



W I C K L O W

ENDLESS OPPORTUNITIES



**Wicklow Tourism
Strategy and
Marketing Plan**



**IRELAND'S
ANCIENT EAST®**

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CONTENTS

1	WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE.....	3
2	POLICY CONTEXT	9
3	WHERE ARE WE NOW	11
4	MARKET POSITIONING.....	21
5	PRODUCT INVESTMENT	25
6	MARKETING PLAN	35
7	DELIVERING THE PLAN	41
	APPENDIX 1 – POLICY LINKS	43

1 WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

This is the Tourism Strategy for County Wicklow. It sets out a vision of what can be achieved in Wicklow, with clear priorities and a series of detailed actions and next steps to ensure the County is realising its potential over the next 5 years (2018-2023). This strategy is for everyone involved in tourism in Wicklow. While there are some clear actions for public agencies, there are others which require the commitment of tourism businesses and local communities – all working together to ensure that Wicklow’s potential can be realised.

This Tourism Strategy and accompanying Marketing Plan align with the broader economic and policy ambitions in Wicklow and for Ireland. With increasing focus on key markets and the intent to make Ireland’s Ancient East (IAE) ‘the most personally engaging cultural destination in Europe by harnessing the authentic culture of the real Ireland, its living culture, lush landscapes and hidden history...’¹, Wicklow has a great opportunity to dovetail the investment in product development and marketing which aims to deliver a 17% increase in domestic tourism revenue and 20% increase in international tourism revenue by 2020 across the IAE region.

WICKLOW ENDLESS OPPORTUNITIES – STATEMENT OF TOURISM STRATEGY 2017: VISION

Our vision is to make Wicklow the number one choice for visitors seeking an idyllic escape that harmonises a wide range of outdoor pursuits in County Wicklow’s world-class natural arena, while driving job creation in the local economy.

This is the Vision already established in the 2017 Statement of Tourism Strategy. It is ambitious for growth, it highlights the value of the natural environment and it links growth directly to job creation. For these reasons it remains a valid Vision for County Wicklow.

THE GOAL FOR WICKLOW

The 2017 Statement established some clear goals:

¹ Irelands Ancient East Path To Growth. Fáilte Ireland. .



- ▶ Establish Wicklow as a year round destination
- ▶ Capture more overnight tourism
- ▶ Encourage the provision of alternative forms of accommodation
- ▶ Convert day visitors to staying visitors
- ▶ Integrate development of tourism infrastructure and assets
- ▶ Strategic approach to marketing & promotion
- ▶ Deliver sustainable development

These goals require a shift from where Wicklow is now. Wicklow is performing well but it has enormous untapped potential arising from its natural and built assets, proximity to large markets and relationship to the stories and promise of Ireland's Ancient East.

The target for Wicklow should be to outperform the forecast all-IAE growth rates over the period 2018-2023 achieving visitor numbers of **750,000** and spend of **€200m** by 2023 (at 2017 prices) up from €157m in 2016.

This target is ambitious but achievable in the context of planned growth across Ireland and wider targets which are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 Key Policy Growth Targets

Policy	Target
People, Place & Policy. Growing Tourism to 2025. Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport. 2015	2025: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Revenue from overseas tourism to reach €5bn/year adjusted for inflation ▶ Employment in tourism to reach 250,000 (from 200,000) ▶ 10 million visits to Ireland
Ireland’s Ancient East Path to Growth Fáilte Ireland. 2017	2020: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 9% increase in tourism employment ▶ 17% increase in domestic tourism revenue ▶ 20% increase in international tourism revenue ▶ 18% increase in visitor numbers to IAE ▶ 11% increase in bednights in IAE
Tourism Industry Strategy For Growth to 2025 Irish Tourism Industry Confederation. 2018	2025: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ €8.1bn from overseas tourism (65% growth on 2017) ▶ 310,000 jobs (35% growth on 2017) ▶ 13.7m visitors (54% growth on 2017)

The growth target must help Wicklow deliver a sustainable year round tourism economy. It needs therefore to be growth which maximises off-peak visits, delivering business year round; it must be high value, attracting international as well as domestic visitors; and it must maximise the positive economic impact, achieving overnight stays as a priority.

These goals for Wicklow necessitate offering an experience of the highest quality to appeal to new visitors and satisfy existing visitors to ensure positive word of mouth and repeat business. Wicklow after all, is in competition with other destinations across Ireland and the rest of the world. Wicklow has to be able to compete effectively and that requires focus, ambition and a united effort across the public and private sector.

THE PRIORITY ACTIONS

To achieve these goals, requires specific actions. There is a temptation to use this strategy to list everything that can or will happen. And there will be other things taking place over the lifetime of this strategy that make sense. Just because they are not specifically named here doesn’t mean they aren’t important. But there is a need to focus on the handful of actions that will have the greatest impact on tourism to Wicklow achieving the vision and goals set out.

The need is to move from a position where we have ‘*Great Assets but Little Impact*’ to one in which we have ‘*Great Assets and Enormous Impact*’.

This approach highlights the important starting point for Wicklow. We have some amazing assets but we just aren’t making the most of them. That is a fortunate position

to be in. We don't need to start from scratch and we don't need to invent reasons to visit. We just need to make sure that our experiences are fulfilling their potential.

The rest of this strategy provides the background and rationale for these actions and in later chapters we explain them in greater detail but here we set out a summary of the five priority actions we have identified for Wicklow:

- ▶ **Develop New Accommodation.** Wicklow must expand the volume and quality of the visitor accommodation available to visitors. This is the biggest constraint to growth of the visitor economy. With around 3% of all Ireland overnights and spend and just over 2% of available serviced visitor accommodation stock, expanding the supply would create the foundations for success. Wicklow's average spend per visit of €261² compares to the Ireland average of €355 highlights the lower spend achieved and the dominance of caravan and camping supply which brings average spend down. With overnight visitors producing €71-89³ (domestic-international) of spend compared to a day visitor estimate of approx.. €42⁴ (note: there are no Ireland Day Visitor statistics and this proxy is based on the equivalent Great Britain Day Visitor Survey. A study for Bray by Rikon in 2013 found the average daily spend to be €24.29 and that included accommodation), this is a clear strategic priority. With lack of supply in Dublin and high hotel revenues, now is the best possible time to drive forward new visitor accommodation. This should be accommodation which corresponds to the needs of target markets and is located in places which support wider economic aims.
- ▶ **Develop Key Towns as Visitor Hubs.** Wicklow, Bray, Greystones, Enniskerry, Blessington and Arklow are places which have the potential to function as visitor hubs. Places where international visitors attracted to Wicklow can come and stay for a day or two as part of a wider itinerary. They have many essential services and varying levels of supporting experiences (i.e. attractions & restaurant/cafes). But in most cases they do not have a rounded visitor offer, that visitors would find appealing and attractive. A specific and detailed plan for each town would help unlock the gaps each has in meeting the needs of visitors: quality accommodation, range and quality of places to eat and drink, evening entertainment, shopping, animation and high quality street scene and public realm, attractions for evenings and an all-weather offer, walking tours and signage highlighting places of interest and unlocking the stories of the local area are all required to create a rounded visitor hub. We also need to connect up important assets such as the Wicklow Way to the villages and services which can in turn support a greater number of visitors.

² Fáilte Ireland. County Briefings Document 2016.

³ Fáilte Ireland. Tourism Facts 2016.

⁴ Great Britain Day Visitor Survey. 2016 (£35 at x-rate £:€ 1:1.2)

- ▶ **Masterplan for Glendalough.** Alongside Powerscourt and the National Park, this is one of the Jewels in our Crown. We say this based on our review of how Wicklow is being talked about in the media, by bloggers and travellers around the world, as well as from our own assessment. But it is an experience which fails to capitalise on its reputation and the natural and heritage assets contained within. It needs to be world class. Not only because it can deliver higher value visitors to Wicklow who can help deliver greater impact and employment. But because of what it says about the County and how serious it is about tourism. While experiences in private ownership such as Powerscourt, have ambitious and ever-changing plans which see the number and value of visitors grow, Glendalough appears stuck. Established studies have highlighted the practical challenges, visitors face when visiting, and the different stakeholders with an interest in the sites in and around Glendalough make achieving a shared vision and delivery plan complex. But the prize offered by a World Class experience here, means it is necessary to fix these issues once and for all. Placing visitors at the heart of the experience will help guide the sort of experience that is required – one which is designed and managed and which seeks to entertain, inspire and delight.
- ▶ **Grow Thematic Experiences.** Development of new experiences that capitalise on the thematic strengths of Wicklow and which align to the stories in Irelands Ancient East will strengthen the Wicklow offer dramatically. Proposals for a Visitor Centre and Studio Experience for the Vikings at Ashford Studios, development of the Blessington Greenway, the Arklow to Shillelagh Greenway, The Vartry Way and St Kevins Way as well as the coastal routes are examples of initiatives which will reinforce Wicklow’s reputation as a world class natural arena for outdoor pursuits and attract interest among international visitors. These as well as continued investment and development of existing experiences will help create reasons to visit and to stay longer in Wicklow. It makes sense, given the investment in Irelands Ancient East, to align support and investment to that development which fulfils the promise made by the stories of Irelands Ancient East. If international visitors are being attracted by this offer, then Wicklow should be the destination which helps them experience it. Whether Vikings, A Tale of Two Worlds (Houses & Gardens), Sacred and Ancient Ireland, Wicklow brings these stories to life. There will also be opportunities to work alongside neighbouring counties to amplify these thematic experiences. Alongside this the development of new and inspiring events which can appeal to Wicklow’s markets could help to build business in the shoulder periods. Emerging ideas for an Ireland Ancient East Garden Festival is an example which should be encouraged and supported in Wicklow. Similarly, successful Festivals from elsewhere looking to expand internationally and which align with the Wicklow offer should be encouraged.
- ▶ **A Common Narrative.** Destination marketing budgets in Wicklow are limited. But there are lots of organisations and businesses talking about the County and its tourism offer to prospective visitors. Tourist Boards, Information Centres,

Hotels, Attractions, Caravan Parks, Transport Providers, Restaurants & Cafes, Producers and makers are all communicating with audiences. But there is no single narrative or 'shared story' which they are able to draw on and use in their own marketing and promotional materials. We recommend that Wicklow invests in a shared story – a narrative developed by the tourism community – and which draws on visitor insight, to produce a series of tools that all of those involved in telling Wicklow's story can draw on. An overarching story for Wicklow; stories for the themes and experiences and the towns and main areas; guidance on and a supply of imagery and video. This work is the antithesis of a marque or logo – it may include one but that is coincidental. What is most critical are the building blocks of material which all the businesses and organisations can use in their own work to amplify and tell Wicklow's story in a co-ordinated and consistent way.

