

**CHAPTER 11**  
**TOURISM AND**  
**RECREATION**

## Chapter 11 Tourism and Recreation

**Aim:** To promote, enhance and maximise the tourism potential of County Carlow, by leveraging regional experience tourism brands and initiatives and by capitalising on and safeguarding the County's natural and built heritage assets, to support the provision of high quality and accessible recreational facilities, amenities and open spaces for residents and visitors to the County, in recognition of the contribution of all forms of recreation to quality of life, personal health and wellbeing.

### 11.0 Introduction

Tourism has become increasingly important as an industry and economic driver for Ireland. Arising from substantial investment in visitor attractions and facilities together with significant promotional campaigns the country has increased in popularity. County Carlow has much to offer given its location proximate to Dublin its rural landscapes, mountains, rivers, tranquil countryside all supported by rural towns and villages. The County has considerable untapped tourism potential which can be supported with policies for the sustainable development of the industry and economic activity generation.

### 11.1 Policy Context

The key policy context for tourism and recreation that informed this chapter includes (inter alia):

- Tourism Recovery Plan 2020-2023, Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts,

Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, and Tourism Recovery Taskforce (TRT)

- People, Place and Policy, Growing Tourism to 2025, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
- Tourism Action Plan 2019-2021, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTS)
- Tourism Development and Innovation – A Strategy for Investment 2016-2022, Fáilte Ireland
- Platforms for Growth – A Programme for Tourism Investment Guidelines, 2019-2022, Fáilte Ireland
- Development Guidelines for Tourism Destination Towns, Fáilte Ireland
- Realising our Rural Potential, Action Plan for Rural Development, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
- Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, Department of Tourism, Transport and Sport
- County Carlow Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2025
- National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland – Get Ireland Active
- County Carlow Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2020-2023
- inCarlow Food and Drink Strategy – The Taste of County Carlow 2020-2025
- Healthy Carlow County Plan 2018 – 2021
- County Carlow Local Arts Development Plan 2016-2021.

### 11.2 Tourism – A National and Regional Context

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTS) published the government policy statement “Growing Tourism to 2025” in

2019. This is an overarching policy document with broad objectives and headline goals in relation to achieving revenue of €5 billion per year from overseas visitors, growing employment to 250,000, and in increasing overseas visitor numbers to 10 million. Particular emphasis is placed on the important contribution that Local Authorities and communities have in the development and promotion of tourism. Specifically, and from a land-use planning perspective, the document envisages that Local Authorities will:

- Continue to act as primary developer of a range of public tourism infrastructure, including outdoor tourism infrastructure and urban and rural heritage.
- Support community effort in destination development, including assisting communities to align their efforts with the tourism agencies brand architecture and consumer segmentation model.
- Provide a competitive environment for tourism enterprises through continued focus on high quality maintenance of public infrastructure frequently used by visitors.

The current DTTS Tourism Action Plan 2019-2021 sets out priority actions that need to be progressed up to 2021 to maintain sustainable growth in overseas tourism revenue and employment. There is an emphasis in the Plan on extending the regional and seasonal benefits of overseas tourism, on ensuring a central role for Local Authorities, and on helping to build the attractiveness of some of the country's less well-known attractions and regions.

Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Development and Innovation – A Strategy for Investment 2016-2022, sets out a framework and mechanisms for the delivery of investment to towns,

villages, communities, and businesses across the country. It is outcome based and aimed at identifying the types of projects for investment. To stimulate innovation and improve international competitiveness, Fáilte Ireland also launched a significant Tourism Development and Innovation Fund. Until recently the Government remained positive for growth in tourism envisaged up to 2025, having significantly increased revenue between 2013-2018. It can however, be expected that the extent of growth in the immediate future will be influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit. It is likely that in the early stages of the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic that the domestic tourism industry will experience earlier opportunities for revival in contrast to international tourism, which may experience a longer-term slump. Due to its proximity to Dublin, County Carlow has an opportunity to benefit from the domestic market in the short term.

### 11.3 Fáilte Ireland Strategies

#### 11.3.1 Ireland's Ancient East

To provide a coherent tourist centric offering and to promote Ireland nationally and internationally Fáilte Ireland developed regional tourist experience brands (See Figure 11.1).

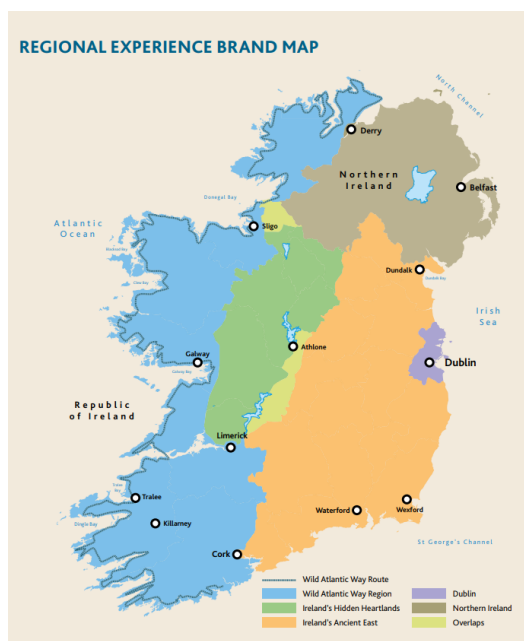


Figure 11.1 - Source: Platforms for Growth – A Programme for Tourism Investment 2019-2022, Fáilte Ireland

County Carlow is located within the ‘Ireland’s Ancient East’ (IAE) brand. The vision for the IAE brand is contained in Fáilte Ireland’s 2013 ‘Path to Growth’ document; *“IAE will be an immersive experience of living culture, breathtaking landscape and hidden history made remarkable by vibrant communities, local lore and the authentic character of the real Ireland”*. IAE encompasses the rich heritage and cultural assets that Ireland has to offer with a focus on the “Culturally Curious and the Great Escapers”. Fáilte Ireland recognises that County Carlow is home to a significant and important wealth of cultural heritage and attractions e.g. Huntington Castle and Gardens, Brownshill Dolmen, Carlow Museum and Altamont Gardens, all of which form an important part of Ireland’s Ancient East.



### 11.3.2 Destination Experience Development Plan

In Carlow, Fáilte Ireland has commenced work on the ‘Tales of Two Worlds’ Visitor Experience Development Plan. This Plan brings together Ireland’s historic houses and gardens, and the period in Ireland’s history of famine and emigration. Fáilte Ireland’s Great Houses and Gardens Experience Development Programme looks at the house and garden experiences available across the County, including ways to develop guiding, events, cost, revenue management and sales distribution. Going forward these Visitor Experience Plans are going to form Destination Experience Development Plan (DEDPs).

#### Fáilte Ireland Strategies – Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- FI O1: Support and facilitate Fáilte Ireland and tourism stakeholder initiatives for the development of tourism experiences in the County, which deliver on the Ireland’s Ancient East brand and the preparation and implementation of Regional Tourism Strategies.
- FI O2: Engage and collaborate with Fáilte Ireland and other tourism stakeholders *in support of their preparation of Destination Experience Development Plans (DEDPs)* and other tourism masterplans within the County and in adjoining counties as appropriate.

## 11.4 Tourism in County Carlow

The Council has a direct and indirect role in delivering tourism related developments. The Council's enhanced role in economic development will see a focus on tourism product development, and co-ordination and facilitation of the tourism industry within the County. As part of this role the Council works with a variety of key tourism co-operatives and development organisations to develop key economic activities in the County. This includes Carlow Tourism which is part funded by the Council under its Economic Development Function.

