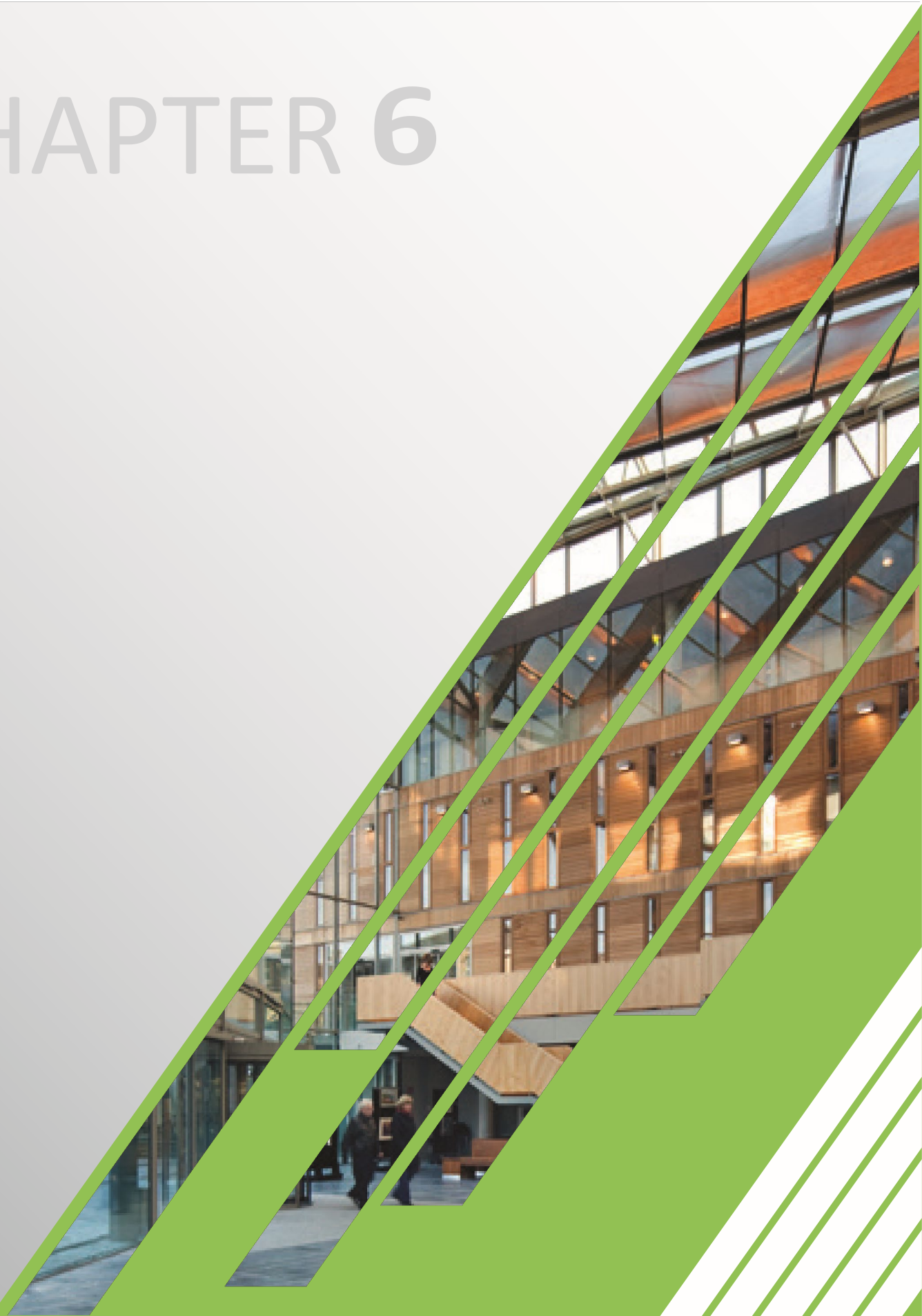
CHAPTER 6



CHAPTER 6
Tourism

2.6 Chapter 6 Tourism

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CH 6.1		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.2.1	Tourism in Ireland	133

Amend the 2nd paragraph in Section 6.2.1 of the plan as follows:

National tourism policy falls within the remit of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and national agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. ~~deliver and implement the adopted policy. The sector is continually evolving and our national bodies carry out research with domestic and international markets to ensure that policy is reflective of these changes. Ireland is promoted nationally and internationally using 'Brand Ireland', under which four distinct experience propositions are used to define the appealing characteristics of each region. Westmeath sits within two of these regional experience brands, 'Ireland's Ancient East' to the east, including Mullingar and the newest of the four brands, 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' to the west, including Athlone.~~ Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority. Its role is to support the tourism industry and work to sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourism destination. It provides a range of practical business supports to help tourism businesses better manage and market their products and services. It also works with other state agencies and representative bodies, at local and national levels, to implement and champion positive and practical strategies that will benefit Irish tourism and the Irish economy. Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas as a leading holiday destination.

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CH 6.2		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.2.2	Tourism in Westmeath	134

Amend Section 6.2.2 and add '*Dun na Si Heritage and Amenity Park*' to the list of attractions in the final paragraph as follows;

Ireland's Ancient East, launched in 2015, is the third regional experience brand from Fáilte Ireland and includes the majority of County Westmeath, from Moate eastwards. In line with this brand, Westmeath offers a rich heritage, with local storytellers who provide unforgettable tours of our ancient sites. Attractions include Dun na Si Heritage and Amenity Park, the Hill of Uisneach, Belvedere House, Gardens and Park, Kilbeggan Distillery, Tullynally Castle gardens and Fore Abbey. The lakes and waterways of Westmeath are also connected with a rich heritage, including the famous legend of the

Children of Lir associated with Lough Derravarragh. The Royal Canal traverses the county, with many preserved original bridges and locks visible to those who travel this route by boat, bike or foot and the Old Rail Trail Greenway brings visitors along the historic Great Western Railway line through the scenic Midlands landscape.

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CH 6.3		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.2.2	Tourism in Westmeath	134

Amend text under Section 6.2.2 of the plan as follows:

Westmeath is a county with considerable heritage and cultural assets, along with a scenic and rich natural environment. Coupled with our vibrant towns and villages and easily accessible location, it is evidently a county of high potential for tourism. Historical Fáilte Ireland and CSO visitor research has included County Westmeath as part of the Midlands region, which has not experienced a growth in visitor numbers commensurate to our coastal counterparts. The county itself however has been out-performing some of our neighbouring counties, due to a number of strong visitor attractions and a critical mass of visitor services concentrated in the towns of Athlone and Mullingar. Fáilte Ireland's figures indicate that in 2018, Westmeath welcomed 1% of the 9,609 million overseas tourists who came to Ireland, spending 1% of the €5,217bn overseas tourism expenditure in Ireland. Irish residents took 238,000 trips to Westmeath (2% of the 10,918 million domestic trips in 2018) spending €27m (1% of domestic tourist spend). ~~Annual visitors to the county reached 262,000 in 2017, of which 103,000 were from overseas. Approximately 42% of the county's overseas visitors are from Britain, 34% from mainland Europe and 18% from North America.~~

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CH 6.4		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.3	Policy Context	137

Insert reference to Fáilte Ireland Destination Development & Commercial Development Plans in Section 6.3 as follows:

6.3.8 Fáilte Ireland Destination Development & Commercial Development Plans.

Ireland's Ancient East has developed a suite of five-year Destination Development Plans. These are designed to be a roadmap for enhancing the existing Ireland's Ancient East visitor proposition to achieve the objectives of addressing seasonality, increasing visitor numbers, improving dwell time and

visitor dispersion across the destination. The Tales of Two Worlds Plan sets out to enhance the experiences at the stunning Houses and Gardens products as well as the attractions that tell the story of emigration and endeavour.

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CH 6.5		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.3	Policy Context	137

To make reference to Fáilte Ireland's Guidance on Sustainable Tourism in Section 6.3 of the plan as follows;

6.3.9 Fáilte Ireland's Guidance on Sustainable Tourism

Fáilte Ireland promotes the incorporation of the principles of sustainability in the tourism policy section of the County Development Plan. Fáilte Ireland has developed five key principles that ensure developments achieve a balance between appropriate tourism development and economic, environmental and social sustainability. Developments will be assessed having regard to compliance with these and the associated policies.