There will be other things that need to happen to underpin a successful visitor economy. Transport improvements, maintaining a clean and well managed public environment and ensuring visitors are safe and secure. But these things will not generate more visitors – they will simply put visitors off if they aren't done well enough. The five actions identified above will help Wicklow push on to achieve the target of **£200m in tourism revenue by 2023**.

2 POLICY CONTEXT

THE BIG PICTURE

Tourism development in Wicklow forms part of the wider Wicklow County Development Plan 2016 – 2022 which in turn aligns with relevant regional and national strategies. There is a recognition that tourism and recreation are positive contributors to the economic and social wellbeing of County Wicklow and the plan reinforces its importance with income from tourists and visitors in the region of €105m⁵ (2013), with over 65% of this income coming from overseas visitors and that income from domestic visitors rose by over 15% between 2010 and 2014.

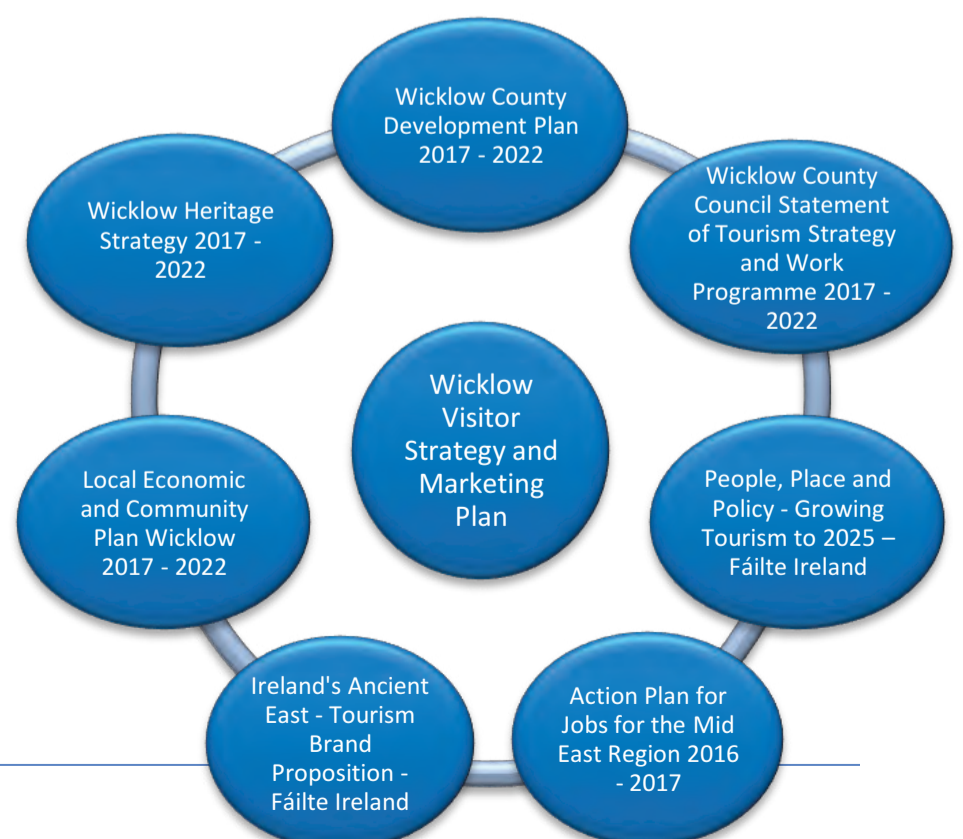
These plans acknowledge the significance of Wicklow’s many tourism assets and long history as a visitor destination. Long known as the ‘Garden of Ireland’ – located on Dublin’s doorstep and within easy driving distance of the city, Wicklow offers golden sandy beaches, mountains, valleys, woodlands, rivers and lakes and all within close proximity to the Capital. Its natural landscape holds a rich built heritage of both archaeological and historical sites including the important early Christian site of Glendalough. Recreational facilities across the county are enjoyed by both locals and visitors alike and its relaxed tranquil feel offers the visitor a real escape from busy urban life and an opportunity to get close to nature.

Wicklow’s Development Plan outlines the potential for growth of larger rural villages and smaller towns across the county, and specifically references small-scale tourism facilities as having the potential to drive local investment – specifically in relation to sustainable rural tourism, niche tourism and entrepreneurship.

A Statement of Tourism Strategy was developed by Wicklow County Council to cover the period 2017 - 2022⁶ and this document has been designed to build on that early work by developing an implementable plan which will assist the growth and development of tourism as an economic driver for Wicklow for the period 2018 – 2022. As with the Statement of Tourism Strategy, this plan has been developed with reference to existing plans and frameworks nationally, regionally and locally, which are either tourism-specific or have a tourism-related element (See Appendix 1).

Fáilte Ireland’s *‘Ireland’s Ancient East Path to Growth’* highlights how that branded visitor experience attempts to provide a counterbalance to the strength of the Wild Atlantic Way, to showcase the unique culture and heritage of Ireland and bring it to

Figure 1 Wicklow Tourism Strategy Policy Environment



⁵ [Wicklow County Development Plan 2016-2022](#)

⁶ [Wicklow County Council Tourism Strategy](#)

life through engaging experiences that unite stakeholders and communities. It recognises that the challenge for this region is keeping visitors sticky. Making sure that rather than transiting through, they stop and stay and spend more time and money here.

Promising 5000 years of history in lush green landscapes and stories told by the best storytellers in the world, the Ireland's Ancient East promise, and the stories which it contains, are strongly evident in the Wicklow offer.

What each of these plans and strategies articulate is ambition – ambition for the region, for tourism growth, economic growth and international profile and impact.

But that ambition needs to be reflected in the actions that follow. They need to be bold, they need to be compelling to international visitors and there needs to be a clear focus on those actions which can have the greatest impact. Too many and the strategy will be diluted. Too few and it will lack the ambition that Wicklow deserves.

3 WHERE ARE WE NOW

NATIONAL PICTURE

The tourism picture for Ireland at the end of 2017 showed positive growth overall with more than 9.9 million arrivals representing an increase of more than 4% on 2016 figures. Business from the UK was relatively flat in 2017 with continued uncertainty about Brexit and the depreciation in Sterling making the cost of short breaks more expensive and impacting on tourism performance. Mainland Europe and Spain in particular showed significant growth as did the Nordic countries. North America performed exceptionally well with Ireland hosting 10% of all American visitors to Europe and 2.1 million arrivals. The outlook is seen as positive for the sector in 2018 with indications for continued growth in overseas tourism.

The global tourism performance picture shown here highlights where Ireland sits in relation to international counterparts and this suggests that despite recent improvements in performance there is still some way to go to match other destinations.

Contributing to this growth in Ireland is the strong online and social media presence developed through Tourism Ireland and the Fáilte Ireland tourism brands of Ireland’s Ancient East, the Wild Atlantic Way and Dublin – A Breath of Fresh Air, alongside global campaigns reaching hundreds of millions of people and significant increased publicity. Some key elements which are impacting this growth include screen tourism growth – film and TV are recognised as strong influencers for

travel to Ireland and developing on this potential can significantly impact visitor numbers. Tourism Ireland is continuing to focus on the culturally curious visitor for the Ireland’s Ancient East brand. This market segment tends to be less impacted by currency fluctuations and stay longer in their chosen locations. Tourism Ireland also feature Dublin’s Doorstep as a gateway to IAE with Wicklow at the heart of this offer.

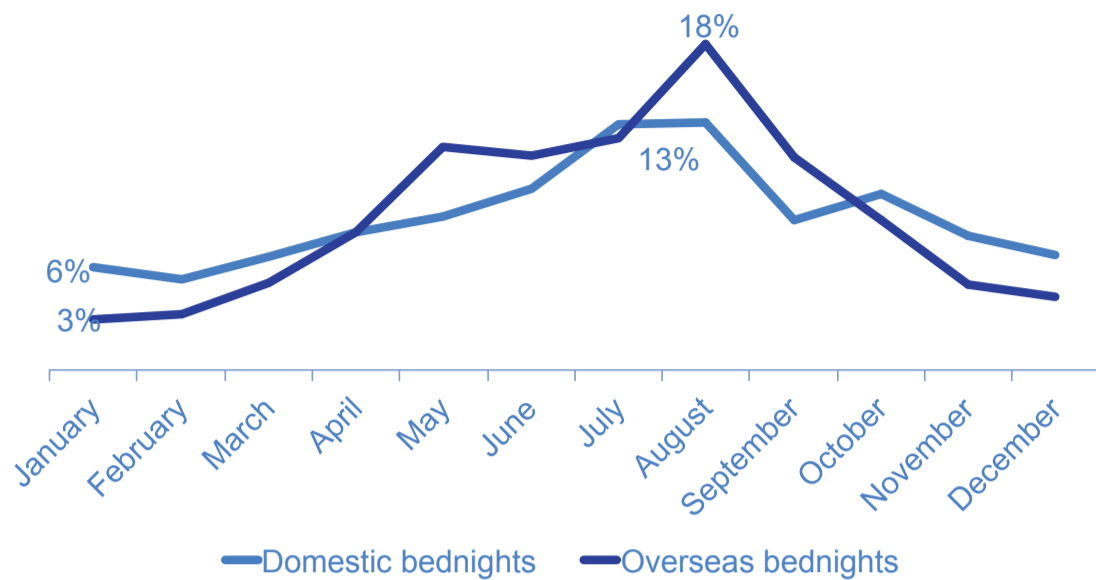
Figure 2 UNWTO Global Performance 2017

International Arrivals	Jan-Dec 2017 YoY % +/-
World	+7%
Africa	+8%
Asia Pac	+6%
Americas	+3%
Middle East	+5%
Europe	+8%
Northern Europe	+5%
Northern Ireland (NISRA) (Jan-Sep)	+4%
Ireland (CSO) (Jan-Dec)	+4%

Sources: UNWTO, NISRA, CSO

In common with many other developed destinations a persistent problem is the seasonal imbalance of visitors. The peaks and troughs of demand are persistent and difficult to overcome. They necessitate variable levels of servicing in terms of staff and can make it difficult to plan. The persistence of these challenges reinforces the need to work harder at overcoming them.

Figure 3 Fáilte Ireland Accommodation Occupancy Survey 2015



WICKLOW ANALYSIS

In 2016, Wicklow welcomed 329⁷ thousand visitors from elsewhere in Ireland. They stayed for a total of 1.5 million nights, with an average length of stay of 4.6 nights, and spent €71 million. This represents 33% of the domestic nights spent in the East and Midlands region and 4% of the total nights in Ireland, which compares well with Wicklow’s 23% (regional) and 3% (national) share of the bed stock.