As a primarily rural area, Carlow has significant natural resources, rural environment, local cultural and social landscape on which the attraction of the County is built. Carlow's strategic location on the M9 affords easy access to Dublin, the midlands, Waterford and the entire South East region.

Tourism has the potential to contribute to the vitality and sustainability of a wide variety of local enterprises, particularly in rural areas contributing to the diversification of the rural economy with increased potential for the regeneration of towns and villages. There is an emphasis in County Carlow on sustainable tourism development, ensuring that negative impacts from tourism are minimised including impacts on the County's heritage assets, infrastructural capacity (water, wastewater, waste and transport) 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 placing an emphasis on revenue growth from visitors over volume growth. Four maps highlighting the key natural, built and cultural heritage assets for tourism in the County, in addition

to key transport and access options, are included in

<https://carlowtourism.com/site-assets/uploads/2020/11/County-Carlow-Tourism-Strategy-and-Action-Plan-2020-2025-long-version.pdf>

### 11.4.1 Carlow's Tourism Economy

Fáilte Ireland have estimated that County Carlow generated €45 million for the local economy in 2017. The County however, is very dependent on the domestic and Northern Ireland market. There is a requirement for the County to focus on attracting increasing numbers of overseas visitors, which provides greater economic return.

The County has the significant benefit of having two 3<sup>rd</sup> Level educational institutions, Carlow College, St Patricks, and I.T. Carlow. This presents potential opportunities for the development of educational tourism in the County by attracting international students to locate here. In this regard, a study by the Irish Universities Association in 2019 indicated that international students contribute €386m to the Irish Economy annually.

### 11.4.2 County Carlow Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2025

County Carlow Tourism Strategy and Action Plan was commissioned by Carlow Tourism, and has been prepared in the context of Ireland's Ancient East. The purpose of the strategy is to:

- improve the profile of Carlow as a holiday destination;
- maximise the economic outputs for tourism;
- grow tourism related employment; and
- improve the product offering and visitor experience.

Key strategic principles for tourism development identified, include (inter alia):

- The natural and built heritage of the County as a primary tourism asset.
- The requirement to align with Ireland's Ancient East.
- The long-standing need to develop a flagship attraction for the County.
- The opportunity for experience and product development.
- The imbalance in the County arising from location of tourism product in the north of the County and areas of attractive scenery which are generally located toward the South of the County.

Product development themes identified in the Plan include:

- Megalithic, Ecclesiastical and Normans (Built Heritage) – A Journey Through Time
- Houses and Gardens - Big Houses and Beautiful Gardens
- Activities and Places (Natural Heritage) – Valleys Views and Vales
- Cultural Heritage – Inspired by Carlow

### Tourism Development – Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

TD P1: Support and collaborate with relevant agencies and bodies such as Carlow Tourism, Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and The Arts Council, and key stakeholders and local communities, , to further understand the needs of visitors in the County and to develop, promote and maximise the tourism potential of the County, and to ensure that tourism facilities are accessible to people with mobility issues, learning disabilities, people with visual or

hearing impairments, young and elderly people.

TD P2: Promote the development and strengthening of the overall value of Carlow as a tourist destination by favourably considering and facilitating the expansion and/or upgrading of existing tourism related development, facilities, and infrastructure, as well as the development of new such facilities and infrastructure, subject to appropriate siting and design criteria and the protection of the environment.

TD P3: Promote and support the development of educational tourism by attracting international students to the County.

TD P4: To support sustainable travel in the tourism sector by the promotion of public transport use and by facilitating, where appropriate, proposals to improve access for existing tourism sites and facilities and visitor attractions throughout the County.

TD P5: Direct tourism-based development where appropriate, into existing settlements where there is adequate infrastructure to service activity and where it can contribute to the maintenance of essential services and the vibrancy and vitality of these settlements.

TD P6: Consider tourism related developments outside of settlements where there is a clear sustainable need for the specific location, and where the benefits to the local community are balanced with the

potential environmental impact of the development.

TD P7: Facilitate the erection of standardised signage for tourism facilities and tourist attractions as part of national and regional initiatives.

TD P8: Encourage and support investment in digital technology in the tourism sector in the County, with a particular focus on visitor attractions and activities with low digital presence and/or integration.

### Tourism Development - Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

TD O1: Support the implementation of the County Carlow Tourism Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2025, and any updated version of the Strategy and Action Plan.

TD O2 Support the Tourism Sector in the County in terms of the key actions in the inCarlow Business Support and Economic Recovery Action Plan 2020, the Local Enterprise Development Plan (LEDP), and any subsequent revisions of these documents.

### 11.5 Heritage Tourism

The natural and built heritage of Carlow are the foundations that attract visitors to the County. The opportunity lies in ensuring this heritage is protected for current and future generations while facilitating and providing for sustainable tourist experience.

### Heritage Tourism - Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

HT P1: Work with key stakeholders, including Carlow Tourism, Fáilte Ireland, the OPW, the Arts Council, the Heritage Council, and key stakeholders, businesses, and local communities, to support the sustainable development and promotion of heritage tourism in the County.

HT P2: Protect and conserve the natural and built heritage of the County upon which the tourism industry is based, including landscapes, designated sites, habitats and species, water quality, archaeology and historic buildings and structures.

#### 11.5.1 Carlow's Castles

County Carlow is an historic County, with its foundation dating back to the late 12th and early 13th Centuries with the arrival of the Normans. Almost 100 castles are to be found in the County, the vast majority of which are now in ruins. They are significant relics of Carlow's historical past and represent important aspects of the County's heritage tourism product. Some notable examples of castles in the County include:

- Carlow Castle
- Black Castle
- Clonmore Castle
- Ballymoon Castle
- Ballyloughan Castle

#### 11.5.2 Carlow's Historic Houses and Gardens

Until the early decades of the 20th century, as many as sixty gentry houses dominated the architectural landscape of the County. The stories surrounding some of these houses are interesting and recount a rich variety of personal and historic events. Principal houses of interest whose grounds or the houses

themselves are presently open to the public include:

- Altamont House and Gardens
- Duckett's Grove, Walled Gardens and Pleasure Grounds
- Mount Wolseley House Tullow
- Lisnavagh Estate Rathvilly
- Huntington Castle, Clonegal
- Ballykealy Manor, Ballon

Both Duckett's Grove and Altamont House are in public ownership. Carlow County Council took formal ownership of Duckett's Grove in 2005. In recognition of its historic and tourist potential works have been carried out including reviving two old walled gardens and the pleasure grounds area together with stabilising the ruined gothic mansion.

Altamont House and Gardens are owned by the OPW and have been subject to refurbishment work following receipt of capital funding as part of the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (Ireland 2040).

The Council will continue to identify, encourage and support the development of such houses for tourism development.

### 11.5.3 Carlow Garden Trail

Some of the historic houses in the County also contain impressive gardens which form part of *Carlow's Garden Trail*. The garden trail offers visitors the opportunity to discover and enjoy some of the manor houses that once dominated the cultural and agricultural life of the County.



[www.carlowgardentrail.com](http://www.carlowgardentrail.com)

### Carlow's Castles, Historic Houses and Gardens Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

HT P3: Promote Carlow's castles, historic houses and gardens as tourist attractions in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland, the OPW and relevant stakeholders, and to facilitate sustainable proposals to enhance their visitor experience through the provision of improved access, signage, and associated infrastructure, as appropriate and as resources allow.

