Ballyhoura Countryside Recreation

Strategy

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Ballyhoura Countryside

Recreation Strategy

A Report prepared for Ballyhoura Development Ltd.,
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1.0 Introduction

The strategy, commissioned by Ballyhoura Development Limited, was prepared by Michael Cregan and Associates. The strategy is based on extensive desk top reviews, and equally extensive consultations with key players in each of the specific areas discussed in the report. Strategies are set out for each of the topics, accompanied by a list of related actions, and a compendium of comparable projects.

The Ballyhoura Region is located in Co. Limerick with tentacles in Co. Cork and with links to the adjoining Galtlee Mountains in Co. Tipperary (Map 1). The region has been undergoing development for countryside recreation and tourism over the last decade, and has been singularly successful in this respect. The focus of developments has been particularly on the Ballyhoura Mountains. The initial developments were assisted by two studies – one of which examined the development of outdoor recreation and the second looked at recreational development in the context of tourism\(^1\). The current study extends the scope of recreational development by examining a range of topics, which are recognised as important components of the outdoor recreation experience and endeavour. They include therefore matters to do with the range of people who could benefit from access to the resources – enabling all people to enjoy the countryside - including people who are physically disabled, and other people who for a range of reasons are not availing of the opportunities. The strategy looks at the added values that can accrue from countryside resources including outdoor learning and the demonstrated benefits to society’s health and well being. Underlying the overall structure of a countryside resource are its particular attributes of nature, landscape and countryside. Recreation and recreational development are premised entirely on the quality and character of the countryside. Hence key strategic actions are those required to protect and enhance the resources. The importance of rural regeneration is also a fundamental aspect of Ballyhoura Development’s remit. Central to this endeavour is the engagement of local people in determining the character of their countryside and their futures. Therefore high levels of local involvement and participation is seen as an important component of the overall strategy.

There are many cross cutting themes for countryside recreation and access such as sustainability, social inclusion and outdoor learning. To account for this, the strategy has adopted a thematic approach to produce a more co-ordinated and integrated account of the issues. The links between the actions are set out in a concluding table which shows how social inclusion, nature conservation and outdoor learning can be perceived as interlinked. The approach enabled the establishment of a set of key issues.

\(^1\) Murphy Ryan Associates and Brady Shipman and Martin ‘Ballyhoura Mountain Park Recreational Use Plan’
Tourism Development International and Ferguson McIlveen ‘Ballyhoura Attractions Cluster Development Strategy’
Map 1 The Ballyhoura Region
2.0 Landscape and Nature Conservation

Objective:

- To protect and enhance the environmental qualities of the Ballyhoura countryside
- To protect the biodiversity of Ballyhoura and the maintenance of ecological processes and systems
- To promote outdoor recreational activities in Ballyhoura while protecting the distinctive natural and cultural values of the region

2.1 Introduction

In this section nature conservation and landscape are considered in tandem because of their integral connection. Policy and planning for nature conservation and landscape care are undertaken at national and local authority levels. However local involvement, drawing on intimate knowledge and a sense of value and pride, is recognised now in many European and national frameworks as a fundamental necessity, giving greater substance and depth to policies and designations. The programme for Ballyhoura Development, as set out in this study, is to identify important areas of action where they, in consort with local communities, can make significant contributions.

The following sections set out national policies with a view to identifying those areas for which Ballyhoura Development can support and develop actions relevant to recreational development in the region.

2.2 National Policies

National policy on nature conservation and landscape protection derives primarily from EU directives and conventions, principally the Natura 2000 programme, Rural Environment Protection Programme (REPS), and the National Biodiversity Action Plan. Landscape policy is somewhat scant. The Heritage Council have adopted the European Landscape Convention to which Ireland is a signatory. The Planning Act 2000 makes provision for the protection of landscapes. The Environmental Protection Agency has published a draft environmental agenda (2007).

Key policies and designations are summarised as follows:
2.2.1 Nature Conservation Designations

Natura 2000 sites are protected habitats for flora and fauna of European importance. They comprise Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive, and Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated under the Birds Directive. The main aim of the Habitats Directive is to promote the maintenance of biodiversity by creating a coherent European ecological network of SAC’s and SPA’s. The habitats and species are listed in annexes attached to the directives.

The objectives of The National Biodiversity Plan are to:

- Conserve habitat diversity, including all sites of special biodiversity importance
- Conserve species diversity
- Conserve genetic diversity, both wild and domesticated

Local authorities will be required to prepare and adopt a local biodiversity action plan for their area. Heritage Officers have responsibility for the Action Plans, which will be part of an Integrated Local Heritage Plan. A biodiversity forum will be established in each area, composed of representative stakeholders, which will provide a mechanism for consultation and input from all interested parties.

The fundamental legislation for the Biodiversity Action Plans is the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Habitats Directive. Important components in the Wildlife Act include inter alia:

- Providing statutory protection to Natural Heritage Areas (NHA’s). NHA designations are the base system for the protection of Irish natural habitats.
- Providing statutory protection to geological and geomorphological sites.

In the earlier Wildlife Act of 1976, provision is made for the creation of Statutory Nature Reserves for the protection of ecosystems and species of fauna and flora. The Act empowers the National Parks and Wildlife Service to designate Nature Reserves on State or private lands.

It is noted in the National Biodiversity Action Plan that legislation should be introduced to provide a legal basis for National Parks and other heritage properties and ‘if necessary, to introduce a National Parks and Heritage Properties Bill’. The existing national parks do not have a statutory footing. The aims of the National Parks are nature conservation and appreciation, and public recreation. No time frame has been indicated in relation to providing legal protection to the Parks.

The 1976 Wildlife Act allows also for the creation of Refuge for Fauna and Wildlife Sanctuaries.
2.2.2 Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS)

REPS is a scheme designed to reward farmers for carrying out their farming activities in an environmentally friendly manner and to bring about environmental improvements on existing farms. The objectives of the scheme include -

- Establishing farming practices and production methods, which reflect the increasing concern for conservation and landscape protection
- Protecting wildlife habitats and endangered species of flora and fauna
- Producing quality food in an environmentally friendly manner

The Forest Service has introduced a scheme called FEPS - ‘Forestry Environment Protection Scheme’- aimed at encouraging farmers to combine the establishment of high nature value woodland with their participation in the REPS scheme. The objectives of FEPS in addition to the latter are -:

- To support, establish, or provide habitats for wildlife
- To encourage protective forestry, such as riparian planting
- To increase Ireland’s woodland cover as a contribution to climate change mitigation

The European Forest Action Plan (2006) established a framework for supporting sustainable forestry, based upon the coordination of forest policies in each of the member states. As a result, forests are being increasingly managed on a multifunctional basis. Amongst the Plan’s objectives are -:

- To maintain biodiversity, carbon sequestration, integrity, health and resilience of forest ecosystems at multiple geographical scales
- Achieve the revised community biodiversity objective for 2010 and beyond
- Contribute to the quality of life.

2.2.3 Planning and Development Act, 2000

Part X111 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides for the establishment of ‘Special Amenity Areas’ in areas of ‘outstanding natural beauty’ or of ‘special recreation value’. S. 204 of the Act empowers a local authority to create ‘Landscape Character Areas’ for the preservation of important landscapes. The Act also provides for the making of Tree Protection Orders.
2.2.4. Landscape Policies

The Heritage Council has policies on landscape in general, on walkways and greenways, and on hedgerows. The Council’s vision for the Irish landscape seeks to ensure ‘that (it) will be a dynamic, living landscape, one which accommodates the physical and spiritual needs of people with the needs of nature in a harmonious manner and, as a result, bring long term benefits to both’. The Council endorses the European Landscape Convention (ELC) to which Ireland is a signatory. The convention is wide ranging and includes measures ‘to establish and implement landscape policies aimed at landscape protection, management and planning’ and ‘to establish procedures for the participation of the general public, local and regional authorities and other parties with an interest in the definition and implementation of policies’, and ‘to integrate landscape into its regional and town planning policies’ (Articles 5 ELC).

The Heritage Council is piloting a Historic Landscape/Seascape Characterisation Study in Derry and Louth, using GIS as an innovative tool for managing change in historic landscapes, and as a primary vehicle for achieving the goals of the European Landscape Convention.

The Heritage Council is part of an INTERREG II C project called REVER (Réseau Vert Européen). The aim of the project is to promote and pilot the development of a transnational network of greenways across the northwest metropolitan areas of Europe. The Council is working with groups and agencies in Ireland examining the possibilities for developing new routes. Rural greenways are routes developed expressly for non-motorised users for pleasure, recreation, tourism, and daily journeys. Rural greenways often follow inland waterways and disused railway lines or cultural routes such as pilgrimage routes. They are valuable in creating ecological networks and help to preserve important landscape features including hedgerows. The Council considers the heritage aspect of greenways as one of their main attractions for users. They are an important tool in raising awareness of heritage and providing access to different aspects of heritage. The Beara Breifne Greenway is a current Heritage Council project. The route draws together all aspects of heritage including archaeology, ecology, folklore and genealogy.

The Heritage Council is a partner in a project called European Pathways to the Cultural Landscape. A goal of the project is to share experiences and approaches to local participation in local cultural landscapes across the European Union. The Dowris Project in the Irish midlands aims to develop an understanding of the development of later prehistoric landscape and society in the region. It also provides accessible information on understanding the landscape and society to the public and to interest groups. The methodology used for the project is based on that developed in the Discovery Programme.

\[Discovery\ Programme\ –\ a\ state\ funded\ archaeological\ research\ institute\ devoted\ to\ enhancing\ knowledge\ of\ our\ past.\ The\ Ballyhoura\ hills\ is\ one\ their\ projects.\]
Hedgerow protection is another of Council's interests, in recognition of the importance of hedgerows to the character of the Irish Landscape. They have produced guidelines for their protection and reinstatement.

2.2.5. Heritage Council Wildlife Grants

Awards and grants are offered by the Heritage Council to local community groups and are available for the following project types:

- Access to Heritage
- Collection of Data
- Seminars and Training Courses
- Special initiatives
- Education and Schools

A grant scheme is available for projects that promote interest, education, knowledge, and pride in aspects of heritage.

The Council has published ‘Conserving and Enhancing Wildlife in Towns and Villages’ to assist local community groups.

2.2.6 EUROPARC

The Europarc Federation was established as an EU funded LIFE programme in 1995 to examine sustainable tourism in protected areas. They published a charter in 2000 (info@europeen-charter.org). The charter commits signatories to implement a local strategy for sustainable tourism defined as:

‘Any form of development, management, or tourist activity which ensures the long–term protection and preservation of natural, cultural, and social resources and contributes in a positive and equitable manner to the economic development and well-being of individuals living, working or staying in protected areas’.

The aims of the charter are:

- To protect and enhance natural and cultural heritage for and through tourism.
- To encourage activities which support the maintenance of historic culture and traditions.
- To provide visitors with a high quality experience.
To meet the special needs of the disadvantaged

To communicate effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the protected area

To provide education facilities and services that interpret the areas environment

A Europarc initiative was launched as a pilot project in 2002 to explore ways of providing children with an insight into the reasons why protected natural areas are important and giving them at the same time an enjoyable learning experience. The pilot generated a model concept for a junior ranger programme.

2.2.7 Biodiversity and Green Structures

There are significant threats to biodiversity in Europe as a whole. Half the known species of vertebrates and one third of bird species are in decline. Natura 2000 is Europe’s response to conserving global biodiversity and its aim is to protect valuable species across their natural range within Europe. Many habitats are highly fragmented and isolated. Most designated sites represent fragments of what were once much more extensive areas of natural and semi natural habitats. In addition important individual wild species are not necessarily found on protected sites. They are often dispersed in the landscape and their populations may be widely dispersed from each other, Protecting and managing ecological networks is thus particularly important and covers all patches of natural and semi natural habitats and lands in between. Many landscape features are crucial to the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans are the key delivery mechanisms. The preparation of action plans must involve active public participation by local communities and interest groups. Their role includes:

- Identifying locally distinct features that should be conserved and protected.
- Providing practical assistance in restoration and long term management of habitats and species.
- Awareness raising and promoting sites and habitats; Providing information by way of leaflets and interpretation boards; arranging public lectures and discussions.

Agricultural biodiversity is a sub-set of biodiversity. It arises from the active management of farmland by farmers. Many components of agricultural biodiversity would not survive without this ‘interference’. Knowledge and indigenous culture are integral components.

Under EU Policy, following the 2003 CAP Reform, farmers are required to deal with a range of environmental protection measures as a condition for benefiting from market support. The EU published a Biodiversity Action for Agriculture, which recommends inter alia:

- Maintaining an unfertilised strip at the margins of land and along watercourses
- Mowing grasslands to encourage wild flowers
- Reducing the use of pesticide and fertilisers
- Protecting and maintaining watercourses
- Retaining wildlife habitats
- Maintaining and improving the visual appearance of farm and farmyard
- Protecting features of historical and archaeological interest

In a recent study⁴, REPS was shown to be important not only for farm management but also for ecological management. The scheme also provides valuable opportunities to improve landscape quality. It was noted in the study that tourists visiting Ireland admire the patchwork pattern of ordinary farmed landscapes.⁵

In relation to habitat conservation, the EPA states while farmers act as guardians of the countryside, some current farming practices associated with the intensification and specialisation of agriculture have the potential to threaten environmental quality. Key issues are water pollution, greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions, and reduction in biodiversity through, for example, removing or over-managing hedgerows.

Hedgerows are an important component of the lowland Ballyhoura landscape and are also important conduits for wildlife migration, and as sources of food and shelter for wildlife. The Heritage Council has published guidelines for their establishment, care and maintenance. Ballyhoura has published a Hedgerow Report, which makes specific recommendation for the conservation and management of the region’s hedgerows.⁶

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⁵ The Heritage Council and Teagasc have produced a booklet on protecting Farmland Habitats – Farmland Habitats (2007)
The Forest Service has produced Biodiversity Guidelines for woodlands and forests. It recommends, where feasible, species diversity with an emphasis on broadleaves; age and structural diversity; retention of old trees and deadwood; maintaining 15% of the forest area for biodiversity, and the retention of 5 – 10% of the forest area as open space. Coillte, when restructuring their forest units, uses these guidelines.7

The Heritage Council has prepared a guidance manual on the preparation of biodiversity action plans8.

2.2.8 Discussion

Nature conservation policies have evolved from a concern with protecting special sites, unique species and unique habitats. EU legislation reflects this emphasis. While the protection of important sites is of considerable importance, an increasing emphasis is being placed on measures to address the whole environment. Landscape protection must address the entire countryside. Protection of special sites is recognised as insufficient to ensure biodiversity and landscape protection. Pollution is not influenced by site boundaries - species migrate across boundaries. In addition many species of importance for biodiversity are dispersed across the countryside. There is a growing consensus that conservation depends on protected areas in combination with policies concerning the broader environment. A landscape approach recognises the interaction between people and the natural world and at the same time, an ecological approach to conservation can be an effective way of maintaining ways of life that are in harmony with the ‘natural’ world and the countryside. The emphasis in Ireland has been on designation policies and a concern for sites rather than with landscapes. The Heritage Council argues that it is important that landscape be considered as a whole rather than in the compartmentalised manner.

