

ILDN proposals on amended 'Recommendations' to Irish Trails Strategy 2020

Recommendation 2

Support local stakeholders to take leadership in defining and developing local trails in every county and work with communities to develop them.

The potential of trails is so significant for local communities and tourism that the ambition needs to be formally captured in local authority development plans and other local plans that potentially identify resources for use in trail development. Communities should be supported and encouraged to plan and develop trail infrastructure in every county as appropriate. To this end, local stakeholders willing to contribute to trail development and maintenance such as local authorities, community groups, sports partnerships, statutory agencies, local development companies and relevant sporting/ recreation clubs, should be challenged to work together to develop local plans that will contribute to the Irish Trails Strategy goals. State agencies should also be encouraged and supported in developing and maintaining trail infrastructure in every county.

The general threshold for participation in the development and delivery of the local trail plan should be a willingness to contribute- in funding, technical advice, volunteer labour or similar valued resources. The challenge to all stakeholders is to use these resources to collectively develop a coherent and sustainable local plan that addresses development costs, maintenance, marketing and other support needs within the context of a national strategy. Local stakeholders that demonstrably prove they have an effective and representative partnership ethos will be prioritised for supports under the Irish Trails strategy.

Recommendation 11

Establish an Irish Trails Strategy Implementation Group and assign the Irish Sports Council as the lead agency responsible for coordinating the delivery of the strategy

Decisions about the development and funding of trails are currently made independently in several government departments including the Department of Transport Tourism and Sport, the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht and their various agencies and services such as *Waterways Ireland*, *Fáilte Ireland* and *National Parks and Wildlife Service*. Government bodies with large land ownerships, such as *Coillte Teo*, *Bord na Mona*, *CIE*, and *ESB* also make decisions about trails and provide important trail infrastructure. Community-led organisations such as the local development companies and individual community groups and sporting clubs also expend significant financial and human resources on trail development.

Improved coordination is necessary, both regarding trail development and funding priorities. All stakeholders' interests and contribution should be factored into the design any new coordination system- which will be a partnership model based on:

1. *voluntary commitment to resource allocation on an initiative to initiative basis*
2. *parity of esteem among the stakeholders.*

Based on these principles the *Irish Trail Strategy* proposes the establishment of an *Irish Trails Strategy Implementation Group* (ITSIG) comprising of the bodies referenced above- where the parties agree to cooperate on trail development and related initiatives. In the context of there being agreement from the resource stakeholders on their retaining final authority on the allocation of same, the Irish Sports Council has played an important role in coordinating work in this area and is well placed to provide support to the implementation group,

Irish Trails Strategy Implementation Group & Comhairle na Tuaithe

The *Department of Environment, Community and Local Government* currently coordinates *Comhairle Na Tuaithe* (CnaT) and has developed and oversees the *National Countryside Recreation Strategy*- of which 'trail development' comprise just one element. The continued implementation of the *Irish Trails Strategy* will support the vision set in the *National Countryside Recreation Strategy* (NCRS) for a countryside that welcomes all visitors who practise responsible use of the resource, where the rights and responsibilities of both landowners and recreational users are respected, and where the necessary funding and structures are in place to deliver a recreation service.

There is a need in the context of the development of the *Irish Trails Strategy* for clarity in defining the roles of the proposed *Irish Trails Strategy Implementation Group* (ITSIG) and that of CnaT. With representatives of all users, landowners and stakeholders in the countryside CnaT is a broader-based organisation than NTAC or the proposed ITSIG and the resulting consultative legitimacy of CnaT in terms of agreeing policy in terms of trail development must be respected in move to streamline coordination. Essentially the relationship between the bodies should be:

- CnaT will set the principles and the policy context;
- ITSIG will take the set policy from CnaT and with the cooperation of its members seek to develop a tactical approach to implementation- which would include a high-level agreement with the its stakeholders on resources to deliver on that policy.
- More focused Trail Action Groups on specific projects, e.g. - *National Coastal Path*, specific Blueways & Greenways, etc. should include representatives of stakeholders with a direct contribution to make to that project.
- Local project groups may be established to work on delivering elements of specific projects or new bodies but will take their policy lead from that set by CnaT.

Recommendation 12

Establish a new Irish Trails Consultative Forum of users and implementing bodies to provide ongoing input and comment on the implementation of this strategy

Irish trails require the ongoing input, advice and support of a large number of public and private agencies, companies and organisations including community development groups, farming organisations, national governing bodies, tourism and outdoor activity providers.

A new structure needs to be established to ensure that all groups with an interest and stake in the area have their say and are involved in the planning, development and promotion of Ireland's trails. The legitimate interests of these groups must be represented equitably in the new structures (ITSIG) and relationships proposed. To this end NTAC asks the stakeholders in CnaT to consider the formation of such a body in its review of the National Countryside Recreational Strategy.

Recommendation 13

Encourage local stakeholders to develop a partnership structure towards the development and maintenance of local trails.

At present coordination of trail development is vested in a number of organisations including local development partnerships, community tourism organisations and local authorities. It is recommended that the above bodies and others, such as community groups, sporting clubs and other relevant stakeholders convene in each local authority area to form a single local 'trails action group' to more coherently drive and direct that development within the context of the Irish Trails strategy.

Local authorities play a pivotal role in the regional life of Ireland. Local development companies also play a central role in supporting local communities to develop trails and related recreational and tourism initiatives. Community groups are often the main driver of development in trail infrastructure in local areas and sporting clubs have a major interest in the appropriate development and maintenance of trails. All these stakeholders have a valid claim of interest in the local trail sector and partnership arrangements should reflect a parity of esteem between the parties.

Therefore, while each trails action groups agreed actions should be serviced and resourced by its stakeholders; the group should be independent of any one stakeholders' control. Where a trail crosses county boundaries, local authorities should act as the initial contact between trails action groups and thereafter both local action groups should combine their efforts on a similar partnership basis and agree a development, maintenance and/ or marketing plan.