HT P4: Support appropriate conservation and restoration works to castles, historic houses, and gardens in the County, in order to safeguard the future of these heritage assets and in recognition of their significant role for Carlow tourism.

HT P5: Support the conservation of historic estates and demesnes through the facilitation of appropriate development that contributes to their conservation and economic viability.



#### 11.5.4 Pre-Christian Heritage

While the foundation of the County dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, there is over 6,000 years of earlier settlement evidence to be found. The OPW Archaeological Survey and Record of Monuments and Places for County Carlow (1995) lists some 807 sites, that range from bronze-age settlements, dolmens, ringforts, hillforts and standing stones. A number of these sites are of significant importance to merit both national and international attention. Examples of particular note include:

- Brownhill Dolmen
- Haroldstown Dolmen
- Cloch-a-Phoill
- Rathgall Hillfort

#### Pre-Christian Heritage - Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

HT P6: Promote the archaeological sites of the County as tourist attractions in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland, the OPW and relevant stakeholders, in particular those sites of national and international importance, and to develop proposals to enhance their visitor experience through the provision of improved access, signage, and associated infrastructure, as appropriate and as resources allow.

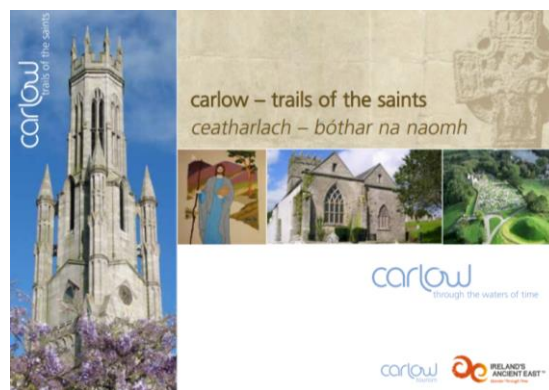
#### 11.5.5 Religious and Ecclesiastical Sites

Carlow is a County with an exceptionally rich, spiritual and ecclesiastical heritage, with a number of sites of national significance. These include the monastic site at St. Mullins, the medieval Cathedral of St. Lazerian Old Leighlin, the eighteenth-century College and nineteenth-century Catholic Cathedral in Carlow, and the Adelaide Memorial Church at

Myshall. Monastic settlements at St. Mullins and Clonmore, and the medieval Cathedral of St. Lazerian Old Leighlin, comprise significant early ecclesiastical sites dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### 11.5.6 Carlow – Trails of the Saints

*Carlow – Trails of the Saints*, features some 51 ecclesiastical attractions. These attractions include sites of national significance as referred to, but also less well-known sites which have an equally important place in the religious and ecclesiastical heritage of the County.



<https://carlowtourism.com/carlow-trail-of-the-saints/>

#### Religious and Ecclesiastical Sites - Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

HT P7: Promote the religious and ecclesiastical sites of the County as tourist attractions in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland and relevant stakeholders, and to develop proposals to enhance their visitor experience through the provision of improved access, signage, and associated infrastructure, as appropriate and as resources allow.

### 11.5.7 Historic Towns and Villages

Riverside towns with medieval bridges, old stone-built estate towns such as those at Nurney and Borris, and hillside villages, all add their own individual character to the County's landscape. Their layout, geographic positioning and interesting architecture, combine to create considerable tourist appeal.

Carlow County Council in co-operation with local communities, businesses and other relevant stakeholders are seeking to improve the physical presentation and appeal of many towns and villages throughout the County, both through the planning process, initiatives such as Pride of Place, and through funding from the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

#### Historic Towns and Villages - Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

HT P8: Develop and enhance the tourism potential of towns and villages by enhancing the public realm and by supporting, as appropriate, schemes to improve their physical presentation and appeal, including those funded as part of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (Ireland 2040) or any funding stream that becomes available during the life of this plan.

HT P9: Facilitate the development of a variety of high-quality tourist attractions, accommodation and services in towns and villages, subject to compliance with good quality design criteria, normal planning and environmental criteria.

HT P10: Develop and maximise the tourism potential of the County by facilitating the appropriate expansion of existing facilities and the provision of new universally accessible and sustainable tourist attractions, facilities, and infrastructure in towns and villages, while ensuring the protection of the environment and subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria.

### 11.5.8 Natural Heritage and Amenities

Throughout the County, there are a wide variety of landscapes, including mountains, beautiful river valleys, navigable waterways, forests and woodlands all of which provide a range of interesting and diverse visitor experiences.

#### Blackstairs Mountains

The Blackstairs Mountains are located along the south and east of the County boundary. They form a mountain chain that runs in a northeast-southwest direction for approximately 22 km with Mount Leinster the highest peak at 796 metres. They represent one of the most important natural attractions in the County as they provide a backdrop for much of the its landscape and constitute the principal touring route in the County.

#### Waterways and Lakes

The main rivers flowing through the County are the River Barrow and the River Slaney and their associated tributaries, which provide both angling and leisure facilities to visitors. The largest catchment area is drained by the River Barrow and its tributaries including the Burren, the Black, the Mountain, the Aughavaud and the Aughananagh. The eastern portion of the County is drained by the River Slaney and its tributaries including

the Derreen, the Douglas, the Clashavey, the Derry and the Clody.

The River Barrow is Ireland's second longest river system running for 192 km from its source in the Slieve Bloom Mountains to the sea. It is navigable for 69 km between Athy and St. Mullins and this stretch is known as the Barrow Navigation. Some of the most attractive visual stretches of this waterway flow through County Carlow. The River Barrow constitutes one of the most significant industrial heritage monuments in the country with bridges, corn-mills, locks and lock-houses and its history alone is an important tourism resource. The Barrow remains a bustling river accommodating many activities including walking, cycling, fishing, boating and canoeing.

Carlow Tourism's publication entitled 'Carlow – Through the Waters of Time', provides a heritage profile of the County that is set against the backdrop of its rivers.

<https://carlowtourism.com/site-assets/uploads/2018/09/Carlow-Through-the-Waters-of-Time.pdf>



All lakes in the County are man-made. There is a shallow lake located at Oak Park Forest Park, which is bounded almost completely by woodlands. Eight small islands bear coniferous and deciduous trees, and the lake is a popular location for bird watchers.

The lake at Altamont House and Gardens was constructed during famine times and forms a focal point for one of the County's top visitor attractions.

### Forests and Woodlands

Coillte is the statutory body responsible for the management of Ireland's public forests. Coillte's "open forest" policy allows visitors to access and enjoy these forest and woodland areas.

The most interesting and diverse forested areas within the County are situated at Bahana, Ballybeg, Ballycinnigan, Clashganny and on the slopes of Mount Leinster. One of Europe's largest nurseries and Ireland's National Seed Centre is located at Ballintemple. While no specific tourist facilities exist at any of these sites, they nonetheless present important opportunities for a diverse range of tourism activities in the future due to their variety of plantation species and scenic appeal. The forested areas immediately surrounding Mount Leinster and the Blackstairs Mountains and southwards of Clashganny, form both a pleasant backdrop and central focus of the South Leinster Way and Barrow Way long distance walking routes.

### **Natural Heritage and Amenities - Policies**

It is the policy of the Council to:

HT P11: Maximise, enhance and support opportunities for the use of the County's uplands and waterways, including the Blackstairs Mountains, the River Barrow and the River Slaney, as tourism and recreational amenities, and engage with relevant agencies, bodies, and key stakeholders in this regard, including Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service, and local communities, to develop the infrastructure, quality and amenity of these natural assets.