2.3 Landscape, Nature and Conservation Strategy in Ballyhoura

In considering a nature / landscape conservation strategy for Ballyhoura, a holistic approach is recommended by which landscape and nature conservation are seen as integral and integrated. In structuring the strategy the approach considers:

A. Context
   - Landscape and Settlements
   - Existing green infrastructure
   - Important habitats and species
   - Biodiversity
   - Coillte Forests

7 English Nature has developed a concept called a Natural Area. It refers to the connection between geology, geomorphology and landscape, habitats, species, and land use. They propose, through this concept, an integration of biodiversity and Geodiversity
8 Heritage Council ‘Guidelines for the Production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans’
Rivers, streams and wetlands
Agriculture

B. Proposals for Landscape and Nature Conservation

Creating New Green Infrastructure by means of:

- Bioregional Concept
- Landscape Character Assessment
- Landscape and Conservation Plan, which will consider
  - Biodiversity
  - Greenway linkages
  - Potential new habitats
  - Communal Forests /Woodlands (including native woodlands)
  - Settlements

Supported by:

- Specific actions
- Community based action

2.3.1 CONTEXT

2.3.1.1 Ballyhoura Region Existing Green Infrastructure

The Ballyhoura Region is a rich mosaic of physical landscapes with a diversity of habitats, fauna and flora. The landscape types in the region include forests, woodlands, open upland areas, farmed grasslands, rivers streams and wetlands, hedgerows, and the imprints of distinctive patterns of agricultural practices. The Ballyhoura hills linked to Slievefelim and Galtye Mountains form a dramatic semicircle of hills to the south. The lowland plains, shaped by 5000 years, of farming are an area of rich grasslands and abundant species of rich hedgerows. Lough Gur and Herbertstown are clothed with the most colourful and species-rich mixture of Limerick grassland communities. A decline in agriculture will bring about important changes to the regions landscape. Extensive areas under forestry already have had a significant impact on the region.

Habitat Designations are listed in the County Limerick Development Plan 2005 – 2011, sections 7.1.7.2 and 7.3 and accompanying maps. Many of them of located in the forested hills.

Ballyhoura Development has published a hedgerow report as previously noted. The report describes the importance of the hedgerow system to the character of the Ballyhoura landscape – ‘They shape the look and feel of the local area. They will tell us when we are home’. Hedges are important as semi natural biological ‘linkages’ threading their way through the landscape. The
report identifies four types of threat to which hedges are now subjected – removal, lack of maintenance, inappropriate excessive management and shrouding by forestry. Recommendations are proposed to address these problems and to ensure that the hedgerows in the region will be conserved and restored.

2.3.1.2 Coillte Forests

Coillte Forests are a dominating feature of the mountain areas of Ballyhoura. The forests have an important commercial role. Coillte are attempting to support the public good in facilitating open access, and are currently involved in the development of off-road cycle trails, in consort with Ballyhoura Development. Coillte in their management plans abide by Forest Service Guidelines for Biodiversity. These various elements are set out in the Cork District Strategic Plan 2006 – 2010 as follows:9

The report notes that soils and climate dictate the choice of suitable species for planting. As the bulk commercial planting takes place in the uplands these species are of necessity conifers, which produce a commercial return. Opportunities exist for diversification in the second rotation particularly for ‘environmental planting’. Native broadleaves such as Willow, Alder, and Birch are tolerant of inhospitable soils and are of particular value for habitat creation, biodiversity and the care of riparian zones.

The percentage of species to be planted is as follows with reference to management units -:

- Sitka Spruce and other conifers  60%
- Broadleaves  10%
- Open spaces  10%

The current incidence of native broadleaves is 2% and will over time increase to 10% as sites become available.

It is recognised that native shrub species, rare species and habitats, are important for biodiversity and the strategy requires that they be properly protected.

Deadwood also has an important habitat value for fungi, mosses and invertebrates. After each thinning, 2 cu.m/ha of deadwood will be retained, rising to 5 cu.m after clear felling

The strategy includes for the design of forest areas to ensure that they sit more harmoniously in the landscape.

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9 Ballyhoura is included in the Cork District.
Coillte has a policy of establishing a social and environmental panel in each district ‘to consult with its stakeholders in formulating its forest management policies and objectives to ensure community support’.

2.3.1.3 Waterways, Rivers and Wetlands

The lowlands are laced with rivers and streams. Most of the eastern lowlands are in the catchments of the rivers Mulkear and the Maigue and its tributaries, the Camogue, Morningstar and Loobagh. The rivers have been to some extent altered. There are, however, many stretches that retain a natural appearance. The rivers flow over limestone rock or drift and are consequently rich in plant and animal life. Intensification of agriculture and agri-industry in the area over recent decades has caused a decline in water quality due to pollution and drainage. Evidence is visible in late summer of effluent damage with extensive growth of algal blooms on the riverbeds, indicating excess nitrates and phosphates.

Lough Gur is recognised as being one of Ireland’s most valued archaeological sites. Limerick County Council is currently preparing an environmental management plan for the area addressing a range of issues including landscape character, biodiversity and water quality.

2.3.1.4 Agriculture

The character of the lowlands in the region is formed from the dominance of grasslands. They are typically in small fields bounded by abundant hedges. The region is at the same time experiencing a decline in traditional agriculture arising from changes in the economics of agriculture. The scope for diversification is therefore extremely important for the individual farmers involved and for the landscape character of the region. As previously noted REPS has made an important contribution in ensuring that farmers can protect habitats and protect the indigenous landscape of their regions.

Settlements refer to villages and the small towns in Ballyhoura. The larger of these will be the subject of local area plans prepared by Limerick County Council to guide future developments. Village Design Statements and Countryside Design Statements are methods developed by the UK Countryside Agency to involve communities in planning and design decisions in their local area. They are suitable for smaller settlements.

2.3.2 Landscape and Nature Conservation

2.3.2.1 Bioregional Planning

Bioregional planning is a way of understanding the complexities of ecosystems as they relate to regional culture. It is an integrated approach to
resource management as defined by ecosystem characteristics. The concept argues that administrative boundaries are not a satisfactory basis for conservation assessment and planning. Bioregions are relatively large land areas characterised by broad landscape scale natural features and environmental processes that influence the functioning of entire ecosystems. Clearly then Ballyhoura is not in that sense a bioregion but could be construed as a ‘sub region’, which are distinguished on the basis of finer differences in geology, vegetation and other biophysical attributes. Ultimately the aim of the approach is to plan for healthy ecosystems based on carrying capacities. The approach generates a perspective for communities to come to know more fully the boundaries of the bioregion they live in and to become more familiar with its unique ecology and character.

2.3.2.2 Landscape Character

The landscape of Ballyhoura can be described by means of a landscape character assessment.

Article 6 of the European Landscape Convention requires states to:

- Increase awareness of the value of landscapes.
- To identify landscapes, their characteristics and the forces for change affecting them.
- To define quality objectives for the landscapes assessed after appropriate public consultation.
- To introduce instruments aimed at protecting and managing them.

The assessment process identifies the types of landscapes in the region. A landscape type is a distinct landscape with its own set of characteristics, which in combination confer upon it a distinct identity. These characteristics derive from geology, geomorphology, topography, vegetation and land uses.

The purpose of an assessment would be to:

- To achieve a better understanding of the types of landscape in the region in terms of their distinct attributes, qualities and sensitivities and to raise local and national awareness of these attributes.
- To identify locally distinct features and set out an agenda for appropriate levels of intervention to ensure that that distinctiveness is protected.
- To understand the conditions required for habitat conservation. Maximising opportunities for biodiversity requires an understanding of the regional distinctiveness in relation to habitats and species.
It is noted by Scottish Natural Heritage and the Countryside Agency\(^\text{10}\) that stakeholders play a vital role in Landscape Character Assessment, producing a more informed assessment with greater ownership of the outcome in the region. The participatory process:-

- assists local people understand and be aware of the attributes of their local landscapes
- enables them establish events to celebrate its character
- enables them develop a confidence in community action
- can help in building consensus on issues where such consensus was lacking
- can help deliver strategies- such as management plans for local nature reserves -which require the involvement of a variety of people and organisations to implement

In other European countries, landscape assessment has been found useful in providing guidance on a growing range of innovative and successful uses aimed broadly at sustainability e.g. targeting agri - environmental measures, facilitating rural development, marketing tourism and regional produce, and regenerating degraded landscapes.

It is conceivable that the Region could undergo significant change over the next number of decades principally through socio economic decline in agriculture, changes in energy regimes, and climate change. The LCA process would significantly assist in managing change and avert negative outcomes.

Scottish Natural Heritage report\(^\text{11}\) on a development referred to as integrated characterisation, – a process that gives equal weight to landscape character, ecological character, historical character, and recreational character and accessibility.

The process of integrated characterisation is in its infancy. Some preliminary explorations have been undertaken in the Oxford region using Quality of Life Capital methodology developed by the Countryside Agency.

Techniques for participatory action in countryside planning include Parish Maps, Village Design Statements, and SRUNA Guidelines. Guidance is also available in a Countryside Agency report\(^\text{12}\) The Cheshire Landscape Trust have piloted ’Parish Landscape Statements’ – a method by which local people

\(^{10}\) SNH and Countryside Agency
\(^{11}\) SNH and the Countryside Agency Recent Practice in the evolution of Landscape Character Assessment Topic Paper No. 1
\(^{12}\) Countryside Agency
can produce landscape character assessment at ‘Parish’ scale. Other projects of relevance are -:

*The Kent Downs Jigsaw Puzzle*, which sought to develop public awareness of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and engage local people in formulating a management strategy, following the completion of a landscape character assessment.

*Suffolk Mill Challenge* which involve forums to identify what values are in the landscape of a region and why; developing scenarios on change and their effects and devising scenarios for future changes.

### 2.3.2.3 Ballyhoura and a pilot integrated project

It is recommended that Ballyhoura would approach the Heritage Council with a proposal to pilot an integrated landscape character assessment project with a clear set of objectives, which would be relevant to the Region’s recreation and tourism strategy, and whose outcomes would be of value to the various programmes, including managing landscapes, tourism, recreation, landscape, nature and heritage protection.

### 2.3.2.4 Landscape Conservation and Development Plan (LCDP)

A LCDP is a conceptual and practical tool for considering nature and landscape in the context of recreation and tourism. Green infrastructure is defined as the regional network of protected sites, nature reserves, and greenspace and green linkages. Green structures should provide multi-functional uses (wildlife, recreation, and cultural experiences as well as ecological services), which would be enhancing, expanding and protecting biodiversity. Green structures reduce habitat fragmentation by restoring connectivity between them. They provide an opportunity to rehabilitate landscapes and habitats where damage has occurred from previous developments.

The green structure would be developed by means of a landscape and conservation plan. The plan has two stages -:

The first stage in considering green structures in the Regions would involve essentially mapping the region by means of landscape character and historic assessment. In pursuing an integrated approach as referred to above, the baseline map would record habitats, reserves, access and recreation facilities, existing green corridors, including trails, watercourses.

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13 The Heritage Council commissioned a study to evaluate landscape assessment in Ireland. The evaluation was critical and proposed that the DoELG guidelines published in draft in 2000 be entirely replaced. They recommended that cross-reference be made to the Northern Ireland guidelines in addition to a number of other European methods.
The second stage would be the preparation of LCDP. The LCDP would basically consider four elements – core habitat, secondary habitat, intensive production areas (agricultural and forestry land use), and settlements. Core habitats are the region’s rare species, and habitats, intact natural systems and lands providing valuable ecosystem services such as groundwater recharge. Landscape ecology principles would inform the designation of core habitats to create a system that includes hubs (areas with considerable interior habitat), linkages (corridors or stepping-stones) and small outlier reserves. Secondary habitats are buffer areas that surround the core habitats. Intensive productive areas are agricultural lands and forests. The plan would conceptualise the landscape and conservation structure of the region based on its innate characteristics and can be used to identify how intensively each part of the landscape should be used. Key issues that would be addressed include Biodiversity, Forestlands, Lough Gur and the Ballyhoura Lowlands, Habitats and Agricultural lands.

2.3.2.5 Biodiversity

The objective in addressing biodiversity in Ballyhoura would be to support the Heritage Council in the development of a County Biodiversity Action Plan. The particular contribution that Ballyhoura could make would include in addition:

- Establishing a biodiversity forum to support, participate, and advise on the Action Plan.  

- To raise awareness of the opportunities to conserve and enhance biodiversity in the Region’.

- In liaison with Limerick County Council and the support of the Clare Biodiversity Officer conduct a series of courses etc.

- Discuss with the Geological Survey of Ireland the possibility of preparing a Geodiversity Action Plan.

- To note Clare County Council, actions in relation to biodiversity.

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14 There are examples of local communities preparing conservation plans - for example ‘Citizens Bioregional Plan for Northeast Ohio’ www.ecocleveland.org

15 The Biodiversity Officer has organised an extensive series of courses, events, and field visits. These have included talks on
- Wildlife in Your Community
- Sustainable Woodland Management
- Birds and Wildlife outing
- Bat Watching

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2.3.2.6 Forest Lands

As a response to the Coillte strategy, it is proposed that Ballyhoura Development prepare a Landscape and Conservation Plan for the Region as described below which would incorporate proposals for enhancing the landscape and conservation values of the Coillte forest. It is an important consideration given the dominance of the forest in the mountain area.

The Coillte component of the Plan would focus on -:

- Forest design with particular reference to the character of forests in walking and scenic areas.
- Species diversification in these areas and in important viewsheds.
- The creation of ecological corridors.
- The creation of native woodlands.

The BSM study\textsuperscript{16} noted that Coillte proposed the conversion of Kilfinane Forest into a recreational forest following clear felling. If this project is to proceed, consideration should be given to creating native woodland. Such a resource would be invaluable as a local amenity and as an educational resource. The Forest Service provides grants for the establishment and maintenance of such woodlands. The Forest Service also awards grants for woodland projects initiated by ngo’s and community development associations around villages and towns under the Neighbourwood Scheme. The funds, under the Scheme, provide for the establishment of new woodlands, the improvement of existing woodlands and the provision of recreation facilities.

‘Heempark’ are a Dutch concept in which a park is created which illustrates the evolution and character of a local /regional landscape by reference to geology, soils, topography, fauna and flora. It is an education and information resource and an amenity. There may be an opportunity to create such a park associated with a community forest.

2.3.2.7 Habitats

The feasibility of establishing other habitats and landscape designations should be explored. These could be Refuge for Fauna or Wildlife Reserves under the Wildlife Act or Special Amenity Areas or Landscape Character Areas under the Planning Act.

Following ecological planning principles, secondary habitats, hubs and linkages could be created to buffer the core habitats and to create a landscape for biodiversity and visual richness.

