experiences with technology can make a business stand out from the crowd. Use of Augmented or Virtual Reality in museums, galleries, historic houses and heritage centres seen as an opportunity.
<b>Flexibility</b>	Includes time and location with many placing more importance on work-life balance and seeking to relocate to more rural locations. Likely to see rise in consumers seeking to extend holidays by staying extra days or even weeks to work remotely.	Opportunities for local providers to build positive associations with newcomers, and for accommodation providers to meet consumer demands for flexible workspace.
<b>Convenience</b>	Loss of human interaction due to Covid is felt by many, however it has enabled rapid adoption of digital technology with QR codes and contactless consumer journeys becoming more common.	Opportunity for hotels to continue to innovate in digital technology interactions, for the use of QR codes for businesses to interact with consumers, and for ordering food online e.g., from hotels in urban areas
<b>Value</b>	Priority placed on affordability, convenience, durability and flexibility of use, with many consumers seeking more eco-friendly purchases. This means many consumers are seeking experiences rather than material possessions.	Opportunity for promotion of luxury breaks and treats and goods as a deserved indulgence such as high-end breaks and retail.



### › Table 4 Continued

Trend	Summary	Opportunities for County Kildare
<b>Self-Identity</b>	Consumers increasingly willing to speak up on social media to voice opinions and will increasingly look to brands to support key causes and communities.	More transformative experiences are being sought by consumers to express their identity, providing opportunity for innovative packages. Also important for key brands to demonstrate their ethics.

### Into Kildare Digital Marketing Activity

Digital marketing activity is both outsourced and handled in house by Into Kildare. Website traffic continues to improve with year-on-year growth in traffic by over 35% (2021 vs 2020) Into Kildare has a strong social media presence and 2021 saw the launch of the new Into Kildare logo and a new high-quality website, including embedded video and events calendar. There are further opportunities for harnessing this platform for the promotion of bundled packages and bespoke itineraries to attract domestic and international visitors. Into Kildare have also provided digital training for members.

Development of the high quality Into Kildare website, and a digital promotional brochure that represent the whole County, offer an opportunity to encourage greater coordination between Kildare County Council departments; a focus on collaboration rather than competition. In addition, this provides a strong opportunity for this to be used by tourism stakeholders to cross promote the wider Kildare offer.

### Cooperative Marketing

Into Kildare has undertaken a range of initiatives since 2016 to increase awareness and drive the development and success of Kildare as a visitor destination. While each tourism business has their own marketing channels depending on the scale of the business, Into Kildare provides an umbrella promotional entity for the county and is able to use the power of collaborative marketing to drive increased awareness of the county offer.

Since the establishment of Into Kildare there has been a gradual growth in funding provided by Kildare County Council, which includes staff salaries. Into Kildare is a membership-based organisation with revenue generated by membership fees from approximate 100 businesses. This funding is vital and has enabled key projects to be advanced such as the development of a new website in 2021. However, some in the industry have indicated this means some tourism businesses in the county are not

promoted by an agency that is majority funded by the local authority and have suggested Into Kildare should not require fees from members to join.

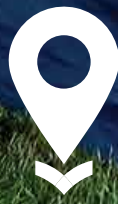
Into Kildare prepares an annual marketing and development action plan focusing on a variety of media including digital marketing activity, PR, press and radio advertising, consumer fair attendance, print production and festival organisation. Industry support among the many businesses that were contacted as part of this study, for Into Kildare was strong, with the promotional and support services described as invaluable.

A significant increase in funding from Kildare County Council would reflect not only the potential economic benefit to be realised from an associated direct growth in visitor revenue and employment to tourism businesses; but from indirect growth to businesses that supply and service tourism businesses, and vitally in the positioning of County Kildare as a desirable place to live work and invest.

Fáilte Ireland has initiated several Visitor Experience Development Plans across the country under the respective brands. These are three to five-year commercial development plans for a region, which bring the public and private sector together to drive visitors and revenue to lesser-known areas and attractions, especially in the off-peak season. These VEDPs have now transitioned to Destination and Experience Development Plans (DEDP). Fáilte Ireland has started work on a DEDP for the Thoroughbred Country (TCDEDP) which includes a range of experience development priorities for both County Kildare and County Tipperary focusing on the equine experience offer. Into Kildare has supported this initiative through support for the Living Legends attraction and the development of the Irish Racehorse Experience as well as the employment in 2021 of a key staff member to help drive the implementation of the DEDP. Further details on the TCDEDP are provided in section 2.2.4.



Taste of Kildare



Into Kildare have also

- » Introduced the We Care in Kildare campaign during the Covid-19 pandemic. In accordance with Fáilte Ireland's guidelines issued on June 8th, 2020, the Into Kildare Network have implemented a county wide initiative called 'We Care in Kildare'. This destination commitment to our visitors will ensure that the following measures are in place to safeguard the health and safety of all visitors and staff. Businesses displaying the Kildare Fáilte poster have signed a self-declaration that they comply with all points if applicable to their business and adhere to government guidance. Following completion of the declaration below, participating businesses receive a 'We Care in Kildare' Poster and Badge sticker to display on their premises, as well as a digital copy of the poster and badge.
- » Hosted the Rose of Tralee pre-tour for three years, where Roses from all over the world enjoy a "behind the scenes" tour of a selection of key Kildare flagship locations. This provides an opportunity to showcase the best the County has to offer and is an opportunity for tourism businesses to collaborate to offer a coordinated itinerary.
- » Developed the Taste of Kildare initiative to include a virtual event in 2020 showcasing the incredible variety of restaurants; talented chefs and food producer in the County.
- » Promoted Kildare across all mediums – press, radio, digital and social as well as representing Kildare overseas at events and trade shows and hosting international, press and blogger familiarisation trips.
- » Represented the County on the marketing steering committees for a range of new attractions and recreational routes. This includes the Royal Canal Greenway, Grand Canal Greenway, Barrow Blueway and the recently launched Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan.

Engagement in and development of this range of activities is only possible due to the commitment from key members of the tourism sector who provide financial support towards delivery of the campaigns and funding provided by Kildare County Council.

## Into Kildare Sustainable Tourism Approach

Tourism is a key industry and important economic sector in Ireland and plays a significant role in revenue generation. To protect the industry and create a sustainable future, Into Kildare will seek to manage tourism growth in the County in a more sustainable manner. In doing so Into Kildare will seek to promote tourism as a means to create employment, protect tourism assets and to support the wider community. The vision in this regard is that Into Kildare will be the most sustainable tourism board in Ireland as represented by its members from the tourism and hospitality industry.

Current work programmes of Into Kildare that align with the Sustainable Development Goals include,

### *SDG 10. Reduced Inequalities: making tourism accessible for all*

- » Working with the relevant stakeholders to encourage visitor sites to be accessible for visitors with reduced mobility, sight, hearing etc.;
- » Promotion of free/low-cost activities for visitors/ locals to access;

### *SDG 11. Sustainable Cities & Communities: preservation of cultural and natural heritage assets*

- » Promoting the message to use local, by supporting Kildare businesses this in turn supports the local economy;
- » Support for the development of new and existing tourism products that seek to preserve cultural and natural heritage;

### *SDG 15: Life on Land: conserve and preserve biodiversity*

- » Promoting the development of sustainable walking and cycling routes such as Greenways & Blueways and influence decisions to ensure they are sustainable products;
- » Encouraging visitors to visit the full county and promote off-peak and shoulder season to avoid 'over tourism'.

Key initiatives to activate a sustainable tourism approach during the strategy period will include:

- » Working collaboratively with local tourism networks, many of which have a sustainable tourism focus.
- » Development of a clear sustainable tourism policy document for Into Kildare;
- » Introduction of a new innovative Green Oak Leaf initiative that builds on international best practice, encourages Kildare tourism businesses to operate more sustainably, and that helps to position Kildare as a green tourism destination.



*Further detail is outlined in Section 4.*



Lullymore Heritage and  
Discovery Park



## 2.2 Destination Analysis

*This section of the strategy provides an audit of Kildare as a visitor destination. The environment within which tourism takes place is initially discussed including commentary on tourism clusters. Detail and analysis are then provided on the components of tourism including accommodation, visitor attractions, visitor activities including equestrian tourism with a focus on the Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan, adventure tourism, retail, food and drink and cultural tourism. This section concludes with a summary of heritage - the natural, tangible, and intangible heritage that makes Kildare unique.*



**County Kildare is strategically located near Dublin and bordered by Wicklow, Carlow, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath, and Meath...**



### 2.2.1 TOURISM ENVIRONMENT

#### Access

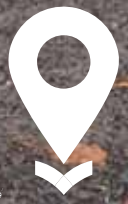
County Kildare is strategically located near Dublin and bordered by Wicklow, Carlow, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath, and Meath as illustrated in Figure 6. While the M4, M7 and M9 motorways provide easy access from surrounding counties this access can be a challenge and an opportunity. Visitors from nearby can easily access Kildare for daytrips, but the county is perhaps not perceived as an overnight destination for many who live in Dublin or who are visiting the county at the start or end of a longer journey. Kildare is well served by rail access with mainline connections to Cork/Limerick, Waterford, Sligo, and Galway, as well as two suburban services from Kildare town to Heuston Station and Maynooth to Connolly Station. There are plans to upgrade the Kildare line by providing DART access to Heuston Station from Maynooth and Celbridge.

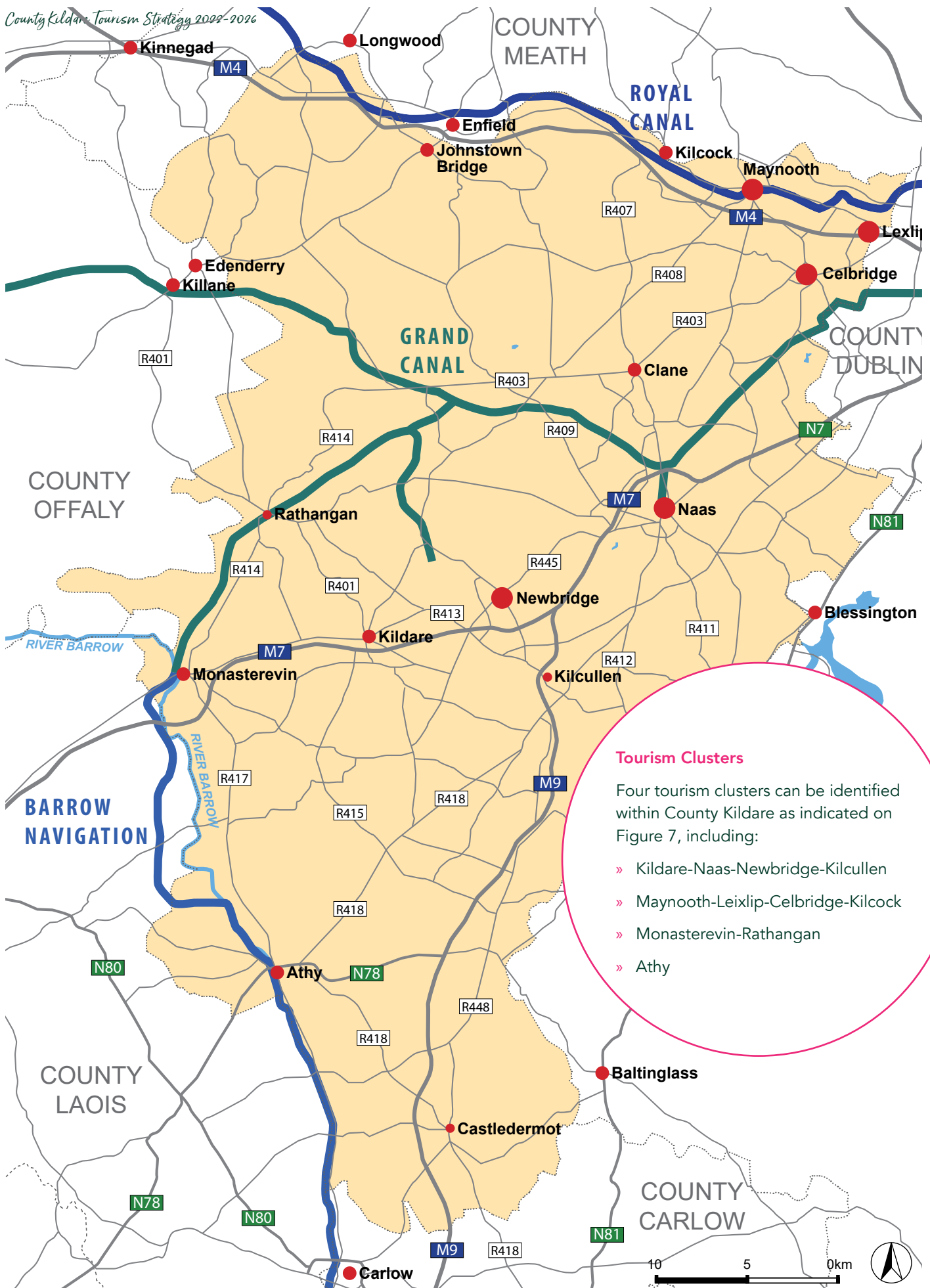
#### Waterways

The Royal and Grand Canals run across the north of the county, providing significant and increasing recreational opportunity with the ongoing completion of the Greenway network between Dublin and the Shannon. Similarly, the River Barrow which runs from the Slieve Blooms south through Monasterevin and Athy will soon be enhanced with the 44km Barrow Blueway providing opportunities for local economic benefit for towns and villages along the route.



Market Square,  
Kildare town





**Tourism Clusters**

Four tourism clusters can be identified within County Kildare as indicated on Figure 7, including:

- » Kildare-Naas-Newbridge-Kilcullen
- » Maynooth-Leixlip-Celbridge-Kilcock
- » Monasterevin-Rathangan
- » Athy

➤ **Figure 6** County Kildare Context



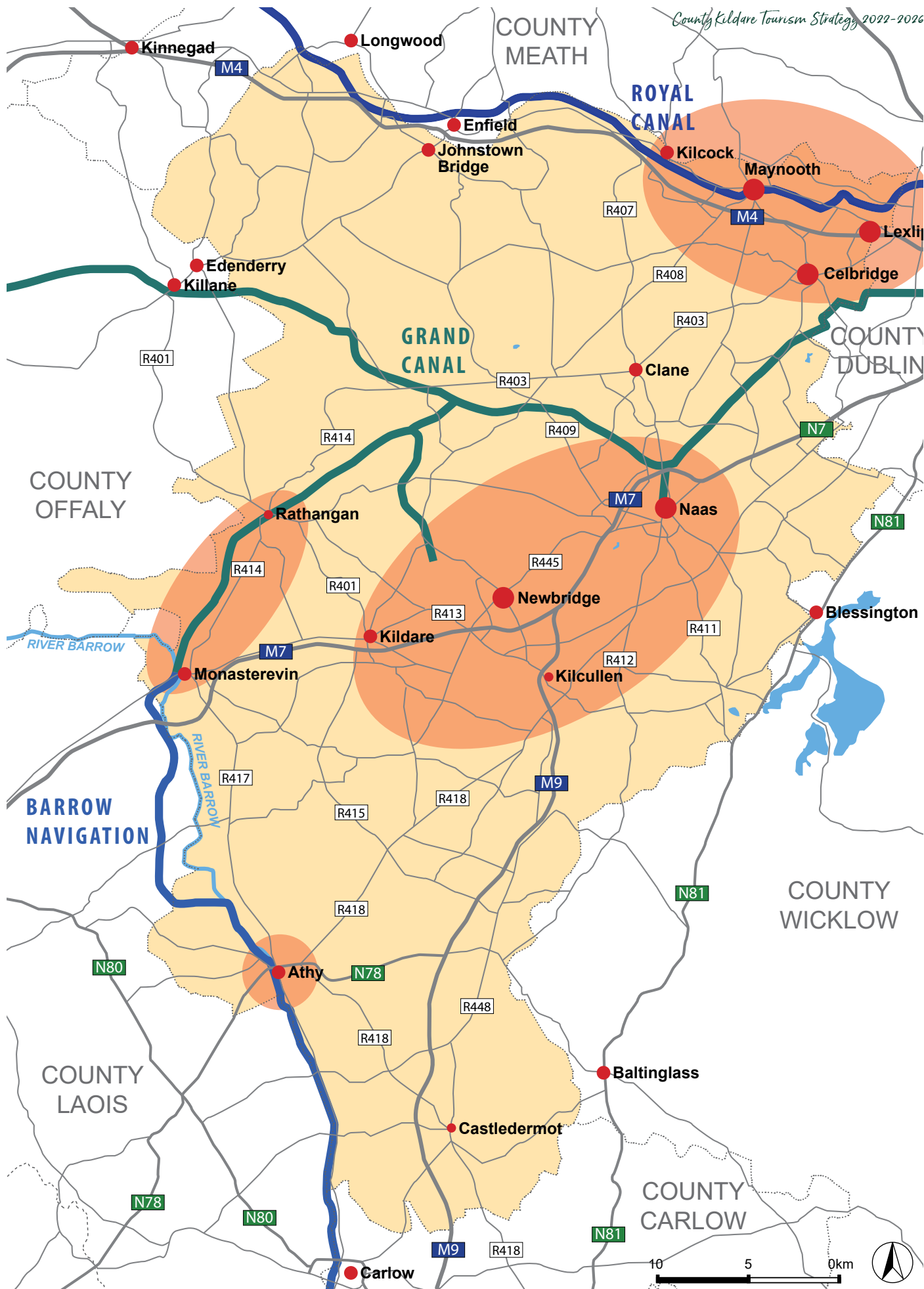


Figure 7 Kildare Tourism Clusters

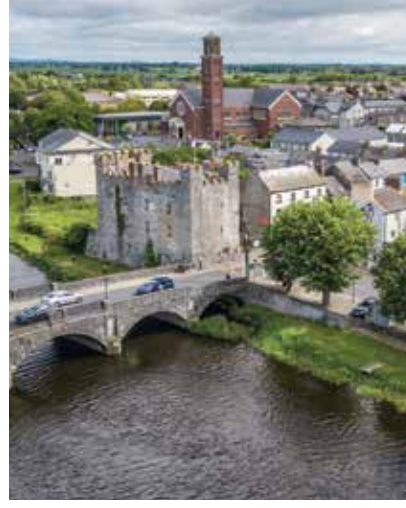


### Kildare-Naas-Newbridge-Kilcullen

This cluster includes the primary tourism offer of the county in terms of visitor attractions, located along the M7 motorway corridor. The historic cathedral town of Kildare is a key tourism hub, and the centre has benefited from Destination Town funding from Fáilte Ireland enabling the first phase of public realm works in the town square with the second phase to be funded from the Urban and Regional Development Fund. The town is home to the increasingly popular Kildare Village designer outlet and the Kildare Heritage Centre, as well as a range of lively bars and restaurants including Silken Thomas, Hartes and Firecastle. Visitors can meet thoroughbred horses at the Irish National Stud and walk around the beautiful Japanese Gardens located nearby at Tully. To the east of Kildare town lie the Curragh Plains with the Curragh Racecourse to the south-west of Newbridge. Newbridge is home to Newbridge Silverware and the Museum of Style Icons as well as the popular Keadeen Hotel. To the northwest of Newbridge lies Pollardstown Fen, the source of the water for the Grand Canal. There are plans to regenerate the cultural quarter of Newbridge which will add to the strong cultural offer in the town. Naas, the county town located to the northeast of Newbridge, has a strong tourism offer including Kildare Maze, Mondello Park Racing Circuit, Naas Racecourse, as well as a wide range of accommodation such as Lawlor's Hotel and many food and drink options. Naas has a direct link to the Grand Canal from Naas Harbour. The Grand Canal Greenway will soon be extended from Sallins to Naas and onto Corbally further extending the network in the county. Punchestown Racecourse and the Killashee Hotel are located to the south of Naas. The fast growing and historic town of Kilcullen is located on the River Liffey to the south-west of Newbridge. The town has a lively bar and restaurant offering including the popular Fallon's of Kilcullen.

