

# Mountshannon White-tailed Sea Eagle Development Plan

The feasibility and development of socio-economic benefits around wildlife viewing at Mountshannon, Lough Derg, Co. Clare



## Report to Mountshannon Community Council

Authors: Alan Lauder, Ronan O'Flaherty

This project has been part-funded by the LEADER programme, through The National Development Plan and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development:  
Europe investing in rural areas



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

Funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development



Ireland's European Structural and Investment Funds Programmes 2014-2020

Co-funded by the Irish Government and the European Union



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine





## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	5
Image credits.....	5
Executive Summary.....	6
1. Introduction .....	8
The project origins .....	9
Eagles at Mountshannon – recent history .....	9
Community socio-economic aspirations.....	11
White-tailed Sea Eagles – ecology, heritage and conservation .....	12
White-tailed Sea Eagle re-introduction to Ireland.....	13
Breeding behaviour and biology .....	14
Chick development .....	14
Conservation .....	15
Threats .....	15
Wildlife Tourism – a general view.....	16
Raptors as a wildlife spectacle .....	17
2. Project Review .....	19
Review Approach .....	20
Project performance and metrics .....	20
Project outputs - physical structures, materials and experiences.....	23
Bird Viewing & Information Point (BVIP) .....	23
Stakeholder and external views of the project.....	28
Project Resources.....	32
Financial .....	32
Personnel .....	34
3. The wider contexts.....	35
Ecology, Environment & Conservation .....	36
Environmental considerations in planning .....	39
Strategic .....	39
Economics .....	43
Community/Social benefits and considerations .....	43
Synergy and competition .....	44
4. SWOT Analysis.....	45
5. Markets .....	47
Overview .....	48
General Market.....	49

Overseas Market.....	51
Domestic Market.....	52
Drivers for Overseas Visitors.....	53
Drivers for Domestic Visitors .....	55
Overseas and Domestic High-level comparison.....	55
Knowing your customer - Overseas & Domestic Segments.....	56
Coach Tourism .....	58
The Schools Market.....	59
What's the overall market potential?.....	60
<b>6. Case Studies .....</b>	<b>62</b>
Wildlife Tourism - general.....	63
Examples of wildlife viewing, viewpoints and wildlife festival projects worldwide .....	63
CASE STUDY 1 Wexford Wildfowl Reserve .....	65
CASE STUDY 2 Galloway Kite Trail, Galloway, Scotland .....	70
<b>7. Project Planning .....</b>	<b>75</b>
Introduction .....	76
Vision and themes.....	76
What will this look like? .....	79
Physical Implementation (what needs to be 'built' or constructed) .....	83
Brand Development.....	92
Managing Visit Cycle – How will the experience work? .....	94
Outline costs and income .....	98
Operational Model & Feasibility .....	101
Management structure .....	101
Key personnel.....	103
Strategic partnerships.....	103
Sources of potential funding.....	107
<b>8. Action Plan &amp; next steps .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>111</b>
APPENDIX 1 Example/Draft Job description for Sea Eagle Project Manager .....	111
Appendix 2 – Appropriate Assessment Screening .....	114

## Acknowledgements

**This project has been part-funded by the LEADER programme, through The National Development Plan and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development**

The authors wish to thank the following people and organisations for their input and multiple contributions and consultation: Mountshannon Community Council and the Mountshannon Eagle team in particular: James Leonard, Vera O'Rourke, Michael O'Rourke, Kevin Chesser, John Kavanagh; Clare County Council, in particular Conjella McGuire and Monica Meehan; Allan Mee (Golden Eagle Trust); Brian Caffrey (BirdWatch Ireland); Chris Rollie (RSPB & the Galloway Kite Trail); Dominic Berridge (NPWS – Wexford Wildfowl Reserve); Tourism East Clare; Lough Derg Marketing Group; individuals and community representative who attended an information event in Mountshannon on 10 May 2018. Staff from Clare Local development Company including Gloria Callanan, Martina Minogue and Agnus O'Shaughnessy have provided invaluable support in development of the project.

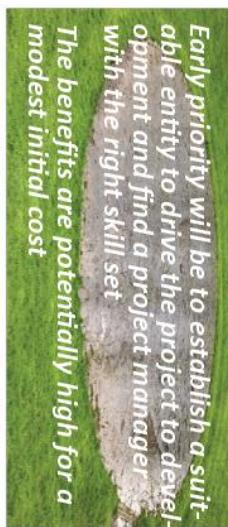
## Image credits

All mapping supplied under ESRI license via CL Spatial [www.clspatial.ie](http://www.clspatial.ie)

Images provided by or sourced from individuals and organisations including: Mountshannon Community Council, V. O'Rourke and the Mountshannon Eagles website and Facebook page, RSPB, The Galloway Kite Trail, NPWS Wexford Wildfowl Reserve, The Golden Eagle Trust, the authors. Cover image of White-tailed Sea Eagle by Kevin Day. Mountshannon Eagles Facebook page cover image by Sam Gaine.

## Executive Summary

A tri-fold leaflet design has been provided as an executive summary. It is provided here for reference and separately as a printable document.



*Early priority will be to establish a suitable entity to drive the project to development and find a project manager with the right skill set. The benefits are potentially high for a modest initial cost.*

### Priority actions

#### Establishment & year 1

ACTIONS
• Commission Development Plan (done)
• Input into Lough Derg Strategy
• Develop project conservation objectives
• Agree management structure and role profiles.
• Agree operational schedule
• Develop calendar of events
• Appoint project manager (Year 2)
<b>Bid to funders for:</b>
• Marketing/TC plan
• Construction of Centre
• Interpretive elements
• Aislear interpretative upgrade plan
• Signage
• Commission/draw-up tourism commercialisation (TC) plan or marketing plan with clear targets for footfall in identified segments and clear KPIs.
• Brand development – logo design and associated works

### Project Costs & Benefits

The plan includes outline finances estimated as below

Activity type	Cost/income (000s)
Capital costs (establishment)	187
Programme costs (years 1-2)	114
Income (unrestricted—after establishment)	43.7

#### The potential benefits identified in the plan include :

- Increase in visitors to Mountshannon of 11-18000 per annum
- New economic activity generated equivalent to c. €800K/20 FTE jobs
- Additional resource and effort for Sea Eagle conservation
- Increased awareness of people to wildlife conservation
- Training opportunities
- Enhanced community benefits like social cohesion and well being
- Local infrastructural enhancements & recreation opportunities



## MOUNTSHANNON WHITE-TAILED SEA EAGLE DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2018-2023

### Executive Summary



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine

# Mountshannon White-tailed Sea Eagle

## Development Plan

### Background & Context

Since 2013, Mountshannon hosted the first breeding Sea Eagles in Ireland in over 100 years. A small viewing project developed and attracts visitors to the area. The community wish to see the project develop to benefit the eagles, the community and the economy and this plan sets out a recommended framework and feasibility study which aims to provide a sustainable means to achieve this.

Lough Derg forms the centre of, or is strategically well placed for, development of a range of tourism and leisure activity initiatives. A number of plans and projects exist to develop this further including the Lough Derg Blueway, plans for development of Inis Cailtra and Faile Ireland's "Hidden Heartlands" programme. A significant gap exists in many of these for the more substantial development of wildlife based tourism and this project is well placed to help address that.

The community aspirations to see an improved economy and other social benefits but with eagle conservation and education as a core part of this has been key in driving the development of the plan.

The plan also forms a significant resource to help inform the development of funding bids and commercial initiatives through which the projects can be resourced.

**The plan** is a framework to develop projects which aim to;  
Enhance the economy by bringing more tourists to the area  
Conserve the eagles and other wildlife  
Enhance community engagement, awareness and well-being  
Engage young people with the natural world

## What's the Plan?

### Recommended projects



The Eagles



Exploring the lake



Hidden Wildlife



Iconic Wildlife Encounters

Science & Research

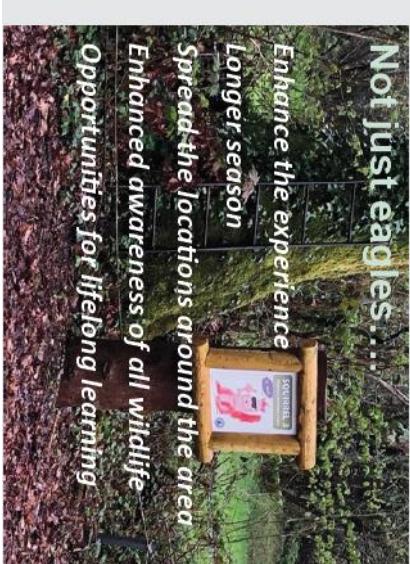
### What's the BIG Idea?

#### Iconic wildlife encounters

The **Eagles** are the iconic symbol of the entire experience, the ultimate wildlife encounter and one all the more special because it cannot be guaranteed. **Discovering Raptors** extends the encounter to a range of other birds of prey, some of whom the visitor will have a much better chance of seeing on their visit.

**Exploring the Lake** can be done at different levels; it covers both a physical exploration of the lake and its landscape, by foot or by boat, and a more 'intellectual' one exploring its history, folklore, geology and ecology.

**Hidden Wildlife** introduces the visitor to the 'secret' world of the lake, particularly its wildlife – birds, mammals, insects and rare fish that live deep in the waters. Wildlife cameras may be one way of revealing this hidden world, but activities like bug-hunts, bat-walks and pond dipping might form the basis of events and educational activities.



**Enhanced eagle viewing at the Bird Viewing and Information Point**—provide a larger space, interpretation, camera technology on raptors and other wildlife and activities and events right at Mountshannon

**Wildlife discovery points** developed along a network of trails, will introduce visitors to a wide range of wildlife. One of these might be a guided raptor feeding site for special close up experiences and boat trips could be developed

**Events and Festivals** seasonal events programme, a wildlife

festival and guided walks or tours provide dynamic content for promotion, awareness and attracting visitors.

**Trails and interpretation** marked to link the discovery points, the eagle centre and other features should be developed—based around existing trails and creating any short linkages and loops where necessary

**Education** groups would provide an effective means to engage young people, raise awareness and bring additional visitors to the area

**Conservation action and science actions** to within a conservation plan to develop a key community aspiration to protect the eagles and other wildlife

# 1. Introduction

---

Background and history



## The project origins

Mountshannon Bay saw the first successful breeding by a White-tailed Sea Eagle pair in the wild in Ireland in over 100 years in 2013 and since then the pair, have successfully fledged chicks in Mountshannon Bay in subsequent years. This document is a development plan which aims to assess the feasibility and plan the future development of, wildlife-based tourism around Mountshannon, focussing particularly on White-tailed Sea Eagles. Resulting projects would aim to conserve and protect wildlife interest while maximising the socio-economic benefits from wildlife viewing and related activities, all of which will develop opportunities for creating sustainable economic activity and employment in the local area.

Mountshannon Community Council has been in existence for over 35 years and is a registered charity which has objectives to benefit the general community of Mountshannon by the;

- Advancement of community welfare including the relief of those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, or disability.
- Advancement of community development, including rural or urban regeneration, promotion of civic responsibility or voluntary work, Protection of the natural environment.
- Advancement of environmental sustainability.
- Advancement of the arts, culture, heritage or sciences.
- Integration of those who are disadvantaged, and the promotion of their full participation, in society.

## Eagles at Mountshannon – recent history

Since 2011, a pair of White Tailed Sea Eagles originating from the re-introduction programme of White Tailed Sea Eagles developed and funded by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in partnership with The Golden Eagle Trust between 2007 and 2011<sup>1</sup> have been present around Mountshannon, Co. Clare.

Following the arrival of the first pair the children in the parish chose names for the birds; Caimin for the male and Saoirse for the female. In 2013 the eagle pair nested on an Island close to the village and successfully fledged two chicks. This was the first time in over 100 years that Sea Eagle chicks fledged from a nest in the wild in Ireland.

The site was in full view from the harbour at Mountshannon and its obvious nature provided an opportunity for public viewing. Public viewing and publicity of the site also made sense from a protection point of view in providing a level of self-policing of disturbance rather than rely on covert operations to protect the nest; an old lesson learned from raptor projects in the UK such as Operation Osprey<sup>2</sup>.

The Mountshannon Eagle Group was formed to help promote the project, and in helping to monitor the nest site overseen by Allen Mee, Project Manager of the White-tailed Sea Eagle introduction program for the Golden Eagle Trust.

When the eggs hatched there were high numbers of visitors viewing the birds from the pier. School groups from the surrounding villages also came to view the birds.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.goldeneagle.ie/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=614&Itemid=129](http://www.goldeneagle.ie/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=614&Itemid=129)

<sup>2</sup>Brown, P. 1979. *The Scottish Ospreys from extinction to survival*. Heinemann

In July 2014 Clare County Council supplied a Bird Viewing and Information Point (BVIP) at Mountshannon Harbour – a small adapted portacabin with interpretive material - for visitors to view and learn more about the eagles placed in a safe location and avoiding disturbance to the birds. The facility was opened in July 2014 by The Ambassador of Norway and The Mayor of Clare. Volunteers assisted with telescopes within the unit and provided information and updates about the daily activities of the eagles throughout the remainder of the season. The nesting eagles continued to generate huge interest locally and nationally. This new attraction brought almost 10,000 visitors to Mountshannon to over a few months in 2014. Nesting was successful.

In 2015 Mountshannon Community Council provided two people from the Community Employment Scheme and Clare County Council provided an additional two people under the Gateway Project. These four employees along with a limited number of volunteers worked to keep the B.V.I.P open for visitors. In 2015 the breeding pair fledged a female chick, named Cealtra, and a satellite transmitter tag fitted to her has enabled the Golden Eagle Trust to track her movements. Updating movements periodically on their website for public information.

In 2016 the pair nested and stayed on the nest right up to and well beyond the hatching date but unfortunately no chick was hatched. Investigations show that disturbance at the nest at some stage during incubation was likely to have caused the eggs to become chilled leading to the failure. The adult pair remained in and around the nesting Island and travelled Lough Derg throughout the summer months. Video footage of the eagles was made available within the Bird Viewing & Information Point to be viewed by visitors when the eagles were not in sight.

In 2017 the pair were successful, rearing two chicks to fledging. The BVIP was active throughout the season and good numbers of visitors came to see the adults and the two chicks which were named Clare and



Shannon. Coverage in the media continued to increase as good news stories on the eagles continued to reach mainstream media.

*(Left) James Leonard of the Sea Eagle project group interviewed for RTÉ Nationwide programme*

In early 2018, bad news struck as Shannon one of two eagle chicks was found dead in Co Tipperary on January 31st.

Testing by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) confirmed the presence of avian influenza H5N6 but the same bird had been previously found sick in October and when tested showed low levels of lead in her system as well as low levels of rodenticide (rat poison). While she recovered in care her later death was a significant loss.

Tragically for the project in 2018 a further blow came with the loss of Saoirse, the breeding adult female (and featured cover image of this report) in early March. Avian influenza was also detected in this case. Coming during the period just prior to breeding the chances of a replacement female taking up the nest site immediately were slim and at the time of writing April 2018 the adult male remains around the nest site currently un-paired.

The time taken for re-establishment of a viable Sea Eagle pair is unknown. At sites elsewhere, in Scotland and Scandinavia, this can be anything from rapid to slow, dependent upon the availability of unpaired individuals. In the majority of cases nests become re-occupied soon fairly after loss<sup>3,4</sup>. There would appear then to be high likelihood of successful re-establishment of a viable pair at the site.

## Community socio-economic aspirations

In May 2016 a group from the Mountshannon Eagle project completed a fact-finding trip to the Isle of Mull, Scotland, where wildlife tourism – somewhat based around eagles - has developed to become a major entity<sup>5</sup>, supporting over 100 jobs and £5m of tourist spend. The purpose of the trip was to explore possibilities for community driven and sustainable Sea Eagle ecotourism. Mull Eagle watch sites were visited and aspects such as charging, logistics and impact were researched. The group found the economic impact of wildlife tourism to be obvious on the island with a number of wildlife tourism operators (small tour buses, jeeps and boats). Many awards from Scottish Tourism bodies and clear positive impacts on community projects on Mull. The group departed with the strong advice to introduce an entrance fee to the Bird Viewing and Information Point at Mountshannon and also to sell promotional material in order to make the project sustainable into the future.

Guidance from the MSCC is clear that it wishes the project to bring similar sustainable eco-tourism initiatives with the Sea Eagles as a central focus point but developing other opportunities alongside this e.g. Woodpark Forest Park walks.

The opportunity now exists to take this forward potentially together with the planned development of Holy Island, the development of the Lough Derg Blue Way and support from Tourism East Clare and Fáilte Ireland

A summary of discussion with the community council addressing some key questions in relation to the project is illustrated in table 1 below:

<sup>3</sup> Sansom, A., Evans, R. & Roos, S. 2016. Population and future range modelling of reintroduced Scottish white-tailed eagles (*Haliaeetus albicilla*). Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 898.

<sup>4</sup> Evans, R.J, Wilson, J.D., Amar, A., Douse, A., MacLennan, A., Ratcliffe, N. & Whitfield D.P. 2009. Growth and demography of a re-introduced population of White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* *Ibis* 151:244–254

<sup>5</sup> Molloy, D, 2011. Wildlife at work. The economic impact of white-tailed eagles on the Isle of Mull. The RSPB, Sandy [http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/wildlifeatwork\\_tcm9-282134.pdf](http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/wildlifeatwork_tcm9-282134.pdf)

## MSCC project aims consultation – summary

<b>Who is it for?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourists and locals</li> <li>• Domestic and overseas</li> <li>• Younger people and schoolchildren</li> </ul>
<b>Why are we doing it?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To bring tourists back into Mountshannon – economic revival (note decline of cruiser traffic)</li> <li>• Protection of the birds – including wardening</li> <li>• Create local employment</li> <li>• Social - improving where we live – quality for people versus quantity of people coming to visit</li> <li>• Creating a renewed sense of community ownership and pride.</li> </ul>
<b>What do we want to give people</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A package that encourages people to come, stay longer and spend locally</li> <li>• Boat trips</li> <li>• Walking routes, loop path</li> <li>• Grounded – must be financially feasible</li> <li>• Want to give people a buzz – unique – tell others – awareness – educational - entertain</li> <li>• Address Nature Deficit Disorder!!</li> <li>• Heritage – Wildlife – Spirituality</li> <li>• A new, professional, organisational structure – current voluntary model not sustainable.</li> </ul>
<b>Where will we make it happen?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harbour/lakeshore</li> <li>• Walking routes</li> <li>• Eagle viewing centre – keep what you have and add to anything new</li> <li>• ‘Bundle-up’ wherever possible and appropriate, especially with new Holy Island Interpretative Centre</li> <li>• Think of the wider visitor landscape and particularly of the lake as a whole: joined up approach where attractions are not competing.</li> </ul>
<b>When will it happen?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phased 5-year plan</li> <li>• Starting 2018 and on to 2023+</li> <li>• Progress as early as possible and identify ‘quick wins’</li> <li>• Critical to ‘claim the space’ and develop a strong negotiating position in advance of any Holy Island development</li> </ul>

## White-tailed Sea Eagles – ecology, heritage and conservation

Known in Ireland as “Iolar Mara” or Sea Eagle, the White-tailed Eagle (scientific name *Haliaeetus albicilla*), will be referred to in this report variably; as White-tailed Eagle, White-tailed Sea Eagle or simply, Sea Eagle. Its name reflects its long association with the coast on this island albeit it frequents large river valleys, lakes and reservoirs too. White-tailed Eagles are Ireland’s largest bird of prey and the fourth largest eagle in the

world, standing at over 1m tall and with a wingspan of over 2m (up to 2.4m); they can weigh up to 17 pounds (7.7 kilos) with females slightly larger than males. Impressive eagles in terms of size, they have large pale buff coloured heads, huge bills, broad heavy wings and short, wedge-shaped white tails which has earned them the moniker “flying barn doors”. White-tailed Eagles are also considered more social and less wary of humans than many other eagle species (e.g. Golden Eagle).

Historically, White-tailed Eagles were found across most of Europe, however they suffered big declines from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century onwards when they were wrongly targeted by shepherds and gamekeepers who saw them as a threat to their sheep and gamebirds<sup>7</sup>. Studies in Norway have shown that White-tailed Eagles have not been proven responsible for any kills on lamb or other livestock<sup>6</sup>. In Ireland and Britain, the population was estimated at 800-1,400 pairs some 1,500 years ago<sup>7</sup>. However, human persecution led to their extinction in some countries, including Ireland, with populations suffering further losses due to environmental pollutants, which can bioaccumulate in their tissues often with fatal consequences. Historically, the widespread use of pesticides such as *Dichlorodiphenyl dichloroethane* (DDT, source of DDE) and *Polychlorinated biphenyl* (PCBs) post World War II<sup>8</sup> affected fertility and reproductive success and also lead poisoning due to ingestion of lead from gunshot and pellets is usually fatal. Strongholds for White-tailed Eagles remain in Iceland, Norway, Germany and Poland with the European population estimated to be between 5,000-6,600 pairs. Previously classed as near threatened<sup>9</sup> the IUCN status of the White-tailed Eagle has more recently been downgraded to ‘Least Concern’ due to its recovery in many parts of its range.

White-tailed Eagles are top predators in marine and freshwater environments and act as good indicators of the quality of these environments given they feed largely on fish. In Scotland, Saithe, Pollock and Lumpsucker found in coastal waters are part of their diet in spring and summer. White-tailed Eagles are best described as opportunistic feeders and can also prey on birds (in particular nestlings of Great Cormorants, Common Buzzards), rabbits and hares and they can also steal food from seabirds and waterbirds (e.g. gulls, Cormorants) and even otters, a behaviour known as “kleptoparasitism”. They will also opportunistically feed on carrion, especially in winter, a behaviour which has led to conflict with man (eagles often take lambs that are carrion). Consequently, they have been persecuted in the past, going extinct in Ireland, along with the Golden Eagle, Goshawk and Red Kite, in the early twentieth century. Their nearest competitor, the Golden Eagle is more adept in the air but the White-tailed Eagle dominates and can oust Golden Eagles from their home ranges.

## White-tailed Sea Eagle re-introduction to Ireland

The task of ‘wilding’ Ireland’s skies once more with White-tailed Eagles began in the summer of 2007, through a programme of reintroduction<sup>10</sup>. Between 2007 and 2011, 100 young (51 males, 49 females) White-tailed Eagles were collected from nests in Norway under licence and transported to Ireland where they were released at a site in Killarney National Park, Co. Kerry. Reintroduction programmes often use surplus chicks which are removed from nests - if these surplus chicks remain in the nest they can be killed by the first-hatched chick, which is common in eagles. Wing-tags and radio and/or GPS satellite transmitters were attached to birds for individual identification and tracking post-release.

<sup>6</sup> Heggøy O & Øien IJ *Conservation status of birds of prey and owls in Norway*. NOF/BirdLife Norway - Report 1-2014. 129 pp.

<sup>7</sup> Evans, R.J., O’Toole, L. & Whitfield, D.P. 2012 The history of eagles in Britain and Ireland: an ecological review of placename and documentary evidence from the last 1500 years. *Bird Study* 59: 335- 349.

<sup>8</sup> Helander, B, Bignert, A, Asplund, L 2008 Using raptors as environmental sentinels: monitoring the white-tailed sea eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* in Sweden. *A Journal of the Human Environment* 37(6): 425-431.

<sup>9</sup> BirdLife International 2000. *Threatened Birds of the World*. Lynx Edicions and BirdLife International, Barcelona, Spain and Cambridge, UK.

<sup>10</sup> Mee A, Breen D, Clarke D, Heardman C, Lyden J, McMahon F, O’Sullivan P. & O’Toole L. 2016 Reintroduction of White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* to Ireland. *Irish Birds*, 10: 301-314.

The first successful breeding pair of White-tailed Eagles bred at Lough Derg in 2013, 100 years after the last known breeding pair on the coast of Mayo. To date 14 chicks have successfully fledged. This outcome compares favourably with neighbouring Scotland where a successful reintroduction programme on the island of Rhum was carried out (between 1975-1985) with 82 wild-bred eagles imported from Norway during that period<sup>11</sup> and in Wester Ross between 1993-1998<sup>12</sup>. More recently, a programme of reintroduction took place in East Scotland (2007-2012). The population in Scotland was estimated in 2015 as 108 pairs<sup>13</sup> (RBBP report in BB) this is broadly in line with modelled population change<sup>3</sup> and illustrates the rate of change that is possible in a reintroduced population and what may be possible in Ireland in future.

## Breeding behaviour and biology

White-tailed Eagles are long-lived, 21 years being the average lifetime, and reach maturity at about 4 or 5 years where sexes form a pair bond and chose a permanent home range which is typically between 30-70 km<sup>2</sup> and usually encompasses sheltered coastal locations or inland locations by lakes and along rivers. Age of first breeding is often seen as a good indicator of the habitat available to nesting pairs and in Ireland the age of first breeding ranges from 4-7 years<sup>10</sup>. If one partner dies, the other can form a new pair bond. Non-breeding birds can range more widely to find sufficient food.

Through the winter and early spring, White-tailed Eagles perform a spectacular aerial display which finishes with the pair locking talons mid-air and cartwheeling towards the ground. Often regarded as part of courtship display, cartwheeling has also been suggested to be a more aggressive behaviour<sup>14</sup> not necessarily between paired birds. The nest itself is constructed out of sticks in a tree or on a coastal cliff and nests are often re-used as pairs are faithful to their territories once they breed and some nests are re-used by several generations. White-tailed Eagles are much more vocal than Golden Eagles especially during the breeding season, in particular males are vocal when near the nest and often both sexes perform a duet. Their call is a mixture of a bark and a yelp.

Once mated, the female usually lays 1-2 eggs per year with eggs laid 2-5 days apart in March or April and are incubated by both parents for 38 days<sup>15</sup>. Once the chicks hatch, they are usually quite tolerant of each other, although the first chick hatched is usually larger and more dominant at feeding times. Males bring food for females to feed to young for the first 3-4 weeks after hatching, after which both parents forage and feed young. Healthy populations in Central Europe are considered those where pairs rear 60-80% of chicks successfully and the nestling brood size reaches 1.2-1.8 juveniles per successful pair<sup>16</sup>.

## Chick development

Young chicks remain in the nest for 10-13 weeks before fledging. Although they can look after themselves from about 30 days after leaving the nest, they will continue to beg for food from adults for several months. The first few years of life will see young eagles spending most of their time in non-breeding areas often with other young eagles, with first-year over winter survival low (60-70% mortality) as in other raptor species.

<sup>11</sup> Green RE, Pienkowski MW & Love JA 1996 Long-term viability of the re-introduced population of the white-tailed eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* in Scotland. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 33, 357-368.

<sup>12</sup> Evans RJ, Wilson JD, Amar A, Douse A, MacLennan A, Ratcliffe N & Whitfield DP 2009 Growth and demography of a re-introduced population of White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla*. *Ibis*, 151, 244-254.

<sup>13</sup> Holling, M. and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. 2017. Rare Breeding Birds in the UK in 2015. *British Birds* 110:706-754

<sup>14</sup> Simmons RE & Mendelsohn, M 2010 A critical review of cartwheeling flights of raptors. *Ostrich*. Vol 64, Iss. 1, 13-24.

<sup>15</sup> Cramp SE 1980. *Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. The birds of the Western Palearctic Volume II. Hawks to Bustards*. Oxford. Oxford University.

<sup>16</sup> Helander, B., Marquiss, M. and Bowerman, B. (eds). Sea Eagle 2000 : proceedings from the International Sea Eagle Conference in Björkö, Sweden, 13-17 September 2000. Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SNF), 2003.

After surviving their first year, most eagles live for 20 years on average subsequently. Young eagles are much darker than adults gaining adult plumage over 5-6 years.

## Conservation

The White-tailed Eagle is a "flagship species" for nature conservation in that conservation measures and firm international actions against environmental contamination with hazardous substances have allowed the species to recover after having been close to extinction. Man-made factors still exert high pressure on the species and these include overfishing, environmental pollutants and contaminants, habitat loss and disturbance. The White-tailed Eagle population in Europe has suffered due to persecution in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and later by hazardous substances<sup>8</sup>. Strict conservation measures and the ban of hazardous substances allowed it to recover across much of its range with reintroductions of wild-caught young allowing populations to re-establish in countries where it had become extinct (e.g. Scotland and Ireland). Other anthropogenic mortality factors (include deliberate poisonings & shootings, collisions with powerlines, turbines<sup>10</sup>, trains) which can exert additional pressures on its population recovery. As these factors also affect other birds of prey, the White-tailed Eagle is a suitable indicator for the impact of certain human activities on bird species. Historically, the absence of the largest component of avian scavengers (eagles, kites and buzzards) in Ireland is likely to have had profound effects on species diversity such as an increase in the abundance of other scavengers such as corvids with recovery following relaxation of human persecution and through conservation actions, such as reintroduction, likely to result in changes in other predator and scavenger populations over time<sup>10</sup>.

The White-tailed Eagle has made a remarkable journey from extinction to flag-bearer for sustainable tourism in Ireland in just over 100 years. The White-tailed Sea Eagle is protected by the provisions of the EU Birds Directive (Directive 79/409/EEC), which is implemented by Member States into national law. One of the key requirements of the IUCN Reintroduction guidelines concerns the need for social feasibility studies to explore the attitudes of local human populations towards restoration and reintroduction. Adaptive outreach campaigns that are open, transparent, inclusive and culturally relevant are an important element to successful re-introductions<sup>17</sup>. DNA studies indicate White-tailed Eagles have retained appreciable amounts of genetic diversity (should avoid genetic bottlenecks) which is good news for its recovery<sup>18</sup>.

## Threats

With no natural predators, the main threat is from human activities such as poisoning, shooting, egg-collecting and/or degradation of habitat and food resources. Eagles are victims of both deliberate persecution of the eagles themselves and as incidental victims of poisons illegally set for foxes and crows. Young birds, ranging more widely before establishing their own territories, are particularly vulnerable. Natural causes of death can include predation of young by crows and territorial fights with other White-tailed Eagles.

Prevention of illegal disturbance/destruction of nests is of extreme importance to minimise the impact on the population. White-tailed Eagles are now breeding across four counties in Ireland with the long-term viability of the reintroduction programme dependent upon minimising losses of adult and sub-adult eagles with the elimination of illegal poisoning a major goal for the species conservation in Ireland<sup>10</sup>.

"The RAPTOR (Recording and Addressing Persecution and Threats to Our Raptors) protocol is a collaborative approach between the NPWS, Regional Veterinary Laboratories, and the State Laboratory, to systematically

<sup>17</sup> Sutton, AE 2015 Leadership and management influences the outcome of wildlife reintroduction programs: findings from the Sea Eagle Recovery Project. *PeerJ* 3:e1012 <https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.1012>

<sup>18</sup> Hailer F, Helander B, Folkestad AO, et al. 2006 Bottlenecked but long-lived: high genetic diversity retained in white-tailed eagles upon recovery from population decline. *Biology Letters* 2(2):316-319. doi:10.1098/rsbl.2006.0453.

determine the extent to which anthropogenic non-habitat related impacts (for example poisoning, persecution, disturbance, collisions, etc.) are threats to Ireland's native birds of prey.