It is proposed that Lough Gur and the lowlands become more integrated into the recreation experience of the region by exploring the feasibility of establishing river based walkways and cycling trails along selected rivers, and

\textsuperscript{16} Murphy Ryan and Associates and BSM op.cit
incorporating segments of other lands as necessary. The rivers in addition are important ecological corridors, which would benefit from this form of development. Ballyhoura could become engaged with the process through the proposed Landscape and Conservation Plan. The plan would show how the region could achieve a greater level of integration both for recreation and for biodiversity.

2.3.2.8 Rivers

A management programme for the river network would gradually restore them as healthy ecosystems. Networking with the EU funded programme called Cycleau would be a means for local involvement in river and ecosystem improvement and restoration work.

2.3.2.9 Agricultural lands

Ballyhoura lands should encourage participation in REPS and FEPS. It would be useful to establish a short-term focus group with local farmers to discuss conservation and biodiversity issues in relation to farming practice and in the context of the need for diversification.

2.3.2.10 Settlements

Ballyhoura should discuss with Limerick County Council the preparation of village design statements and countryside design Summaries for selected towns and villages. The selection would involve establishing a set of criteria relating to village character and its importance to the fabric of Ballyhoura, and possible future development pressures.  

2.4 Selected Projects

The following are selected projects to which Ballyhoura could examine as sources of good practice and as potential networks.

- Dartmoor National Park, England

  A project directed at helping the public appreciate the geological landscape of Dartmoor /

- European Ecological Networks (www.ecnc.org)

  The body was established by the EU to support the establishment of Natura 2000. The organisation provides assistance to stakeholders;

17 see ‘Design Initiatives in the countryside ’ Research notes CRN 2 Countryside Agency
provide access to information resources on biodiversity and can organise and facilitate stakeholder consultation processes

- **EUROPARC Federation (www.europarc.org)**

  Established to set up a programme for sustainable tourism in protected areas in Europe. Includes junior ranger programme. The Heritage Council has an involvement. The Mourne Mountains region is an applicant for Europarc status.

- **The Cycleau Project (www.cycleau.com)**

  An EU funded project for the management of natural water resources. It involves people/groups/organisations who have an interest in river catchment integrated management processes. The project provides a CD-ROM that can be used by stakeholders as a guide to best practice.

Projects listed the Cycleau 2006 newsletter, by way of example, are:

- The Cycleau agricultural exchange whose aim was the sharing of information between French and UK farmers relating to the management of diffuse pollution and soil erosion and to identify ‘good farming practice’

- An environmental education programme based in Payre, France and another educational programme for schools in Pays de Quimperle

- **Lifescape Landscape (www.yourlifescapeyourlandscape.org)**

  An EU funded project whose aim is to help people explore new ways to profit from the rural landscape while preserving its beauty. An example of one of their projects is Farming for Nature - a Dutch project based on new management systems combined with the provision of recreation facilities and activities. In exchange, Farming for Nature organises a financial fund from the surrounding region, which provides an income for the participating farmers.

- **European Geoparks Network**

  Copper Coast, Co. Waterford and Marble Arch Cave, Co. Fermanagh are two Irish examples. The network vice coordinator is Dr. P McKeever of the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland

- **Yorkshire Dales National Park  *Landscapes for Tomorrow*™**

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18 Yorkshire Dales National Park (1992) *Interpreting Landscape Futures in the Yorkshire Dales National Park*
Research into the links between public policy and landscape change through the involvement of the local population. The programme generated options for future change.

- EcoCity Cleveland (www.ecocleveland.org)

Citizens Bioregional Plan for Northeast Ohio. The process includes a reference manual for guiding citizens through the process – ‘The Greater Cleveland Environment Book’

- Farmington Valley – Connecticut19 is a Valley Biodiversity Project

There are seven towns in the forested river valley of Farmington. A citizen-based organisation has been in place since the early 1950’s working on conservation and restoration. The biodiversity project is one aimed at keeping ecosystems intact through a combination of targeted preserves and improved land use plans. The objectives of the project are: Field research; Community education; Information sharing; Fostering consensus.

2.5 Strategy for Conservation and Landscape

- To create a unified vision for Ballyhoura embracing its landscape and its natural and cultural attributes.
- To create a comprehensive and sustainable network of green corridors
- To enhance the diversity of the landscape.
- To connect and enrich biodiversity.
- To extend access and recreational opportunities.

To achieve this vision will require:

- The preparation of a Landscape Character Assessment followed by a Landscape Conservation and Development Plan.

Studies and actions that will support the LCDP include:

- A local Biodiversity Action Plan
  - To facilitate the extension and creation of enhanced biodiversity and access links between existing woodland, forest, open space areas and agricultural lands.

o The development, as far as is feasible, of river corridors as focal features for biodiversity and access enhancement.
o The development of other potential habitats as local nature reserves.
o The development of community woodlands by means of the Forest Service Neighbourhood Scheme.
o The development of native woodlands.
o Focus groups to deal in general with biodiversity and agricultural biodiversity.

- Examining the feasibility of developing a home park following the Dutch ‘Heem Park’ model.

- Preparing, through community actions, Village Design Statements and Countryside Design Initiatives.

2.6 Specific Actions

The following is a summary of actions proposed in this section of the report:

- Discuss with the Heritage Council the feasibility of creating a Greenway linking the mountains, the Galtees and the lowlands particularly at Lough Gur and the immediate surrounding areas.

- Discuss with the Heritage Council the feasibility of establishing a pilot Integrated Landscape Character Assessment project.

- Establish network connections with EUROPARC to learn about the management of protected landscapes and sustainable tourism, and the EUROPARC Junior Ranger programme.

- Support the Heritage Council in the preparation of a Biodiversity Action Plan

- Establish community groups for actions in relation to a number of initiatives including:
  o Biodiversity and agricultural biodiversity, habitat creation and management, and hedgerow protection and management.
  o Coillte Forests and the creation of forest parks and native woodlands and the sympathetic restructuring of management units with reference to landscape design and planting.
  o Network with the Cycleau project and establish a community group with an interest in river/wetland management.
  o Contact the European Geoparks Networks and discuss with the Geological Survey of Ireland the feasibility of creating a Geoparks, and preparing geological guide notes on walks in the area
  o Network with the Lifescape Landscape project
o Establish a working group to consider the feasibility of creating a Heem Park and seek assistance for the project through Forest Service and Heritage Council grants.


**KEY ACTIONS**

- Establish Greenways linking the entire Region including the Galtees

- Integrated Landscape Character Assessment

- Biodiversity Action Plan

- Geopark and geological guides

- Local participation in landscape and nature issues
3.0 Health and Wellbeing

Objective:

To ensure that the natural resources – countryside, woodlands and forests - in Ballyhoura are developed and managed in such a way that they contribute to community health and wellbeing.

3.1 Introduction

This section of the report examines issues in relation to health, wellbeing and outdoor recreation and identifies areas for action by Ballyhoura Leader. Research results, primarily from the UK, are outlined and recommendations are made on the basis of their outcomes. It has been assumed for a long time that countryside recreation and contact with nature was a ‘good thing’. It is however only very recently that those bodies of research have provided empirical evidence in support of this. Contact with nature and recreation in ‘natural’ settings have now been shown to enhance health and wellbeing.

3.2 National Policies

The Obesity Task Force report of 2005 sets out an agenda for Ireland in relation to health and obesity. The report makes some 80 recommendations on the issue. The focus is almost entirely on the growing incidence of obesity, the consequences for health, and policy measures that need to be put into place. The taskforce vision is stated as ‘An Irish society that enables people through health promotion, prevention and care to achieve and maintain healthy eating and active living throughout their lifespan’.

The other national project for health involving outdoor activity is the Irish Heart Foundation’s internationally respected Slí na Sláinte programme.

The Health Service Executive published a report in 2005\footnote{HSE – South Area (2005) ‘Our children ….their future….. their weight’} where it is noted that ‘Ireland is in the throes of a global obesity pandemic’. The report examined the level of participation in physical activity by children in school. 66% of the surveyed children participated in at least 20 minutes strenuous exercise 3 or more times a week. Over half the boys and 48% of the girls were spending 2 – 3 hours per day in front of a screen. The level of engagement is set against recent recommendations from the Department of Health and Children, which state that children should aim to participate in activities of at least moderate intensity for one hour every day.

The issue of health and well-being is increasingly a cause of concern at national level. The national obesity task force reported that 39% of Irish adults are overweight and 18% are classed as obese. Of these, slightly more men
than women are obese, and there is a higher incidence of the disease in the lower socio-economic groups. Childhood obesity is now the most prevalent childhood disease in Europe. While there are currently no agreed criteria or standards for assessing Irish children for obesity, some studies are indicating that the numbers of children who are significantly overweight have trebled over the past decade - it is estimated that 300,000 children on the island of Ireland are overweight or obese.

Obesity is also associated with premature death and excessive morbidity. There are 2000 deaths annually associated with obesity in Ireland. Many urgent physical health challenges are connected to sedentary lifestyles. Physically active people have a lower risk of dying from CHD, type 11 diabetes, hypertension and colon cancer. Despite this evidence, there has been a dramatic fall in physical activity over the last 50 years. In the UK 23% of males and 26% of females are classified as sedentary.\(^\text{21, 22}\)

Stress and mental ill health are on the increase in contemporary society. The World Health Organisation estimates that depression and depression-related illness will become greater sources of ill health by 2020, particularly because behaviour such as smoking, high alcohol consumption, and over eating are likely to be coping mechanisms for mental distress and have their own serious consequences.

3.3 Research

3.3.1 Summary Recommendations from Research

It has become an accepted contention that exposure to nature is beneficial. Hunt et al\(^\text{23}\) argue that the issue is complex and that it is difficult to separate out the environmental impacts from other impacts in the context of health. However a number of research projects completed quite recently have indicated that outdoor recreation and physical activity generally are good for health and well being. A summary of the key findings is listed as follows:-

- ‘Green space activities’ can have a wide range of social, economic, environmental and health benefits.
- Walking is increasingly recognised as one of the best ways to improve people’s physical health and mental well being.
- Brisk walking reduces the risk of heart disease. It is recommended (IHF) that everybody accumulates at least 30 minutes of moderately

\(\text{\textsuperscript{21}}\) CJC Consulting (2005) \textit{Economic Benefits of Accessible Green Spaces for Physical Health}

\(\text{\textsuperscript{22}}\) In economic terms, a figure of c. €30 million has been estimated for in-patient costs alone in 2003 for a number of Irish hospitals.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{23}}\) Hunt et al (2000) ‘\textit{Health Update- Environment and Health: Air Pollution}’ Health Education Authority London
intense physical activity on most days of the week. For elderly people the recommendation is for 60 minutes light intensity activity every day of the week.

- Physical activity in the natural environment enhances longevity, promotes a greater sense of well being, fewer symptoms of depression and enables people to function better at work and at home.

3.3.2 Specific Research Programmes

3.3.2.1 OPENspace Health and Wellbeing Literature Review

OPENspace have conducted an extensive literature review relating to health, well being, and countryside recreation. Key points from the review are summarised as follows:

- Exposure to the natural environment can have a negative effect on human health. (e.g. contact with poison ivy, Lyme’s disease etc.)

- Terms such as ‘quality of life’ are not well defined and there is little information that outlines the ways in which health professionals understand them.

- Outdoor recreation provides an opportunity to increase people’s sense of well being and heighten social interaction.

- Physical activity in the natural environment not only aids an increased life span, greater well being, fewer symptoms of depression, lower rates of smoking and substance misuse, but also an increased ability to function better at work and home.

- ‘Health Walk’ and ‘Green Gym’ participants stated in the course of interviews that being in the countryside and having contact with nature are key motivating factors in keeping them active.

- Long-term strategies are required which integrate land use planning with economic regeneration, education, recreation, land management, and public safety.

The review identified, as a consistent outcome of the research, the need to promote outdoor activities as a part of everyday life and to promote the acquisition and use of the skills necessary to maintain that engagement. The research has shown that exercise does not have to be in any way strenuous to be beneficial. Eight key barriers to participation in physical recreation have been identified: Being overweight; not enjoying the activities; being too old;

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lack of time; suffering from ill health; suffering from injury or disease; lack of facilities, skills, transport; fears over safety; concerns about environment and weather

3.3.2.2 Research by MIND

The organisation MIND (representing the interest of mental health patients in the UK) commissioned two studies from the University of Essex to examine the potential benefits of ‘green exercise for mental health’. Specifically the report sought -;

- To provide an overview of evidence for the therapeutic role of green exercise.
- To present new research confirming that green exercise improves mental health.
- To set out policy implications and to bring “ecotherapy” from the margins of Britain’s health policy.

For the first study, 108 people involved in green exercise activities with local MIND groups were surveyed. The activities included gardening projects (52%), conservation work (7%), running (3%), and cycling groups (1%). The study concluded that:

- 90% of people who took part in MIND green exercise activities said that the combination of nature and exercise is most important in determining how they feel.
- 94% of people commented that green exercise activities have benefited their mental health.
- 90% of those surveyed commented that taking part in green exercise activities had benefited their physical health.

The second study looked at the role the environment plays on the effectiveness of exercise for mental well-being. Two groups of local MIND associations took part in two walks in contrasting environments to test the impact on self-esteem, mood and enjoyment. One environment was a shopping centre and the other was a woodland setting in a country park. The outdoor walk showed a 90% improvement in self-esteem, 71% elevation of mood, and 71% reduction in tension. The figures from the indoor walk were significantly lower - 17% self esteem, 45% mood improvement and 28% reduction in tension.
3.3.2.3 CRN A Countryside for Health and Wellbeing

The Countryside Recreation Network conducted studies on the effects on health of active participation in the countryside. This was done by means of a quantitative analysis of the effects of ten countryside activities on the health of 263 people. Green exercise was found to bring about a significant improvement in self-esteem and mood. It was noted that ‘the synergistic effects of exercise generate many positive physical and mental health benefits regardless of the level of intensity, duration or type of green activity’. They conclude that green exercise has important implications for public and environmental health. A fitter and emotionally more content public would cost the economy less, as well as reducing individual’s human suffering.

3.3.2.4 Henley Centre Health and Outdoor Recreation

A somewhat complex and detailed study was conducted by the Henley Centre to provide policy guidance to English Nature and related agencies in the UK. As part of the process, the Centre identified the key drivers of change, the uncertainties, and the crucial questions that surround the links between outdoor recreation and health. The following seven drivers were identified as critical - reconfiguring age, risk averse society, social inclusion, drive to greater physical activity, well being, declining mental health and priorities in public spending.

‘Age reconfiguration’ refers to:

- Increased longevity
- An increase in interest in health amongst older people
- Younger people focus more on stress, and work or family related issues
- The sedentary lifestyles of many children
- Children may be more disconnected from the concept of outdoor recreation. It may prove to be very difficult to reverse this situation.

