

Westmeath Tourism Strategy 2021 to 2027

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

2: Context

Policy Context

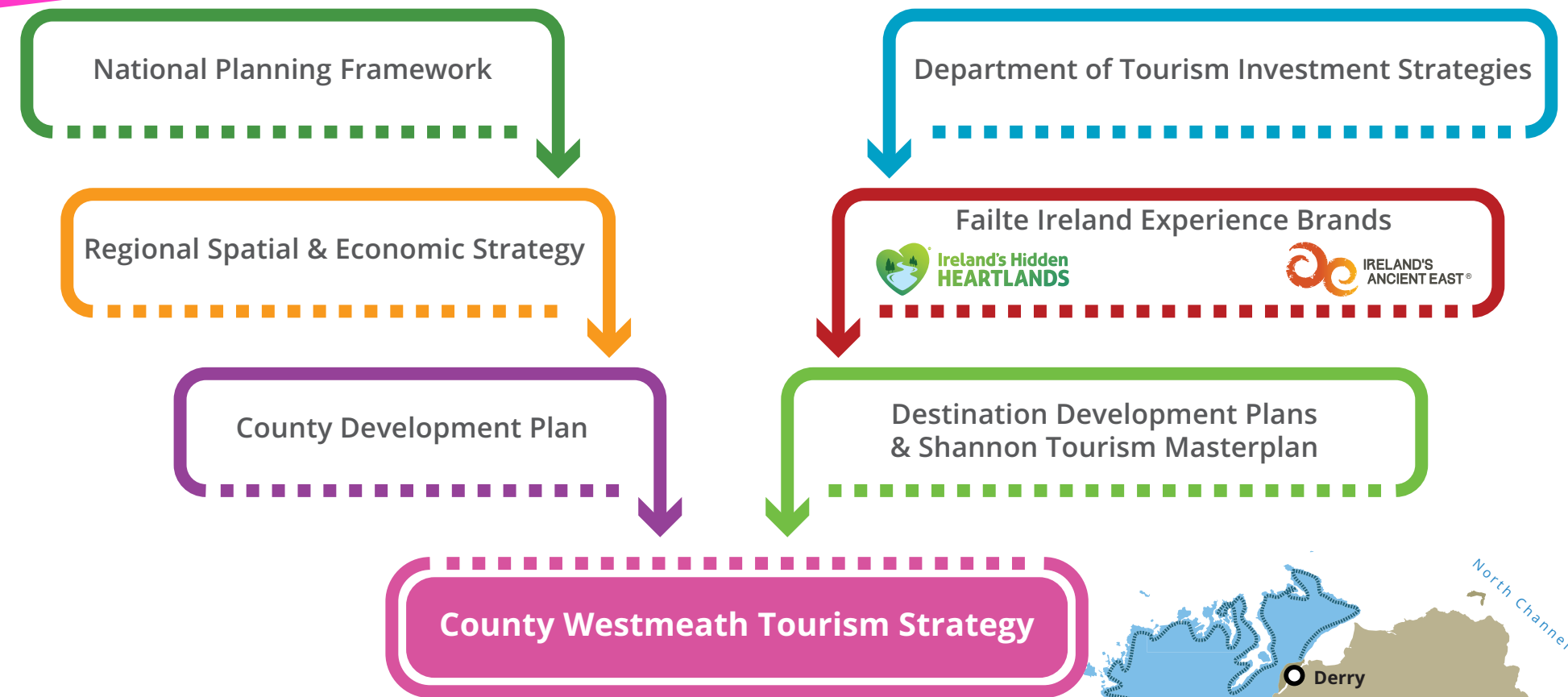
At national, regional and county level, there are many existing plans and strategies which are relevant to tourism in Westmeath. In developing the new Tourism Strategy, we must take account of the existing adopted policy and strategic approach set out by our National Tourism bodies and Planning Authorities.

National tourism policy falls within the remit of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media and agencies Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland. Ireland is promoted nationally and internationally using 'Brand Ireland', under which four distinct experience brands are used to define the appealing characteristics of each region. Most of county Westmeath is covered by 'Ireland's Ancient East', including Mullingar. Athlone and the area adjacent to the River Shannon and Lough Ree are now part of 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands'. It's important that we align our new strategy with the relevant brands, so that we can take full advantage of the opportunities offered by them.