In addition to man-induced threat, the risk of natural zoonoses to individual birds or pairs can be moderate to high in some circumstances and while it has been known for some time<sup>19</sup> more recent studies and cases indicate specific problems for raptors and potential implications for White-tailed Eagle. Two of the Mountshannon eagles were lost to avian flu in 2017/2018 and this has been widely reported in the media. This potentially dealing a large blow to the viewing project efforts in the short term at least<sup>20</sup>. Such cases are not unheard of and WTSE appears susceptible in other areas and such natural/semi-natural risk should be considered in project planning<sup>21</sup>

## Wildlife Tourism – a general view

Definitions of wildlife tourism are largely consistent between studies and authors, and may be summarised broadly along the lines of:

*Tourism with the primary purpose of viewing, studying and/or enjoying of wildlife (animals, plants and other organisms)*

Such a definition includes wildlife watching holidays, wildlife boat trips, guided walks, visits to nature reserves, sanctuaries, viewpoints and project sites which are aimed at experiencing wildlife in natural or semi-natural conditions – it is the authors' opinion that zoos, aquaria and other experiences of captive wildlife and the viewing of domesticated wildlife does not constitute wildlife tourism. It also excludes activities where the interaction with wildlife is incidental to the experience and also consumptive forms of wildlife tourism such as hunting and fishing.

Wildlife tourism is widely considered a growth industry and is contributing substantially to the economy of many countries<sup>223</sup>.

In rural locations where a wildlife resource provides a potentially attractive experience and where there are few competing demands, wildlife tourism has been shown in many case studies to be a significant driver of economic benefit.

To achieve such benefits there are some parameters of the environment, society or economy which need to be in place to realise full benefits, these include:

- A wildlife "spectacle" – a species, group of species, species community or habitat which is special and provides an experience which is special, intimate, powerful, emotional or impressive
- A set of natural features which enable the spectacle to be viewed and experienced in a sustainable or unobtrusive way, i.e. which does not adversely affect the wildlife spectacle itself

---

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Greenwood (1977) The Role of Disease in the Ecology of British Raptors, *Bird Study*, 24:4, 259-265

<sup>20</sup> Example of media <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/first-case-of-bird-flu-strain-confirmed-in-co-tipperary-1.3386811>

<sup>21</sup> Other instances of WTSE avian flu, e.g.

[http://www.oie.int/wahis\\_2/public/wahid.php/Reviewreport/Review?page\\_refer=MapFullEventReport&reportid=26065](http://www.oie.int/wahis_2/public/wahid.php/Reviewreport/Review?page_refer=MapFullEventReport&reportid=26065)

<sup>22</sup> The Economic Impact Of Wildlife Tourism In Scotland. 2010. Scottish Government Social Research <Http://Www.Gov.Scot/Resource/Doc/311951/0098489.Pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Higginbottom, K. (ed). 2004. Wildlife Tourism; Impacts, Management and Planning. Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd

- A community, organisation or other entity which can realise the benefit through the value economically or socially that the wildlife brings



*A guided wildlife watching group in the Himalayas watching Snow Leopards - rural locations can benefit significantly from wildlife tourism and the species gain direct economic value and community conservation efforts often follow*

therefore be popular whether the public seek these out or encounter them incidentally to visiting a specific area. Examples of viewing projects of wild raptors from Europe and further afield are given in the *Case Studies* section of this report. There are many examples but typically they feature viewing of a nest from a distant viewpoint, often backed up by video technology in some form. Viewpoints can be permanent, temporary and sometimes mobile.

<sup>24</sup> [https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/coral\\_economy.html](https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/coral_economy.html)

<sup>25</sup> <http://wwf.panda.org/?200711>-->

<sup>26</sup> RSPB (2010) The Local Value of Seabirds: Estimating spending by visitors to RSPB coastal reserves and associated local economic impact attributable to seabirds. The RSPB, Sandy, UK

<sup>27</sup> O'Connor, S., Campbell, R., Cortez, H., & Knowles, T., 2009, Whale Watching Worldwide: tourism numbers, expenditures and expanding economic benefits, a special report from the International Fund for Animal Welfare, Yarmouth MA, USA, prepared by Economists at Large.

<sup>28</sup> Espírito-Santo, C. & Petrucci-Fonseca, F. 2016. Ecotourism as a vehicle of information for Iberian wolf conservation in Beira Interior – Central Portugal October. IV Iberian Wolf Conference

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316741175\\_Ecotourism\\_as\\_a\\_vehicle\\_of\\_information\\_for\\_Iberian\\_wolf\\_conservation\\_in\\_Beira\\_Interior\\_-\\_Central\\_Portugal](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316741175_Ecotourism_as_a_vehicle_of_information_for_Iberian_wolf_conservation_in_Beira_Interior_-_Central_Portugal)

Some species, communities or natural habitats lend themselves well to wildlife tourism, being restricted in range and special by their rarity e.g. coral reefs<sup>24</sup> or snow leopards<sup>25</sup>, impressive by their scale, size or number e.g. seabird colonies<sup>26</sup>, whale watching<sup>27</sup>, safari animals or where they solicit an emotional connection to or response from people through their cute appearance, perception of threat or danger or unusual or appealing behaviour e.g. primates, wolves<sup>28</sup>, otters.

### Raptors as a wildlife spectacle

Birds of prey and owls, collectively known as raptors, can have significant appeal for many people as a wildlife spectacle. They can be impressive by their size (eagles, vultures, larger owls) or number (migration watchpoints), have spectacular behaviours (fast flight, hunting) can be cute (chicks in nests, small owl species) and are enigmatic being often rare or difficult to see. Their predatory behaviour and link to human culture often also creates an emotional connection. These traits lend themselves well to use within wildlife tourism.

Viewing opportunities for raptors are attractive to people of all ages. Falconry displays often providing a first close up experience of raptors albeit these would, arguably, not be included within wildlife tourism (though can be of value in raising awareness of raptors and are often impressive in themselves).

Experiencing raptors in wild situations can be difficult for non-expert public. Opportunities to see raptors can

Raptors which are rare (in their local, regional or global context) or are impressive in size, such as White-tailed Eagle at Mountshannon are a particular attraction but even common raptors (e.g. Kestrel) are rarely seen in a nesting environment and can add significant value to an experience or potentially even form an experience in their own right in certain contexts.



*Raptor watchers from all over the world congregate at Tarifa, Spain throughout spring and autumn to observe migration of thousands of birds of prey over the straits of Gibraltar, one of the world's great raptor migration sites – raptor watching tourism can bring significant economic value to rural areas*

## 2. Project Review

existing project structures and performance



## Review Approach

The approach to review of the existing project takes two key approaches; a direct narrative assessment (objective and subjective) of the existing project facilities and outcomes and; collation of views from relevant individuals, organisational stakeholders and visitors via sampling the visitors book.

The review covers the project's audience and level of engagement in relation to tourism performance and a critique of key aspects of project delivery or performance so far. It has been carried out by the consultants to the project in order to assess performance, identify any failures, gaps or opportunities that may be apparent and that can be addressed in the future development of the project. Stakeholder views have been derived from consultation meetings or other communications and may be subject to interpretation. Visitor book comments have been taken on face value.

The review is intended to be as objective as possible and placed in the context of the consultancy team's collective experience and in comparison with other existing projects from consultants knowledge or readily available published material. All views and criticism is intended to be constructive and practical.

## Project performance and metrics

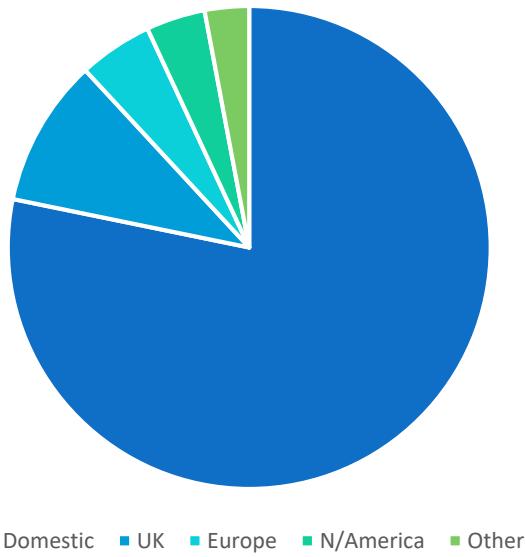
### *Visitor Numbers*

Research carried out by the client in 2015 indicates that on average some 300 visitors a week came to the site, or roughly **10,000 a year**. The visitor book suggests a much lower number, probably of the order of about **3,000 or 4,000 a year**. However, repeat visitors tend not to sign a visitor book each time they visit, and of course not every visitor who comes will sign the book at all. If the extrapolated figure of 10,000 a year is accurate, as it may well be, a very large proportion of these will be repeat visitors and therefore probably 'local' rather than holidaymakers. It is important to make this distinction, as when calculating the economic dividend to the area the assumptions applying to spend by holidaymakers, whether domestic or overseas, cannot be applied to local traffic. This does not mean that local visitors do not bring a 'dividend' – they do, and a very important one, but one which has to be measured in social rather than pure economic terms.

### *Profile*

The profile of visitors to the station is predominantly Irish – to the tune of 79% in fact. The next biggest segment is the UK at 10%, followed by visitors from mainland Europe (5%) and North America (4%). Rest of the world comes in at 2%.

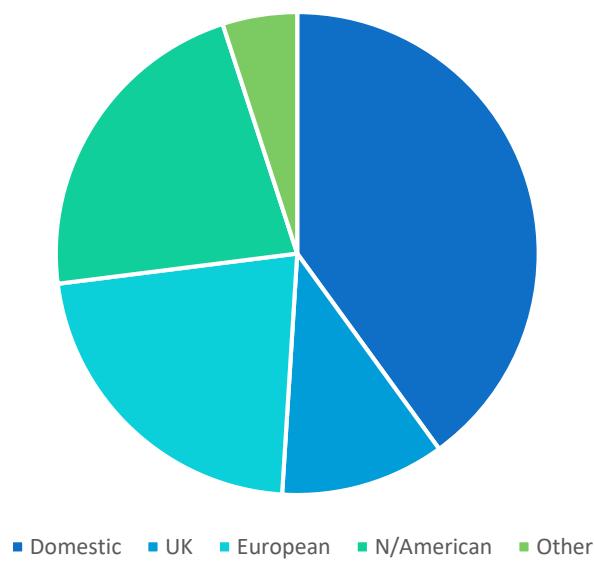
### Origin of Visitors to Eagle Station



In a later section where we examine the potential market in more detail, we can see that the above breakdown is very similar to that for the East Clare region as a whole. Domestic visitors dominate overall in the region, with the breakdown seeming to be around 70:30 domestic to overseas.

For County Clare as a whole the ratio is completely different: overseas visitors are in the majority and the ratio of domestic to overseas looks more like 60:40. The internal breakdown is different too, with the UK visitor much less important and the European and North American more so.

### Origin of Visitors to Co Clare



So, the profile of visitors to the viewing station in Mountshannon is radically different from the profile of visitors to the county as a whole but is perhaps not so different to the profile of visitors that come to East Clare. What this comparison tells us is that the present viewing station does not characteristics which are attracting a different audience than is already present in the East Clare area and that the more diverse and overseas based visitors to the wider county are not currently being attracted. As it stands then it is not acting as a significant destination-attraction in itself: people come here because they are already in the area.

### **Feedback**

As part of this study, an analysis of the comments left by visitors in the station's visitor books from 2013-2017 was carried out. Visitor reaction was overwhelmingly positive, with words like 'fantastic', 'brilliant' and 'amazing' routinely used. To be precise, of the cases where the visitor's reaction could be determined, **99%** were explicitly positive. This is borne out by a visitor survey undertaken in 2017 where the vast majority of respondents marked their experience as 5 out of 5. This is a remarkable achievement for a visitor experience largely delivered out of a portacabin! On the basis of the words used to describe their experience, the following word cloud was generated.



The two most common reactions were 'fantastic' and 'interesting'. An interesting phrase also recurs again and again – this was 'great to see'. There is a strong sense amongst many visitors that they have experienced something special, and that they feel 'privileged' to have done so. Even instances where the visitor recorded that they 'couldn't see' the bird (which as the word-cloud above shows was not infrequent), this is almost invariably qualified in some way: it is not that the visitor felt 'cheated' by not seeing the eagle, it is a much more accepting response which acknowledges that it special experiences like

this cannot be guaranteed. This is the essence of an 'iconic wildlife experience' – it is not guaranteed, precisely because it is special, but the effect if experienced will be lasting.

## Project outputs - physical structures, materials and experiences

### Bird Viewing & Information Point (BVIP)

The BVIP is a small unit based on the pier looking across to the nesting island. It is a portacabin style structure and houses the main personnel.

#### *General perceptions and location notes*

The consultant team visited the BVIP in autumn 2017 during the end of its period of operation. Some key findings and perceptions:

#### *Physical structures*

The general appearance (in the context of a portacabin) is good, not obtrusive nor unsightly and does not remove or detract from views or the ambience of the general area given the context of a mix of boat types, vehicles, car parking space, various signage and nearby municipal toilets/water sports facilities

Interpretive signage and materials appear well produced and images used on signs are striking which gives a good brand identity and clear message about the site's purpose

Use of Irish language adds strong brand identity and cultural linkages to the eagles.



*External view of the existing BVIP - impressive eagle images make for strong branding*

The space available and limited budget may have been the most significant driver of the building's scale. Necessarily and understandably it has been kept relatively small and compact and is an adequate space for its initial intended use as a basic viewing experience to address the initial need.

Looking to future development there are limitations that a small building presents. The interior space is limited and basic – a mix of shelving on a rear wall, small windows looking out toward the eagle nest site with low quality glass and restricted view, limited options to open them, limited standing area (5 comfortably standing but only 2-3 viewing at a time). Those with limited mobility may find this difficult to navigate and particularly large or small individuals or children may struggle with viewing window height. In fine weather the opportunity to step outside into the fresh air would be ideal but there is no dedicated space for standing and observers would be standing in a car park (with some inherent traffic risk). Interior space would be further compromised with the presence of project personnel.

There is also restricted space and opportunity for interpretive or educational displays and equipment and less so again for any options for sales or donations (albeit a small unobtrusive donations box is present).



*Interior of BVIP - viewing windows*

There is no intended criticism of the project team, the facility is for the most part “made the most of” and the team work hard to accommodate the visitors and give them a good experience (good experience is the norm from knowledge of the visitor book comments) but enhancing the facility further could bring significant project benefits.

The existing location or general area has some potential for a larger or more permanent facility but the exact scale or nature of that would be dependent upon many factors. The need for bespoke interpretive and viewing facilities is clear as is the need for an opportunity to provide a means of revenue income if the project is to develop further.

### ***Viewing Experience***

The viewing experience is critical to both the ability to attract visitors but perhaps even more importantly to impress those visiting and to hold them on site for longer – the longer people stay at Mountshannon the more likelihood there will be that they will be enjoying their visits, become aware of educational or awareness messages and not least, spend money in the local economy by having a need to stay overnight, to eat or drink or to take home gifts or souvenirs.

The viewing experience is currently very limited due to a number of factors, these are listed and analysed in the table below.

### ***Communications – Branding, web and print media***

Mountshannon Eagles has only limited formal project branding but has developed a reasonably strong identity as a project, site and operation and this is reflected in much of its media and communications materials. There is however significant opportunity to both fix branding and operational issues in the short term at low cost to enhance visitor experience and income and to design interpretation to meet clear need in the event of developing an expanded project. Building upon and further developing from the existing branding is a clear opportunity.

## BVIP Viewing issues and potential solutions

Viewing experience issue	Main problems	Priority (H/M/L)	Potential solution?
Distance from nest	distance from the nest is >1km	H	exploration of advanced viewpoints closer to nest, boat trips or technology
Angle of view	low viewpoint looking up - cannot see well into nest	L	difficult to fix but of lower importance as most relevant detail can be seen, back up with nest cameras may be a supportive solution?
Limited availability of optics	2 'scopes - limits the no. viewers at any time	H	more availability of good quality equipment is vital at peak times and for the ability to comfortably host group visits
Quality of optics	High quality optics provide best possible view but even they are limited at long range and in poor visibility. Only one high quality scope is available	M	
Periodic absence of birds	even when nest is successful birds can occasionally be perched or away hunting out of sight	L	having nothing to see happens rarely during main breeding period - maintaining interest through good engagement of personnel and use of recorded video is helpful
Lack of experienced guides	volunteer guides are currently the most knowledgeable, suitably knowledgeable employment scheme personnel are rare	H	engagement with personnel is regularly shown to be a key factor at nature sites and knowledgeable and engaging characters are vital – recruitment or training of specialist skilled personnel would be advantageous
Personal space at viewpoint	any more than 2-3 people viewing through the limited windows creates some level of crowding	H	expansion of viewing facility including larger windows, more floor space and in particular development of an outside/covered viewing area



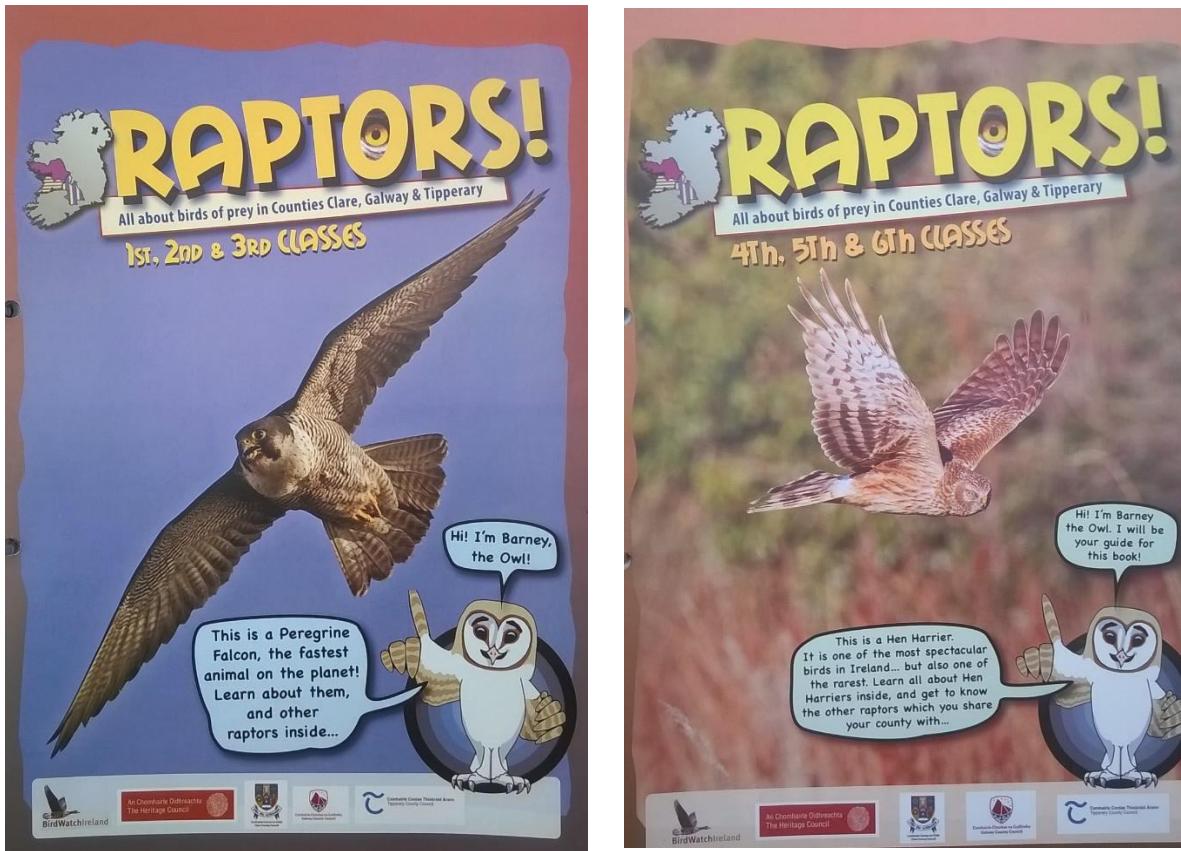
BVIP - rear wall & open shelving – cluttered storage arrangement

### Print media

There is little formal, project-specific print media. With a relatively fledgling project and without a permanent facility, development of relatively high cost printed media would be superfluous to need. The key experience for visitors is the viewing and engagement with people to interpret the eagles, print media is less vital at this stage but may become more important as the project develops.

The project has used two raptor educational booklets aimed at use for children. This is a well-produced booklet on raptors generally two versions provide age specific information from 4-

8 year olds and 8-12 year olds. It has proven a useful give-away/donation incentive and is popular and well received by family visitors nowhere it is not Sea Eagle project, geographically or sea eagle- specific.



*Raptor Educational booklets – designed for different project projects but a useful family visitor resource, though not project specific – new materials of similar high quality would be required for both interpretation and formal education programmes in a future project development scenario*

Project specific materials should be considered in light of any future development and an education programme will require significant new materials produced and targeted ideally to the school curriculum as well as being project specific.

#### **Static interpretive material**

There is little static interpretive material associated with the project.

The project signage and images placed on the exterior of the BVIP is high quality and attractive and immediately strikes a clear perception of what the project and the centre is all about. The strength here lies in strong and consistent use of high quality images, simple and bold text.

There is a small interpretive board placed outside the centre. This is not mounted but placed on the ground, and on visiting was propped up by a rock. While this board is of value, particularly for periods when the centre is not manned, the style is less consistent with the quality of the BVIP exterior and the display/mounting is not suitable for ease of reading. Placing it closer but outside the centre at a suitable height and angle for multiple user types would be a short term fix, while a longer term interpretive strategy is developed.

There is a range of simple signs and posters for e.g. funder acknowledgement and information provision. These are of highly variable quality and style and while in many cases are necessary (e.g. direction to the

Donations Box), at times lend a more amateur feel and potentially portray a lack of professionalism. This in turn can potentially impact on a project in a numbers of ways; a subtle detraction from the overall perception or devaluing of the experience, reducing inherent trust ("do I want to put my donation in that box?") and creating a lack of clarity of take home message.

An important feature which is prominent is a whiteboard which is updated with news and sightings on a near daily basis – again this is useful for when staffing is either absent or tied up with other tasks. This however appeared confusing and poorly written on the day of the site visit and as such could be enhanced with slightly more care. A useful potential option would be for a second external board to be displayed outside the centre for news updates when the centre is closed/unmanned.

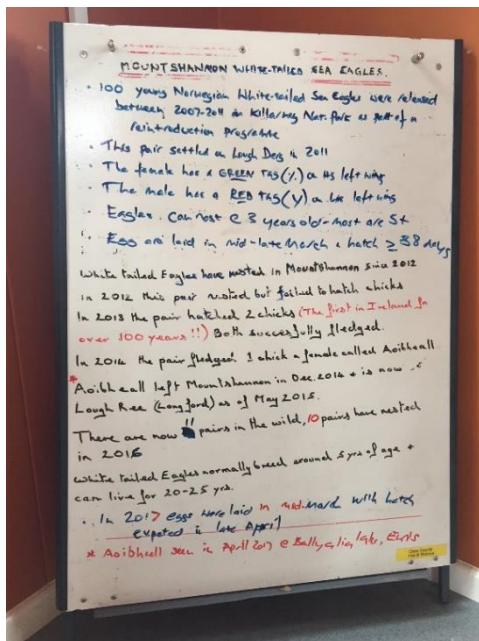


Getting a consistent, coherent interpretive story planned and executed in future will add significantly to the experience and the potential of the project to solicit support for its aims and for deriving funding.

Some immediate, low-cost, fixes are feasible prior to taking forward any further development and the consultancy team have relayed these to the Mountshannon Eagles team for potential implementation.

A useful feature is a project video which is played on a wall mounted TV mounted at one end of the room. This is useful and the video itself is of relatively high quality simple eagle footage. This provides a useful prompt for visitor engagement during periods when no birds are on view and also enables visitors waiting a turn at the telescopes to occupy themselves with relevant material. However, the display itself could be improved by use of signage and static interpretation around the screen.

### External interpretation at BVIP



The options for future use of technological fixes for bringing views to the public should be seriously considered

### Road signage

One of the most significant positive communications tools the project retains is a "brown tourist sign" at the junction of the pier road with the village. Simply stating "Sea Eagles", it gives a strong clear message and encourage people to visit.

Signage further from the site, on the M7 or other major road networks would undoubtedly help to drive more traffic to the facility.

*The news whiteboard – this approach can be helpful and effective but care needs to be taken over presentation*

### Web and social media

The project has a dedicated website [www.mountshannoneagles.ie](http://www.mountshannoneagles.ie)

The website is up to date and has a good range of content, news items, project background. Design appears strong and professionally produced and there are no obvious broken links or similar issues. There is a clear gap in news items from 2017 and this may relate to available web skills within the project group (this should be easily rectified).

The website shows the clear link between the project and the Golden eagle Trust and there is good information flow from the GET's work onto this website.



*Strong images, news updates and a good following on the project Facebook page - the eagle's stories make for a strong personal connection and may feature in driving repeat visits to the site*

feature images regularly and contributions from a range of visitors. Posts appear to get >50 “likes” and >20 shares regularly. There is a lower level of updating outside of the season.

There are two twitter accounts called Mountshannon Eagles and neither have tweeted as yet.

There is an opportunity to develop a larger social media following which may create an opportunity to drive visitor traffic to the view point and may bring other opportunities such sales, fundraising and other forms of support.

Social media relies heavily on content updates and interaction through posting, re-posting and discussion threads. This can be difficult to achieve in a volunteer based project but with dedicated staff can be more responsive though a level of review is required to ensure social media effort is effective in assisting the achievement of targets

## Stakeholder and external views of the project

Consultation with significant stakeholders, project partners and relevant external bodies were carried out on various dates, either in person with the consultant team or on the telephone.

Within each consultation, key observations and views in relation to the existing BVIP facility and experience of the project were sought and discussed and the most significant areas in relation to the existing facility and project, as a summary of the consultants interpretation of views expressed , are presented in the Table below.

*Interpretation of key points gleaned from stakeholder and external organisation consultations*

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>MSCC - various members, multiple meetings</b>
<b>Subject area</b>	<b>Comment summary</b>
Distance	Project needs improved optics, getting closer would be good but would mean moving away from pier area
Location	pier area is good, good numbers in summer but seasonal. How to extend the season and how to drive visitors to the Aistear park and main street for using shops and café's (though few options there at present)
Media	children like birds of prey booklet - would like one developed for the project specifically. Website has been a challenge to keep updated, needs some work
Signage	brown sign is good but more would help. Directing from major roads would bring more traffic.
Personnel	Staffing has been limited to employment scheme – can be good but do not necessarily come with the right suite of skills for the job but manpower is valuable to meet and greet people. Volunteer rotas tried and not easy to make work but volunteers remain vital for the project.
Facility	Looking for help to make it better, would like it to be more like a visitor centre and more open with better facilities
Future vision	The community would like a self-sustaining, staffed and enhanced experience from the project which brings higher numbers of people to the area and which contributes more substantially to jobs and businesses in the local area
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Golden Eagle Trust</b>
<b>Subject area</b>	<b>Comment summary</b>
distance	Too far for good views and better views from other side of island - opportunity for boat trips if kept at safe distance. Perhaps additional forward viewpoints at key locations with guided access.
location	A visitor centre and more professional interpretation content would enhance the project.
media	Not currently project specific and this would be of value. Web presence is good and carried GET news items to expand the interest to other raptor species. Linkage to conservation story in future very important to build on good will and project can be genuinely valuable to conservation of WTSE through raising awareness and engendering support
signage	No significant comments
personnel	Would be enhanced by dedicated and specialist staff backed by volunteers. Volunteers are vital and very good at what they do – they are the heart and soul of the project and much of the success so far derives from their effort.
facility	not ideal location or size of building and better optics would enhance views and enhanced VC style building would be better.
Future vision	Recognise value in community focussed and keeping it sustainable. Should provide a personal/special experience of the eagles and ideally give enhanced viewing options - probably a boat. GET could play a strong conservation messaging role about the eagles and work collaboratively more to mutual benefit
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Clare County Council - heritage</b>

Subject area	Comment summary
Strategic	New detailed Heritage plan in place, with clear objectives (summarised in our 'Wider Contexts' chapter). Mountshannon and the eagle project fit perfectly with that. Strong calendar of events should be a component of any development plan. Linking with Lough Derg Science Group could provide additional knowledge resource for the lake, as well as what is already available through GET for the eagle.
Funding/Supports	As well as the usual sources, there are also opportunities under the various Heritage Council calls as well as funding for biodiversity-related projects. Stronger partnerships with GET and BirdWatch could be a mechanism to access funding through joint NGO-Community proposals. Also supports available for festivals.
Future vision	Ultimately, Holy Island will be the main draw for tourists to Mountshannon but full development there, including Visitor Centre on the lakeside, is several years off, 5-10 years. Other activities/enterprises will benefit from Holy island but they need to be ready. The eagle project can take the lead now but needs a key person in place to drive it.
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Clare County Council – tourism</b>
Subject area	Comment summary
Strategic	New Tourism strategy to be published shortly; recognises the need to spread tourism more evenly throughout the county; recognises that existing destinations heavily over-subscribed (Cliffs); East Clare has unique identity – Lough Derg's potential a massive untapped resource. Inter County Lough Derg Marketing Group continues to drive that agenda. Blue Way will create new bundling opportunities. Mountshannon and eagle centre have profile and potential.
Funding/Supports	LEADER and possibly Fáilte Ireland. No new local authority funds likely but appointment of new Rural Community Development Officers will be a major support for groups like Mountshannon. Variety of community and social employment schemes also. Should also look at opportunities through LEADER-funded village strategies.
Future vision	Sees real opportunity here and real commitment across the board to make East Clare a new, vibrant tourism destination. A more immersive experience will develop compared to west coast, with free independent travellers the prime target. Holy Island will ultimately become the signature draw for Mountshannon and has the capacity to become a destination in its own right. Development of eagle project needs to proceed with an eye to that.
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Tourism East Clare</b>
Subject area	Comment summary
Strategic	Focus is squarely on outdoor activities and 'soft adventure'. Targeting both domestic and overseas markets and see an opportunity to leverage off Shannon. Development of joined-up itineraries for visitors, to help explore what East Clare has to offer and to encourage longer dwell-time. Blue Way is major step forward; also looking at creating opportunities for kayak-fishing. Feel there is also an untapped potential in the arts community in East Clare that could be incorporated into the visitor offering. Will also be pushing a 'twinning' initiative with other towns/regions in Europe to build direct links with East Clare.
Funding/Supports	Have obtained funding for a consulting-resource to support restructuring, marketing and new collaborative ventures for Tourism East Clare over next 18 months. This in turn will help the Mountshannon group in the development of their own proposals.
Future vision	Very optimistic and see significant growth in visitor numbers. Independent travellers and 'slow tourism' is the space East Clare will claim. Strong family focus too ('connected families' segment).