### Maynooth-Leixlip-Celbridge-Kilcock

This cluster is heavily influenced by proximity to Dublin with rapidly growing populations with good public transport links to the city. Maynooth is home to Maynooth University campus with student accommodation available for rent in summer months providing over 1,300 rooms. The historic Maynooth Castle could be enhanced as a visitor attraction with more visitors expected to the town given its position on the Royal Canal Greenway. Maynooth has a growing reputation as a culinary destination as well as an accommodation hub with three hotels in the town including The Glenroyal Hotel & Leisure Club and the nearby Carton House, a Fairmont Managed Hotel. Kilcock lies to the west of Maynooth along the Royal Canal Greenway with the popular Donadea Forest Park and Clonfert Pet Farm nearby to the south. Leixlip is an historic and attractive town on the Liffey. The historic Leixlip Castle dates from 1172, one of the oldest continuously habited buildings in Ireland, is open for tours on selected days. Given recent nearby residential development and recent Covid related restrictions St Catherine's Park is increasingly well used. The fascinating Wonderful Barn is located to the south-west. Leixlip is close to the Royal Canal Greenway with other walks to choose from including Rye River Walk, The Royal Canal Way and Arthur's Way Heritage Trail, a 16km trail following the life of Arthur Guinness from birth to death. Leixlip has a good hospitality offering, with four hotels including the Court Yard Hotel and Leixlip Manor Hotel, and many restaurants and bars. A tourism development plan is currently being prepared for the town. Celbridge has amenities and facilities for visitors, including self-catering accommodation, guesthouses and two hotels. Castletown House is located to the east of the town and is to benefit from an upgrade to visitor facilities in 2022. The K-Club, with the renowned Palmer Golf Course, and Barberstown Castle lie to the south-west of Celbridge at Straffan.



### Monasterevin-Rathangan

This cluster, more rural in character, is linked by the Barrow Line which runs from Robertstown on the Grand Canal to the north to Athy to the south. The Barrow Blueway will bring significant economic opportunities to each town. The area is characterised by peatlands with Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park to the north, the Bog of Allen Nature Centre near Rathangan and a new plan to develop Umeras Peatlands Park near Monasterevin, driven by a local community group. A new landmark Church of Oak multi-grain distillery is under development at Ballykelly Mills near Monasterevin which will attract significant numbers of domestic and overseas visitors. The proximity of the Church of Oak Distillery to the proposed Umeras Peatlands park in tandem with the location on the Barrow Blueway can provide a significant cluster of visitor activities in this area. There are two Coillte locations in this cluster - the beautiful Killinthomas Wood near Rathangan, with 10k of walks and diverse flora and fauna, and Moore Abbey Wood near Monasterevin.

### Athy

Athy lies to the south of the county and is perhaps more closely linked with the rural character of County Carlow which offers opportunities for cross promotion. The town lies at the southern end of the developing Barrow Blueway with significant opportunities for the development of a watersports hub. Many visitors are already attracted to the town by the popular Clanard Court Hotel, the nearby Burtown House & Gardens and the Shackleton Autumn School, while the town will significantly benefit from planned investment in the Shackleton Experience visitor attraction located in the historic courthouse, as well as public realm enhancements to the town square. Kilkea Castle is located to the south between Athy and Castledermot with luxury accommodation set on 180 acres.

➤ **Figure 8 Proposed Church of Oak Distillery, Monasterevin**



### Linkages and Place-making

It is essential that linkages are developed between these four broad tourism clusters, not only in terms of physical linkages including blue and green infrastructure such as the canals and rivers, but also through public transport and cross promotion. It is further essential that the towns within each cluster are celebrated and enhanced through place-making investment to improve each for those who live there and by extension for those that visit. Continuing to develop linkages in partnership with public and private sector agencies is essential, for example Kildare County Council working with Kildare Village to develop a pedestrian connection to the market square in Kildare town, and working with Waterways Ireland to develop linkages from the Royal and Grand Canals and the Barrow to towns and villages along the routes of each.



## 2.2.2 ACCOMMODATION

### Hotels

Some of the finest hotels in Ireland can be found in County Kildare including Carton House, a Fairmont Managed Hotel and the K-Club. The new Into Kildare website indicates 15 hotels in the county which are members. According to Fáilte Ireland, there are currently 21 hotels operating in County Kildare. Of those listed by Into Kildare three are listed as Guesthouses (Cliff at Lyons) or B&B's (Firecastle, Silken Thomas) by Fáilte Ireland rather than hotels. The 21 hotels are listed in Table 5.

A review of the Into Kildare website and Discover Ireland as well as online research indicates that there are approximately 25 hotels in the county, with 12 of those members of Into Kildare with one (Keadeen Hotel) that is not registered with Fáilte Ireland; a further 9 that are registered with Fáilte Ireland and that are not members of Into Kildare ; and a further 4 that are not members of Into Kildare or registered with Fáilte Ireland (The Johnstown Estate 4\*, Finnstown Castle Hotel 4\*, Naas Court Hotel 3\*, Burtown House & Gardens).

It could be argued that both Into Kildare and Fáilte Ireland membership models exclude some accommodation providers which means visitors may not be as aware of these hotels as they could otherwise be. With many visitors booking online, through channels such as booking.com, visitors can find most providers. However the opportunity for maximising the potential for cross promotion and collaborative marketing is impacted by hotels who are not members of Into Kildare.

Several hotels have cross promotion agreements with Kildare Village and the Irish National Stud which include, for example, a 10% discount voucher for Kildare Village.

► **Table 5** Hotels in County Kildare (2021) (Source: KPMG-FA)

Hotel	Location	Rating
<b>K-Club</b>	Straffan	5*
<b>Carton House, a Fairmont Managed Hotel</b>	Maynooth	4*
<b>The Westgrove Hotel</b>	Clane	4*
<b>Killashee Hotel</b>	Naas	4*
<b>Glenroyal Hotel &amp; Leisure Club</b>	Maynooth	4*
<b>Clanard Court Hotel</b>	Athy	4*
<b>Kilkea Castle Hotel &amp; Golf Resort</b>	Castledermot	4*
<b>Moyvalley Hotel &amp; Golf Resort</b>	Moyvalley	4*
<b>Kildare House Hotel</b>	Kildare	4*
<b>Barberstown Castle</b>	Straffan	4*
<b>Courtyard Hotel</b>	Leixlip	4*
<b>The Keaden Hotel</b>	Newbridge	4*
<b>Osprey Hotel &amp; Spa</b>	Naas	4*
<b>Lawlors</b>	Naas	4*
<b>Maudlins House Hotel</b>	Naas	4*
<b>Celbridge Manor Hotel</b>	Celbridge	3*
<b>Leixlip Manor Hotel</b>	Leixlip	3*
<b>Town House Hotel</b>	Naas	2*
<b>Harbour View Hotel &amp; restaurant</b>	Kildare	2*
<b>Springfield Hotel</b>	Leixlip	3*
<b>Riverforest Hotel</b>	Leixlip	2*

### Other Accommodation

There are 16 B&B's, 2 Guesthouses, 12 self-catering units and a camping and caravan site listed by Fáilte Ireland on the Discover Ireland website, with ten of these listed on the Into Kildare website. There are in addition over 50 additional B&B's and guesthouses listed on TripAdvisor which are not listed by either Into Kildare or Fáilte Ireland. There are an additional four self-catering businesses listed on the Into Kildare website: Ashwell Cottage, Lavender Cottage Self Catering and Maynooth Campus & Conference Accommodation. Camping facilities are available at Forest Farm Caravan and Camping at Athy.

### Meetings Incentive Conferences and Events (MICE)

MICE venues have been severely impacted by the downturn in travel due to Covid-19 in 2020 and 2021. It is expected that this market will return to some degree in early 2022 and more strongly thereafter. Kildare has four large venues with the Killashee Hotel offering capacity for events up to 800 people, the Glenroyal Hotel (540), the K-Club (500) and Carton House (500). Other hotels with significant event space include Clanard Court (450), Celbridge Manor Hotel (400), and The Osprey Hotel (350). Given the proximity of many to Dublin city and Dublin Airport there is a significant opportunity to promote County Kildare as a conference location. Associated with conferences there is an opportunity to develop additional packages of things to see and do for conference delegates, as well as for incentives and team-building events.

### Airbnb

Data from Inside AirBnB indicates that there were 365 AirBnB listings in County Kildare at the last date of assessment (January 2022). Of these 122 were entire homes or apartments (33.4%) and 231 were private rooms (63.3%). There was an average occupancy of 70% with an average price/night of €83. Mapping this data clearly indicates clusters of AirBnB properties at Maynooth, Celbridge, Naas, Kildare town, and Athy as shown in Figure 9.

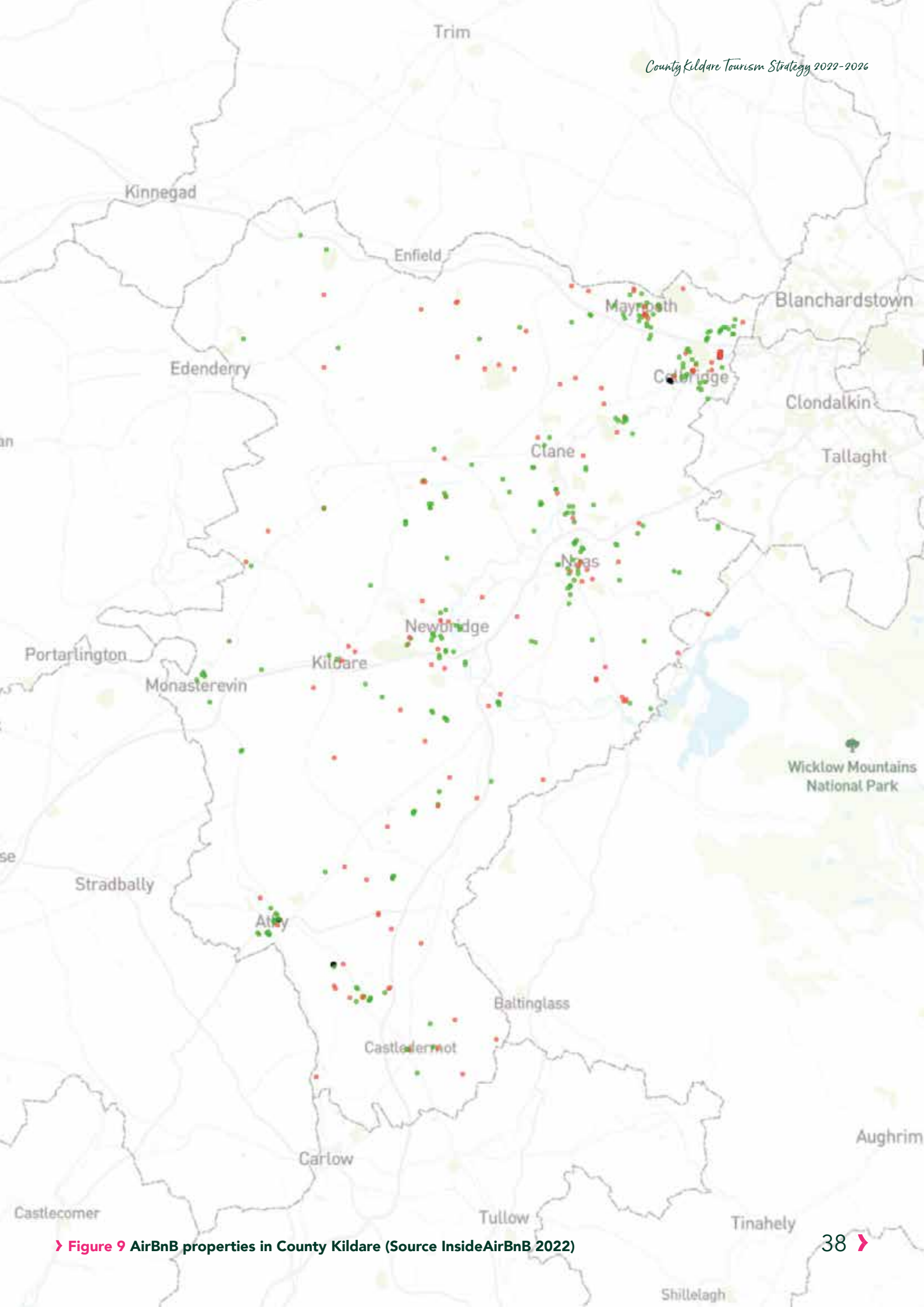
### Campervans

The increase in popularity of campervans is a further opportunity for County Kildare. Many people have bought or have chosen to hire campervans, with the economic benefits most often realised where there are opportunities to park near towns and villages with evening food and drink opportunities. Several counties are actively pursuing ways to provide such facilities where they do not currently exist or to enhance those that do. This is a clear opportunity for Kildare in coming years.



**Many people have bought or have chosen to hire campervans, with the economic benefits most often realised where there are opportunities to park near towns and villages with evening food and drink opportunities.**





› Figure 9 AirBnB properties in County Kildare (Source InsideAirBnB 2022)

## 2.2.3 VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

Fáilte Ireland define a visitor attraction as *“a permanently established destination, capable of attracting day visitors or tourists, which must be open to the public, without them necessarily having to pre-book. The primary purpose of the attraction should be sightseeing, for which it may be feasible to charge admission. It should also allow access for entertainment, interest, or education rather than being primarily a retail outlet or a venue for sporting, theatrical, or film performances.”*<sup>18</sup>

There are a wide range of visitor attractions in County Kildare ranging from historic houses, castles, gardens, and heritage centres, to those associated with equestrian activities, peatland areas and even car-racing circuits. Some are well known nationally such as Newbridge Silverware and the Museum of Style Icons and the Irish National Stud & Gardens. According to data collected by Fáilte Ireland, many top visitor attractions, both free and fee-paying, saw a rise in visitor numbers between 2018 and 2019; however, some also experienced a significant decrease. Table 6 below indicates the comparative performance of visitor attractions in Kildare in the three years from 2016 to 2019. With most attractions relying on overseas tourists for most of their visitors it can be expected that visitor numbers for 2020 and 2021 will be significantly down on those from 2019.

› **Table 6 Visitor Attraction Data 2017-2019 (Source Fáilte Ireland 2021)**

Attraction	2017	2018	2019	Fee Charged
<b>Castletown House Parklands</b>	666,541	642,278	965,632	No
<b>Irish National Stud &amp; Japanese Gardens</b>	126,810	127,370	138,310	Yes
<b>Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park</b>		50,000	55,000	Yes
<b>Castletown House</b>	13,549	27,760	26,204	Yes
<b>Maynooth Castle</b>	23,315	22,946	21,937	No
<b>Burtown House</b>		5,000	20,000	Yes
<b>Athy Heritage Centre</b>	17,000	16,000	14,000	Yes
<b>Kildare Town Heritage Centre</b>	15,079	14,597	12,400	No
<b>Larchill Arcadian Gardens</b>		3,500	3,500	Yes



**Castletown House Parklands** has been Kildare's top visitor attraction since 2017, when it attracted 666,545 which grew to 965,362 visitors in 2019. However, the majority of these are local domestic repeat visitors with just 28-29,000 paying visitors annually. It is expected by the OPW that there will be increased revenue generation opportunities once planned upgrades take place to the courtyard in 2022. Obtaining ownership of lands near the house, currently in private ownership, would enable the estate to maximise the on-site offer, for example the addition of adventure activities.