Wicklow has seen strong growth in domestic visitors in recent years, outperforming the national average. This growth contrasts with a significant fall in domestic visitors to Dublin over the same period and which may be influenced by visitor demand exceeding supply (accommodation) in Dublin.

Also in 2016 Wicklow was visited by 272 thousand overseas visitors, who spent €86 million. 41% of this spend came from visitors from mainland Europe, with 26% from Britain and 24% from North America. There has been good growth in overseas visitors to Wicklow since 2012, closely reflecting the trends in the region, state and Dublin. In Wicklow, 45% of visitors in 2016 are from overseas, which is typical of Ireland as a whole.

Per head of population, Wicklow’s visitor accommodation supply is consistent with the rest of Ireland, but Wicklow has a below average proportion of hotel bed spaces, especially at the 4*/5* end of the market. This may account for the fact that although Wicklow has a comparable share of visitor numbers when contrasted with available bed stock, the average spend per trip of £261 is significantly lower than the national average of £355. This would suggest that increased investment in more, high quality accommodation would allow revenue from tourism to increase in line with visitor numbers.

TOURISM IN WICKLOW

- ▶ ‘Known as the Garden of Ireland, Wicklow combines immaculate estates with a rugged wilderness of lush green landscapes, for which Ireland is justly famous.’
- ▶ In 2016 it received 272,000 overseas and 329,000 domestic visitors

⁷ CSO / Fáilte Ireland

PRODUCT AND PERFORMANCE

Wicklow has a breadth and a depth to its tourism offer that means it is well placed to develop a thriving tourism economy. It has world renowned heritage and natural assets, gardens and historic houses, outdoor activities and recreation including the Wicklow Way and a growing network of trails, a National Park, woodlands and uplands, sandy beaches and scenic landscapes, film locations and food culture; it is within reach of huge domestic and international markets; it has some high quality resort properties; and it has some interesting towns and villages. Many of its natural and built heritage attractions in particular form part of the National Park or are in the ownership of the State – either through the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Coillte or the Office of Public Works.

Long referred to as the ‘Garden of Ireland’, it is its situation, only an hour from both Dublin and Rosslare ports / airport, that offers the greatest opportunity and threat to the growth of tourism. While it is the perfect place to experience Ireland’s unspoilt beauty and while it has a huge market nearby, it is also an easy day-trip with quick and easy routes back to Dublin.

The current tourism product of Wicklow, while varied, lacks a compelling and consistent brand proposition for visitors. The county has much to offer the visitor but little in the way of joined up and coherent development and presentation of a countywide proposition.

Transport & Access

Situated just south of Dublin and accessed by the main arterial route to the South East M11/N11 to the east and the N81 to the west, the county is effectively cut in two by the Wicklow Mountains making tourism across the county (east-west) difficult to develop.

The eastern side of the county is serviced by both mainline rail and DART (rapid transit) services to Bray and a lighter service to Greystones. Mainline rail offers daily commuter and intercity services in and out of the capital, serving the county towns of Bray, Wicklow, Rathdrum and Arklow. A more patchy service is available at weekends. The coastal nature of the rail services make inland tourism attractions and activities virtually inaccessible to the visitor unless travelling as an independent traveller with a car or on a pre-booked coach tour.

Many areas of the county do not have access to public transport services. A rural transport initiative exists, but the service relies on local development and buy-in to be successful and sustainable. A privately owned bus service (St. Kevin’s) provides the only formal transport to the area of Glendalough / Laragh / Roundwood. This service operates from Dublin city twice daily. Additional bus services (routes 132 and 133) are also available from Dublin airport to serve Blessington and Baltinglass on the western side of the county and Ashford and Wicklow on the eastern side respectively. [Bus Éireann](#) provides several routes through Arklow, including the 002, 005 and 384 services. The Wexford Bus operates several services day and night linking Arklow and Wicklow Town with Dublin Airport.

With significant numbers of international arrivals to Dublin not hiring a vehicle, Wicklow has to carefully consider how the public transport infrastructure can more easily connect Wicklow's main assets with the visitor hubs and make it easier to experience the County.

Accommodation

Accommodation in the county is a mixed bag, from top quality 5* spa hotels through to specialist rental accommodation in unique venues, to hostels, B&Bs, caravan, camping and glamping. The coastal area of the county is home to multiple caravan parks which provide a second home for Dubliners and domestic visitors. This is prevalent all along the eastern coast south of Dublin; however, those who have a holiday home in these locations tend, for the most part to bring their supplies with them on arrival and therefore result in lower average spend/head.

High end accommodation fares somewhat better with 4* and 5* accommodation such as Powerscourt, Macreddin Village, Druid's Glen offering spa and relaxation breaks for both domestic and international visitors – and a large element of corporate visitors also. These resorts contain much of the activity and spend within the resort property although this also translates into good quality employment.

The challenge for Wicklow is to create more supply to service and attract our target markets; and to find ways to get them to stay longer and explore more.

Towns & Visitor Hubs

For towns to function as visitor hubs – places where people want to come and stay while exploring the immediate area in and around County Wicklow – they need to fulfil a number of requirements. There must be accommodation of a quality which meets their needs, facilities such as restaurants and pubs where evening and daytime meals can be enjoyed, entertainment and attractions for evenings and rainy days, shops for souvenirs in addition to the everyday needs for essential supplies. They should be attractive and animated, easy to get to and to get around.

While the different settlements in Wicklow each have some of these attributes, most lack one or more of the more important attributes.

Bray has the largest population. Originally a Victorian seaside town the esplanade still retains much of the Victorian flavour but it has seen better days with more than a few properties on the sea front in need of repair and renewal. There has been substantial development and renewal in recent years, much by the council, and work has been carried out on the seafront which has improved the public realm. However, the nature of the tourism product reflects a more traditional seaside resort, with amusements, arcades and small scale hospitality providers a feature of the sea front location. There is also a marked difference between the sea front and the town centre itself – which has suffered in recent years as a result of the economic downturn and has not yet fully recovered. The town is host to the Bray Summer Festival, Bray Jazz Festival and Bray Air Show, the latter attracts large numbers of visitors to the town who for the most part fall into the category of domestic day-trippers. Accommodation in the town includes some larger properties as well as a number of smaller guest houses and B&Bs.

Wicklow is a town touched by historical events including the Viking and Norman invasion which are etched on its landscape and form part of its built heritage. The town is home to the Historic Wicklow Gaol (featured as a key experience in the Ireland's Ancient East brand) and the harbour with its dual piers and adjoining 'Murrrough' wetlands. Coastal walks along Wicklow Head provide the focal point for local tourism with boat hire and kayaking a feature of the coastal services. The town has a clear charm but requires development to compel tourists to choose it as their destination hub. While the town has some accommodation much of it is small and the larger properties are in need of significant investment to meet the requirements of international visitors (though some investment has been forthcoming during the time this strategy has been developed). The town has a committed cohort of people interested in maximising its tourism potential.

Arklow is the third largest town in the county and is a commuter town to Dublin. Arklow itself has a number of legacy environmental issues related to industrial and mining activity. While it delivers the Sea Breeze Festival, the town has the potential for further development.

The coastal town of **Greystones** offers the visitor an escape from Dublin city. Serviced by the DART it has a strong food culture, good village atmosphere, sailing, marine activities and beach and cliff head walks. Unfortunately, accommodation for the visitor is lacking in the environs and with the DART on the doorstep it is all too easy for the visitor to choose to stay in Dublin and opt for a day visit rather than basing themselves in Wicklow.

Enniskerry is a pretty village at the foothills of the Wicklow Mountains and serviced by an hourly bus route to Bray and another to Dublin city centre. The village formed part of the original Powerscourt demesne and serviced the estate in former years. The village itself is home to a range of small but authentic food producers and is peppered with quaint shop fronts and local providers against a backdrop of built heritage of St Patrick's Church and cemetery at the village edge. Enniskerry is a bustling village with a good cohort of visitors in the summer months especially. Most of whom are passing through to visit Powerscourt Estate and Gardens or Powerscourt Waterfall nearby.

To the west of the county is the town of **Blessington**, situated on the banks of the River Liffey. Home to the beautiful Blessington Lakes, the town is peppered with a number of historical monuments many of which are accessible to the public. The town originally served the Blessington Estate – the main house of which stood on 410 acres in Blessington Demesne. This house was destroyed by fire in 1760. The magnificent Palladian mansion - Russborough House, situated between the towns of [Blessington](#) and [Ballymore Eustace](#) was at one time home to the philanthropist [Sir Alfred Beit](#) and houses a renowned collection (the Beit Collection) of fine art within its walls. The house and parklands are open to the public as a visitor attraction.

The towns therefore have some potential for further development as visitor hubs with Wicklow Town, Greystones and Bray in particular offering significant potential given their ready-made food and drink offer, relatively easy access and natural/built attractions.

Glendalough

Wicklow's Glendalough has been a destination for visitors since early Celtic times when people travelled to the Monastic settlement and its two lakes, set in a spectacular glaciated valley in what is now Wicklow's National Park. Today visitors still descend on the valley in huge numbers for its varied offer: The Monastic Site and ecclesiastical tourism; Scenic beauty of the valley; Known brand of Glendalough nationally and internationally; Spirituality / a place of sanctuary; and Outdoor pursuits –National Park Walks – Wicklow Way, Hiking, mountain-biking etc.

It is the jewel in Wicklow's tourism crown – or has the potential to be so, but at present it suffers from a lack of coherence and consistency in its visitor offer. Visitor numbers to the site are judged to have grown in recent years to approximately 1m, although the only effective measures are the tickets purchased at the visitor centre (80,000 in 2016, source: OPW). Domestic and international visitors are very much in evidence but day visits from Dublin and the surrounding area also generate very significant numbers of visitors' especially in fine weather and at peak periods.

Access to the site is difficult and public transport almost non-existent. A twice daily scheduled coach service and other pre-booked tour programmes deliver groups but most visitors use private cars to travel independently. A previous report by Brady Shipman highlighted the many transport challenges and implementation of the proposed solutions is ongoing.

Private coach tours present some difficulties for Glendalough both in terms of the OPW managed site and access to the national Park. In the case of the OPW site many of the private tour providers utilise the OPW car park for their visitors to alight and deliver their own guided tour of the site bypassing the OPW facilities. In addition, difficulties for coaches accessing the lake road, which leads from Glendalough village to the upper lake, in recent years has resulted in little or no coach tours accessing the upper lake at all, thereby only offering the visitor a short stop at the visitor centre, monastic settlement and lower lake.

The lack of traffic management and issues with parking presents a real difficulty in realising the tourism potential of the location. Many people using the car park at the Visitor Centre are not customers of the actual site but are in the main walkers heading up into the National Park uplands and the Wicklow Way. Resulting overspill parking on approach roads can cause significant problems.