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Lough Derg Marketing Group</b>
<b>Subject area</b>	<b>Comment summary</b>
Strategic	Group is developing a new strategy, having achieved all existing goals. Will be commissioning an economic analysis and consultation round in next couple of months. Public consultations over summer 2018. WTE plans fit perfectly with their own strategy. Group should make a submission as part of the consultation process and ensure that its own vision gets captured as part of the new strategy.
Funding/Supports	Unlikely that any new stimulus fund is in the offing but Lough Derg Group will be leveraging existing funds and seeking that Lough Derg be prioritised for investment. LEADER also fully recognise potential here. Likely to be a call in 2019 from Fáilte Ireland under new Hidden Heartlands proposition – Mountshannon group should be positioning for this. Other sources of funding include Town and Village Renewal Scheme (Terryglass as very good example of this); and REDZ funding.
Future vision	Very positive, strong opportunities, inter-county approach brings new energy. Sees Blue Way as an overarching brand for Lough Derg covering water AND land-based activities, walking trails, heritage and food. While Waterways Ireland are tasked with marketing this the Lough Derg Group will be playing an active role too. Mountshannon is very important for the Blue Way. Will be tracking Blue Way usage and spin-offs to local economy regularly from now on.
<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>BirdWatch Ireland</b>
<b>Subject area</b>	<b>Comment summary</b>
Distance/view	Felt the viewpoint was fine while the original nest was present but more recently the distance is a challenge for best views
location	Good harbourside location but appears space is limited.
media	BWI were involved in raptor leaflet design - happy with it but recognise it is not specific to the project.
signage	No specific comment
personnel	BWI recognise some potential for their own volunteers but also have only a limited pool in the local area.
facility	Recognised the limited project resources currently available and the necessity for an appropriately scaled facility at present but can see the opportunity and potential for an enhanced centre
Future vision	Enhancement of centre and experience would be ideal and can see opportunity for wider wildlife experiences in the area – swifts, woodland birds, raptors more widely, waterbirds and particularly community based events.

In addition to these stakeholders there are others who will be important to consult with in taking the project forward in future. Liaison with these organisations will be an important part of the role of a project manager in future. These include, but are not limited to:

- *National Park's & Wildlife Service* – statutory consultee for licensing and planning matters, wildlife protection and designated sites
- *ESB* – management of Lough Derg water area/lake bed
- *Waterways Ireland* – partnership working with Blueway and management of boat traffic on lake
- *Neighbouring communities* - Whitegate, Scarriff, Tuamgraney, Killaloe
- *Coillte* – Major forest owners and managers at Portumna Forest Park (next nearest Sea Eagle nest)

## Project Resources

### Financial

The project so far has received limited funding from a range of sources which has allowed it to establish and operate since 2013 at low or no significant cost to the community and has enabled those visiting to experience the thrill of seeing Sea Eagles, often for the first time and from a dedicated viewpoint.

In addition to a cash contribution from the MSCC, the operational cost of the project is significantly supported by a large in-kind contribution from volunteers - by way of staff time and it has also received donations of equipment and materials from external organisations.

While in-kind contributions may still be a significant portion of future operational costs following development, particularly the valuable and effective use of volunteers, the potentially increased visitor numbers and level of visitor expectation will demand a greater level of service as well as size and quality of facilities. For all project aims including conservation outputs, increased visitor numbers, financial sustainability and message delivery to be met, costs will undoubtedly increase but ideally to a level which is both sustainable and potentially contributes a surplus to community and conservation funds.

The running costs and income for the existing project are illustrated below

#### *White-tailed Sea Eagle – project operational costs 2015- 2017*

	2015	2016	2017
<b>INCOME</b>			
donations (box)	1940	297	3050
donations (other)	0	0	144
grants (council)	950	600	1000
sub total	2890	897	4194
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>			
equipment	950	0	3295
personnel	0	0	945
Heat/light/power	0	0	0
travel	226	660	250
other	0	0	63
sub total	1176	660	4553
Net Income	1714	237	-359

The project is run at very low cost but, arguably the largest single element, staffing, is supported by the local community employment scheme (not detailed above as falls out with the direct project finances). Council grants are also a significant element and the capital cost of the facility building itself was provided by the council.

While these may well continue to factor strongly in project operation, not least because strategically the project provides a valuable resource for the employment scheme and the council, the expressed aim of the Mountshannon Community Council is to see the project develop further to add more benefits to the local economy, to contribute to the protection and conservation of the eagles and to bring significant social benefits to the community. All of which meet a number of strategic aims and would contribute to strategic plans for the area.

To achieve this, significant development is required. However, looking at these finances critically there is significant opportunity, even without further development, to create new income streams in the short term which may assist in taking the project further forward and provide a modest means of support for future development plans.

*Immediate consideration should be given to revenue generation:*

#### **Donations**

- A supporter scheme may be feasible and attract regular donations.
- Developing a corporate or larger donor support network would be welcome and may be targeted towards specific items.
- Development of a more significant ask for donations within the viewpoint
- Charity run/cycle/walk event – targeted at raising money and raising awareness of the eagles

As a result of the above, a 100% increase in donations would not be unexpected with the right ask, even with existing facility provision – say, c.5-7K per annum and a small charity run or walk event could potentially add to that.

#### **Sales**

- development of small range of souvenir items (posters/mugs/postcards)
- pin badge sales – specifically, metal pin badges are popular and have become a feature at bird viewing sites
- coffee/hot drinks machine

This could result in a modest but important return for the project. 1000 items sold and netting 2-3 euro per item on average could bring in, say, 2.5K per annum

#### **Events**

Development of an events programme around the eagles and other wildlife viewing could attract paying/donating participants – 10 events raising €100 per event would add a further 1K to project funds as well as both raising profile and increasing visitors to the local area

#### **Grants**

Immediate grant funding would likely be limited to existing levels but could increase for capital or project programme expenditure through further development. Utilising the unrestricted income generated above as match funding and utilising the in-kind contribution where possible is important in unlocking appropriate grant support

The project is currently engaging 5-10,000 visitors or visits per annum but for the impact of the project to grow it will require:

- marketing and promotion
- an enhanced visitor experience
- better and bigger facilities
- ancillary support to accommodate more people
- more personnel to engage with the visitors.

To achieve all of this a critical element in taking forward a step change in development would be the appointment of a **project development officer**.

## Personnel

Project personnel are currently either volunteers or are staff recruited through the community Employment scheme. In discussion with the community council team, the key issues and challenges of the current arrangements are:

- Managing and maintaining a suitable volunteer rota is a significant challenge.
- Staffing at weekends and holiday periods can be challenging whereas volunteers are more available then
- Skilled and knowledgeable staff and volunteers are vital
- The skills and knowledge required are specialist
- There is limited personnel resource for further project development and management

It has been shown in a range of studies of nature reserve visitors in the UK that engaging with people (e.g. a warden/information person/ranger/volunteer) is a key dependency on the quality of visitor experience<sup>29 30</sup>

<sup>31</sup>. Interpretive personnel bring a range of vital attributes:

- can respond quickly to visitor needs and questions
- information supplied can be constantly updated and tailored to the needs of the visitors
- easily facilitate the active involvement and engagement of visitors
- pitch the interpretation level and approach for a range of audience types
- People connect best with people!

Maintaining the presence and skills of interpretive personnel into the future will be important.

A key gap that exists at present is for project development. Projects of this nature often require significant expertise and personnel resources to develop further. This so far has been collectively managed by the Eagle project team and the Community council with some support from staff at Golden Eagle Trust and at Clare County Council. It is an admirable achievement to have taken it to its current standing with very little resource.

For further development a **dedicated project officer** resource would be necessary. Such a role would bring the required focus and energy to drive development of ideas, project planning and delivery of project outcomes while providing a key central hub for the community council and other groups. This role would require funding support and the right organisational support and structure for deployment. This will be developed further in the project planning section.

---

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell, J and Ryland, P. 2017. Natural interpretation: a brief guide to the interpretation of nature and wildlife. AHI Best Practice Guidelines 13. Association for Heritage Interpretation.

<http://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/29728/1/AHI.%20BPG%2013.%20Natural%20interpretation.%20With%20photos.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Smith, D and Harley, D. (1993) The 1989 Reserves Visitor Survey Results: The Contribution of Visitors to Local Economies. Unpublished report, RSPB, Sandy

<sup>31</sup> Rayment, M (1999) Spending by Visitors to RSPB Reserves: Results from the Reserves Visitor Survey 1998. RSPB, Sandy

# 3. The wider contexts

ecological, conservation, strategic, economic, social, stakeholder aspirations and other projects



## The Lough Derg Blueway

Imagine the scene...

13,000 hectares of clear water; surrounded by beautiful and dramatic countryside in three Irish counties (Clare, Tipperary, and Galway), and traversed by a series of trails, on the water and on land, that provide the opportunity for exhilarating activities and wonderful adventures.

The Lough Derg Blueway is yours to explore and enjoy. You can do it your way – by canoe, paddle board, under sail, by bicycle or by foot. The Lough Derg Blueway will excite you to the possibilities of enjoyment and new, unforgettable experiences.

Below are a series of guides (themed) and zone maps which have been produced to help you plan your next short break or holiday to the Lough Derg Blueway.



The adventure and the warm welcome awaits you...

## Ecology, Environment & Conservation

### *White-tailed Sea Eagle ecology*

Key ecological considerations in the future development of the project are outlined below:

**Rarity;** The status of Sea Eagles in Ireland, as a still rare breeder means they provide a significant draw for visitors from within the state and likely from Northern Ireland. They are, However, less significant on a European scale, being much commoner and more easily seen across much of northern Europe, and even within Britain they are relative accessibility at sites within Scotland<sup>32</sup>. Eagles, however, do hold a strong intrinsic attraction for people and White-tailed Eagle is a spectacular species. The likelihood of attracting a generalist audience by promoting the availability of an opportunity to view them may be a strong enough attraction for many. This species alone is probably not enough of a draw for the, not insignificant, specialist wildlife or bird tourism market but potentially combined with “Irish specialities” such as seabirds (e.g. Cliffs of Moher<sup>33</sup> or Skelligs<sup>34</sup>) and cetaceans (e.g. Shannon Dolphinwatch<sup>35</sup>, Cork whale watch<sup>36</sup>)

**Timing;** the nesting season runs broadly from February to September but the peak periods are during incubation, while there are young in the nest and particularly large young, and the period just after the young fledge. This covers approximately April to August inclusive. Outside this period there are likely to be adults or fledged young in the area but the reliability of seeing them is much lower and there is a higher risk of disappointment for visitors and with less interesting behaviour. This could be changed with the development of supplementary feeding during the non-breeding season.

**Feeding;** Raptor feeding can build and develop a significant wildlife spectacle in certain circumstances and this can suit relatively gregarious raptors like Sea Eagles<sup>37 38</sup>. There are many considerations in taking supplementary feeding forward as a development and detailed ecological a technical input is required. There is a developing suite of experience both scientific and anecdotal on key approaches<sup>3940</sup> and this should be considered carefully. The development of artificial feeding away from the nest site though, at a suitable location may provide an added attraction, bringing in other raptor species and bringing reliability year round. There are attendant risks and opportunities with feeding and this could be used, with care be effective in bringing the birds closer to people but at the same time has the potential to reduce the risk of illegal persecution by providing a safe, secure and reliable feeding site, provided best practice advice<sup>41</sup> is sought and followed.

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.wild-scotland.org.uk/search\\_members/?species=14](http://www.wild-scotland.org.uk/search_members/?species=14)

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.clare.ie/event/cliffs-moher-seabirds-festival/>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.skelligmichaelcruises.com/the-skelligs-2/skelligs-birds/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.dolphinwatch.ie/>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.corkwhalewatch.com/introducing-our-bespoke-whale-watching-vessel-the-holly-jo/>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.gigrin.co.uk/red-kite-feeding/>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.foejapan.org/en/aid/jbic02/sakhalin/ChangingEnvironment.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Creating Supplementary Feeding Stations For The Conservation Of The Egyptian Vulture In Greece - Life+ Project “The Return Of The Neophron” Life10 Nat/Bg/000152 [http://lifeneophron.eu/files/docs/1427882690\\_797.pdf](http://lifeneophron.eu/files/docs/1427882690_797.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Melanie E. Orros & Mark D. E. Fellowes (2014) Supplementary feeding of the reintroduced Red Kite *Milvus milvus* in UK gardens, Bird Study, 61:2, 260-263, DOI:10.1080/00063657.2014.885491

<sup>41</sup> Anon. 2006. The effects of feeding reintroduced red kites in England and guidance on best practice. Chilterns Conservation Board, Natural England, RSPB, Southern England Kite Group, ZSL.

## ***Disturbance & other threats***

Disturbance to nesting White-tailed eagles is illegal. Fortunately, some pairs can become more robust to close approach but this is highly dependent on individual birds' traits and on long and gradual periods of exposure to disturbance cues<sup>42</sup>. There may additionally be sub-lethal effects which are not easily detected but which may affect eagle breeding success. Published advice generally is suggesting 300+ metres is generally safe but local circumstances should be taken into account. This may have a bearing on the development of further viewing facilities and boat trips and it would be critical to keep bird welfare as the primary consideration in this. This is well reflected by the opinions of the local community and in the vision of the future of the project from the project group. Security of conservation of the nest island in the long term would be highly desirable.

Other threats come from illegal persecution; deliberate or otherwise. Shooting and poisoning of raptors continues to be a problem in Ireland as it is in other countries and the social structure of sea Eagles means that the loss of an individual can have profound and sometimes lasting effects on the occupancy of sites. The loss of "Saoirse", the long standing breeding female at the site in winter 2017 to avian flu is a blow to the immediate project<sup>43</sup> but the male remains loyal to the site and there is optimism it will be able to attract a further female in due course. This natural death follows a series of persecution incidents which have affected Irish Sea Eagles including those reared at Mountshannon<sup>44</sup> and a key part of the project is about raising the awareness of the need for raptor conservation and about engendering widespread public support for the eagles. In turn this core purpose can also lead to community benefits through networking, co-operative working and social cohesion.

## ***Other wildlife and conservation interest in the Mountshannon area***

As well as Sea Eagles the local Mountshannon area has the potential to develop other wildlife interest and listed below are some key opportunities for adding value to the wildlife attractions in the local area with modest additional cost and effort:

**Hen Harrier** – the hinterland rising up to the Slieve Aughy mountains is a stronghold for Hen Harrier and much of the area is designated as a Special Protection Area for them. An opportunity exists for viewing from vantage points over moorland sites with a chance of seeing the bird hunting – there may be synergy with the *Hen Harrier Project*<sup>45</sup> and there may be opportunities for mutual benefits. Nest cameras are more difficult and problematic with this species.

**Kestrel** – relatively common in the local area, kestrels can be attracted to specially designed nest boxes and fairly simple camera technology<sup>46</sup> deployed to bring intimate family pictures to the public. A suitable site with a remotely deployed camera could be explored

**Buzzard** – relatively common in the area, they could form another raptor species for a themed focus and a simple nest camera arrangement could bring pictures to a viewing centre. They are often visible and vocal over forests in spring and summer and readily come carrion which could make them a feature of a raptor feeding site.

---

<sup>42</sup> Ruddock, M. & Whitfield, D. P. 2007. A Review of Disturbance Distances in Selected Bird Species. Unpublished report to Scottish Natural Heritage

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.nenaghguardian.ie/news/roundup/articles/2018/03/15/4153513-another-whitetailed-sea-eagle-found-dead-on-lough-derg/>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/one-of-only-two-irish-bred-white-tailed-eagles-shot-and-killed-1.1713647>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.henharrierproject.ie/about.html>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/monitoring-kestrels>

**Sparrowhawk** – like Buzzard above, they could form another raptor species for a themed focus and a simple nest camera arrangement could bring pictures to a viewing centre, this is a secretive species and could prove attractive and insightful to an audience as part of both a raptor theme and a “hidden wildlife” theme.

#### **Waterbirds – seasonal – swans, grebes**

Lough Derg has a significant population of waterbirds throughout the year. The main concentrations of nesting birds are found on islands mostly to the northern end of the lake, with populations of gulls, terns and cormorants. Around the shoreline of the lake there are reedbeds holding common species such Mute Swan, Tufted Duck and Great crested Grebe.

In winter, larger number of duck, e.g. Tufted Duck, Wigeon and Teal arrive from the east while some large flocks of Whooper Swans can be seen in places, often feeding in fields.

It may be possible to create nesting rafts for e.g. Common tern, close to Mountshannon which would add an attraction to the area. The Great Crested Grebes displaying<sup>47</sup> in early spring would make a good feature of a targeted viewing event. It may be feasible to create an autumn and winter viewing event for Whooper Swans and other wildfowl. Bird hides on the loch shore may not be necessary but raised viewpoints with suitable interpretation would add to attractions along a shoreline walk.

#### **Woodland birds**

There is a great deal of forestry and some native woodland in the area and walks such as that at Woodpark would be enhanced by creating of a few simple feeding stations with screened viewing. These require regular topping up with food but can bring in a wider range of species throughout the year than would be seen in a typical garden and may also attract Red Squirrels or Pine Marten.

#### **Red squirrel**

See above. Squirrel feeding stations are already an attraction at the Lakeside Campsite. These could be effectively used (with co-operation) or added to in new forest walking areas and potentially simple camera feeds back into a centre would add value. This in itself would be a significant attraction and can bring year round interest.

#### **Otter**

Otters are relatively common in the area but can be very difficult to see. Otter viewing is very popular among wildlife viewing audiences and can be a highlight of any trip. The potential for the creation of artificial otter holts with live cameras should be explored. This may not be feasible and would need significant additional research to achieve but would be a significant draw for visitors

#### **Wildflower meadows**

Identifying an existing meadow or developing an existing amenity or agricultural grassland area, as an accessible, wildflower meadow could be a significant feature and provide an area of quiet enjoyment. This could be the destination of a specific walk in the right circumstances – perhaps linked to a heritage/archaeological feature

#### **Aquatic life –pond dipping/aquaria//fish**

The strong relationship and locational link to Lough Derg is an opportunity to create a theme of the project around the lake’s aquatic life. From waterbirds and otters already mentioned to fish and aquatic invertebrates.

---

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORqblRpH9Eg>

Development of a pond dipping area would provide a valuable educational resource for visiting school groups. A small aquarium within any facility, if feasible, could potentially include a range of aquatic life and possibly fish. An opportunity to tell the story of the lake's fish like the rare Pollan and the enigmatic Lamprey and the diversity of forms of brown trout in the lake would provide strong interest and could capture the interest of visitors already in the area for angling or help to promote this aspect to a wider audience. A synergistic relationship in this regard, might be formed with Inland Fisheries Ireland.

Seasonal events such as the May fly hatch may provide event opportunities.

#### **Other wildlife**

Other wildlife interest could be identified on an ad hoc or opportunistic basis by project personnel and could form the basis of seasonal events or other interpreted features – butterflies and dragonflies, bug hunts, significant trees, orchid meadows, swifts within the village, nest box cameras on common birds. Many of these could address a “hidden wildlife” theme.

## **Environmental considerations in planning**

Given the focus of the project around wildlife, it is important to ensure any impacts on wildlife are only positive. Key environmental considerations need to be taken account of in taking any new proposals forward. Clare County Councils planning process, as standard seeks safeguards in new developments against all normal environmental issues in relation to e.g. effluent and emissions, traffic, noise etc.

In particular though, it should be specially noted that the further development of an expanded project has the potential to have close or direct interaction with two Natura designated sites and a range of specially protected species.

As such, any potential impacts upon these sites, qualifying features or other wildlife should be treated appropriately and this would include screening for Appropriate Assessment<sup>48</sup>.

It is a statutory requirement that all plans and projects, not directly connected to the delivery of the conservation objectives of a Natura site, are required to be screened for Appropriate Assessment (AA)<sup>48</sup>. An AA screening for this plan is included at Appendix 2. Specifically, the plan itself has no impact until such time as it is adopted and delivered in whole or in part, and in particular individual proposals within the plan will require screening and/or AA in their own right. Those elements subject to planning control and those on or close to the designated sites or those requiring specific licensing consent from e.g. NPWS, are particularly notable in this regard.

## **Strategic**

As part of the background research for this study, a wide range of reports and publications were reviewed, including:

- Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023
- Clare County Heritage Plan 2017-2023
- *Life at the Lake – Roadmap for Experience development and Destination Marketing 2014-2017* (2014)
- *Inis Cealtra Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan* (2017)
- *W2 Report - Audit and assessment of Tourism Product and Operators in the East Clare area* (2015)
- *Lough Derg Heritage Audit* (2011)

---

<sup>48</sup>Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities. 2009. National Parks & Wildlife Service. [https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/NPWS\\_2009\\_AA\\_Guidance.pdf](https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/NPWS_2009_AA_Guidance.pdf)

- Clare Local Development Strategy (2016)
- Clare Rural Development strategy 2026 (2018)
- Fáilte Ireland Tourism Plan

For reasons of space, key points from the most important of these are summarised below.

### **County Development Plan (2017-2023)**

Clare County Council's Corporate Vision is of a county which can become 'Ireland's centre for culture, heritage and tourism.' In its County Development Plan 2017-23 a specific chapter is devoted to Tourism with a related goal to create 'A County Clare in which tourism growth continues to play a major role in the future development of the County, adapting to the challenges of competing markets by maximising the development of a high quality diverse tourism product.' Specific, relevant, objectives include:

***CDP9.13 Development Plan Objective: Lakeland and Waterway Tourism:*** To support the development of tourism activities in lakeland areas and waterways...

***CDP9.18 Development Plan Objective: Niche Tourism:*** To encourage growth of the niche tourism industry in County Clare in order to expand the range of tourism products on offer.

The plan includes a section dedicated to the potential of East Clare, with particular regard to Lough Derg where 'opportunities exist to further develop the area, by promoting and encouraging niche tourism products such as the **Mountshannon Bird Viewing Information Point**, facilities for water-sports and outdoor activity centres, wellness and self-development facilities, spa and health facilities and agri-tourism. The purchase of Holy Island by Clare County Council provides a significant opportunity to sustainably manage the cultural and historic tourism potential of the ancient island.' The relevant Development Objective is worth reproducing in full as almost every element resonates for the Mountshannon project. It reads as follows:

***CDP9.23 Development Plan Objective: Tourism in East Clare:***

- (a) To work with relevant stakeholders to prepare and implement a Visitor Management and Sustainable Tourism Development Plan for **Holy Island** and to investigate the provision of ancillary services in local villages in the area;
- (b) To promote the Lough Derg (on the Shannon) **Heritage and Nature Trail**, the work of the Lough Derg Marketing Strategy Group and to collaborate with Fáilte Ireland and relevant stakeholders on other future initiatives that enhance established attractions and work to promote Lough Derg and the surrounding area as a tourism destination;
- (c) To facilitate **sustainable marina developments** and associated amenities at appropriate locations inside and outside of settlements along Lough Derg and lake areas;
- (d) To develop and enhance tourism products in particular sustainable and **eco-tourism**;
- (e) To facilitate and encourage the development of new and expanded **outdoor activities** in East Clare such as canoeing, water sports, bird watching, mountain-biking and walking trails and to develop links to complementary facilities;
- (f) To promote Lough Derg and the Slieve Aughty region as a tourism location and to develop a series of **viewing points** in the area;
- (g) To promote **wellness and self-development** facilities; spa and health complexes and agritourism enterprises;

- (h) To support the upgrade of the amenity facilities in the Ballycuggeran area;
- (i) To facilitate the investigation of historical sites in East Clare containing the remains of a complex of blast furnaces and iron foundries;
- (j) To support the development of a **footpath/ walking route** around Lough Derg, linking Killaloe to Tuamgraney and Mountshannon;
- (k) To support the sustainable development of Tinarana Estate as a tourism product; I To ensure compliance with all relevant legislation as outlined in Objective CDP2.1.

#### **Clare County Heritage Plan (2017-2023)**

References to Lough Derg figure prominently throughout this plan. Six themes identified here, two of particular relevance, one being “Community” and another ‘Sustainable Tourism’.

Under the “Community” theme, an objective is to encourage and support through “a small-scale heritage grant scheme”. Under the “Sustainable Tourism” theme the objectives are to maximise heritage potential, to improve access, information and interpretation, to support implementation of Inis Cealtra plan, and very importantly to support development of **sustainable wildlife adventure tourism**.

#### **Clare Rural Development strategy 2026<sup>49</sup>**

Entitled *Realising Clare’s Rural Potential – Our Life, Our Home*, this new strategy from the Clare Rural Development Forum (under the aegis of the County Council) has a very broad remit. It plans for the creation of 4,000 jobs over the next ten years, including jobs in community-run social enterprises, and targets a number of key towns and villages for inward investment, in turn driving local regeneration of their hinterlands: Scariff-Mountshannon is explicitly named. Local leadership will be supported through a special Rural & Community Support Unit. Improved natural and cultural environment, real quality of life and intergenerational interaction are all to be supported goals. There are clear opportunities for the Eagle project in Mountshannon under many of these headings.

#### **Inis Cealtra Plan (2017)**

This is an extremely comprehensive and detailed plan. However, the procedure outlined for the development of the island as a visitor attraction is very complex and prolonged – there is a sense that the proposed Visitor Centre could be many years off. That being the case, it is important for the Mountshannon station to proceed on its own initiative but plan appropriately so that it can link up later. In this regard, it should be noted that **specific provision has been made to house the Project in the new Visitor Centre**, with an area of 40sq meters set aside.

The extent of the stakeholder consultation already carried out on this project is noteworthy. There has been extensive consideration of other links and parallel development. Projections for visitor numbers are ambitious and due to a lack of hard statistical information for this area of Clare, they seem to have been based on educated opinion rather than extrapolated data. The medium estimate is for 35,000 visitors in Year 1 rising to **75,000 by Year 4-5**. A high level of seasonality is predicted with 80% of visitors expected May-September. In fact a major concern for the writers is how to limit numbers - massive success is taken as a foregone conclusion, bringing with it real risk for the archaeological integrity of the Island. The proposed admission fee is **€4-€5 per adult** to the centre - quite low by current standards and almost inevitably meaning that the project will not be self-financing. Perhaps recognising this, the writers recommend that a proper set of Profit and Loss accounts should be commissioned.

---

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.clarecoco.ie/community/publications/clare-rural-development-strategy-2026-26009.pdf>

### **Life at the Lake (2014)**

*Life at the Lake* is a plan produced to guide the development of Lough Derg as a tourism destination. It proposes three main tourism products, i.e.

- A discovery point and Trailhead at Portroe Lookout, upgrading existing facilities and creating a 'must-see' visitor experience.
- A Lough Derg Canoe/Kayak Trail, including infrastructure, interpretation, canoe-friendly accommodation and visitor-offering 'bundles'. Mountshannon and Inis Cealtra are specifically identified as part of a short-break route.
- Enhanced offering and facilities at University of Limerick Activity Centre (ULAC) to create a defined iconic visitor attraction that becomes a motivator for visits.

Two other products are proposed in the form of an eco-park at Portumna, including bike and canoe hire and wildlife experiences (observation platform and discovery trails), along with a range of visitor oriented publications. Importantly, *Life at the Lake* also envisaged the appointment of a Lough Derg Tourism Co-Ordinator.

### **W2 Audit of Tourism product/Operators (2015)**

The W2 report is an extremely comprehensive assessment of tourism product, operators and opportunity in the East Clare region. It identified 21 land-based activity enterprises, 26 water-based activity enterprises, and 29 cultural activity enterprises. It provides a SWOT, cluster mapping of activities, ideas for product development and a marketing strategy. Expansion of the Mountshannon viewing station would fit well within the overall strategy proposed in this report.

### **Clare Local Development Strategy (2016)**

This sets out a framework for investment in the region, drawing on LEADER funding under the Irish Rural Development Plan 2014-2020. The Strategy provides a strong statement of support for '**the less developed Lough Derg area**', including Lough Graney and Sliabh Aughy and says that development here will be a priority. The actions to be undertaken/funded should be designed to support 'the development, marketing and branding of this destination.'

### **Fáilte Ireland**

In April 2018, Fáilte Ireland introduced a new marketing proposition called 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' focusing on the midland region and the Shannon basin. East Clare is now brought within this new brand, moving out of the Wild Atlantic Way region (which in reality was a poor fit for this part of the county).

Narrative surrounding the new brand invites the visitor to



'Explore the green heartlands of Ireland's natural beauty, where activity and relaxation are centred around rural communities. The Hidden Heartlands lifestyle can be discovered across a lattice work of land and water trails, showcased by the iconic River Shannon and the Beara Breifne Way. There's an infinite variety of things to do for all ages along the length of the Shannon, by the many beautiful lakes in the area or along the many quiet rural byways that criss-cross this picturesque part of Ireland. The water offers leisurely boat trips, water sports and great fishing, while numerous walks, cycle trails and pony trekking trails allow you

to take in the views, or explore the rural heartlands and small villages in this quiet, relaxing part of the country.'

The value and relevance of this new branding proposition for Mountshannon will be immediately seen.

## Economics

Tourism is a massively important industry for Ireland. In 2017 we welcomed over 10 million visitors, most of those coming to the Republic. Different categories of visitor spend differently, with the overseas holidaymaker the most valuable of all, spending on average €89 per day. Various multipliers have been used in the past to calculate the overall benefit to local economies: a figure of 1.6 was used in a recent study of the impact of tourism in the Ballyhoura Region and this is probably the most appropriate for East Clare as well. On that basis, every 1,000 overseas holidaymakers that the viewing station in Mountshannon attracts would generate €142,000 for the local economy, assuming they stay in the area for the day. Fáilte Ireland reckon that every €32,000 spend supports one job locally. So, if the eagle station can attract say 5,000 overseas visitors a year that would support about 20 jobs locally. What is key of course is to attract these people in the first place, keep them in the area, and give them something to spend their money on.



Additional considerations in this regard include consideration of the capacity for Mountshannon itself to realise the income, and in turn the jobs, and thereby benefit directly. Without guides, shops, eateries, accommodation and other small business services the ability to realise the economic return direct within the village and environs may be limited.

## Community/Social benefits and considerations

In addition to economic value, a community-based wildlife tourism project would bring additional and highly significant benefits to the community and to individuals if structured in the right way. These benefits would be likely to include:

- lifelong learning experiences – increased awareness and educational resources for schools, children and adults through formal education programmes, events and interpretation as well as through discussion and engagement informally
- Training and upskilling – offering new opportunities for local people through formal training and volunteering
- Environmental benefits and engendering respect for place – a better living and working environment through heightened awareness of the need for well-kept spaces for visitors and well as local people – community with a vested interest in enhancing its surroundings
- Personal and community well-being – engagement with nature and community groups can enhance mental and physical health
- Community identity – strengthening community identity and social cohesion by sharing common goals, aspirations and in working together

The potential to increase visitor numbers at the village significantly can bring issues to consider and manage around the social acceptability of increased tourism:

- Traffic and noise
- Boat traffic
- Changing the ambience in the village
- Need for compromise over space – sharing
- Design of village space

## Synergy and competition

There are three key projects which will be the most likely to interact with the Mountshannon Sea Eagle project

Lough Derg Blue Way – this is now the overarching brand and vector for activity tourism within the area and this project will interact directly with it. It will be important to develop synergies between the projects to mutual benefit (most of which should come together naturally).