Risk Averse Society. People perceive an increasing number of risks in their lives, many of which centre around health. Such fears have significant impact on their willingness to engage in outdoor recreation. Many schools are hesitant about the prospect of a trip involving outdoor recreation. There are fears of injuries, of pupils contracting diseases, and of litigation arising from such incidents.

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26 Henley Centre Headlight Vision (2005) Health and outdoor recreation A report for Natural England’s outdoor recreation strategy
Well being. Society is increasingly aware of the importance of well being as a means to life fulfilment. Social, mental and softer factors rank higher in people’s minds than money; over 80% of people consider family and friends as well as their personal education and knowledge as important features of their life. Part of the perception of well being for people is their environment and what their daily lives consist of in terms of activities and experiences. Taking time out, getting fresh air, being in open space, and looking at different scenery are seen as important sources of well being. One of the challenges however is communicating this fact to a wider range of people.

There is plausible evidence (including the MIND research referred to above) that outdoor activities enhance mental health. Despite this evidence, sufferers of illnesses such as depression are far likelier to receive no treatment other than drugs. ‘The possible beneficial impact of outdoor recreation has yet to register as a significant treatment amongst health professionals and policy makers’.27

The report identifies critical issues, most of which are relevant at a national policy level. In the context of the ageing population and the sedentary life of young people, it asks:

- If promoting vigorous physical activity may further distance those groups from engagement?
- Are there ways in which people’s engagement with outdoor recreation /health can be subtly presented and thereby made more enticing?
- What are the appropriate transition activities for people who have never taken part in outdoor recreation, and which would encourage their active participation?
- On the other hand, as the benefits of outdoor recreation to health have now been amply demonstrated, is there a case for a more aggressive drive to encourage greater physical activity and health?

3.3.2.5 Mental Health and Green Spaces

The British Forestry Commission commissioned a report on green spaces and health28. Amongst the conclusions in the report are the following:

- Accessible attractive greenspace is associated with autonomous physical activity. There is evidence that people are more likely to engage in frequent physical activity in locations that have high quality and well-maintained green space.
- Passive use of greenspace (or low levels of physical use, and intermittent or irregular use) is unlikely to provide significant physical

27 ibid p.14
28 CJC Consulting (2005) Economic Benefits of Accessible Green Spaces for Physical and Mental Health: Scoping Study
benefits. However passive use generates psychological and quality of life benefits.

- There is a general lack of information on the long term benefits of programmes that encourage green space physical activity.

- The evidence available on activity programmes that use existing green spaces indicates the potential for cost effective health benefits at low cost. Capital expenditure for woodland – based physical exercise is minimal by comparison with gyms and leisure complexes.

- The key attribute for classifying greenspace and health is functionality in relation to physical activity. Open space can facilitate physical activity through scale, attraction, accessibility or connectedness (network of paths).

3.4 Recommendations from Research

The following are pertinent MIND recommendations -:

- ‘Ecotherapy’ should be recognised as a clinically valid treatment for mental distress.

- GPs should consider green exercise as a treatment option for every patient experiencing mental distress.

- Referral to green projects - such as green care farms - should be incorporated into health and social care referral systems.

- Designing for mental health and well being should be recognised as good planning practice.

The CRN report states that the barriers to participation have been overcome in the best projects. Factors that make up best practice include attention to good partnerships, opportunities for feedback, clearly marked routes, good information, facilities, successful market research, good staff, a programme of events with clear dates and locations, personality of group leaders and advertising to local people.

They make a series of sectoral policy recommendations addressing -:

- Access and recreation providers who need to address maintenance of paths, sustainable transport, and promotion of facilities and provision of information.

- Agriculture managers and policy makers should refer to the fact that land management can involve opportunities for public health provision. On that basis they should promote improvements in countryside
access and encourage the farming community to promote the opportunity.

- Schools should ensure that all primary age school children experience visits to a range of countryside settings, and where possible to establish their own on-site gardens.

- The health sector needs to consider the contribution of green exercise to public well-being and the savings that would be incurred through ecotherapy.

- Social services should acknowledge that green exercise has clear mental health benefits and should seek to ensure the provision of appropriate facilities and access that will encourage families and other groups.

- Partnerships - green exercise has implications for many sectors and there is a need for cross-disciplinary and sectoral strategies.

### 3.5 Sample Projects

**British Corps of Conservation Volunteers**

BTCV has developed the concept of Green Gym in which people meet in their local area at least once a week. A session lasts for up to 3 hours during which participants will be doing conservation or gardening activities ([www.btcv.org.uk](http://www.btcv.org.uk)).

**Malvern Soulmates**

This is one a number of initiatives promoted as part of the UK Walking to Health programme (similar to Slí na Sláinte) and involves organised or independent walks across the Malvern Hills ([www.whi.org.uk](http://www.whi.org.uk)).

**Fitness in the Forest**

A programme developed by the Forestry Commission in Scotland as part of Scotland’s ‘10,000 steps in the woods’. It starts as a 2 hour guided walk and increases in distance as the programme progresses. It aims to promote the health benefits of exercising in forests. Other programmes include Forest Schools and Woodlands for Learning ([www.forestresearch.gov.uk](http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk)).

**Základní Skola Kvasice**

A Czech Republic project called ‘Walk with Our School’ in which a number of half day walks are organised. Teachers and pupil walk through their region, to ‘learn about the way of living of their ancestors, and orientate themselves according to old maps, natural signs’ ([zs.ksvasice@volny.cz](mailto:zs.ksvasice@volny.cz)).

**Bikeability**

A programme designed to provide cycling skills and confidence to young people ([www.bikeability.org.uk](http://www.bikeability.org.uk))
**Hartslag Limburg**
An integrated community and high risk strategy to reduce the incidence of cardiovascular disease in the Limburg region of the Netherlands. The programme involves 800 projects ranging from cycling clubs to supermarket education.

**Healthy Schools Initiative**
A Manitoba government programme to address all aspects of health in the context of schools. A UK programme run by a NGO has similar though less comprehensive aims (www.manitoba.ca/healthyschools) (info@healthychoolsininitiatives.org).

### 3.6 Discussion

Irish people are confronted with a number of serious health and social issues. The trend towards a sedentary lifestyle is recognised as a major contributor towards many of those health issues. Ongoing research is providing evidence of the value to health and wellbeing of active recreation. In addition to the range of benefits to physical and mental health, and social well being identified through research, it is also recognised that the benefits can act in tandem. A recreation programme directed at youth obesity can simultaneously reduce the use of alcohol, build family bonds, increase self esteem and promote volunteerism. The objective of health programmes would be to encourage people to engage in regular physical activity. This requires making facilities, locations and activities attractive, safe and accessible and available. It is noted that there has been a significant reduction in the levels of physical activity engaged by young people. A report by Bell et al (2004) has shown that if children are not allowed or encouraged to access natural areas by themselves, they are less likely to develop a habit that will continue into adulthood. Children and young people need to be encouraged to visit countryside recreational areas and other green spaces and an effective way of achieving this could be to link environmental educational activities within the school curriculum.

### 3.7 Strategy for Health and Wellbeing

- The various resources and programmes at Ballyhoura relating to the use of the countryside can be expanded / developed to incorporate actions for health and wellbeing.

- Work with Health Services Executive and other health agencies to promote the benefits of health through more active ways of life. The partnerships in this instance would also examine social exclusion

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where health is involved-for example the use of the forests for walking by the elderly.

- Provide opportunities for local people and visitors to access the countryside with a focus on health and well being. The opportunities in this case would be directed at people who would not customarily make use of the Ballyhoura countryside for recreation.

- Liaise with Sli na Sláinte to develop innovative programmes relating to walking and health.

- Put in place a clear and effective communication strategy to ensure that a comprehensive programme of opportunities exist for people to be physically active within Ballyhoura throughout the year and that it is accessed by as many people as possible on a regular basis.

- Liaise with local schools to encourage the use of the countryside in Ballyhoura for physical activity in addition to conservation and educational endeavours. Examples of such programmes include the forest based programmes referred to above.

- Organise seminars to demonstrate the values of recreational activities in Ballyhoura to target audiences including schools, young people, youth workers and related agencies, organisations responsible for working with older adults, and health promotion agencies.

- Encourage doctors to be aware of the benefit of outdoor recreation for physiological and psychological health.

- Ballyhoura needs to be promoted in an attractive way (which is the case). In regard to health, as noted in the Henley report, it is important to focus on what people want, and to present those positively rather than focussing on health benefits which might discourage participation.

- Liaise with Third level bodies such as NUI Galway’s Department of Health Promotion in developing research projects based on Ballyhoura’s resources and activities.

**KEY ACTIONS**

- Establish partnerships with health agencies, third level institutions and schools to develop actions and research on countryside recreation and health.
• Prepare a health/wellbeing recreational plan for Ballyhoura.

• Develop a health communication strategy.
4.0 Outdoor Learning

Objective: to develop an active outdoor learning culture based on the resources available in the Ballyhoura countryside.

4.1 Introduction

Environmental education is an all-embracing term that includes outdoor play in the early years, school grounds projects, outdoor learning, recreational and adventure activities, personal and social development programmes and education for sustainability. It is now recognised as a core component of sustainable development. Sustainable management of the environment is one of the greatest challenges confronting us. Climate change, loss of biodiversity, ozone layer depletion, degradation of river systems and of ground water supplies, are amongst many serious and complex environmental threats. Education has an important role to play in empowering people to participate in achieving the necessary changes that will lead to more sustainable ways of living. As early as 1980, the World Conservation Strategy argued that:-

‘A new ethic, embracing plants and animals as well as people, is required for human societies to live in harmony with the natural world on which we depend for survival and well-being. The long term task of environmental education is to foster or reinforce attitudes and behaviours compatible with this ethic’

(IUCN UNEP and WWF 1980 sect. 13)

A 1997 UNESCO statement asserts that:

‘It is widely agreed that education is the most effective means that a society possesses for confronting the challenges of the future. Indeed, education will shape the world of tomorrow.’ (‘Education for a sustainable future: A Trandisciplinary vision for concerted action’)

In other words, there is a crucial need to develop ‘an eco-literacy educational process’ capable of generating the necessary practices and solutions to stabilise our ecosystems. The term ‘ecological literacy’, as noted by David Orr31, identifies the goal which is built on the recognition that:

- ‘The disorder of ecosystems reflects a prior disorder of mind, making it a central concern to those institutions that purport to improve minds, In other words, the ecological crisis is in every way a crisis of education,

- ‘All education is environmental education…by what is included or excluded we teach the young that they are part of or apart form the natural world’

Traditionally, environmental education has been perceived as dealing with the quality of the physical environment, with projects on nature study and

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appreciation. It is now argued that education about biodiversity and other nature-based themes needs to be immersed in concepts of human rights, equity, and democracy that are core issues of sustainable development. The concept of sustainable development is based on recognition of the necessary connections between the requisites of environmental care and those of development. Poverty, sustainable tourism, green consumerism, ecological public health and waste management as well as those of climate change, land degradation, depletion of natural resources and loss of biodiversity are primary concerns for both environmental and development education. Contemporary environmental education not only has the task of committing individuals to sustainability, but also to help them reflect upon and act on the different interpretations of sustainable development. The components of this approach refer to the following:

4.1.1 Environmental Citizenship

This requires developing not only an understanding of the relevant concepts but also developing thinking skills for political literacy covering critical reflective knowledge about the environment and experiences in the processes of environmental politics - how over consumption, waste and misuse of resources can be reduced, how economic activity may be altered to minimise environmental deterioration. Involvement with real problems is seen as the most effective way of developing the action skills needed to evaluate and implement solutions. The outcomes can result in individuals being encouraged to take care and manage the environment directly through participation in practical projects. The Third World Environmental Education Conference held in Turin in 2005 addressed amongst many other topics – community awareness, communications, and the environment (including the key role of farming in environmental care).

4.1.2 Values and Environmental Ethics

Decisions to participate in environmental change are dependent on a sense of responsibility and on personal motivations that can derive from the development of an environmental ethic.

4.1.3 Sustainable Futures

Sustainable planning requires a consideration of preferred futures with a focus on solutions and goals. Environmental education requires an examination of probable and possible alternative environmental futures.

Key elements are:

- Developing awareness and interest in environmental issues through communication and the marketing of ideas and values
Building capacity to address those issues through improved levels of information, expertise and skills, and at the same time building communities of interest and establishing a relationship between them.

The following principles are considered the basis for its operation:

- Environmental education must involve everyone and should not be confined to any one group. It is the responsibility of all organisations and communities and individuals.
- Environmental education must be lifelong. Information about environmental problems is constantly improving, informed by past experiences and mistakes. As better technologies are developed and applied, the ability of society and individuals effectively to respond also improves.
- Environmental education must be holistic and about connections.
- Environmental education must be practical. One of the most fundamental defining characteristics of effective environmental education is that it must lead to actions which result in better environmental outcomes, not simply the accumulation of data or knowledge.
- It must be in harmony with social and economic goals and not take place on the margins. It must be developed in such a way that it has a direct bearing on the lives, the well being, and the culture of communities.

The components of environmental education, as defined by John Fien[^32] are:

- Awareness raising
- Shaping values
- Developing knowledge and skills

It is accepted that the common ground in the process comprises the following elements:

- The educational intention is to stimulate personal and social development
- The themes of outdoor, adventure and education are all important to some degree in the process
- The process engaged in is that of learning experientially.

The various benefits of outdoor learning include:

• Opportunities for integrated learning experiences.

• Physical activities in the outdoors clearly contributes to health and well being and to personal and social development.

• Environmental connection and sustainability: A feeling for the natural world is regarded as an essential element to developing a sense of value and thereby encouraging sustainable practices. In Norway Friluftsliv is a concept, which refers to a deep connection between people and the natural world.

• Sense of Place - a sense of one’s position in relation to other organisms and the landscape is often a result of direct contact with these. A sense of place also refers to attachment by communities and individuals to the locality. Such a sense is important in nurturing attachment and responsibility for place, environment and culture.

• Rites of Passage - there is little opportunity for the transition from childhood to adulthood to be acknowledged and valued in western society. The residential camp experience, involving extraction from school and home, adventure with a group of peers which might involve hardship and return and reintegration, is seen as analogous to some tribal ‘rites of passage’.

• Citizenship/Taking Responsibility - a well-developed outdoor educational programme can provide a wide range of opportunities for young people to take responsibility for their own actions. Structured outdoor engagement and learning can provide community groups with a sense that they can have control over their ‘place’, and actively contribute to the creation of a sustainable community.

• Reality; Virtual and Actual - the outdoor experience can counter a tendency of young people to spend school and recreation time absorbed in the virtual world of computer and television.

4.2 Environmental Education in Ireland

There is no officially stated Irish government policy on environmental education and a paucity of official information/programmes. The VECs administer outdoor education endeavours and run a number of Department of Education approved centres including one in Kilfinane. The centres are administered by Outdoor Adventure Ireland. The centres receive contributory funding from the Department, mainly to cover core-staffing costs. Outdoor Education Ireland (www.oec.ie) defines outdoor education as including aspects of adventure sports, ecology and environmental studies with the general aim of contributing to an individual’s physical, social, and personal development while endeavouring to ensure that these individuals become
more aware of the environment and the importance of conserving it for future generations.