Principle 1: Tourism, when it is well managed and properly located, should be recognised as a positive activity which has potential to benefit the host community, the place itself and the visitor alike. Sustainable tourism planning requires a balance to be struck between the needs of the visitor, the place and the host community.

Principle 2: Our landscapes, our cultural heritage, our environment and our linguistic heritage all have an intrinsic value which outweighs their value simply as a tourism asset. However, sustainable tourism planning makes sure that they can continue to be enjoyed and cherished by future generations and not prejudiced simply by short term considerations.

Principle 3: Built development and other activities associated with tourism should in all respects be appropriate to the character of the place in which they are situated. This applies to the scale, design and nature of the place as well as to the particular land use, economic and social requirements of the place and the surroundings.

Principle 4: Strategic tourism assets – including special landscapes, important views, the setting of historic buildings and monuments, areas of cultural significance and access points to the open countryside, should be safeguarded from encroachment by inappropriate development.

Principle 5: Visitor accommodation, interpretation centres and commercial / retail facilities serving the tourism sector should generally be located within established settlements thereby fostering strong links to a whole range of other economic and commercial sectors and sustaining the host communities. Sustainable tourism facilities, when properly located and managed can, especially if #accessible by a range of transport modes, encourage longer visitor stays, help to extend the tourism

season and add to the vitality of settlements throughout the year. Underlying these principles for Sustainable Tourism, the definitions of economic, environmental and social sustainability against which any tourism project assessed are defined as follows:

Economic sustainability must be considered to ensure that the tourism sector is managed. The key strengths of the County include landscape, heritage, natural environment, lifestyle and amenity pursuits. The sector is highly affected by seasonality and there are extremes in visitor numbers at key attractions contrasted with smaller attractions which struggle to maintain visitor numbers. These 'peaks and troughs' should be carefully managed to ensure the protection of natural resources. Tourism innovation should also be encouraged – particularly where it brings about environmental benefits. Finally, for projects to be economically sustainable they should meet the needs of the permanent and also visitor population alike, so the preparation of robust business plans for all such developments will ensure proposals are viable and sustainable.

Environmental sustainability will be central to the development and protection of a viable tourism sector and this is a key consideration in a County where tourism attractions are located in environmentally sensitive areas and close to historic areas where the quality of the built heritage and environment must be protected from inappropriate development – whether tourism related or not. The 'mainstreaming' of policy guidance tools such as the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) will undoubtedly address any deficits in relation to many of these key policy areas.

Social Sustainability is arguably more difficult to assess. Many of the potentially negative impacts of tourism development can however be addressed through careful consideration of the social and cultural nature of the receiving environment. The impacts that large-scale developments can have on existing local communities policies can be assessed having regard to the impact of visitor numbers on local quality of life, culture and heritage – with a particular emphasis placed on unique areas such as culturally sensitive areas where small impacts over time may have a significant cumulative effect.

Chapter 6 **Proposed Amendment CH 6.6**		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.4.1	General Tourism Development	138

Insert reference to the TII publication "*Policy on the Provision of Tourism and Leisure Signage on National Roads (2011)*" in Section 6.4.1 of the plan as follows;

Consideration shall also be given to TII publication "*Policy on the Provision of Tourism and Leisure Signage on National Roads (2011)*", which outlines policy on the provision of tourist and leisure information signs on national primary and national secondary roads in Ireland.

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CH 6.7		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.4.1	General Tourism Development	138

Insert the following text under Section 6.4.1 as follows:

The key to unlocking the growth potential of an area is the development of experiences that will motivate potential tourists to firstly visit there and secondly to dwell in the area. These new experiences are less concerned with visitors passively seeing or doing things; they encourage tourists to immerse themselves actively in the locale, interacting with people, engaging the senses, and learning the history and stories of the places. Fáilte Ireland's response to this challenge has been the creation of a framework to develop and deliver destination development plans along with strengthening destination towns. Ireland's Ancient East has started work on a number of Destination Development Plans which aim to develop world-class experiences focused on the region's rich heritage. The themes of the Experience Development Plans have been designed to enhance each area's strongest tourism assets and appeal to core overseas markets. Vitally, these plans will be delivered in a way that encourages visitors to spend more time in an area, without compromising the environment or culture of the region. The 'Tales of Two Worlds' Development Plan brings together Ireland's historic houses and gardens, and the period in Ireland's history of famine and emigration. A number of Westmeath businesses are now taking part in a bespoke Great Houses & Gardens Experience Development Programme as part of this, which focuses on the county's rich historic houses and gardens. The Ancient Destination Development Plan is also bringing together businesses in Westmeath to develop world-class experiences centred around the area's rich ancient history including the Hill of Uisneach, connecting Westmeath with the wider geography of the Boyne Valley.