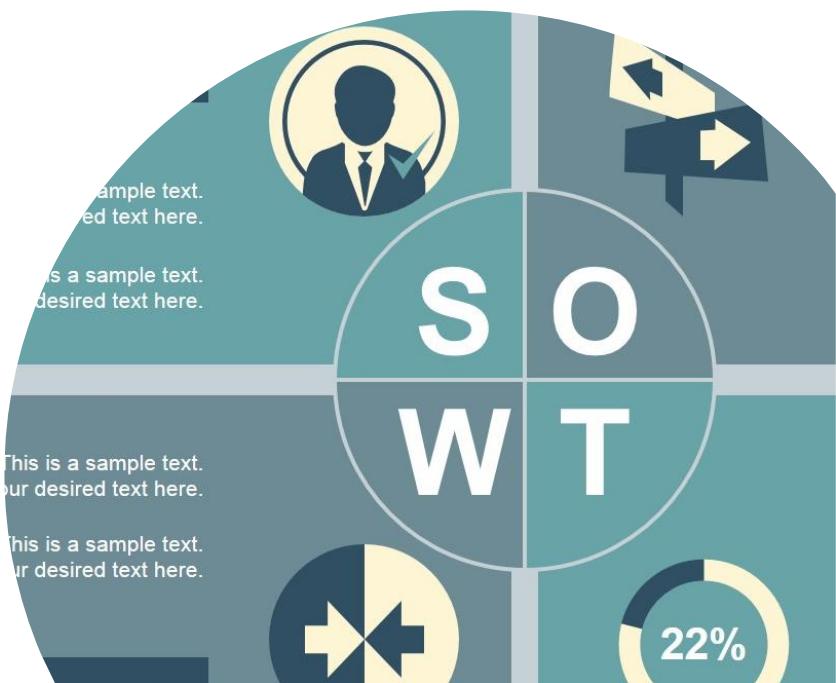
Opportunities for wildlife watching in the Mountshannon area can be accessed on or from the Blueway and provide a readily promotable feature for the Blueway offer.

Inis Cealtra – This potentially large and complex project is likely to be the most significant local enterprise in the future should it realise itself as described by the Development Plan. Locational, operational and experiential synergies are likely to offer an opportunity for Mountshannon as a whole and for the Eagle project to build itself into the core offer of this project should it develop.

Portumna Forest Park Eagle Viewing – there is an open hide at Portumna Forest Park, managed by Coillte, which can be visited and offers good views of eagles along with some interpretation and forest walks. This remains a low key facility and rather than be seen as competition, rather offers an option for visitors to Mountshannon to explore as an addition to their stay. The juxtaposition of scenery, walks and diverse wildlife viewing options around Mountshannon is a more complete offer which should hold visitors for multiple days or multiple visits over time rather than the relatively small-scale and limited experience offered at Portumna.

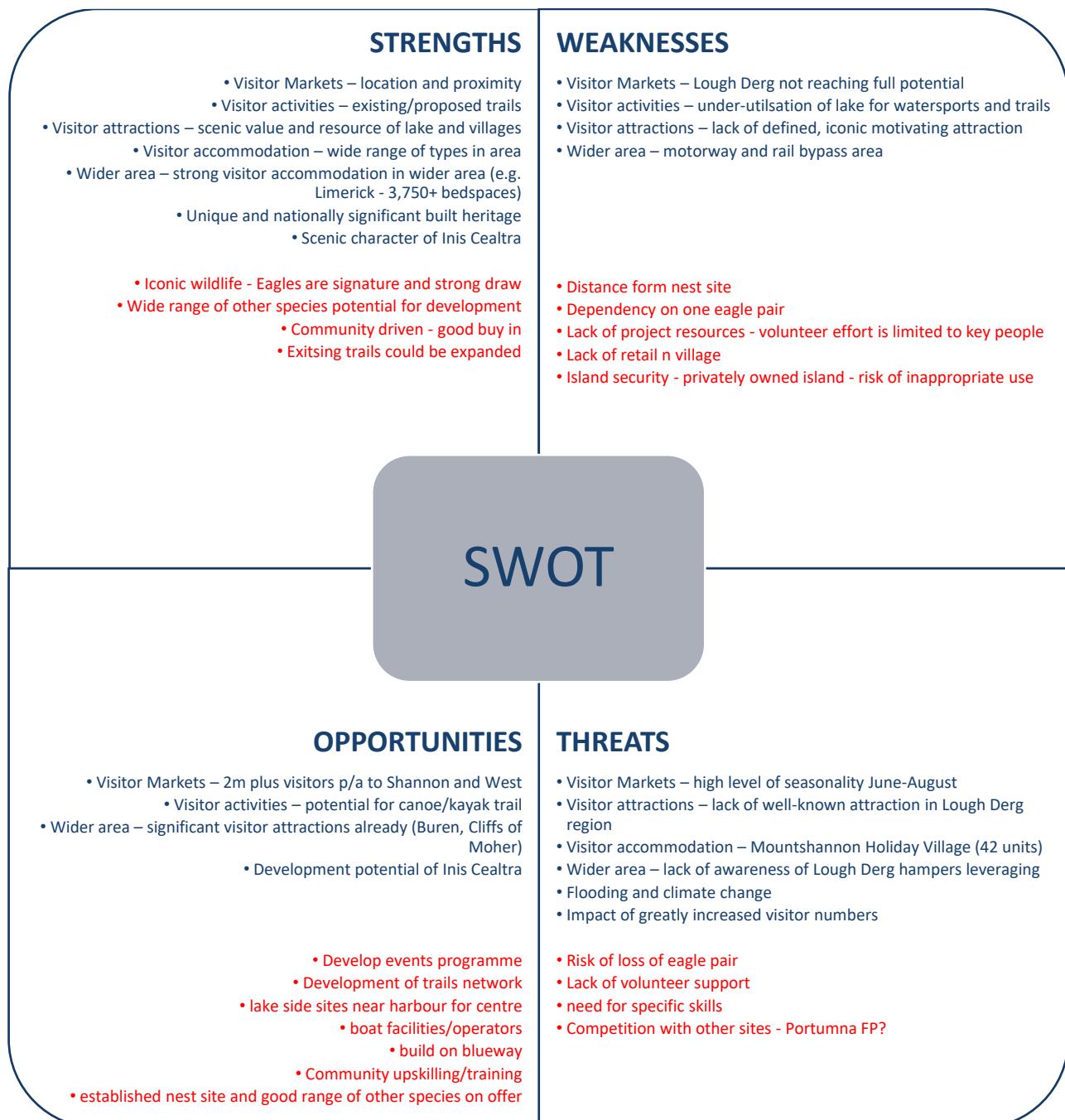
# 4. SWOT Analysis

Strengths, weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats



The diagram below illustrates a synthesis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT analysis) carried out for the 2014 Life at the Lake - A Roadmap for Experience Development and Destination Marketing 2014-2017 report.

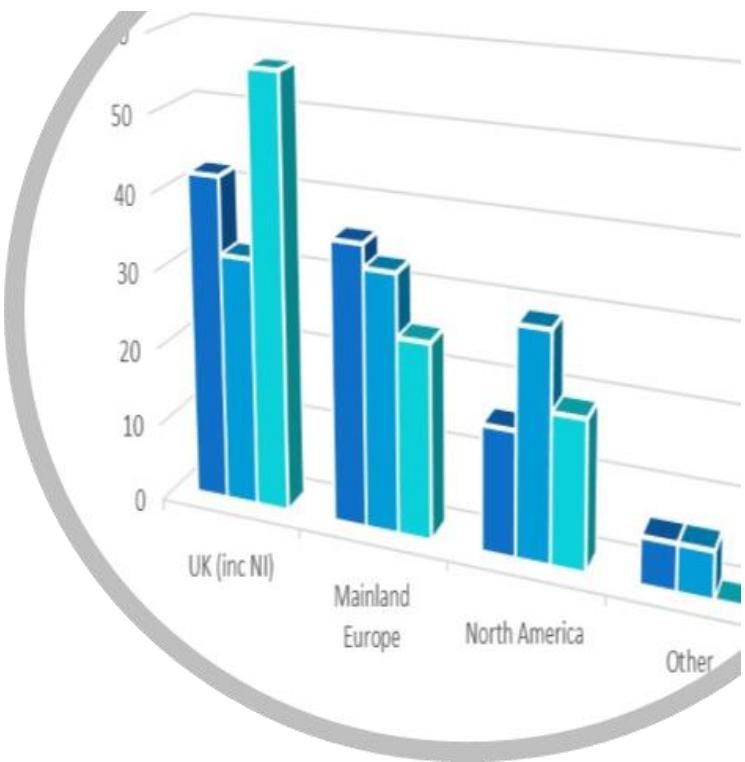
It is highly relevant to the development of the Mountshannon project. Additional Sea Eagle Project specific aspects are added to these in red text.



The analysis presented is not exhaustive but is illustrative of the range of issues and opportunities that exist both with the current project and looking to the future. A significant element of the future potential of the project lies with the market potential and audience reach which is discussed in the next section.

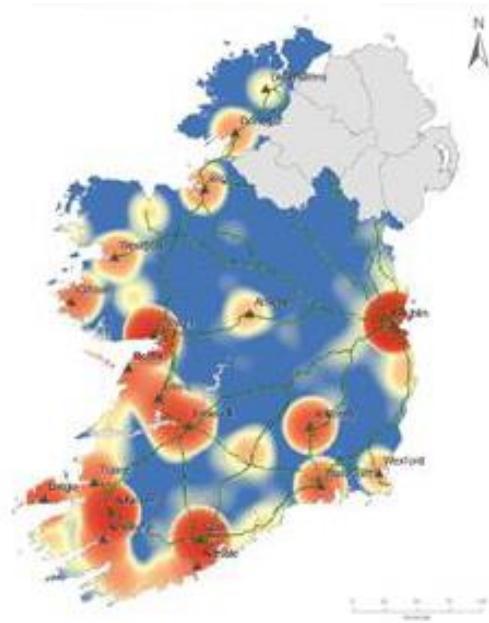
# 5. Markets

Analysis of actual and potential visitors



## Overview

Mountshannon is in a tourism hotspot, for both domestic and overseas visitors.



The problem is that it is 'off-the-road' so we first have to determine who our target market is, we have to tell them we are here, and we have to persuade them to visit. The information available to the Consulting Team indicates that the site receives some 3,000 visitors annually. The season runs from April to October with about 60% visiting over July and August.

A snapshot survey of 115 visitors to the White Tailed Eagle viewing point in Mountshannon last year (2017) provides important information about its customers and where they come from. This is discussed in more detail elsewhere (Chapter XX) along with information extracted from the Visitor Books, but key points to emerge were as follows:

- The vast majority of respondents accounting for 79 were from Ireland, followed by UK (incl. Northern Ireland) at 20, mainland Europe 9 and North America 7.
- 79 were on their first visit to Mountshannon and 32 were repeat visitors (balance did not indicate)
- 54 were staying locally
- 47 had specifically come to see the eagles
- A massive 103 said they would come back to see the eagles again

The survey provides very useful information on our customers, and in particular point to a quite high proportion of overseas visitors of around 30%. The fact that 40% had come specifically to see the eagles points to this as a driver with real potential for Mountshannon, reinforced hugely by the fact that **90%** said they would come back again. All-in-all, this augurs well for the site.

Turning to look at the regional situation, the top sites (attracting 100,000 visitors plus) are:

Attraction	County	2016 Visitor Nos. (2015 <i>in italics</i> )
Cliffs of Moher	Clare	1,427,166
Bunratty Castle and Folk Park	Clare	352,286
Rock of Cashel	Tipperary	338,830
Holy Cross Abbey ( <i>free attraction</i> )	Tipperary	210,000
Ailwee Cave and Burren Birds of Prey	Clare	140,000
Hunt Museum	Limerick	108,000
King John's Castle	Limerick	107,076

By way of more direct comparison, Craggaunowen, which is in the same hotspot but similarly ‘overlooked’, attracts about 20,000 visitors annually between April-September, but has the benefit of belonging to a family of attractions operated and marketed by Shannon Heritage. Its visitor profile is overwhelmingly independent travellers (70%) and domestic (80%). An interesting aspect of the White Tailed Eagle station is its apparent ability to attract a higher percentage of overseas visitors and this is critical for accessing development funding.

## General Market

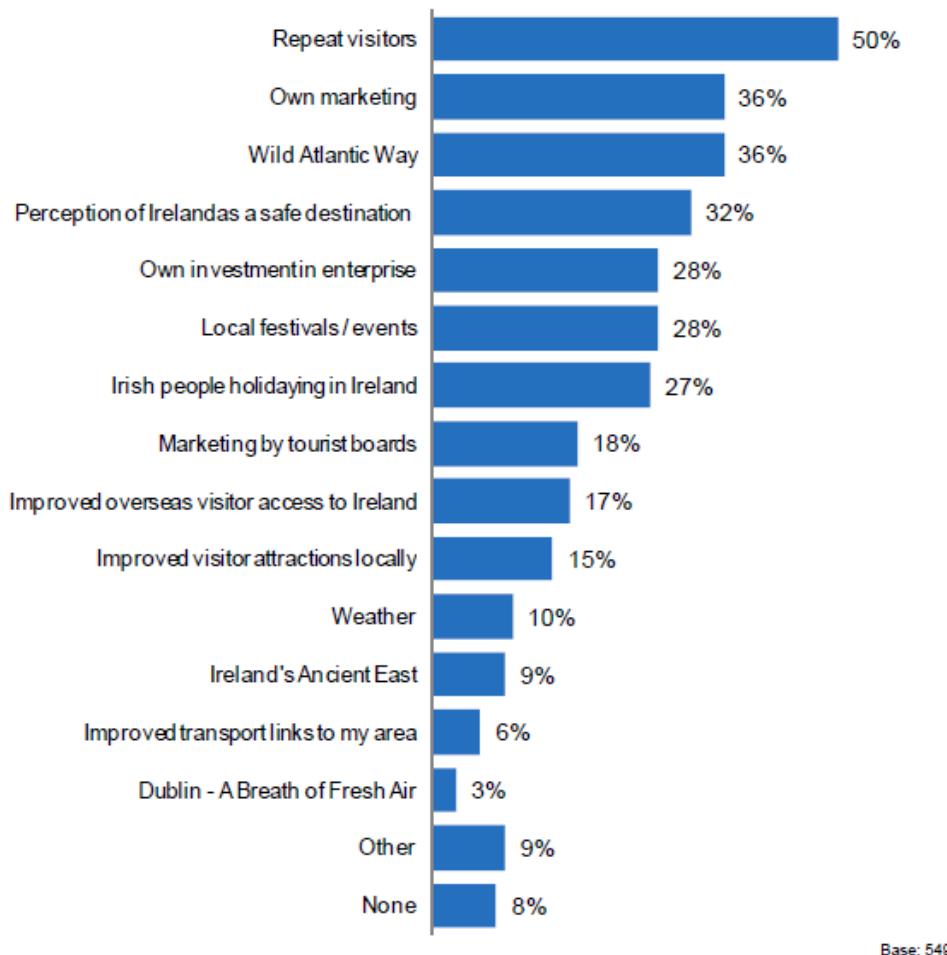
The tourism sector has been one of the great success stories of the Irish economy over the past two decades. This period has seen considerable and sustained growth with major investment in key infrastructure and a move from a focus on low cost to quality, and a greater awareness of what makes Ireland different. The recession had a major impact, naturally: the numbers of overseas visitors plummeted around 2007 and only began to recover properly in the last three years. However, business sentiment has improved significantly since 2008 (Fáilte Ireland’s Tourism Barometer Sep 2017), and the industry as a whole remains optimistic, although perhaps less so since the threat of Brexit emerged. Two-thirds of hotels report business up, and over half of guesthouses (where the German market appears to be growing). Nearly 50% of attractions reported visitor footfall up, even though a similar number reported British visitors down. What is making the difference this year is the increased numbers of North American visitors, which are more than compensating for the fall-off in UK visitor numbers at attractions in 2017.

### Business Sentiment Index – National

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>% Up</b>	14	15	28	39	41	60	68	70	72	<b>57</b>
<b>% Same</b>	18	11	25	31	25	27	21	23	19	<b>28</b>
<b>% Down</b>	68	74	47	30	35	13	11	7	9	<b>15</b>

As regards the main positive factors affecting business in 2017, most operators picked out repeat visitors and own marketing as most important, along with the success of the Wild Atlantic Way as a brand.

**Q11 "What are the main positive factors affecting your business this year?" (Prompted)**

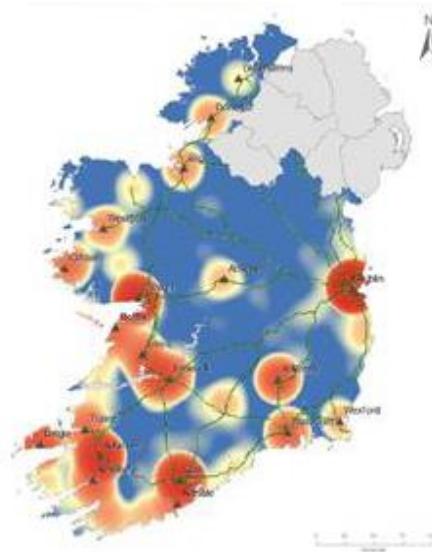


The main issues of concern were the Sterling-Euro exchange rate (42%), the strength of Dublin and other cities in attracting and keeping visitors there (26%), operating costs (26%), the weather (24%) and a perception that Ireland offers poor value for money (20%).

## Overseas Market

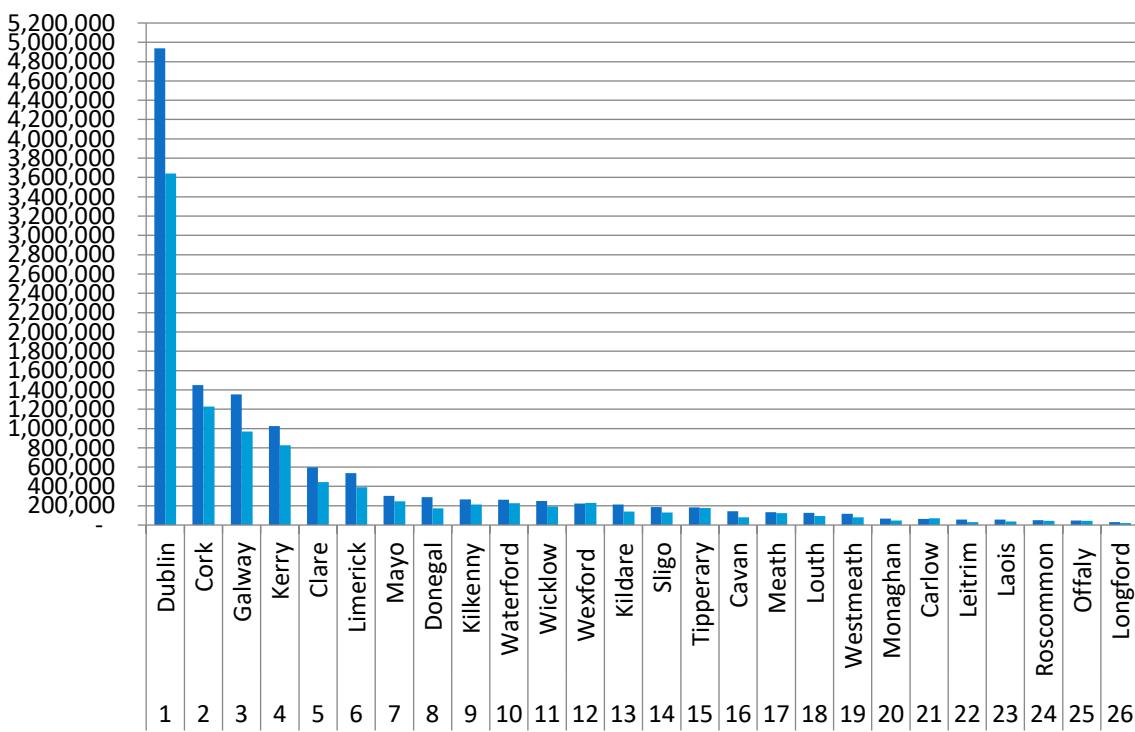
The overseas market continues to grow nationally, reaching **8.7 million** in 2015 (Fáilte Ireland: *Tourism Facts 2016* (Sep 2017)). Britain remains our largest market, accounting for nearly 42% of visitors, followed by mainland Europe at 36% and North America at 17%. Overall expenditure is estimated at **€6.6 billion**. Just over half of all overseas visitors (52%) come here during the months May-Sep. Tourism 'hotspots' concentrate around the coast (see opposite) and while Thurles itself is not a hotspot, it is relatively close to a cluster of hotspots.

By far the most important destination is Dublin, while Clare ranks a very respectable number 5 overall, showing substantial positive growth over the last few years. However, the figures relate much more closely to the west coast, where the impact of the Wild Atlantic Way has been most pronounced, rather than to East Clare. In fact, anecdotal evidence suggests that the success of the Wild Atlantic Way has actually pulled visitors away from areas East Clare towards the coast.

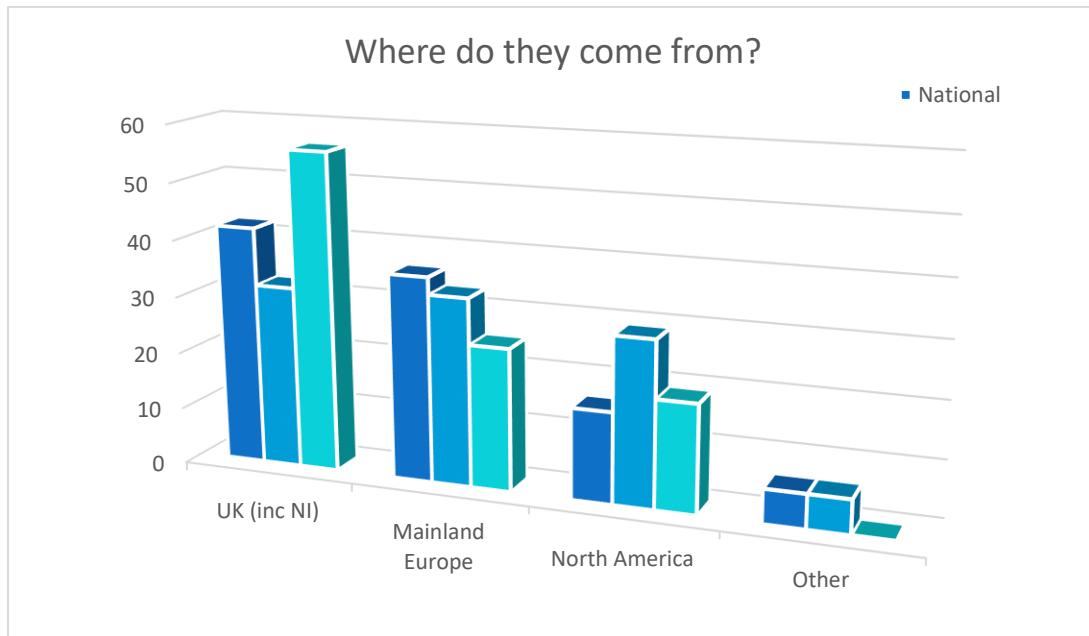


has  
like

**Overseas Visitors to Counties 2016 (blue) vs 2012 (red)**



In percentage terms, the relative representations of the main overseas markets are quite different for the Mid-west Region (Clare, Limerick and Tipperary North) to the national profile: the UK (incl. Northern Ireland) is less important while North America is much more important. Visitors from mainland Europe account for roughly the same as they do nationally (source *Tourism Facts 2016*, Fáilte Ireland August 2017). Interestingly, on the basis of the snapshot survey, the experience in Mountshannon in no reflects this regional profile for overseas visitors with UK visitors dominating the overseas market. This is an issue worth examining, especially given the anticipated impact of Brexit on this market.



In terms of value, the overseas market was worth about **€127m** to Clare in 2015 (*last year for which county-based statistics available*), with the per capita spend for each of the overseas markets as shown below.

	ALL	Britain	Mainland Europe	North America	Other					
Clare	597k	€127m	110k	€30m	221k	€29m	220k	€60m	46k	€9m

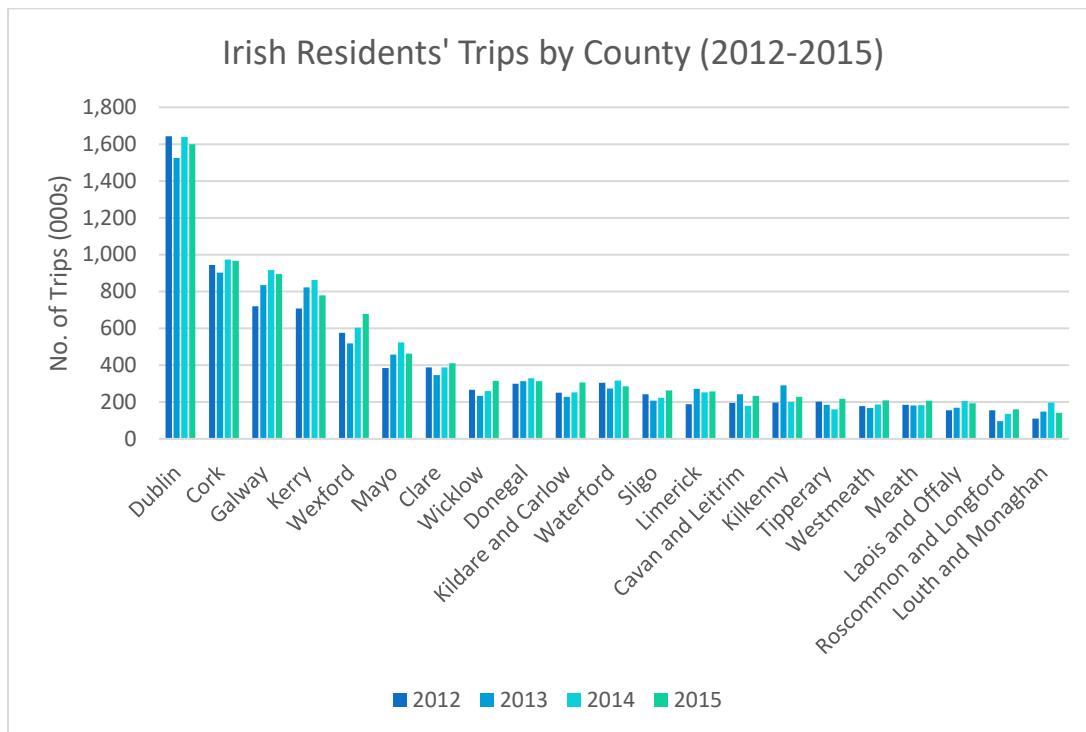
The vast majority (84%) are professionals and most (75%) are either travelling alone or as couples. Over half rent their own accommodation or stay with friends/relatives. In terms of age they breakdown nearly 50:50 over/under 45 years.

## Domestic Market

As with the overseas market, domestic trips by Irish residents have grown strongly in recent years, with over 9m trips made last year. Spend has also grown apace, reaching nearly €2bn in 2016 (€1.8bn to be precise).

At county level, the performance of Clare over the last few years is shown below compared with other Irish counties. As can be seen, it ranks **7<sup>th</sup> overall** in terms of domestic visits and is recovering strongly in the last

few years from a low in 2013 to reach 410,000 in 2015 (last year for which consolidated county-based statistics are available).



A 2016 survey by **myhome.ie** revealed that Kerry was the most popular destination for domestic visitors, followed by Galway, Cork, Wexford, and then Clare. These survey figures, based on 5,200 respondents, reflect the profile shown in the chart above quite well (leaving Dublin to one side which scores low due to the fact that many if not most respondents were from the capital anyway).

The actual figures for domestic figures to Clare for the last four years available are as follows, along with the total estimated spend:

	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Number</b>	388,000	347,000	388,000	410,000
<b>Spend</b>	€88.1m	€87.2m	€83.2m	€101.2m

## Drivers for Overseas Visitors

Fáilte Ireland's Port Survey 2016 assessed the importance and rating of various characteristics of Ireland for our overseas visitors. Top in terms of importance were friendly and hospitable people (92%) and beautiful scenery (91%). All were rated even higher on experience. Environmental issues such as natural attractions and an unspoilt environment were important for 85% and 82% of respondents respectively. However, when indicating if and why their expectations were exceeded the vast majority (66%) listed the Irish people as their reason, with only 25% naming nature or wildlife in that context. This tells us two things: one is that nature and wildlife is not an area where visitors' expectations are being exceeded, and the second is that the personal touch is key for overseas visitors – they like to meet Irish people. So, no matter how good or iconic

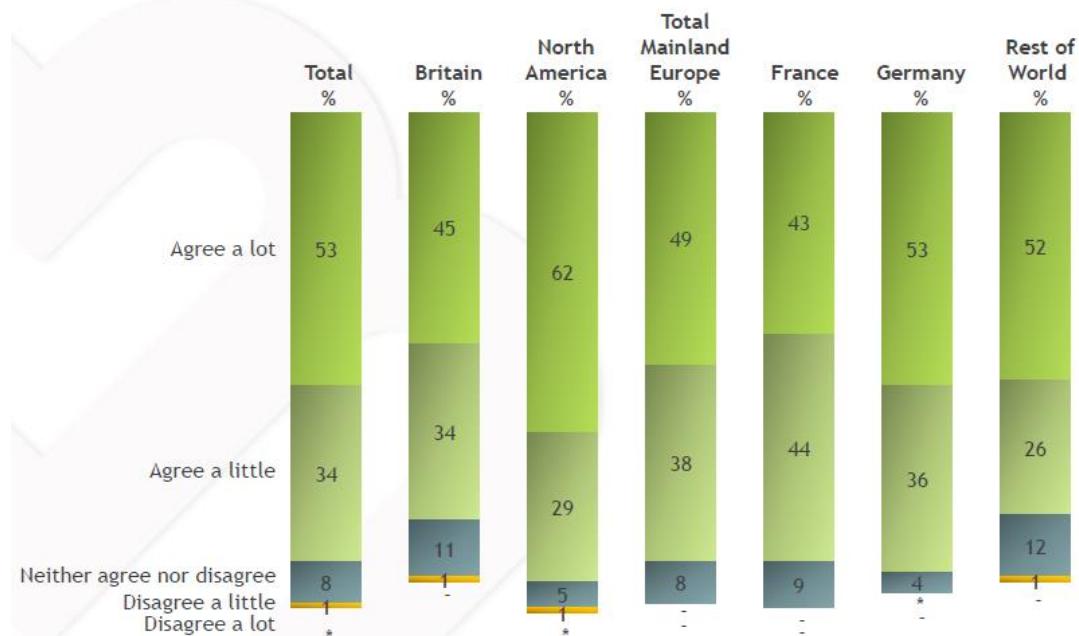
the experience we offer is, it must be delivered with that personal touch that is seen to be characteristic of Irish people.

	Total %	Britain %	North America %	Total Mainland Europe %	France %	Germany %	Rest of World %
<u><b>Friendliness/Hospitality/Pace of Life</b></u>							
Friendly, hospitable people	92	92	91	93	94	92	90
Easy, relaxed pace of life	72	77	66	74	80	73	74
<u><b>Environment</b></u>							
Beautiful scenery	91	82	94	92	90	93	93
Good range of natural attractions	85	77	89	85	87	87	86
Natural, unspoilt environment	82	75	82	86	86	87	79
Attractive cities/towns	80	77	87	75	74	70	82
<u><b>Value/price</b></u>							
Good all round value for money	72	79	76	65	64	59	72
Competitively priced air and sea fares	67	75	71	62	66	55	60

An earlier Port Survey (2015) determined that 87% of overseas visitors agreed that Ireland provided them with plenty of opportunities to enjoy '*revitalising outdoor activities and experiences*', with 53% saying they agreed strongly with that statement. This view was held most firmly by North Americans, who as we have seen visit the Shannon Region in particularly high numbers. This should be a market targeted by the White Tailed Eagle project.