Apart from Castletown House, no other Kildare attractions feature in the top 50 attractions in Ireland in 2019 by visitor volume.

**The Irish National Stud & Gardens** was Kildare's top fee-paying attraction for both 2018 and 2019, with an 8% increase in visitors to the attraction between that period, receiving 138,310 visitors in 2019. The addition of the new immersive attraction the Irish Racehorse Experience in 2021 can be expected to boost interest. This attraction takes the visitor on a journey through the rich history and heritage of the Irish thoroughbred sector, from the world's very first steeplechase in Cork to today's commercial success story where Ireland and the Irish diaspora continue to lead the world in breeding, training and racing.

**Lullymore Heritage Centre and Discovery Park** was Kildare's third most visited attraction in 2019, attracting 55,000 visitors. A family favourite the regeneration of the former working bog has seen a proliferation of wildlife on site. Key calendar events bring many domestic visitors to the site.

The 13th **Maynooth Castle** maintained its position as the fifth most visited attraction in the county in 2018 and 2019. There is an opportunity for OPW to enhance the visitor offer particularly with Maynooth now on the Royal Canal Greenway.

**Athy Heritage Centre**, the sixth most visited attraction in 2018 with 16,000 visitors, saw visitor numbers fall to 14,000 in 2019.

**Kildare Town Heritage Centre** in the centre of Kildare town also experienced this decline receiving 12,400 visitors in 2019 compared to 14,597 in 2018. The introduction of the Legends of Kildare takes visitors on a journey through time to meet character of Kildare and to immerse themselves in the stories of the county.

**Burtown House & Gardens** near Athy was the sixth most visited attraction in 2019 when it saw its visitor numbers soar from 5,000 the previous year to 20,000. The early Georgian villa which is surrounded by gardens and parkland now has a diverse offer including accommodation, weddings and events, Burtown's Green Barn Restaurant which sources produce from the on-site garden; Jo's pantry with food shop, art gallery and interiors store; and a food and craft market on August Bank Holiday.

**Several attractions are not included in this table** i.e., have not provided detail on visitor numbers to Fáilte Ireland. These include Newbridge Silverware and the Museum of Style Icons, Mondello Park, Clonfert Pet Farm, Bog of Allen Nature Centre and Kildare Maze.



Apart from  
Castletown  
House, no other  
Kildare attractions  
feature in the top  
50 attractions in  
Ireland in 2019 by  
visitor volume.



## Development Opportunities

There are many opportunities to develop new compelling visitor experiences connected to key cultural and natural heritage assets of Kildare. These include:

» The planned development of the Shackleton Experience Athy, a new €5m attraction at the Athy Heritage Centre will tell the story of polar explorer Ernest Shackleton.

*Ernest Shackleton, one of the most famous Polar explorers of all time, was born close to the village of Kilkea between Castledermot and Athy in 1874. Renowned for his courage, his care for his comrades, immense contribution as an explorer, and for the epic escape with his team from the shipwrecked Endurance, where he was responsible for bringing them home without losing a man. The Shackleton Museum Athy will be housed in a restored 300-year-old building and will aim to be one of the world's great polar museums. The museum project is being driven by the community-run Athy Heritage Company, which gained full Museum status in 2016. The story of Shackleton's adventures will be told using a variety of immersive media, along with artefacts from the Museum's collection such as family photographs. Significant funding has been secured with the attraction expected to open in 2022 and include the actual sledge and harness used by Shackleton and a 15-foot model of Shackleton's ship Endurance as well as the actual cabin where he met his death on his last great expedition to the South Pole. There are additional opportunities for team building and for linkage to the nearby Barrow Blueway.*

- » Potential for the development of a visitor hub for the Curragh Plains that tell the story of the natural, cultural and built heritage of this fascinating area, ranging from the folklore, medieval history, military history, equestrian and natural environment, as well as providing facilities for visitors to experience the Curragh including bike hire, tours and pony trekking. A significant study is now underway for the Curragh Plains.
- » Potential for the development of the community led Umeras Peatlands Park near Monasterevin, which is also near the proposed Church of Oak Distillery, and the new Barrow Blueway and the Royal Canal Greenway.
- » Potential for the development of the Wonderful Barn in a project led by Kildare County Council,
- » Engagement with the Church of Ireland in relation to sensitive visitor access to St. Brigid's Cathedral and Round Tower.

**Kildare currently lacks a nationally significant visitor attraction** i.e., one that attracts over 250,000 paying visitors annually. There is an opportunity to undertake a feasibility study to consider concepts and the feasibility for such an attraction, given the proximity of Kildare to Dublin. One such opportunity might be to engage with an established operator, such as Punchestown Racecourse, that have existing facilities and land which could be utilised.



## 2.2.4 VISITOR ACTIVITIES

Visitors to County Kildare can increasingly engage in multiple activities that are of interest to them. Those seeking adventure can engage in equestrian activities, walking, cycling, kayaking, canoeing, car-racing, and even flying. Those who wish to shop can visit one of Ireland's most popular retail outlets at Kildare Village as well as visiting Whitewater Shopping Centre and Newbridge Silverware in Newbridge. Those seeking a culinary experience will not be disappointed in Kildare's many restaurants, cafes, and markets. While visitors seeking an immersion in the culture of the county will find a, now, expanding range of events and festivals on offer to celebrate that which makes Kildare distinctive. There are significant plans to enhance and develop infrastructure, facilities and services which together will enhance the visitor experience.

### Equestrian tourism

Equestrian activities in the form of horse-riding would, in many other counties, be considered one of a range of adventure activities; however, in Kildare the scale and importance of equestrian activities to the county and indeed national economy is exceptional, and for that reason is discussed separately here. The Kildare County Council Economic Development Plan estimates 5,000 people are directly employed in the equine industry within the county. With 104 stud farms in the county and racecourses at Punchestown, Naas, and The Curragh, there is potential to capitalise on this asset to increase tourism revenue.

Fáilte Ireland have developed the Thoroughbred County Destination Experience Development Plan (TCDEDP) which was launched in 2021. With Ireland recognised internationally for its thoroughbred industry the plan states that

*“The geographic heart of the Thoroughbred story is Kildare in addition to the richness of the Fethard and Coolmore experiences in South Tipperary.”*

TCDEDP is a 5-year destination development plan to deliver the world's best collective thoroughbred visitor experience. The aim is to develop a destination cluster with a specialisation focus on the thoroughbred experience theme, increasing the supply of accessible visitor experiences that will help develop an international profile. To deliver the plan there are three interdependent layers of activity<sup>19</sup>:

### A: Achieving the 'Big Ideas'

projects supported by key catalyst projects including

- » **International Thoroughbred Trail (ITT)** - developed through a core of year-round accessible thoroughbred experiences which can include for example Curragh Gallops with trainers accessible at an agreed number of times each year, as well as inclusion of other visitor attractions and outlets such as Newbridge Silver and Kildare Village. The goal is a world class trail proposition. This is considered a collaborative approach with opportunities for additional experiences and events to develop a greater density of year-round experiences. The ITT can also guide future strategic investment in areas such as public realm, wayfinding and orientation investment.
- » **Accessible Privilege** – there is an opportunity to develop new 'prestigious' yet accessible opportunities for the visitor to engage with behind the scenes and gain access to industry experts, their stories and insights. Experience development platforms include 'Behind the Scenes' immersive experiences targeted at the leisure market and based on achieving a higher volume of visitor numbers; and premium 'Money Can't Buy' experiences developed to target the premium luxury market. This will represent smaller volume and higher yield targeting high net worth visitors and the MICE market. It is considered essential that a sequence of experiences be bundled together as part of the ITT to create the long-term destination differentiation.



**B: Strategic Development Pillars** - Create the conditions for Experience Development (Developing New Experiences). Pillars include:

- » Strategic Development Pillar One – The Thoroughbred. This strategic pillar focuses on the horse story from foaling to the opportunity to meet household names and global equine superstars. It is designed to create unrivalled thoroughbred experiences with the horse at the centre of the story. Indicative Strategic Pillar Experiences include National Stud Experience, Fethard Horse story/Coolmore Experience, Mingle with the Stars (Stallion trail), Fall of the Hammer (Goffs), The Curragh Experience, Trainers' Yards Experience.
- » Strategic Development Pillar Two – Thoroughbred People. It is the thoroughbred people who make the stories come alive. From epic wins to close calls, visitors will access a day in the life of the people who nurture and tend to our thoroughbred heroes. Indicative Strategic Pillar Experiences include: The Inside Track – Expert Eyes (trainers and the gallops), Shoeing Champions with Farriers, The Saddle Makers, The Old Skills – RACE.
- » Strategic Development Pillar Three – Place and Heritage. From the origins of the turf club to the equine story behind the establishment of Newbridge Silverware, the destination story is the thoroughbred story. The delivery of this global story will be an important element in establishing the destination profile as a guardian of thoroughbred heritage. This strategic pillar will become a key destination orientation enabler. It will provide the main experience access points for the visitor, linking the destination to the thoroughbred story and emerging premium experiences offering behind the scenes access, only the thoroughbred industry can provide. Indicative Strategic Pillar Experiences include: National Stud Experience, Fethard Horse Country experience, International Thoroughbred Trail, The Curragh Plains, The Military Museum, Kildare town, Newbridge Silverware experience.
- » Strategic Development Pillar Four – The Winning Post. The destination possesses a calendar of events that provide access to some of our greatest national sports occasions. These events, from major festivals to regularly hosted race days can be amplified to enhance their impact on the destination. The destination must embrace its key

festivals to add value to the visitor's experience. They each possess the potential to be significant catalysts for growth. This will be achieved through collaboration and destination innovation instilling a destination pride in these major festivals and realising the significant economic opportunity each represents for local communities. Indicative Strategic Pillar Experiences include: Punchestown National Hunt Festival, Curragh Derby Days and Festival, Champions Day Weekend – Niche festival development, racing days out combined with destination thoroughbred experiences.

- » Catalyst Projects. Four catalyst projects have been prioritised including National Stud Experience which has capacity to deliver significant footfall for Kildare and represents a major destination access hub. A strategic objective is to increase economic returns for the destination through a partnership approach to creating 'blended experiences and itineraries'. The Curragh Experience with the racecourse a globally iconic venue there is an opportunity to deliver a vast range of potential experiences. The integration of the interpretation of the story of the Curragh Plains is considered a part of the Curragh Experience project. Fethard Horse Country/ Coolmore in County Tipperary offers potential for the enhancement of the visitor journey and possible expansion of new experience options should be considered to deliver a world class story told through an international standard experience. Festivals and Events provide an immediate platform for destination engagement. The TCDEDP indicates that a longer-term festival plan is required to provide a cohesive approach to engaging the destination with the festival opportunity. This includes engaging communities and linking accommodation and attractions to festival delivery.

### C. Destination Enablers (Developing the Core)

which focuses on collaborative development, industry development and effective systems and processes.

The TCDEDP includes an extensive delivery plan with a range of partners including Into Kildare. A new full-time role has been resourced within Into Kildare to assist delivery over the 5-year period of the plan.

## Adventure Tourism

Outdoor sports activities are becoming more popular with people realising the importance of connecting with nature and spending time outdoors with friends and family, particularly in 2020-2021 with the impact of Covid-19. Fáilte Ireland report the top five activities which visitors engaged in during 2019 as hiking, cycling, golfing, equestrian and angling. Visitors to Kildare can engage in exceptional experiences on land and water. These include:

- » **Greenways:** There has been significant investment in the national greenway network in recent years. The **Royal Canal Greenway** has been developed over the last decade and is now almost complete, with the section from Sheriff Street to 10th Lock and Dublin County border to Maynooth to be completed in the next two years. On the Grand Canal the section from Hazelhatch Bridge to Alymers Bridge is complete with sections west in Kildare having received Part 8 planning approval. Within the next few years visitors will be able to cycle from Dublin to Kildare along two greenways; to the north the Royal Canal Greenway will run along the Kildare/Meath border and on to Westmeath and Longford to the Shannon, while to the south Dublin will be linked via South Dublin by the **Grand Canal Greenway** to Kildare then on the Shannon via Offaly and to the south to Carlow via the Barrow Blueway. There are strategic opportunities to link the Grand Canal to Naas Harbour and via Pollardstown Fen to the Curragh. Further opportunities exist to link the Royal and Grand Canal Greenways through the north Kildare countryside via an off-road greenway, subject to landowner agreement and planning approval. Economic opportunities are realised where visitors stop and spend along the route, which is a key focus for Waterways Ireland and Kildare County Council. Ongoing promotion of the network as a key activity in the county will help to raise awareness and encourage greater use. Partnerships with businesses and destination marketing organisations in neighbouring counties offer potential as does promotion as an Ireland's Ancient East activity.
- » **Barrow Blueway:** There are currently four Blueways in Ireland which are in the process of meeting the Blueway Brand requirement and are owned and managed by Waterways Ireland. These include Lough Derg Blueway (160 km), Shannon Erne Blueway (3 sections totalling just over 73 km), Royal Canal Blueway at Mullingar (23 km), Shannon Blueway, 4 sections totalling 87 km). A new 46km Blueway along the Barrow Line from Lowtown/Robertstown to Athy offers significant local economic opportunities with a vision, as stated in Barrow Blueway Economic Plan, "to realise the economic potential of the Barrow Blueway as a catalyst for land and water based recreation and as a corridor that connects communities, places and experiences". The Plan identifies key principles, elements, places and opportunities to bring the plan to life based on a partnership approach between key agencies. Towns along the route include Rathangan, Monasterevin, Vicarstown and Athy. Waterways Ireland is currently developing the infrastructure for the Blueway by resurfacing the existing towpath to create a 2.5m wide, traffic-free, multi-use route. Kildare and Laois County Councils are providing pedestrian crossings where the route crosses roads and several lowered jetties are being put in place to enable easy access and egress for paddlesports. The programme of works to create the 46 km Blueway is being funded through a successful application by Waterways Ireland, Kildare County Council and Laois County Council to the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund for €6.8 million.

- » There are several existing watersports operators along the Barrow including Athy Boat Tours. Further detail is provided in the Economic Plan with regards to canoe outfitting companies such as Go with the Flow – River Adventures, and Paddle Your Own Canoe, both offering trips from Monasterevin. A new Monasterevin Sports Hub was opened in September 2021, initially facilitating local activity such as providing a home for Monasterevin Blueway Kayaking Club. This hub, and a similar one to be opened in Athy, have potential for encouraging visitor participation in watersports activities. While there are several smaller local activity clubs there is a significant opportunity for the development of a Shackleton Outdoor Education Centre at Athy with a feasibility study being supported by Kildare Sports Partnership. A conservative estimate of the economic impact in the first year of the Blueway from cyclists, walkers/runners and paddlers is for a total additional annual expenditure of €1.4m from 40,000 additional users. The Economic Plan states that *“Spending may be higher if international visitors are attracted to the facility and if there are strong associations made between the history of the canal and the development of the Guinness Brewery and the Whiskey distilleries and Maltings. If the route is well marketed and consumers like it, this throughput and expenditure may double by year three but only if the required opportunities for expenditure are put in place with the capacity to service the route.”*<sup>19</sup> Key to success will be the provision of necessary infrastructure, engaged and supported service providers to cater for visitor’s needs, and the marketing of Barrow Blueway concept, themes, stories to local people, neighbouring communities, and visitors.
- » **Walking/Hiking:** The Royal and Grand Canal Greenways and the Barrow Blueway offer opportunities for walking that can increase the length of times visitors spend in towns and villages in the county and enhance their experience. They also offer opportunities for the provision of interpretation of the heritage (natural, cultural and built) that can bring these historic corridors to life. In addition to the 132km of canals and rivers in the county there are many forests that are popular for walking. One of the most popular of the four Coillte forests is Donadea Forest Park which includes Donadea Castle and estate. Three looped walking trails in the forest park cater for all abilities. In addition, Coillte manage three other woods, Moore Abbey, Mullaghreelan Wood and the popular Killinthomas Wood near Rathangan one of Ireland’s hidden gems with 10km of walks. While Coillte have invested in Donadea in recent years they would be willing to work in partnership with Kildare County Council to enhance the recreation opportunity and visitor service offer there (e.g., an enhanced visitor centre). Coillte have suggested that recreation development in the county be guided by a collaborative Kildare recreation strategy. For those seeking more expansive walks The Curragh provides 5,000 acres of unenclosed grassland to explore from Kildare town to Newbridge. There is further potential to develop recreational trails as part of the Curragh Plains project, including potential for the Derby Legends walk to be extended. Kildare has several walking trails focussed on the heritage of the county including Arthur’s Way Heritage Trail, St Brigid’s Trail, Shackleton Trail and Celbridge Heritage Trail.
- » **Equestrian:** There are ten horse-riding outlets, located in Naas (3), Maynooth (2), and one outlet in Clane, Prosperous, Kildare town, Kilkea and Abbeyview, respectively. Visitors and locals follow the thrill of the chase at The Curragh Racecourse which is Ireland’s premier international flat horse racing venue and one of the most iconic sporting venues in the world, Punchestown Racecourse home of Irish jump racing and hosts to the famous five-day Punchestown Festival, and Naas Racecourse an easily accessible and family friendly course 10 minutes from Naas centre.