HT P12: Support the provision of ancillary infrastructure and services that enhance the user experience of the River Barrow, such as water access, bike and boat storage, rest areas, shelters, toilets, changing and other facilities, where appropriate and feasible to do so subject to normal planning and environmental criteria.

HT P13: Continue to work closely with Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, and neighbouring Local Authorities, to promote and enhance the tourism and recreational potential of the River Barrow.

HT P14: Facilitate, where appropriate, increased access to the County's waterways from towns and villages where visitor services are located, subject to the protection of the environment.

HT P15: Facilitate infrastructure to enable increased tourism activity associated with water-based activities on the County's waterways, such as boating, cruising, kayaking, angling, and other sustainable water-based interests.

HT P16: Encourage the development of shared facilities centres at inland water bodies, to support greater access to water for water-sports and water-based activities and events, subject to compliance with planning and environmental criteria.

## 11.6 Greenways and Blueways

Greenways and blueways provide multi-activity recreational trails for use by residents and visitors and encourage and promote walking, cycling and water-based activities in a safe and controlled environment. They can

be developed along abandoned rail lines, utility corridors, other natural linear open spaces such as riverbanks and canals.

Blueways can be provided as standalone sites for water-based activity infrastructure, which are strategically located along rivers based on the eat, stay, play principle.

The recreational trails greenways and blueways are key tourism infrastructure assets, playing an important role in Irish tourism. They add value to the existing tourism offering and support the development of rural communities and job creation in the rural economy and can contribute to the protection and promotion of natural assets and biodiversity.

Internationally activity tourism continues to grow in popularity and has the potential to grow further, subject to appropriate siting and compliance with environmental considerations.

### 11.6.1 Barrow Valley Greenway

Under the Carbon Tax Fund 2020 and as part of a Barrow Valley Greenway Initiative, the Council received funding in 2020 to investigate the feasibility of developing a greenway in the County utilising the route of the disused Carlow to Wexford railway line. The old railway line runs south from Muinebheag to Borris, where it crosses the Borris Railway Viaduct and then continues south to Wexford. The development of such a greenway if viable would significantly boost the appeal of tourism in the County and provide possibilities for linkages with similar infrastructure in adjoining counties.

### 11.6.2 Borris Railway Viaduct

The redevelopment and adaptation of the Borris Railway Viaduct Project as a civic

amenity and walking/cycling route by the Council in 2020 was supported by the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF). The viaduct is a 16-arch limestone viaduct constructed between 1859-1860 situated at the southeast end of Borris village and is a Protected Structure (RPS Ref. CW57). The redevelopment and adaptation of the former railway viaduct as a civic amenity and walking/cycling route has been sensitively carried out in accordance with best conservation practice. It incorporates new landscaped universal access paths at its northwest end, a new path surface and new guard railings across its length, with interpretation panels to enhance the visitor experience.

### Greenways and Blueways - Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

GB P1: Facilitate engagement with relevant stakeholders including Waterways Ireland to promote the development of greenways and blueways at appropriate locations in the County, through the utilisation of disused transport links and routes and/or existing linear open spaces such as riverbanks, as well as opportunities to integrate and link such routes with towns, villages, and communities in the County and existing/proposed such routes outside of the County, subject to compliance with planning and environmental criteria.

GB P2: Support the provision of small-scale complementary facilities and businesses along greenways and blueways which would enhance the user experience, such as water access, bicycle hire and storage, boat storage, rest areas, changing facilities, cafes and craft shops, where appropriate

and feasible to do so and subject to compliance with normal planning and environmental criteria.

GB P3: Support the development of a tourism masterplan for the River Barrow, and in collaboration with adjoining local authorities and stakeholders as appropriate, which sets out an integrated framework for tourism development along the River Barrow.

### Greenways and Blueways - Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

GB O1: Support and facilitate the delivery of a greenway route(s) in the County where deemed feasible, including necessary supporting infrastructure, subject to compliance with planning and environmental criteria.

### 11.7 Carlow Town – Destination Town

In 2019 Fáilte Ireland launched its 'Destination Towns' initiative, which included a €15.5 million funding programme from which €500,000 was allocated to each Local Authority in two rounds (in 2019 and 2020). The aim of the funding was to boost the attractiveness and appeal of destination towns nationwide, as they are recognised as key motivators for overseas holidaymakers coming to Ireland. For the purposes of tourism, Fáilte Ireland defines a destination town as *"a town in which a visitor can spend an overnight, and in which a cluster of products, services, activities and experiences are offered. It incorporates various stakeholders and intangible elements, such as its character, image and identity, and can function as a touring base for visitors"*. The Council was successful in its application to Fáilte Ireland for this funding for Carlow Town, which will contribute towards

enhancing public spaces together with wayfinding in the town in a way that develops tourism by engaging visitors and enhancing their experiences.

### Destination Town Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

DT O1: Support, promote and maximise the role of Carlow Town as a designated Ireland's Ancient East 'Destination Town', and to engage with Fáilte Ireland in developing and promoting future tourism initiatives in the town, including enhancement of public space, the development of a way finding project and welcome signage, transport links, accommodation, the night-time economy, and the sustainable development of our natural and built heritage, in order to capitalise on the potential benefit of the funding for the town.

DT O2: Examine the potential of Tullow as a designated Ireland's Ancient East 'Destination Town', and to engage with Fáilte Ireland in developing and promoting future tourism initiatives in the town, including enhancement of public space, the development of a way finding project and welcome signage, in order to capitalise on the potential benefit for the area.

## 11.8 Culture, Arts and Entertainment

Cultural, arts and entertainment facilities are wide ranging in the County and include museums, galleries, theatres, cinema, libraries, museums, buildings and spaces of important artistic and cultural significance, halls for meetings, community and arts centres and music venues. Such facilities contribute towards the intellectual, artistic

and social quality of life for people in the County. They can also encourage people, tourism, businesses, and jobs to an area and enhance the image of a local area, helping to create a sense of place, enforcing local distinctiveness and contributing to the regeneration of the urban environment.

Funding and support schemes for arts in the County include:

- Individual Artists and Community Groups Arts Acts Grants Scheme
- ArtLinks
- Per Cent for Art Scheme

### 11.8.1 The County Carlow Local Arts Development Plan 2016-2021

The County Carlow Local Arts Development Plan 2016-2021 sets out strategic objectives and actions aimed at leading, nurturing, and sustaining the arts sector in the County. This includes (inter alia) objectives and actions to maximise opportunities for arts, funding, address artists' working space, provide commissioning opportunities for artists, and nurture professional development. The VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art and George Bernard Shaw Theatre located in Carlow town facilitates contemporary and traditional productions.

### Culture, Arts and Entertainment - Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

CA P1: Promote and support the role and continued expression of local culture, arts and entertainment in the County, and to facilitate and where appropriate to encourage the use of public spaces in towns and villages for art events and performances.

- CA P2: Promote and support local arts development and funding opportunities, and increase public awareness of, participation in, and access to the Arts, in line with the objectives and actions of the County Carlow Local Arts Development Plan.
- CA P3: Continue to promote and support the role of the VISUAL Centre for Contemporary Art and George Bernard Shaw Theatre as a regional and County arts asset venue of national significance.
- CA P4: Encourage and support the creation and display of works of art in public areas, including appropriate locations within the streetscape, provided no unacceptable environmental, amenity, traffic or other problems are created.
- CA P5: Encourage and support an improved night-time economy through the increased use of existing and temporary spaces for Culture, Arts and Entertainment uses including through extended opening hours for existing attractions, subject to compliance with planning and environmental criteria.