Base: All Respondents

**'IRELAND PROVIDES PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES TO ENJOY REVITALISING OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES'**



In terms of what activities overseas visitors engage in while holidaying in Ireland, about **23%** do some hiking or cross-country walking. That probably represents the demographic most open to viewing the eagles as well.

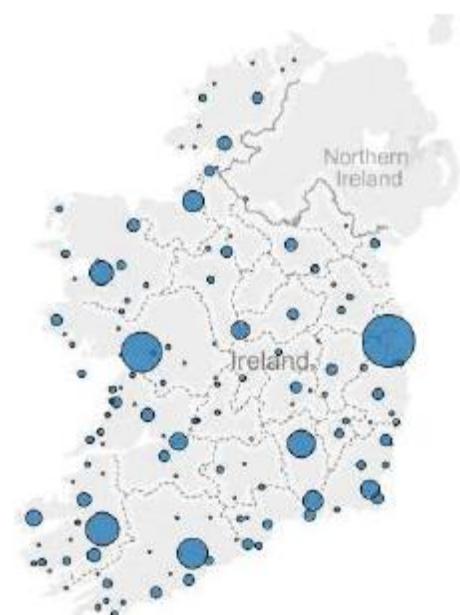
The **internet** remains the most important source of information amongst overseas visitors, both for choosing and planning their holidays. Guide books remain important too, especially for mainland European visitors and those from North America, both of whom record about a third of visitors using these media. The vast majority of overseas visitors (70-90%) arrange their own holidays here, rather than taking a package deal.

## Drivers for Domestic Visitors

The most recent information (at time of writing) published by Fáilte Ireland of domestic tourism can be found in Domestic Omnibus 2016. The study shows that in 2016 **9.3 million** trips were made by Irish residents, spending €1.8bn, up on 2015 by 2% and 3% respectively. This figure includes visits to friends and relatives, business and other trips, as well as domestic holidays. The domestic holiday figure was 4.8m, with a spend of €1.12 billion, up 4% and 5% respectively on the previous year. Short holidays (1-3 nights) were up on 2015 (+4%), while longer breaks (four nights plus) were up still more (+6%). July-September is by far the most important period for longer breaks (65%) but short breaks are much more evenly spread across the year. Short breaks can and are taken throughout the year.

In all, 58% of the population took at least one holiday break in Ireland. Most breaks were booked on relatively short notice, with 56% taken within a month of the booking. Just over half of all bookings were made using the internet. 35% of holiday bednights were spent in hotels, while 22% were in rented accommodation and 19% in own holiday-homes. The vast majority (83%) travelled in their own cars. 60% of those travelling, and 80% of all adults, were between 30 and 69 years old.

The main drivers for domestic holidays were to avoid the inconvenience of travelling abroad, followed by scenery, less expensive than travelling abroad, and proximity to home.

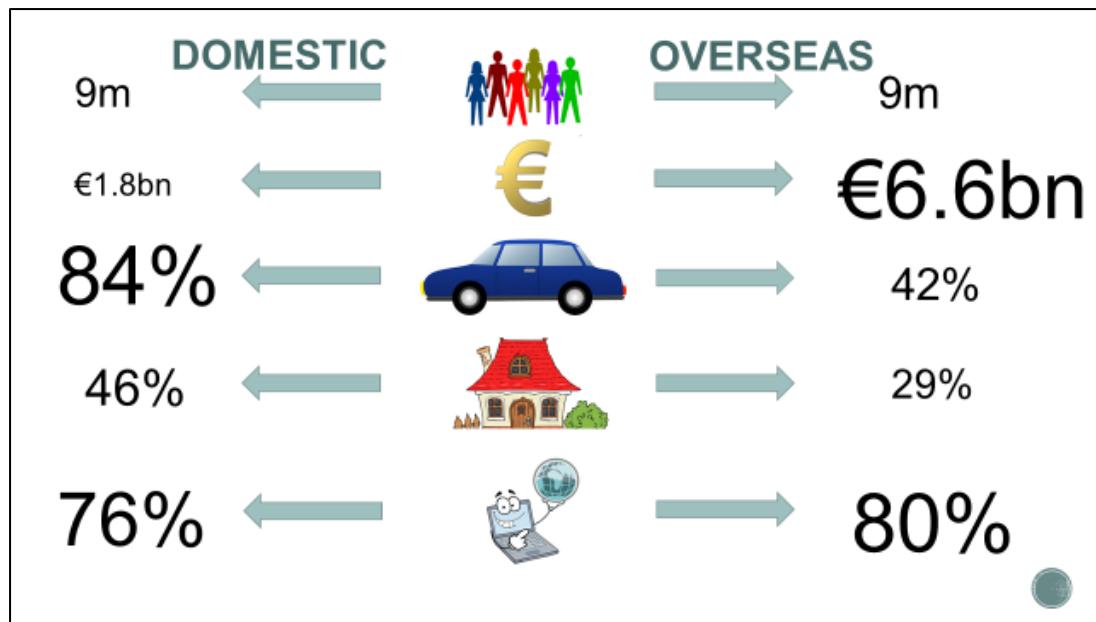


Locations of Overnight stays by Domestic Visitors in 2016

In terms of what Irish people do when on holiday in this country, the statistics are very clear: we like a very wide range of activities, in almost equal measure. The top activities for the last few years have been hiking and walking (25% in 2016), visits to houses and castles (24%) and visits to National Parks (23%). Visits to heritage/interpretative centres, are somewhat lower on our list of things to do at 20%.

## Overseas and Domestic High-level comparison

The following infographic compares some of the main characteristics of our overseas and domestic visitors in terms of numbers, spend, use of self-catering accommodation, and the internet for planning holidays/activities. For the new attraction at Hayes Hotel, this again emphasizes the importance of the domestic holidaymaker, who offers greater independence in terms of transport, but also the need to ensure targeted marketing outside the hotel/guesthouse sector.

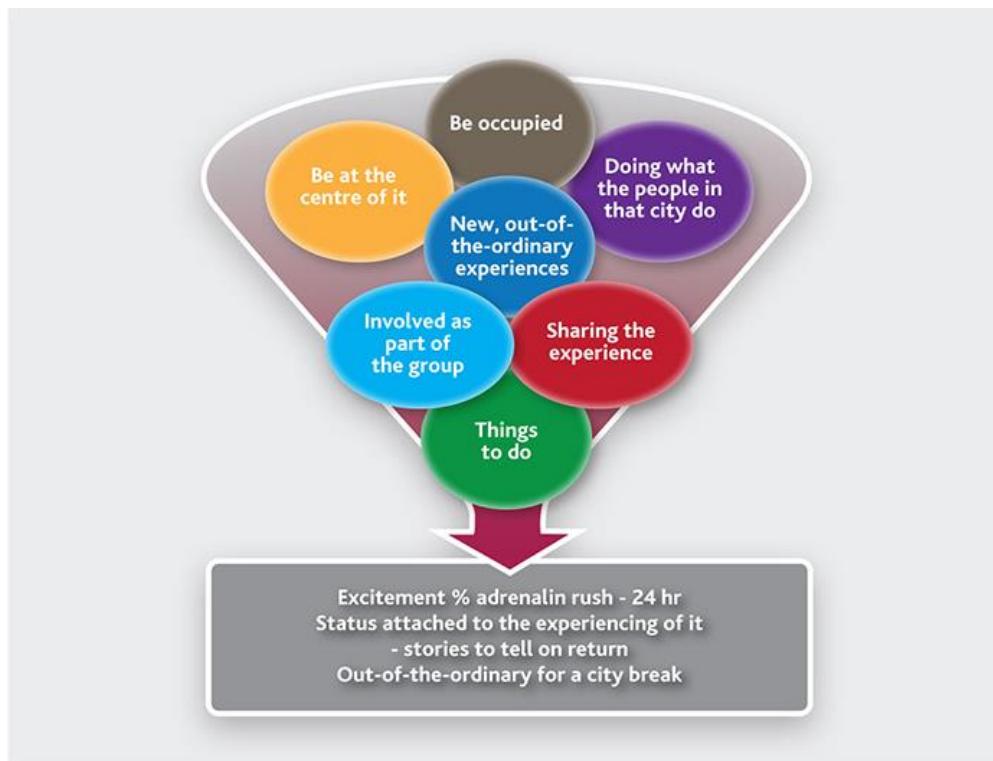


### Knowing your customer - Overseas & Domestic Segments

Fáilte Ireland divides the overseas market into three distinct segments. These are the 'Culturally Curious', 'Social Energisers' and 'Great Escapers'. The following series of infographics summarises their characteristics and motivations:



*The Culturally Curious*



*The Social Energisers*



*The Great Escapers*

The most important segment for the White Tailed Eagle project should be the Great Escapers segment, who enjoy nature and rural landscapes and whose sense of exploration and discovery would be well-matched by an iconic wildlife experience such as viewing the eagles. However, a very close focus should be kept on the Culturally Curious segment too, who constitute one of the most important overseas segments for Ireland and who are likely, ultimately, to be drawn to Mountshannon for the Holy Island experience.

On the domestic front, three segments have also been identified, as follows:



For the white-tailed eagle project, the most important segment here is probably 'Connected Families'. These make up about a quarter of the domestic market and consist of relatively young families. Parents are in their thirties or forties, with children generally under the age of ten. They want to spend time together, create memories and look for hidden gems and activities that can be enjoyed by the whole family. They rely heavily on internet and social media when looking for things to do.

### Coach Tourism

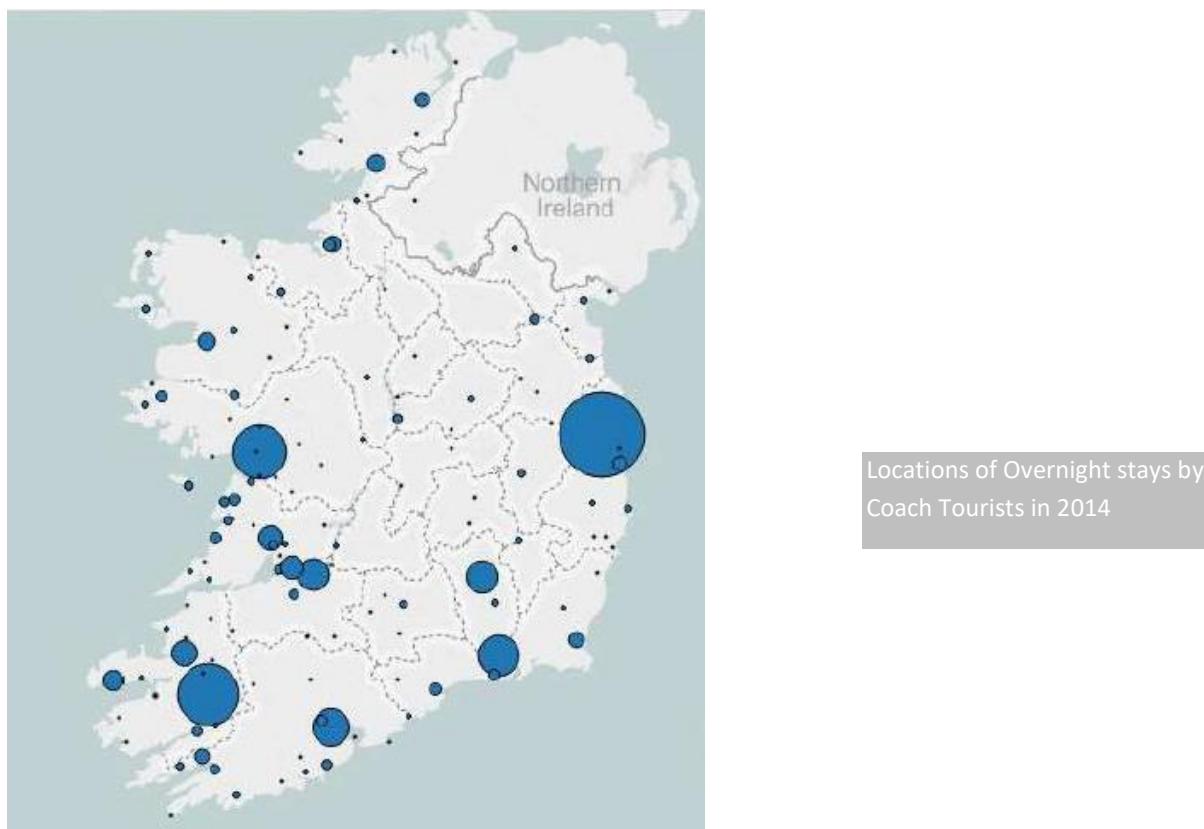
Coach tourism is a relatively important sector for the Shannon Region. Of the 369,000 visitors who travelled to and through Ireland by coach in 2014, **40%** came to the Shannon Region<sup>50</sup>. The market is growing, but Britain – once the most important market for coach tourism – has declined steadily and been overtaken in recent years by both North America and Mainland Europe. North America is by far the top market, however, and 50% of the North American coach market comes to the Shannon Region.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Britain	111	92	57	30	36	27
North America	88	115	117	148	137	204
Mainland Europe	61	67	75	75	67	87
Other	17	26	36	30	54	51
	<b>278</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>369</b>

<sup>50</sup> Source: *Coach Tourism 2014*. Fáilte Ireland, Sep 2015.

In terms of age profile, over half of coach tourists are **older than 54 years of age**, with 30% over 65. 80% travel between May and September, with just over 50% of visits occurring in July/August/September alone. Couples are the predominant party composition, representing 43% of all coach tourists, while other adult groups account for 42%. Visits to places of cultural or historical importance are the main activity, with **97%** engaging in this.

Coach tourists stay for eight nights on average, with the Shannon Region reasonably well represented for overnight stays. However, we don't see this segment as of any real importance to Mountshannon or the White Tailed Eagle Project. Niche-operators (like Paddywagon) or language-school tours (important for Craggaunowen) could be targeted in due course, but by-and-large it will be the free independent travellers who are of value.



## The Schools Market

The schools market is quite different to all others. On the one hand, it has very specific needs and very limited associated spend. On the other hand, it tends to deliver footfall off-peak which helps counteract the inevitable seasonality which dogs all visitor attractions. Taking counties Limerick, Tipperary and Clare as representing a natural catchment<sup>51</sup>, the most recent enrolment figures indicate the following school populations:

<sup>51</sup> East Galway would also be relevant but numbers are not broken down that way, so inclusion of all Tipperary here compensates in terms of establishing an overall pool.

County	Primary	Secondary	Totals
Clare	14,000	8,000	22,000
Tipperary	19,000	14,000	33,000
Limerick City	7,000	8,000	15,000
Limerick County	15,000	8,000	23,000
	<b>55,000</b>	<b>38,000</b>	<b>93,000</b>

The total available pool in terms of potential visits will considerably less, allowing that only certain year-groups would be relevant. We estimate this at about 40,000 students based on three Primary year groups and three Secondary to include Transition Year. Targeting 5% of these would represent some 2,000 visits in all, mostly offseason, making this an important market for the Project.

### What's the overall market potential?

The obvious area of growth is in the area of free independent travellers, both overseas and domestic.

Some 600,000 overseas visitors come to Clare annually and of those we know that 23%, or about 140,000 are very open to outdoor experiences and actually engage in hiking or cross-country walks. This represents a key pool to target. Unfortunately the vast majority of these will focus their activities on the west coast. We have no figures to hand to indicate what the breakdown might be but there are some ways of extrapolating that information. The W2 report recorded expenditure of €4.25m by overseas visitors in East Clare in 2015, and €9.75m by Domestic visitors. Based on the known expenditure for the county as a whole in each category, this suggests that about 3% of overseas visitors to the county come to East Clare and about 10% of domestic visitors. Converting to actual numbers, we get about **60,000** visitors in all – 41,000 domestic and 18,000 overseas. The breakdown is roughly **70:30** and this validates well against the actual breakdown for visitors to the White Tailed Eagle station annually, as gleaned from the visitor books.

So, it appears that there might be about 18,000 overseas visitors in the general area over the course of a normal year, but only about half of those will be here during the right season for the eagles – say **9,000**. Having chosen to come to East Clare in the first place, we can assume that these visitors would also be well-disposed to the idea of visiting the eagle station. In terms of domestic visitors, it appears that about 41,000 come to East Clare, of which 60% or 24,600 are here during the right period. About a quarter of domestic visitors are interested in outdoor pursuits like hiking and walking, or visiting national parks. That figure matches up well with the key domestic segment of relevance, Connected Families, which also represent about 25% of the market. However, on the basis of their choice of holiday location we believe that it would not be unreasonable to increase that figure to about 50% for those holidaying in East Clare – and quite possibly more – so, about **12,300**. On that basis, the available interested pool in the right area at the right time comes to some **21,300** in total between overseas and domestic visitors.

On that basis, a range of target participation-levels gives us the following projected visitor numbers, to which our targeted student visits at 2,250 per annum must be added::

TARGET	Visitors	Schools	Total
Forecast based on 10%	2,130	2,250	<b>4,380</b>
Forecast based on 20%	4,260	2,250	<b>6,510</b>
Forecast based on 50%	10,650	2,250	<b>12,900</b>

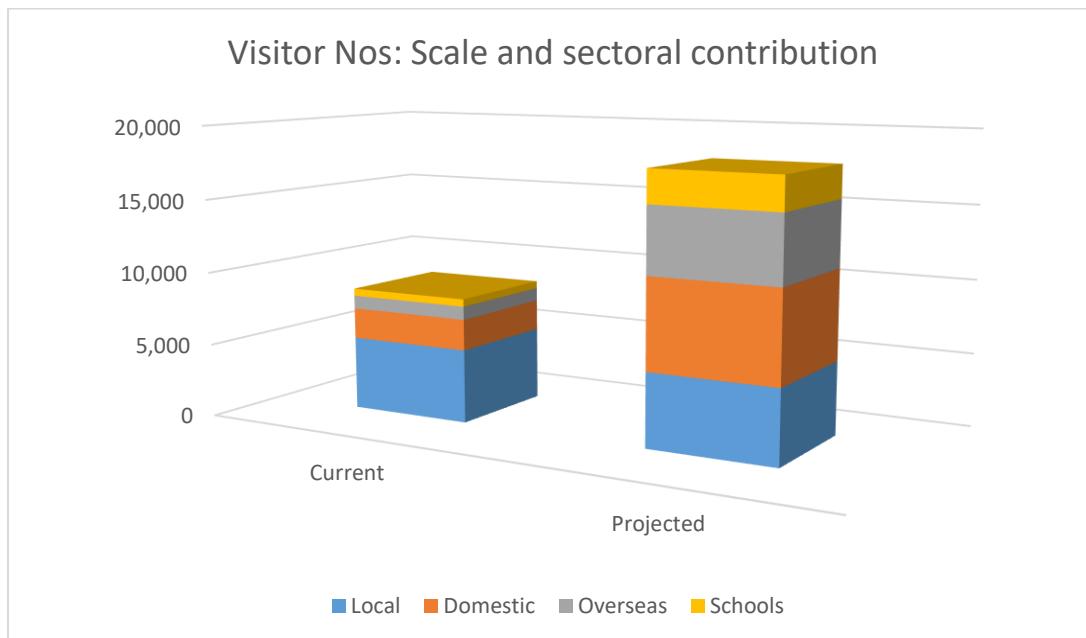
From analysis of the Visitor Books, it would seem that the Centre is already attracting about 20% of the combined, interested, visitor pool to this part of Clare. This is being achieved with very little marketing-effort

and is an indicator of the motivational power of the Sea Eagle to drive visits. It also supports our hypothesis that a very high proportion of visitors to East Clare would visit a new Eagle Centre. It also suggests that achieving a target to attract 50% of interested visitors, travelling here at the right time of the year, is quite feasible.

So, a reasonable projection for potential visits to a new Sea Eagle Centre in Mountshannon are between **6,000 and 13,000** annually.

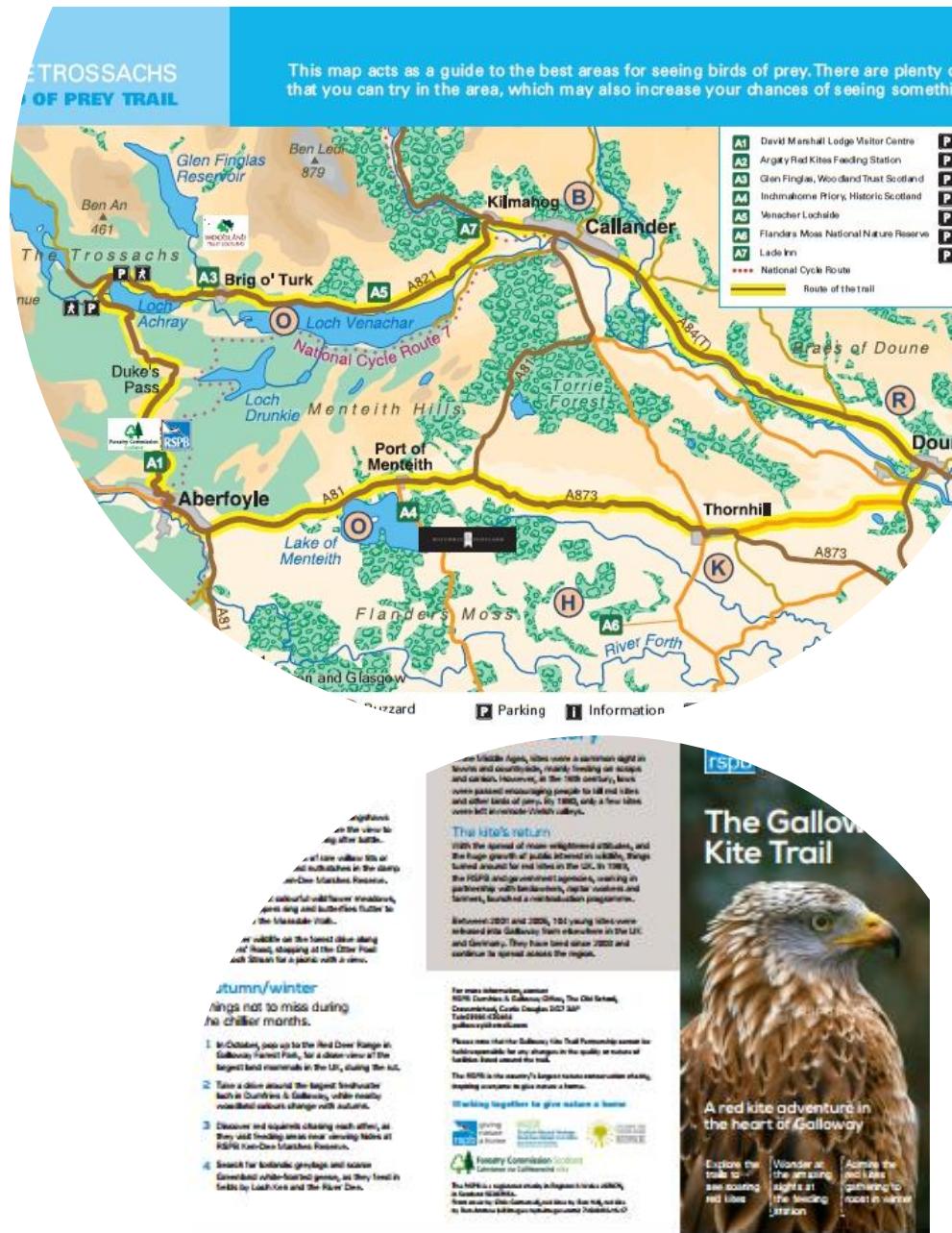
We also need to stress that these figures take no account of 'local' visits, which seem to be quite significant. Overall footfall to the Viewing Point in some years has been estimated at around 10,000 visits, as compared with the 3-4,000 evidenced through the Visitor Books. The difference is not too surprising, as many people do not sign the visitor book, and repeat local visitors especially so. It would be reasonable to assume that the balance between the Visitor Book entries and overall head counts is probably made up by local traffic. We can assume this custom will at least remain stable.

So, to our projections above, we need to add say **5,000** local visits, giving us an overall projection of between **11,000 and 18,000** visits annually as a reasonable target.



# 6. Case Studies

Examples, lessons learned and reference values relevant to the project



## The Galloway Kite Trail



## Wildlife Tourism - general

There is a scarcity of data and statistical information about the wildlife watching tourism sector and its economic value to local economies in Ireland. It is important to differentiate between the economic value of tourism, precisely of the wildlife watching market segment, and not the economic value of wildlife itself. Tourism is increasingly referred to as a driver of sustainable development. It was mentioned in the UNGA Resolution 66/288 which endorses the Outcome Document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), "The future we want", as one of the sectors capable of making a significant contribution to the three dimensions of sustainable development, noting also that tourism is linked closely to other sectors and can create decent jobs and generate trade opportunities. International organisation such as 'The International Ecotourism Society' have over 750 member organisations promoting responsible tourism practices that benefit conservation and communities in over 190 countries world-wide.

Eagles as sustainable tourism icons that provide educational and public relations tools and are symbolic of active conservation management<sup>52</sup>. Humans have been disconnected from birds of prey in the past, therefore providing opportunities to change human attitudes to these remarkable birds, such as at Lough Derg and other publicly accessible sites, will help to provide a more sustainable future for them.

## Examples of wildlife viewing, viewpoints and wildlife festival projects worldwide

### ***Raptor Viewing projects in the UK***

Examples from other raptor viewing projects have shown the benefits to local communities and local economies in properly managing and marketing of such projects. In the summer of 2006, circa 290,000 people went osprey-watching in Britain, contributing £3.5m to the areas around these sites and helping to support local communities (RSPB data). The Welsh Osprey Project opened in 2004 welcomes 73,000 visitors per annum; the Lake District Osprey project opened in 2001, hosts about 75,000 visitors per annum. At Loch Garten in Scotland, the RSPB Osprey Centre has up to 90,000 annual visitors. The Scottish Wildlife Trust's Loch of Lowes Osprey Centre (in Perthshire) opened in 1969 and by 2007 had received over 1.25m visits to the site.

On the Isle of Rhum, since the reintroduction of the White-tailed Sea Eagle in 1975, the local tourism industry around the island has diversified including neighbouring islands (Mull) with RSPB figures<sup>53</sup> indicating £5 million spent by tourists each year on Mull directly related to the White-tailed Eagle attraction, supporting up 64 to 108 full-time equivalent jobs by this spend each year and from £1.4 million to £2.4 million of local income is supported each year. Almost a quarter of visitors to the island are influenced to come by the attraction of the White-tailed Eagles. Mull Eagle Watch Tours operate annually during the summer months.

Another Scottish example is the Galloway Kite Trail which brought almost £700,000 of new spend into the local economy in 2009, supporting almost 20 full-time equivalent jobs<sup>54</sup>. Additional spending not accounted for includes spending by volunteers and reserve staff, direct expenditure by the reserve on goods and services provided by local and regional suppliers etc. Such projects offer additional benefits including health and well-being, educational and cultural that are harder to quantify but nonetheless important.

---

<sup>52</sup> *Invasive and Introduced Plants and Animals. Human perceptions, attitudes and approaches to management*. 2011. Edited by Rotherham, ID & Lambert RA. ISBN: 978-1-84971-071-8

<sup>53</sup> Molly D 2011 *Wildlife at Work. The economic impact of White-tailed Eagles on The Isle of Mull*. The RSPB Sandy.

<sup>54</sup> Molloy D and Rollie CJ 2010 *The Galloway Kite Trail: Economic impacts within Dumfries & Galloway*. RSPB Scotland, Edinburgh.

### ***Raptor viewing projects from further afield***

In Iceland, there is a White-tailed eagle Centre located at the Westfjords for visitors and in Norway, there is a centre at Flatanger, both located in more remote parts of Northern Europe and attracting visitors to remote locations.

In the US, with its national bird, the Bald Eagle and also the Golden Eagle there are many opportunities for viewing and most states where the birds are residents have at least one viewing project, often back up by online webcams. Some are more developed than others such as the National Eagle Centre in Minnesota, which is a large interpretive centre on the banks of the Mississippi and which house non-releasable, rehabilitated Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles and located in an area home to wintering Bald Eagles some of which are even which are attracted to the food put out for captive eagles and provide an impressive spectacle for visitors.

In Japan, birdwatching trips at Hokkaido afford visitors the chance to view the largest of the worlds eagles, the Steller's Sea Eagle and in winter up to 2,000 eagles congregate across a broad area. It has become a mecca for birdwatchers from across the globe to see this spectacular species at close quarters.

A range of example projects from Ireland and around the world of relevance to the Mountshannon project are described below in brief, with key examples, lessons or benefits identified where appropriate.

### ***Wildlife watching in Ireland – some examples***

The nature reserve and wildlife watching network is much less developed in Ireland than in the UK but there is a high degree of potential for expansion. In particular Ireland has a range of wildlife which is specialised to our northern maritime climate, temperate terrestrial and especially our marine and wetland habitats. Seabirds, cetaceans (whales and dolphins), migratory waterbirds like Whooper Swans are of particular significance globally but raptors still form a significant attraction, some of which is based around their comparative rarity here and the stories behind their conservation.

Examples of existing viewing projects and site include:

#### ***Peregrine watch, Wicklow Mountains National Park***

An event based project – park education guides showing tourists and visitors a pair of Peregrines nesting on a nearby cliff. Views are distant, cameras have been tried with mixed success in the past. Low key. Limited promotion probably limits effectiveness and variation in effort from year to year. This project is unlikely to drive footfall at the site as it is already a major visitor attraction in itself but may enhance awareness of one of the park's iconic species .

#### ***Cliffs of Moher seabird festival, County Clare***

Seabird viewing at a signature Wild Atlantic Way site. The Cliffs of Moher partner with, amongst others, BirdWatch Ireland, to run a series of events during a key seabird time. Expanding the visitor offer at this iconic site and working to mutual benefit of the partners. An example of strategic partnership, modest scale festival and mutual benefit.

Puffins are potentially the major feature at this site but there are other seabirds and Peregrine Falcon also. This festival will help raise awareness of te species present and diversify the way in which visitors experience this signature site.

#### ***Oxford Island, Lough Neagh***

A well-established site on the shore of Lough Neagh which attracts over 200,000 visits per annum. Owned and managed by Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Council much of the area is designated as a National Nature Reserve due to the diversity and local importance of habitats such as reed beds, open water, wildlife ponds, forests and wildflower meadows. The facility houses a number of facilities including a network of all

access walking trails, bird watching hides, the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Kinnego Marina and the Kinnego Bushcraft Centre – this is an extensive facility with a large visitor centre, café, retail outlet – pitched to attract and cater for large visitor numbers.