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19- Barrow Economic Plan, Waterways Ireland, Kildare County Council and County Kildare Leader Partnership, 2021, page 34

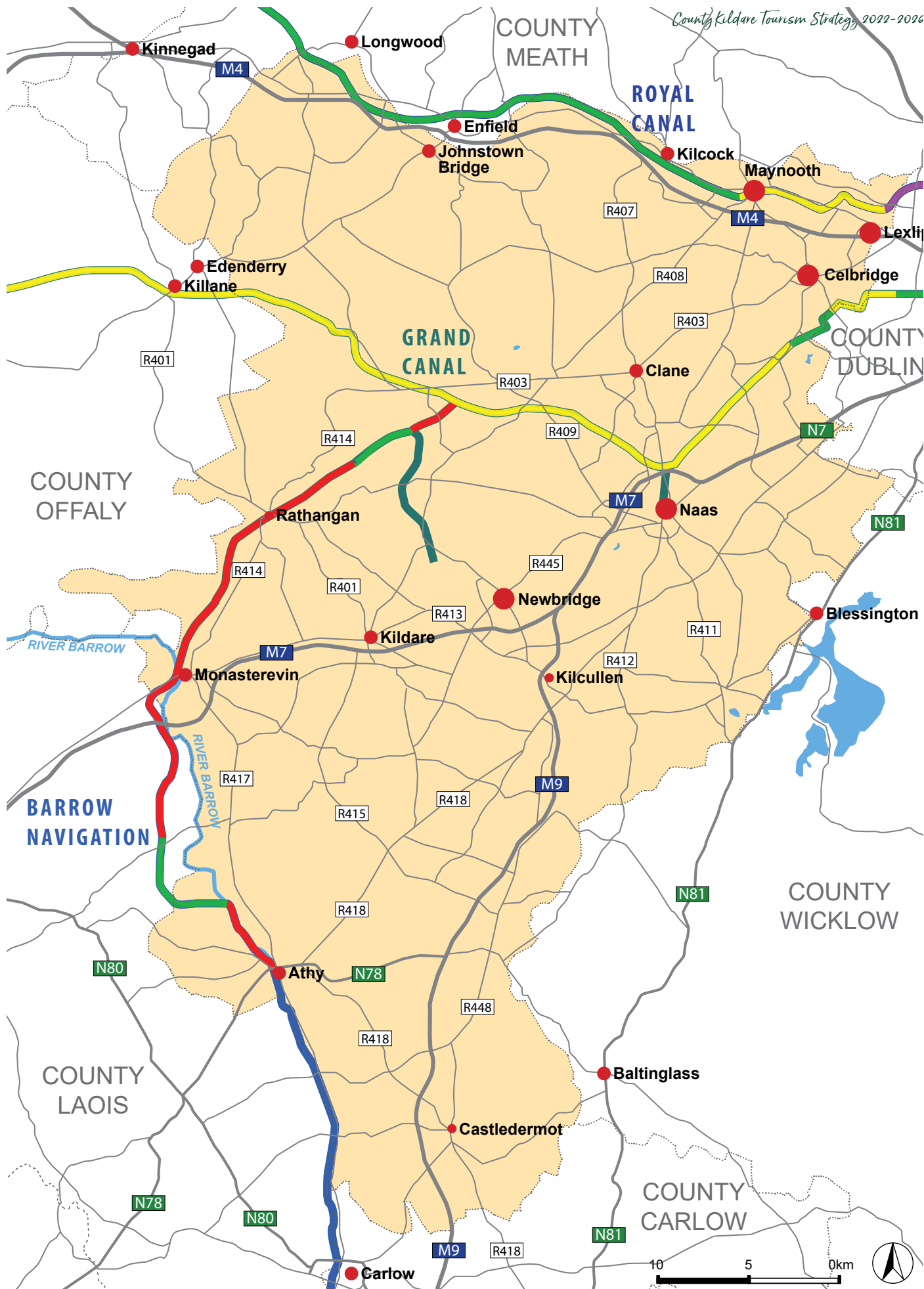


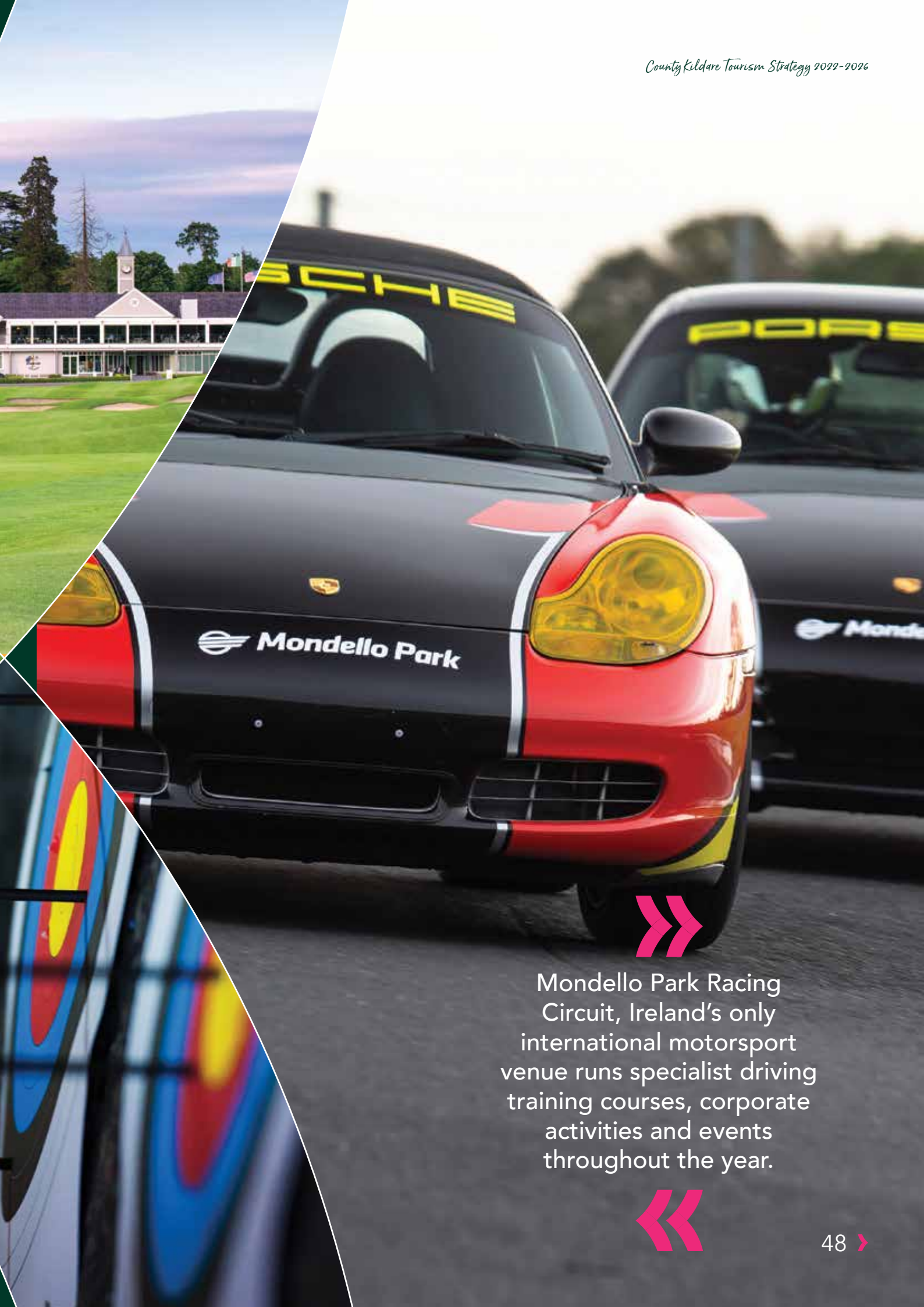
Figure 10 Indicative Status of Greenways and Blueways in County Kildare 2021 (Source Waterways Ireland and KPMG FA)

- » **Golf:** The 5 Star K-Club Hotel & Golf Resort is one of the best golf hotels in Ireland with one of the best golf courses in Ireland, designed by one of the greatest players, Arnold Palmer. Carton House Golf offers two championship golf courses, the Montgomerie Links Golf Course and the O'Meara Parkland Golf Course. Kilkea Castle is home to not only one of the oldest inhabited castles in Ireland but also a championship-level golf course. Moyvalley Golf Club is home to a par 72 course designed by Darren Clarke and suitable for all levels of golfers. There are over 20 parkland golf courses in County Kildare.
- » **Angling:** Kildare is a premium angling destination with superb fishing available on the Grand and Royal Canals, the River Barrow and River Slate as well as stocked lakes. The key sections of the Royal Canal are near Leixlip. A permanent angling section has been established at Ballyteigue on the Barrow Line of the Grand Canal which includes 10 wheelchair accessible stands. The K-Club offers excellent fishing for salmon, brown trout and rainbow trout along with tackle, boat, ghillies and tuition.
- » **Car-racing and driving:** Mondello Park Racing Circuit, Ireland's only international motorsport venue runs specialist driving training courses, corporate activities and events throughout the year.
- » **Flying:** A unique activity is available at The National Flight Centre at Weston Airport, which offers scenic flights to visitors and a range of approved courses.
- » **Adventure Centres:** Thrills can be found at Redhills Adventure in Kildare town with land based soft adventure from low impact tag activities to target fun at the ranges; Abbeyfield Farm Country Pursuits offering clay pigeon shooting, rifle range, archery, and equestrian pursuits; K-Leisure in Naas, Newbridge and Athy with leisure club, gyms and a 25m swimming pool, spa, fitness classes and astro-pitches; and Leinster's largest hedge maze, Kildare Maze.



*"Kildare is a premium angling destination"*





Mondello Park Racing Circuit, Ireland's only international motorsport venue runs specialist driving training courses, corporate activities and events throughout the year.



## Retail

Retail centres are not traditionally considered a visitor attraction however Kildare Village is not an average centre. Over 100 outlets attract more than 4m visitors annually, with a rise in footfall in 2020 and a third phase which opened in October 2021. Kildare Village has been described as the 'pyramids' of Kildare, given its ability to attract domestic and international visitors. The management of Kildare Village consider the centre to be an embedded part of the tourism business and social community of the county. Kildare Village has discount arrangements with many hotels and other attractions in the county and can be considered a key attractor for the county.

Leveraging this significant footfall and the associated national and international promotion is effective and essential and provides a significant opportunity in coming years. For example, development of packages for the county that involve accommodation, activities, food, entertainment, as well as a visit to Kildare Village. There are also plans to link Kildare Village to Kildare town centre with two phases already completed. Completing this link should be prioritised by Kildare County Council. Kildare Village have previously operated a bus link between their location, Kildare town train station, Kildare town and Irish National Stud & Gardens, and are keen to explore the opportunity of reviving this link in partnership with other businesses.

## Food and Drink

Fáilte Ireland Food and Drink Strategy 2018-2023 indicates that food and beverage consumption accounts for 35% of total revenue from visitors to Ireland. The document reflects on the challenges Irish tourism faced in this sector in changing visitor perceptions of Ireland as having an authentic cuisine offering and how they are planning to continue to do so in the future. The strategy aims to increase Irish food and drink experiences across the country. The strategy will increase the capability of Ireland's food and beverage operators in delivering a world-class offering and intensify Irish food and drink marketing and promotion. The strategy outlines that high-quality offerings at mealtimes are only one aspect of food and drink when it comes to the Culturally Curious. Other offerings in culinary tourism include food festivals/tasting events, distillery/brewery visits, indoor/outdoor local food markets and visiting local producers.

Most restaurants have been significantly impacted by Covid-19 and reviving and surviving will be a focus for many during 2022. Kildare has one of the best dining scenes in the country with restaurants for every palette, ranging from hearty comfort food to Michelin starred fine dining. These range from award winning gastro pubs such as The Dew Drop Inn & Brewhouse and Silken Thomas, to exceptional local restaurants such as Fallon's of Kilcullen, Hartes of Kildare, The Mill Restaurant & Terrace at Celbridge and the Ely Wine Store in Maynooth. There is an emphasis on use of local produce, particularly at Burtown House & Gardens, Edward Harrigan & Sons and the two-Michelin star Aimsir at Cliff at Lyons near Celbridge. Kildare has a great range of traditional pubs such as The Auld Sheebeen on the banks of the canal at Athy, and even a brewpub with Lock 13 Brewery at Sallins. Other food offerings include, Firecastle in Kildare town, Swans of Naas and Green Barn at Burtown House.

There are farmers markets in several towns in Kildare including Kildare, Naas, and Athy where visitors have an opportunity purchase local produce and to interact with local people.

To celebrate and promote the exceptional food and drink offer in County Kildare, Into Kildare organised Taste of Kildare with the first event held in 2018. This event saw local businesses coming together to create a culinary experience, showcasing Kildare's food offering to a national and international audience. The events took place in the Walled Garden at the K-Club with cookery demonstrations, beer and wine tasting, children's activities, and live music. A virtual cooking demonstration timed for the Christmas season with some of Ireland's top chefs replaced live events for 2020. In 2021, Taste of Kildare went virtual once again for Christmas with an objective to showcase everything that Kildare has to offer visitors from festive experiences, food and gifting – giving the gift of a Taste of Kildare. The message to support and shop local is key. There are opportunities to leverage the food offer in Kildare, driving local economic benefit and enhancing visitor experience. As indicated earlier more visitor revenue is spent on food and drink than on accommodation. Raising awareness of the exceptional food offer can help drive overall visitor revenue to the county and encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more. Examples are extending the Taste of Kildare concept and establishing a County Kildare Food Trail with associated promotional material. Culinary activities could also be developed such as 'catch and cook' and 'make your own, guided trails and tours and long-table dining.



*Kildare Village* 

## Cultural Tourism

Kildare is world-famous for horse-racing events which generate significant economic benefit. For example, around 130,000 spectators over 5 days attend **Punchestown Festival** which generated an estimated €64m in 2018, of which €25.3m is spent outside of the festival on entertainment, food, drink and accommodation. Other key calendar race events include the **Dubai Duty Free Irish Derby** at the Curragh Racecourse. In addition, there are a wide array of events associated with music, food, nature, and art. While most have been on hold in recent years, there are now an eclectic mix of events listed on the new Into Kildare events calendar (<https://intokildare.ie/events/>). Of particular interest are those that celebrate Kildare characters such as those associated with Ernest Shackleton with the **Shackleton Autumn School** attracting many people to Athy from around the world. The online event held in 2021 had an even greater reach. Another key festival is the **Féile Bríde (Festival of Brigid)** a week-long annual festival held in February has a growing and diverse programme.

*One of Ireland's patron saints, St Brigid was born in AD 450 in Faughert, near Dundalk, County Louth. While Brigid founded many convents across Ireland the most famous was in County Kildare. This was said to have been built by an oak tree where the town of Kildare now stands around AD 470. The abbey of Kildare became one of the most important and prestigious in Ireland and was known throughout Europe. Brigid's feast day is 1st February, originally a pagan festival called Imbolc. Making a St Brigid's cross is a well-known traditional Irish ritual to celebrate the beginning of spring on 1st February. St Brigid died in circa AD 725 at the age of 75. Plans are already being developed for a celebration to mark the 1500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St. Brigid's death in 2024, a key opportunity for County Kildare. The tranquil Solas Bríde centre near Kildare town provides a hub for festival activities. Given the importance and potential of this festival it is essential that a multi-agency collaborative approach is taken to the development of the festival, with Into Kildare playing a lead role.*

Kildare has a strong link with car racing, with the Gordon Bennet Route, originally raced in 1903, taking visitors on a 166km tour through one of the most beautiful parts of Ireland. The **Gordon Bennett Festival** takes place each June with a host of activities to commemorate the race including a rally following the circuit. The **Mondello Park Racing Circuit** has Ireland's only permanent international motorsport venue and runs events and corporate activities. Mondello Park also hosts an exceptional collection of historic racing cars, which has significant potential as a visitor attraction.



**...there are now  
an eclectic mix of  
events listed on the  
new Into Kildare  
events calendar...**





Perpetual Flame  
of St Brigid,  
Kildare town



## 2.2.5 HERITAGE

Heritage is an important part of understanding a destination, it is what makes it authentic and distinctive. It provides clues to the past, and help visitors, and locals, to understand why a place has evolved as it has and why it is special. Heritage is important as it has been valued and passed on as a legacy from previous generations to those today and for those in the future. Heritage provides connection and a sense of place; it is a destination differentiator comprising natural, tangible, and intangible aspects. Valuing and conserving heritage is essential; as is appropriately utilising it to enrich visitors' experiences and to encourage longer visits. In turn, support from tourism can provide resources to maintain and protect Kildare's heritage for future generations.

### Natural Heritage

Kildare's natural heritage includes waterways such as the canals and rivers, landscapes such as The Curragh (and beneath it one of Ireland's largest aquifers), the ancient peatlands, and the rivers and canals.