Signage for Glendalough both on approach and in destination requires a review and coordinated approach to highlight the visitor potential. Currently brown signs pepper junctions on access routes with little differential between local accommodation (B&Bs etc.) and the monastic site of Glendalough itself. The visitor would benefit from a more refined approach to signage providing ease of navigation to the location. In-destination signage is also lacking. It is easy for the visitor to bypass the Glendalough Visitor Centre and end up in the village where no parking is available, or indeed travel on up to the upper lake where there is no signage as to what is on offer for the visitor beyond a car park and fast food facility.

Ownership of the site in its broadest definition is spread across a variety of different stakeholders which includes the National Park and Wildlife Service, Coillte, the Office of

Public Works (OPW), Wicklow County Council and private ownership. The OPW manages the Glendalough Visitor Centre located beside the monastic site and the lower lake. This site has a relatively small car/coach park. It is open year-round and offers both a visitor reception facility, guided tours of the monastic site and an exhibition offering interpretation the site. It also houses additional information on the surrounding area. Infrastructure at the Visitor Centre is now second generation and needs renewal. The OPW has plans for both its car park and updating of its current exhibition as part of a rolling programme of maintenance and upgrade. Fáilte Ireland is currently part-funding a project to remark and install CCTV in the OPW Visitor Centre car park and to create a barrier management system, as part of their Strategic Management Initiative – funding programme.

The facilities in and around Glendalough are varied. The area is home to two spiritual tourism providers, both of which have an excellent international reach attending their retreats and programmes. The local area has a rich mining history with work already carried out on mining trails in the mountains around the valley, but this work has not been developed or marketed to the visitor audience. The location is a magnet for outdoor pursuits with many visitors opting to take part in the various array of activities (both paid and free) which are readily available locally. Beyond the monastic site itself the village of Glendalough offers a relatively small hotel (providing accommodation and bar food/drinks etc.), a small craft shop and an open stall at the bridge where visitors can buy souvenirs etc. The outlying and connected village of Laragh offers further limited facilities including another small scale hotel. Other accommodation in the area is mostly provided through local B&Bs and a local hostel.

Local businesses see the potential to develop and improve their offer but are reluctant without a commitment by all stakeholders to improve the whole experience. This highlights the necessity for all stakeholders to move together under a shared plan.

In summary, despite some amazing natural and ancient assets, Glendalough does not deliver a world class experience. First and last impressions are muddled, interpretation and orientation is poor and the experience lacks inspiration and the supporting facilities do not capitalise on visitor's spending power. An overall lack of focus on the visitor and their needs is a result of the many different stakeholders and the lack of a co-ordinated response in the form of an agreed and visitor focussed plan.

SWOT

Throughout our work we have received a lot of feedback about where the opportunities and challenges for Wicklow to develop its tourism come from. We have experienced much of the product first hand and we have drawn direct comparisons to other parts of Ireland as well as key international competitors.

The assessment we have made is that while there are a number of challenges facing Wicklow if it is to significantly grow and develop the value of its tourism economy, these are addressable.

Our view is that a number of key interventions would make significant inroads to improving the local economy and these are set out elsewhere in this strategy.

A summary of the strengths is that Wicklow has a breadth and

quality to the offer (natural and built) which aligns strongly with the brand proposition for Ireland’s Ancient East. It has a number of assets (Glendalough, Powerscourt, Russborough) which have international recognition.

While also a potential weakness, the proximity to Dublin as a source market and as a point of arrival for international visitors has to be seen as a strength. The fact that most visitors are looking to maximise the number of experiences that they can capture in the shortest possible time and that Wicklow contrasts and complements those that are available in Dublin is a strength. But there is a pressing need to make the Wicklow offer so compelling and rich that a day visit is never enough and that it necessitates at least one if not more overnight stays.

We also found a committed tourism industry, keen to deliver a great experience, to show off what Wicklow has to offer and to grow and develop the economic impact arising from those visitors.

The lack of an easy to use shared narrative and quality marketing tools available for all to use, makes it hard for the industry to amplify the main messages about Wicklow in a consistent way and while Wicklow has some good accommodation, the need for further



development of a quality and style which will meet the needs of international visitors is necessary if the County is serious about growing the overall value of the sector.

Even within the context of the IAE proposition Wicklow's tourism offer is not sufficiently well-developed to attract and retain visitors. A concerted effort is required to identify the thematic priorities for county based tourism and develop packages and itineraries which knit these together e.g.

- ▶ Film location tourism
- ▶ Gardens trails and itineraries
- ▶ Outdoor adventure and activity with supported facilities and hospitality services that build on the established and emerging trails (Wicklow Way, St Kevins, Vartry, Arklow-Shillelagh)
- ▶ Themed products for the destination – Vikings, Sacred, Tale of Two Worlds etc.

This analysis also points at some areas of strong opportunity. The development of a Hero product for the County in Glendalough through delivery of a Masterplan for the area incorporating renewed interpretation and tackling transportation and facility limitations would potentially have the greatest impact on visitor growth. The leverage of the 'Garden of Ireland' brand – through association with National Botanic Gardens at Kilmaccuragh, existing garden product and possible plans for development of the house on this site links well to the existing offer in Powerscourt and elsewhere. And the potential to leverage Dublin's Doorstep proposition through development of world-class experiential visitor offers in the county with a particular focus on activity whether that is on the coast, Blessington Lakes, or the Wicklow mountains is yet another strand to be exploited.

DELIVERY ARRANGEMENTS

VisitWicklow are the destination marketing organisation for Wicklow County, bringing together the main tourism businesses to jointly market and promote the County to domestic and international visitors. This they do through their website and other promotional channels and work closely with Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland on joint promotional activity. Their budgets however are modest and this necessitates a focus on areas of greatest opportunity. VisitWicklow is overseen by a board of industry and County Council representatives. They achieve much with modest resources and their potential to do more and do things differently has to be balanced against the interests of their varied stakeholders and available resource (human and financial).

The County Wicklow Tourism Working Group have been driving the development of the strategy and linking it to the wider Local Economic & Community Plan. It would be good to think that this group could continue to oversee the implementation and delivery of the Strategy and the Actions identified within it as they have built up a good understanding of the challenges and opportunities. The group would need to review its terms of reference to drive forward some of the actions especially those requiring greater collaboration and co-ordination and the involvement of major agencies and partners.

4 MARKET POSITIONING

HOW WICKLOW IS PRESENTED NOW

We reviewed a range of different information sources to understand where and how Wicklow was being presented as a destination. This included travel guides, travel media (newspapers, magazines), travel bloggers, tourism organisations and local businesses.

We found some very inspiring and compelling phrases and terms which came up again and again, most of which are hugely positive for Wicklow and which are helpful in starting to define how the narrative and proposition for Wicklow can be developed to appeal to target markets: *Wilderness, mountains, gardens, houses, timelessness, nature, rugged and unspoiled* all hint at the way in which Wicklow was represented in the sentences, paragraphs and phrases discovered.

Guides and articles with a focus on international visitors usually made a clear connection with Dublin, suggesting it worked well as an ‘add-on’ and was complementary to a Dublin visit or should be included as part of a touring visit beginning or ending in Dublin.

The honeypots of Powerscourt, Glendalough and the National Park all featured as stand-out assets that received the most recognition. But while Wicklow had good coverage in most travel guides and while there were some quality travel articles in major titles, a review of a wide selection of the world’s major travel titles produced no or very dated results, suggesting there was still work to be done to increase visibility via these channels.

Likewise travel bloggers had produced some lovely Wicklow content, often linking it to touring itineraries and invariably focussing on the honeypot assets again. But the majority of top global bloggers had little or no Wicklow content suggesting further scope to develop and amplify Wicklow messages.

When we turned our attention to local businesses we found they presented messages about the wider Wicklow offer in very different ways. Accommodation providers were generally better at talking about and describing the wider offer with attractions, destinations and key days out featuring alongside information about their own businesses. Some businesses e.g. [Fatbike Adventures](#) and [Clissman Horse Caravans](#) have built their business around a rich Wicklow experience and their materials exude this in written and visual form. But many other local businesses, including some very unique and inspiring, were generally much poorer at describing what the wider region had to offer and how Wicklow features in their experience.

The ‘*Endless Opportunities*’ identity and brand is one which works well for the County Council. Much time and effort has been put into its development and it has the support of many stakeholders. However it is not an identity which has been adopted by the tourism industry and there is a need to consider how this identity can be developed further to work for visitors and the businesses that target them.

'*Garden of Ireland*' is an identity which is used more frequently by the trade and has a long history of informal use and a reasonable level of market recognition.

While the identity of Ireland's Ancient East is increasingly appearing within materials referring to Wicklow or being used by Wicklow businesses, it is the underlying promise of that brand which requires further development by the tourism trade and promotional bodies if it is to help.

Whichever identity and logo is used, it is in fact the underlying themes and narratives that are arguably more valuable. They describe in greater detail the experience that visitors will have; they inspire and animate; and they can and should be embellished by images, video and content in all its forms.

This does not require changing the identity or logo, but would benefit from a richer narrative, with agreed stories, words, phrases, images, video and content that the whole industry can use consistently.

MARKET TRENDS

One of the most significant trends affecting destinations is the **ageing population**. As the Boomers mature, reach retirement and have paid off their mortgages they are likely to remain one of the most significant travel markets for both domestic and international travel. Their interests are well documented and they want to keep their body and mind stimulated and meet like-minded people. They most closely overlap with the Culturally Curious segment identified by Fáilte Ireland and there is much within County Wicklow which appeals to this market. With 37%⁸ of the European population (age 15+) over 55 accounting for 39% of all private travel there is plenty of evidence to support the value of this demographic.

Non-traditional households are making up an increasing proportion of international travellers. Multi-generational groups, 'Grandtravel', and differently shaped, non-linear families are all increasingly prevalent and the implications for the industry throughout Ireland is the need to provide facilities that recognise and service these changes. In accommodation for example this might be more family rooms, connected rooms, different bed layouts and more flexible configurations.

Research shows that visitors want more out of their life and their time away on holiday. They are looking to make **authentic connections** to people, places and cultures. Great experiences produce an emotional response among visitors, conveying much more meaning than simply buying a travel commodity – something which anyone can buy and experience. It is easy to say what needs to be done and much harder to actually do it. We need to really help visitors join up the dots to make sense of the experience and how to go about actually experiencing it. And we need to work hard at turning the touchpoints from a travel commodity we buy into something unique and authentic for each visitor.