### **Culture, Arts and Entertainment - Objectives**

It is an objective of the Council to:

- CA O1: Support the implementation of the County Carlow Local Arts Development Plan 2016-2021, and any updated version of this Plan, as a means of promoting the development of culture, arts and entertainment in the County,

### **11.9 Events and Festivals**

Events and festivals are an important means of attracting additional visitors to the County thereby increasing expenditure, attracting visitors during the off-peak season and encouraging repeat visitation. The County hosts numerous events and festivals, which make an important contribution to the tourism and economic development of the County.

#### **Events and Festivals - Policies**

It is the policy of the Council to:

- EF P1: Support and promote existing events and festivals to increase the tourism, heritage, and cultural profile of the County, and where appropriate, promote and facilitate the development of new events and festivals, and venues to host same.

### **11.10 Carlow Food, Drink and Craft**

Food plays a major part in the contemporary tourism and visitor experiences and provides a platform for supporting and expanding local economic development. Within the wider County Carlow area, a range of indigenous producers operate, inspired by the unique landscape and people of the County. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the important role of the outdoor dining and hospitality offering for businesses, which has now become a more prominent feature across the County. Under its Outdoor Dining Enhancement Scheme, Fáilte Ireland has provided funding for Tullow Street Upper, as well as Main Street Borris, for permanent outdoor dining structures. Businesses need to be supported to facilitate outdoor dining and hospitality for longer periods throughout the year, subject to compliance with planning and environmental criteria. Some notable establishments include Carlow Brewing

Company and Royal Oak Distillery both located in Muinebheag / Royal Oak. The Carlow food sector is supported by the Carlow food festival 'A Taste of Carlow'. The Carlow Farmers' Market is recognised as one of a few authentic farmers' markets where producers are all local, produce their own products and sell mainly their own produce. Carlow also has an abundance of original, traditional, handmade crafts including woodturning, pottery, ceramics, ironwork and textiles, that have obvious appeal to visitors. The Council will continue to support the further development of the food, drinks and craft sectors in the County and its important role for tourism.



[\(https://carlowtourism.com/food-trail/\)](https://carlowtourism.com/food-trail/)

### 11.10.1 Carlow Food and Drink Strategy – The Taste of County Carlow 2020-2025

The strategy outlines an industry partnership approach to food and drink development which includes Agri-Food Tourism. It focuses on the development of production, processing, promotion, and consumption of locally sourced food in the County while also exploring cross boundary opportunities for collaborations.

The Strategy includes a five-year vision, that has been determined by analysis of the current food and drink landscape in Carlow, and identification of the opportunities and challenges that a small sized County can navigate to punch above its weight in

promoting its varied food and drink assets. The vision will assist in developing an integrated approach to the overall progression of the food and drink sector. This will be sustainable over the longer term by positioning the sector within Council business supports as well as telling the story of visitor experience led collaborations and initiatives.



### Policies: Food, Drink and Craft

It is the policy of the Council to:

- FD P1: Promote and support the development of food, drink, and craft sectors within the County, including the development and promotion of the Carlow Food Trail, and to work in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to facilitate growth in these sectors.
- FD P2: Recognise the contribution of niche enterprises such as specialised crafts, distilleries and breweries in supporting economic development and promoting tourism.



### Objectives: Food, Drink and Craft

It is an objective of the Council to:

FD O1: Support the implementation of the Carlow Food and Drink Strategy – The Taste of County Carlow 2020-2025, and any updated version of this Strategy, as a means of promoting the development of food and drink in the County, including agri-food tourism.

#### 11.11 Tourist Accommodation

There is an underlying need to ensure the provision of a variety of tourist and visitor accommodation types, to facilitate the growth of the tourism sector and encourage longer term stays in the County. The County's tourism sector is significantly affected by seasonality. Tourism can be weather sensitive, which can undermine its economic sustainability. This can be addressed in part by ensuring there is adequate provision of a range of visitor accommodation types and facilities which can extend the tourist season.

It is important that there is a wide range of tourist accommodation options available in the County however, it must be provided in a manner which does not impact upon the natural and built heritage of the County.

In general, tourist accommodation developments will be encouraged to locate in towns and villages, within close proximity to services and amenities. However, it is also recognised that some forms of tourist accommodation, due to their nature or scale, may require a location outside of settlement boundaries.

Apart from providing tourist accommodation, the hosting of conferences is also an important element of business tourism for the hotel trade. The availability of conferencing

facilities helps to reduce the reliance on the seasonal tourism trade. There is potential for growth in this area in the County given Carlow's strategic location in the South-East, its pivotal inter-regional role due to proximity and strong links to both the Midlands and the Greater Dublin Area, and due to proximity to airports, ports, and to rail and motorway routes.

#### Policies: Tourist Accommodation

It is the policy of the Council to:

TA P1: Promote, encourage and facilitate the provision of new tourist accommodation, including conference/business tourism facilities, and the expansion/upgrade of existing hotels, guesthouses, B&Bs and other tourist accommodation, at appropriate locations throughout the County, in both rural and urban settings, and subject to ensuring a high standard of siting, layout, design, landscape and environmental protection, the provision of adequate infrastructure and compliance with best practice planning considerations.

TA P2: Support the development of new camping and glamping facilities, and facilities for campervans/motor homes/touring caravans, at appropriate locations throughout the County.

#### 11.12 Recreation

The natural and built assets of the County, which attract tourists to the area, are also the foundations upon which infrastructure and facilities for recreation and amenity are based. The availability of such infrastructure and facilities makes a significant contribution

to the physical health and overall well-being of the County's residents.

Carlow's natural landscape encompasses cornerstone recreation assets such as mountains, rivers, forests, woodlands and trails, which are ideal locations for a range of physical and sporting activities, both active and passive. These existing natural assets can be supplemented by the provision of additional facilities, such as green networks for walking and cycling, parks, open spaces, playgrounds, and playing fields. The Council has a crucial role to play in ensuring that recreation and amenity in the County caters for both residents and visitors, and that it is accessible for all sectors and age groups in society.

#### 11.12.1 County Carlow's Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2020-2023

The Outdoor Recreation Strategy provides a framework for the development of Carlow's recreational assets, which will enhance the County as a place to live, work, visit, and play. It recognises that outdoor recreation provides value, by adding to our quality of life and by supporting our local economy via activity tourism. The Strategy's timescale provides a vision for outdoor recreation development to 2040 and identifies the specific objectives between 2020 to 2023, which will bring us closer to our vision of "Sustainable, Local, Inclusive outdoor recreation". The stated aims of the Strategy are to:

- Provide an effective and sustainable framework to maximise current and future opportunities for participation in outdoor recreational activities in Carlow, whilst striving for the conservation and protection of the natural environment and cultural heritage.

- Reflect the vision and objectives of the National Countryside Recreation Strategy and the Sport Ireland Trails Strategy.
- Recognise the economic potential of recreation from a tourism viewpoint and separate projects which have an economic benefit from local amenity benefit.
- Identify the required infrastructure for recreation (signage, parking, trail furniture etc.).
- Identify cross-cutting themes i.e. rivers and walks.