Visitors can discover more about Kildare's bogs at the Bog of Allen Nature Centre and at Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park. Bog butter, coins, the great Irish Elk and an ancient dugout canoe are just some of the fascinating things that have been recovered in a preserved state from the bog. A local community group are now seeking to establish an exciting new attraction at Umeras Peatlands Park near Monasterevin alongside the Barrow. Pollardstown Fen, near Newbridge is an area of alkaline peatland that stands over 220 hectares and obtains its nutrients from calcium rich spring water. Mostly under the ownership of the state, it is of international importance, is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and contains several rare vegetation types, along with an uninterrupted pollen record of the changes in its composition of vegetation going back to the last ice age. A proposal for a new National Peatlands Park on a landscape scale in the Bog of Allen is being driven by Irish Peatlands Conservation Council, Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park,

Umeras Peatlands Park, Wild Kildare, Kildare Bat Group, Butterfly Conservation Ireland, and Birdwatch Ireland. The proposed study area is over 7,000 hectares. The objective is to rewild and restore the cutaway peatlands following the cessation of industrial scale peat extraction, creating a National Park similar in ambition to world famous parks such as The Peak District, The Lake District and the Broads National Park in the UK. The Barrow River is an important ecological corridor. The Canal sits above the valley of the River Barrow as far as Monasterevin and crosses some of its tributaries by short aqueducts. At Monasterevin it crosses the Barrow via a longer aqueduct and leaves the river valley. While the Canal has not been designated as a whole, parts of it have proposed National Heritage Area (pNHA) status and it is close to and interacts with the River Barrow and River Nore Special Area of Conservation under the EC Habitats Directive. The Royal and Grand Canals also form important ecological corridors across the county. The woodlands managed by Coillte form an important part of the natural heritage of the county and are also easily accessible for many visitors.

### Tangible Heritage

Kildare has some of the most recognisable and fascinating built heritage features in Ireland. Archaeological features of world importance, monastic sites, castles, big houses, and industrial heritage decorate Kildare's landscape, offering the potential to unearth and showcase Kildare's history. One archaeological site in Kildare, Dún Ailinne outside Kilcullen, has been included on the tentative list for nomination as a World Heritage Site as part of a larger assembly of sites i.e. The Royal Sites of Ireland, which include Cashel, Dún Ailinne, Hill of Uisneach, Rathcroghan Complex, the Tara Complex and Eamhain Mhacha. It is a policy of the council to support nomination for the site.

Kildare has a range of monastic heritage sites such as St. Brigid's Cathedral and Round Tower, and Castledermot Monastic Site & Friary. There are also many castles in the county, such as those at Leixlip, Maynooth, Kiltel and Athy, visible and fascinating signs of an era when daily life was less secure, and defence was a necessity. Four towns in Kildare are former walled towns, Kildare, Naas, Athy and Castledermot with policies in place to protect existing or potential lines of the walls. These are all features which would be of great interest to many visitors, with 70% of overseas visitors in 2019 visiting heritage or historical sites.

Kildare has some of Ireland's finest Georgian mansions including Ireland's most visited free attraction Castletown House; and two houses which are now hotels; Carton House, a Fairmont Managed Hotel and Straffan House (K-Club). The grounds and settings of these houses for an intrinsic element of their character and it is an objective of the council to protect this character. Many of the towns in the county were planned around the same time as the construction of some of the large houses. Most of these towns are now Architectural Conservation Areas to protect architectural heritage e.g., Ballitore, Kilcock, Maynooth, Leixlip, Prosperous, Rathangan, Kildare, Monasterevin, Moone, Athy, and Naas.

Prior to the advent of the faster railway network the Grand Canal, Royal Canal and Barrow Line were highly important economic corridors. Each have their own legacy of industrial heritage including the canals and lock gates, bridges, aqueducts such as the Barrow Bridge at Monasterevin and the Ryewater Aqueduct near Kilcock, mostly built around 1780-1790. There are also many fine stone buildings; warehouses and lock keepers' cottages, with Waterways Ireland currently reviewing potential uses. Although from a slightly earlier time (1743) the fascinating Wonderful Barn on the edge of the Castletown House estate near Celbridge, is a form of agricultural heritage, with the generally accepted use being as a grain store.

There are museums to cater for every interest in the county including the Museum of Style Icons at Newbridge Silverware, the Curragh Military Museum a hidden gem which provides a fascinating history of the Irish armed forces, the Steam Museum at Straffan, and National Science and Ecclesiology Museum at Maynooth to name a few.

There are several heritage trails in the county including the Naas Historic Trail, Celbridge Heritage Trail, National Famine Way, Kildare Town Heritage Trail, Gordon Bennet Route, and Athy Historic Trail, which visitors can take to explore the story of the Kildare.

### **Intangible Heritage**

Intangible heritage can include customs, sports, dance, music, folklore, crafts and local skills and knowledge. Several aspects of intangible heritage that relate to Kildare have been described earlier including the equestrian industry and race events, and festivals such as local festivals, Taste of Kildare and Féile Bríde. There are other aspects of intangible heritage that are distinctive to Kildare and that would be of interest to many visitors. This includes folklore around the Curragh, such as Fionn McCool and links to the Hill of Allen, the industrial heritage of the waterways, and the stories of those that worked in the big houses of the county and on the estates. The Hurling Experience at Kilcullen showcases Ireland's national sport of hurling and provides visitors with an immersive experience of the world's oldest, fastest and perhaps most skilful field sport. The religious history attached to monastic sites tell stories connecting past to present. The Kildare Monastic Trail stretches 92km from Castledermot to Oughterard near Straffan, leading visitors along a route that combines monastic history with beautiful scenery. The newly developed 9-day walking St Brigid's Way pilgrimage route beginning at Brigid's birthplace in Faughart, Co. Louth and finishing in her monastic city, Kildare offers an opportunity for development. The Legends of Kildare VR tour at the Kildare Town Heritage Centre provides visitors with an immersive portal into the past to connect with ancient characters. Another example is the temporary Racing Legends Museum with a wide array of historical racing artifacts and memorabilia on show including original Pathé footage of past race events.

## 2.3 SWOT Analysis

The tourism context and destination analysis findings have been drawn together in a SWOT analysis which is presented below. The strategy which follows aims to capitalise on Kildare's competitive advantages and to address perceived disadvantages to ensure that tourism benefits can be realised for local communities in County Kildare in the coming years.

### STRENGTHS

#### Location and Access

- » Proximity to Dublin enabling easy access by domestic and international visitors as well as conferences and incentive trips
- » Good access via train and road and on key routes from Dublin to the west and south
- » Surrounded by seven neighbouring counties with visitors seeking a range of things to see and do in the area
- » Popular domestic tourism destination
- » Strong brand recognition of 'Kildare'
- » Some accommodation providers leveraging attractions and activities in neighbouring counties to encourage increased overnight stays in Kildare e.g., Dublin Zoo and Tayto Park

#### Product development – existing and planned

- » Development of the Barrow Blueway from Robertstown to Athy with new watersports hub at Athy and Monasterevin, and boat trips available from Athy with Athy Boat Tours
- » Completion of Royal Canal Greenway with bike hire available at Maynooth Station, and barge hire available between Maynooth and Castleknock
- » High quality hotel offers with two 5-star hotels (Carton House, a Fairmont Managed Hotel and the K-Club)
- » World class golf offer, with renowned courses at Carton House and K-Club and home to Ryder Cup
- » International and national equestrian reputation including Curragh, Punchestown, and Naas racecourses and the new immersive visitor experience at the Irish National Stud
- » World class retail offer at Kildare Village and Newbridge Silverware
- » Weston Airport
- » Family friendly attractions e.g., Irish National Stud & Gardens, Lullymore Heritage Park, Clonfert Pet Farm, Kildare Farm Foods Open Farm & Shop, Kildare Maze
- » Strong food offer with Taste of Kildare event, Burtown House, a range of restaurants in several towns, Naas Wild Food Fair supported by LEO, Athy Food Innovation Hub, and Maynooth a Purple Flag Restaurant location. Local producers enable businesses within the county to support and keep business within Kildare
- » Mondello Park Racing Circuit
- » Linkage with St Brigid and established Solas Bhríde Centre providing vibrant hub for spiritual tourism
- » Gordon Bennet Classic Rally through Kildare, Laois and Carlow each June



## Heritage Assets

- » Royal and Grand Canal towpaths providing location for Greenway development
- » River Barrow providing opportunity for 48km Blueway development
- » Peatlands home to Lullymore Heritage Park
- » Donadea Forest Park
- » Historic houses and castles including Castletown House, Maynooth Castle, Kilkea Castle
- » Attractive and historic rural towns and villages e.g., Kildare, Monasterevin, Athy, Kilcullen
- » Curragh Military Camp
- » Derby Legends temporary exhibition in Kildare Town Courthouse (seasonal)

## Raising awareness and communication

- » Development of new Into Kildare brand and website
- » Kildare promoted as part of Ireland's Ancient East

## Place-making

- » Kildare Town Square – phase 1
- » Outdoor dining means facilities have improved

## Business and Events

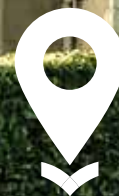
- » Large conference facilities available at several hotels
- » Capacity to hold large scale events e.g., at The Curragh, Punchestown Racecourse, Naas Racecourse

## Collaboration and Networking

- » Strong support for Into Kildare from Kildare tourism industry
- » Opportunity to link to Carlow via Columbanus Trail/Way



*Killashee Hotel*



# SWOT Analysis

## WEAKNESSES

### Location and Access

- » Proximity to Dublin which reduces demand for overnight stays from those living in Dublin, and means coach tours leaving Dublin unlikely to make a stop so close to the city
- » Lack of coach parking in some towns
- » Geography of Kildare means relatively long travel time from north of county to the south e.g., when travelling from attractions outside the county such as Dublin Zoo and Tayto Park

### Raising awareness and communication

- » Level of funding for Into Kildare limits potential to engage on a broad level of promotional activities e.g., international trade fairs
- » Potential of Barrow Blueway may not be realised without investment in promotion
- » Lack of an app for tourism in the county
- » Capturing longer overnight stays (>2 nights)
- » Lack of orientation signage at key visitor hubs
- » No marketing plan in place for Shackleton Experience
- » Lack of visible marketing of Kildare offer in key hotels

### Product development existing and planned

- » Lack of focal point for the County, with no one specific dominant urban centre or attraction
- » Lack of range of accommodation near key attractions and accommodation range in south Kildare
- » Lack of a visitor hub for the Curragh Plains
- » Lack of clarity among external stakeholders regarding who to approach in relation to capital project development i.e., Into Kildare or Kildare County Council
- » Need for more self-catering and waterway activity providers
- » Lack of caravan parks near key visitor hubs
- » Key heritage buildings left empty e.g., Courthouse in Kildare town

### Business and Events

- » Need for more coordination of business tourism offer

### Collaboration and Operation

- » Need for increased networking and packaging among local tourism industry
- » Membership based organisation framework of Into Kildare means some left out
- » Lack of staff for many tourism businesses an ongoing issue post Covid

### Data

- » Lack of availability of accurate visitor data to enable strategic planning at a county level

# SWOT Analysis

## OPPORTUNITIES

### Location and Access

- » Development of Greenway and Blueway network facilitating access by bike from Dublin
- » Plans to complete pedestrian linkage from Kildare Village to Kildare town centre
- » Opportunity to re-open Curragh rail station with existing platform
- » Opportunity to link Grand Canal Greenway to the Curragh via Pollardstown Fen

### Place-making

- » Cultural quarter in Athy and Newbridge
- » Naas Canal Quarter and Castle Quarter
- » Funding for Naas outdoor dining area

### Business and Events

- » Opportunity to develop conference market with associated activity packages due to proximity to Dublin
- » Availability of LEO funds e.g., Start Your Own Business schemes and Green for Micro schemes to support tourism businesses

### Product and experience development

- » Wide range of high-quality product offer enables appeal to a broad market
- » Increasing awareness of importance of tourism infrastructure in supporting a high quality of life which in turns stimulates investment
- » Completion of the Royal Canal Greenway and continued development of the Grand Canal Greenway with opportunity to create linkages between each and with the Barrow Blueway
- » Planned development of Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development by Fáilte Ireland to promote the equestrian businesses and attraction in the County and opportunity for a Thoroughbred Trail
- » Opportunity for development of a visitor hub for the Curragh Plains to include natural and cultural heritage interpretation, and visitor services and activities e.g., bike hire, pony-trekking
- » Opportunity to maximise visitor experience at Punchestown Racecourse with additional national scale visitor attraction
- » Planned development of range of visitor experiences including:
  - » Barrow Blueway providing local spin-off economic opportunities
  - » Shackleton Experience at Athy with associated opportunity for corporate team building and link to Barrow Blueway
  - » Farmyard retail, food and events at Castletown House
  - » Umeras Bog Park (community group led)
  - » Church of Oak Distillery near Monasterevin (private sector led)
- » Attraction of US College Football series from 2022-2025 (with 2-year extension option)
- » Plans to develop Eco-Park at Robertstown
- » Plans to develop the Wonderful Barn (KCC led)
- » Growth in interest in outdoor adventure activities e.g., cycling, walking, kayaking
- » Proposal for National Peatlands Park focussed on Bog of Allen – the largest bog in the country
- » St Brigid's Cathedral and Round Tower offers potential for sensitive visitor experience
- » Opportunity to develop permanent Racing Legends exhibition

## Raising awareness and communication

- » Broadening appeal of Kildare to family market through targeted marketing e.g., 'days out of the city'
- » Promotion of Kildare offer through high quality digital campaign and use of Kildare videos on Instagram
- » Development of a new tourism brochure to promote the wide offering available throughout the County
- » Introduction of a Kildare Green Oak Leaf to recognise sustainability accreditation
- » Encouraging Kildare residents to be a visitor in your county
- » Further development of saleable packages and itineraries, particularly as part of Ireland's Ancient East
- » St Brigid 1500<sup>th</sup> celebration in 2024, opportunity to connect to diaspora
- » Promotion of big houses of Kildare (Carton House, Straffan House [K-Club], Palmerstown House, Burtown House, Kilkea Castle, Killashee Hotel)
- » Promotion of Kildare packages to ferry passengers from France and UK
- » Dialling up the stories of and characters of Kildare to animate the county for visitors
- » Potential for Curragh to be nominated for UNESCO World Heritage Site
- » Potential to use Bord na Mona bog trail lines and walking and/or cycle routes

## Collaboration and Networking

- » Tourism business breakfasts supported by industry with several hotels willing to host
- » Familiarisation visits roadshow and fam visits for front of house staff
- » Opportunity for Kildare Ambassadors
- » Opportunity for upskilling and training to increase industry skillsets and visitor readiness
- » Collaborating with community groups in tourism development
- » Increased cross marketing between Kildare tourism businesses
- » Collaborating with other networks in Kildare on specific projects

## Data

- » Plans by Into Kildare to undertake coordinated tourism data collection



Kilkea Castle

# SWOT Analysis

## THREATS

### Business resilience

- » Viability and recovery of tourism businesses impacted by Covid-19
- » Impact of Brexit on UK market
- » Impact of Covid on North American and mainland Europe markets
- » Impact of climate change on natural environment
- » Transition to low carbon businesses likely to impact on conference tourism

### Product and experience development

- » Impact of Covid on National Exchequer may impact on availability of capital funding for tourism projects

### Location and Access

- » Kildare a go through destination rather than a go to destination due to proximity of Dublin and motorway network
- » Lack of public transport connectivity between visitor attractions in Kildare

### Business resilience

- » Viability and recovery of tourism businesses impacted by Covid-19
- » Impact of Brexit on UK market
- » Impact of Covid on North American and mainland Europe markets
- » Impact of climate change on natural environment
- » Transition to low carbon businesses likely to impact on conference tourism

### Raising awareness and communication

- » Market perception of Kildare as a premium 5-star destination, limiting the market who would visit.
- » Thoroughbred Country Destination Development Plan may only attract a niche market



# Chapter Three

# Strategy Framework

## Where do we want to go?

The strategic framework outlined in this section seeks to capitalise on the opportunities, build on success and to address challenges, positioning Kildare as a thriving resilient destination for the next 5 years to 2026 and beyond.

### 3.1 Vision for Kildare Tourism

Tourism as an industry has been exceptionally challenged during 2020-2021, with many businesses in a state of recovery and survival for the next few years. However, while there will continue to be challenges there are many positives; businesses have become more resilient and have transformed the way in which they do businesses and engage with consumers, with a new focus for many on digital processes. Consumers are eager to travel, many domestic tourists have rediscovered not only their local area but also places in Ireland they were less familiar with and will wish to return to. There is an increasing emphasis on outdoor activities including dining, and on increased spending on experiences as a deserved indulgence after Covid-19 related restrictions.

This presents a significant opportunity for County Kildare in the coming years. While it may take 4+ years to build back to the tourism revenue and volume experienced in 2019, there is a strong emphasis on strategic investment in tourism attractions, services and infrastructure in Kildare that will enhance the tourism opportunity; creating conditions that will support increased local economic development based on tourism and enhanced visitor experiences.

There are clear opportunities for the County, particularly those associated with Shackleton, the 1500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St Brigid's death, the further development of Greenways and Blueways, and the implementation of the Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan.