⁸ Tourism Trends and Ageing. Eurostats. 2016

Very often clusters around a specific destination or a theme can be brought together to strengthen the whole experience and this remains a core objective at the heart of Ireland's Ancient East and the experience must usually be interactive and engaging as visitors want to feel a sense of learning, belonging and involvement – not just seeing things. Recent research⁹ has also shown that places have a much greater **emotional** importance than objects. The research found an emotional link between people and places that is often difficult to verbalise but which is tangible and affects people psychologically and physically and importantly people want to share their connection to a significant place with others. So when we get it right, the visitors will do our marketing job for us.

Wellness is an increasingly large and mainstream aspect of global tourism believed to account for around 14%¹⁰ of all tourism expenditure (\$563bn) and faster growing than all tourism at 14% (2013-2015) compared to all tourism growth of 6.9%. While there is a core of visitors who seek and take wellness dominated break, the majority (84%) integrate wellness into their mainstream breaks. The research also highlights the importance of the natural environment when taking a wellness break and this is where the natural environment of Wicklow with its mountains, coast and lakes has much to offer.

The way in which visitors receive tourism information, inspiration and make their travel arrangements has continued to change and adapt. The power of a handful of intermediaries in travel booking and the introduction of disruptor channels such as Airbnb highlights the significant role of **digital** in tourism. The way in which different markets use technology also needs to be understood with older generations making extensive use of the internet for activities such as online banking and travel booking and the younger generations using social media for ideas and inspiration rather than traditional websites. The implications for Wicklow are for the whole industry and as such the whole industry can learn from each other in terms of best practice and what is working.

The implications for destinations are the need to find ways to work with and alongside these digital intermediaries and see them as partners rather than competitors. The destination remains best placed to deliver the '*inspiration and awareness*' and promoting the reasons why a visitor should visit, while the digital intermediary has a huge audience and is delivering a growing share of all bookings. By lifting the quality of both digital content and digital promotion to ensure that destinations are reaching target markets cost-effectively and are actually inspiring them to visit, destinations and intermediaries can both benefit.

The implications of the '*filter bubble*' with search engine and website algorithms only delivering content that is deemed relevant to a visitor mean that it is increasingly hard for destinations to get their content and messages into the hands of new visitors that

⁹ Places That Make Us. National Trust. 2017

¹⁰ Global Wellness Institute

are not already aligned to the offer. The need to use other intermediaries and social media to connect what we want to say with new audiences is increasingly important.

While it is easy to say Wicklow Tourism should only focus on ‘inspiration and awareness’, the private sector partners will generally look to support activity that delivers benefits in the short to medium term. So a balance must be struck and a recognition that the activity must deliver for the short, medium and long term if the destination is to have a sustainable (commercially, economically, environmentally) future.

5 PRODUCT INVESTMENT

This strategy advocates five areas of development and investment to develop tourism in the County. It isn't everything that will happen. But it will be the focus for this strategy and the work that partners inside and beyond the county come together to work on. The rationale is to support the goal to achieve above Ireland growth rates for the value of the visitor economy achieving **€200m in earnings by 2023**.

These are the areas of development to achieve that high growth rate.

ACCOMMODATION

If Wicklow is serious about increasing the impact from tourism and growing the value of its economy then it has to provide the accommodation bedstock to deliver that. This is one of the most significant constraints to growth. We should also look beyond the numbers of beds available to ensure that the stock in Wicklow is of a standard and modern enough to meet the needs of discerning international travellers and therefore whether some existing stock will need to be upgraded or replaced.

ACCOMMODATION DEVELOPMENT

<p>Description</p>	<p>Wicklow has to expand the volume of serviced accommodation to capitalise on the opportunity to grow its visitor economy. To convert from day visits to staying and increase the overall number of staying visitors requires accommodation. The nature and location of the accommodation also has to meet the needs of our target markets. It must fulfil the high standards of an international culturally curious visitor and provide the flexibility to serve the needs of different group compositions.</p> <p>Three, Four and Five-star standard accommodation with internationally recognised brands of a size and scale to support the requirements of the travel trade and group travel would remove one of the major constraints to growth. Unique and unusual accommodation such as that proposed by Zoobox near Blessington also adds richness and appeal with a contemporary and distinctive offer.</p> <p>The County could not only trade more strongly on its own terms as a destination of choice for a short break, holiday or stopover as part of a touring route but can also deliver accommodation to service those priced out of Dublin.</p> <p>The priority locations for accommodation development should be in the hubs of Wicklow Town and Greystones. Bray, Blessington, Enniskerry and Arklow may also be able to sustain further accommodation development.</p> <p>This development goes hand in hand with the priority for Hub Development in these same locations.</p> <p>The planning policy for Wicklow currently indicates the potential for development of visitor accommodation and objectives T10-T19 set out the framework for that development.</p> <p>Next steps include:</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A hotels prospectus, setting out the market case, identifying suitable sites and indicating the type of support for prospective developers. ▶ A concerted approach working with Fáilte Ireland and the Irish Hospitality Foundation as well as commercial property consultants to take key sites to market to secure developer interest and bring forward applications that align with the strategy aims.
Evidence	<p>Wicklow has 2.9% of all Ireland accommodation capacity. A total of 6434 beds. Wicklow receives about 3.1% of all Ireland visits (2.6% overseas, 3.5% domestic) and therefore is performing well in comparing share of accommodation to share of visits. However a large proportion of the accommodation is in caravan and camping spaces (1740 beds and 5.7% of all Ireland stock) while the hotel stock is made up of 3330 beds (2.3% of all Ireland stock). This may well account for the lower than average spend per visit of €261 in Wicklow compares to €355 for all Ireland.</p>
Delivery (Timetable, Partners)	<p>The development of a dedicated hotel study may be required and the preparation of the hotel prospectus could be developed either in house (WCC) or supported by a specialist consultant. In either case officer time will be required to support this initiative and make the links between prospective developers and the planning process.</p> <p>2018: Hotels Study (if required) and development of Hotels Development Prospectus</p> <p>2019: Commercial Property Sales; Site marketing; Developer Contact; Pre-Application support & advice</p> <p>2020: 1-2 Planning Applications (100-200 additional rooms minimum)</p> <p>2021-2023: Development period; Opening</p>

GLENDALOUGH

Glendalough has huge potential – the hard work has been done. The beautiful scenery and layers of history have been established. All we need to do is make it work outstandingly well for visitors. It doesn't now and we know that. So this is the time to unlock Glendalough's potential as a prize that can underpin our visitor economy and as a clear statement to the whole county of the quality standards we are setting out for an entire Wicklow experience.

GLENDALOUGH	
Description	<p>Glendalough is a Jewel. It has international recognition and a strong reputation. Travel journals, articles, guidebooks and bloggers all make reference to Glendalough as a must-visit and include it in itineraries. However the experience on the ground leaves much to be desired.</p> <p>To access the site is challenging by public transport. Traffic, access and parking is problematic at peak periods. The site is confusing for first time visitors and it is unclear where to start, where to go and when you have finished your Glendalough experience. Signage and interpretation on the site is poor. The provision of facilities including retail and catering is not of a standard to match the quality of the natural environment. Overall the experience underwhelms. However the potential is great. Glendalough has many elements which align to the IAE stories and it has carrying capacity at many periods of the year. There are some key steps to transition this site from one which is underperforming to one which can act a compelling reason to visit and dwell in Wicklow and Ireland's Ancient East:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A masterplan for the whole site which designs the experience by placing visitors at the centre rather than the needs of those with responsibility for different parts of the site. The quality of the man-made experiences (visitor centre, catering, retail, accommodation, parking, toilets) needs to match the quality of the natural environment and become world class. And the plan needs to determine how to interpret the site and improve orientation, dwell time and satisfaction. ▶ Traffic management, parking and access arrangements need to work better. The Brady Shipman report set out some clear improvements and these need to be delivered. Visitors arriving for the first time need to clearly understand where they should go (before they get there) and access the parking quickly and easily. Considering whether parking could and should be pushed further away from the main site with other forms of onward transportation provided (as happens now in Zion National park, Stonehenge and elsewhere) may assist. ▶ The Visitor Centre needs to be a must-visit jumping off point for all visitor arrivals. It should share the story of what there is to see and experience, provide specific information about how to experience it and introduce the stories. It should not be optional. It can help unravel the layers of history and should also provide some clear commercial opportunities in terms of

	<p>retail, gifts, food and drink. It can also help radiate the benefits from a visit to Glendalough to the surrounding area and attractions helping with an ‘attract and disperse’ strategy. The ambition for Glendalough could be to act as a jumping off attraction for the whole of Ireland’s Ancient East, embedding it as a must-visit part of an Ireland visit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Explore the potential to establish this area as a Geopark with the potential to strengthen the sustainable tourism credentials for the site.
<p>Evidence</p>	<p>We ran a specific workshop for key stakeholders involved in Glendalough including Wicklow County Council, OPW and the National Parks and Wildlife service. That workshop identified 5 key challenges for Glendalough:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Access/Parking/Congestion: A challenge at peak times; Unclear as first time visitor where they should start; Poor mobility to sites for the disabled. ▶ Orientation: Unclear where you should start – too many options; Unclear what there is to see; Need to guide 1st time visitors and help them understand what they should do; Unclear advice at ‘decision’ points – left or right? Visitor Centre quality and role under achieving. ▶ Interpretation: Information inconsistent, sometimes poor quality, sometimes missing; No interpretation at the monastic site; Not reflect the National Park gateway role; Long tourism history at Glendalough missing ▶ Commercial: Does not match the quality of the natural experience; Limited catering, retail, gift offer ▶ Identity: Perceived lack of respect for the site; No obvious Glendalough identity to unite different stakeholders
<p>Delivery (Timetable, Partners)</p>	<p>Critical partners are OPW, the National Parks Service, Wicklow County Council, Coillte and the many community stakeholders with a vested interest. Costs for delivering the masterplan would be determined through the masterplanning process.</p> <p>2018: Masterplan. Agree to commission a visitor-centric masterplan and interpretation plan for the whole site.</p> <p>2018-2020: Implement Brady Shipman transport recommendations implementation.</p> <p>2019-2022: Invest in the core experience (Visitor Centre) and work with stakeholders to advance the quality of the retained offer. Explore the potential for expanding the accommodation offer and in developing events to support year round business.</p> <p>2019: Explore the potential for a Geopark designation and the ways in which that would strengthen the Wicklow offer.</p> <p>2022: Re-launch the Glendalough experience as a must-see part of an Ireland visit.</p>

VISITOR HUBS & VISITOR WELCOME

Many visitors, though not all, value the attraction of a town or village to stay in while touring and staying in a region. They offer the chance to mingle and mix with locals, to explore more deeply and to be entertained especially in an evening with a choice of places to eat and drink, to hear music or dance.

And places which do this well for visitors are often also great places to live and work. This action advocates the focussed development of Wicklow, Greystones and Bray as visitor hubs.