The VEC describe the aims of the programme as follows-

- To develop an awareness of the amenities of the Irish countryside by initiating people, young and old, into the various adventure sports.

- To assist in the training of leaders in the various sports so that the schools and centres are in a position to develop their own programmes.

- To develop an out-of-doors dimension in all areas of the curriculum by helping schools and centres plan and carry out structured field trips.

ECO - UNESCO is Ireland’s only national environmental organisation for young people specialising in environmental education. Its aims are to increase awareness, understanding and knowledge of the environment amongst young people, to promote its protection and conservation and to promote the personal development of young people through practical environment projects. ECO UNESCO is variously funded by Government Departments and local authorities amongst others.

Green Schools (www.fee-international.org) is the Irish branch of an international environmental education programme known as Eco –Schools, which is again, designed to raise students’ awareness of environmental values and issues specifically through classroom projects. An Taisce runs Green Schools in conjunction with local authorities.

Calmast (Centre for the Advancement of Learning of Maths, Science and Technology) may be somewhat peripheral. The project is based in Waterford Institute of Technology and it supports, promotes and researches the learning of maths, science and technology in schools. It organises events and activities around the country.

There are currently 16 projects in Ireland promoted by European Environment Education sponsored by the Club of Rome. These include ENFO (the Department of Environment and Heritage) whose aim is to increase awareness of sustainable development by providing up to date information on all aspects of the environment and sustainable development; a Coillte project called ‘Learn about Trees’; an EPA project for schools, and a project by the Irish Wildlife Trust

Leave No Trace is an international non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting outdoor recreation through education, research and partnership. Seven Leave No Trace principles of outdoor ethics form the framework of their message.³³ Leave No Trace Ireland is an all-Ireland network of:

³³ Plan ahead and prepare/ Travel and camp on durable surfaces/ Dispose of waste properly Leave what you find/ Minimise campfire impacts/ Respect wildlife/ Be considerate to other visitors
organisations and individuals, which runs training courses and awareness workshops. It is currently applying for membership of the parent organisation (www.leavenotraceireland.org).

4.3 Environmental Education in other countries

While reports on the Nordic countries and on the UK describe a decline in environmental education activities, and in Local Agenda 21 projects, the web pages present a profile of very extensive activity in the area by comparison with Ireland.

Learnscapes are a type of environmental programme defined as “places where a learning programme has been designed to permit users to interact with the environment” This is achieved through developing school based curricula that engage students interactively with their surrounding environment. The UK programme ‘Learning Through Landscapes’ is an example. (www.ltl.org.uk) There is also in the UK an organisation called The Institute for Outdoor Learning (www.outdoor.learning.org). Teachernet is an organisation of teachers committed to environmental education who have published a manifesto which states that ‘every young person should experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of learning and personal development, whatever their age, ability or circumstances.’

The essence of outdoor learning is set out in a Scottish report34, which states that ‘the outdoor classroom is a setting, the outdoor education is a process in which students and others take part, and outdoor learning is the learning, which accrues as a result.’ It is seen as a teaching approach, which can enhance and integrate a broad range of core experiences across the whole curriculum.

There are extensive environmental education programmes in Germany and in the Nordic countries. There is a Nordic Network in Environmental Education and Outdoor Education with an extensive set of goals. In Norway the national guide for curriculum development requires a range of outdoor experience between grade I and 9 which will teach safety and competence in the outdoors, enhance social and personal skills and expose pupils to their cultural and historic heritage. In Poland there is an international school – The Centre for Environmental Education ZRODLA - with a mission to education students, teachers and the general public about environmental issues. (www.zrodla.org).

The European Outdoor Education Network 35, is a partnership between 12 countries (not including Ireland). The organisation is an NGO that promotes

35 Full title is Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning in European Exchange Projects www.eoe-network.org.
the development of outdoor adventure education through an exchange of practical and academic knowledge.

Projects have included:

- **Creation of a European module on environmental education through outdoor activities**
- **Nature, youth, and identity- an interplay between local traditions and global trends**
- **Comparative practices on women involvement in outdoor activities.**

Professor John Fien in Australia has prepared ‘Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future’ - UNESCO’s multimedia teacher education programme which is administered from the UNESCO office in Paris. This contains resources needed for 26 workshops on different sustainable development projects in teacher education courses.

### 4.4 Research on Environmental Education

A substantial research project for Natural England was completed in 2006\(^{36}\). The study set out to investigate the proposition that wild adventure space can play an important role in meeting the development needs of young people. The study sets out evidence of the potential benefits for the individual and the community arising from young people’s engagement with wild spaces, and barriers to obtaining these benefits. The evidence gathered demonstrated that experience of the outdoors has the potential to confer a multitude of benefits on young people’s physical development, emotional and mental health and well being, and social and educational development, which may have long lasting effects into adulthood.

The research provides support to the work of Louise Chawla\(^{37}\) and to Louw’s\(^{38}\) contention that young people are in danger of suffering from ‘nature deficit disorder’ to their detriment.

The National Foundation for Education Research in the UK has conducted a review of research on outdoor learning\(^{39}\). The review again only deals with school-going children and undergraduates. It looked at three main types of outdoor learning – fieldwork and outdoor visits, outdoor adventure education, and schools grounds/community projects. The review found that there was substantial evidence to indicate that fieldwork, properly conceived, adequately planned, well taught and effectively followed up, offers children opportunities to develop their knowledge and skill in ways that add value to their everyday experiences in the classroom. Likewise, there is strong evidence to suggest that outdoor adventure programmes have positive impacts notably in relation

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to personal and social attributes. It is however noted that the evidence that such activities foster environmental understanding and concern is not strong. Nature experience in other words does not automatically contribute to environmental commitment or understanding. School grounds projects are shown to enhance personal and social development but there is insufficient research available on the potentially wider benefits of school ground projects.

Much of the research on environmental education has focussed on outdoor learning and activity for school-going children. There appears to be as yet little information on the methods, and benefits of outdoor learning for adults and communities, and on education for sustainable management.

### 4.5 Sample Projects

The following projects were cited in a research review\(^{40}\) as being exemplary. The review focussed on identifying the benefits of wild adventure space to teenagers, the benefits to community and the barriers to accessing outdoor adventure:

**Riverside Centre Oxfordshire** (www.harwell.plus.com/riverside)

A country based outdoor recreation centre offering kayaking and canoeing to young people aged 13 – 19. The centre offers challenges, fun, lots of support coaching, clear parameters and accredited outcomes; it works particularly hard to target minority groups, disabled people and young homeless people.

**Forest Schools** (www.foresteducation.org/forestschools.php)

This is a Forestry Commission education initiative offering young people opportunities to do things they not normally allowed do in a forest environment – fire fighting, shelter building, coppicing, cooking and green woodworking. The workshops take place in school time.

**Green Ground Zero – Green Gyms** (www.btcv.org.uk)

A one-year programme for young people between 11 and 13 with weight problems. It includes gardening and conservation work, camping holidays, learning about healthy lifestyles and nutrition. The programme includes for family monitoring whereby other siblings and parents are involved in what is referred to as a whole family approach.

**Oakfield Active Recreation for Children (ARC)**
(play@ryedevelopmenttrust.org)

Oakfield ARC is a charity focussed on community regeneration. The charity, based on the Isle of Wight, purchased and developed an area of woodland on the outskirts of Ryde within the island’s most disadvantaged ward. The project has been exemplary in the manner in which it engaged young people in the process of developing the site. Over 500 young people aged 8 – 18 have been involved. The process elicited from the children a wish list for the site, site development took place on the basis of the wish list, and as a result has fostered ‘a sense of power, control and ownership’.

Fairbridge Trust (www.fairbridge.org.uk)

Fairbridge supports 13 – 25 year olds in fifteen of the most disadvantaged urban areas in the UK. These are not in education employment or training. A range of challenging outdoor activities are offered. Fairbridge foster joint partnerships both within the UK and abroad. They have a partnership with a Raleigh run Motive 8 project for disadvantaged young people with disabilities (www.raleighinternational.org/case_studies/overseas).

Doit 4 Real YHA residential holiday camps (www.doit4real.co.uk)

These are Easter and summer camps for young people between 11 –17, particularly those on limited incomes and not having a likely opportunity of having access to outdoor adventure activities. An innovative aspect of the scheme is that young people book into the programme as individuals and not with an established peer group, which facilitates scope for developing relationships with new people outside of usual social contexts. A major success of the scheme was the training of young counsellors to deliver training and pastoral care.

A number of projects deal with ‘adventure on wheels’, which is pertinent to Ballyhoura’s programme in developing a mountain bike trail network. One of these is the 7Stanes project (www.7stanes.gov.uk). Another bike centred project is run by the Perdiswell Young People’s Club in Worcester (www.pyplc.co.uk), which includes the provision of free bus transport to improve access to the facilities.

4.6 Strategy for Outdoor Learning

To support the development of sustainable communities and a sustainable management ethos in Ballyhoura through a range of environmental education endeavours.

4.7 Specific Actions

- Establish connections with European Outdoor Education Network.
- Identify and develop a range of programmes in Ballyhoura focussed on outdoor learning endeavours. These would include nature interpretation, leave no trace, focus groups dealing with outdoor learning /ecological literacy/sustainable management of resources.

- Raise schools staff and community awareness about the range of outdoor learning opportunities in Ballyhoura.

- Promote the Green Schools Initiative.

- Publicise the value of outdoor recreation for schools and communities in the area.

- Provide information on resources, conferences, symposia on outdoor learning and the environment. Develop a web site that will provide this information.

- Development guidance and training programmes for helpers to assist in the development of Ballyhoura’s resources for environmental education.

- Establishes linkages with ECO –UNESCO.

- Examine the potential for Coillte, EPA and the Irish Wildlife Trust programmes in the region.

- Examine opportunities for establishing a training programme based on the UNESCO Multimedia Teacher Education programme. The programme could contribute to the proposed focus group activities.

- Develop a demonstration project such as a Heempark.

- Encourage and provide support into environmental education research focussed on the resources of the Ballyhoura region.

- Discuss opportunities with the Outdoor Adventure Centre for developing projects centred on sustainable management.

4.8 References

Barnes, P and Sharp B (eds. 2004) *The RHP Companion to Outdoor Education’* RHP


UNESCO *Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future CD ROM* from UNESCO, Education for a Sustainable Future 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France
KEY ACTIONS

- Link with the European Outdoor Education Network.
- Develop information flow on all aspects of outdoor learning.
- Develop a range of active outdoor learning initiatives
  Develop a demonstration project (on the lines of a ‘Heem Park’).
5.0 Social Inclusion

Objective: To ensure that equal opportunities are available to all sections of the community in Ballyhoura to access the countryside for recreation and enjoyment.

5.1 Introduction

Social exclusion is understood as a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems. The 2000 Partnership Agreement described social inclusion as ‘cumulative marginalisation in reference to employment, income, social networks, and adequate quality of life’. An inclusive society is one in which members participate meaningfully and actively, enjoy equality, share social experiences and attain fundamental well being. Inclusion is an active process and goes beyond remediation of deficits. Canadian work has shown that inclusion is more than access to participation. It is about access to respect, selfhood, and human community. Inclusion is to be understood in terms of opportunities to participate, to achieve, to be seen and understood, to be accepted and to belong. In a National Disability Authority report it is noted that teenagers with disability defined inclusive leisure primarily around enjoyable relationships, going to places they wanted to go to and with people they wanted to be with. ‘Inclusion is welcoming and accommodating people with diverse needs and focussed on removing environmental, attitudinal and institutional barriers to access and participation’

5.2 Policies in Ireland

A number of policy areas in Ireland have addressed social exclusion. The current Social Partnership Agreement, ‘Sustaining Progress’, has as one of its core objectives the aim of building a fair and inclusive society and to ensure that people have the resources and opportunities to live life with dignity and have access to the quality of public services that underpin life’s chances and experiences. The Irish National Children’s Strategy 2000 states that ‘children will have access to play, sport, recreation, activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood’. The National Disability Authority has published guidance on improving accessibility within the built and outdoors environment for people with disabilities. The Forest Service Recreation guidelines recognise that the needs of people with disabilities should receive careful attention in the planning of forest recreational facilities. However studies and other material in Ireland dealing with other forms of social inclusion and countryside recreation are scant.

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41 National Disability Authority (2005) ‘Promoting the Participation of People with Disabilities in Physical Actions and Sport in Ireland’
42 National Children’s Strategy (2000) Objective D P. 57
5.3 UK Diversity Review

More detailed guidance material is now available from the UK where a comprehensive Diversity Review has been undertaken\textsuperscript{44}. Scoping research by the Countryside Agency found a lack of evidence on the type, level and amount of countryside access by under-represented groups and a lack of evidence of the benefits of countryside access. The Review has addressed these evidence gaps through research aimed at answering key questions about both visitor diversity and perceptions, and to establish awareness of the needs of under-represented groups. Ongoing action research projects are testing ways of generating a sustained increase in visitor diversity.

5.3.1 Diversity Review Scoping Research

Scoping research investigated\textsuperscript{45}:

- Under representation in accessing local countryside and greenspace for enjoyment.

- The relationship between under representation, cultural background, and social exclusion.

- The potential role of countryside access and recreation to address social exclusion.

The definition of countryside recreation offered in the review is particularly relevant to Ballyhoura. *Countryside is any area perceived by users of the countryside. Thus urban fringe woodlands and country parks, local farmland or green belt areas and inland waterways were potentially included*\textsuperscript{46}

Key findings of the Scoping Review are as follows:-:

- While countryside activities have the potential to be inclusive, many people currently experience real or perceived barriers to access.

- There is strong anecdotal evidence of under-participation in countryside recreation by young adults, low-income groups, people from minority ethnic and black groups, women, older people, and people with disabilities.

- There is significant lack of good baseline information regarding the level and nature of participation in countryside activities by under-represented groups

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\textsuperscript{44} Defra (2006) *Outdoors for All? A Draft Diversity Action Plan*
\textsuperscript{45} OPENspace (2003) *Diversity Review: Options for Implementation* Edinburgh
\textsuperscript{46} Some authors prefer the term ‘social inclusion’ as it suggests a more positive concept.
Participation in countryside recreational activity offers an attractive means of promoting social inclusion and can have a wide range of social economic and health benefits.

The provision of new facilities or transport is not sufficient. A more comprehensive and integrated approach is required to increase the level of visiting from under-represented groups, including increasing peoples understanding of and sense of belonging to the countryside.

The research recommended inter alia -:

- The development of an evaluative framework
- Research people who were underrepresented and/or socially excluded including an exploration of their perceptions, needs and preferences

5.3.2 Evaluation Framework

A diversity framework and toolkit were developed as a means of evaluating ongoing action research and in recognition of the need for ongoing evaluation and monitoring of action research to assess progress in achieving increased levels of participation.47

5.3.3 Needs and Perceptions

Research was undertaken into the needs and perceptions of a selected segment of under represented groups. It was found that all under represented groups were keen to visit the countryside and participate in countryside recreational activities. This was particularly so after they had an experience of a facilitated or escorted visit to the countryside. Young people from inner city locations did however require more stimulating activities to entice them.