The preparation of the Strategy included an audit of walking and cycling routes in County Carlow, which identified 70 walking trails and 58 cycling trails. Most of these trails are located on the eastern and western edges of the County.

#### 11.12.2 Carlow Outdoors Initiative

Carlow Outdoors is an initiative of Carlow County Development Partnership CLG, which seeks to celebrate, expand and promote the wealth of recreational and tourism experiences in the County. ([www.carlowoutdoors.ie](http://www.carlowoutdoors.ie))

#### 11.12.3 Healthy Carlow County Plan 2018-2021

The Plan's vision is to achieve "A County where everyone can enjoy physical and mental health and well-being to their full potential, where well-being is valued and supported at every level of society and is everyone's responsibility". In terms of physical health, the Plan aims to increase participation amongst specific groups that would benefit from additional support and access to sport, recreation and physical activity, and includes three priority objectives to:

- Increase the number of people with a disability taking part in sport and physical activity and address the barriers to access.
- Develop and coordinate programmes that provide families with opportunities to be active together in collaboration with key stakeholders - with a particular focus on outdoor recreation.
- Coordinate a programme of activities to develop and support physical activity in an identified area of disadvantage in order to maximise resources, create new opportunities and address gaps in provision.

### 11.13 Outdoor Recreation

County Carlow has a variety of outdoor recreational spaces and facilities, which provide significant amenity and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. The river corridors in the County, coupled with upland mountain areas, forests and woodlands, historic house and garden trails, provide excellent walking, cycling and water-based activities. There is potential to further develop, enhance and promote these natural and built assets in the County for recreational purposes, such as through the provision of greenways and blueways (e.g. Barrow Valley Greenway Initiative). This is discussed in Section 11.6 in this chapter.

#### 11.13.1 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS)

The Government's ORIS was established in 2016 and provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure. The scheme helps to make use of the resources of the countryside to contribute to healthy active lifestyles, while also supporting economic and tourist potential for local communities and tourist visitors.

In 2021 connecting the Wicklow Way with the South Leinster Way in County Carlow was one of the key large-scale projects that received funding of €371, 250 under the ORIS. In addition, funding of €200,000 was also allocated to the Oak Park Forest Park Looped Walks. This investment will involve significant development of these important and popular outdoor amenities in the County.

#### 11.13.2 Walking

Various formal and informal walking routes are available throughout the County. Of particular note are;

- Three of Ireland's key national walking routes, the South Leinster Way, the Barrow Way, and the Wicklow Way. The Barrow Way has been voted as one of the top five finest and impressive visitor attractions in the country. The route follows the original towpath along the River Barrow, along which horses would have historically pulled barges and goods for transport. The full length of the Barrow Way from Lowtown in Co. Kildare to St. Mullins in Carlow is 114km.
- The 6km looped walking route through Kilbrannish Woods (Kilbrannish Forest Recreation Area) in Mount Leinster. The Kilbrannish Forest Loop is 5 kilometres in length and offers fine views from the summit of Croaghaun northwards over the plains of Carlow with views of Myshall and Tullow below. A car park and picnic facilities are available to visitors.
- Woodland Walks in Oak Park include Butlers Wood Loop (700m), the Lake Path (800m), Fox Covert Track (1100m) and Sally Island Trail (1700m). The proximity of the

walkways to the extensive collection of ferns, mosses and woodland flora, provides an ideal opportunity to interact with nature.

- Clogrennane Wood looped walk offers extensive panoramic views across the County.
- 10 no. Slí na Sláinte routes within the County which are important and valuable facilities for communities, easily accessible and widespread appeal. It will be the policy of the Council to support community organisations in the development of routes such as Slí na Sláinte.
- Sports clubs in the County have also developed safe and well-maintained walking routes around their grounds. They are frequented by the local communities and can work in harmony with the local clubs by promoting the benefits of an active lifestyle.

Other walking routes in the County, including those listed by the National Trails Office and those promoted by Carlow Tourism are:

- Rathwood Forest Walk
- Clashganny Forest Looped Walk
- Bahana Forest Looped Walk
- Tinnahinch and Graiguenamanagh to Borris and to Inistioge Walk
- Borris to Nine Stones Walk
- Nine Stones to Kildavin Walk
- Slieve Margy Way
- Slieve Margy Way Swan Loop
- Carlow Town Walk
- Leighlinbridge Historic Town Walk
- Windfarm Loop (Kilbrannish)

A significant walking route which is subject to development and promotion incorporates part of County Carlow is The Turas Columbaus which is part of the Columban Way Walk. This

walk traces the footsteps of the Irish sixth century monk and missionary Saint Columbanus. The starting point of this pilgrim route is the Nine Stones in Mount Leinster, where the saint was born, and it stretches to Bangor in Co. Down and on through Europe, ending in Bobbio, Italy. The village of Myshall in particular, has long been believed to have nurtured the saint. Plans for the route in Carlow, including promotion and signage, are at an advanced stage and will link sites associated with the saint's early life and education with places he visited in Europe.

### 11.13.3 Cycling

As a recreational activity cycling has increased in popularity in recent years, and the Council acknowledges that facilities for cyclists should be provided as resources permit and where appropriate. The uptake in off-road cycling, and mountain biking in particular, has also increased, and Carlow's Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2020-2023 recognises a need to support the development of such off-road activity trails.

The Carlow to Kilkenny National Cycle Network was founded by Carlow/Kilkenny Local Authorities under the National Cycle Network (NCN) program. It has provided a dedicated on-road cycle route 35km in length between Carlow and Kilkenny. The route is located on the R448/R712 (the old N9/N10). The route starts/ends on the northern edge of Carlow Town which links to the extensive network of cycling routes in the town itself. There is direct access to the River Barrow towpath (Barrow Way) from Carlow Town. The Burren River Linear Park is a key asset in Carlow Town, which includes a hard-surfaced cycling and walking route along the east of the river. The linear park extends to c. 2km, with direct access to the town and to and from several residential areas along its length.

The Blackstairs Cycling Circuit includes up to 5 on-road cycling routes, ranging in distance from 12km, to longer distances over 100km. The routes take in the most scenic upland areas of the County such as at Nine Stones Mount Leinster, and incorporate villages such as Borris, Ballinkillen, and Ballymurphy.

The Hidden Sky Road Cycling Route, at 37km in length, begins in Borris Village, passing alongside the Mountain River, and leaving the village under the former Railway Viaduct. The looped cycling route includes Myshall Village, and ascends to a high point at Slievebawn, where scenic views of the County are available.

### Recreation - Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

- R P1: Promote the value of the County's outdoor recreational and amenity resources as key assets for the local economy and for the health and well-being of communities and continue to support the expansion of existing amenities.
- R P2: Co-operate with relevant agencies and bodies, local development organisations, community groups, and other key stakeholders, in the development of recreational facilities throughout the County.
- R P3: Support the diversification of the rural economy through the development of the recreational potential of the countryside.
- R P4: Develop, in conjunction with local communities, short walking routes, such as looped walks, heritage trails and Slí Na Sláinte routes.
- R P5: Facilitate, where appropriate, the provision of walking and cycling trails in the County, in co-operation with relevant agencies and bodies, including Coillte, Waterways Ireland, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Government Departments, and other Local Authorities.
- R P6: Promote the expansion of cycling facilities throughout the County and liaise with relevant agencies and bodies such as Fáilte Ireland and Sport Ireland, in the development of cycling touring routes throughout the County and adjoining counties, in particular areas of high amenity.
- R P7: Support the maintenance of existing off-road walking and cycling trails and the development of new such trails in the County and ensure that the development of new trails does not negatively impact on any European or nationally protected sites.
- R P8: Support and promote public access to the County's high amenity, scenic and recreational lands, including upland areas, waterways, and other natural amenities, which does not endanger the conservation of such natural amenities.
- R P9: Ensure that recreational facilities are based on principles of Universal Design.
- R P10: Support the development of cycle-parking facilities at appropriate locations in all urban areas of the County.
- R P11: Facilitate, where appropriate, the appropriately designed quality

signage for walking and cycling routes throughout the County.

