

Longford County Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025 - 2030



Ríaltas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Developed through the collaboration, guidance and expertise of



An Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe
agus Pobail agus Gaeltacht
Department of Rural and Community
Development and the Gaeltacht



SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND



LONGFORD
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SPORT IRELAND



Waterways Ireland
Uiscebhéalait Éireann Watterweys Airlann



An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta
agus Fiadhúlra
National Parks and Wildlife Service



Consulting support provided by Outscape.



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Introduction

The need for a County Outdoor Recreation plan for Longford

In 2022, a national outdoor recreation strategy '*Embracing Ireland's Outdoors 2023-2027*' was launched by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). The strategy specifically called for the development of County Outdoor Recreation plans across Ireland:

"At county level, our ambition is to achieve a more planned and coordinated approach between the many stakeholders, with the introduction of a County Outdoor Recreation Committee and the development of an Outdoor Recreation plan for each county."

There is a collective recognition amongst key stakeholders in Longford that the development of a County Outdoor Recreation plan provides an opportunity for a more collaborative approach towards unlocking the positive impacts of outdoor recreation.

What is Outdoor Recreation?

Outdoor recreation means activities that take place in the natural environment such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering, wild swimming and paddleboarding. It does not include activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches (such as golf, football, show jumping) or motorised activities (such as quads/scramblers) except for motorised mobility aids. A definition can be found in Appendix 1.

Benefits of Outdoor Recreation

The development of the national strategy for outdoor recreation alongside significant financial investment has been driven by the acknowledgement of the many benefits outdoor recreation brings to communities in Ireland, including mental and physical health benefits, economic and social benefits.

'*Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*' outlines evidence of the increased demand for outdoor recreation and the substantial benefits it brings:

- Overseas visitors who participated in outdoor recreation spent €1.7billion in 2019
- Visitors to Coillte forests almost doubled between 2018 and 2021
- 97,000 cases of disease were prevented in Ireland due to physical activity participation in 2019 providing a total cost saving of over €405 million
- Recreational walking is by far the most participated in sport or physical activity in Ireland

Development of the plan

The development of this plan was supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development.

The process was led by Outscape between December 2024 – May 2025 on behalf of a Project Team consisting of Longford outdoor recreation stakeholders.

The process followed the guidance set out in 'Guidelines for Development - County Outdoor Recreation plans' developed by DRCD (2024). The Project Team included:

- Longford County Council (LCC)
- Longford Sports Partnership
- Longford Community Resources
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)
- Fáilte Ireland
- Bord na Móna
- Coillte
- Waterways Ireland
- Roscommon LEADER Partnership (National Trails Register)

In line with the national guidelines, the Project Team drove the direction of the plan's development, reaching consensus on strategic priorities and actions following a period of:

- Desk research, GIS mapping, and site visits
- Key stakeholder consultations
- In-person public consultation events
- A public online survey

This document represents a summary of the outputs of the development process setting out the strategic priorities and actions for Longford for the period of this plan.

The Action plan will be subject to a mid-term review to assess whether modifications are required given the dynamic nature of outdoor recreation. At the end of the plan period, the plan's success will be evaluated against delivery of the actions.

This plan is subject to SEA/Appropriate Assessment screening.

Overriding Status of the plan

The plan is situated alongside the hierarchy of statutory documents that forms the decision-making and consent-granting framework, all of which have been subject to legislative requirements relating to public consultation and environmental assessment/screening for environmental assessment. As such, the plan is wholly subject to the requirements of the provisions set out in these documents throughout the implementation of the plan, including provisions relating to sustainable development, environmental protection, and environmental management that have been integrated into these documents, and does not introduce any alterations or additions to those provisions.

The plan does not provide consent or establish a framework for granting consent and will not contribute towards a framework for granting consent. The plan is not binding on consent-related decisions.

The plan does not introduce rules, limits, or other criteria to be used in development management. The plan solely will set out recommendations that may be considered for integration into the relevant parts of the decision-making and consent-granting framework – in particular the Longford County Development plan 2021-2027.

In order to be realised, the types of projects referred to in the plan will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier environmental assessment and other licencing requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework. Implementation of the plan shall comply with such existing measures from the County Development plan 2021-2027 that are already in force.

Strategic context

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors, the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027, aims to strengthen the sustainable development of the outdoor recreation sector and drive economic and health benefits to communities, while protecting landscapes, habitats and built heritage. The implementation of the strategy is a key deliverable under 'Our Rural Future' rural development policy 2021-2025.

Several actions within this plan have been adopted as a direct response to the national strategy, including the establishment of a County Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC) and a county-wide Stakeholder Forum.

Other national strategies

Several other national strategies have also informed this plan, including;

- National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025
- National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030
- Tourism Policy Framework 2025-2030
- Child and Youth Participation Strategy 2019-2023
- National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland (2016, reviewed 2020)
- Sport Ireland Policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the Outdoors (2020)
- Sport Ireland Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities (2017)
- Coillte Strategic Vision (2022)

Regional and local strategies

The development of this plan has also been shaped by regional and local strategies including;

- Longford County Development plan 2021-2027
- Longford Local Economic and Community plan 2023-2029 (LCC)
- Longford Climate Action plan 2024-2029 (LCC)
- Longford Sports Partnership Strategy 2018-2022
- Longford Community Resources CLG Strategic plan 2021-2025
- County Longford LEADER Local Development Strategy 2023 - 2027
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region 2019-2031 (Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly)
- Longford Active Travel Strategy 2023 (LCC)
- Longford Heritage and Biodiversity plan 2019-2024 (LCC)
- Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023 – 2027 (Fáilte Ireland)
- Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030 (Waterways Ireland/Fáilte Ireland)
- Longford County Tourism Strategy 2023 – 2027 (LCC)

Key trends

A number of national and global trends have informed the development of this plan and include:

Increase in demand: A growth in interest and participation in outdoor recreation in Ireland and globally.

Activities: Soft activities, such as walking and cycling, represent the most significant segment of outdoor recreation and consumer demand for soft activities is set to continue. There is a rise in new activities such as open water swimming and stand up paddleboarding.

Ageing population: The population in Ireland is getting older and the number of older people taking part in outdoor recreation is expected to increase, along with a growth in multi-generational participation in outdoor recreation.

Closer to home: People are seeking opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation 'closer to home'.

Sustainability: People are increasingly concerned about the environment and behaving more sustainably.

Wellbeing: The global trend to improve our physical and mental wellbeing is driving a desire to integrate health and wellbeing into leisure and tourism choices.

Consultation summary

Consultation with national stakeholders, and local stakeholders including the public, has been critical to informing the understanding of the current position of outdoor recreation in Longford and the actions included in this plan.

National stakeholder consultation

In line with the DRCD guidelines, national organisations and strategic governing bodies were invited to engage with the plan development process. These included:

- Dept of Rural and Community Development
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- Fáilte Ireland
- Coillte
- Sport Ireland
- National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- National Built Heritage Service
- National Monuments Service
- Heritage Ireland
- Office of Public Works
- Irish Farmer's Association
- Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmer's Association
- Irish Natura and Hill Farmer's Association
- Irish Creamery Milk Supplier's Association
- Ireland's Association for Adventure Tourism
- Leave No Trace Ireland
- Active Disability Ireland

Public meetings

Public events were held in April 2025, inviting participation and input from anyone with an interest in outdoor recreation. Events were held in:

- Longford Library
- Ballymahon Library
- Granard Library

Comhairle na nÓg

An online consultation meeting of Longford Comhairle na nÓg enabled input into the project from young people.

Public online survey

A public survey was conducted during a two-week period in April 2025.

The survey presented a series of questions that were designed to test the extent to which the public agreed with emerging strategic priorities developed by the project team.

The survey indicated support for the strategic direction of the plan amongst respondents.

Stakeholder insights

A lack of public awareness exists of what's available, especially recent developments and what is planned for the future.

There is a desire for improved connectivity between existing trails and to settlements .

Gaps exist in the provision of trails and other outdoor recreation opportunities near some rural settlements.

There is a need to enhance accessibility for people with a disability, older people and those with mobility challenges.

There is an opportunity to engage with local communities and outdoor clubs to improve local provision and overcome barriers to participation, e.g. costs and access to equipment.