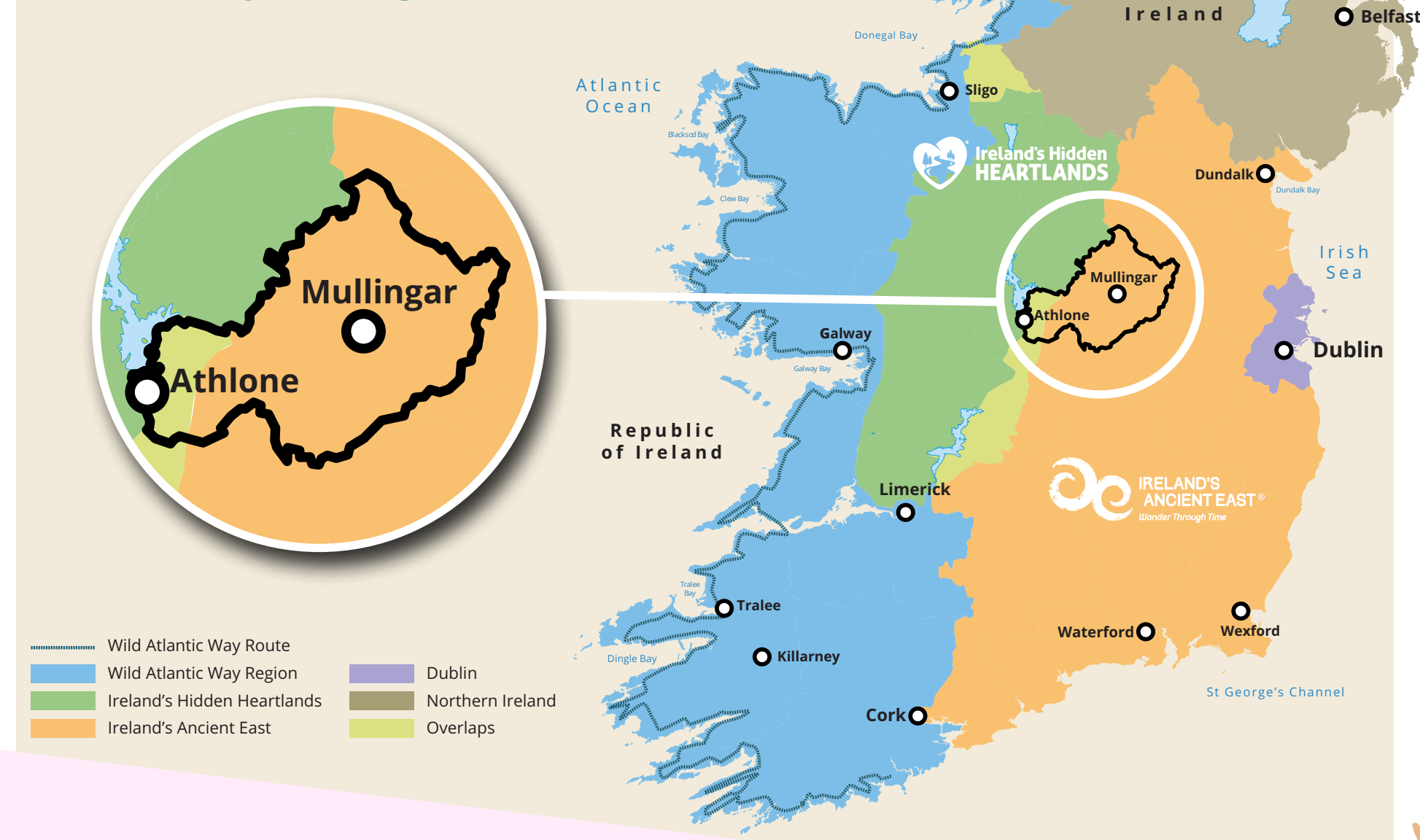
The new Westmeath County Development Plan 2021-2017 includes a dedicated Tourism Chapter. The objectives and policies contained in this County Plan align closely with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019 and the National Planning Framework 2040. The County Development Plan has a key role in facilitating the development of our tourism potential, through supporting sustainable development of our natural and historical assets and strengthening the role of our towns and villages in providing tourism-related infrastructure.

Environmental Sustainability

In line with National, Regional and Local Policy, the new strategy will place a strong emphasis on sustainable tourism, safeguarding the quality of our landscapes, natural environment and cultural heritage for the long-term enjoyment of these assets. It will express and detail the integrated approach required to deliver the broader direction and objectives set out in adopted policies and plans, which have themselves been subject to legislative requirements relating to public consultation and environmental assessment. Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment are being conducted as part of this process.



Ireland's Regional Experience Brands



Tourism Performance

By 2020, tourism had become one of the country's most important economic sectors, supporting an estimated 260,000 jobs and generating over €5 billion for the national economy. Most of this growth has been concentrated around the coastal counties, however Fáilte Ireland has been working closely with Westmeath County Council and others to achieve a more regional spread of tourism. Initiatives underpinning Ireland's Ancient East and the new Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand, along with investment to enhance the visitor experience can support our growth in the future.

Most recently, Covid 19 has delivered a massive and devastating shock to the industry worldwide with unprecedented impacts for tourism businesses. When travel can safely resume, tourism will have a key role to play in our economic recovery and in the immediate term, domestic tourism has the potential to help sustain our tourism businesses.

How to have your Say

You can have your say by sending a submission via the [Public Consultation Portal](#), or by emailing tourism@westmeathcoco.ie.