Inhibitory factors to access and use were -:

A lack of information on where to go and what to do when they got there. Even when the information was readily available, poor public transport made it difficult for these groups to reach attractive places. Amongst disabled people, problems linked to public transport and the cost of visiting were also cited as important factors restricting their use of the countryside. A lack of knowledge of available facilities and an absence of specific provisions for disabled people were important for this sector. Social isolation and a feeling of vulnerability in the unfamiliar terrain of the countryside were also factors influencing people with disabilities.

Young people from inner city locations held negative perceptions of the countryside. They were not generally enticed because they felt that

recreational areas would lack the kind of stimulating activities to which they would be attracted.

Other factors, which are recognised as important in causing under represented groups from participating, are -:

- Lack of appropriate activities to attract excluded groups. This applies particularly to youth and young active adults.

- Lack of awareness of local initiatives and lack of perceived relevance. In this connection, with the dramatic increase in the numbers of Europeans living in Ireland, recognition must be given to their needs. There is also not much known as yet about how other European nationals and other ethnic groups relate to the Irish countryside. Poles and others have a strong tradition of connection to the outdoor world and to nature.

- Physical difficulties of access to sites.

- Lack of confidence and negative perceptions of the environment.

- Lack of appropriate interpretive information on sites and lack of publicity. Signage and information was particularly important for women who wished to know the direction of their ultimate destination waypoints and viewpoints along the way.

- Neglected or poorly maintained environments. Fear of for example getting lost in the woods is a factor that affects women. These fears can be compounded by a sense that the area has been neglected. A lack of maintenance or presence of fly tipping can be interpreted as indicators of neglect.

- Previous negative experience of the countryside. Research in the United States suggests that adults who enjoy the countryside and feel safe derives from their having had frequent contact when they were children.

- Lack of (accessible) transport.

5.3.4 Benefits of Countryside Recreation

The countryside is recognised as having a role in addressing social exclusion. Outcomes include:

- Enhanced physical health and general wellbeing.

- Development of social, personal and practical skills.
- Enhanced sense of achievement.
- Improved quality of life.
- Enhanced community development and cohesion.
- Wider opportunities for education and economic development.
- Greater appreciation of the natural environment.

5.4 Discussion

Exclusion cannot automatically be inferred from under representation. A group that is under-represented may not feel excluded if it has full access but still declines to participate in the countryside.

Ballyhoura should develop an action plan for social inclusion in countryside recreation. The action plan would identify measures for removing barriers, which inhibit or discourage target groups from accessing and enjoying the amenities of the Region. The key initiatives, which should be incorporated in the action plan are:

- Identifying and networking with policy makers, resource providers, potential users and agencies representing such groups. As noted above there is a lack of confidence amongst under-represented groups about being in the countryside and there is a lack of information available to them about where to go and what there is to do. Reciprocally, there appears to be a lack of confidence amongst (some) providers in engaging with under represented groups. Training and guidance programmes would address issues by providing information on needs, perceptions and thereby increase awareness of diversity issues. It would demonstrate ways of engaging with the target groups and through an understanding of their respective needs make provision for these needs. It would also aim to provide training in evaluation techniques that are important in assessing the effectiveness of actions aimed at achieving higher levels of participation.

- Forums and networks are also valuable ways of creating confidence in organisations representing target groups. They are a means of exchanging ideas and information and proposing and developing joint actions and strategies. As Ballyhoura Leader has a well-developed link into local communities it should be feasible to establish a local access forum to discuss and develop issues and actions relating to delivering on diversity.

- Effective information dissemination and marketing is required to attract target groups who are under represented and the information should be legible, accessible, widely dispersed and readily available. Materials
should be tailored to each of the target groups. For example people with disability will require formats like audio displays or large format writing. An online database would also be invaluable with information on trail types, surface finishes, gradients etc.

- Targeting particular groups for outreach and involving other professionals may be of considerable value. For example programmes to encourage positive experiences of local woodlands in childhood will need to involve teachers and youth workers. Working together with the local Health Service Executive would help maximise the health benefits of outdoor activities.

A range of outreach methods has been used to increase participation. These fall broadly into categories:

- Information provision, both on and off site
- Community consultation and engagement
- Improvement to access through transport, site design and the provision of facilities
- Sports, including outdoor pursuits
- Environmental projects

The Action Plan would propose a set of pilot projects targeted at specific groups. These could include school-based initiatives aimed at involving children and their parents in for example creating and adopting a trail.

Inviting local resource managers for example from Coillte to visit schools to explain the aims and objectives of their management activities in the region.

There is also the need for research programmes, given the paucity of understanding and data there is currently on exclusion issues. Research programmes would seek to address the following broad topics:

- Identify groups which are underrepresented in countryside recreation in Ballyhoura through visitor surveys
- Monitor changes in visitor patterns arising from actions undertaken to enhance inclusion
- Conduct perception and awareness studies
- Monitor and evaluate specific projects
5.5 Sample Projects

PACT is a student scheme developed in Yorkshire, which involves student volunteers from local universities linking with families and providing assistance such as helping young person access the local countryside.

SPACE is a Suffolk base project which enables disabled young people socialise with other non-disabled people

The Institute of Technology in Tralee supports the Adapted Physical programme and pays staff to run the programme. Students organise and run twenty different sessions, which take place each week catering for adults and children with disabilities.

Wicklow Uplands Council launched a rural transport initiative to reduce the marginalisation and social exclusion experienced by people living in the west and the south of the county.

5.6 Strategy for Social Inclusion

- To encourage the use of Ballyhoura region currently under-utilised by under represented groups.

- Develop a range of recreation activities to which they will be attracted and to which they will wish to return.

- Put in place a structure through Ballyhoura Leader which will link providers (Coillte etc) into a programme which will support the target groups. The programme will be based on an understanding of their needs, develop an ability to work with them and ensure that the resources under their care will provide pleasurable experiences.

- Develop links and networks between Ballyhoura Leader, other relevant agencies, and organisations representing under represented groups.

- Establish a local access forum involving local community interests groups, organisations representing the target groups, potential users and resource providers.

- Develop outreach programmes.

5.7 Specific Actions

- Develop a range of policies for encouraging under represented groups to access and use the countryside in the Ballyhoura Region for recreation.
• Determine the factors (physical and perceived) that inhibit or discourage target groups from using the countryside resources

• Establish links and networks with interest organisation and local users.

• Raise the confidence of potential users.

• Provide a wide array of information on facilities and activities.

• Develop a diversity awareness culture in Ballyhoura Development Ltd.

**KEY ACTIONS**

• **Establish local access forum on social inclusion**

• **Network with other relevant agencies**

• **From above, develop innovative recreational plan for social inclusion**
6.0 Tourism

Objective: Develop nature based tourism in the Ballyhoura region based on sustainable and ecological principles

6.1 Introduction

Rural tourism has been defined as ‘a variety of visits away from home to locations outside main towns … be they holidays, day trips, business trips or to visit friends and relatives’. Rural tourism is associated with many landscape settings from non-urbanised towns and villages and gentle countryside to rugged landscapes. Rural tourists are attracted to many aspects of the countryside - peace and quiet, slower pace of life, fresh air, non-urbanised setting, and an abundance of open space. Tourism is seen as increasingly important to rural economies. The demand for rural recreation and tourism arises from a number of interrelated factors including - car ownership, social occupation status - managerial and professional groups are much likelier to use the countryside than low income groups. The majority of visits are made by a small minority of frequent visitors and most participate in informal activities – walking, driving, and visiting friends. Users are, at the same time, attracted by the opportunities to participate in a wide range of activities which can be available in the countryside.

Tourism and leisure in the countryside has increased in recent decades. In Ireland for 2006, 32% of overseas visitors spent their time in the countryside and 25% spent a portion of their time in the countryside. The average per capita expenditure was €600. Cultural and historical sightseeing was the most sought after activity. In the UK\textsuperscript{48} it is estimate that 1.1 billion day visits are spent annually in the countryside. Rural tourism generates in the region of £14 billion. Average spending on a trip was in the region of £8.50. Almost 41% of day trips were to the countryside and the second most popular activity was walking. It is therefore an important resource bringing valuable economic and employment benefits to many rural communities. Rural tourism has expanded in popularity because of increased free time, increased spending capacity, increased car ownership and the expanded network of roads. The demand for rural tourism is expected to grow because of the following factors:

- Increased interest in the countryside and environmental matters.
- The countryside is perceived as having a diversity of landscape and cultural facilities that contrast with the increased standardisation of urban settings.
- The countryside is perceived as having less risk from pollution and terrorism.

\textsuperscript{48} Fáilte Ireland does not have as yet comparable figures for Ireland
• People are becoming more interested in activities such as cycling and walking because of a desire to be fitter and healthier.

• An aging population is more active than previous generations and are seeking outlets and locations for active breaks.

• Overseas visitors are interested in the countryside.

• There is a growing domestic trend of taking multiple short breaks of one to three nights. In the UK this accounts for 56% of all overnight holiday trips and half of all countryside trips are for 3 nights or less.

Other factors that are important considerations to the development of rural tourism are:

• Changes in the economics of agriculture and its potential decline as a major land user in certain parts of the county\(^{49}\). As a consequence areas of the countryside may become increasingly available for recreational use.

• Recreation and tourism have the potential to influence rural economies, particularly in areas negatively affected by declining agriculture

• EU and national policies on biodiversity (Natura 2000) and landscape protection (European Landscape Convention) require that the countryside be managed sustainable for multiple purposes. For example the European Forest Policy, ratified in 2006, accepts that forest management has to be multi-functional and embrace biodiversity and recreation in addition to commercial timber production.

6.2 Fáilte Ireland Strategy

Fáilte Ireland\(^{50}\) has noted a 13.9% increase in overseas tourists between 1998 and 2005 though much of their activity is concentrated around Dublin. Domestic tourism has grown significantly since 2000 – a 46% increase between 2000 and 2004 and an increase in expenditure of over 65% over 5 years with the benefits accruing to the regions rather than to Dublin. Most of the demand for domestic tourism comes from people in the ‘affluent east’, while the “spend” on tourism goes to the south and west of the country.

Drivers of tourism demand are: Economic growth Population demographics; lifestyle changes; Increasing availability of affordable transportation (including cheaper car rentals)

Other factors are: New technology which broaden peoples access to information and travel opportunities; Increased leisure time whereby people

\(^{49}\) Rural Ireland 2025: Foresight Perspectives’ NUI Maynooth and Teagasc 2005

\(^{50}\) Fáilte Ireland ‘Tourism Product Development Strategy 2007 – 2013’
are able to enjoy more holidays and more flexible working arrangements; Health and safety concerns

In relation to demographics, the most significant is the active aging population. They have more leisure time and are fitter than this age group used to be. This has been identified as the most significant expanding market in UK, Germany, France, and the US.

Emerging trends in customer profiles include:

- More frequent and shorter trips.
- A more discerning traveller.
- Growing environmental awareness.
- Holiday destinations are increasingly determined by activities, hobbies and interests.
- A strong awareness of value.

The following issues have been identified as having a strong impact on consumers needs:

- Increased stress
- Improved education and increasing knowledge of other ways of life and tradition
- The desire to reconnect with some traditional values
- Increased concern regarding security
- The desire to continually improve oneself
- The old are getting younger
- The desire to make more of the limited time parents have with their children

The set of needs which tourism activities attempt to satisfy include delivering

- An authentic experience
- Reward - to feel exclusive and personally satisfied
- Rejuvenation
- Relaxation and serenity
Belonging

To feel stimulated and knowledgeable

Energising

Safety and healing

Discovery

In a recent study based on the Scottish experience, it was reported that tourists know ‘what they want and where to get it.’ They arrive on-site with preconceived opinions, and if these expectations are not met, there is no second chance. All groups require accurate information, easily found.

Sightseers and ‘culture seekers’ make up over half of Ireland’s holidaymakers each year. Their interest is scenery, learning about the country and its culture, sightseeing, visiting historical sights, and experiencing music and the arts. Amongst the other key ‘segments’ are family (25%) and outdoor activities (6%).

In the category of domestic tourism, 20% comprise country ramblers – child focussed holidays represent 25% and ‘food and luxury seekers another 20%.

In 2005 52% of visitors rated Ireland’s scenery as an important reason for visiting Ireland. In that regard key challenges identified in the strategy are:

- To protect the quality, character, and distinctiveness of the Irish landscape
- To make sure that design guides are available and that developments created within sensitive landscapes adhere to the principles set out in the guidelines. ‘The sustainability of Irish Tourism will be particularly determined by how well landscape change is managed over the coming decades’ (p.23)

The provision of infrastructure is identified as another key challenge with the need for good internal transport from airports, to and between regions, and public transport to rural locations amongst the key challenges.

The report sees ‘soft adventure’ as a theme where Ireland can offer ‘the largest amount of tangible product’ but is critical of the level of provision in a number of areas including angling, water sports, equestrian centres, and walking. Cycling provision is regarded as poor because of the limited network. The operators are small businesses who have to carry high insurance costs, hence there are not enough hire services available. Also new trains are not bicycle friendly.

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52 Soft adventure covers adventure centres, angling, equestrian activities, walking and cycling.
The second largest theme is in the Arts and Events group, with festivals receiving the highest rating under this heading.

The strategy is critical of museums and heritage theme provision because of elements such as a lack of visitor facilities, weak or non existent interpretation, and poorly presented displays.

6.3 Farm Tourism

The decline in farming could have a serious impact on rural communities. One way in which this has been at least partly addressed is through farm tourism. In the UK 15% of farms have diversified in the last decade into tourism and in the period 2004 – 2005 an income of £420 million has been generated. Farm Stay (www.farmstay.co.uk) promotes farm tourism amongst both farmers and the public. Farm tourism embraces a range of activities from the provision of accommodation to opportunities for working or just staying on a working farm. Natural England, in support of various aspects of rural development, publishes information on a range of topics on its website including accommodation, transport, activities and countryside organisations.

A distinction is drawn between farm tourism and farm attractions. The latter normally consist of leisure, education and/or entertainment facilities on a working farm. They are extremely diverse and can include animal attractions, farm interpretation, museum, arts and crafts, horse riding, and other activities. Visitors to farm attractions are normally either on day trips or else staying in accommodation that is not the farm itself.

A list of options and opportunities identified by Morris\(^53\) are appended. (Appendix 1)

The OECD note that the success of farm tourism in German speaking countries derives from a combination of small farm size, interesting scenery, closeness to markets, traditional town and country links caused by late migration from the countryside to city regions, the owner occupation of farmsteads, and a tradition of effective and interventionary local government and co-operative movements. The report states that the role of farm tourism in local economies has been exaggerated, and in locations where the factors listed above are lacking, it has been slow to develop. Successful farm tourism development requires effective co-operative marketing and development efforts.