Current situation





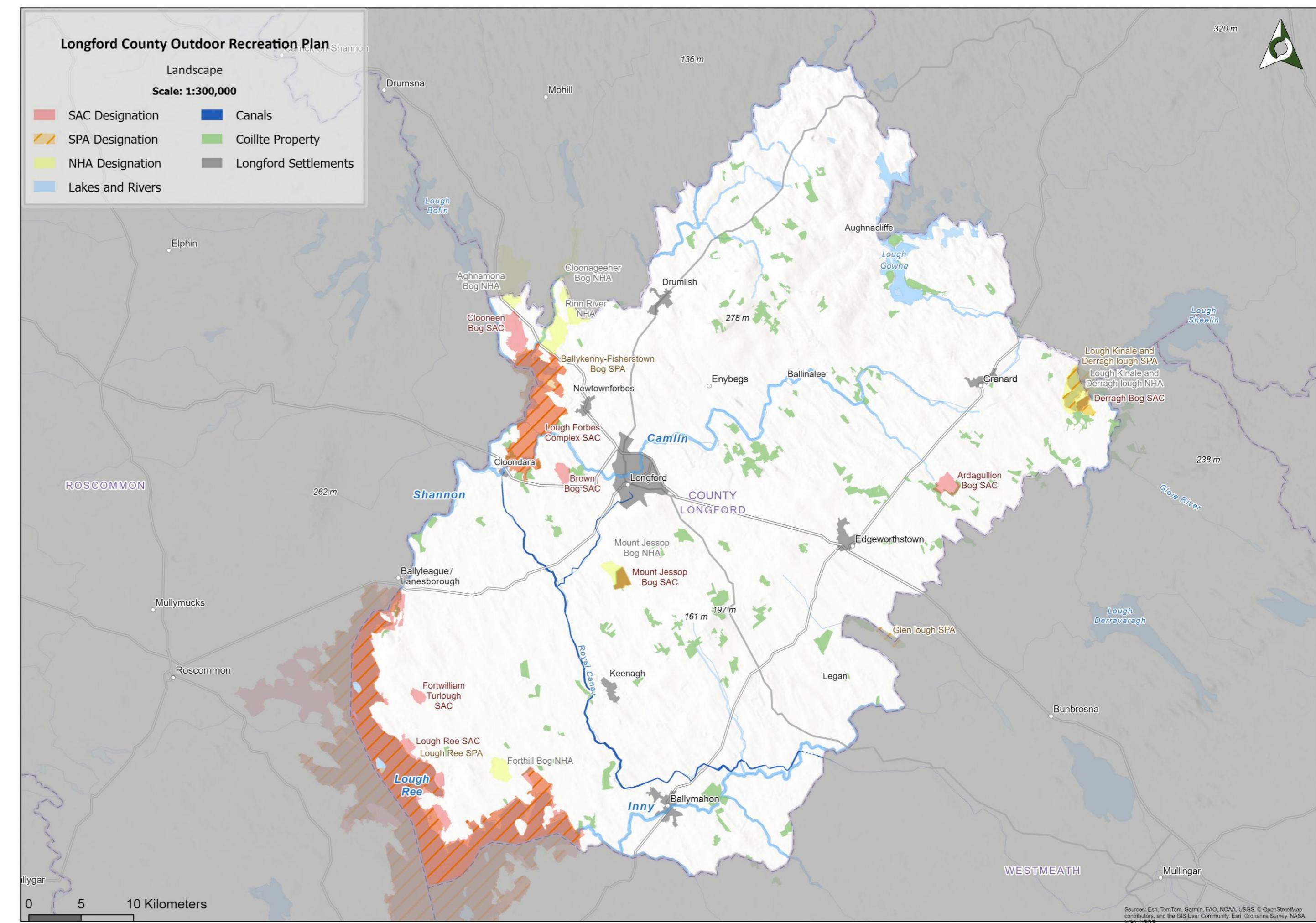
Environment

Longford's low-lying rural landscape features agricultural lands, significant areas of peatland and other wetlands and is peppered with pockets of forestry. The county is bounded to the west by the River Shannon, and traversed by the rivers Camlin and Inny, and the Royal Canal. This topography shapes the possibilities for outdoor recreation in the area.

There are several landscapes protected by legislation, featuring a diverse array of significant habitats and bird species. The majority of these are located along the River Shannon, including Lough Ree and a network of raised bogs and other wetlands and callows.

There are other smaller, but no less significant, protected areas scattered across the county, e.g. Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough, Glen Lough, Mount Jessop Bog, Forthill Bog.

In addition to natural heritage, there are numerous built and cultural heritage sites and monuments across the county that evidence the county's human history through the ages, e.g. the Corlea Iron Age trackway, early Christian sites, the Norman motte at Granard, the Ballinamuck 1798 battlefield site, and modern industrial heritage features associated with peat extraction.





Access

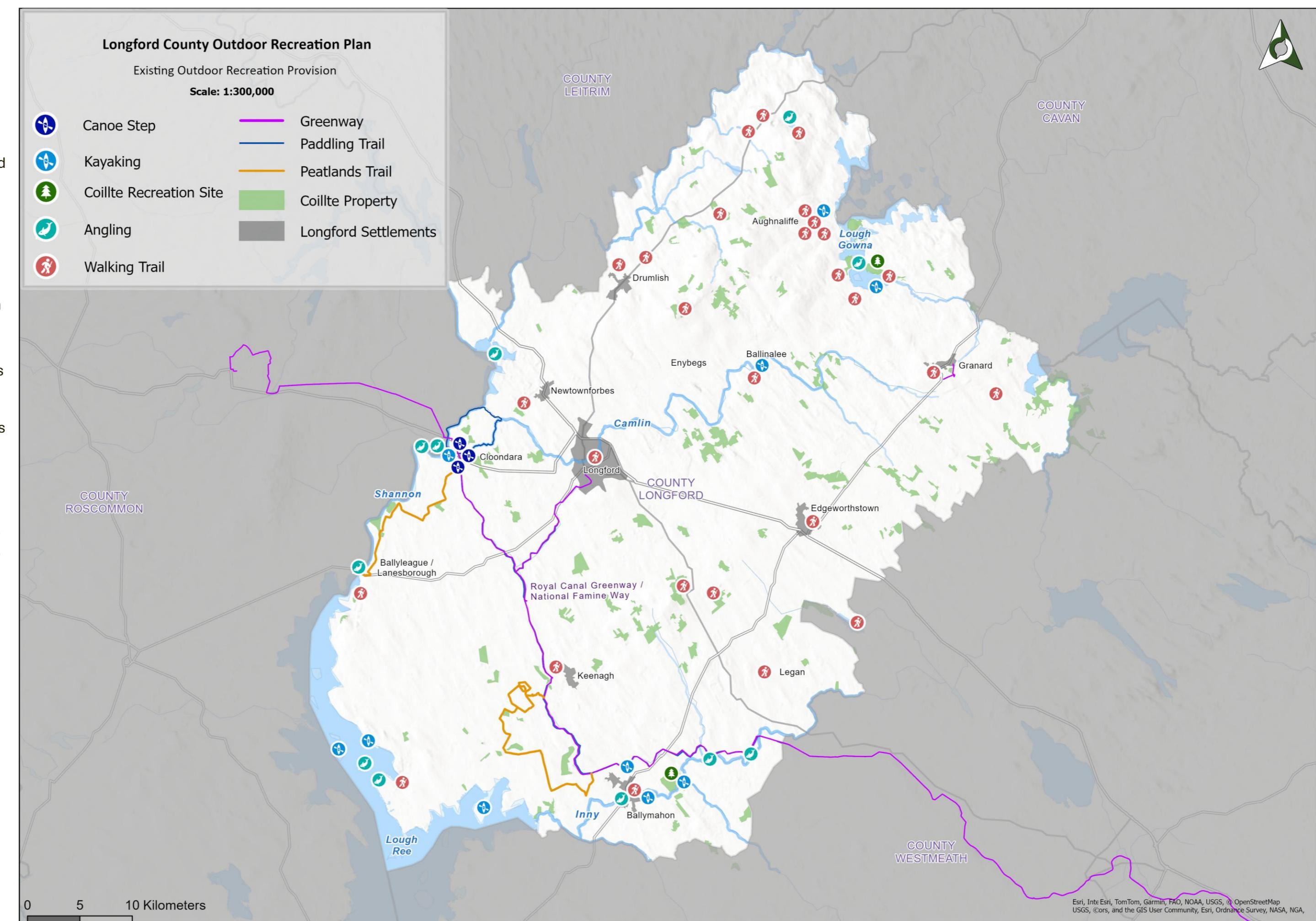
Access refers to the infrastructure and arrangements in place that facilitate people's enjoyment of natural places and spaces for various forms of outdoor recreation.

There is an array of walking trails on offer in the county, many of which have been constructed or improved in recent years, particularly within the northern half of the county.

These trails provide vital opportunities to connect local communities to a variety of green and blue spaces, including peatlands, woodlands, lakes and river corridors.

The Royal Canal Greenway/ National Famine Way, and the currently expanding network of peatland trails provide opportunities for longer walks and cycling in the south of the county.

Water access points along the Royal Canal, River Camlin (at Cloondara), River Inny, Lough Ree as well as numerous smaller lakes, provide opportunities for paddlesports and angling.



Key recreation assets in Co. Longford

Royal Canal

The Royal Canal is an important recreation and active travel asset for the county, providing vital greenspace access to settlements along its route including Abbeyrule, Ballymahon, Keenagh, Cloondara and Longford Town via the Longford branch canal corridor.

It provides opportunities for paddlesports, especially kayaking, with canoe access at Cloondara and Ballybrannigan Harbour.

The Royal Greenway provides a 130km access corridor for walkers and cyclists from Maynooth, Co. Meath, to Cloondara and to Longford Town via the branch canal, with approximately 44km of this route (including the branch canal) located in Co. Longford.

Community trails

There is an array of walking trails, public rights of way and green spaces available across Co. Longford.