The facility dovetails into its environment well, using designed wetland and the lough shore, The wildlife spectacle is modest though of interest to birdwatchers but the centre depends on multiple uses and its ability to act as a trail head for its trail network and marina for recreational users

#### **Inch – Foyle Wildfowl Project, County Donegal**

A National Nature Reserve managed by NPWS (Inch Wildfowl reserve) and a local authority run series of shoreline access points on Lough Foyle near Myroe. Two sites twinned cross border went through an INTERREG funded programme to develop visitor infrastructure and events. The area being impressive for waterbirds, particularly in winter. Access was informal and relatively limited to a few small areas until around 2014 when a trail loop around the Inch lake was created and new viewpoints and signage installed there and at the Lough Foyle sites along with hides, screens and interpretation. The project saw overall visitor numbers increase from around 40000 to around 90000 but with out of state visitors accounting for only up to 15% of all visits. Additional annual visitor spend was estimated to comfortably exceed €700,000 per annum and equating to around 20 FTE jobs. This project utilised collaboration and a combination of impressive wildlife populations along with enhancing access in an area where access was relatively limited to unlock visitor activity.

## **CASE STUDY 1 Wexford Wildfowl Reserve**

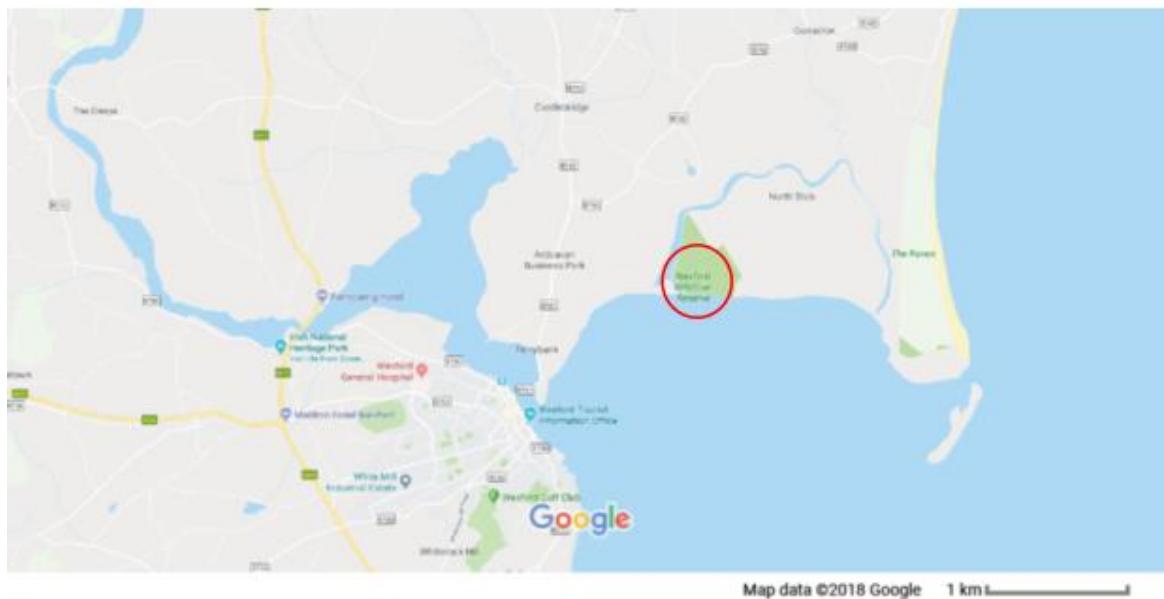
### **Site location and Context**

Established in 1969, the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve comprises some 200 hectares of reclaimed 'slobland' just north of Wexford Harbour. The word 'slob' is from the Irish and means mud, or oozy mire. These sloblands, known as 'The North Slob', were reclaimed from the sea in the 1840s and protected by a seawall. Much of the area is actually two meters below sea-level. The Reserve lands account for about a quarter of the North Slob and are of international importance, sheltering almost half of the world's population of Greenland

White-fronted Goose, which overwinters here from October to April. It is a Special Area of Protection for birds under the Europe-wide Natura 2000 network.

The Reserve was established by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in partnership with what is now Birdwatch Ireland, who provided the land and who remain joint owners of the Reserve. Day to day management is by the NPWS.





## How does it support itself?

The Reserve charges no admission fee, nor does it collect voluntary donations. All running costs are met out of central Government funds, via the relevant governing Department (currently the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht). A contribution towards upkeep is also made by Birdwatch Ireland.

## Facilities and Services

Only a very small area of the Reserve is open to the general public. The facilities here consist of a small but attractive Visitor Centre and exhibition, an eight-metre tall observation tower, three hides (different locations), a small pond with 'captive' waterfowl, along with ample carparking and toilets. The exhibition space covers about 12 X 10m internally and tells the story of the slob and its birdlife. There is also a 15min AV in reception. There are daily guided tours as well as a variety of events and activities (see below under *'How is the site managed?'*)

There is no café and no trails through the Reserve outside the immediate area of the visitor centre. In fact, one of the objectives of the approach taken here is to 'contain' visitors and protect the remainder of the Reserve from human interference.

## Metrics

The Reserve currently welcomes about 20,000 visitors annually, well down from a peak of over 40,000 in 2005. However, management in the Reserve consider that these former levels were too high and out of step with what could actually be accommodated on site. Visitor numbers are quite well distributed across the whole year, displaying much less of a 'bulge' in the summer months than is usually the case in a visitor attraction. Visitors are mostly couples and families, dominated by domestic holidaymakers in the summer months and local footfall (including local school-trips) in the off-season and shoulders. The site is well-known locally, which accounts for that local footfall, while visitor footfall is driven by low-level marketing (see next section below). There are no breakdowns of the overall footfall into local, domestic or overseas, however.



### How is the site managed?

The Reserve is managed on a day-to-day basis by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The total staff complement comprises of the Warden (onsite 3 days a week and with other NPWS functions), a Guide (sometimes two at peak times) recruited on six-month contracts, and a General Operative who is responsible for maintenance, opening and closing, and basic repairs. A contract cleaner comes on site for an hour or two 3 days a week. All running costs are met by the NPWS.

The site is open to the public all year round, seven days a week, 9am-5pm, closing only on Christmas Day. Weekend opening is staffed on an overtime basis.

The **visitor experience** begins online with a good website and Facebook presence

[www.wexfordwildfowlreserve.ie](http://www.wexfordwildfowlreserve.ie) (link to Facebook through there). On site, the sense of arrival is good, especially as the visitor approaches the Visitor Centre which is an attractive timber-clad building, passing a small pond with tame waterfowl. On the way in, various nesting boxes are visible, which add to the conservation 'atmosphere'. The reception area is bright and airy, doubling up as an AV space, with life-size models of White-fronted geese flying overhead. The exhibition area is colourful and engaging, with information panels, large displays and artefacts from earlier times on the Slobs. There is a small but nice children's zone with activity sheets and a giant jigsaw. Access to the observation is from inside the visitor centre and the views from the top are dramatic and extensive. Outside, an attractive (short) trail with various interpretative panels leads to a hide overlooking the 'closed' areas of the reserve. Two more hides are along the entrance road.



There is a free **Guided Tour** every day at 3pm, which last for about 40 mins. This takes the visitor around the centre, the hide, and finally the tower (which is by far the most popular element of the tour). The Guide brings viewing equipment that the tour group can use, although most will have brought their own.



Other activities offered include regular fieldtrips for **pond-dipping** (2hr sessions Tuesdays and Thursdays) and **bug hunts**. Both are hugely popular, regularly attracting 10-15 a session, and up to 60 on occasion. 10-15 is deemed optimal. These activities also form the core of school trips as well, including curricular studies at both primary and secondary level. Other very popular activities include a **regular lecture series** organised on site by the Wexford Naturalists Field Club, and an annual **Bat Walk** during Heritage Week (which includes a short lecture and twilight walk – this often turns into a stargazing session as well which has added to its popularity).

There is no Visitor Book, so information on visitor feedback is largely anecdotal. A feedback form is distributed to schools, but responses have not been fully analysed. They are reported as universally positive. The site receives 4.5 stars on TripAdvisor, with 86% of reviewers recording their experience as 'Very Good' or 'Excellent'.

The Reserve participates in various county-based tourism initiatives and promotions, and holiday-maker footfall is driven by that, via accommodation providers in many cases. The site is well-known locally and its various events and activities ensures that it remains relevant for the local community and that their awareness of the site remains high. Investment in promotion and marketing is negligible however, beyond printing of leaflets and Facebook updates. The site is well signposted from the main roads however.

#### **What do they do well? Examples of best practice?**

From a conservation perspective, what they do well here is protection of species and habitat, and raising awareness. The Reserve has become embedded in the local community, is well-known and well supported. They have succeeded in maintaining respectable visitor numbers (now stabilising at around 20,000) and very importantly spreading this out across the year. A very positive relationship with the local naturalist Field Club has proved critical in delivering out-of-hours events and lectures that would not otherwise be possible, and which again maintains relevance in the community. Activities such as pond-dipping are managed very well and have remained consistently popular, while the relationship with local schools – particularly with regard to curricular activities – is excellent. The combination of quality indoor and outdoor experiences is very important, and provides for an enjoyable visit in almost all weathers.



### **Lessons and relevance for Mountshannon**

Key lessons for Mountshannon include:

- The importance of having a physical centre, offering a range of experience and interaction
- The ability to tap local footfall effectively to spread visitor numbers across the year
- The value of building strong relationships with one or more other groups
- The importance of activities in broadening the visitor offering and encouraging return visits
- Not focusing on a single species: the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve is famous for the White-fronted Goose, resident for only a few months of the year; it secures visitors throughout the year by broadening its interest-base and through regular activities and events.

There are also lessons to be learnt from what the Reserve does NOT do well, or chooses not to do. First, because of how it is constituted, it has no access to an independent funding stream (such as LEADER). Second, it confines its visitors to a tiny portion of the Reserve albeit for good conservation reasons – however, this is not clear to visitors in advance, who often travel expecting to be able to ‘roam’ a special place. Expectations are sometimes not delivered upon as a result. Finally, it has no café or refreshments for sale – again, something which is increasingly expected by visitors and for which they are prepared to pay.

### **Conclusions**

A valuable model, both in terms of what it does and does not do. The key importance of not building everything upon a single species is well addressed here, along with a good mix of indoor and outdoor experience and strong local integration.

## CASE STUDY 2 Galloway Kite Trail, Galloway, Scotland

### Site Location & context

The Galloway Kite Trail is a partnership project, led by RSPB but incorporating a wide range of partners and sites. It lies alongside Loch Ken and the River Dee an area with a suite of wildlife not dissimilar to that at Lough Derg and incorporates private farmland, hill ground, public forests lands and an RSPB nature reserve.



### What are its aims?

It aims to provide a tourism stimulus around wildlife and particularly Red Kites. Kites were re-introduced to the area in 2001 and now successfully breeding in good numbers. Initially there were regular persecution incidents involving kites in the area with illegal poisonings and shootings and the establishment of the kite trail was in part at least, an attempt to realise greater awareness of the socio-economic value of the Red Kites and other wildlife of the area. This in turn was to engender more widespread support among the community and provide a level of peer scrutiny of illegal persecution in order to dissuade further incidents.

### How does it work?

The trail is an anticlockwise route of some twenty four miles around Loch Ken (winter) with an additional fourteen miles of forest drive (summer only). Being out on a bike is recommended and a great way to spot red kites for the energetic. Cycle racks provided at Boat O Rhone, New Galloway and Mossdale.

There are six outdoor viewpoints with interpretation boards; nine walks, (including a short path to a feeding station); four hides; one feeding station; one visitor centre with CCTV screen, (summer only); eleven unique information boards in business premises around Loch Ken and Castle Douglas; road signs and two red kite sculptures, (at Parton and Mossdale). Four information shelters have been built around the trail and at Castle Douglas to provide information on the Trail, red kites and other aspects about the local area



## Good kite viewing

### Parton Heritage Trail

Opposite Loch Ken Holiday Park. Circular walk 3 miles (4.8 km), viewpoint ½ mile (0.8 km) from car park.

### Bennan viewpoint

Uphill walk ¼ mile (500 m), steep in places, to viewpoint.

### The Secret Cages

Parking at Bennan Viewpoint car park. Walk to cages ¼ mile (1.2 km), circular walk including Bennan Viewpoint 1½ miles (2.4 km).

### Mossdale Walk

From car park near red kite sculpture, follow old railway line under the road bridge and continue following way-markers along the 1½ miles (2.4 km) circular trail.

### Bellymack Hill Kite Feeding Station

Follow drive from B795 to car park and Visitor Centre. Café, shop, toilets and nature trail. Kites fed at 2 pm. Admission charges apply.

### RSPB Ken-Dee Marshes

Disabled parking at first hide. Three mile (4.8 km), return walk along track from car park to viewing platform and hides.

### Neilson's Monument

Parking at the Barstobrick Visitor Centre. Half a mile (0.8 km), uphill walk to monument and viewpoint, uneven in places.

Galloway Kite trail map (courtesy GKT)

## Who runs it?

The RSPB lead the co-ordination of the trail but many partners are involved including public landowners (e.g. Forestry Commission) and farmers, business, accommodation providers, pubs and shops and community groups.

## How does it support and manage itself?

There is a partnership group supporting the project and RSPB provide staff resources to manage it some of which are supported in part by grants.

The project was initially funded by LEADER and aspects ERDF funding through the objective 5 programme.

In April 2007 the Sulwath Connections Landscape Partnership Project went live bringing in grant of over £165,000 through a partnership between The Heritage Lottery Fund, RSPB, Dumfries & Galloway Council and Scottish Natural Heritage. The grant funded a full time Galloway Kite Trail Community Liaison Officer for three years, the creation of new information points and interpretation in villages around the trail, and the creation of an audio guide and leaflet.

During 2010 - 2012, the trail and other RSPB work in this region received funding through the Connecting Communities With Wildlife project. This project was part financed by the Scottish Government and the European Community, Dumfries and Galloway LEADER 2007 - 2013 Programme, SNH and RSPB Scotland.

This funded the community liaison post for a further two years and also the production of a wildlife viewing manual - Places to enjoy Wildlife in Dumfries & Galloway, promoting places wildlife attractions across the region to visitors coming to the kite trail. A feasibility study was also undertaken to investigate the possibility of filming and showing live footage of a red kite nest in the Galloway area.

### **What facilities and services are there?**

Businesses and sites provide support and information on the red kite project and Kite trail as well as offering a variety of services in the area. The initial businesses associated with the trail included three hotels, two public houses, one Guesthouse, one Holiday Park and one Holiday Cottage business. Since 2003, the popularity of the trail has resulted in over 30 businesses supporting the project, ranging from tea rooms and village shops to an art gallery, visitor centres and an outdoor activity centre. Key features of the trail include:

- **Kite Feeding Station** - Bellymack Hill Farm<sup>55</sup> - provides a hide and kite feeding site for viewing and photographing spectacular numbers of kites from a hide and there is a small charge to visit this as well as a farm shop.
- **Shops and Businesses** - with information, accommodation food etc – there are a range of business including craft shops, art galleries, campsites, B&Bs, pubs, an activity centre and a holiday park that participate in the trail and provide information and sometimes viewpoints for kites and other wildlife and in return benefit from the visitor flow to see the wildlife or who choose to stay longer because of it.
- **Visitor Centre** – there is no dedicated visitor centre but the Forestry Commission centre at Clatteringshaws Loch and the National Trust for Scotland Centre at Threave Castle provide visitor hubs at either end of the trail and act as valuable orientation points
- **Nature Reserves** – there are nature reserves with trails and hides where kites, woodland and wetland birds and other wildlife like Red Squirrels are popular with visitors and form a part of many visitors' itineraries. The RSPB Ken-Dee marshes reserve<sup>56</sup> in particular is at the heart of the trail

### **Metrics**

The 2010 report The Galloway Kite Trail: Economic impacts within Dumfries & Galloway published by RSPB Scotland<sup>57</sup> produced a range of metrics for the project's impact. Some important statistics include:

- Over 10% of visitors to Dumfries and Galloway cite the GKT as a motivating factor for their visit.
- Visitor spend directly attributable to those primarily visiting the GKT reached over €700,000 in 2009 and equating to nearly 20 FTE jobs
- The trend of impact improved between 2004 and 2009.
- The total spend contributed by all visitors to the trail exceeded €6million in 2009.
- A very wide range of other benefits are attributed to the trail not least the raising of awareness of the value of nature conservation and Other benefits (Community, environment, amenity etc)

### **What do they do well?**

- Partnerships with business – strong support and an extensive business network in a very rural area

---

<sup>55</sup> [www.bellymackhillfarm.co.uk](http://www.bellymackhillfarm.co.uk)

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/ken-dee-marshes/>

<sup>57</sup> Molloy, D. and Rollie, C.J., 2010. The Galloway Kite Trail: Economic impacts within Dumfries & Galloway. RSPB Scotland, Edinburgh. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/positions/economics/the-galloway-kite-trail.pdf>

Branding – a distinctive and clearly identifiable logo used consistently and frequently across all of the sites and materials

- Staff enthusiasm and energy – Chris Rollie, Area Manager for RSPB and driving force behind delivery of the project has maintained focus and energy throughout the project. In discussing the project, Chris has also praised the enthusiasm and commitment of staff and attributed much success to a wider team of staff and volunteers delivering to a clear plan and a consistent message.
- Making the most of what they have – the Kite Trail is not the Scottish Highlands and does not have the reputation and majestic scenery but with good marketing and an attractive packaging up of a visitor experience across a range of business types catering to a broad spectrum of visitors, the trail has been successful on many fronts.
- Planning funding and getting strategic partnerships organised – build a support base of funding and seek to generate economic benefits for the local community, engender local support and build value

#### **Lessons & relevance to Mountshannon WTSE viewing**

The kite trails extends over a larger area than the proposed Mountshannon project but much of the landscape and many of the opportunities that exist are quite similar. It could be argued that a Lough Derg - wide Sea Eagle Trail might be viable but the Mountshannon project would in any event be vital to such a venture and would be a primary area for developing opportunities and at modest cost.

Similar motivations lie behind achieving increased awareness as were desirable for the Kite trail, that of engendering support for Eagle conservation and wildlife generally. The motivation then extends to developing the community cohesion around the ideas to be able to deliver a project of genuine benefit to wildlife and people.

Some key lessons include:

Forge a diverse partnership with the right motivations – the scale of the partnership and network of connections in the Kite trail is important. Bringing the right people together at Mountshannon will be equally important

Develop a clear identifiable brand

Much of the Kite trail hangs together across many diverse sites due to its distinctive “red” Kite logo, simple strong name the way it is consistently used across various sites and signage – enabling diverse styles and levels of interpretation and media to work in harmony

Recruit a project LEADER with the rights skills and energy – a champion of the project to lead and drive activity is vital. Funding for such a post can be difficult to achieve but a strong case should be made and building the post around the right person may also be important.

Modest funding can still achieve a lot – the scale of the kite project is very modest for its relative impact. Similar scale of resources or perhaps a bit lower even would likely be required for the Mountshannon Eagle project (in the low hundreds of thousands rather than millions) and the potential scale of benefit for the local area is very significant.

“This to me is an outstanding example of how a modestly funded project, the initial focus of which centred on wildlife, interpretation and enjoyment of rural Dumfries & Galloway, can be transformed into a wildlife tourism project that brings long term sustainable benefits to a wide range of local community and business interests.”

Riddell Graham, Director of Partnerships for VisitScotland



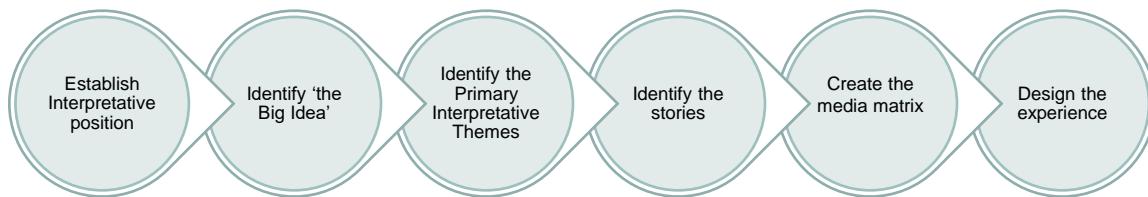
# 7. Project Planning

Vision, facilities, markets, business model, costs and funding



## Introduction

There are six main steps in planning and delivering a visitor experience. While this report has been commissioned as a development plan, rather than a 'design and deliver' it is still useful to see how the overall process works and what those individual steps are. The following graphic provides a quick overview of this:



As part of the present study, the first three steps are addressed, setting a foundation for a more detailed design at a later stage represented in turn by completion of the last three steps. To complete those steps requires a physical space to be created combining indoor and outdoor facilities and events and through which the final visitor experience and flows are designed.

Development of these first three steps follow.

## Vision and themes

### *Establishing an Interpretative Position*

The first step in designing a visitor experience is to establish 'an interpretative position'. We do this by asking a series of questions:

- Who is this new experience 'for'?
- Why are we creating it?
- What do we want to give our visitors?
- Where will we make it happen?
- When will we make it happen?

These are questions which were explored with the community sea eagle group and the following emerged as the drivers for, and desired outcomes from, a possible redevelopment:

*Who is it for?*

- Tourists and locals
- Domestic and overseas
- Younger people and schoolchildren
- To bring tourists back into Mountshannon – economic revival (note decline of cruiser traffic)
- Protection of the birds – including wardening
- Create local employment

*Why are we doing it?*

What do we want to give people

- Social - improving where we live – quality for people versus quantity of people coming to visit
- Creating a renewed sense of community ownership and pride.
- A package that encourages people to come, stay longer and spend locally
- Boat trips
- Walking routes, loop path
- Grounded – must be financially feasible
- Want to give people a buzz – unique – tell others – awareness – educational – entertain
- Address Nature Deficit Disorder!!
- Heritage – Wildlife – Spirituality
- A new, professional, organizational structure – current voluntary model not sustainable.

Where will we make it happen?

- Harbour/lakeshore
- Walking routes
- Eagle viewing centre – keep what you have and add to anything new
- ‘Bundle-up’ wherever possible and appropriate, especially with new Holy Island Interpretative Centre
- Think of the wider visitor landscape and particularly of the lake as a whole: joined up approach where attractions are not competing with each other.
- phased 5 year plan
- starting this year; 2018-2023
- progress as early as possible and identify ‘quick wins’
- critical to ‘claim the space’ and develop a strong negotiating position in advance of Holy Island development

When will we make it happen?

Converted into a narrative, the feedback received from this exercise might read as follows:

“

We want to create something unique that brings tourists back into the area and encourages them to stay longer, that supports employment, protects the eagles and helps build a renewed sense of pride in our community.

We want it to be enjoyed by young and old, locals and visitors alike. We want to offer people a range of activities and experiences, which are both enjoyable and educational, and which in particular encourage young people to re-engage with the natural world.

We see this as more than just about the eagles – it is about the wider visitor landscape along the Lakeshore, linking activities and attractions into an exciting outdoor visitor experience. This is something which will develop over time but we see a space right now which we want to occupy and use as a catalyst to make other things happen.

### *The Big Idea*

Since every project like this needs a ‘Big idea’, a single simple strategic objective that underpins everything, we believe this is best expressed as the creation of **iconic wildlife encounters**.

Delivering this on the ground involves bringing together a whole range of different strands. One is a **clear concept**, then there is the **physical infrastructure** on the ground and the nature of the **visitor offering**; then comes **marketing and merchandising**, and finally we need a **management structure**.



The central concept is clear – the creation of **iconic wildlife encounters** – and we also have a narrative to support and expand that, based on what was gleaned from those five questions we asked at the very start of the process. The next step is to identify what are termed the ‘Primary Interpretative themes’ which will inform and guide what we offer visitors. We see these as follows:



**The Eagles** are the iconic symbol of the entire experience, the ultimate wildlife encounter and one all the more special because it cannot be guaranteed.

**Discovering Raptors** extends the encounter to a range of other birds of prey, some of whom the visitor will have a much better chance of seeing on their visit.

**Exploring the Lake** is something which can be done at different levels: it covers both a physical exploration of the lake and its landscape, by foot or by boat, and a more 'intellectual' one exploring its history, folklore, geology and ecology.

**Hidden Wildlife** introduces the visitor to the 'secret' world of the lake, particularly its wildlife – birds, mammals, insects and rare fish that live deep in the waters. Wildlife cams are one way of revealing this hidden world, but so are group activities like bug-hunts, bat-walks and pond dipping which might form the basis of events and educational activities.

**Science and Research** provides an opportunity to introduce the visitor to the ongoing conservation efforts of so many different bodies who are all working to understand and save this unique landscape and its iconic eagles, partnering with the people of Mountshannon and the wider community of the lake.

Each of these themes needs to be delivered in some way to the visitor, and some will be delivered in several different ways. The interaction begins online with a new website, continues onsite in Mountshannon in a small visitor centre, and in the field through guided or self-guided tours on and off the lake, and through a growing network of trails and viewpoints.

### What will this look like?

The "big idea" presented above presents a coherent and strong ongoing central tenet around which the project can be developed. It is consistent with the vision and aspirations of the community and builds on proven experience from the existing project and of similar projects elsewhere while offering a strong USP

Elements within the initial scoping of the community council were identified in initial discussions and background information provided by MSCC. The plan will include aspects of these elements throughout project delivery and they are addressed in turn below.

### ***The Bird Viewing experience of Lough Derg and environs***

Central to the whole project are the eagles. The presence of a visible eagle nest while very important is not project critical as it is likely that eagles will frequent the area even if not nesting and may be attracted or viewed in a number of ways. In other words, even if Mountshannon lost the resident pair of sea eagles, it would still remain a viable proposition as a central concept and the area could still offer viewing opportunities and thus retain this brand element.

The viewing experience for the eagles in future can consist of six or more main elements

1. **The bird viewing and Information point** – this would be developed to be a larger and more refined building (moving away from the cramped portacabin offered currently) and outside space (potentially covered), enhanced optical equipment and interpretive displays. Probably initially as a temporary building of the garden building style but potentially progressing to a built structure, potentially in tandem with developments for Inis Cealtra.

The location on the lake shore in the village is vital and there are apparent options for development of a new viewing facility but this will be highly dependent upon site availability, planning issues and cost

The viewing facility should include a Café and retail space within it and detailed design will be subject to available sites and build options but an internal space of 40 – 60 sq. metres may be feasible and consideration of outside space for good weather viewing, al fresco seating and coffees and muster for events would be of particular value and may reduce the size of internal space required.

2. **Technology** – cameras on raptor nests and at feeding stations can be developed at relatively low cost and provide a resource for interpretive use. In the case of the Sea Eagles, this would provide a very good enhanced viewing experience and at times or in seasons when eagles are not present, recorded footage can be a valuable substitute and can be interpreted by personnel within a centre. Care and specialist advice needs to be taken in siting such cameras and it may not be feasible at the original nest itself  
Other species could also be used as well as or instead and can be captivating for an audience – kestrel, Sparrowhawk or buzzard would be suitable species in the area.
3. **Feeding sites** – raptor feeding sites at a “secret” location – guided tours into a hide overlooking a raptor feeding site could prove popular – simple infrastructure and regular feeding following best practice guidance could develop a powerful experience for visitors, albeit without the sheer numbers or spectacle of e.g. red kites but with the real potential of Sea Eagles attending such a site.
4. **Boat trips** – sea eagle viewing from boats, enhanced with the development of careful feeding akin to those boats seen in Mull would provide a highly attractive experience for visitors and photographers and could be a key development in the project. This would be dependent upon partnering or bundling with a suitable operator and the development of an approved approach and method.
5. **Viewpoint and trail network targeting raptors and hidden wildlife** – a network of trails and discovery points for walking, cycling and driving visitors to access good areas for viewing eagles, raptors and less obvious wildlife can be easily developed with modest infrastructure and with the potential to develop events around these.
6. **Events and festivals** – seasonal events, a wildlife festival and guided walks or tours would enhance the projects offerings significantly and provide constant and dynamic content for promotion, awareness and attracting visitors. These would assist significantly out with the main, April -August)

eagle season and bring stretch to the offerings as well as providing a focus for efficient resource allocation.

***Merchandising and other options*** – a key element of the financial viability of a future project would be the ability to bring in unrestricted revenue funding through measures to raise donative and retail income. While this may be viewed as competition with other retailers locally, the reality is there are few other outlets in competition and further, direct competition would be avoidable in the most part while at the same time projected increased visitor numbers would have an overall positive effect on all local retailers. Products for sale would be directed towards hot drinks (not hot food), souvenir and project items – pin badges, information booklets, pictures, maps, mugs and the like.

### ***Bird Viewing Tours in tandem with Inis Cealtra or perhaps separately and involving other birds on Lough Derg.***

The concept of bird viewing tours on the lake is feasible at least as far as eagles are concerned. The potential to develop boat trips from Mountshannon harbour either independently or with partner operators is likely to be realistic but in the first instance this will require engagement between the key stakeholders and the development of a pilot project or plan for testing. The long term viability may well hinge on the developments at Inis Cealtra.

There are few other bird viewing opportunities on the lake itself in the immediate Mountshannon area other than the eagles but there are common species which can add to the experience and be interpreted within any boat trip (e.g. Great Crested Grebe, Cormorant, Common tern).

### ***The Aistear Park.***

The park is a quirky, attractive and a well-kept space. With enhanced interpretation and signage, it could form part of the welcoming and orientation experience, perhaps a threshold space through which at least some visitors might approach the viewing area – this would require some planning of walking routes/paths and attendant groundworks to get the layout right to complement the position of a viewing facility.

There is an excellent open amphitheatre and plenty green space on which events could be held – perhaps daily meet and greet, nature based events and even evening talks – a canopy cover could be developed for inclement weather perhaps and it may form a central point for guided walks or even a small nature festival.

### ***Development of Nature Trails***

There are already walking routes through nearby Wood Park forest – the option to create further trails should be developed to include:

- Linking Woodpark to other routes
- Developing one main signature trail and identity
- Expanding trails to sections of shoreline, moorland areas and to heritage sites (e.g. dolmen)
- Panoramic viewpoints and wildlife discovery points
- Development of squirrel, woodland bird and raptor feeding stations with hides/"secret" viewpoints

### ***Lake based opportunities***

The development and onward marketing of the Blueway sits with Waterways Ireland and Mountshannon will likely be an important node on that Blueway. Self-discovery tours for those coming to kayak or boat on the lake can be developed with simple merchandising – a plasticised or laminated bird identification card

or waterway nature trail guide could be an excellent, sellable resource. A “must do” activity for waterborne visitors to the area

### ***Other local attractions***

Encouraging people to stay in and around Mountshannon by keeping development and promotion of “local” attractions LOCAL! Linking to the Blueway (further tapping into the “great escaper” visitor segment) and Inis Cealtra (for those “Culturally Curious” visitors) will be key and focussing within this project on making the iconic wildlife experiences substantial and impactful. Making sure wider development of local attractions are part of the project’s life and development will be important into the future in particular working closely with the development of any activity around Inis Cealtra.

The immediate priority for this project though should be to focus on the development of the suite iconic wildlife experiences.

### ***Photographic opportunities***

Photography opportunities for rare or iconic wildlife are sought after by many in the growing community of wildlife photographers. The Mountshannon area potentially offers opportunities for a number of key species and hides, photo stops and feeding sites could be developed along trails and at key points to enable this to develop.

Sea Eagles, Hen Harrier and other raptors, Red Squirrels, Great Crested Grebes are all wildlife which may be classed as iconic and with the right opportunities developed would attract those keen to stay in the area to photograph them. Illegal disturbance at nest sites can be an issue and offering opportunities for safe photography away from nest sites would be ideal.