The Ballyhoura region has many of the attributes necessary to develop farm tourism and farm attractions.

6.4 Forests and Tourism

The following section is based on a research project conducted by the British Forestry Commission.\(^{54}\)

In the UK, tourism is perceived as an increasingly core area of forestry. Forests provide a broad range of economic, social and environmental benefits. Their value to tourism derives from a range of factors including:

- Visual screening and noise absorption abilities
- Extensiveness and robustness
- Availability for year round use and for all weather use

They can therefore:

- Absorb large numbers of people
- Accommodate a wide diversity of uses
- Promote all year round tourism
- Attract visitors regardless of the weather

Three features were seen to be critical in the delivery of value to tourism enterprises:

- Woodland imagery
- ‘Natural’ and ‘wild’ spaces
- Man–made facilities and services

The access that woodlands provide into what is perceived as ‘natural’ or ‘wild’ places, and their general aura, was also regarded as beneficial to tourism enterprises. The ability to explore away from trails into the ‘wild’ resource, and the sense of excitement generated, were especially important to providers of activity type holidays.

Man made facilities such as walking and cycling trails, visitor centres and car parks, as well as services such as guided walks, were also important. The condition of these facilities was seen as strongly related to the condition and character of the woodlands. Maintaining the appropriate balance between man-made and natural infrastructure was important in preserving the overall appeal of the settings for visitors.

Woodland tourism uses:

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- Accommodation stays in woodlands
- Cultural heritage and arts activities
- Natural heritage activities
- Sports and adventure
- Timber production – to convey information on forest management through activities such as tree planting, viewing tree felling and timber processing
- Use of woodlands as an environmentally sustainable product
- Woodland materials and products – to enable people sample and purchase locally sourced products such as wood craft, berries, mushrooms etc.
- Health and well-being activities
- Themed woodland holiday packages
- Events

The report defined the following as the tourist resources in the forestry sector:
- Natural and biological materials
- Man-made infrastructure and information materials
- Services e.g. guided walks
- Expertise to manage land for leisure use
- Funding /access to funding

It was considered that forest managers should be made more aware of all of these assets and that at present there is an excess focus on physical resources at the expense of ‘softer’ assets, for example, knowledge and skills in land management for tourism.

The report recommends:

- Greater collaboration between forest managers and tourism providers. In particular, a transfer of knowledge and skills in forest and land management would be beneficial, covering interpretation, installation and maintenance of high quality infrastructure and reducing conflict between recreational user groups
- Increasing the communication between management teams
- Changing the behaviour of harvesting contractors
- Promoting landscape design and diversification of tree species
- Improving marketing and information provision
- Increasing provision of access and infrastructure

The Leisure Landscapes report is supported by research from Scotland\textsuperscript{55} which shows that activity-based tourism is the single largest growth area in forest-based tourism. A point made in the research is that not only have the providers to be attentive to the needs of users, the users themselves had to be respectful towards the resource and its amenities. And to this end there is a need to educate visitors on how to behave with care in forests and woodlands.

6.5 Discussion

The countryside supports a range of activities and functions. A growing demand for countryside recreation and the promotion of its economic benefits has to be balanced with the needs for conservation and the sustainable management of agriculture, forestry and the countryside in general. The countryside is a fragile and finite resource. There is an optimal level at which recreation can occur in any particular landscape and when this is exceeded it can have deleterious effects on the environment. Rural tourism is dependent on their being an attractive countryside. The loss of attractiveness arising from excess levels of usage or inappropriate developments will consequently lead to a decline in visitor numbers. There is thus a need to plan and manage tourism and recreation to maintain the character and quality of the countryside and to sustain the benefits accruing to local communities. In other words, a balance must be struck between the promotion and development of countryside recreation and the maintenance of the resource that supports it. Sustainable tourism is now seen as the means of achieving that balance.

The challenges common to all countryside destinations\textsuperscript{56} have been identified as:

\textit{Rurality} - This attribute underpins rural tourism and recreation. Tourists seek rural non-urban nature experiences and therefore tourism and recreation developments require maintaining and enhancing the ‘naturalness’ of the countryside.

\textit{Regeneration and Development} - Tourism must be planned and managed to meet the ultimate objective of revitalising the countryside through employment and income generation.

\textsuperscript{55} Muir K (2006) \textit{Activity Based Tourism: What does it mean for us?} Countryside Activity Network 14.2

\textsuperscript{56} Roberts L and D.Hall (2001) \textit{‘Rural Tourism and Recreation’}, Ayr
Balance - Tourism must be balanced with other demands on the rural resource base, and potentially conflicting needs of local communities, landowners, visitors must all be optimised.

Environmental sustainability - The countryside is finite and fragile. As noted above, the base attraction of rural tourism is the attractiveness of the countryside and the very specific range of opportunities for recreation it offers. Tourism development policies must be based on the objective of maintaining the character and integrity of the countryside. This requires monitoring, protection and conservation.

Business developments - Rural tourism businesses face a range of challenges such as poor returns on investment, insufficient skills or resources for marketing, a lack of training and the inability to adapt to a service culture and to seasonality.

The UK government set up a task force to consider environmental impacts of tourism and to suggest ways in which tourism could be developed in a more sustainable way. They proposed seven tasks:

Assessment of Capacity - determining the capacity of a destination is crucial to its sustainable use.

Transport Management - Cars have a significant impact on the countryside. The impacts can be reduced by effective transport policies.

Marketing and Information - It is possible to influence the timing and destination of visits to the countryside through effective marketing. For example, visitor behaviour can be influenced by information.

Conservation and Adaptation - Practical work such as ongoing maintenance of trails and footpaths will make them more sustainable.

Design and control of development - Careful siting and design of new buildings and the recycling of disused buildings can minimise the visual impacts.

Community Involvement - The involvement of local people in the planning and development of tourism and recreation is central to maintaining a balance between the needs of local people and of visitors.

Natural England listed their priorities for sustainable tourism as follows:

- To work closely with the key players in the tourism sector to improve the visitor’s experience, extend the tourist season, and achieve a managed approach to using natural assets.

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To encourage the tourism sector and individual businesses to take full account of biodiversity and to develop incentives, such as visitor payback schemes, for funding environmental projects.

To promote the need for biodiversity to be part of sustainable accreditation scheme for the tourism industry.

To support the development of environmentally friendly travel strategies and alternatives to using private cars.

To acknowledge the wider global benefits of domestic tourism such as reducing the amount of carbon dioxide emitted in comparison with foreign travel.

To promote research into the relationship between tourism and the natural environment and to secure a better understanding within the industry of the possible effects.

As noted above environmental sustainability requires an understanding of the capacity of the resource being used. Carrying capacity is defined as the level of use that the countryside can sustain before the landscape, the experience of visitors and the prosperity and well being of its communities are impaired.

The following is a framework for studying and managing impacts:\(^{59}\):

**Biophysical Impacts**

- Physical change e.g. trampling, erosion, accretions, addition, subtraction and restoration of materials

- Biological Change e.g. disturbance of ecology, effects on populations, relationships among wildlife, introduction, mutation or extinction of species

**Social and personal impacts**

- Perceived changed e.g. visual or aural etc

- Conjured change e.g. with changed meaning

Carrying capacity studies can address social and psychological issues in addition to the more obvious biophysical issues.

Activity tourism has become an important and expanding component of Irish tourism. Providers have become aware of the importance of understanding the needs of visitors and engaging with them on their terms. – which means offering diversity, choice and high standards of service. Surveys have shown that the pattern of visits to the countryside is changing. People are more likely

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59 Adapted from Broadhurst M (2001) ‘Managing Environments for Recreation and Leisure’
to engage in several different activities. Diversity encompasses local food, local histories, buildings, landscape and its variety of features. (In regard to food, the National Trust introduced a new food policy in 2006 based on using quality local seasonal and sustainable food. Keeling describes the growth of the Welsh tourism market over the last number of years. They have segmented the market into different groups of people (samplers, learners, dabblers and enthusiasts). These groups can be targeted for marketing, information and product development purposes (see Table 1).

Surveys have also shown that people expect higher standards of service and have options of going to other destinations if they are not satisfied. Vaughan states that ‘no matter how good the area and its facilities, there is one crucial element to any successful trip – people. A warm welcome, personal attention and helpful attitude make all the difference. Whilst fortunately it isn’t the norm, I’ve had my fair share of surly staff ….in contrast, and more often, I have come home with tales of great places and great people. Characters and individuals who enrich the trip and add colour and value’

6.6 Sample Projects

Peak District National Park – Environmental Quality Mark
(faith.johnson@peakdistrict.gov.uk)

PROGRESS is a project design to protect two of Europe’s most treasured landscapes - the New Forest in England and the Fontainebleu Forest in France. The project has undertaken studies into recreational pressure and then has worked through local stakeholders in each forest to consider how best visitors can best be redirected to reduce impacts. The project has been part funded under INTERREG 111B (www.progress.eu.info and www.alterra.wur.nl/Uk 9 the latter responsible for developing user pattern models).

Equine Tourism – www.equinetourism.co.uk

European Rural Tourism Development – a project which aims to develop and pilot new learning materials and a new course in rural tourism development which will be delivered on – line to course participants via a virtual campus (www.info.nortcoll.ac.uk).

A cycle tourism strategy has been developed for the North York Moors and Coast (www.moors.uk.net)

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6.7 Strategy for Tourism

- Develop a sustainable model for tourism in Ballyhoura based on a set of capacity studies and indicators.

- Prepare a countryside recreation plan based on the sustainable model

- Identify gaps in provision with particular reference to Fáilte Ireland’s 2007-2013 Tourism Product Development Strategy

- Identify gaps in provision in relation to user groups – in particular the older active age group, families and overseas visitors.

- Identify gaps in provision of activities for which there is a development potential. Cycling tourism would appear to be one of those activities. Its development will require identifying and supporting interested entrepreneurs.

- Explore the potential for farm based tourism and farm attraction tourism. To this end a local cooperative group should be establish to examine options and to establish pilot projects. The group would also establish a web based information source similar to farm stay in the UK.

- Establish optimum quality standards that sites and routes should be expected to achieve. A benchmark standard should be established based on criteria such as:
  - Sense of welcome
  - Safety and security of visitors
  - Facilities and their maintenance
  - Conservation and heritage value
  - Extent of community involvement in planning and management
  - Marketing of the region and the facilities/activities

As part of the coordination and provision of tourism opportunities in Ballyhoura, pre-visit information and on-site interpretation should be comprehensively developed. Reference would be made to local history, ecology, in addition to facilities, access, services, activities etc. The recently published ‘Breifne’ as a joint production of local authorities in Cavan, Leitrim Fermanagh, Sligo and Roscommon is exemplary.

Survey, assessment and monitoring of recreational activities would enable the development of an integrated and comprehensive source of information and would enable the segmentation of the market (as referred to above in reference to the Welsh Tourist Board) and the targeting of the different segments.
KEY ACTIONS

• Prepare a sustainable tourism plan for the Region
• Promote the use of farms in the Region for tourism
Appendix 1

Tourism Opportunities for Farms:

- Turn redundant barns into bunkhouses and camping barns
- Provide additional activities and facilities such as farm trails, fishing lakes, craft working, cycling hire and storage horse stables, picking fruit etc
- Improve quality of accommodation and attractions whilst maintaining and enhancing the unique character of buildings and environment
- Enhance the catering aspect-farmhouse breakfasts are a key selling point
- Promote local food and drink products
- Develop a flexible range of accommodation and services to suit a variety of needs
- Identify target markets listen to requirements and provide the right quality of services

From Morris H  *The Farm Tourism Market*
## OUTDOOR ACTIVITY MARKET SEGMENTS - KEY PRODUCT REQUIREMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Samplers</th>
<th>Dabblers</th>
<th>Enthusiasts</th>
<th>Learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>Promoted short walks - 2-3 miles, easy going, on waymarked paths</td>
<td>Promoted day and half day walks - 4 - 7 miles, relatively easy going</td>
<td>Well maintained footpaths</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Walks leaflets</td>
<td>• Walks books</td>
<td>Guided walks (for some)</td>
<td>Walker-friendly accommodation - particularly B &amp; B and hostels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walks suitable for children</td>
<td>• Walks leaflets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walks accessible by public transport</td>
<td>Walks suitable for children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accessible walks for people with impaired mobility</td>
<td>Walks accessible by public transport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walks in country and forest parks</td>
<td>Guided walks (for some), Walker-friendly accommodation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short guided walks (for some)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling</td>
<td>Traffic-free cycle paths</td>
<td>Promoted day cycle rides on quiet country lanes - 25-35 miles</td>
<td>Promoted cycle touring routes (for some) - most cycle tourists will plan their own routes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cycle hire</td>
<td>Packs of day cycle rides around an accommodation base - for centre based</td>
<td>Cycle carriage on trains and buses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cycle breaks</td>
<td>Cyclist-friendly accommodation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain Biking</td>
<td>Purpose-built mountain bike trails suitable for novice riders and families</td>
<td>Purpose-built mountain bike trails</td>
<td>Purpose-built mountain bike trails</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mountain bike hire</td>
<td>Mountain bike hire</td>
<td>Promoted cross-country mountain biking trails</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cyclist-friendly accommodation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse Riding</td>
<td>Accredited riding and pony trekking centres</td>
<td>Promoted horse riding trails</td>
<td>Accredited riding and pony trekking centres</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accredited riding centres that offer group rides and hacks</td>
<td>Accredited riding schools and centres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>Access to rivers, lakes and the sea</td>
<td>Access to rivers, lakes and the sea</td>
<td>Fishing guides</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sea fishing trips</td>
<td>Charter boats for sea fishing</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fishing guides</td>
<td>Tackle shops/bait suppliers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure Sports</td>
<td>Accredited activity centres, operators and instructors</td>
<td>Accredited activity centres, operators and instructors</td>
<td>Access to crags</td>
<td>Accredited activity centres, operators and instructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Equipment hire</td>
<td>Access to caves and gorges</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fishing guides</td>
<td>Take off and landing points for paragliding and other airports</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tackle shops/bait suppliers</td>
<td>Promoted trails for 4 x 4 driving and other motorised sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canoeing</td>
<td>Accredited canoe and watersports centres and operators</td>
<td>Access to rivers, lakes and the sea</td>
<td>Accredited canoe teaching centres and instructors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accredited canoe centres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sailing</td>
<td>Accredited sailing operators and charter boats</td>
<td>Accredited sailing operators and charter boats</td>
<td>Marinas, harbours, moorings and slipways</td>
<td>Accredited sailing schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chandlery</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boat repair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Watersports</td>
<td>Accredited watersports centres</td>
<td>Access to beaches and the sea</td>
<td>Access to beaches and the sea</td>
<td>Accredited watersports centres and instructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beach showers and changing facilities</td>
<td>Beach showers and changing facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Equipment hire e.g. surf boards, wet suits</td>
<td>Blue charter boats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accredited watersports centres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table provides a summary of some of the key product requirements of each market segment for each type of outdoor activity.