Many of these provide greenspace access at or within easy reach of towns and villages, providing vital 'doorstep' opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Some examples include:

- Ballinalee Forest Trail
- Brí Leith Walk, Ardagh
- Corlea Bog Amenity Walk
- Corn Hill Walking Trail
- Leebeen Park, Aughnacliffe
- Newcastle Woodland Trail

There are seven walking routes registered on the Sport Ireland Outdoors National Trails Register, indicating that they meet Sport Ireland's quality criteria for trail infrastructure and management, and are eligible for inclusion on a public liability insurance scheme which indemnifies private landowners and voluntary trail management organisations. These are:

- Edenmore Bog, Ballinamuck
- Commons North, Lanesborough
- Waterfall Trail, Aughnacliffe
- Mass Bridge Trail, Aughnacliffe
- Nature Trail, Derrycassin Woods
- Main Avenue Walk, Derrycassin Woods
- Walled Garden Walk, Derrycassin Woods

Peatland trails

Following the cessation of peat harvesting, the development of recreational trails, amenities and facilities is being integrated into a pipeline of renewable energy projects, alongside biodiversity enhancement, habitat rehabilitation and restoration, and commercial development.

Over the past number of years, recreation trails have been developed in these areas, primarily following the former routes of industrial bog railways. These currently consist of:

- A trail network centred around Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre, with trail connections to the Royal Canal and Ballymahon
- A linear trail connecting Lanesborough and Cloondara, via Knappogue and Derryaroge

It is planned to extend these trails over the coming years, to form part of the Midlands Trail Network that will connect the whole Midlands area through a latticework of recreational trails. This project has received significant funding from the EU Just Transition Fund Trail Network Development Scheme.



Derryaroge Peatland Trail



Waterfall Trail, Aughnacliffe



Ballinalee Forest Trail



Royal Canal Greenway. Courtesy Fáilte Ireland.

Participation Opportunities and Awareness

There is recognition amongst stakeholders that provision of inclusive opportunities and the consistent promotion of those opportunities is required to increase levels of participation in outdoor recreation in Longford.

Participation Opportunities

Several county stakeholders provide opportunities for local people to participate in outdoor recreation, including:

Longford Sports Partnership

Longford Sports Partnership delivers a variety of programmes annually which enable residents to enjoy outdoor recreation, including walking, cycling, kayaking and pony riding, parkour and green gyms, as well as programmes for schools, such as the Daily Mile and Paddles Up.

Clubs

Longford is home to a range of sporting clubs that take part in outdoor recreation. These include:

- Longford Ramblers and Hikers
- Lough Ree Athletics Club
- Longford Athletics Club
- Longford Cycling & Racing Club
- Heartland Wheelers Cycling Club
- Lanesboro Triathlon Club
- Longford Triathlon Club
- Longford Hunt Branch of Irish Pony Club

- Mosstown Stables
- Camlin and District Anglers
- Lanesborough Pike Angling Club
- Inny Kayakers
- Abbeyshrule Canoe Club
- County Longford Scuba Divers
- Lough Ree Sub Aqua Club
- Lough Ree Access For All
- Vertical Kayakers

Activity providers

There are few activity providers permanently based in the county, with those operating providing paddlesports tuition and cycling hire for locals and tourists. Some activity providers in the county have recently been awarded funding from the EU Just Transition Fund to improve their services.

Events

A 5km Parkrun event is hosted by volunteers at the Mall Park, Longford, every Saturday.

The Gaelforce Great River Swim is an annual festival held on the Shannon at Lanesborough Ballyleague, in partnership with the local community.

Other annual events include the Royal Canal Run Longford, Two Provinces Triathlon and Longford Trail Run Series.

Awareness

Awareness is about connecting people to their outdoor recreation opportunities by providing the right information with which to encourage and enable responsible participation*. Platforms that promote outdoor recreation in Longford include (but are not necessarily limited to):

Longford Tourism: Longford Tourism Office, and Longford Tourism social media channels disseminate information about outdoor activities and trails. Walks information, including maps and audio guides, is provided on the longford.ie website, and has also been published in a booklet format.

Longford Sports Partnership website and social media: Promotes events and other participation opportunities.

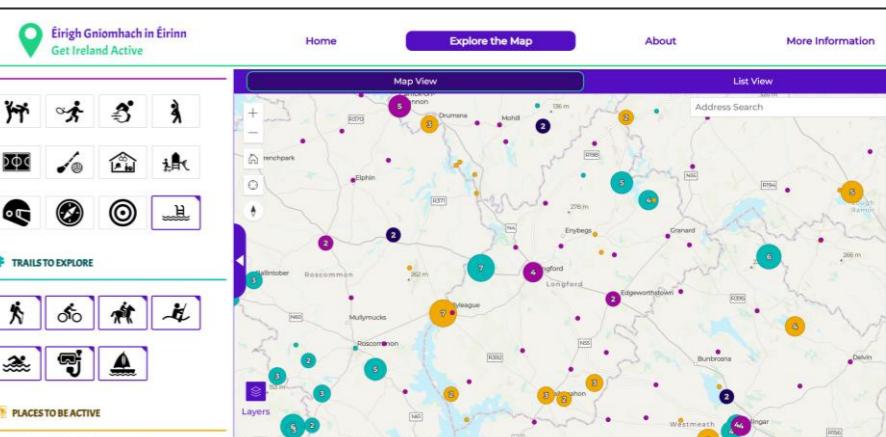
Discoverireland.ie: Fáilte Ireland provides tourism information for Ireland and promotes Longford as part of the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands proposition, with a strong emphasis on slow tourism activities exploring the outdoors.

Getirelandactive.ie: A Sport Ireland database with information on participation opportunities including clubs, events, and access locations.

Activity provider websites: Features details of guided outdoor activity experiences provided through local operators.

*Responsible participation

This term refers to outdoor recreation activities and behaviours that are appropriate to their context within the local environment and residents/ landowners.



Outdoor recreation stakeholders in Longford

Longford has a wide array of stakeholders who play an active role in the development, management, and promotion of outdoor recreation.

In 2024, Longford Sports Partnership was selected to participate in a three-year pilot to employ an Outdoor Recreation Officer, funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).

The Officer's role is to work in collaboration with all county stakeholders to support a more co-ordinated, cohesive approach to outdoor recreation at county level, by establishing a County Outdoor Recreation Committee and Stakeholder Forum in line with national guidance provided by DRCD.

Participation Organisations	
Longford Sports Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outdoor Recreation Officer Outdoor Sport and Diversity Inclusion Officer Community Sports Development Officer Sports Inclusion Disability Officer Physical Activity for Health Officer Collaboration with National Governing Bodies and other partners
Activity providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guiding and instruction for outdoor sports
National Governing Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for sports clubs

Users		Landowners		Development, Management & Maintenance Organisations	
General public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local residents Residents of neighbouring counties 	Bord na Móna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitates recreational trail provision, with trails on Bord na Móna land managed under license by Longford County Council 	Longford County Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wide remit for development and maintenance of recreation amenities
Tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic visitors International visitors 	Coillte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landowner and provision of forest recreation sites 	Longford Community Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for communities in developing and maintaining recreation amenities
Groups/ clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Variety of groups and clubs across various activities Variety of events, festivals and competition 	Waterways Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management of Royal Canal, including recreational facilities and access 	Roscommon LEADER Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural Recreation Officer duties currently include Longford
Environment & Heritage Organisations					
National Parks and Wildlife Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statutory responsibility for granting activity consent and enforcing European and Irish environmental law in designated areas. 	Private landowners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Landowners providing permissive access for recreation 	Trail management organisations and community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walking trail development, management and maintenance
Longford County Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biodiversity Officer overseeing development of biodiversity action plan Heritage Officer overseeing heritage plan 	Longford County Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provider (or manager under license) of recreation sites, trails and access points, including Parks 	Coillte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management of forest recreation sites (in partnership with community groups), forest road access in all forests for pedestrians
Main Tourism/ Promotion Organisations					
LAWPRO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (Local Authority Waters Programme) River Basin Management Plan 	Fáilte Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discoverireland.ie Ireland's Hidden Heartlands 	Fáilte Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for tourism projects (e.g. Just Transition Trail Network Development Scheme), industry support and training
Inland Fisheries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management and conservation of fisheries 	Longford County Council and Longford Tourism Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit Longford Longford Tourism Office 	Transport Infrastructure Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greenway development
		Sport Ireland Outdoors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> getirelandactive.ie and the National Trails Register 		

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges for outdoor recreation in Longford