A series of feeding sites for squirrels and woodland birds with well-placed hides for photographers should be developed within Woodpark forest and other areas (already seen at Lakeview campsite).

The development of a raptor feeding site, used all year round (but notably so in autumn and winter) later would have the potential to attract sea-eagles and other raptors. This could be developed in a number of ways but with main accessible public viewing enabling donations and with “forward” or photography hides bookable at a fee.

The development of these will require a suitable site, a basic viewing facility and a structure for operating.

### ***Schools visits***

In addition to the above a significant new element to be added would be educational visits. The potential market for these is identified as potentially 2000-3000 children per annum and specific facilities to accommodate this would be required – school visits would be centred around a programme which could entail a period of eagle viewing, outdoor activities like pond dipping and a big hint centred around the wildlife discovery points and materials produced to fit with the curriculum rather than simply a school tour visit, although either could be accommodated. There would be a cost to hosts a school visit which would be levied on a per child basis and be modest and potentially with an element of external funding support where possible.

### ***Conservation action and science***

A strong element of the aspiration within the local community is to see the development of the project contribute both directly and indirectly to conservation of the Sea Eagles and potentially other wildlife in the area.

The project can contribute in a number of ways and the key task would be to establish a conservation team or group to lead on these in conjunction with project personnel:

- Awareness and education – through schools visits and events
- Wardening and policing – a more established and well-manned viewing station and potentially the presence of guided boat trips and walks places more eyes on the nesting island for wardening purposes.
- Science and research – a key connection into the support of science and research on Sea Eagles through e.g. visitor contributions to research either monetarily or voluntarily
- The inclusion of a significant role in conjunction with relevant authorities and organisations in maintaining the island as disturbance free, carrying out monitoring of the pair and their breeding attempts and potentially
- Training courses – up-skilling volunteers and others within the community in wildlife knowledge and information giving and potentially in participation with conservation activities
- Liaison with The Golden Eagle Trust, as a key advisory partner, to ensure that community programmes and efforts are well directed to make a direct contribution
- Establishing a local wildlife conservation “team” to carry out key tasks – this would include co-ordination of volunteers, sourcing and maintaining necessary equipment, direct management or maintenance of habitats or conservation areas as developed and the effective liaison with boat traffic and key authorities to establish a “safe zone” at key times around the island

All of these aspects could be developed and driven by a project manager as part of the task and subject to funding generated.

## Physical Implementation (what needs to be 'built' or constructed)

### *Development of the Bird Viewing and Information Point*

The elements described in the table below are suggested as typically feasible for similar spaces but included for concept development only – A new building would be subject to detailed architect input and dependent upon design and planning limitations and cost.

Feature	Key points	Interior Floor Area (m <sup>2</sup> )
<b>Name</b>	Lough Derg Eagle Discovery Centre (or similar)	
<b>location</b>	See map	
<b>Capacity (interior)</b>	10-20 people	
<b>Capacity (exterior)</b>	Identifiable, defined and safe exterior space such as a veranda, seating area (covered/uncovered) or concourse for a further 30+	
<b>Viewing (interior)</b>	Window wall – floor to ceiling, optically neutral, angled glass, fully opening with floor area of scopes and standing room	10-15
<b>Viewing (exterior)</b>	Veranda or viewing platform – consider rooftop?	
<b>Interpretive</b>	Materials, displays and standing room	5-10
<b>Café &amp; retail</b>	Minimum - high quality coffee machine (self-prepared) Snacks counter (home baking/cakes etc) Retail display	10-20

<b>Ancillary/storage</b>	Staff/storage/office/support	8-10
<b>Toilets</b>	External	
	Total approx. area	33 – 55 m <sup>2</sup>

The BVIP would develop a new name and clear branding around Eagles.

The existing “portacabin” would be replaced in a suitable location with a multifunctional space with the potential for a 10+ year lifespan to meet the interim need while the Inis Cealtra projects develop. Capacity would be for 30-50 visitors both inside (up to 20) and out, thereby providing capacity for a coach party or school group at one time.

The interior space would be open plan and a viewing area would dominate – viewing across to the Sea Eagle nest with high quality telescopes and full length viewing windows with optically neutral glass (angled to reduce rain drops!) and with the option to open.

Interpretation would include camera feeds from raptor nests and squirrel/bird feeding sites, nestboxes etc. Potentially a small freshwater aquarium or access to a pond dipping area outside or potentially a glass sided pond or other innovative solution. Full size models of an eagle nest and the eagles themselves will bring home their impressive size and bring the experience up close and personal.

A veranda or viewing platform outside (perhaps rooftop) and possibly partly covered would allow for viewing in the open air (or potentially with a canopy cover for shade).

*(Below) Garden building type construction – a cost effective solution suitable for development as a visitor centre and interpretation space - covered veranda for dual viewing and al fresco coffee space, large doors could be opened up and a larger interior with larger windows than shown for viewing (image courtesy of Crowes Sawmills)*



Inside a small café and retail facility would complement well-designed static and technological interpretation placed throughout the space. Toilet facilities would be nearby or external, unobtrusive units. There would be some ancillary space for staff welfare, storage and office functions.

Vehicle parking would be that which exists around the harbour and in the village centre. Strategically developing village centre parking and a walkway down through The Aistear Park to the viewpoint would perhaps be ideal from the point of view of bringing visitor footfall into the village centre and opening up exposure to business there.

*(Below) Multipurpose beach visitor centre with upper story lookout - large windows for maximising viewing*



(Below) Interior visitor space in a seabird visitor centre - sliding doors open for fine weather days, interpretation is bold and simple and uses wall space well, the opposite wall has large windows allowing in light and looking out towards a seabird and seal colony



A suggested search area for a location is indicated in the map below – a suitable building, renovation or new build or temporary building may be feasible. The area marked red on the map shows a zone within which views to the existing eagle nest are uninterrupted and which links through to existing parking, to the Aistear Park, to the harbourside and to the main street.

Search area for new site for BVIP



### Trails and discovery points

Without extensive local landowner consultation the detailed development of specific routes for marked trails at this stage is not possible but with the limited level of consultation carried out there are clear opportunities which have the potential to be further developed.

The map below illustrates some **search areas and existing routes** which may have development options. The existing Woodpark forest area and trails (marked in orange) would link up well to other potential walking routes or areas. There are partial or key sections marked in yellow on the map and these are indicative areas which could be developed rather than detailed routes. These would require links to create loop walks but there are many opportunities along quite roadways and in extensive hinterland forest blocks which could be developed to facilitate this.

Developing a primary **signature trailway** of varying lengths and with off shoots would be an ideal scenario and use of the existing Woodpark trail and the potential for lake-side walks to link up with this would likely be the primary step in this along with the connection to or incorporation of the East Clare Way (red dashed line) may add to the attraction of using this section of this long distance footpath.

*(Below) Lake shore search area for trails and discovery points linking to Woodpark forest*



Along with trail development there are opportunities to indicate to or guide, visitors on the **wildlife viewing opportunities** that exist along these routes.

A trails officer or equivalent contact within the local authority working with project staff to develop these would be a clear next step.

**Wildlife Discovery points** should be placed on trails and there is an opportunity to theme the trails based around their main discovery points along trails should take a number of different forms:

Discovery point type	Key features	Resource required
Squirrel feeding	3+ woodland sites, viewing screens, simple interpretation – regular top up of feeders	Interpretation design, production, screens, signage, squirrel feeders
Woodland bird feeding	3+ woodland sites, viewing screens, simple interpretation – regular top up of feeders	Interpretation design, production, screens, signage, bird feeders (can be combined with squirrel feeding)
Raptor feeding watchpoint	Identified vantage point into secluded area – field/forest clearing. Well screened and controlled access, viewing	Secluded field site, hide and screened access, parking if distant from village, approvals required for feeding, personnel for guiding
Wildflower meadow	High quality meadow, management regime established, low key access through the meadow, interpretive guide to flowers, opportunity to picnic	Management resources to maintain meadow (seasonal grazing and mowing), re-seeding if necessary, simple infrastructure, signage, interpretive resource
Pond dipping area	Close to centre, probably restricted use for safety and limited to supervised educational groups.	Designed wetland, pond dipping platform <sup>58</sup> , associated educational resources

Suggested discovery points are not shown as these are dependent upon eventual centre location, development of trail routes which require detailed planning and are habitat dependent.

---

<sup>58</sup> BTCV guidance on pond dipping platforms <https://britishrecycledplastic.co.uk/btcv-pond-dipping-platform/>



Not least, landowner agreement would be needed, among other factors.

*Squirrel feeding station at Lakeside Camping and Caravan Park (left)*



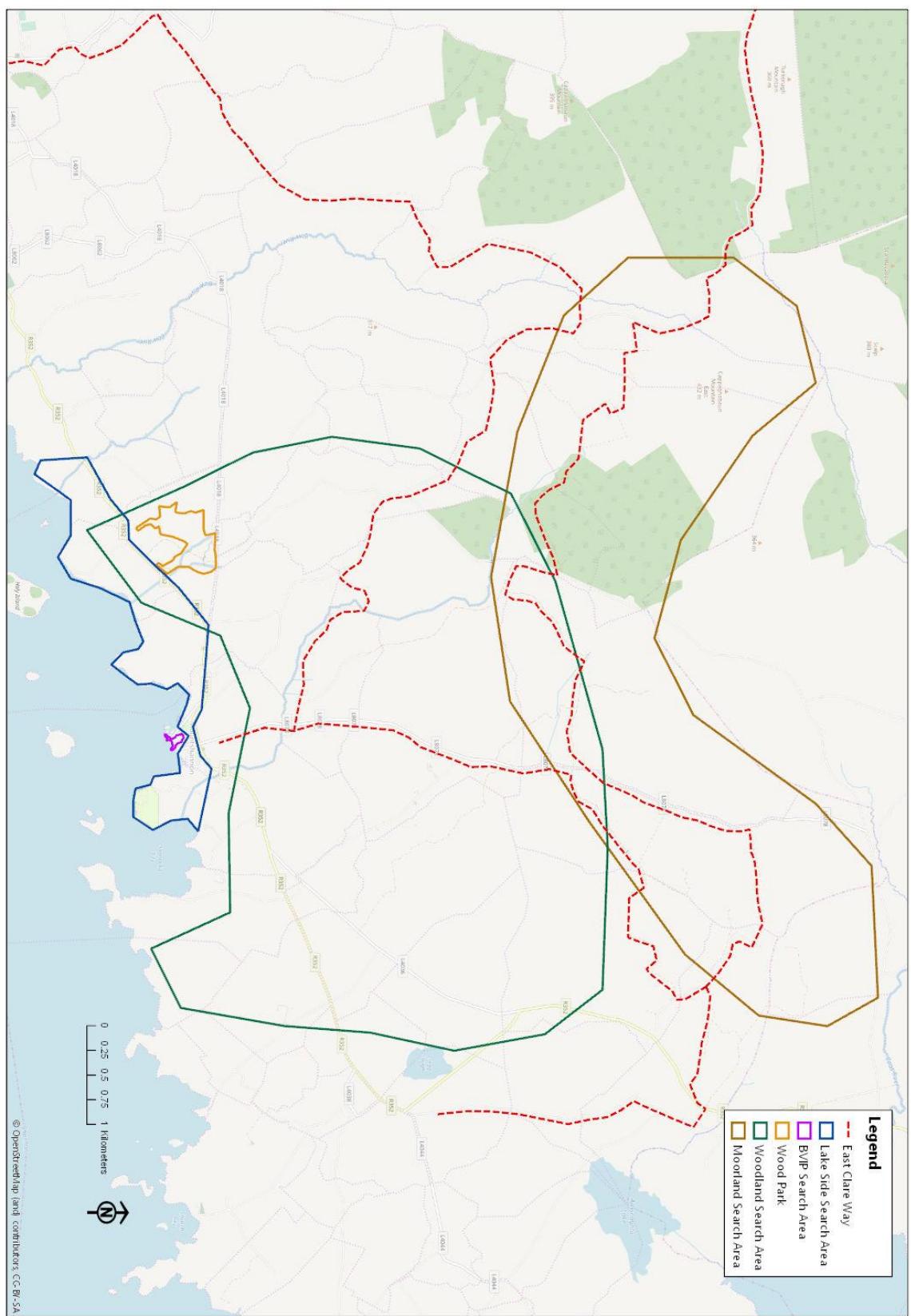
*(Above) Viewing screen example - this one is robust for use in an exposed environment - screens the viewer from species which may flee from disturbance, slots at different heights for people of varying heights and abilities – identification chart to help*

The map below indicates search areas:

- Hen Harrier/raptor viewpoints = brown
- Woodland discovery points = green (Woodpark forest in orange)
- Eagle centre search area = purple
- Lakeside discovery points and trails = blue

The East Clare Way which is a significant walking route and well signed could form an excellent basis for the trails network and potentially enables discovery points to be placed along it.

(Below) Search areas - moorland (brown), lakeside (blue) and woodland (green) discovery points and trails, potential locations for forward guided eagle viewing sites lie within the blue area and Woodpark forest (orange)



### ***The Aistear Park***

This space is already in existence but could be better exploited to interact with future developments and add significant value.

The park is an attractive space – an effort to re-interpret the park to include a strong wildlife linkage to the eagle centre would bring clear thematic connections and in particular ensuring the developing brand identity is carried through would be important.



*(Above) Amphitheatre at Aistear Park - an opportunity for an educational, events or outdoor meeting space – an awning for erection in poor weather and some events props could turn it into an interesting outdoor events space perhaps a meeting point for regular guided walks*

New signage to work to orientate people to a new centre and vice versa and the development of the amphitheatre as an events space (design/purchase of events equipment, a canopy or outdoor props etc)

### **Brand Development**

Development of a simple, clear, striking and memorable brand has been identified as an important aspect of success within other projects and sites.

A “brand” is a name, design, symbol or other feature that distinguishes an organisation, project or product from its competitors [or others] in the eyes of the customer<sup>59</sup>. The value of generating a brand in the case of this project is to create a lasting impression, to signpost visitor traffic to the project and to create a trusted and trustworthy entity in whom visitors, the community and partner organisations will invest time, effort or money to patronise or support in some form to

---

<sup>59</sup> American Marketing Association Dictionary - The Marketing Accountability Standards Board (MASB) endorses this definition as part of its ongoing Common Language in Marketing Project

ensure they either enjoy an experience, feel like they are making a difference or gain another mutual benefit from.

The Brand then needs to be about more than a logo design but about the whole project – the way it looks, feels and performs in terms of meeting its aims.

A significant element of brand however is a visual logo design and in this case a design should be simple and strong, easily reproducible and which can work in a number of forms from signage and leaflets through to web media and merchandise.

Logo design is a specialist sector and an early task for the project would be to commission or develop a logo design along with a project identity (name) with aspects in mind such as:

- Eagles and eagle conservation
- Other wildlife
- Irish and local identity
- Simple and low cost to reproduce
- Different from local competitors

*Examples of successful logos from comparable projects (below)*



The Galloway Kite Trail logo is simple – uses the stylised Red Kite image well and the name works to give local identity. The conservation message alongside the visitor enjoyment aspects is clear when looking at the way the project is delivered

*(Below) An eagle project sign on the Isle of Mull - incorporating brand and logos for the project and its partners*





The Mull Eagle watch logo is simple – uses the striking eagle image for lasting impression but is perhaps more difficult to reproduce well on a range of products though flexibility in how it is used is possible and is seen in the signage below



The Lough Boora Discovery Park logo uses a composite image of a Hare made from images of key aspects of the park and giving the impression of a historical symbol along with celtic-inspired text – all of which conjure the desired management aims and expected experience of the park



The logo of the Wicklow Uplands Council is successful in engendering the feeling of partnership and landscape through the optical ambiguousness of the landscape and handshake symbology merged – reflecting the shape of the local mountains and a spirit of co-operation in the aims

A good test of a logo and thereby the brand is whether the logo is identifiable or memorable without its associated text or name.

## Managing Visit Cycle – How will the experience work?

Many attractions fail because they ignore something called ‘the Visit Cycle’ – the process by which visitors plan, arrive, explore and leave your site. This process is summarised in the diagram below. As can be seen, the Visit Cycle is made up of four quite distinct segments.

All too often, attractions concentrate on just one of these – the stage when visitors are on site and enjoying the experience, the segment captioned ‘During’ in the graphic above. This is indeed a crucial stage, but to ignore or underplay the others will spell disaster, in particular for a new attraction. The Eagle centre in Mountshannon will need to focus very carefully on each of the segments shown above.

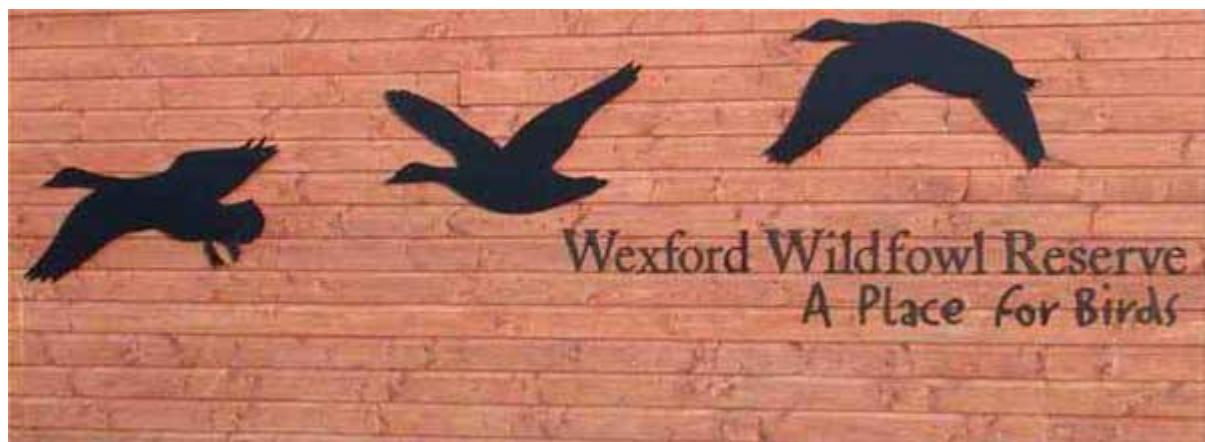
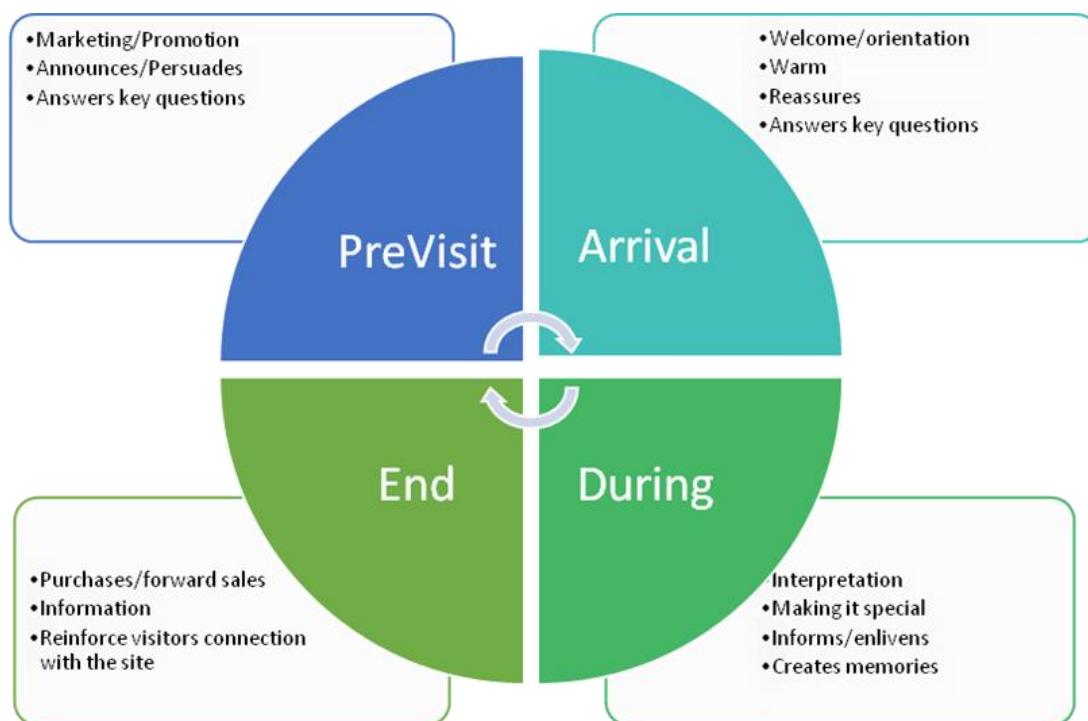


(Left) Aistear Park interpretation is starting to look tired and a re-fresh tied into the main themes of the project would create an opportunity for new interest in a space that brings people closer to the village centre

Visitors will begin their interaction with your site well **before they ever arrive** and what they experience at this stage will decide whether or not they come at all. What we are talking about here is marketing and promotion, delivered in the first instance by a good website, search-engine-optimised for a range of English and foreign-language engines. Social media like Facebook and Twitter keeps the interaction current and lively. Print-media should not be overlooked – a really well-designed flyer is a powerful incentive to visit.

A **sense of arrival** is next, and it needs to be built. This means that your existence needs to be marked on all approach roads with a single, strong marketing image and a message that says the Sea Eagle centre is (for example) just 20kms away, 10kms away, 5kms away etc. When the visitor does arrive, it must be instantly clear that he or she has done so. One of the easiest ways of doing this is having a flag flying, which draws the visitor's eye, followed up then by a clear, large name-plate.

(Below) The visit Cycle



(Above) Creating a sense of arrival - external nameplate at the Wexford Wildfowl Reserve

A welcome and orientation board introduces the site and explains what is available to the visitor: in the case of the Eagle centre this would also include the Aistear Park, trails, activities and coffee-shop. This should all create a sense of anticipation, which is reinforced with clear directions to the reception/information point where a warm welcome reassures the visitor. There needs to be plenty to look at in the reception area, an events board, sightings today etc.

*(Below) Simple, attractive signage of a type that would work very well at the arrival point in the harbor. Easily and cheaply updated.*



At

Mountshannon, the **visitor experience** will be spread over a number of areas, including the centre, the lakeshore, the Aistear Park, walking trails, and excursions. Because of this, and because many will be free experiences, it is critical that all are **branded in a single consistent style**, so that the visitor instantly associates their current experience with the Eagle centre. Each experience needs to pick up on at least one of the primary **interpretative themes** set out earlier in this chapter. The information provided in the centre will also be ordered around those same themes ensuring a consistent interpretative design and a consistent message that links all the experiences seamlessly. Hence, a walking trail becomes a vehicle for exploring the Lake and discovering hidden wildlife; the re-interpreted Aistear Park shines another light on life and history, and brings the eagles squarely into the picture in a very interactive and immersive fashion. Excursions bring the visitor closer still to the wildlife, whether that is raptors or insects. The centre becomes a hub for all this, with signposting guiding the visitor to all the sights and activities available (including Holy Island). Even the cup of coffee that the visitor buys should link to the eagle project, supporting further conservation and research. What actually happens within the Centre itself depends very much on how much space is available, but at a minimum it would contain high quality information panels in various languages and an equally high-quality AV. This is all possible in quite a small area, but leveraging on all the other activities in the area creates the sense of a much bigger and immersive experience.



*(Above) Making the eagle centre a hub for other activities*

Finally, the point at which the visitor **departs** the site needs to be managed. This is the 'segment' of the visit cycle most often overlooked. It is your opportunity to reinforce the visitor's connection to the site, capture feedback, make sales, and even forward-sell by asking the visitor to post a review, upload an image, follow on Facebook – whatever, but it needs to be done. With a small coffee-shop on site, the

opportunity is there for the visitor to relax by the lake, talk about their day, *What'sApp* friends – all critical to building wider awareness and ultimately visitor numbers. The coffee-shop is more than simply about selling coffee.

**The key step in managing the visit cycle is a tourism commercialisation plan or marketing plan.** The centre should aim to **prepare a clear plan, with well-defined objectives and key performance indicators.** A plan of this nature would assist in identifying the key elements required to be in place to move the projects **forward**. Fáilte Ireland have some useful guidelines and a template plan which is enables any attraction to draw up a marketing plan themselves. It can be found at the following link:

<http://www.failteireland.ie/Supports/Develop-your-tourism-enterprise/Online-guides/Marketing-Plan-Online-Course/Marketing-Guide.aspx>

## Outline costs and income

Detailed costs for developing the project further along the lines described, to achieve the experience envisaged are not possible at this stage. However, estimated costs for the most significant items in the first two years, identified from projected activities listed in the *Action Plan* section, and based on estimates from comparable structures and activities at similar sites are provided below.

Capital items - phase 1 (year 1-2)			
Item	Description/comments	Assumptions	Approx.. cost (€000s)
Eagle centre	(excl. site/plot costs) c. 50m <sup>2</sup> building & fit out - probably a garden building type structure in the short term	1000/m <sup>2</sup> + services, fit out and excluding interpretation	90
Interpretation EC	Eagle centre interpretation – various incl. 4xtelescope	optical equipment @ 3.5K per 'scope	30
Aistear Park	re-interpretation, new signage, awning for amphitheatre	Threshold signage & basic interp.	35
Remote camera systems	dependent on no. type & location	for 2 - simple systems	15
Feeding areas	3 sites - screens, feeders, simple interpretation	at 2K per site	6
Pond construction	teaching pond dipping area - platform & materials	1 pond, excavator & platform - volunteer time to finish	6
Event equipment	various		5
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>187</b>

Much of the capital cost will revolve around the construction of a new centre. A building that will function well for 10+ years taking the project through to a period when it may be feasible to merge effort with the Inis Cealtra plans would be optimal.

Small scale works such as modest interpretation and simple camera systems on raptor nests or at squirrel feeding stations could prove a large draw.

No costs for establishment of a café or retail facility are included at this stage but a decision in year-2 on the operational model for that operation (in-house or franchise) should occur and proceed on a for profit basis to fund the project, related community projects or other causes as may be agreed.

The costs included above allow for some degree of community involvement and volunteer effort. In particular, a volunteer programme operated by the project manager/project group would be critical in achieving the costs estimates for much of the smaller scale work such as feeding station screens, pond dipping area and other low-tech events and interpretation.

The table below shows indicative early programme costs. A large proportion of which would be sought from grant funding during the project set up phase.

Programme costs thereafter would need to be covered by operational income and a business case made for each.

Programme Costs (phase 1 - years 1-2)			
Item	Description/comments	Assumptions	Approx. cost (€000s)
Project Manager	Professional project officer/manager to drive project delivery, marketing & fundraising	cost for first 2 years @ 0.6 FTE + costs (T&S, insurance equip.)	65
Website/social media re-vamp	Web design	(simple non-commerce site)	10
Volunteer programme	Equipment, insurance, training	year 2	10
trial excursions	Walks/excursions/boat trips		5
trial events	Events calendar throughout season (approx. monthly)	Event cost at ave. 0.3K per event	4
Marketing/tourism commercialisation plan	commission plan/plan assistance & implementation	3K plan, 6K per annum	15
Brand design	professional design costs for brand development	ceiling	5
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>114</b>

Set against these costs would be a range of income streams.

The income table below is based on conservative estimates of net income after initial establishment of programmes and is illustrative of the scale of net income feasible on a per annum basis without taking into account restricted income through grant funding etc.

A critical step in this is the marketing plan in that it will be pivotal in driving footfall and support in order to generate income which in turn provides match funding for further development. The marketing plan itself could be eligible for external funding.

These are identified as net income for brevity and cost of sales and income generation are assumed accounted for.

This table aims to be illustrative to give orders of scale rather than exact estimates.

It appears feasible that with a modest operation over €40K of surplus can be generated. This would in turn, enable these funds to be re-invested or potentially used as a match funding source for grant aided projects within the operation or community.

<b>Indicative unrestricted income (per annum after initial establishment)</b>			
<b>Item</b>	<b>Description/comments</b>	<b>Assumptions</b>	<b>Per annum (€000s)</b>
<b>Donations (small)</b>	Donations derived from donations boxes	+100% on existing average	7
<b>Supporters scheme</b>	Dedicated supporters scheme with newsletter and supporters event	200 members @ 25	5
<b>Major donors/philanthropy</b>	Say 3 donations per annum @ 2.5k each Equipment, insurance, training	@ 2.5k each	7.5
<b>Corporate/business supporters</b>	Ten supporters initially	250/each ave.	2.5
<b>Events income</b>	Monthly events attracting 50 people	2euro/head	1.2
<b>Sales – retail/coffee</b>	10000 people (initial figure) spending on small items	Net ave. income per head=2 Euro	20
<b>Education programme</b>	500 children (initially – growth thereafter) attending	@net income of 1Euro per head	0.5
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>43.7</b>

The above table includes non-grant funding only. Aspects of the work programme as illustrated on the costs table may be eligible for significant grant intervention and this may reduce start-up costs significantly.

**A key element not included above are aspects of conservation activity** – these can often be funded or part-funded by a range of funding sources and may need to be developed in partnership with other organisations – the potential for any surplus or elements of donative income to contribute directly to conservation activity and potentially form a source of match funding for grant aided project work, is high. This is not included in the finance tables above as this would be developed subject to an agreed plan and directed by the formation of key groups, sub-groups or partnerships.

## Operational Model & Feasibility

The optimal operational model for the project in its first 5 years is suggested below.

### Management structure

There are a number of options for managing the project into the future but the key primary attributes of any future management structure are:

- Sound and timely planning and decision making
- High standards of governance
- Effective financial control
- Employment and deployment of personnel (e.g. a project officer, volunteers etc)
- Legal ownership and accountability for assets

The current operation of the eagle project is through the Community Council and this is adequate for operation at its current small scale.

With the scale of the project potentially increasing >200,000 Euro over two years or so, the inherent need for management of finances, the need to employ and manage a project officer and volunteers and to fundraise for and provide cashflow to operate a substantial project with multiple funding streams and cost bases and with potential liabilities over land, buildings and operations means that establishing a separate operational entity would be prudent.

A limited company, with or without charitable status, should be an early consideration. Formal legal business advice should be sought in establishing this or another suitable entity. Such a company would form a **Social Enterprise** and potentially become a focus of economic activity and employment related to the project while working with private companies and operators where appropriate.

In our opinion, the best model for this is a Company Limited by Guarantee.

A company limited by guarantee (CLG) is a company which does not have share capital and whose constitution explicitly provides that the liability of its members is limited to a pre-determined contribution to its assets in the event of it being wound up. This type of company model is typically used by charities, not-for-profits, sports and social clubs and management companies. The CLG has a single-document constitution, incorporating a memorandum of association and articles of association. The constitution must accord with the form set out in the Companies Act 2014. As well as setting out the limit of guarantee applying to the members, the Memorandum must also set out the objectives of the CLG. The CLG has the capacity to do any act or thing stated

in the objectives, but importantly it may also do other things if it believes these to be advantageous or incidental to attaining those objectives.

A CLG may have as few as one single member, though this would be unusual, but there is no maximum number of members. That said, the constitution of the CLG must specify the number of member(s) with which it is to be registered. A CLG also requires at least two directors. Every director must be at least 18 years old, and at least one has to be resident in the EEA. One of these directors can be the company secretary. Directors of a CLG are very often unpaid, and if they are paid the level of remuneration has to be determined at a general meeting by the members.