VISITOR HUBS AND WELCOME	
Description	<p>The main towns of Wicklow have the potential to function as visitor hubs. Places where visitors can come and stay and base themselves while experiencing the wider Wicklow offer as part of a holiday or short break.</p> <p>They require accommodation to fulfil that role. But they also need to entertain, especially in an evening, and be places where there are a variety of eating and drinking options, where there may be attractions whatever the weather, where there are retail options (for supplies and gifts) and where the place feels welcoming and animated.</p> <p>We believe that Wicklow Town, Greystones, Bray and Arklow are best placed to function as visitor hubs. They fulfil many of these functional needs now and with some continued support and development could improve further to act as places which attract and retain visitors. Aside from accommodation development, animating the places especially at night is a key challenge. Whether through music, entertainment, lighting and community engagement (walks, talks) these places can help international visitors connect with the real Ireland and its people – exactly what they are looking for. In some cases this will require new activity; and in other cases it is helping visitors identify what is already there and how they can access it. It doesn't necessarily require significant investment and in most cases there should be a clear commercial imperative for doing it.</p> <p>Town Teams are well placed to develop and take forward the plans for their local areas. In most cases the opportunities lie in making more of the variety of what is there now, helping package and present it to visitors and where new things are proposed, lower cost initiatives such as walks, festivals and events and activities will help transition the place towards somewhere appealing to visitors. Poetry, readings, late night galleries, music etc. etc.</p> <p>There is also the need to link up experiences and the towns with key attractions. The suggested approach to provide regular public transport between Wicklow Town and Glendalough is a perfect example of how to connect these together.</p> <p>In addition the major asset, The Wicklow Way, gives visitors a chance to get away from it all. But to increase the appeal it also needs to service those visitors using the Way with connections to the village hubs along its length.</p>
Evidence	Visitor attitudes surveys from Fáilte Ireland highlight the importance

	<p>of friendly and hospitable people as well as the beautiful scenery as the two most important factors and reasons why they are satisfied with a visit to Ireland. Interesting towns and villages also appear as an ‘advantage’ that Ireland has in the minds of visitors.</p> <p>Examples of places which have developed their offer and reaped the rewards are usually the best illustrations of what can be achieved. During various workshops for this strategy we highlighted a number of these including Floyd, Virginia and Clonakilty</p>
<p>Delivery (Timetable, Partners)</p>	<p>The costs for developing the plans can be largely contained in the time and dedication of the local community. The hardscaping, landscaping, development, and introduction of new public realm schemes including lighting as well as events, trails and entertainment all have varying costs for which grants, sponsorship, and commercial investment can be sought.</p> <p>Those best placed to develop comprehensive plans at the Town Teams, Town Councils, LEO, the County Wicklow Partnership and County Council.</p> <p>2018: Review and refine the Wicklow Town Tourism Plan with a view to developing concrete and prioritised actions driven by the needs of visitors.</p> <p>2019: Develop similar plans for Greystones, Bray and Arklow and start to implement the actions in the Wicklow Plan. Develop the links between the Wicklow Way and village hubs and the services they can provide to walkers.</p> <p>2020-23: New entertainment, festivals and events, public realm, signage and trails, and support for the development of accommodation, facilities and retail that will serve the visitor community. Site visits to best practice locations by the Town Teams will generate further ideas and inspiration.</p>

THEMATIC EXPERIENCES

‘Something for everyone’ means ‘nothing to anyone’. So Wicklow has to recognise that it has some clear strengths and it must play to those. Clustering experiences that present a meaningful and compelling reason to visit in itineraries, in campaigns, and in packaging can help a visitor understand the way in which they can enjoy the experience promised. Different market segments will be drawn to different themes so we need not expect that one size fits all. While the Wild Atlantic Way has had huge success, it is certainly worth reflecting that many of the attributes promised by that brand can also be found in Wicklow – the wilderness, dramatic scenery, nature and ‘get away from it all’ promise can be found here, just an hour outside Dublin and therefore more easily integrated into a short break or holiday for an international visitor. The importance and significance of the outdoors and the natural setting are clearly important to visitors and the businesses looking after them. Though not an overt IAE theme, Wicklow should continue to build on its reputation as a place to get active outdoors, whether on the Wicklow Way, the Coastal Walks, St Kevins Way on horseback or bicycle.

THEMATIC EXPERIENCES	
Description	Development of new experiences (Vikings Studio Tour, Blessington Greenway, Vartry Way and Arklow-Shillelagh Greenway) as well as continued investment and development of existing experiences (including at Avondale Forest Park and House, the Powerscourt Distillery and Cool Planet experience) will help create reasons to visit and to stay longer in Wicklow. It makes sense, given the investment in Irelands Ancient East, to align support and investment to that development which fulfils the promise made by the stories of Irelands Ancient East. If international visitors are being attracted by this offer, then Wicklow should be the destination which helps them experience it – and due to many of our existing assets Wicklow is exceptionally well placed to do this. Whether Vikings, A Tale of Two Worlds (Houses & Gardens), Sacred or Ancient Ireland, Wicklow has much to offer. Alongside this the development of new and inspiring events which can appeal to Wicklow’s markets could help to build business in the shoulder periods. Emerging ideas for an IAE Garden Festival is one example which should be encouraged and supported in Wicklow. Similarly successful Festivals from elsewhere looking to expand internationally and which align with the Wicklow offer should be encouraged and supported. Also continued development and packaging of existing products whether outdoor and active or which highlight the compelling food and drink offer as well as those promoting the film tourism potential should all continue to be developed as strands to the Wicklow experience. Existing festivals (literary, jazz etc.) with the potential for further growth can make a positive impact in the short term and identifying interventions that can help them grow should be a priority.
Evidence	There is a variety of research, from Ireland and elsewhere, which validates the importance in developing experiences for visitors. No longer content with visiting an attraction or doing something, visitors want to feel immersed in a place and among its people, they want that experience to be authentic and as far as is possible unique and distinctive. Of course unique is a much overused phrase but it sets

	<p>the benchmark for what needs to be attempted and what we are trying to achieve. Fáilte Ireland’s Experience Development Framework sets out much of the thinking.</p>
<p>Delivery (Timetable, Partners)</p>	<p>Delivery of new experiences is driven largely by community or commercial interests leading the initiative. But they require the support of the wider industry and the Tourism Working Group as a strategic lead to help drive them forward from concept to delivery. Resources to bring forward and present the thematic experiences are largely contained in the marketing outputs of Wicklow Tourism and other key stakeholders (Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, Commercial Partners)</p> <p>2018-23: Tourism Working Group to provide support to three new experience concepts (Viking Tour, Blessington Greenway, Garden Festival) – assist in the planning and funding of these schemes and with manpower and resources to bring them to fruition.</p> <p>2019-23: Launch Garden Festival, Viking Visitor Centre and Blessington Greenway and support development of emerging projects such as the Arklow-Shillelagh Greenway and the Wicklow to Greystones Coastal Route.</p>

A COMPELLING AND CONSISTENT NARRATIVE

Destination marketing budgets in Wicklow are limited. But there are lots of organisations and businesses talking about the County and its tourism offer to prospective visitors. Tourist Boards, Information Centres, Hotels, Attractions, Caravan Parks, Transport Providers, Eateries, Producers and makers are all communicating with audiences. But there is no single narrative or ‘shared story’ which they are able to draw on and use in their own marketing and promotional materials.

NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT	
Description	<p>We recommend that Wicklow invests in a shared story – a narrative developed by the tourism community – and which draws on visitor insight, to produce a series of tools that all of those involved in telling Wicklow’s story can draw on. An overarching story for Wicklow; stories for the themes and experiences and the towns and main areas; guidance on and a supply of imagery and video. This work is the antithesis of a marque or logo – it may include one but that is coincidental. What is most critical are the building blocks of material which all the businesses and organisations can use in their own work to amplify and tell Wicklow’s story in a co-ordinated and consistent way.</p> <p>Being a destination is highly competitive and the landscape of competing places is crowded. Wicklow has to stand out and that will only happen if everyone works to a common narrative. Expecting the image and reputation of the place to reside in the hands of one organisation (Wicklow Tourism) is unrealistic when each and every businesses is conveying an idea of Wicklow and what it has to offer and when every resident is sharing images and ideas about what can be seen and done.</p>
Evidence	<p>The deployment of the brand strategy for Ireland (Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland’s Ancient East, Dublin – a breath of fresh air) are delivering tangible results in improved performance and reaching international visitors. Evidence from elsewhere, national and regional, highlights the benefit of developing a clear and compelling narrative which can be used by everyone involved in tourism. While local stakeholders can amplify the messages that are probably already being used by the official destination marketing body, this starts to make itself felt when tour operators, media and visitors themselves start to adopt and recognise the brand as is happening in Irelands Ancient East. There are many excellent examples of this type of work developed in regions including Aberdeenshire, British Columbia Canada, Lancaster and the Scilly Isles.</p>
Delivery (Timetable, Partners)	<p>This is a project which necessitates the engagement of the entire industry to develop the brand narrative. That process of engagement directly supports their adoption of it in their own work.</p> <p>2018-19: Commission development of the brand to extend the work already completed within the ‘Wicklow – Endless Opportunities’ identity.</p> <p>2019: Roll-out adoption of the brand with a developed toolkit and suite of resources for all stakeholders</p> <p>2020: Highlight successful case studies of adoption by the</p>

	stakeholders and the industry 2021-23: Develop the tools and continue to expand adoption
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6 MARKETING PLAN

MARKET STRATEGY

The choices for Wicklow are very broadly whether to target visitor segments we have now or new market segments; and whether we can push existing product or need to develop new product and diversify. This simple choice is illustrated below.

The simple fact is that we are in a strong position – we have an amazing offer, but we need to make it work harder. And we have a good balance of markets that are attracted to what we have.

	EXISTING PRODUCT	NEW PRODUCT
EXISTING MARKET	Market penetration – sell more of existing offer to existing markets	Product development – develop new offer for existing markets
NEW MARKET	Market development – target new markets with existing offer	Diversification – develop new offer for new markets

Our view is that the greatest opportunities are in the top left quadrant of this diagram. Get more of the same people already visiting to come. Yes, get them to stay longer and spend more. And get more of them from other countries who look and act like the ones we have here now. And our product needs to develop – we need more accommodation, we need to unlock the potential of Glendalough and there will be new development that will entice new visitors.

However we really need to join up what we have already got and make it so compelling for visitors that we become the destination of choice. That requires partnership and collaboration, a compelling narrative understood and used by everyone, and clever packaging and presentation of the offer using themes and stories which appeal.

TARGET MARKETS

The approach within this plan is about selective growth. We simply don't have the resources to reach everyone we might want to attract. The experience is not only more attractive to certain markets but there are ways in which, if it is presented cleverly, it can appeal to those markets in a way which is more compelling than other similar destinations.