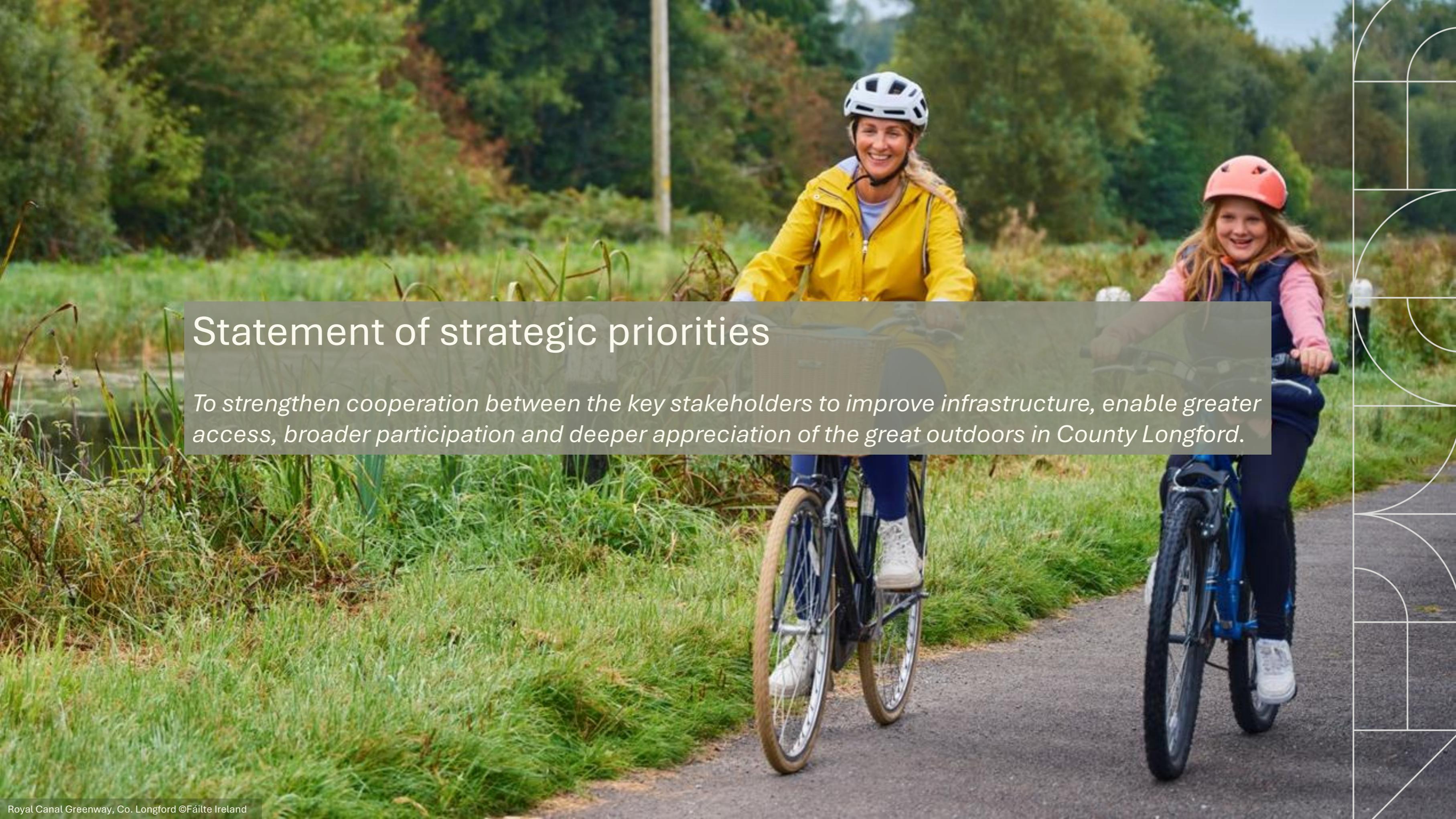
This page presents an at-a-glance summary of the current situation of outdoor recreation in Longford. It has been used to inform the plan's strategic priorities and action plan.

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The recent appointment of an Outdoor Recreation Officer, the development of this plan and the establishment of a County Outdoor Recreation Committee provides a catalyst for renewed collective action.Availability of funding for outdoor recreation development, e.g. Just Transition Fund (Fáilte Ireland), Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (DRCD).Diverse outdoor environments with free public access, e.g. peatlands, forest, waterways, lakes, parks.Trail connectivity between communities and green and blue spaces, cultural and industrial heritage, sports facilities, especially in the north of the county.	Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Poor public awareness of outdoor recreation sites and activities available in the county.Lack of resources for managing and maintaining outdoor recreation sites and amenities.Few trails on the Sport Ireland Outdoors National Trails Register, with some recreation sites not currently meeting the National Trails Standards with regards to trail quality, access for people with disabilities and basic visitor services.Low numbers of clubs and activity providers present in the county.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">New structures provide opportunities to renew and strengthen partnerships between stakeholders.Opportunity for CORC to collectively prioritise accessibility and inclusion in all future projects and programmes, so that everyone can access the outdoors in Longford.Work in partnership to fully realise the potential of the proposed Midlands Trail Network to enhance connectivity and outdoor recreation opportunities, subject to sustainability and environmental assessments.Current efforts to prepare for additional Longford trails to receive accreditation on the Sport Ireland Outdoors National Trails Register will enable the appointment of a Longford Rural Recreation Officer and the delivery of the Walks Scheme in the county.	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Meaningfully engaging members of the public who do not currently participate in outdoor recreation and removing physical and social barriers to access.Balancing increasing levels of accessibility and activity tourism development with environmental and community limitations.Identifying a long-term sustainable solution to managing and maintaining an extensive trail network.Fostering and maintaining productive dialogue with stakeholders via the County Outdoor Recreation Committee and the Stakeholder Forum.

Strategic objectives and action plan



Edenmore Bog Walk. Courtesy Longford Tourism.



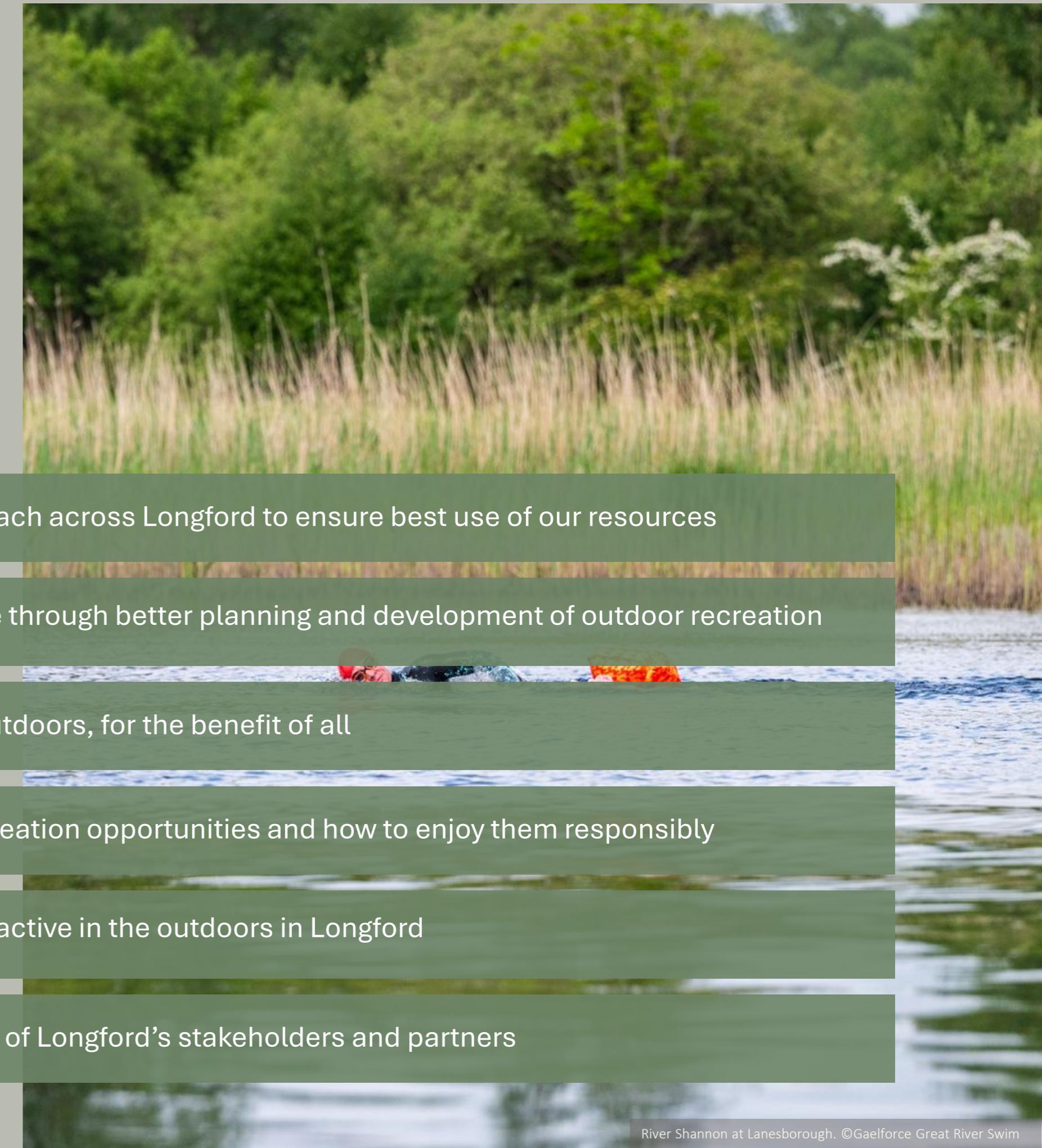
Statement of strategic priorities

To strengthen cooperation between the key stakeholders to improve infrastructure, enable greater access, broader participation and deeper appreciation of the great outdoors in County Longford.

Strategic objectives

The strategic objectives reflect those defined within the 6 themes of '*Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*'.

Leadership and Collaboration	To create a more co-ordinated, cohesive approach across Longford to ensure best use of our resources
Environment	To protect Longford's environment and heritage through better planning and development of outdoor recreation
Access and Infrastructure	To protect and improve access to Longford's outdoors, for the benefit of all
Awareness and Engagement	To create awareness of Longford's outdoor recreation opportunities and how to enjoy them responsibly
Participation Opportunities	To increase and support the number of people active in the outdoors in Longford
Expertise	To improve the knowledge, skills, and expertise of Longford's stakeholders and partners



Leadership and Collaboration

Why is this important?

Across Longford there are numerous organisations involved on a day-to-day basis in the planning, development, management, maintenance and promotion of outdoor recreation.