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CH 6.8		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.4.1	General Tourism Development	139

Amend CPO 6.9 of the plan as follows:

CPO 6.9	Continue to support the development and expansion of tourism-related enterprise including immersive visitor attractions, services and accommodation and food and craft businesses, particularly those offering a visitor experience, such as tastings, tours and demonstrations.

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CH 6.9		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.4.1	Policy Context	140

Amend CPO 6.13 of the plan as follows:

CPO 6.13	Support opportunities for increased tourism as a result of ~~warmer summers~~ Climate Change within limits of existing infrastructure and sensitive habitats.

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CH 6.10		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.4.1	General Tourism Development	140

Insert new CPO after CPO 6.15 of the plan as follows*:*

Promote sustainable tourism in ways that positively enhance the environment and liaise with tourism providers to encourage the provision of "eco-tourism" schemes including the development of a "Circular Economy" approach to tourism.

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CH 6.11		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.4.2	Destination Towns	140

To add the following text to the end of the first paragraph under Section 6.4.2 as follows;

In planning their trip, visitors need reassurance that there will be plenty of quality things to see and do both in the day time and evening, along with a range of accommodation options and restaurants. The most effective and efficient way to deliver this for visitors is through destination towns. Athlone and Mullingar both offer high-quality visitor services including a range of accommodation, restaurants, cafes, visitor attractions and guided tours. Current provision enables both towns to serve tourism to the range of surrounding attractions and amenities. In this regard, Athlone has been granted investment under Fáilte Ireland's Destination Towns funding Programme.

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CH 6.12		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.4.2	Policy Context	141

Amend CPO 6.18 of the plan as follows:

CPO 6.18	Support the development of a cross sectoral approach to promote Athlone as the principle visitor services centre and hub for Fáilte Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and the ~~forthcoming Shannon Tourism Masterplan~~Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon Navigation**,** to develop the recreation and amenity potential of waterways ~~including the River Shannon and Lough Ree~~ and the development of a greenway network including the Galway to Dublin Cycleway.

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CH 6.13		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.7	Lakes and Waterways	147

Amend CPO 6.50 of the plan as follows:

CPO 6.50	Continue to work closely with Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and neighbouring counties to ~~realise the potential of~~ implement the Strategic Initiatives of the Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon Navigation, particularly in relation to tourism actions for Athlone, Lough Ree and the Mid-Shannon ~~region for tourism, taking account recommendations arising from Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Shannon Masterplan' and~~ Discovery Zone. *'Shannon Masterplan'*, *'Spirit Level'* and the *'Athlone Waterfront Strategy'* will also be taken into account.

Chapter 6 Proposed Amendment CE CH 6.14		
Section:	**Heading**	**Page No.**
6.9	Arts, Culture and Festivals	150

To add the following text to Section 6.9 of the plan as follows:

Fáilte Ireland has identified festivals as a key driver for tourism growth, particularly during off- season times. They are an important component of the Irish tourism product offering. They provide opportunities to showcase culture, food, people and places, thereby greatly improving the tourist experience. Investment in and business development support for festivals is helping to drive growth and entice both domestic and overseas visitors to different parts of the country in the off- peak season.
A number of vibrant festivals enable local communities to celebrate a valuable cultural heritage and spotlight local talent and unique local attributes. The International Drama Festival is hosted in Athlone annually, spotlighting Athlone as an important venue for the performing arts, while the Bealtaine Fire Celebration at Uisneach highlights the traditions and rituals associated with this ancient heritage site. While some festivals remain small in scale year after year, reaching only a local audience, others have the ambition to grow into larger events, capable of attracting larger numbers of visitors, resulting in a greater impact to the local economy and highlighting the festival location as one worth visiting to a wider audience. The Council will seek to support these festivals where possible, to support their growth potential, subject to event licensing and quality standards.