That said, one of the advantages of Wicklow is that it has wide appeal. The segments made up of older couples, younger groups, individuals and couples, and families are all found here. Segments titled by Fáilte Ireland as 'Culturally Curious', 'Great Escapers' and 'Connected Families' are drawn to the offer in Wicklow.

But is important to not spread limited marketing funds too thinly. While individual businesses will make decisions influenced by their own product and the markets it attracts, taking a whole Wicklow approach needs to take into account the segments which have the greatest potential for the future.

We ran a workshop with key stakeholders during the strategy development phase and we considered the key criteria for determining the target markets: whether the segment is large and growing; whether it is high spending; whether they take frequent breaks and travel off peak; whether Wicklow is accessible to them and they can be reached by marketing channels; whether they are attracted to what Wicklow has to offer and will they be good ambassadors.

We have also run a business survey as part of this project and received a good response from a cross section of businesses including accommodation, camping & caravan, attractions, restaurants, bars and cafes, shops, activity providers, tour operators, wedding venues and camper hire. The survey confirmed much of the earlier work and found that:

- ▶ Businesses valued the families most highly among domestic audiences – largely as a result of their current dependence on this market.
- ▶ Internationally they agreed that the Culturally Curious and the Great Escapers offered the greatest potential for Wicklow
- ▶ Many felt the match to outdoor activity, sport and use of walks, trails and outdoor events and places were the main reasons for choosing these segments

The results of this work are that the priority segments for Wicklow are the Culturally Curious, Great Escapers and Connected families. Here we set out our thinking:

Target Segment	Who they are	What they are looking for	Why they are a priority for County Wicklow
Culturally Curious	Typically aged 40 and frequently travelling as couples, the Culturally Curious, travel to broaden their minds. They are curious about everything and are delighted to discover the world. They explore the	Range of exploration: History, Culture, Architecture Broad Culture: including food and café	They tend to have more disposable income and are not tied to school holidays. They take multiple breaks year round. Wicklow's assets suit

Target Segment	Who they are	What they are looking for	Why they are a priority for County Wicklow
	<p>landscapes, history and culture of places and they choose their destinations carefully, looking to visit new places.</p> <p>A holiday has to be ‘authentic’ and they don’t like to follow the herd. They are looking to encounter new places and experiences that are out of the ordinary and they seek out the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of a place. They enjoy connecting with nature and getting off the beaten track and they want to connect to a place and its people.</p>	<p>Walking Comfortable relaxed pace Far away from their usual routine Learning and local insight Experience of discovery and authenticity scenery, great outdoors.</p>	<p>this segments requirements. They have money to spend and travel out of season. They can also be reached through traditional marketing channels such as newspapers, magazines and advertising. This also has the benefit of close alignment to the FI and TI activity meaning Wicklow is well placed to piggy back on their promotional work.</p>
Great Escapers	<p>Often couples, approximately 30 years old, some with babies or young children. They are in need of time out from busy work and careers and they want to get physical with nature and to reconnect with their partner and families – to recharge their batteries. They like their break to be strenuous but not extreme and they want to connect to nature especially in more remote and exciting places. They appreciate peace and quiet between activities as it is ‘down time’ and being off the beaten track. But they also want the wow factor without too much effort.</p>	<p>Somewhere away from it all Nature & rural Experiencing the elements: stars and water Picturesque landscapes Wicklow has a unique selling point in the Outdoors as it stands out from other areas along the East Coast of Ireland with its varied and dramatic landscape.</p>	<p>Wicklow is a better known proposition for this segment from Ireland than overseas but Wicklow has what they are looking for and while many of them are attracted to the Wild Atlantic Way, those combining a visit with Dublin can find many of the experiences they seek, closer to a combined Dublin experience. Because for many time is short, the positioning of Wicklow alongside Dublin for this market makes sense.</p>
Connected Families	<p>The largest domestic segment they are made up of relatively young families and share some overlap with the Great Escapers. Family holidays are the best weeks of the year and a special opportunity to spend quality time together. They put their heart into planning and finding out everything a destination has</p>	<p>A variety of things to see and do whatever the weather with a focus on activity which will delight the children. Attractions, activities (formal and informal), and</p>	<p>Wicklow has a range of indoor and mainly outdoor experiences that appeal to this segment and they remain a core part of the Wicklow market mix. While mainly focussed on key holiday periods, they</p>

Target Segment	Who they are	What they are looking for	Why they are a priority for County Wicklow
	to offer. They are looking to create memories to last a lifetime.	simple pleasures (walks and picnicking) Opportunities learn about the history of the country through the big houses and stories.	have further potential to grow and expand in the short term and are loyal repeat visitors.

Business tourism is a segment which will also have opportunities for specific products within Wicklow. Corporate business, incentives and meetings at the larger resort and golf properties is valuable and also comes across the year. The quality improvements and choice of facilities in Wicklow can only add to the destinations appeal. The potential however is largely for individual businesses to develop and convert and we are not recommending a role for Wicklow Tourism given their limited resources. Wherever possible consideration should be given to how the development of Wicklow’s natural and outdoor experiences might also add to the experiences sought by those organising team building and incentive type events.

INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

While the domestic market remains hugely important to Wicklow, overseas markets have the potential to add significantly to the value of tourism to the local economy and costs for reaching these markets are becoming ever cheaper by making use of digital marketing channels, social media and tour operators and intermediaries.

The main markets which Tourism Ireland are focussed on are Great Britain, Germany, France and N America. It would be surprising if the potential for Wicklow was greatly different to that for Ireland although there may be some key markets in which the specific thematic appeal of Wicklow has greater significance. The Nordic markets in particular have been indicated as one market where there are potential opportunities.

The business survey re-iterated the significance of these markets, though the businesses felt that the GB market should remain more prominent in future activity than recent performance would suggest. They also felt there was real potential from the Netherlands, Nordics and Canada but recognised that these were not likely to be as fruitful as the four main (GB, USA, France, Germany). In most cases they also felt that China, while offering good long term potential, was a market which still required developing and that business focus, at least in the short term, was likely to be elsewhere.

Key information related to the main international markets:

Overseas Markets	
USA	3 rd largest market to Ireland by volume but no. 1 in value €1,174m

	<p>and growing 70% US visitors are in Ireland on holiday They stay longer and spend more than other markets Just 7% are holidaying in the mid-east of Ireland Americans seek out the simple pleasures and love to soak up the atmosphere</p>
GB	<p>No. 1 market by volume and 2nd by value €1,110m but shrinking Only 39% are here on holiday and around 60% are repeat visitors Just 4% travel to the mid-east of Ireland They have a good seasonal spread with 60% visiting April-September</p>
Germany	<p>4th largest market by volume but no. 3 in value €387m 68% are on holiday 90% stay in serviced accommodation 9% are in the mid-east of Ireland They are Europe’s largest outbound travel market</p>
France	<p>5th largest market by volume and value €273m 61% are on holiday in Ireland 6% are in the mid-east They are attracted by the scenery and landscape</p>

At this point in time we believe GB has the greatest potential for Wicklow. Though the market has struggled of late it remains fiercely loyal to the destination and provides good seasonal coverage. But we also think the N America has potential. It is growing, influenceable and their interests align well with the offer in Wicklow. They are perhaps less impressed by the natural splendour of the Wicklow – after all N America has dramatic scenery of its own. But, they are big spenders. Though drawn to the West Coast currently, there is much within the Wicklow offer that corresponds to their interests.

Opportunities from new and emerging markets such as China should also continue to be exploited. Here again the lead will come from the national tourist office and Wicklow must do everything it can to support their work with content, collateral and itineraries to convert interest to bookings and sustain business for the future. This will also enable Wicklow Tourism to function as a market intelligence conduit back to the trade in Wicklow. Daily flights from Beijing and Hong Kong to Dublin are an opportunity that Wicklow needs to fully exploit.

MARKET CHANNELS

We recommend a tight focus on both markets and communications channels to make a real impact rather than a scattergun effect across numerous communications channels. We recommend prioritising the following channels: adapting the main tool, the website; building digital marketing capabilities; providing the content and narrative to increase the reach and amplify the marketing by all partners within Country Wicklow; and strengthening the Press & PR coverage of the County.

The modest marketing resources necessitate alignment with others (Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Carriers) so that Wicklow can piggyback on their higher marketing spend. We also advocate a focus on developing the ‘awareness’ and ‘inspiration’ to visit for publically funded activity, pushing the conversion of interest and enquiries to business to convert whether directly or through intermediaries.

Given this our recommended focus is on:

Website – County Wicklow needs a website that reinforces the desire to visit focussing on motivating and inspiring visitors and built around the needs of the target segments and the themes which appeal. Thematic itineraries and ideas should come to the fore offering a flavour of what can be experienced by different types of visitors, across the region in 24, 48, 72 hours and 7 days. While the website has visual appeal it needs to lift the quality of content, imagery, itineraries and inspiration and make better use of first-person stories to bring the experience to life. The website needs to create an emotional response among prospective visitors. It should avoid listing everything that is available and should be built around the specific target markets.

Digital marketing – Online advertising, natural search and social media will be the most effective and efficient route to market for all target segments. Consideration should be given to appointing a specialist digital marketing agency to deliver a comprehensive programme of digital marketing activity and SEO (search engine optimisation) as well as content to attract new visitors. Social media will remain an important tool for getting County Wicklow talked about and for bringing together the content of a wide community of residents, visitors and local businesses. The platforms are ideal for galvanising industry and visitors to come together and share the very best that the destination has to offer. The destinations role is to use the platform as a ‘stage’ – Industry and visitors are the ‘actors’.

Brand Narrative Content & Tools – Prepare a clear narrative and identity for County Wicklow that extends the impact of the ‘Endless Opportunities’ work. It should involve stakeholders in its creation and be a narrative that makes it clear what sets the destination apart. It should be something which provides place and thematic stories which can be used as a framework by all of the partners within and beyond County Wicklow who want to promote the area. This has benefit for travel trade and press activity also. With a billion reviews every year on TripAdvisor continuing to develop content alongside these types of intermediaries will increase the reach of County Wicklow significantly.

Press & PR – Focus stories on events and the seasons – providing inspirational ideas for journalists to coincide with seasonal copy requirements.

Continue to develop the bank of high quality images available to media. Provide press visits to journalists and freelance writers, bloggers and vloggers and work with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to support these visits.

7 DELIVERING THE PLAN

PARTNERSHIP

This strategy advocates a number of discrete transformational projects while recognising that much of the core delivery of sales and marketing work must remain. It is probably helpful to think about the blocks of work in two ways: Transformational and Tactical. The transformational work is very strategic, pulling partnerships together to focus on the product development challenges and deliver the step change required to elevate Wicklow above competing destinations; Tactical is the delivery of the tourism marketing plan and campaigns, the engagement with tourism businesses and the advocacy for visitors back into public policy environments.