These include State Lands and private landowners who own or manage land on which outdoor recreation takes place. Public and State landowners and managers include Longford County Council, Bord na Móna, Coillte, Inland Fisheries Ireland, NPWS and Waterways Ireland.

Longford Sports Partnership and several private sector businesses are involved directly in facilitating participation in outdoor recreation activities, whilst Fáilte Ireland is involved in promoting and developing the area as a slow tourism destination, as part of its Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' brand proposition.

Several community groups are actively involved in managing and maintaining outdoor recreation trails and sites across the county.

With so many organisations involved, it is essential that everyone works together collaboratively to learn from each other, prevent duplication of effort, and maximise limited resources. This will ensure that those using the outdoors will be rewarded with the best outdoor recreation experience possible.

Developing quality experiences, identifying additional resources and strengthening relationships will be vital to sustainably growing the outdoor recreation offering in the county.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to achieve a more planned and coordinated approach between all those directly or indirectly involved in outdoor recreation across Longford.

As set out in the national strategy '*Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*' each county in Ireland is required to set up a

- A County Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC)
- A County Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum (*the Forum*), feeding into the committee

The CORC will ensure co-operation and collaborative working between the key stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in outdoor recreation planning, development, management, promotion, education, training and participation.

The CORC will include members of this plan's Working Committee, with the potential to co-opt others who can bring organisational insights or specific expertise.

The forum will be established to provide opportunities for anyone with an interest in outdoor recreation to contribute to and participate in, the development of outdoor recreation in Longford.

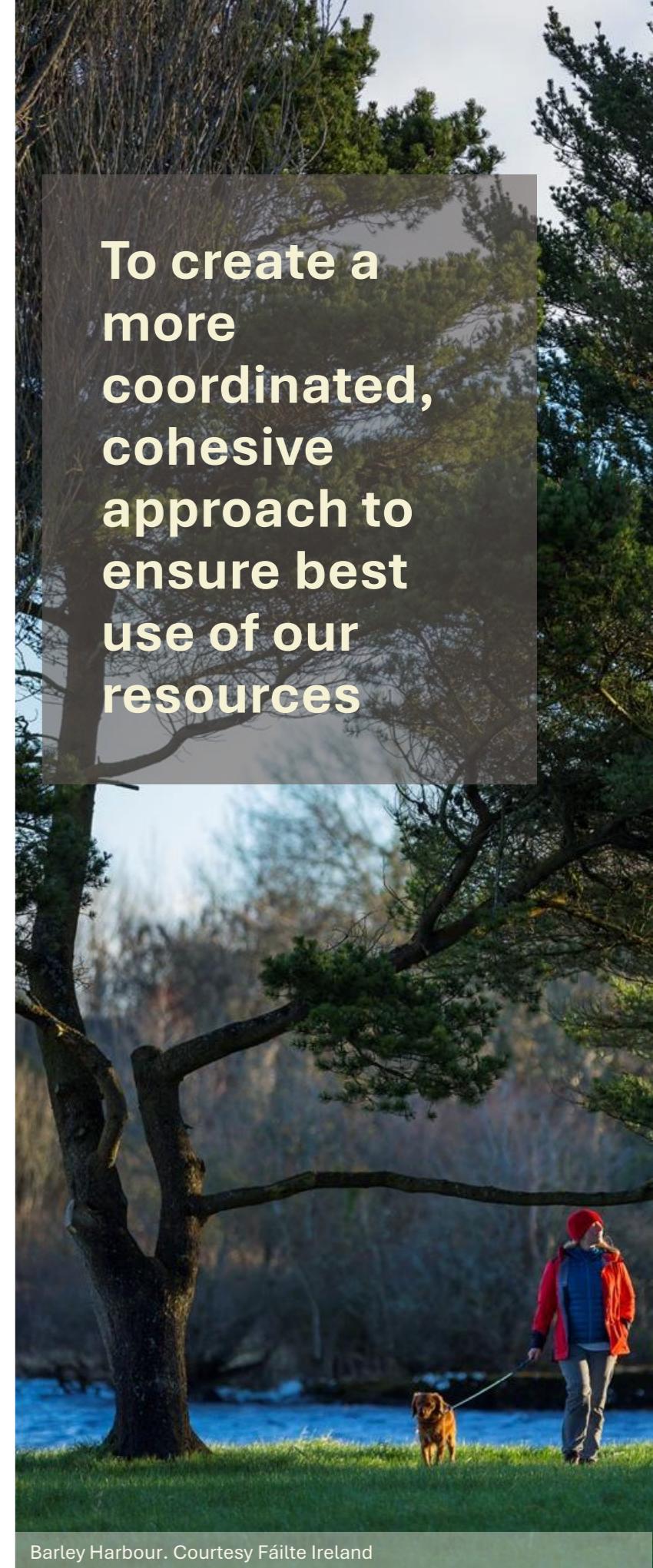
Longford's Outdoor Recreation Officer will act as the Secretariat to both the County Outdoor Recreation Committee and County Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum.

Outdoor recreation by its very nature cuts across the remit of several Directorates in Longford County Council. To facilitate information exchange, nurture positive and productive working relations, create synergies between and across various outdoor recreation projects, provide for better decision making, and alignment of delivery across the Council, a Cross-Directorate Outdoor Recreation Working Group will be established. The group will be chaired at Director level, to provide the requisite and necessary value to the conversation, raising the profile and acknowledging the importance of our outdoors at the highest level of the organisation.

In addition, to help us deliver this plan we will:

- develop a co-ordinated response to visitor management of existing and new outdoor recreation assets and invest in ongoing maintenance of same
- seek to secure a full-time Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) replacing our current part-time RRO. This full-time post will pursue new Walks Scheme opportunities
- make greater use of the Rural Social Scheme, the Tús Community Work Placement Initiative and voluntary community groups in the management and maintenance of our outdoor recreation sites
- explore the opportunities to appoint an outdoor recreation 'development' lead in the county

To create a more coordinated, cohesive approach to ensure best use of our resources



Leadership and Collaboration Actions

Action	Lead Delivery Organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders	
1.1	Establish a County Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC) to ensure a co-ordinated approach and alignment of decisions at the county level with the national outdoor recreation strategy. Co-opt new members as necessary.	Longford Sports Partnership	2026 - ongoing	• Key strategic county stakeholders
1.2	Establish a Stakeholder Forum to ensure that those in the county with an interest in outdoor recreation can contribute to the development of outdoor recreation in Longford.	Longford Sports Partnership /CORC	2026 - ongoing	• Public, clubs, communities, service providers, County Tourism Committee
1.3	Establish a Cross-Directorate Outdoor Recreation Working Group comprised of Longford County Council officers who have responsibilities related to outdoor recreation.	Longford County Council	2026-ongoing	
1.4	Appoint a Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) to work with private landowners to develop new walking trails and administer the Walks Scheme across the county.	Longford Community Resources	2026-2028	• Private landowners
1.5	Develop a facilities database to include detailed information on all outdoor recreation sites across the county including; land ownership, visitor services, organisation responsible for the on-going management and maintenance etc. Review and update annually as a minimum to ensure information is complete and accurate.	Longford County Council	2026-2027	• CORC • Sport Ireland Outdoors

Environment

Why is this important?

Longford's diverse and rich environment features a variety of habitats comprising rivers, forests, woodlands, bogs and lakes all of which provide opportunities for a wide range of outdoor recreation activities for the local community and visitors.

Enjoying time in green and blue space and connecting with nature is a core motivator for outdoor recreation participation. Therefore, outdoor recreation relies on a sustainable natural environment, including healthy landscapes and waterways.

It is therefore imperative that the environment is at the heart of any recreation development.

Longford's has an abundance of sites that are protected and designated by environmental legislation including six Natural Heritage Areas, e.g., Aghnamona Bog, eight Special Areas of Conservation e.g., Clooneen Bog and four Special Protection Areas e.g., Glen Lough.

Work is currently underway to designate Lough Ree and its environs as an UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

All stakeholders in the county have a shared responsibility to fulfil the legal obligations to protect these natural assets.

Conserving, protecting and managing Longford's outdoor environment for future generations, whilst encouraging an appreciation and enjoyment of its resources is key to this plan.