- R P12: Support the development and promotion of the Turas Columbaus as part of the Columban Way Walk, including appropriately designed and located signage, and in collaboration with adjoining local authorities and key stakeholders as appropriate.

### Recreation - Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- R O1: Support the implementation of County Carlow’s Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2020-2023 and the Healthy Carlow County Plan 2018-2021, and any updated versions of these documents, as a means of promoting the development of outdoor recreational facilities and infrastructure in the County and increasing access to and participation in recreation and physical activity.
- R O2: Support the development of a connection/link in the County between the Wicklow Way and the South Leinster Way subject to proper planning and compliance with environmental considerations.

### 11.14 Public Rights of Way

Public rights of way in the County constitute an important amenity for residents and visitors, providing a valuable link to some of the County’s natural assets such as the rivers, mountainous areas, forests and woodlands. The Council recognises the importance of maintaining established rights of way and supporting initiatives for establishing recreational routes and general accessibility. The Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) requires each County Development

Plan to include an objective for the preservation of public rights of way that give access to places of natural beauty or utility and for such rights of way to be listed and identified on Development Plan maps. In accordance with this statutory provision public rights of way identified to date in the County are listed in Table 11.1 below and shown on Map 11.1. It should be noted that these public rights of way do not constitute an exhaustive list. Therefore, the omission of a public right of way from the list shall not be taken as an indication that such a right of way is not a public right of way.

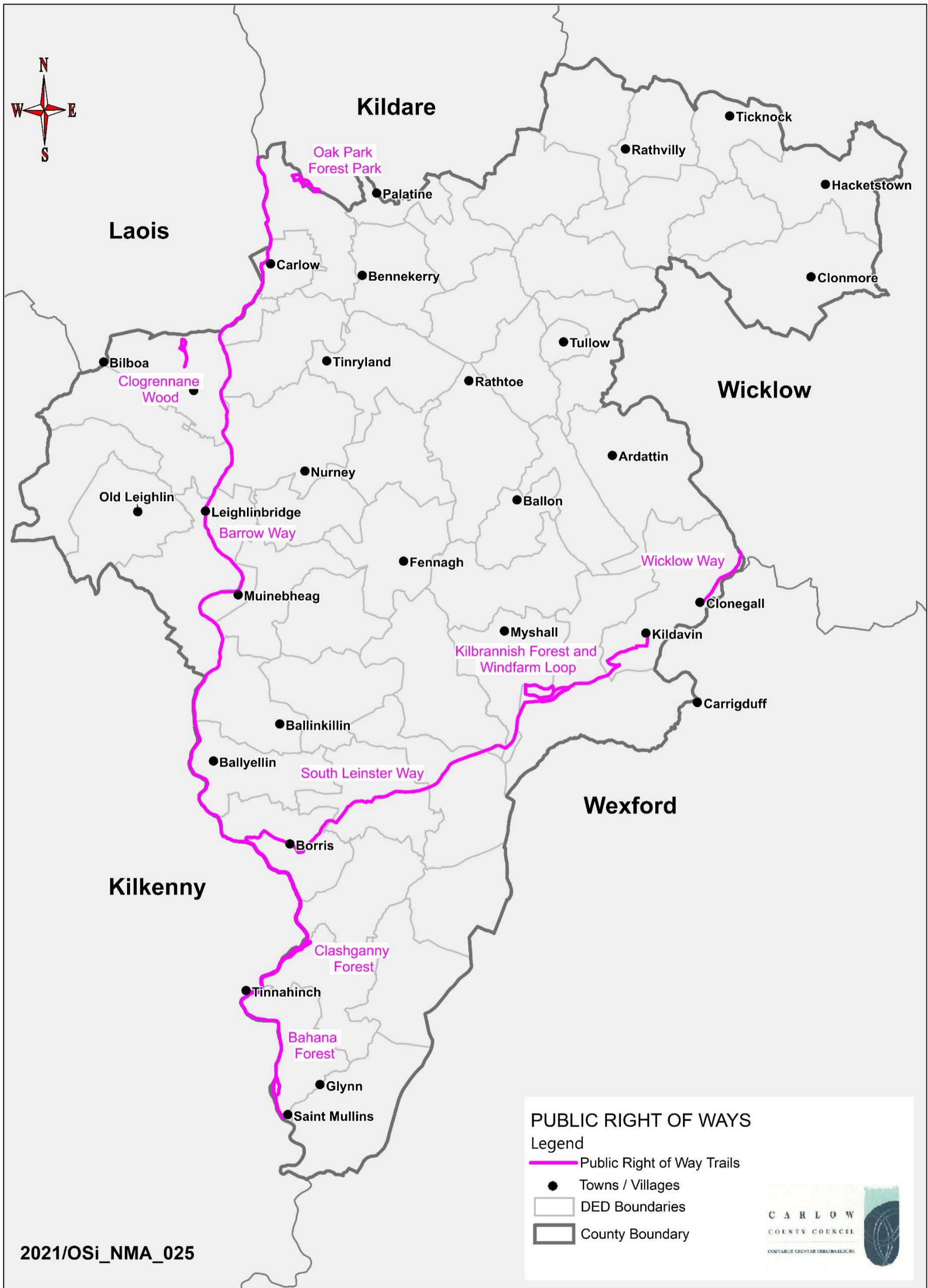
Public rights of way, Slí na Sláinte Walking Routes and Trails of the Saints are also shown on the Objectives Maps for the settlements included in Chapter 15.

The Council will endeavour to identify and list any further public rights of way as they come to the attention of the Planning Authority.

Ref No.	Public Rights of Way	Description
PRW1	Barrow Way	River and road walk
PRW2	Wicklow Way	Off-road, road and forest walk
PRW3	South Leinster Way	Off-road, road and river walk
PRW4	Kilbrannish Forest and Windfarm Loop	Forest walk
PRW5	Clogrennane Wood	Forest walk
PRW6	Oak Park Forest Park	Forest walk

<b>PRW7</b>	Clashganny Forest	Forest and river walk
<b>PRW8</b>	Bahana Forest	Forest and river walk

Table 11.1 Public Rights of Way in County Carlow



Map 11.1 Public Rights of Way



## Public Rights of Way - Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

RW P1: Preserve public rights of way in accordance with Sections 10 and 14 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), which give access to mountain, riverbank and other places of natural beauty or recreational utility in the County.

RW P2: Seek to ensure that new development will not have a negative impact on established public rights of way, in particular in areas of high amenity, including the upland areas and waterways of the County.

RW P3: Seek to improve the condition and appearance of existing rights of way as part of a proposed development, where the applicant has confirmed the legal status of the existing right of way.

RW P4: Require identification and preservation of any existing established public rights of way prior to any new development proposal, infrastructural development, energy, telecommunications or golf course developments.