Considering the research undertaken to inform this study as to those factors that make Kildare distinctive as a destination, along with an understanding of current consumer trends, our vision for Kildare tourism is:

**“Kildare, a rural escape close to the city, is recognised worldwide for exceptional thoroughbred experiences, a place to engage with rich culture, picturesque landscapes, gastronomy, and a warm welcome. A sustainable ethos based around low impact regenerative tourism is at the heart of what we do. Our county is a place apart, with a blend of fascinating history and modern vibrancy; a place to reconnect and indulge with friends and family; where reviving and recharging is a racing certainty.”**

## 3.2 Goals, Strategic Priorities and Objectives

The strategic framework is intended to provide clear direction for all tourism stakeholders for the collaborative development of tourism in County Kildare to 2026. A mid-term review is recommended to ensure the strategy can be re-evaluated to take account of yet unknown developments in overseas and domestic tourism patterns in coming years.

Responsible tourism has increasingly become embedded as a business imperative, with visitors seeking holidays that minimise negative impacts and businesses operating in a more sustainable way. Research has indicated that visitors are now increasingly seeking experiences that result in a positive impact, on communities, biodiversity, climate action and social inclusion. Regenerative tourism offers a framework, like that of the circular economy, to revitalise local economies, preserve local cultures and biodiversity, while offering memorable, authentic transformative experiences for visitors.

The importance of destination organisations is increasingly focussed on destination management rather than as well as destination marketing. Into Kildare are seeking to position County Kildare as a model for sustainable tourism development. In doing so the Into Kildare, working with key stakeholders, will look to encourage tourism businesses to operate more sustainably, and will seek to use a demonstrable sustainable tourism approach as a competitive marketing advantage.

The strategy is guided by six goals:

- i. **Kildare developing a reputation for low impact regenerative tourism**, tourism that celebrates the heritage of County Kildare and provides local economic benefit;
- ii. **Delivery of world class tourism experiences based on the distinctive culture, landscape, and heritage of Kildare**; encouraging visitors to stay longer, spend more, wish to return, and recommend visits to others;
- iii. **A measurable increase in the number of overnight stays in the county**, which in turn will provide local economic benefit, particularly in key visitor hubs;
- iv. **Increased recognition of the role that Into Kildare plays**, with public and private sector buy-in and a partnership-based approach;
- v. **Increased awareness among local, domestic, and international visitors of the County Kildare tourism offer**, through enhanced digital engagement and coordinated promotional campaigns;
- vi. **A more collaborative and resilient tourism industry in County Kildare**, with readily available supports and capacity building opportunities.



The strategy is based around **six strategic priorities** designed to deliver on the vision and goals and ensure Kildare can stand out in a crowded marketplace. A clear **objective** is outlined for each strategic priority in Table 6. The actions identified under each strategic priority will enable compelling and high-quality visitor experiences, with an increasingly resilient, competitive, and innovative industry that provides local economic benefit to the communities of Kildare. One that is based on principles of sustainable and regenerative tourism, leaving places better than they were before.

Tourism is a vital part of the economy of Kildare. While other industries may support more employment, tourism plays a vital role in supporting rural economic development, and in positioning County Kildare as a desirable place to live, work, invest and study.

The six strategic priorities together provide a pathway to the activation of the vision for Kildare tourism that capitalises on its exceptional heritage assets, community, and location, and positions Kildare for the future of tourism. Each strategic priority forms a focus area for delivery with further detail provided in Chapter 4.

› **Table 7 Strategic Priorities and Objectives**

Strategic Priority		Objective
SP1	Effective Coordination, Communication, and Collaboration	Together the tourism stakeholders in Kildare will work collaboratively with a common vision, striving for a united and competitive destination, with appropriate resourcing.
SP2	Enable Industry Resilience	The Kildare tourism industry will become increasingly resilient through digitisation support to support a smart tourism approach, support for a low carbon transition, enabling of networking opportunities and by targeted capacity building.
SP3	Create Captivating Experiences	Innovative world class visitor experiences will be created that provide an immersive, compelling reason to visit Kildare and motivate more overnight stays with an emphasis on regenerative tourism.
SP4	Reinforce Destination Connectivity & Accessibility	A reimagining of the way in which visitors can access County Kildare will focus on new transport links, signage, universal design, and a wider range of visitor accommodation.
SP5	Build Visitor Awareness	Key market segments among domestic and international visitor will be targeted to raise awareness of Kildare as a rural escape with exceptional experiences through a range of digital and print media, events, packaged offers, and itineraries.
SP6	Measure Strategy Impact	A smart destination approach will drive collation and analysis of a range of tourism data to inform decision-making and to benefit Kildare communities

# Strategy Overview

## 1 Vision

**Kildare**, a rural escape close to the city, is **recognised worldwide** for exceptional thoroughbred experiences, a place to **engage** with rich culture, **picturesque landscapes, gastronomy**, and a **warm welcome**. A sustainable ethos based around low impact regenerative tourism is at the heart of what we do. Our county is a place apart, with a blend of **fascinating history** and **modern vibrancy**; a place to **reconnect and indulge** with **friends** and family; where reviving and recharging is a racing certainty.

## 6 Goals

- i. Kildare developing a reputation for low impact regenerative tourism
- ii. Delivery of world class tourism experiences based on the distinctive culture, landscape, and heritage of Kildare
- iii. A measurable increase in the number of overnight stays in the county
- iv. Increased recognition of the role that Into Kildare plays
- v. Increased awareness among local, domestic, and international visitors of the County Kildare tourism offer
- vi. A more collaborative and resilient tourism industry in County Kildare

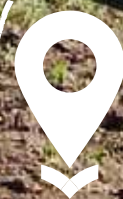
## 6 Strategic Priorities

## 27 Actions

SP1	<b>Effective Coordination, Communication, and Collaboration</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Seek to enhance tourism project coordination</li> <li>2. Progressively increase operational funding for tourism in County Kildare</li> <li>3. Explore opportunities to work with tourism partners outside Kildare</li> <li>4. Review benefits of retaining membership model for Into Kildare</li> <li>5. Continue to build Into Kildare team</li> </ol>
SP2	<b>Enabling Industry Resilience</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Implement focussed advisory programme</li> <li>7. Maximise collaboration opportunities within Kildare</li> <li>8. Elevate level of service offer</li> <li>9. Prepare Into Kildare Sustainable Tourism Policy and introduce Kildare Green Oak Lead Initiative</li> </ol>
SP3	<b>Creating Captivating Experiences</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Strengthen Kildare’s tourism offering of Blueways, Peatways, and Greenways</li> <li>11. Support the implementation of the Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan</li> <li>12. Support existing and new opportunities for exceptional visitor attractions</li> </ol>
SP4	<b>Reinforcing Destination Connectivity &amp; Accessibility</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Support new transport infrastructure to enhance access</li> <li>14. Commission and implement new signage strategy</li> <li>15. Encourage the adoption of principles of universal design</li> <li>16. Undertake accommodation study</li> </ol>
SP5	<b>Building Destination Visibility</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. Commission new high-quality marketing collateral as needed</li> <li>18. Continue to develop ‘Distinctively Kildare’ Food Strategy</li> <li>19. Work collaboratively to bring exceptional conferences and events to Kildare</li> <li>20. Continue to engage with Fáilte Ireland on Ireland’s Ancient East</li> <li>21. Support development of packaged/bundled offers</li> <li>22. Ensure key Kildare County Council tourism projects are supported through targeted marketing campaigns</li> <li>23. Attend key overseas tourism events</li> <li>24. Continue to strengthen existing twinning and diaspora relationships</li> </ol>
SP6	<b>Measuring Strategy Impact</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>25. Identify data led KPIs and source destination data</li> <li>26. Position Kildare as a smart destination</li> <li>27. Undertake mid-point evaluation of strategy</li> </ol>



*Irish National Stud*





# Chapter Four

# Realising the Vision

## How are we going to get there

*This chapter forms the roadmap to realise the vision for tourism in Kildare. The aspiration is for all actions to be completed within the lifetime of the strategy; however it is acknowledged that some actions are ongoing, and others are subject to external collaboration. The actions outlined are ambitious yet achievable. Ensuing adequate resourcing as well as a focus on internal and external collaboration is key to the success of the strategy.*

### 4.1 Recommendations

#### *Strategic Priority 1. Coordination, Communication, and Collaboration*

Together the tourism stakeholders in Kildare will work collaboratively with a common vision, striving for a united and competitive destination, with appropriate resourcing.

##### 1 - Seek to enhance tourism project coordination

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It is essential that the many stakeholders that form the tourism eco-system in Kildare work collaboratively with a common vision, striving for a united and competitive destination. Delivery of the components of tourism are currently the responsibilities of different agencies, for example Into Kildare for the marketing of tourism while also playing a key role on committees developing tourism attractions and infrastructure; Kildare County Council fund Into Kildare and have a core role in funding visitor attractions and infrastructure, place-making, and completing funding applications; LEO supporting capital support, training and education; and Kildare Chamber engaging with tourism businesses as well as marketing and promotion. With strong governance critical to effective delivery of tourism as an agent of change and economic development it is essential mechanisms are in place to enable cross-cutting decision making and collaboration. While the Board of Into Kildare play an essential role in providing oversight for the operation of Into Kildare, it is recommended that **working groups be established that focus on specific projects**, set up by Into Kildare, with the support of Kildare County Council. The objective being to ensure effective collaboration between key agencies and to establish strategic direction for destination management.

## 2 - Progressively increase operational funding for tourism in County Kildare

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Marketing and promotion of County Kildare plays a strong role in positioning the county as a desirable place to live, work, visit and study. It is essential to enable a step change in the level of marketing and promotion of Kildare as a destination in domestic and overseas markets in coming years. While funding from Kildare County Council to Into Kildare has been significantly increased in recent years, a significant proportion of this funding is utilised for salaries for staff members who are critical to delivery of marketing, promotion, and support programmes. To facilitate the undertaking of the actions outlined within this strategy a significant increase in the overall budget is required. By increasing the budget by 25% per annum for the next 5 years an overall subvention of €1m per annum would be achieved by year 5. This investment would be justified by the potential for the positioning of Kildare as an exceptional visitor destination, but also to encourage investment and relocation in the county as a desirable place to live and work. A defined multi-annual marketing, promotional and development plan should be developed linked to KPIs to provide a rationale for increased funding.

## 3 - Explore opportunities to work with tourism partners outside Kildare

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Kildare is surrounded by six counties including Dublin, Wicklow, Carlow, Laois, Offaly, Meath, and seven counting Fingal and South Dublin separately. This provides Into Kildare and Kildare County Council with a significant opportunity to work with destination management companies organisations, visitor attractions and accommodation providers in each neighbouring county to develop complementary packages and itineraries. There are many instances of this currently, with The Glenroyal working with Dublin Zoo and Tayto Park to increase visitor dwell time. Regular (bi-annual) meetings of tourism officers in each county could help facilitate this initiative.

## 4 - Review benefits of retaining membership model for Into Kildare

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The current membership-based model generates around 15% of the revenue of Into Kildare, with the remainder coming from Kildare County Council; however there is criticism that this model excludes some businesses who do not wish to or cannot afford to pay, such as half of the hotels in the county. In turn these businesses support Kildare County Council through rates contributions. A review of the current model should compare other external models of revenue generation, for example Mid Wales Tourism, and conclude whether a membership fee-based model is the most effective means of operation.

## 5 - Continue to build Into Kildare team

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The opportunity from continued growth of tourism revenue accruing to County Kildare is significant. However it is essential that Into Kildare are sufficiently resourced to ensure Kildare can effectively compete with other destinations. One example is digital engagement which is increasingly important and yet requires ongoing resourcing. To enable Into Kildare to deliver on the vision and the marketing, promotion and support programmes outlined in this plan, it is essential the team continues to grow.

## Strategic Priority 2. Enabling Industry Resilience

The Kildare tourism industry will become increasingly resilient through digitisation support to support a smart tourism approach, support for a low carbon transition, enabling of networking opportunities, targeted capacity building, and a Green Oak Leaf sustainable tourism initiative scheme.

### 6 - Implement focussed advisory programme

Tourism businesses have had to adapt to survive in recent months due to the impact of Covid-19. For many this has accelerated a digitisation process that was already underway with many businesses enabling on-line booking and upgrading websites. One focus for this action area is to build on the good work that has already been undertaken, supporting those businesses that have not yet started this process or that need further support. To ensure exceptional experiences clear and concise information on available funding and supports for low carbon transition will be provided to tourism experience providers to provide a consistent experience offer.<sup>23</sup>

### 7 - Maximise collaboration opportunities within Kildare

Successful destinations focus on ensuring collaboration between tourism stakeholders and providing opportunities for networking where opportunities for business development and partnership can arise. Introduction of Kildare tourism industry breakfasts will provide this opportunity, with a venue rotating between key hotels and on a quarterly basis. The format will be agreed by stakeholders and may include formal speakers or solely be an opportunity for a coffee and a catch up; the goal is to provide opportunities for dialogue and partnership development. It is also important those engaging with visitors, for example front of house staff, can talk about experiences in the county with first-hand knowledge. Kildare Destination Training will be regular events, with a roadshow format where participants are given information and training on attractions and activities in Kildare and nearby things to see and do in Ireland's Ancient East. The potential for a digital information learning platform will also be explored.

To ensure local benefit from tourism it is important that local communities are involved in tourism development. Into Kildare will continue to engage with local community groups to further integrate their views into decision-making and to enhance community linkages. The 'Adopt a Kilometre' initiative seeks to involve local communities in looking after a local area and is promoted by Kildare County Council. Encouragement of this initiative, for example on Greenways and Blueways, can provide a route for engagement of local communities in the protection of local heritage and environment.

23 - See also Action 6.1 in the County Kildare Economic Strategy

24 - <https://kildare.ie/CountyCouncil/AllServices/Environment/GreenKilometreScheme/>

## 8 - Elevate level of service offer

To ensure that the level of service offered is elevated to the highest possible level and to ensure that tourism providers can access appropriate training for the future of tourism, a training needs analysis will be undertaken for tourism providers in Kildare. New training products where there are gaps through working in partnership with relevant education and training providers e.g., Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board, LEO to build industry capacity. Fáilte Ireland have significantly added to their suite of capacity building and training programmes including: The Learning Hub which provides online courses on finance, management & support, revenue management, and sales & marketing (digital marketing, SEO), and MICE supports. Kildare tourism businesses will be encouraged to adopt principles of Leave No Trace, with detail also included on Greenway and Blueway signage.

## 9 - Prepare Kildare Sustainable Tourism Policy and introduce Kildare Green Oak Leaf Initiative

Into Kildare will seek a repositioning of County Kildare as one of Ireland's most recognised sustainable tourism destinations. Objectives are to highlight and promote sustainable tourism practices, raise awareness of sustainable tourism to industry and visitors, and to support the protection of the cultural and natural heritage in the County. It is essential that a concept of 'betterment' underpin the development of new visitor attractions. Where possible elements of attractions should be focussed on regenerative tourism that essentially leaves heritage assets and local communities in a better condition e.g., restoration of built heritage, re-wilding of natural heritage, employment of local people, use of local produce etc. Into Kildare and Kildare County Council could consider joining a European network of collaborative sustainable tourism destination networks e.g., European Regions for Competitive and Sustainable Tourism . A new succinct Kildare Sustainable Tourism Policy document will identify specific actions to create a more sustainable tourism industry in Kildare that are aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The policy for Kildare will identify local actions based on the report from the Sustainable Tourism Working Group which identifies national actions to promote sustainable tourism practices out to 2023. The actions and activities will have short and long-term goals with clear objectives that can be measured and key metrics along the way to measure progress and success. The Sustainable Tourism Policy will build on work currently undertaken by Into Kildare that focus on SDG 10, 11 and 15 as outlined in Section 2.1.

An immediate, practical, and innovative initiative will be the introduction of the Kildare Green Oak Leaf award for tourism businesses in the County. This initiative builds on a similar scheme in Slovenia and will see Kildare tourism businesses awarded a Green Oak Leaf when they receive accreditation from one of several defined eco-labels, such as that provided by Sustainable Travel Ireland. This Green Oak Leaf symbol will be used to denote businesses with sustainable tourism practices on the Into Kildare website and associated promotional material such as a digital brochure for the County. The objective will be to encourage businesses to become more sustainable, and to prove that they are operating more sustainably. This will not be a new eco-label or accreditation scheme but will recognise those businesses that receive accreditation from approved schemes.

25 - <https://covid19.failteireland.ie/learning-hub/>

26 - <https://www.failteireland.ie/Commercial-development/Business-Tourism/Business-tourism-training.aspx>

27 - <https://www.failteireland.ie/apply-covid-19-safety-charter.aspx>

28 - <https://necstour.eu/>

29 - <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c0cd3-sustainable-tourism-working-group-report/>

30 - [https://www.slovenia.info/uploads/zelen\\_a\\_shema/2021\\_02\\_sto\\_zsst\\_ang\\_v02.pdf](https://www.slovenia.info/uploads/zelen_a_shema/2021_02_sto_zsst_ang_v02.pdf)



## *Strategic Priority 3. Creating Captivating Experiences*

*Innovative world class visitor experiences will be created that provide an immersive, compelling reason to visit Kildare and motivate more overnight stays with an emphasis on regenerative tourism.*

### 10 - Strengthen Kildare's tourism offering of Blueways, Peatways, and Greenways

The completion of the Greenway and Blueway network will provide a direct low impact recreational linkage from Dublin City Centre to north and central Kildare. Completion of this network will be prioritised during the lifetime of the strategy. Based on a relatively undemanding average of 20km/hour, this not only brings these rural towns in range for visitors but also enables commuting from many towns to Dublin. Once completed, during the lifetime of this strategy, this network will transform recreational access from Dublin to Kildare. In tandem the completion of the Barrow Blueway from Lowtown/Robertstown to Athy will bring significant economic opportunities to communities along this route. It will be critical to enable access to each through safe cycle routes between towns and villages along and near each Greenway/Blueway. There is potential for linking with the Safe Routes to School programme to enable development of such linkages. Waterways Ireland and Kildare County Council are currently collaborating on development of necessary associated infrastructure including orientation, interpretative and directional signage.