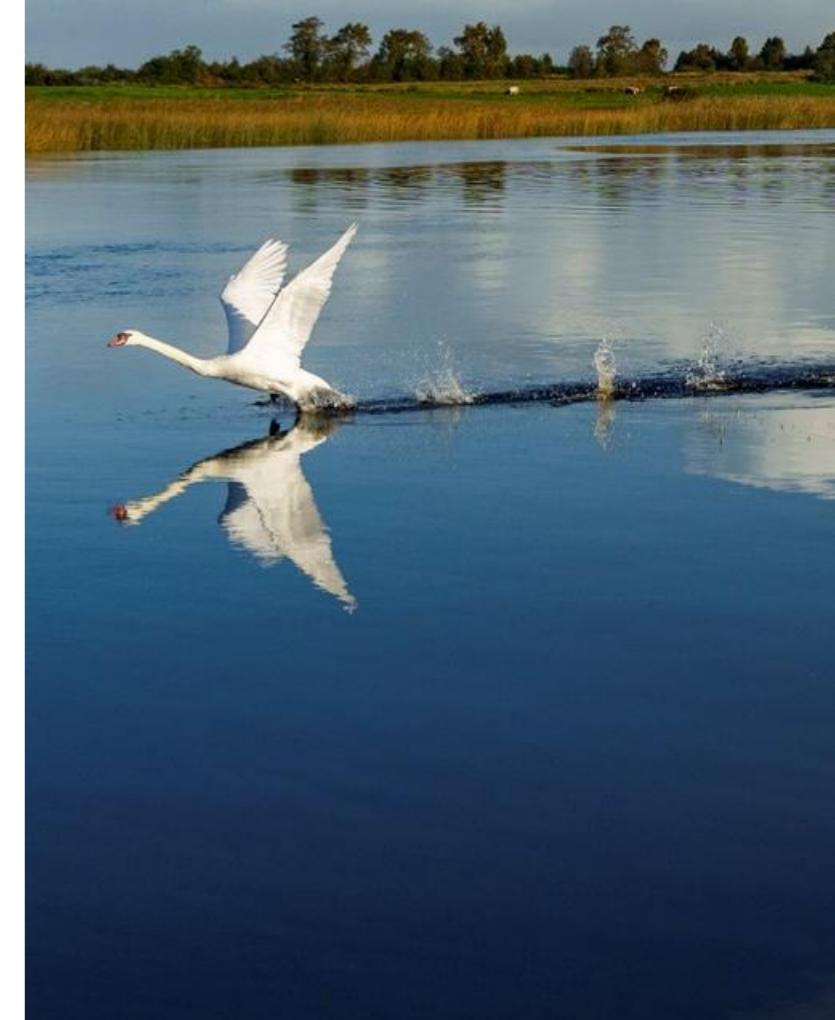
What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to ensure that environmental considerations are woven into the fabric of all future outdoor recreation decision-making to secure the quality of our outdoor recreation experiences and natural habitats for future generations.

We hope to do this by:

- ensuring that the environment is considered from the earliest stages and throughout project and programme development
- ensuring that all recreation development should result in a 'net gain' to the environment e.g. by incorporating initiatives that enhance space for nature into projects, such as tree planting
- including environmental protection and enhancement as a standing item at all Cross Directorate Working Group meetings
- seeking to ensure, where possible, that public transport and active travel opportunities are developed to connect local people and visitors to recreation sites. This will not only reduce the carbon footprint of recreational users but provide greater connectivity between people and places and encourage healthier communities

To protect the environment through better planning and development of outdoor recreation



Environment Actions

Action	Lead Delivery Organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
2.1 Support, encourage and promote best practice regarding environmental protection, conservation and rehabilitation in all future outdoor recreation projects and ensure compliance with legal obligations with regards to protecting the environment.	CORC	2026 - 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPWS • Longford County Council • Bord na Móna • Coillte • Office of Public Works
2.2 Identify gaps in transport provision to enhance connectivity and accessibility to key outdoor recreation sites	CORC	2027 - 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder Forum
2.3 Support the establishment of the proposed Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere Reserve	CORC	2026-2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPWS

Access and Infrastructure

Why is this important?

Longford currently provides a range of outdoor recreation opportunities including walking, cycling, and watersports.

These activities take place on the county's forests, waterways, peatlands and parks owned and managed by Coillte, Longford County Council, Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna, NPWS, Inland Fisheries Ireland, and private landowners.

There is a recognition that the north of the county is well served by community trails, that is, trails on people's doorstep, whilst the south of the county will be transformed through the Midlands Trail Network in the future. This will involve Bord na Móna developing and repurposing available and suitable areas of former industrial peatlands to support a network of accessible cycling and walking trails.

It is also acknowledged that the area's waterscapes offering could be significantly enhanced and expanded to provide a better experience for all users.

Any development must have the environment at its fore and be led by the research on trends including:

- walking is the dominant outdoor recreation activity and will continue to be
- a growth in participation, including a rise in the number of older people taking part and growth in multi-generational participation
- people wish to participate in a range of outdoor recreation activities e.g. walking, cycling, adventure play etc

- people seek opportunities 'closer to home' to participate with friends and family
- a notable rise in new activities such as open water swimming, and Stand Up Paddleboarding (SUP)

Understanding and providing for these trends in consumer behaviour is key to ensuring that future outdoor recreation development and visitor services across the county is targeted appropriately.

The long-term responsibility for managing and maintaining current and future infrastructure is also a key issue to be considered to ensure facilities are safe and of sufficient quality and managed in a way that is appropriate to their settings.

What is our ambition?

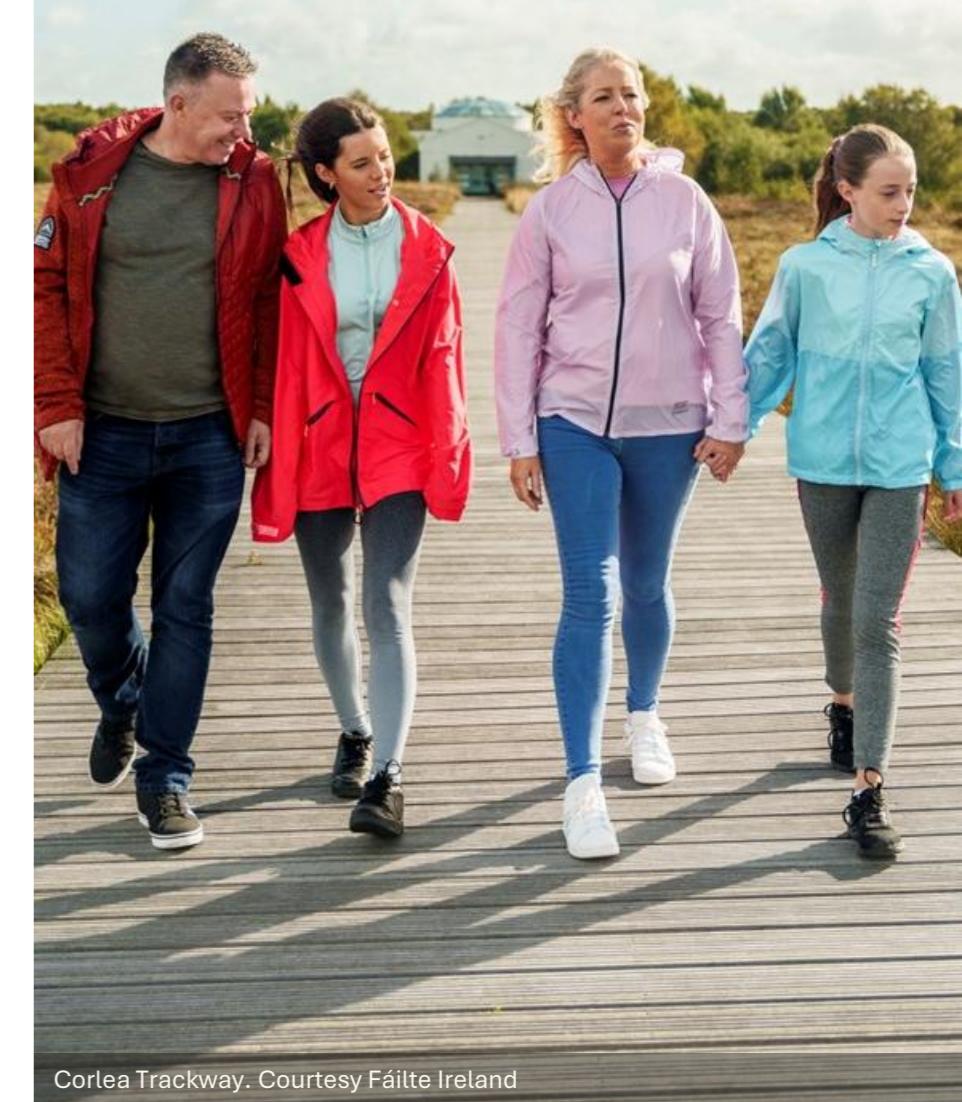
Our ambition is to provide high quality, accessible, and sustainable outdoor recreation facilities across the entire county, including recreation trails for walking, cycling and watersports.

We will do this by:

- improving the accessibility and inclusivity of sites to ensure as many people as possible can enjoy using them
- improving the 'connectivity' between existing outdoor recreation sites and the local community
- increasing the number of trails registered on Sport Ireland's national trails database

- continuing to develop the Midland Trail Network and support the activation of the trails in line with the vision for Fáilte Ireland's '*Ireland's Hidden Heartlands*' destination experience brand in Co. Longford
- seeking to develop a Blueway in line with Blueway Partnership principles and criteria and seeking to develop additional water trails at appropriate sites
- supporting the sustainable development of watersports including outdoor swimming at appropriate locations
- improving visitor services at recreation sites including visitor welcome, car parking, toilets, catering, signage, waymarking and interpretation
- ensuring each outdoor recreation site has a management and maintenance plan in place to establish a long-term management strategy, by collaborating with landowners and third parties such as community groups and/or those employed to manage amenities through other schemes such as the Rural Social Scheme and the Tús Community Work Placement Initiative