There is a transitional phase also as the key players move from where they are now to new ways of working to include broader and more comprehensive use of the brand by all stakeholders; broadening the participation of stakeholders in supporting marketing through content and strengthening social media performance; and focussing on core markets, segments and themes.

Our view is that the Tourism Strategy Group should maintain a role developing and overseeing implementation of this strategy, monitoring actions and developing the partnerships required to fulfil the transformational projects. This will include liaison with the Town Teams on development of Tourism Hubs in specific towns.

Wicklow Tourism has a clear role in continuing to develop the Tactical strand of work, focussed on delivering the sales and marketing necessary to convert the visitors that will underpin the change in performance.

There is a need for both these main organisations and other defined partners to come together to deliver Transitional projects and specifically in the development of the Brand narrative to widen use by the whole of Wicklow.

RESOURCES

With an approximate budget of €130,000 made up of contributions from Wicklow County Council and business much of that meets the premises and staff costs necessary to deliver marketing activity and leaves very small budgets for actual marketing delivery. So we need to be clear that any marketing ambitions have to be tempered by the available resource and all opportunities should be taken to increase the level of funding, via private and public sector investment against specific actions as well as the future potential for tax levies to support promotion.

The County and its partners should also look to the wider investment they make in supporting tourism, culture and events and try to align this funding to achieve a bigger impact. The costs of information services for example might be looked at again to see whether, if used in different ways, they could achieve a greater impact. The use and deployment of volunteers to support welcome and information might also add to the experience positively without adding to the costs. Use of Greeters and Ambassadors in other locations has been used to great effect and examples such as in [Brighton](#) and [Kent](#) offer ready-made examples.

Grants to support product development in experiences and events should be used to underpin a number of the key actions identified – especially where they align to national programmes and support national objectives.

PROGRAMME

While the actions have been identified in earlier chapters, here we summarise them across the short (1-2 years), Medium (3-5 years) and Long (5+ years) term:

SHORT TERM (1-2 YEARS)
Hotel Development Prospectus Glendalough Visitor Masterplan Town Plans (Visitor Hubs – Wicklow, Bray, Greystones, Arklow) Brand Narrative Development New Product – Blessington Greenway
MEDIUM TERM (3-5 YEARS)
Glendalough Visitor Centre, Interpretation and Transport Improvements. Relaunch as world class ‘Hero’ experience Two new hotel planning applications (min 100-150 rooms each) and openings New programming, public realm and accommodation in Visitor Hubs New Product – International Garden Festival (IAE) and another Signature Festival to extend the season; Viking Studios Experience, Arklow-Shillelagh Greenway Extend Brand Toolkit – adoption by trade, stakeholders and growing visitor awareness
LONG TERM (5+ YEARS)
Broaden programming, events and product development to extend the season Improve public transport to ensure that visitors to Dublin without private vehicles can access and dwell in Wicklow

These suggested timeframes recognise the interconnected sequence between different actions however they are illustrative and can be accelerated if sufficient capacity and resource exists.

APPENDIX 1 – POLICY LINKS

The table below outlines the linkages between the main policies and frameworks and the objectives of this Tourism Strategy:

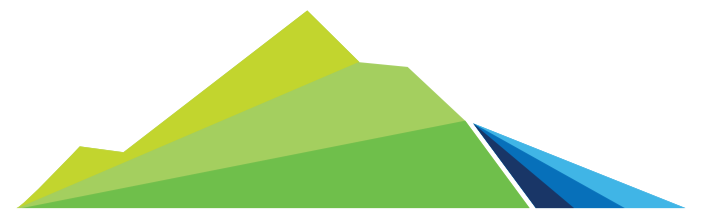
Strategy	Objectives	How will they be achieved?	Links to this Tourism Strategy
<p>People, Place and Policy-Growing Tourism to 2025 – Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revenue from overseas visitors will increase to €5 billion. Employment in the sector will increase to 250,000. There will be 10 million visits to Ireland annually. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positioning tourism as a key pillar of the Government’s Economic Strategy Working with Local Authorities to ensure clarity of understanding in relation to growing tourism locally. Recognising the value of people and place as the greatest assets for delivering on tourism growth and developing human capital in the sector. Developing and delivering an effective policy framework and supports to deliver on tourism targets. Providing promotional opportunities and marketing Ireland as a destination to both mature and developing markets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This strategy outlines the latent potential of Wicklow in tourism terms. It presents recommendations for the development of both larger-scale opportunities as well as local responses to tourism development. This Strategy recognises and promotes the value of a coherent vision for tourism as an embedded part of the development of Wicklow county.
<p>Wicklow County Development Plan 2016 -2022 – Wicklow County Council</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognise and deliver on the positive contribution which tourism can bring to the economic and social well-being of County Wicklow. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and facilitate the development of sustainable tourism in county Wicklow in line with matters pertaining to planning and development of sector. Develop opportunities to expand on existing tourism offer in the county Maximise proximity to Dublin tourism marketplace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This strategy presents a challenge to Wicklow to create infrastructural and operational responses to appropriate tourism development against a backdrop of local economic development and wellbeing and having reference to local policies, plans and frameworks. The strategy analyses the tourism product available in the county, specifically with reference to national tourism development planning (IAE) and outlines ways in which Wicklow can develop its existing tourism offer to meet the needs of visitors to IAE.

Strategy	Objectives	How will they be achieved?	Links to this Tourism Strategy
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage facilities and natural and built tourism assets in a sustainable way for the county. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The strategy establishes Wicklow's significance with reference to Dublin's tourism market. It presents a greater understanding of the market and of consumer expectations, and explores opportunities for maximising tourism potential from this market. This strategy proposes development opportunities which promote sustainable tourism principles and reflect the natural and built heritage of the county.
Action Plan for Jobs for the Mid East Region – Department for Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To capitalise on the region's prominence in Ireland's Ancient East and contribute to the targets in the Government's Tourism Policy Statement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support efforts from Fáilte Ireland, the local authorities and the community in sustaining tourism employment and providing new opportunities for businesses in the region. Maximise region's natural, heritage and recreational assets, together with its national and international connectivity to increase visitor numbers to the region. Maintain and develop an experiential approach to product development for tourism audiences aligned to the core proposition of IAE and Local Authority tourism promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of a strategic and coordinated approach to tourism development for Wicklow which aligns with Fáilte Ireland's IAE. Establishing a tourism identity for the county which responds to national agendas and is compelling for the international IAE visitor.
County Wicklow Local Economic and Community Plan 2016 to 2022 – Wicklow County Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a County Strategy for tourism, building on Ireland's Ancient East, to encourage greater economic benefits to Wicklow, in collaboration with neighbouring counties. Develop and promote dedicated themed tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a Tourism Strategy for County Wicklow. Establish linkages between the Wicklow Way and local villages to offer an enhanced visitor experience and benefit the local economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This Strategy delivers on the objective of developing a County Strategy for Tourism – an over-arching strategy which references the entire county. It establishes a phased approach to this development and a rationale for this approach. Incorporated within the

Strategy	Objectives	How will they be achieved?	Links to this Tourism Strategy
	<p>trails to include urban trails and heritage assets, film, food and spiritual trails.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maximise the opportunities for film tourism in the County. ▪ Promote marine leisure activities, allowing for collaborations with National and International tourism agencies to promote the County's marine assets. ▪ Develop an integrated management plan for Glendalough in order to maximise the value of the experience to the County, while preserving the distinctive character of the area. ▪ Incorporate the food and beverage brand into a food related tourism initiative which can be marketed nationally and internationally. ▪ Support the development of a County Wicklow Geopark ▪ Establish the 'Film Wicklow' initiative to promote Wicklow as the premier film making location in Ireland and to provide assistance to film makers. ▪ Create a Wicklow Brand and Marketing Strategy that communicates a strong recognisable brand nationally and internationally to all sectors of 		<p>Strategy is a SWOT analysis which examines the potential for tourism product and experience development in the county, with a specific focus on the development of Glendalough as a world-class visitor attraction which has the potential to attract and retain international visitors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The strategy identifies the core areas for development which will have the potential to attract the most visitors alongside niche tourism potential in the county. ▪ This plan addresses the potential for development of Glendalough – through the provision of a Masterplan for the location.

Strategy	Objectives	How will they be achieved?	Links to this Tourism Strategy
	communities including residents, visitors, existing businesses, potential investors and diaspora.		
Ireland's Ancient East Path to Growth - Fáilte Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drive growth for international visitors, revenue and associated employment in geographical areas ▪ Reposition area from transit to touring zone to a destination which attracts overnight international visitors ▪ Create a brand of international quality and credibility – through proposition of Ireland's built heritage and living culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work with local stakeholders to develop world-class visitor experiences. ▪ Ensure Ireland's Ancient East is delivered in accordance with the principles of sustainable tourism, so that economic, social and environmental benefits are delivered in a balanced way. ▪ Link iconic visitor experiences with lesser known sites to disperse visitors, increase dwell time and spend locally. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This strategy has been developed in alignment with the key objectives of the inland Ancient East brand, promoting the potential for key and iconic attractors as the drivers for increased tourism and creating linkages to other significant tourism attractions locally.
Wicklow County Council Heritage Plan 2017 – 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Raise awareness of, and enthusiasm for, Wicklow's heritage. ▪ Increase understanding of the value of Wicklow's heritage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work with Wicklow County Tourism to expand the heritage content on www.visitwicklow.ie to develop heritage themes on existing trails and to capitalise on opportunities arising under Fáilte Ireland's - Ireland's Ancient East brand. ▪ Assess the current level of access to National Monuments and publicly owned archaeological monuments in the county and, where possible, encourage partnerships to provide appropriately managed access, protection and interpretation of these sites. ▪ Liaise with relevant sectors in the development of greenways/ walking/cycling routes to ensure that such projects are developed in a sustainable manner and that every 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This strategy has been developed in alignment with the key objectives of the inland Ancient East brand, promoting the potential for key and iconic attractors as the drivers for increased tourism and creating linkages to other significant tourism attractions locally. ▪ The plan highlights the opportunities presented by collaborative and partnership approaches to phased development of the Wicklow tourism offer.

Strategy	Objectives	How will they be achieved?	Links to this Tourism Strategy
		opportunity is taken to promote the natural and built heritage along such routes.	



W I C K L O W

ENDLESS OPPORTUNITIES







WICKLOW OUTDOORS



BLUE SAIL ▶

VISITORS PLACES DESTINATIONS



Wicklow County Council
County Buildings
Station Road
Wicklow
Co. Wicklow

www.wicklow.ie