### 11.15 Open Space

The provision of public open spaces for people of all ages and levels of fitness is vital in creating successful and healthy sustainable communities. These spaces play a key role in enhancing the appearance and distinctiveness of neighbourhoods, and in contributing to the quality of life of residents and visitors. Public open space is also considered of particular importance in relation to residential developments, where it provides

opportunities for both recreation and socialisation. Open space and parks can also comprise an integral part of the provision of high-quality green infrastructure for communities, further details on which can be found in Chapter 9.

The prioritisation of compact growth in national and regional policy, including the consolidation of existing built-up areas in towns and villages, requires an increased focus on the delivery of high-quality public and private open spaces. In this regard, the zoning of land for open space is an important element of land-use planning.

Open space can be provided in a variety of sizes throughout the County. The day-to-day recreational provision to local communities can be catered for by district or neighbourhood parks (town parks). Town parks are generally in a central location, are easily accessible and provide facilities for both formal and informal recreation in a parkland environment. Town Parks in the County are presently located in Carlow Town, Tullow and Muinebheag. The open spaces in the built-up areas of the towns and villages, and within residential developments, can include smaller local and pocket parks, which can provide a range of informal, passive and active recreational spaces.

The County has significant potential for linear open space and recreation along the River Barrow, the River Slaney and the Burren River. These water corridors are key natural assets that subject to proper planning and sustainable development, provide particular opportunities for walking and cycling trails, nature and wildlife trails, water-based activities (e.g. boating, kayaking, fishing and angling), and activities along tourism trails.

The Council will adopt a proactive hierarchical approach to achieve a balanced provision of open spaces and parks of differing sizes and functions distributed throughout the County, which will benefit all communities by accommodating a wide range of active and passive recreational pursuits within easy reach of their homes and places of work.

### Open Space - Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

- OS P1: Ensure sufficient land is allocated to provide a variety of open spaces on a hierarchical basis throughout the County in order to achieve a choice of open space, recreational and amenity facilities.
- OS P2: Develop public open spaces that have good connectivity and are accessible by safe, secure walking and cycling routes, and seek to develop and improve physical linkages and connections between networks of open spaces.
- OS P3: Require the provision of good quality, well located and functional open space in new residential developments to cater for all age groups.
- OS P4: Preserve, manage and maintain to a high standard the existing public parks, recreational areas and open spaces in the County.
- OS P5: Increase the use and potential of existing public open space, parks and recreational areas, both passive and active, by integrating existing facilities with proposals for new development

and by seeking to upgrade existing facilities where appropriate.

- OS P6: Retain, where appropriate, areas adjacent to waterways as a linear park which may link into the wider open space network.
- OS P7: Facilitate and encourage open space to be planned for on a multi-functional basis incorporating ecosystem services, climate change measures, green infrastructure, SuDS, and key landscape features in their design.
- OS P8: Prohibit the development of areas zoned open space/amenity or areas which have been indicated in a previous planning application as being open space.
- OS P9: Support community groups in the development of open spaces, such as parks, community gardens, and allotments, subject to residential amenity and proper planning and sustainable development.

### Open Space - Objectives

It is an objective of the Council to:

- OS O1: Designate or zone, through the Local Area Plan process, suitable active and passive open space in all settlements, commensurate with their existing and future needs.
- OS O2: Require passive and active open space to be provided in tandem with new residential development
- OS O3: Protect and develop connected networks of green spaces in urban areas and urban fringe areas adjacent

to the countryside to serve the growing communities in urban centres.

### 11.15.1 Play Areas

Play areas for children and teenagers contribute significantly to enhancing quality of life and sense of community. The Council recognises the need to maximise opportunities for play areas and facilities and will support their provision in a variety of land use zoning categories where appropriate.

Council operated playgrounds in the County are currently provided at Carlow Town Park, Tullow, Borris, and Oak Park Forest Park. In 2020, a new skateboard park was developed and opened by the Council at Carlow Town. Tinryland Park, a not-for-profit civic amenity, includes a playground, tennis court and astro turf pitch.

### Play Areas - Policies

It is the policy of the Council to:

- PA P1: To support local communities in the provision of a range of play facilities, playgrounds, skate parks and other play areas in appropriate locations across the County.
- PA P2: Provide play facilities adjacent to community and childcare facilities, in so far as is possible, and to ensure their proper management and maintenance.
- PA P3: Facilitate appropriately scaled play areas within new and existing residential developments.

### 11.16 Sports and Leisure Facilities

The County has a large number of purpose-built sporting and recreation facilities, provided through a mix of public, private, third level, school, community facilities, and voluntary organisations. There are purpose-built sports and recreation facilities in the County for the GAA, soccer and other playing pitch uses, and for golf, rowing, athletics, tennis, badminton, squash, swimming, sub aqua, and equestrian uses. Apart from purpose-built facilities, the built environment of urban areas and the landscape of rural areas in the County, such as public roads, public footpaths, woodlands, and waterways, also support a range of other sports and leisure activities, such as walking, jogging, cycling, boating, fishing, and outdoor swimming.

Commercial leisure facilities are those run on a profit basis and can include cinemas, family entertainment centres such as bowling, indoor children's play centres, fitness centres, gyms, swimming pools etc.

The County Carlow Local Sports Partnership (LSP) is at the forefront of the development and promotion of sporting and recreational facilities in the County, and its key focus is that there is a sustainable level of development within the local sports infrastructure. The LSP works with clubs, schools and community groups to ensure that structures are in place to enable participation for all community members in a wide range of sport or physical activity options.

The Council will continue to liaise with sporting clubs and organisations, communities and other relevant stakeholders, to ensure that where possible that needs are met in the provision of quality sports and recreational facilities. The Council is seeking to deliver a

Water Hub Activities Centre within the Carlow Town Park to maximise usage of recreational and economic opportunities associated with the River Barrow. Developments which seek to cluster activities and integrate them with community facilities, including schools, will be encouraged to ensure a more sustainable and efficient use of shared arrangements such as access, parking, changing rooms etc.

### **Sports and Leisure Facilities - Policies**

It is the policy of the Council to:

- SL P1: Facilitate a vibrant and active sports sector in the County with increased participation levels, good quality sustainable facilities, which are appropriate in scale and location and which provide opportunities for people to have access to play an active role in sport and physical activities.
- SL P2: Support national sport policies and objectives, including collaboration with Sports Ireland and National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs), the County Carlow Local Sports Partnerships, clubs, communities and partnerships within and beyond sport, to increase sport and physical activity participation levels.
- SL P3: Support local community and sports groups in developing sports facilities and to consider the development of such facilities at appropriate locations in the County. These facilities, if possible, should be clustered within other community facilities such as community centres and open spaces to create multi-user community hubs.
- SL P4: Ensure that the development of new sports facilities are designed to be

universally accessible and accompanied by appropriate infrastructure including car parking, bicycle parking and changing rooms.

- SL P5: Promote town and village centre sites for sports and leisure facilities, and to facilitate out of town/village sites where appropriate, (following a sequential test), in servicing large hinterland communities, where the site includes comprehensive off-road parking, conforms to all safety guidelines and is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

### **Sports and Leisure Facilities - Objectives**

It is an objective of the Council to:

- SLO1: Ensure that sufficient land is zoned in local area plans to facilitate sports clubs and facilities.
- SL O2: Seek to deliver a Water Hub Activity Centre in Carlow Town Park subject to the availability of financing and compliance with all planning and environmental criteria.