To protect and improve access to Longford's outdoors, for the benefit of all



Access and Infrastructure Actions

1 Action	Lead Delivery Organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
3.1 Increase the number of trails meeting Sport Ireland's trail standards, e.g. with regards to information signage and wayfinding, trail surfacing and ensuring effective management strategies are implemented, including implementing appropriate trail maintenance plans and management agreements are put in place.	Longford County Council	2026-2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CORC • Longford Community Resources
3.2 Support the ongoing delivery of the vision for the 'Midlands Trail Network' – a network of walking and cycling trails under consideration for long-term development across the Midlands region, mainly located on rehabilitated peatlands.	Bord na Móna Fáilte Ireland	2026-2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longford County Council • Waterways Ireland • NPWS
3.3 In partnership with landowners / trail management organisations, carry out a review of key recreation sites and trailheads to assess the quality of amenities provided and the site's physical accessibility, and make recommendations for appropriate improvements.	Longford County Council	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CORC • Longford Community Resources
3.4 Develop a Community Trail Plan to identify opportunities to improve access to green space and increase trail connectivity between green spaces and communities.	Longford County Council	2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CORC • Longford Community Resources
3.5 Develop the Camlin Loop as a Blueway, in line with Blueways Partnership principles and criteria for Blueway development, i.e. strengthening capacity of activity providers, provision of amenities for water-based and land-based activities, accommodation and food services, and the development of the visitor experience and raising the profile of the area's key stories through interpretation.	Waterways Ireland	2026-2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CORC • Longford County Council • Activity providers • Blueways Partnership • Fáilte Ireland • County Tourism Committee
3.6 Develop Water Trails on the Royal Canal and on the River Inny, and deliver on the associated ongoing management tasks (i.e. maintenance, marketing and promotion to locals and visitors).	Longford County Council	2027 – 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CORC • Waterways Ireland • Inland Fisheries • LAWPRO • Fáilte Ireland

Access and Infrastructure Actions

1	Action	Lead Delivery Organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
3.7	Evaluate the potential to provide open water swimming activity across the county.	Longford County Council	2027-2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waterways Ireland • Inland Fisheries • Water Safety Ireland • Visitor Safety Group (Irish Sub-Group)

Awareness and Engagement

Why is this important?

Although Longford is rich with outdoor recreation opportunities, there is a low level of public awareness of the opportunities available. This is a significant barrier to participation in outdoor recreation for locals and visitors.

Currently there is no dedicated promotion of outdoor recreation at a county level, with information currently available on Longford Council's website, Fáilte Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, and Sport Ireland Outdoors. Longford's outdoor recreation proposition is also promoted through numerous unofficial channels, e.g. AllTrails, Outdooractive, Komoot, Hiiker, blogs and social media channels.

There is a recognition that existing marketing and promotion platforms are not up to date with gaps in knowledge and a lack of a comprehensive mapping tool for local sites and trails.

It is important to have accurate, current and accessible information on places to go and outdoor recreation experiences on offer across the county.

This information needs to be communicated in a coherent manner to a wide audience using a range of platforms in line with consumer preferences for media and content. It needs to appeal to both the outdoor recreation enthusiast and those who have not previously engaged with the outdoors.

Raising awareness of how to behave responsibly in the outdoors is also important. This includes encouraging users to take responsibility for their own

safety, teaching them how to minimise their impact on the environment and ensuring they understand the importance of respecting landowners and managers who allow them to recreate on their land.

- increasing the number of walking, cycling and water trails accredited and consequently promoted on Sport Ireland's National Trails Register

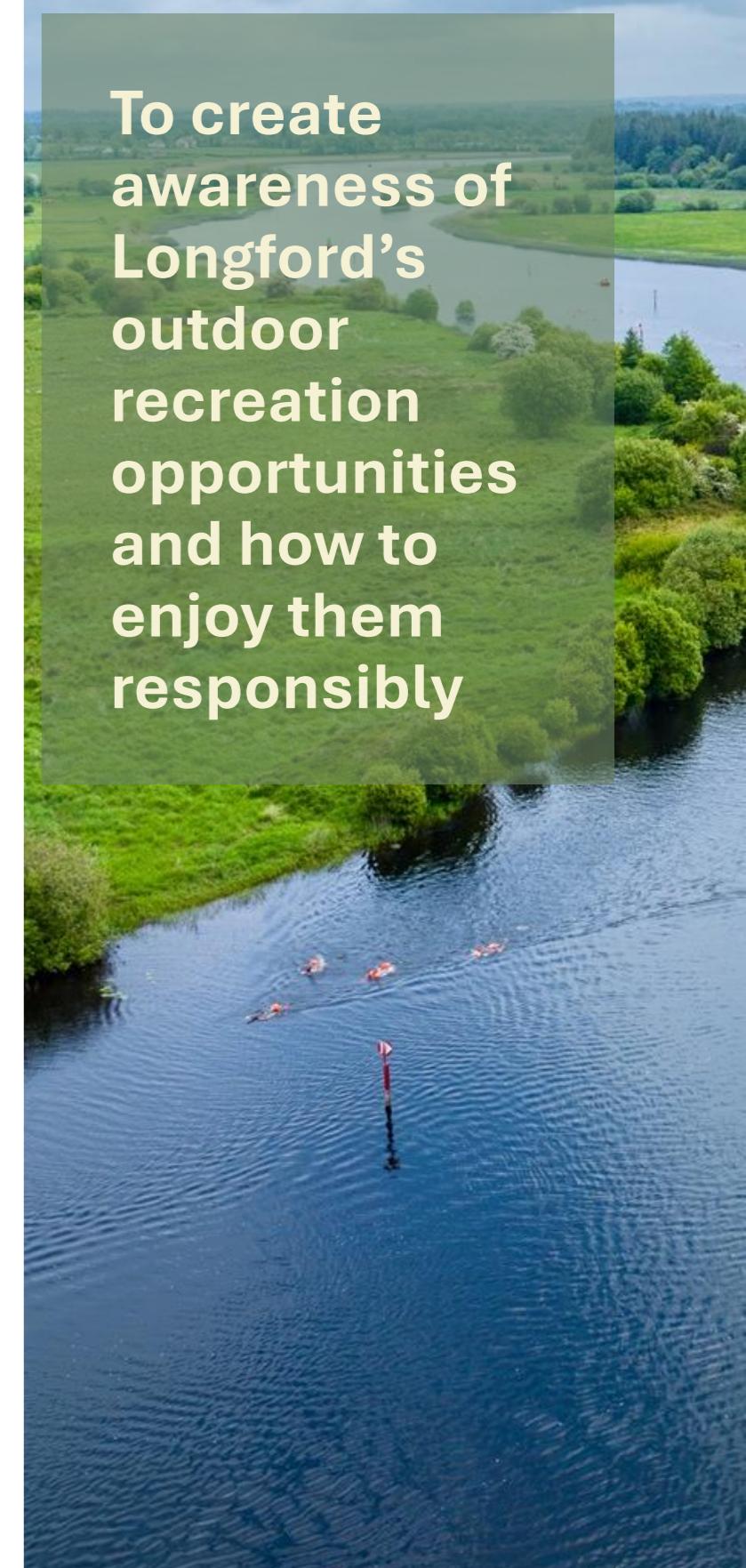
What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to collaborate to develop a unified approach to promoting the outdoor recreation opportunities that Longford has to offer to both locals and visitors as well as promoting responsible behaviour messaging.

We will work to achieve this by:

- examining the reasons for low levels of engagement in the county
- taking a coordinated, collaborative and consistent approach to promotion of outdoor recreation
- developing a centralised outdoor recreation database that is accurate and up to date, including an interactive map
- supporting and building the portfolio of outdoor events taking place across the county, ensuring that the local community is benefiting, and environmental protection is prioritised
- engaging with national partners to clarify and amplify responsible behaviour messaging to users of the outdoors in Longford

To create awareness of Longford's outdoor recreation opportunities and how to enjoy them responsibly



Awareness and Engagement Actions

Action	Lead Delivery Organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
4.1 Improve collaboration between those organisations with an outdoor recreation marketing and promotional remit, including cross selling on each other's promotional platforms, when appropriate.	CORC	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CORC stakeholders
4.2 Increase the promotion and marketing of all outdoor recreation opportunities to both locals and visitors on appropriate platforms including targeted social media campaigns.	CORC	2026-2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CORC • Sport Ireland • County Tourism Committee • Fáilte Ireland
4.3 Support and roll out the national 'Responsible Use of the Outdoors' campaign at a local level to educate, encourage, and inform safe and responsible use of the outdoors in line with Leave No Trace principles.	CORC	2026 - 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave No Trace Ireland
4.4 Support the development of a portfolio of outdoor events across the county, ensuring that the local community is benefiting from these initiatives.	Longford County Council Fáilte Ireland	2026-2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longford Sports Partnership • County Tourism Committee • Communities • Clubs

Participation Opportunities

Why is this important?

Spending time in the outdoors and participating in outdoor activities brings a multitude of benefits to individuals and society. By providing opportunities for people to get active outdoors:

- their physical health improves as they become more physically active
- their mental health improves as time spent outdoors, increases the levels of happiness and life satisfaction
- their social well-being improves as they gain opportunities for social interaction reducing feelings of loneliness, isolation and improving overall quality of life
- the environment improves as more people accessing and connecting with their environment ultimately results in greater awareness and care for it
- the economy benefits as increased participation provides direct economic benefit to the wider economy through activity tourism and wider savings to the health service

It is acknowledged however that there is unequal access to the outdoors across society with multiple social and economic barriers preventing people engaging in outdoor recreation. In particular there is under representation from high social need communities, rurally isolated communities, new communities including refugees and asylum seekers, the elderly and people with disabilities.

All of these communities, for a variety of reasons, can experience difficulty in accessing outdoor recreation opportunities.