Table 1 Key Outdoor Product Requirements
7.0 Participation

Objective: Develop an extensive participatory culture in the Region

7.1 Introduction

Participation is about fostering collaboration to achieve consensus at a local level on issues which impact on local communities. Its rationale is that local communities have a ‘stake’ in their place and environment and, with it, a sense of what it is they value about their place and how changes can be accommodated while preserving the integrity of the place.

Institutions (local authority, central government etc) have been resistant to participatory planning, preferring a consultative approach. This frequently proves to be no more than a token exercise which leaves the authority still in control of the outcomes. A number of projects based on participation have been developed in Ireland which provide models for participation – notably SRUNA, SEMP, and Village Design Statements. They have demonstrated the value to planning of community engagement. The projects have demonstrated that goals and opinions are important to people and that people generally make reasonable demands and respect the solutions reached if the viewpoints they put forward are treated with respect and thought. Also it is easier to reconcile conflicting viewpoints in planning if different opinions are taken into account early enough. A plan presented when it is almost finalised can be an understandable source of grievance and resistance.

Improved data communication and levels of education have increased peoples interest in local decision making and their influence on it. The government and local authorities are increasingly paying heed to matters which affect the quality of life for people under headings such as better local government, integrated local transport, social inclusion, health and well being. These types of endeavour require, at the very least, consultation between local authorities and community groups.

Key outcomes of participatory planning are (see Table 1):

- By listening to stakeholders and taking account of their viewpoint, conflicts can be utilised.
- Better founded and more widely accepted plans emerge through collaboration.
- It enables organisations to improve their activities to better satisfy the expectations of their stakeholders.
7.2 Planning for Participation

It is generally recommended that when a participatory programme is being proposed, a plan should be prepared tailored to the specific requirements of the situation being explored:

- The elements to be addressed in the plan.
- Deciding what groups and what individuals would be interested in the issue and whose participation would facilitate the attainment of the plan.
- What sort of participatory resources are available?
- What are the desired outcomes?

Types of participation range from individual-level methods, such as questionnaire interviews, written comments, web discussions, to public meetings, open house and Samoan Circle (where everyone is free to express views but only one person at a time is allowed to do so). Open house can include field excursions where participants can become acquainted with management issues, for example, in relation to forestry or nature designations or biodiversity. The method can provide a forum for discussing alternatives and their implications and potential consequences.

Group methods are effective means of imparting and gathering information but require that only a small number of stakeholders would participate. The arrangement facilitates discussion, appreciation of different opinions, and obtaining immediate feedback. There is a wide range of techniques and methods available, including work groups. The latter was used in the SRUNA project based on organised interest groups. The method ensures that the most important stakeholders get to know what the particular process is about, and how it proceeds, and reciprocally, the managers procure an understanding of the in-depth values, knowledge, and concerns of the stakeholders.

Workshop group method can be used to formulate, assess, and resolve problems associated with a particular topic which has been defined in advance - for example looking at forest practice in relation to growing conifers and their impact on the character of a landscape and the management regime required to produce productive crops. The forum can then consider ways in which management might adjust certain practices to lessen landscape impacts.

7.3 Community Sustainability Indicators

Community sustainable indicators are a way of assessing the attainment of sustainable development /quality of life goals in communities (Table I).
In Europe the international Council for Local Environment Initiatives (www.iclei.org) distinguishes three types of sustainability indicators:

**Simple Indicators** are most commonly used in practice. They answer simple questions like *how many?* and *how much?* They are easy to set up and assess but they only indicate whether a trend is positive or negative. They do not show whether or how much change is needed.

**Linkage indicators** to indicate and judge the interactions between economic activities, their social benefits and their ecological effects. They often generate new perspectives and support a new integrated way of looking at the prevailing situation.

**Distance – to - target indicators** can be used when common aims and targets have been developed as part of the consensus building process in a local community. They indicate the distance that still needs to be covered in order to reach the aims and targets. A checklist for sustainable communities is appended.

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**A sustainable society seeks to**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protect and enhance The environment</th>
<th>Use energy, water and natural resources efficiently and with care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimise waste, then reuse or recover through recycling, composting etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limit pollution to levels that do not damage natural systems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meet social needs</th>
<th>Create or enhance places, spaces or buildings that work well, wear well and look well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make settlements human in form and scale value and protect diversity and local distinctiveness and strengthen local community and cultural identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protect human health and amenity through safe pleasant environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meet local needs locally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empower all section of the community to participate in decision – making and consider the social and community impacts of decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promote economic success</th>
<th>Create a vibrant local economy that gives access to satisfying and rewarding work without damaging local environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value unpaid work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make opportunities for culture, leisure and recreation readily available to all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 2 Sustainable Communities Checklist

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Adapted from ‘Communities Count’ (1998) New Economic Foundation UK
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Example of popular indicators chosen by communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protect and enhance the environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Value and protect the Diversity of nature | ▪ Wildlife in rivers and streams(target to increase selected species populations)  
  ▪ Wildlife diversity: total species numbers and numbers which are threatened |
| Limit pollution                           | ▪ Water pollution load  
  ▪ Age and condition of trees |
| Minimise waste                            | ▪ Percentage of household waste recycled  
  ▪ Number of households composting kitchen and garden waste |
| **Meet social needs**                     |                                                      |
| Create or enhance places, spaces and buildings that look well, work well, and wear well | ▪ Positive attributes of villages and local towns recorded in design guidelines  
  ▪ Positive attributes of countryside as recorded in countryside statements |
| Make settlements ‘human’ in scale and form including housing in the countryside | ▪ Number of planning applications approved which include safeguarding conditions which relate to historic or landscape character |
| Value and protect diversity and local distinctiveness strengthen local community and cultural identity | ▪ Community cohesion; views from different focus groups  
  ▪ Protection of natural areas  
  ▪ Protection of archaeological resources |

Table 3  Community Chosen Indicators

7.4  Strategy for Participation

Create a culture of participation in Ballyhoura which will address a wide range of topics in the development of outdoor recreation.

**KEY ACTIONS**

- Create a community forum for participation in planning and development in Ballyhoura.
- Develop, through the forum, sustainable community indicators.
8.0 The Strategy and the Priority Actions

A series of actions is proposed to realise the aims of the strategy and is on Table 8. The actions show a degree of overlap and are grouped under the headings – community involvement, networks, communications, plans, and other actions. They cohere with the key issues identified in the introduction. Identifying user needs, and gaps in provision relate to both social inclusion and tourism. Protecting the environment will occur through plans proposed under landscape and nature, and are developed also under the headings sustainable tourism, woodland tourism, and programmes for outdoor learning.

The importance of community involvement crosses each of the topic headings and is addressed under the promotion of farm and cycling tourism, the preparation of village design statements and the enlargement of the Green Schools programme.

Health recreation planning can be cross referenced to social inclusion (project developments in environment and sports) and communication with schools.

The broad aims of the strategy finally is to develop a countryside recreation culture in Ballyhoura in which local people and visitors alike will benefit from the opportunities to visit and enjoy the countryside and mountain resources of the region. A range of plans and specific actions should be undertaken to ensure the continued growth of recreational opportunities in harmony with the land, the landscape and the people of the region. The practical actions have the following broad aims:

- To ensure that Ballyhoura Development Ltd. can continue to pursue and establish partnerships between organisations and local communities, for projects, funding and the joint promotion of activities.

- To promote and adopt sustainable practices in recreation provision to maintain and enhance the environmental quality of the region.

- To develop the recreational opportunities of the region in ways that are consonant with practices to protect and enhance the natural resources and environmental quality.

- To raise awareness and understanding of the benefits and opportunities associated with countryside recreation. These benefits include health and well being, environmental appreciation, and rural regeneration.

- To meet the access needs of those who have limited opportunity to enjoy the countryside.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Type</th>
<th>Landscape and Nature</th>
<th>Health and Well Being</th>
<th>Outdoor Learning</th>
<th>Social Inclusion</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
<th>Participation</th>
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<td>Community involvement</td>
<td>Create local flora</td>
<td>Establish Partnerships</td>
<td>Liaise with European OEN</td>
<td>Liaise with local entrepreneurs</td>
<td>Create local community forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Networks</td>
<td>Link with Europarc, Cycleau, Lifescape Landscape project</td>
<td>Liaise with Sli na Sláinte</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>On biodiversity and agriculture biodiversity</td>
<td>Develop information programme</td>
<td>Develop information programme</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To schools and teachers on resources of region</td>
<td>Communicate on benefits of Outdoor Recreation including to schools and doctors re ecotherapy</td>
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<td>Seminars to Target audiences</td>
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<td>Plans</td>
<td>Greenway</td>
<td>Health recreation plan</td>
<td>Demonstration Park</td>
<td>Action plan for social inclusion</td>
<td>Sustainable tourism plan</td>
<td>Woodland tourism plan</td>
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<td>Landscape character Assessment Landscape and conservation plan</td>
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<td>Biodiversity Action Plan Geopark Village Design Statements Countryside Design Summaries</td>
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<td>Other actions</td>
<td>Green Schools</td>
<td>Opportunities for environmental research</td>
<td>Outdoor learning initiatives Training programme for environment education helpers UNESCO teacher training programme</td>
<td>Develop projects – environment and sports with wide appeal Identify gaps in provision Identify gaps in user groups</td>
<td>Develop cycling tourism Identify gaps in user groups</td>
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Table 4 Priority Actions
Appendix 2

A summary of two reports on the development of Recreation and Tourism in Ballyhoura
Ballyhoura Mountain Park
Recreational Use Plan

*Prepared by Murphy Ryan and Brady, Shipman, Martin*

**Recommendations**

**Marketing**

1. An overall tourism marketing strategy to be developed with particular reference to:
   - Environmental Quality.
   - Excellent quality of existing holiday accommodation.
   - Development of Mountain Park as a recreational resource.
   - Information on market trends.

2. New market locations to be identified with an emphasis on locations where people would value environmental quality.

3. Ballyhoura Development Ltd to develop formal links with institutions engaged in research and whose work and interest would coincide with opportunities for research in Ballyhoura.

**Guidelines for Development**

- It should cater for overseas visitors and length of stay should be extended.
- It should provide support to Kilfinane.
- It should have regard to Coillte policy in relation to the latter's recreational plan.
- It should be environmentally and socially acceptable.
- It should provide free access to the public to the mountains.

- Main entrance to the park should be located within the Ardpatrick/Greenwood area.

- A visitor centre should be developed and should be strategically located with direct access to it from the main entrance.
Strategic Theme

- Outdoor development consistent with ecological development
- Vehicular access across the mountain should not be encouraged

Recreational Uses

Fifteen potential uses identified- walking, hiking, wildlife, field study, painting, cycling, orienteering, grouse, horse riding, cross country running, treasure hunts, camping, adventure sports, archery, children’s play area.

Recreational Use Classification

- Provide core area with recreation as the designated primary use and commercial forestry in subsidiary role. Environmental enhancement of this area which would include broadleaf tree planting in place of the dominant conifers.
- The Forest Recreation Plan to be broadened to include low lying land across Castle Oliver and Ballyorgan
- Improving the quality of walks with off road trails, more lowland walks, better and information and re routing some forest walks to forest perimeter.
- Key walking links to be developed with the following objectives as priorities:
  - Links to Galtee and Aherlow areas
  - Reduce number of walks on public roads
  - Organise improved mapping (1:50,000)
- The Keale River Walk from Ballyorgan – return route should be off road
- Walks to be developed in the triangle Ballyhoura Mountains, Kilfinane and the Galtees
- The Grouse Moor Area should be a restricted zone with walks confined to through routes and nature observation
- Facilities to be developed above Glenenair Bridge for limited parking short loops and links to south
- A Walking Centre to be provided incorporated into the Visitor Centre
- Special facilities should be considered for Castle Oliver and Ballyorgan - Adventure play, hostels, cottage accommodation and pleasure gardens

- Field Study Centre to be located in Kilfinane in conjunction with the Outdoors Pursuit Centre.
Ballyhoura Attractions Cluster Development Strategy


Recommendations

- Rebrand as Ballyhoura Mountain Recreation Area
- Link with adjacent mountain zones and private lands
- A hierarchy of access points to be developed offering different levels of facilities
  - A-level access points to include car park, toilets information, picnic and play areas, access to trails
  - B-level access points to include car parking, information, picnic area and trail access
  - C-level access – car parking, information and trail access.
- Proposed range of activities to include walking, cycling, horse riding, special interest, motorised, shooting, special needs, and events.

The preliminary development plan set out the following recommendations:

- Produce a long term recreation management plan in association with Coillte which reconciles requirements of commercial forestry and the recreational provision
- Two activity zones proposed and indicated on a map. Zone 1 would be for passive activity and zone 2 for active recreation but a certain amount of overlap would be feasible.
- As indicated above a hierarchy of access points proposed. Reference is made to Glenosheen with an emphasis on family provision; Garrane as a location for ‘serious’ activities; Castlepook river for general access; and a number of other locations for levels B and C (as indicated on a map).
- Three new routes proposed as follows. These are indicated on a map:-
  - New routes which would follow watercourses along valley bottoms and to be used exclusively for walkers, cyclists and
horse riding. One of the routes would be developed as far as Doneraile.

- A series of looped routes from each of the A gateways
- A mountain bike, quad, 4x4 tracks and trial bike areas/trails be developed.

  - Test the feasibility of developing angling and other leisure facilities at the Forest Homes in Ballyorgan including the development of an artificial lake on the Molanna river and an associated walkway and other facilities.

**Heritage Initiative**

- A set of objectives to provide a rural heritage and cultural experience based on a hub and spoke system. Kilmallock would be the interpretive hub and the spokes would radiate out to Lough Gur, Liscarroll, Charleville, Churchtown and other interesting sites
- A five year Heritage Management Plan should be prepared.
- Orientation, safe access and interpretation should be provided at the Archaeological and historical sites
- In particular a range of initiatives should be prepared to capitalise on the Lough Gur cluster of Archaeological sites
- Driving routes are identified which would encompass the heritage and historic sites and the routes would be clearly identified
- Waking routes with loops and cycling routes would be similarly identified and developed
- An integrated system of signage and Ballyhoura country branded information materials would be developed
- Heritage Guides would be hired and trained and a range of methods developed to present heritage information.

**Supportive Initiatives**

- These would address accommodation gaps, food and drinks provision, visitor entertainment, environmental protection, training needs, and marketing of the areas products.
- Organisational arrangements will require to be put in place to bring about delivery and management of the plan and will involve the local
authorities, Ballyhoura Development, Tourist interest Dúchas and Shannon Development. It is envisaged that a partnership structure would be the most effective arrangement.

Marketing

A set of marketing objectives is set out to create an awareness of the Ballyhoura County attractions. These include targeting market segments by press and public relations; advertising campaign; promotional packages; internet marketing etc.