The Barrow Blueway Economic Plan (2021) contains comprehensive recommendations regarding the realising of economic opportunities along the route of the Barrow Line. The Tourism Product Identification Study undertaken for the Royal and Grand Canal (2012), which recommended the development of the Greenways along each canal, contains a wide variety of recommendations for realising economic benefits. This includes provision of signage that describes the proximity of visitor attractions at key hubs on the canal, a series of off-road cycle routes to connect the Royal and Grand Canal through the Kildare countryside, and development of low impact on-water activities based on international good practice. Where recommendations are considered viable and appropriate these will be considered, subject to engagement, planning and environmental assessment. Peatways are walking and cycle routes across boglands. Opportunities for collaboration with key stakeholders, to develop such linkages in Kildare and with neighbouring counties will be investigated. Opportunities for regenerative tourism will be a core focus i.e. using tourism development to enhance the natural environment, to provide an economic benefit to local communities, and a heightened understanding of and appreciation for the natural environment by visitors.

## 11 - Support the implementation of the Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan

The Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan is an exceptional opportunity for County Kildare (and County Tipperary), offering an opportunity to unite distinctive aspects of built, natural and cultural heritage, and with the strategic and financial support of Fáilte Ireland. Implementation of the plan will be prioritised over the lifetime of the strategy. While most actions are led by Fáilte Ireland or Kildare County Council those that Into Kildare have been identified as leading on include:

- » Review the feasibility of creating a Thoroughbred Trainers Trail to map the density of trainers' yards linked to the Stallion Day with the potential to link to the ITT to provide scheduled access to behind-the-scenes trainers experiences.
- » Examine the capacity of existing events to incorporate the thoroughbred theme for consistency in the destination narrative e.g. Taste of Kildare

Those where Into Kildare have been identified as a support agency (with lead agency(s) indicated) include:

- » Develop the International Thoroughbred Trail (ITT) creating a world class thoroughbred trail experience (Lead Fáilte Ireland)
- » Undertake an audit of the existing horse crafts industry capacity to develop a series of immersive visitor experiences (Lead Fáilte Ireland)
- » Undertake industry capacity training to create new experiences to increase the volume of bookable thoroughbred and cross cutting thematic experiences. (Lead Fáilte Ireland)
- » Undertake an annual thoroughbred tourism/industry ambassadors programme (Lead Fáilte Ireland)
- » Examine the development of reciprocal networking marketing opportunities through the thoroughbred industry's global network (Lead Thoroughbred Tourism Leadership Group, Irish Thoroughbred Marketing / Horse Racing Ireland)
- » Examine the alliance marketing opportunity among the tourism and thoroughbred industry (Lead Thoroughbred Tourism Leadership Group, Irish Thoroughbred Marketing / Horse Racing Ireland)
- » Examine the development of destination taste trails (Lead Kildare County Council)
- » Support the development of new food and drink experiences with the capacity to collaborate with thoroughbred experiences and integrated into the ITT. This should also examine the inclusion of the thoroughbred theme with existing food activity such as Taste of Kildare (Lead Fáilte Ireland)
- » Create an annual experience focus on retail and fashion experiences linked to the thoroughbred event themes (Lead Private Sector)
- » Create the destination structures and supports required to develop two major festivals around the Irish Derby and Punchestown Festival. (Lead Kildare County Council and Fáilte Ireland)

## 12 - Support existing and new opportunities for exceptional visitor attractions

In 2019 County Kildare had only one visitor attraction in the top 50 fee-paying visitor attractions in Ireland. By 2025 Kildare will aim to have 3 visitor attractions of scale in the top 50 paying attraction list for Ireland, with 5 new fee-paying visitor attractions in total. While visitor volume is not considered a vital factor of success, the associated revenue accruing to local communities and employment will be essential to support wider objectives of rural economic development.

The development of compelling visitor attractions can be driven by the private sector, public sector, and community groups. In addition to the development of the Shackleton Experience at Athy, there are two new visitor attractions currently being advanced; the Church of Oak Distillery (private sector led) Umeras Peatlands Park (community led) both located near Monasterevin. Both projects will be supported in principle.

While these attractions may have potential to attract 70-100,000 visitors annually depending on location, Kildare lacks a nationally significant visitor attraction capable of attracting over 250,000 visitors a year. Three feasibility assessments are proposed to scope opportunities for such an attraction:

- » Commission feasibility study to determine optimum location for a Curragh Plains Visitor Centre with associated interpretation of the heritage story, visitor activities and services. This study would build on work undertaken by The Paul Hogarth Company in relation to the Curragh Plains;
- » Feasibility analysis of a significant new visitor attraction at the Wonderful Barn near Celbridge;
- » Commission concept study to evaluate opportunity for an additional major new visitor attraction, in association with a private sector operator with a large site and existing visitor facilities e.g., Punchestown Racecourse or similar.

Further opportunities existing in relation to St Brigid's Cathedral and Round Tower in Kildare town. Engagement will be undertaken with Church of Ireland regarding potential for sensitive and small-scale visitor access. There is also potential, in Kildare Town, to utilise the Courthouse for an arts and crafts hub or similar purpose.

The OPW will undertake a significant upgrade of visitor services and infrastructure at Castletown House in 2022. This will provide opportunities for new events and activities.

Donadea Forest Park is a very popular destination, particularly for families, a key target market. The forest park was awarded €345,000 in September 2021 by the Department of Rural and Community Development for a significant upgrade to the entrance and parking and area and provision of toilets. There is a further opportunity to enhance the visitor offer on-site including development of a visitor centre. Opportunities to support and/or partner with Coillte in this regard will be explored.

A prioritised tourism experience investment plan will be developed by Kildare County Council to guide decision-making by key stakeholders.

## Strategic Priority 4. Reinforcing Destination Connectivity & Accessibility

A reimagining of the way in which visitors can access County Kildare will focus on new transport links, signage, universal design and a wider range of visitor accommodation.

### 13 - Support new transport infrastructure to enhance access

There are several opportunities to enhance visitor access to County Kildare which can be considered as part of this strategy. These include:

- » Collaboration with Iarnród Éireann to assess the feasibility of re-opening the Curragh rail station within the lifetime of the strategy. This would enable more sustainable public transport access to the heart of the Curragh, helping to realise the potential of the Curragh as a visitor amenity, and potentially via Pollardstown Fen to the Grand Canal Greenway.
- » Attraction of a private sector bike hire company (Blepper bike or similar) to provide bikes in key towns along Barrow Blueway and Royal Canal Greenway.
- » Development of integrated recreation links with neighbouring counties as part of Greenway and Blueway network e.g., accommodation providers participating in a baggage transfer initiative (an example of this in practice is in France where Accueil Vélo accommodation providers within 5km of a route either provide luggage transfer services or are able to arrange these via local partners).
- » Development of new off-road cycle routes connecting the Royal and Grand Canal Greenways and each Greenway/Blueway to towns and attractions along the routes, facilitating tourism and benefiting local communities. The opportunity provided by former Bord na Mona rail lines could be considered for the development of such linkages.

### 14 - Commission and implement new signage strategy

A new signage strategy will consider all aspects of orientation, directional and interpretative signage in a cohesive approach. For example, tourist orientation signage in Kildare town, Newbridge and Kilcullen. Investment in interpretative signage for the Royal and Grand Canals, the Barrow Way, and the Curragh Plains will enable visitors to better understand the fascinating history, culture and flora and fauna of these places. The use of smart signage in key tourist towns will contribute to objectives with regards to visitor monitoring to inform decision-making (see action 27). Ensuring Kildare is a legible destination where visitors can easily find their way around and discover new things to see and do that they may wish to return for, is a way of encouraging increased dwell time. In turn if visitors stay for longer, they will, hopefully spend more and have a better experience in the county.

### 15 - Encourage the adoption of principles of universal design

Adoption of principles of universal design (i.e. making tourism attractions, accommodation and services accessible for all) will enable a wider cohort of people to enjoy their experience of tourism in Kildare. This includes the young, the old, and those with diverse abilities. New and existing tourism businesses will be encouraged to adopt principles of universal design and age friendly design in the development and operation of their businesses.

## 16 - Undertake accommodation study

Kildare is renowned for high end hotels and has a strong hotel offer in comparison to other counties. The range of accommodation offer in terms of mid-range accommodation, self-catering, and alternative accommodation such as glamping, camping, and campervan accommodation is less understood. An accommodation study can focus on analysis of gaps, constraints, and opportunities for expanding the provision of and quality of visitor accommodation, for example the provision of campervan sites near towns and waterway hubs. This study could also consider supportive policy for county and local development plans, opportunities for capital investment such as campervan sites, and incentivisation supports to encourage upgrades of accommodation, for example in relation to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria.

## *Strategic Priority 5. Building Destination Visibility*

*Key market segments among domestic and international visitor will be targeted to raise awareness of Kildare as a rural escape with exceptional experiences through a range of digital and print media, events, packaged offers, and itineraries.*

## 17 - Commission new high-quality marketing collateral

The development of a high-quality website and brand for Into Kildare in 2021 provides a foundation for the development of further marketing collateral. A new digital brochure will enable tourism stakeholders to better communicate the Kildare offer to domestic and international visitors. A print brochure will enable promotion of County Kildare offer in visitor accommodation and key hubs in the county. To increase visitor awareness of the Kildare offer a quality tourism map of County Kildare, including key hubs, Greenways and Blueways, key attractions etc in both print and digital format will be commissioned and distributed. The commissioning of a high-quality short video with the use of drone footage of significant Kildare visitor attractions, towns, landscapes, and activities can be used to promote County Kildare offer by tourism stakeholders as embedded video and for use in tourism shows for B2B and B2C. A new Kildare Tourism app will provide detail on content from the website and enable visitors to tailor their own itineraries, encouraging them to spend longer in the rural parts of the county.

## 18 - Continue to develop 'Distinctively Kildare' Food Strategy

New income generation opportunities for artisan food and hospitality businesses will be created through the expansion of the Taste of Kildare event, and the development of an experiential Distinctively Kildare Food and Craft Trail linking year-round food experiences across county and showcasing artisan produce. This is supported by both the Kildare Economic Strategy (6.4) and the Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan. The strategic approach that will be taken includes an audit of current food experiences to identify year-round saleable food experiences with growth potential, continuing to work with Kildare accommodation providers and restaurants to put local food on menus and celebrate local produce through highlighting the authentic local stories, and supporting the development of new food and drink experiences. The strategic approach will also examine the inclusion of the thoroughbred theme with existing food activities, such as Taste of Kildare. The focus on local food is aligned with the overall objectives for a more sustainable tourism development.

## 19 - Work collaboratively to bring exceptional conferences and events to Kildare

County Kildare currently has a range of exceptional and world-famous events which bring many people to the county, generating significant local economic benefit. These include Punchestown Festival and the Dubai Duty Free Irish Derby, Shackleton Autumn School, and Féile Bríde (Festival of Brigid). Enhancing the impact of existing horse-racing festivals is a focus for the Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan and will be supported. Events can now be added to the Into Kildare online calendar to enable coordination and promotion. New event opportunities include the 1500th anniversary of St. Brigid's death in 2024, the opportunity for which requires a multi-agency collaborative approach to be taken to development to maximise impact. This is a significant opportunity for the County to showcase the wider offer in conjunction with the anniversary events and to use the 1500th anniversary to build awareness of tourism in Kildare and the County's association with St Brigid. Kildare Chamber have secured a 3-year agreement, with a 2-year extension option, to host The High School Football Showcase with competing American teams playing and staying in Kildare and hosted at Maynooth University. There is a clear opportunity to develop activity packages for students and their families to coincide with the events. With Carton House keen to secure the European Open within the lifetime of the strategy and the K-Clubs history of hosting the 2006 Ryder Cup, the 2013 Irish Open and the 2016 Women's World Amateur Team Championships, any proposal to bring a golfing event of scale to the county would be supported

There is considerable potential to develop revenue from MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events) tourism to Kildare, with several hotels and the three racecourses able to cater for significant events. Into Kildare have established a partnership with Dublin Convention Bureau to coordinate the attraction of such events. It is recommended that this partnership is continued.

## 20 - Continue to engage with Fáilte Ireland on Ireland's Ancient East

National investment in the promotion and development of Ireland's Ancient East in domestic and overseas markets represents an unmistakable opportunity for County Kildare. Into Kildare will work with Fáilte Ireland in ensuring Kildare experiences are captured in relevant policy documents and promotional plans. This include ensuring content and itineraries are dialled up on the Ireland's Ancient East website.

## 21 - Support development of packaged/bundled offers and itineraries

The linking of bundled food and drink offers that involve food, drink, accommodation, and activity product throughout the county is a key opportunity. Tourism providers will be supported to build on existing and to develop new packages, with these packages promoted through the Into Kildare website and targeted to key markets e.g. UK visitors to Punchestown Festival, employees of Intel, guests in key hotels etc. Itineraries that showcase the Kildare offer have been developed, with a range available on the Into Kildare website. These can be further developed with an additional option for visitors to tailor make their own itineraries. With the development of the Greenways and Blueway there will be increasing opportunity to promote on water activities, including for example a 'Come and Try It' week. The local domestic market i.e., those living and working in County Kildare presents a key opportunity. A local Discover Kildare campaign could target this audience and encourage residents to be tourists in their own county.

## 22 - Ensure key Kildare County Council projects are supported through targeted marketing campaigns

The new Shackleton Experience visitor attraction at the Athy Heritage Centre has the potential to become one of the world's great polar museums. The attraction is strongly supported by Kildare County Council, with significant capital funding allocated and launch targeted for 2022. A flagship attraction for south County Kildare and the Athy tourism cluster, it is essential that a coordinated and targeted marketing and promotional campaign is undertaken both for B2B and B2C to ensure that visitor projections can be met and return on investment realised. Additional opportunities for team building and for linkage to the nearby Barrow Blueway will be investigated. Similarly, the investment by Kildare County Council and the State in the development of the Royal and Grand Canal Greenways and the Barrow Blueway can further be supported by targeted and coordinated marketing linked to key development dates.

## 23 - Attend key overseas tourism events

To continue to raise the visibility of County Kildare amongst consumers and to engage with existing and potential tour operators it is essential that Into Kildare represent the county at national and international consumer fairs including World Travel Market in London, ITB in Berlin and Meitheal. Given the importance of the domestic market to the county it will also be important that Into Kildare continue to attend domestic consumer shows annually e.g. The National Ploughing Championship, The Holiday World Show.

## 24 - Continue to strengthen existing twinning and diaspora relationships

Twinning of a county and its towns offers opportunities to gain economic benefits from reciprocal tourism promotion and events as well as cultural exchange and sharing of best practice. County Kildare is twinned with Deauville, (France) and Lexington, Kentucky, (U.S.A;) while Newbridge is twinned with Bad Lippspringe, (Germany,) Ocala, Florida, and Argentré-du-Plessis, (France;) Kildare town is twinned with Corps Nuds, (France;) Leixlip with Bressiure, (France;) Athy with Grandvilliers, (France;) Naas with St David's, (Wales,) Dillingen, (Germany,) Casalattico, (Italy,) Allaire, (France,) and Omaha, (USA;) and Maynooth with Canet-en-Roussillon, (France). Each of these relationships can be further developed to increase awareness of the Kildare tourism offer and to encourage increased numbers of overseas visitors.

## Strategic Priority 6. Measuring Strategy Impact

*A smart destination approach will drive collation and analysis of a range of tourism data to inform decision-making and to benefit Kildare communities*

### 25 - Identify data led KPIs and source destination data

#### **Identify metrics of success**

A relevant measurement framework, establishing key performance indicators (KPIs), is essential to monitor the effectiveness of the tourism performance of County Kildare. While national agencies including Fáilte Ireland and the Central Statistics Office gather data on tourism volume and behaviour, this information is generally not available at a sub-regional level and is often not sufficiently up to date to respond to ongoing market changes. The integration of monitoring and measurement as a key part of any action plan is good practice as it helps to refine future activities to either capitalise on positive outcomes or to prevent unnecessary waste of public or private funds or time.

The measurement mechanisms recommended as part of this strategy will include both quantitative and qualitative elements to capture the success of the county in meeting the expectations of visitors and identifying how many visitors arrive, how long they stay and how much of a contribution to the economy that they make. The aim is to ensure that those involved in tourism management in Into Kildare and Kildare County Council have the data and understanding they need to guide plans and investment decisions.

In identifying metrics of success, with a focus on regenerative tourism, a key consideration is that revenue growth over volume growth should be prioritised, and that metrics that benefit communities including growth of revenue from tourism bed-nights. Further metrics can include:

- » Number of businesses with online booking capability;
- » Revenue growth in key visitor attractions providing data to Fáilte Ireland;
- » Number of new experiences developed over 3-year implementation period;
- » Relative performance in the Ireland's Ancient East destination area and nationally.

#### **Implement recommendations of asset and activity assessment study**

Understanding the impact of tourism is important for any destination and the sourcing of data is key to this. Into Kildare have commissioned an asset and activity assessment study to inform understanding in this regard. A survey undertaken on behalf of Into Kildare to inform this study indicates that most tourism businesses who responded to the survey would be willing to supply data on a confidential basis to Into Kildare. Recommendations of this study will be important in defining the remit for data collection and analysis.