Furthermore, it is understood that nationally there is poor participation in 'adventure activities' among children and young people.*

A range of participation programmes and initiatives is already being delivered by Longford County Council and the Longford Sports Partnership that cater for some of these underrepresented groups.

- increasing the awareness of the programmes and other opportunities that are available to enable participation in outdoor recreation

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to provide inclusive outdoor experiences in Longford to enable a wide and diverse audience to enjoy the county's outdoor spaces and avail of the many benefits from doing so.

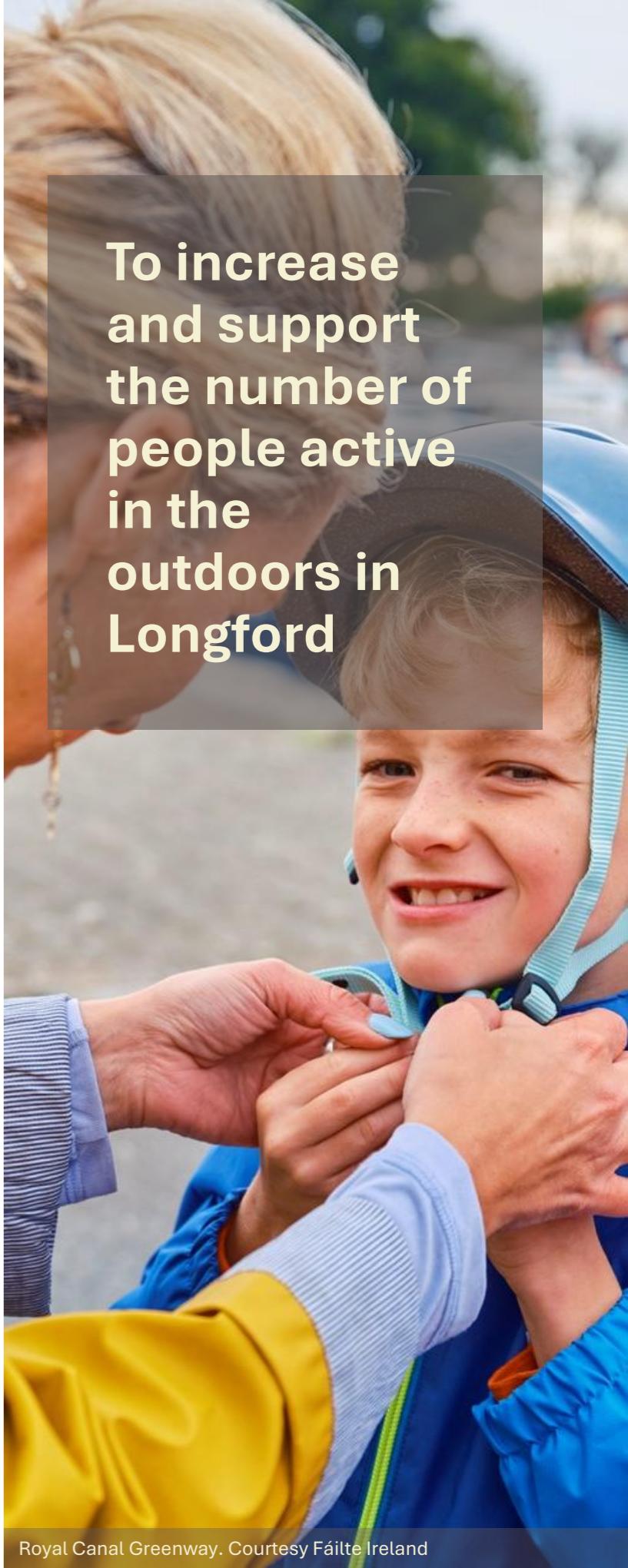
We want to better provide for segments of society that are currently underrepresented in outdoor recreation, and encourage participation within these groups.

This will be achieved through:

- working in partnership with other stakeholders and activity providers to ensure an increased number of fully inclusive and accessible outdoor places - therefore reducing the physical barriers that prevent participation
- designing and delivering programmes targeted specifically at underrepresented groups

*Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity, Sport Ireland, 2018

To increase and support the number of people active in the outdoors in Longford



Participation Opportunities Actions

Action	Lead Delivery Organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
5.1 Support opportunities for underrepresented groups to participate in a wide range of activities in Longford through connecting with these groups, designing suitable programmes and facilitating the delivery of these.	Longford Sports Partnership	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities • Stakeholder Forum • Longford Community Resources • National Governing Bodies
5.2 Increase opportunities for participation in outdoor recreation for everyone, by creating events and programmes that are as inclusive as possible.	Longford Sports Partnership	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CORC • National Governing Bodies • Local clubs • Stakeholder Forum
5.3 Recognising the concerns of activity providers, support the identification of industry-wide solutions that will help to sustain the sector by raising key challenges with stakeholders at local, regional, and national levels.	CORC	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ireland's Association for Adventure Tourism • Stakeholder Forum • Longford Sports Partnership • Activity providers • Outdoor recreation clubs

Expertise

Why is this important?

Over the last decade, the outdoor recreation sector in Ireland has grown significantly, reflected in an increase in central government funding for outdoor recreation development.

National level stakeholders have expressed a desire to standardise and improve outdoor recreation practices in Ireland. There is a clear requirement to provide support to the sector to achieve and maintain consistently high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities and infrastructure, and to fulfil all legal obligations.

The quality of outdoor recreation development needs to keep pace with national expectations. Investment in local capacity-building to improve sector expertise will be required to meet these expectations.

There are gaps in knowledge and expertise amongst stakeholders, particularly in relation good practice in protecting the environment and accessibility.

Currently there is a limited number of activity providers and instructors in the county despite formal training available in for example, instructor training, through the National Governing Bodies of sport.

Across the county there is also limited visitor monitoring taking place by some of the key recreation landowners. Collecting such information is important for supporting future funding applications and informing management requirements etc.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to equip those working and volunteering in the outdoor recreation sector in Longford with the knowledge, skills, and expertise they need to thrive in their roles.

We will work towards:

- more collaboration and skill sharing between the members of CORC and the Stakeholder Forum
- developing a more skilled, knowledgeable sector, reflecting good practice throughout Ireland
- supporting activity providers to deliver safe, quality experiences for all
- putting in place a coordinated visitor monitoring programme

We will support stakeholders, including trail management organisations and volunteers, to ensure that management and maintenance practices are consistent and align with guidance and standards set out at a national level (e.g., guidance for responsible recreation, trail management standards).

CORC will work with sector partners to identify opportunities for learning, development and networking that could be provided through collaboration with expert professional bodies, specialist contractors and other local practitioners so that participants can experience best practice in action.

To improve the knowledge, skills, and expertise of Longford's stakeholders and partners



Expertise Actions

Action	Lead Delivery Organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
6.1 Carry out a training needs analysis with those individuals or organisations directly or indirectly involved in the planning, development, management, promotion and delivery of outdoor recreation across the County	CORC	2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities • Clubs • Activity Providers
6.2 Based on the outcome of the training needs analysis, develop a training framework and roll out using national and international experts in the field. Training may include instructor training, training on trail design, Leave No Trace principles, visitor safety principles, and inclusive design principles, and be delivered through courses, seminars, site visits, conferences etc.	CORC	2027 - ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities • Stakeholder Forum • Clubs, National Governing Bodies • Activity providers • Leave No Trace Ireland • Visitor Safety Group • Active Disability Ireland • Sport Ireland • Outdoor Recreation Network
6.3 Continue to upskill and support capability and capacity building within the activity tourism sector by working with activity providers to provide specific training focused on the needs of the visitor.	Fáilte Ireland	Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National governing bodies • Activity tourism providers • National Enterprise Hub
6.4 Implement a visitor monitoring programme to co-ordinate the collection and analysis of robust, reliable data to inform future decision making and funding applications.	Longford County Council	2026 - ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CORC

Appendix 1 – Definition of outdoor recreation

The term ‘outdoor recreation’ is used in this plan to align with the definition given in *Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors*, the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027, which is stated below.

Physical activities that take place in the natural environment

Providing a definition of outdoor recreation that is not open to challenge is difficult considering the wide range of activities involved, the diverse groups and individuals who participate and the varying motivations for participation.

By ‘outdoor recreation’ we mean activities that take place in the natural environment, such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming. It does not include activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches (such as golf, football, show jumping) or motorised activities (such as quads/scramblers) with the exception of motorised mobility aids.

For the purposes of the strategy, outdoor recreation is defined as those activities that:

- are undertaken by people in their leisure time - however this can include organised activity through clubs /groups (e.g. coastal rowing club, guided walking group)
- involve physical human power/effort – however this can sometimes involve equipment (e.g. surf board, canoe, bike, boat, ropes), or passive enjoyment of the natural environment
- require access to green and/or blue spaces in rural or urban environments
- are not primarily focused on competitive outcomes
- sometimes use purpose-built facilities in the natural environment to facilitate participation (e.g. construction of walking, mountain biking and horse-riding trails, development of canoe steps)
- include play in the natural environment

For the purposes of the strategy, outdoor recreation does not include:

- motorised activities except for ability assistance, due to the damage to the natural environment and built heritage and, in particular, in protected areas
- activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches specifically designed and constructed for those sports (e.g. golf, football, show jumping) hunting and shooting as they do not fall within the remit of Comhairle na Tuaithé



Royal Canal Greenway. Courtesy Fáilte Ireland