## 26 - Position Kildare as a smart destination

Developing systems to collate and analyse data to understand visitor behaviour and visitor patterns can help position Kildare as a 'smart tourism' destination. This data can be gathered using a range of existing and potential infrastructure including smart sensors (typically installed in bins, streetlights etc) and share data for analysing visitor footfall in town centres. Anonymised telecom and bank data can be used to monitor visitor flow, patterns and trends to inform decision-making. Collaboration is essential, between the owners of data and infrastructure installed to collect data, and between tourism agencies such as Into Kildare and tourism stakeholders to enable sharing data. Destinations such as Barcelona produce tourism dashboards for use by the industry to inform decision making metrics that benefit communities including growth of revenue from tourism bednights, which could be considered for Kildare.

## 27 - Undertake mid-point evaluation of strategy

The impact of the Tourism Strategy should be monitored and evaluated. This can be done by examining it in terms of impact making tourism a more sustainable and regenerative form of development e.g. performance in terms of the impact on Visitor, Industry, Community and Environment. Areas of importance will comprise the following areas:

- » Economic – contribution to local economic performance, including spend in the county, increased employment in relevant sectors, such as accommodation and food, increases in new business formation etc. based on KPIs;
- » Social – increased awareness of value of local environment and engagement by local communities in tourism, based on community engagement;
- » Awareness – are visitors increasingly aware of the County Kildare tourism offer, based on sentiment surveys, and social media/website traffic;
- » Environmental – does tourism development lead to improved or degraded environmental performance, such as quality of protected areas or increased traffic;
- » Organisational – does the strategy enhance organisational goals, improve partnerships and networks within the county, the East and Midland's Region and Ireland's Ancient East destination.

A mid-point evaluation undertaken in 2024 will determine whether implementation of the strategy is achieving stated objectives.

## 4.2 Action Plan

	Action	Lead	Support	Timeline	KPI
1	<p><b>Seek to enhance tourism project coordination</b></p> <p>Establish project working groups ensure effective collaboration between key agencies and to establish strategic direction for destination management.</p>	Kildare County Council, Into Kildare, LEO, Kildare Chamber	Waterways Ireland, OPW, Coillte	Ongoing	Project working groups established and working effectively
2	<p><b>Progressively increase Into Kildare funding</b></p> <p>To facilitate the undertaking of the actions outlined within this strategy, a significant increase in the overall budget is required. A defined multi-annual marketing, promotional and development plan should be developed linked to KPIs to provide a rationale for increased funding.</p>	Kildare County Council		Ongoing	Into Kildare funding increased by 25% p.a.
3	<p><b>Explore opportunities to work with tourism partners</b></p> <p>Kildare is surrounded by six counties including Dublin, Wicklow, Carlow, Laois, Offaly, Meath, and seven counting Fingal and South Dublin separately. This provides an opportunity to collaborate to develop complementary packages and itineraries.</p> <p>Regular (bi-annual) meetings of tourism officers in each county could help facilitate this initiative.</p>	Into Kildare	Tourism Officers in neighbouring counties	Ongoing	Packages developed with each neighbouring county
4	<p><b>Review benefits of retaining membership model for Into Kildare</b></p> <p>A review of the current model should compare other external models of revenue generation, for example Mid Wales Tourism, and conclude whether a membership fee-based model is the most effective means of operation.</p>	Into Kildare		2022-2023	Membership model reviewed
5	<p><b>Continue to build Into Kildare team</b></p> <p>To enable Into Kildare to deliver on the vision and the marketing, promotion and support programmes outlined in this plan, it is essential the team continues to grow.</p>	Into Kildare, Kildare County Council		2022	Additional resourcing secured for building Into Kildare team and new team members recruited

	Action	Lead	Support	Timeline	KPI
6	<p><b>Implement focussed advisory programme</b></p> <p>Building on the digitisation process by offering information on digitisation supports, supports for low carbon transition and sustainability programmes to enable a more resilient and consistent offer.</p>	Kildare County Council	Into Kildare, LEO, Kildare Chamber, Fáilte Ireland	Ongoing	Focussed advisory programme developed and delivered
7	<p><b>Maximise collaboration opportunities within Kildare</b></p> <p>Successful destinations focus on ensuring collaboration between tourism stakeholders and providing opportunities for networking. Initiatives will include:</p> <p>Kildare tourism industry breakfasts rotating between venues,</p> <p>Kildare Destination Training with a roadshow format,</p> <p>Continuing to engage with community groups to integrate their views into decision-making, and</p> <p>Support for an 'Adopt a Kilometre' initiative on Greenways and Blueways to provide a route for engagement of local communities in the protection of local heritage and environment.</p>	Into Kildare Kildare County Council	Carton House, a Fairmont Managed Hotel, K-Club, Killashee Hotel, Clanard Court, The Glenroyal Hotel, The Keadeen Hotel	Ongoing	<p>Kildare tourism industry breakfasts introduced</p> <p>Provision of destination training</p> <p>Community engagement continued</p> <p>Adopt a Kilometre initiative promoted on Greenways and Blueways</p>
8	<p><b>Maximise collaboration opportunities within Kildare</b></p> <p>To ensure that the level of service offered is elevated to the highest possible level and to ensure that tourism providers can access appropriate training for the future of tourism a training needs analysis will be undertaken for tourism providers in Kildare. Kildare tourism businesses will be encouraged to adopt principles of Leave No Trace, with detail also included on Greenway and Blueway signage</p>	LEO, Into Kildare	Kildare Chamber Fáilte Ireland	2022	<p>Training needs survey undertaken, and targeted training programme delivered</p> <p>Leave No Trace programme promoted</p>
9	<p><b>Prepare Kildare Sustainable Tourism Policy and introduce Kildare Green Oak Leaf Initiative</b></p> <p>Into Kildare will seek a repositioning of Kildare as one of Ireland's most recognised sustainable tourism destinations. A new succinct Kildare Sustainable Tourism Policy document will identify specific actions to create a more sustainable tourism industry in Kildare that are aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.</p> <p>A new Kildare Green Oak Leaf symbol will be used to denote businesses with sustainable tourism practices on the Into Kildare website and associated promotional material such as a digital brochure for the County.</p>	Into Kildare	Fáilte Ireland Tourism accreditation bodies e.g. Sustainable Travel Ireland	2022	<p>Kildare Sustainable Tourism Policy prepared</p> <p>Kildare Green Oak Leaf initiative implemented, and key businesses awarded</p>

	Action	Lead	Support	Timeline	KPI
10	<p><b>Strengthen Kildare’s tourism offering of Blueways, Peatways, and Greenways</b></p> <p>The completion of the Greenway and Blueway network will provide a direct low impact recreational linkage from Dublin City Centre to north and central Kildare. It will be critical to enable access to each through safe cycle routes between towns and villages along and near each Greenway/Blueway as well as infrastructure including orientation, interpretative and directional signage.</p> <p>Opportunities for collaboration with key stakeholders, to develop linkages such as Peatways across bogs and low impact water-based activities in Kildare and with neighbouring counties will be investigated.</p> <p>Collaborate on the activation and animation activities around Blueway and Greenway development to maximise the tourism and economic benefits.</p> <p>Seek opportunities to explore the on water offering on the Royal and Grand canals offering hubs of activity along the Greenways or floating experiences.</p> <p>Explore connectivity with new and existing trails to support active travel networks.</p> <p>Work collaboratively and adequately resource the ongoing maintenance and future development of Greenway/Blueway products, to ensure they continue as attractive visitor experiences.</p>	Kildare County Council, Waterways Ireland	Into Kildare NTA	2022-2026	<p>Completion of Royal Canal Greenway, Grand Canal Greenway, Barrow Blueway in County Kildare</p> <p>Greenway and Blueway network collaboratively enhanced and animated to provide high quality visitor experience and local economic benefit</p>
11	<p><b>Support the implementation of the Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan</b></p> <p>The Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan is an exceptional opportunity for County Kildare (and County Tipperary). Some key initiatives (with others detailed earlier) include:</p> <p>Develop the International Thoroughbred Trail (ITT) creating a world class thoroughbred trail experience.</p> <p>Review the feasibility of creating a Thoroughbred Trainers Trail to map the density of trainers’ yards linked to the Stallion Day with the potential to link to the ITT to provide scheduled access to behind-the-scenes trainers experiences.</p> <p>Examine the capacity of existing events to incorporate the thoroughbred theme for consistency in the destination narrative e.g. Taste of Kildare.</p>	TCDEDP Steering Group, Fáilte Ireland, Kildare County Council, LEO	Equine industry stakeholders	Ongoing	Thoroughbred Country Destination Experience Development Plan implemented

	Action	Lead	Support	Timeline	KPI
12	<p><b>Support existing and new opportunities for exceptional visitor attractions</b></p> <p>The development of compelling visitor attractions can be driven by the private sector, public sector, and community groups. In addition to the development of the Shackleton Experience at Athy, there are two new visitor attractions currently being advanced; the Church of Oak Distillery (private sector led) Umeras Peatlands Park (community led) both located near Monasterevin. Both projects will be supported principle.</p> <p>A prioritised tourism experience investment plan will be developed to guide decision-making by key stakeholders.</p>	Kildare County Council	LEO, Tourism stakeholders, Fáilte Ireland, Church of Oak Distillery, Coillte, Into Kildare	Ongoing	3 Kildare visitor attractions of scale in the top 50 paying attraction list for Ireland for 2025 (requires at least two more to reach 88,000+ by 2025), with 5 new fee-paying visitor attractions in total.

	Action	Lead	Support	Timeline	KPI
13	<p><b>Support new transport infrastructure to enhance access</b></p> <p>There are several opportunities to enhance visitor access to County Kildare which can be considered. These include:</p> <p>Collaboration with Iarnrod Eireann to assess the feasibility of re-opening the Curragh rail station</p> <p>Attraction of a private sector bike hire company</p> <p>Development of integrated recreation links with neighbouring counties</p> <p>Development of new off-road cycle routes</p>	Kildare County Council	Fáilte Ireland (liaising with NTA on plans)  Iarnrod Eireann  Sports Partnership	Ongoing	New transport infrastructure opportunities assessed and implemented where possible  Curragh rail feasibility study/discussion completed
14	<p><b>Commission and implement new signage strategy</b></p> <p>Ensuring Kildare is a legible destination where visitors can easily find their way around and discover new things to see and do that they may wish to return for, is a way of encouraging increased dwell time. A new signage strategy will consider all aspects of orientation, directional and interpretative signage in a cohesive approach.</p> <p>The use of smart signage in key tourist towns will contribute to objectives with regards to visitor monitoring to inform decision-making.</p>	Kildare County Council	Into Kildare, NTA, Waterways Ireland	2022	Signage strategy commissioned and implemented

	Action	Lead	Support	Timeline	KPI
15	<p><b>Encourage the adoption of principles of universal design</b></p> <p>Adoption of principles of universal design will enable a wider cohort of people to enjoy their experience of tourism in Kildare. This includes the young, the old, and those with diverse abilities. New and existing tourism businesses will be encouraged to adopt principles of universal design and age friendly design in the development and operation of their businesses.</p>	Access Kildare	Kildare County Council, Into Kildare	Ongoing	Kildare tourism businesses encouraged to adopt principles of universal design
16	<p><b>Undertake accommodation study</b></p> <p>An accommodation study can focus on analysis of gaps, constraints, and opportunities for expanding the provision of and quality of visitor accommodation, for example the provision of campervan sites near towns and waterway hubs.</p>	Fáilte Ireland	Into Kildare	2022-2023	Accommodation study completed
19	<p><b>Work collaboratively to bring exceptional events to Kildare</b></p> <p>County Kildare currently has a range of exceptional and world-famous events which bring many people to the county, generating significant local economic benefit.</p> <p>There is a significant opportunity in continuing to collaborate to increase revenue from MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) tourism to Kildare through continued partnership with Dublin Convention Bureau.</p>	Kildare County Council, Into Kildare	Dublin Convention Bureau Tourism trade	2022-2026	<p>St Brigid 1500th festival programme successfully undertaken</p> <p>Develop annual plan for St Brigid's day events</p> <p>Increase in numbers of MICE events and related bed nights in Kildare annually</p>
20	<p><b>Continue to engage with Fáilte Ireland on Ireland's Ancient East</b></p> <p>Into Kildare will work with Fáilte Ireland in ensuring Kildare experiences are captured in relevant policy documents and promotional plans. This include ensuring content and itineraries are on the Ireland's Ancient East website.</p>	Into Kildare, Kildare County Council	Fáilte Ireland	Ongoing	IAE opportunity maximised

	Action	Lead	Support	Timeline	KPI
21	<p><b>Support development of packaged/ bundled offers and itineraries</b></p> <p>The linking of bundled food and drink offers that involve food, drink, accommodation, and activity product throughout the county is a key opportunity. Tourism providers will be supported to develop new packages, with these packages promoted through the Into Kildare website and targeted to key markets.</p> <p>A local Discover Kildare campaign could target this audience and encourage residents to be tourists in their own county.</p>	Into Kildare, Neighbouring tourism officers		Ongoing	Targeted packaged/ bundled offers developed
22	<p><b>Ensure key Kildare County Council projects are supported through targeted marketing campaigns</b></p> <p>This includes the new Shackleton Experience visitor attraction, Barrow Blueway, Thoroughbred Country DEDP, Royal and Grand Canal Greenways.</p>	Into Kildare, Fáilte Ireland	Kildare County Council, Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland	Ongoing (2022 focus for Shackleton Experience and Barrow Blueway)	Targeted marketing and promotional campaigns developed for key county projects with budget from KCC
23	<p><b>Attend key overseas tourism events</b></p> <p>Into Kildare will represent the County at key national and international consumer fairs and shows to raise the profile of the County amongst consumers and tour operators.</p>	Into Kildare	Tourism Ireland Tourism trade	Ongoing	3 events attended annually
24	<p><b>Strengthen existing twinning and diaspora relationships</b></p> <p>Twinning of a county and towns offers opportunities to gain economic benefits from reciprocal tourism promotion and events as well as cultural exchange and sharing of best practice.</p>	Kildare County Council, LEO, Into Kildare	Fáilte Ireland	Ongoing	Twinning relationships strengthened between Kildare and twinning partners

	Action	Lead	Support	Timeline	KPI
25	<p><b>Identify data led KPIs and source destination data</b></p> <p>A relevant measurement framework, establishing key performance indicators (KPIs), is essential to monitor the effectiveness of the tourism performance of County Kildare.</p> <p>In identifying metrics of success, with a focus on regenerative tourism, a key consideration is that revenue growth over volume growth should be prioritised, and that metrics that benefit communities including growth of revenue from tourism bed-nights.</p>	Kildare County Council	Into Kildare	2022-2025	Asset and activity assessment study recommendations implemented
26	<p><b>Position Kildare as a smart destination</b></p> <p>Positioning Kildare as a smart tourism destination means using data to understand visitor behaviour and visitor patterns. This data can be gathered using a range of existing and potential infrastructure including smart sensors (typically installed in bins, streetlights etc) and share data for analysing visitor footfall in town centres.</p>	Kildare County Council	Into Kildare	2022-2025	Kildare tourism data available online
27	<p><b>Undertake mid-point evaluation of strategy</b></p> <p>The impact of the Tourism Strategy should be monitored and evaluated. A mid-point evaluation undertaken in 2024 will determine whether implementation of the strategy is achieving stated objectives.</p>	Into Kildare	Service provider	2024	Mid-point evaluation of strategy completed by external review, and actions updated





Positioning Kildare as a smart tourism destination means using data to understand visitor behaviour and visitor patterns



Pollardstown Fen,  
Newbridge



# Appendix: Consultees

**KPMG Future Analytics would like to thank those who participated in the online surveys and in strategic conversations to inform this plan.**

**This includes:**

- » Athy Heritage Centre and Museum
- » Association of Visitor Experiences and Attractions (AVEA)
- » Board of Into Kildare
- » Carton House, a Fairmont Managed Hotel
- » Clanard Court Hotel
- » Coach Tourism & Transport Council (CTTC)
- » Coillte
- » County Kildare LEADER Partnership
- » The Curragh Racecourse
- » Derby Legends Museum
- » Eoghan Corry
- » Fáilte Ireland
- » Fallons Restaurant
- » Firecastle
- » The Glenroyal Hotel
- » Into Kildare/Kildare Fáilte
- » Irelands Association for Adventure Tourism (IAAT)
- » Irish Caravan and Camping Council (ICCC)
- » Irish Hotels Federation (IHF)
- » Irish National Stud and Japanese Gardens
- » Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC)
- » The K Club

- » Keadeen Hotel
- » Kilkea Castle
- » Kildare County Council (Executive, Planning, Heritage)
- » Kildare Chamber of Commerce
- » Kildare LEO
- » Killashee Hotel
- » Kildare Sports Partnership
- » Kildare Town Heritage Centre & Tourist Office
- » Kildare Village
- » Lullymore Heritage Park
- » Maynooth Campus
- » Mondello Park
- » Naas Racecourse
- » Newbridge Silverware Visitor Centre & Museum of Style Icons
- » Newbridge Tidy Towns
- » Office of Public Works (OPW)
- » Punchestown Racecourse
- » Solas Bhríde
- » Silken Thomas
- » Tourism Ireland
- » Waterways Ireland
- » Umeras Community Development/TDI



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