The form of Constitution of a Company Limited by Guarantee is shown below. This template has been taken directly from the Companies Act 2014 and is the bare minimum of what needs to be

included. In practice, however, the Memorandum and Articles of Association will go into much more detail, setting out precisely what areas the new company may operate in, its ethos, aims and objectives, as well as detail on the running of meetings, roles of Directors, reporting etc.

#### **Extract from Companies Act 2014.**

##### **Schedule 10: Form of Constitution of a Company Limited by Guarantee.**

##### **CONSTITUTION OF [name of company as below]**

##### **MEMORANDUM OF ASSOCIATION**

The name of the company is: THE UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION COMPANY LIMITED BY GUARANTEE.

1. The company is a company limited by guarantee, registered under Part 18 of the *Companies Act 2014*.
2. The objects for which the company is established are the raising of funds for the furtherance of education and research carried out by Irish universities and the doing of all such other things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above object.
3. The liability of the members is limited.
4. Every member of the company undertakes to contribute to the assets of the company, if the company is wound up while he or she is a member or is wound up within one year after the date on which he or she ceases to be a member, for—
  - a. *the payment of the debts and liabilities of the company contracted before he or she ceases to be a member, and the costs, charges and expenses of winding up; and*
  - b. *the adjustment of the rights of contributors among themselves, such amount as may be required, not exceeding €1.*

##### **ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION**

The following Regulations shall apply to the company:

1. The number of members with which the company proposes to be registered is 4.

*[In addition to the immediately foregoing words, the following sentence may be included:- See section 1177(5).]*

2. The provisions of the *Companies Act 2014* are adopted.

We, the several persons whose names and addresses are subscribed, wish to be formed into a company in pursuance of this constitution (list names, addresses and descriptions of each person)

As well as providing separately examples of actual

Memoranda and Articles of Association which would be directly applicable to the operation at Mountshannon, we also recommend that the new entity apply for Charitable Status. This brings a number of benefits, including discount arrangements with some service providers (for example, Google offer a suite of valuable advertising and other services). It is also an internationally recognised and understood 'brand' which is critical in terms of attracting philanthropic donations ('not-for-profit' simply does not have the same international status). Charitable Status is also necessary in order to maximise the staffing supports offered by Pobal. Finally, having charitable status also enables the CLG to seek exemption from the requirement to file financial returns with the Companies Registration Office (CRO), which is a useful lessening of the administrative burden.

The only constraint of significance arising from charitable status is that the ability for companies to pay their directors is seriously restricted under the Charities Act 2009. However, this is unlikely to be a major issue for this project.

## Key personnel

A project of this nature, moving from small scale to a project significantly more complex, will require a significant increase in manpower in order to;

1. generate detailed plans and the funding to deliver them, and
2. Manage the operation on a time-limited, or ongoing, basis

There are help and resources available through a range of bodies within the area, particularly through the emerging rural development staffing at the local authority. It is unlikely, however, that enough dedicated resource with suitable local or specific technical knowledge will be available to deliver a project of this nature and in this specific location over the timescale envisaged.

It is recommended that funding is sought for a **Project Officer/Manager** with both technical experience and project development and management experience to drive the project forward. A draft **job description** is contained at Appendix 1 for such a post.

The project officer would report to a **project management board or board of directors** of the operational entity (c.f. company). This board of directors may come from within the community council entirely or more likely it may be warranted to recruit others with specific areas of expertise or experience either locally or from further afield as appropriate.

Given the community-based nature of the company, and the nature of the benefit flowing back to the community both economically and potentially significantly, socially, then the operation of the project is likely to continue to depend substantially on a range of voluntary actions and volunteer individuals. Establishment of a **Volunteer programme** is identified as an important deliverable within the early project actions. This will not only aid the project by providing a range of personnel resources but should be targeted to ensure that individuals are managed and developed in ways that enhance their skillset, provides valuable training, life-long learning and experience opportunities and provides participants with benefits through communication, health and well-being. In turn such a volunteer programme group could significantly enhance some of the less tangible community attributes such as social cohesion, economic, educational and gender equality within the community.

## Strategic partnerships

In addition to funding agencies the project is likely to benefit from the formation of strategic partnerships. Some of these partners have already played important roles as part of the existing eagle project, through funding or other involvement and are likely to be important partners into the future.

Other partners may be necessary to bring on board by offering skills or attributes, technical or regulatory advice, services which may bring mutual benefits in kind. In some cases, developing

aspects of the project using a partnership approach may provide an opportunity for the development of applications for funding which may deliver a project with significant added value, wider reach or in a more effective or cost efficient manner thereby levering value for all parties.

The existing **close relationship with Clare County Council** has been highly valuable both from a resource but also an expertise point of view. The opportunity to work closely in future to continue to develop the project as suggested would have great synergy with the role of the **Rural Development Officer** as well as the Heritage Officer within the council and these will be key contacts in helping to take the project forward.

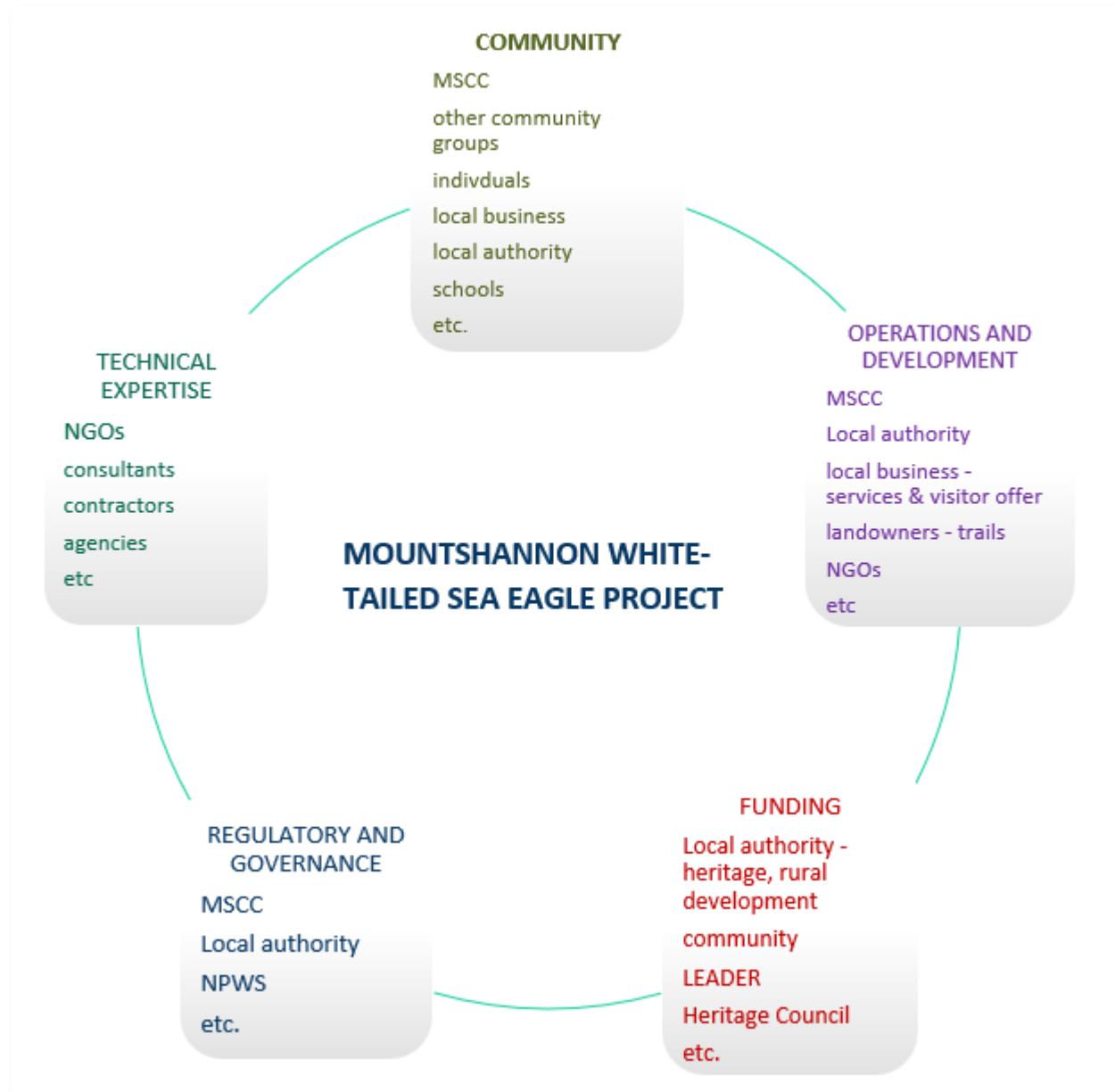
For delivery of the **conservation aspects of the project** going forward it would make sense to align with relevant eNGOs<sup>60</sup> where there are overlaps of mutual interest – thereby bringing expertise and resource/capacity to delivery of the main objectives. **Golden Eagle Trust** being the primary partner with respect to the Sea Eagles and other raptors, and perhaps a range of other bodies for other taxa.

In the longer term the synergy between the potential developments based around Inis Cealtra and this project could sensibly be aligned both projects bringing value to each other. Taking these forward in a mutually beneficial way with at least some degree of strategic partnership will be important but it is clear given the potential scale of the Inis Cealtra developments that the Sea Eagle project cannot wait for this to come to full fruition but rather make progress in advance and adapt as other projects come into delivery phase.

---

<sup>60</sup> Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations

(Below) Strategic partnerships for project development



**Community** groups are important to the project in providing much of the energy, ideas and direction of the project. The community needs to be encouraged to be supportive of the project in order to access the skills and resources that it may offer.

The community will not only benefit from the project but can bring benefits to the project through readily accessible local skills and services. There is the potential for mutual development of enhanced accommodation (more visitors need more places to stay and those places benefit) and

services like shops and eateries (to realise economic benefit visitors need to enjoy their visit but also to avail of outlets for spending within the community).

In developing an offer for educational visits, local schools will be vital in providing a collaborator with a special interest locally and with which ideas can be mutually developed.

**Technical expertise** can be tapped in a number of ways, by buying services from service providers or contractors and by looking for partners who can work with mutual benefit in mind. NGOs often fall into the latter category as natural partners. They often bring high levels of technical expertise and sometimes other resources such as staff and volunteer time. The natural partner for this project is The Golden Eagle Trust, as originator of the Sea Eagle re-introduction and having been a partner in the existing project since its inception. They bring detailed technical expertise on Sea Eagles and other raptors and would be critical in co-design of any enhanced eagle viewing efforts and development of e.g. raptor feeding sites.

Other NGOs or agencies such as Birdwatch Ireland, Inland Fisheries Ireland and the like, may have significant skills to bring in developing specific aspects of a developing project. This can perhaps most easily be realised through events, and in many cases there will be great mutual benefit from developing opportunities for cooperative working on these. Building and enhancing relationships thereafter.

**Regulatory and governance** aspects of the project will be critical and it is important to tap into the local authority for planning advice to avoid pitfalls and identify opportunities, key departments e.g. the National Parks & Wildlife Service of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to resolve licensing matters and not least working within the rules governing business ensuring the entity's board is achieving high standards of administration and operation.

The **operation and development** of the project needs a large range of partners from those within the community through to specialist service providers and NGOs. It will be particularly important to develop the right relationships over commercial aspects of the project and the line between operations and fundraising will often blur. Decisions on whether to operate commercial aspects in-house or to franchise aspects will require careful consideration and may need synergies between local operators and the project to deliver the best value for the community.

Local business also will play an important role likely being a key aspect of the interface between visitors and their experience of the project. It is important therefore that the project works with local business to help them promote the project for guests and customers to enjoy their stay and considering returning. An important role of a future project entity might be to provide information and training to these businesses regarding what the project might offer.

Development of a sustainable project into the future will require start-up funding and regular capital and programme funding to ensure it develops apace and delivers high quality experiences. There are natural funders with existing programmes that are well known, such as LEADER, and string linkages with Clare Local Development Company will be important into the future however other funders and approaches to funding should also be explored. Working closely with Rural Development staff from the local authority will be important in identifying the right funding mechanisms for the right aspects of the project.

## Sources of potential funding

There are a variety of potential sources of funding which can be explored, with considerable overlaps across some. In practice, any small not-for-profit entity such as the Sea Eagle Centre will need to tap into a range of these.

### **LEADER**

The first port of call for support towards delivering on the capital elements of the current project is LEADER. The main capital expenditure items would all be eligible (with the exception of café equipment). This includes the main building, associated equipment as well as interpretation there and in the Aistear Park, plus the proposed feeding areas. The fact, of course, that these costs are eligible does not mean that will automatically be funded. However, the proposals outlined in this report are utterly consistent with all broader strategies for the region and dovetail well with the overarching Blue Way initiative for Lough Derg. Web design, branding and marketing are all elements that could also be submitted for funding from LEADER in the first instance, as could any trail development.

### **Hidden Heartlands**

Hidden Heartlands is the new branding proposition from Fáilte Ireland for this part of Ireland. It is likely that a call for proposals will issue next year, in which case the Sea Eagle Centre may wish to submit a bid. Until more information is available on the nature of that call, we cannot say how relevant it will be. Trail development which tied into the Sea Eagle Centre and linked into the Blue Way, with some interpretation and discovery points along the way, could well be a candidate project.

### **Village Renewal Schemes**

These can prove very useful sources of funding, once a clear plan has been put in place. Continued development of the facilities in the Aistear Park – for example the proposed awning over the ‘amphitheatre’ – might well be viewed positively if presented in the context of a joined-up plan.

### **Local Authority**

Direct Local Authority funding is limited, but practical support is available in other ways and especially now via the recently appointed Rural Community Development officers. One valuable source of funds is towards events and festivals and we have already pointed to the importance of developing an active events calendar, including one or two flagship events that could seek funding under this heading.

### **Heritage Council**

The Heritage Council issues regular calls for proposals through its Community Grants Schemes which can be quite wide-ranging. Could cover research, public awareness and events. Amounts are generally small (a few thousand) but extremely value for what they support. The Sea Eagle Centre would be perfectly positioned to look for funding from this stream and in due course this should be one to target.

### **Pobal Schemes**

Various Pobal-operated schemes could be of use, especially for support staff. Many similar community-led projects avail of TUS and community employment schemes to this end. Gateway Programme may also be of use too in specific circumstances. However, one of the most valuable supports is the possibility of a grant towards the cost of employing a Manager. There are conditions to be met, including total other employees, but long-term this is an avenue worth exploring.

### **Outdoor Recreation Grants**

Part of the Rural Recreation Scheme operated by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, outdoor recreation grants may be another means of funding trail development and related activities.

### **REDZ**

REDZ (Rural Economic Development Zones) is part of the Government programme for rural development and aims to stimulate economic development in rural towns and their hinterlands. Collaboration between Local Authorities, local communities and business interests is an essential part of the scheme, with the involvement of local communities seen as a key element. REDZ has funded an extremely wide range of projects and developments, and offers definite opportunities for the Eagle Centre under any future manifestation of the initiative.

### **Philanthropy**

While this is not as 'visible' in Ireland as it is in other countries, a community-led project like the Mountshannon Sea Eagle would be an attractive candidate for a philanthropic donation. The Sea Eagle is a powerful image with an equally powerful story. The new Centre, with enhanced branding and marketing, but retaining its community-based roots and not-for-profit status, would be in a reasonably strong position to look for philanthropic funding. Developing relationships with major donors requires time and the exploration of personal connections.

# 8. Action Plan & next steps

## Identification of recommendations and programme for future development

This project plan is built around a single “Big Idea” of **Iconic wildlife encounters** – Mountshannon will be the location to have or to start your wildlife adventure at Lough Derg it will comprise 5 main themes and these are summarised below:



A simple, concise but targeted action plan for the first five years follows. This plan is aimed at addressing delivery of the big idea and the themes as described and has taken account of the suggested actions and main considerations identified and described throughout the earlier sections of the plan in order to seek to deliver the community and project team aims and aspirations for the project and the wider socio-economic benefits that should accrue.

It aims to lay out the main actions and work areas required to get the key elements of the project established and running for the first 5 years. It will necessarily be reactive and involves significant elements of review and appropriate response.

Detailed plans for the main elements will flow from the initial establishment of a management structure and project officer. These two items being critical to the success of the project into the future.

## Five Year Action Plan (begin 2018)

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Strategic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commission Development Plan;</li> <li>Input into Lough Derg Strategy</li> <li>Develop project conservation objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify key strategic partnerships;</li> <li>Work with Blue Way;</li> <li>Aim to lead for Mountshannon</li> <li>Bring single brand into play for as many activities as possible;</li> <li>Get ready for Hidden Heartlands call;</li> <li>Reach out to schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue development of Strategic Partnerships</li> <li>Explore Bundling opportunities</li> <li>Build new research links</li> <li>Consolidate local position</li> <li>Embed into Blue Way</li> <li>Embed into Hidden Heartlands</li> </ul>	As Y3 but start to explore complementary funding streams (incl. philanthropic, crowd funding)	As Y4
Operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agree management structure and role profiles.</li> <li>Agree operational schedule</li> <li>Develop calendar of events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appoint Project Manager;</li> <li>Website/Social Media revamp;</li> <li>Decision on Café – concession or self-operated?</li> <li>Volunteer Programme</li> <li>Focus on core-period (April-Sep)</li> <li>Deliver calendar of events, incl. outside core period</li> <li>Conservation action programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Full operation</li> <li>Build volunteer programme</li> <li>Link with 3<sup>rd</sup> level Heritage Management courses (placements)</li> <li>Extend core-period one month either side</li> <li>Deliver calendar of events</li> <li>Deliver selected field trips/excursions</li> <li>Feeding station operational by Q2 or Q3 – review staff requirement or partner-up.</li> <li>Conservation action programme</li> </ul>	As Y3	As Y4
Capital	<p>Bid to funders for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marketing/TC plan</li> <li>Construction of Centre</li> <li>Interpretive elements</li> <li>Aistear interpretive upgrade plan</li> <li>Signage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction phase</li> <li>Commission interpretative 'design and deliver' for Centre and Aistear.</li> <li>Bid to LEADER for Trail enhancement</li> <li>Bid to Hidden Heartlands for feeding station (Raptor Safari)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction phase for Trails</li> <li>Construction phase for feeding station (Raptor Safari)</li> </ul>		
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commission/draw-up tourism commercialisation (TC) plan or marketing plan with clear targets for footfall in identified segments and clear KPIs.</li> <li>Brand development – logo design and associated works</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess against KPIs and adjust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess against KPIs and adjust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess against KPIs and adjust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess against KPIs and adjust</li> </ul>

# APPENDICES

---

## APPENDIX 1 Example/Draft Job description for Sea Eagle Project Manager

### DRAFT Job Description

<b>Job Title:</b>	<b>Project Manager</b> Mountshannon Sea Eagle Centre	<b>Job ID/ Post ref:</b>	
<b>Reporting to:</b>	<b>Mountshannon Community Council</b>	<b>Date of Issue:</b>	
<b>Nature</b>	The post is a fixed term contract for a four-year period commencing in 2019. The employer for this role is Mountshannon Community Council.		

<b>Job Purpose:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Manage and develop the Mountshannon Sea Eagle Centre, liaising with partners and wider stakeholders in Clare, rest of Ireland and overseas.</li><li>• Be the public face of the Sea Eagle Centre Project.</li><li>• Create networks, engage with partners, stakeholders and the wider community.</li><li>• Report to Mountshannon Community Council who will provide strategic LEADERship for the project.</li></ul>
<b>Principal duties and responsibilities:</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Establish and grow the Mountshannon Sea Eagle Centre into a significant visitor experience attracting 15-20,000 visits annually after four years.</li><li>2. Effective day-to-day operation of the Centre, within budget, set timescales, agreed quality standards and in accordance with any funder requirements or regulations.</li><li>3. Management and production of all reporting paperwork, e.g. highlight reports, risk analysis, quality assurance documentation, et cetera, and delivery of these reports to the Community Council.</li><li>4. Effective staff management of a small project team to include volunteer workforce.</li></ol>

5. Be a visible 'face' of the Centre, embedded within the community, engaging with partners, stakeholders and the wider community to ensure buy-in and to support and encourage their involvement.
6. Effective communications management to ensure all partners and wider stakeholders are kept up-to-date and involved as appropriate with the development and delivery of the project
7. Arrangement and management of events and workshops as required – this will involve evening and possibly weekend working.
8. Work with appropriate colleagues to procure and manage sub-contractors to deliver specific outputs and/or funder requirements, e.g. project delivery elements, project evaluation et cetera
9. Liaison with the Community Council finance officer, partners and stakeholders as required to ensure robust budget management throughout the contracting period.
10. Co-ordinating collection and collating of quantitative and qualitative evidence of the activity, outputs and outcomes. Preparing and presenting reports to various audiences as required, including short annual report.

**Relationships: Responsibility for People – Supervision/Management:**

1. This post may include direct line management responsibilities for occasional support staff and volunteers.

**Relationships: Communication / Nature of Contacts:**

1. The Project Manager will engage with wider stakeholders and the general public as required, for example delivering bespoke engagement events from time to time.

**Job Working Environment:**

1. Office and field environments
2. Nature of work may entail working outside normal office hours, including weekends.

<b>Person specification – Qualifications, Knowledge, Experience &amp; Skills:</b>	Essential	Desirable
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A degree or equivalent qualification/background in a related discipline for example arts, heritage, destination management.</li> <li>2. Knowledge/experience of Sea Eagle conservation programme and raptors generally.</li> <li>3. Demonstrable experience in a previous Project Management role or relevant qualification.</li> <li>4. Good knowledge and understanding of Information and Communication Technologies, including facility with social media.</li> <li>5. Be able to work on own initiative, self-motivated with the ability to form partnerships to ensure programmes, activities and events take place.</li> <li>6. Experience of delivering grant funded projects</li> <li>7. Have excellent interpersonal skills, with excellent communication skills, written and verbal.</li> </ol>	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓



## Appendix 2 – Appropriate Assessment Screening

### **Appropriate Assessment Screening Report**

#### **PROVISION OF INFORMATION FOR HABITATS DIRECTIVE ASSESSMENTS FOR MOUNTSHANNON WHITE-TAILED SEA EAGLE DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

Prepared by Alan Lauder BSc (hons), Ecologist

May 2018

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This report contains information which may be required by the competent authority to undertake a Stage One Screening Assessment of the Mountshannon White-Tailed Sea Eagle Development Plan. The report provides information and appraises the potential for this project to have significant effects, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, on any Natura 2000 sites (hereafter 'European sites' or "Natura sites").

### **1.1 Legislation and Background**

Article 6(3) of Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (as amended) (hereafter 'the Habitats Directive') requires that, any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site, but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, shall be subject to AA of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. The possibility of there being a significant effect on a European site will generate the need for an AA to be carried out by the competent authority for the purposes of Article 6(3). Accordingly, a screening for AA in respect of an application for consent for proposed development must be carried out by the competent authority (in this case, NPWS) in order to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if the proposed project, individually or in combination with another plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on any European site.

A Stage Two AA is required if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that a proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a European site. The Screening (Stage One) operates merely to determine whether an AA (Stage Two) must be undertaken on the implications of the plan or project for the conservation objectives of relevant European sites.

This document comprises information to enable the competent authority to perform a Stage One Screening for AA.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Authors Qualifications & Expertise**

This report has been prepared by Alan Lauder

Alan gained an honours degree in Ecology from The University of Stirling in 1989. Alan is an experienced ecologist, nature conservation and habitat management specialist with over 25 years professional post-graduate experience. His relevant experience includes extensive planning related casework for state and non-governmental organisations within Scotland and Ireland, input to and preparation of site designations, Environmental Impact Statements & Assessments. He is a highly experienced wetland and upland management specialist and ornithologist with particular expertise in raptor and waterbird ecology and conservation including notable experience with Peregrine, Merlin and Hen Harrier. He has extensive knowledge of survey and conservation management of wetland and upland habitats gained from over 30 years managing designated sites and nature reserves in Scotland and Ireland. Alan currently carries out a wide range of relevant work including management planning for designated sites, ecological assessment and advisory works for a wide range of commercial and state clients. He has attended a range of relevant training courses throughout his career including recent training in Appropriate Assessment from CIEEM (2016).

## 2.2 Guidance

This AA screening report has been prepared with reference to the following guidance documents where relevant:

- Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities. (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision).
- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive: Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPW 1/10 & PSSP 2/10.
- Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (European Commission Environment Directorate-General, 2001);
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provisions of Article 6 of the Habitat's Directive 92/43/EEC (EC Environment Directorate-General, 2000 updated draft April 2015);
- Guidance Document on Article 6(4) of the 'Habitats Directive' 92/43/EEC. Clarification of the Concepts of Alternative Solutions, Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest,
- Compensatory Measures, Overall Coherence. Opinion of the European Commission (European Commission, January 2007).
- Guidelines for Good Practice Appropriate Assessment of Plans under Article 6(3) Habitats Directive. Findings of an international workshop on Appropriate Assessment in Oxford, December 2009.

The information collected for this report, to assist the competent authority to screen the proposal for AA, was based on a desktop study carried out in April and May 2018.

Information relied upon included the following information sources, which included maps and ecological data:

- Ordnance Survey of Ireland mapping and aerial photography available from [www.osi.ie](http://www.osi.ie);
- Online data available on European sites as held by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) from [www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie);
- The final draft of the Mountshannon White-tailed Sea Eagle Development Plan (to which this AA forms an appendix)
- Information on the status of EU protected habitats and species in Ireland (National Parks & Wildlife Service)

## 2.3 AA Screening Methodology

The above referenced guidance documents set out a staged process for carrying out AA, the first stage of which is referred to as Screening. This stage identifies the likely significant impacts on a Natura site, if any, which could arise from a proposed project either alone or in combination with other plans and projects. If the conclusions at the end of screening are that there is no likelihood of significant effects occurring on any European sites, as a result of the proposed plan or project, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects, then there is no requirement to undertake AA.

However, even if screening makes a finding of *no significant effects*, and therefore concludes that AA is not required, these findings must be clearly documented in order to provide transparency of decision-making, and to ensure the appropriate application of the 'precautionary principle'.

Screening for AA involves the following:

1. Determining whether a project or plan is directly connected with or necessary to the conservation management of any European sites;
2. Describing the details of the project/plan proposals and other plans or projects that may cumulatively affect any European sites;
3. Describing the characteristics of relevant European sites; and
4. Appraising likely significant effects of the proposed project on relevant European sites.

The stage following Appropriate Assessment screening is the Appropriate Assessment itself and this is informed by a Natura Impact Statement. This stage will only proceed if there is assessed to be a likelihood of significant effects occurring on any European sites, as a result of the proposed project, either alone or in combination with other plans and projects or where there is a requirement to apply the 'precautionary principle'.

In the case of this plan, all practical, non-administrative elements of it require further stages of planning and assessment before they can proceed and these include; adoption of the plan, detailed operational planning and delivery of individual elements and in some cases the need for formal planning consent or licensing.

The plan is an outline of broad proposals and provides a guide to the future development of a project but does not assume sign up for delivery and does not provide the level of detail required for full assessment of potential impacts. Therefore, this screening report identifies those elements of the project contained within the plan which, without mitigation, are likely to cause an impact on a Natura site and therefore which will require an AA to be carried out once they have reached the detailed proposal stage.

### **3. OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED PROJECT AND ITS RECEIVING ENVIRONMENT**

#### **3.1 Description of Proposed Project**

The Development Plan to which this screening report forms an appendix is an advisory plan which outlines options and suggested proposals and provides a guide to the potential future development of the project. It does not assume that any or all elements will be selected in future for delivery as there are a number of contingencies upon which these depend including consent, funding and locations being made available. Due to these contingencies the level of detail required for full assessment of potential impacts is not present within the plan. Without formal adoption and a mechanism for delivery the plan has no impact on the European sites and as such would screen out.

But for the purposes of informing further AA screening and assessment of impacts for individual elements of the project as it develops, the project is examined and screened in outline.

The main aims of the project are expressed as a narrative in section 7 of the plan and these are summarised below:

- Enhance the economy by bringing more tourists to the area
- Conservation of the eagles and other wildlife
- Enhance community engagement, awareness and well-being
- Engage young people with the natural world

The key proposals contained within the plan to achieve these aims and which are considered within this screening can be found at sections 7 & 8 of the plan. These outline the proposals that will be considered in the future of the project and identify an action plan of recommended options.

These may, in all or some cases, require statutory consents, licences or approvals to proceed and where appropriate will require appropriate assessment in their own right.

This screening report identifies those actions which are likely to have an impact on the interests of a Natura site, in the absence of mitigation, and which therefore are likely to require appropriate assessment should they be acted upon.

For the purposes of this screening, those actions identified which are either unique or which may develop further are relevant and actions developing later which are not initiated in year 1 are also included. The actions are amalgamated into broad headings in table 3.1 and this indicates the likely consenting or competent authority as appropriate.

**In summary, the plan recommends the development of:**

- A project management structure, partnerships and administration to ensure cost efficient and effective management of the project
- Nature Conservation objectives and actions to conserve the White-tailed Sea Eagles and other key species in the area
- Development of strategies and plans for marketing and promotion of the project
- Development of events and an education programme based around wildlife
- Development of interpretation points (“Wildlife Discovery Points”) and access trails
- Development of a new Eagle centre within Mountshannon as the hub of the project

Table 3.1 Plan elements for screening

Plan element	Consenting/competent authority
Development of Management structure and project operations administration	
Commission Development Plan	-
Input into Lough Derg Strategy	-
Agree management structure and role profiles	-
Agree operational schedule	-
Funding bids - Centre, interpretive elements, Aistear interpretative upgrade, signage	-
Identify key strategic partnerships;	-
Work with Blue Way	-
Get ready for Hidden Heartlands call	-
Appoint Project Manager	-
Decision on Café – concession or self-operated	-
Volunteer Programme	-
Bid to Hidden Heartlands for feeding station (Raptor Safari)	-
Nature conservation activity	
Develop conservation objectives	-
Conservation action programme	NPWS
Development of marketing plan and media	
Marketing plan	-
Aim to lead for Mountshannon	-
Website/Social Media revamp	-
Bring single brand into play for as many activities as possible	-
Social media maintenance	-
Development of events & education programme	
Develop calendar of events	-
Reach out to schools	-
Trial field trips/excursions	NPWS
Deliver calendar of events	NPWS
Deliver selected field trips/excursions	NPWS
Development of trails and interpretation	
Commission interpretative 'design and deliver' for Centre and Aistear Park	LA
Bid to LEADER for Trail enhancement	LA
Construction phase for Trails	LA
Construction phase for feeding station (Raptor Safari)	LA/NPWS
Feeding station operational by Q2 or Q3 – review staff requirement or partner-up.	NPWS
Development of a new eagle centre	
Centre Construction phase	LA
Centre operational phase	LA

### **3.2 Description of Receiving Environment for the Proposed Development**

The area utilised for the project is currently not defined precisely and would be subject to change as the precise details of the project develop. It largely lies around the village of Mountshannon in County Clare and extends roughly out to a radius of 5km or so.

The plan includes a series of indicative search areas for different elements of the project and these are illustrated in Figure 3.1.

The total area of the project elements is unknown at this stage and will be further defined on project element specific basis as these are developed.

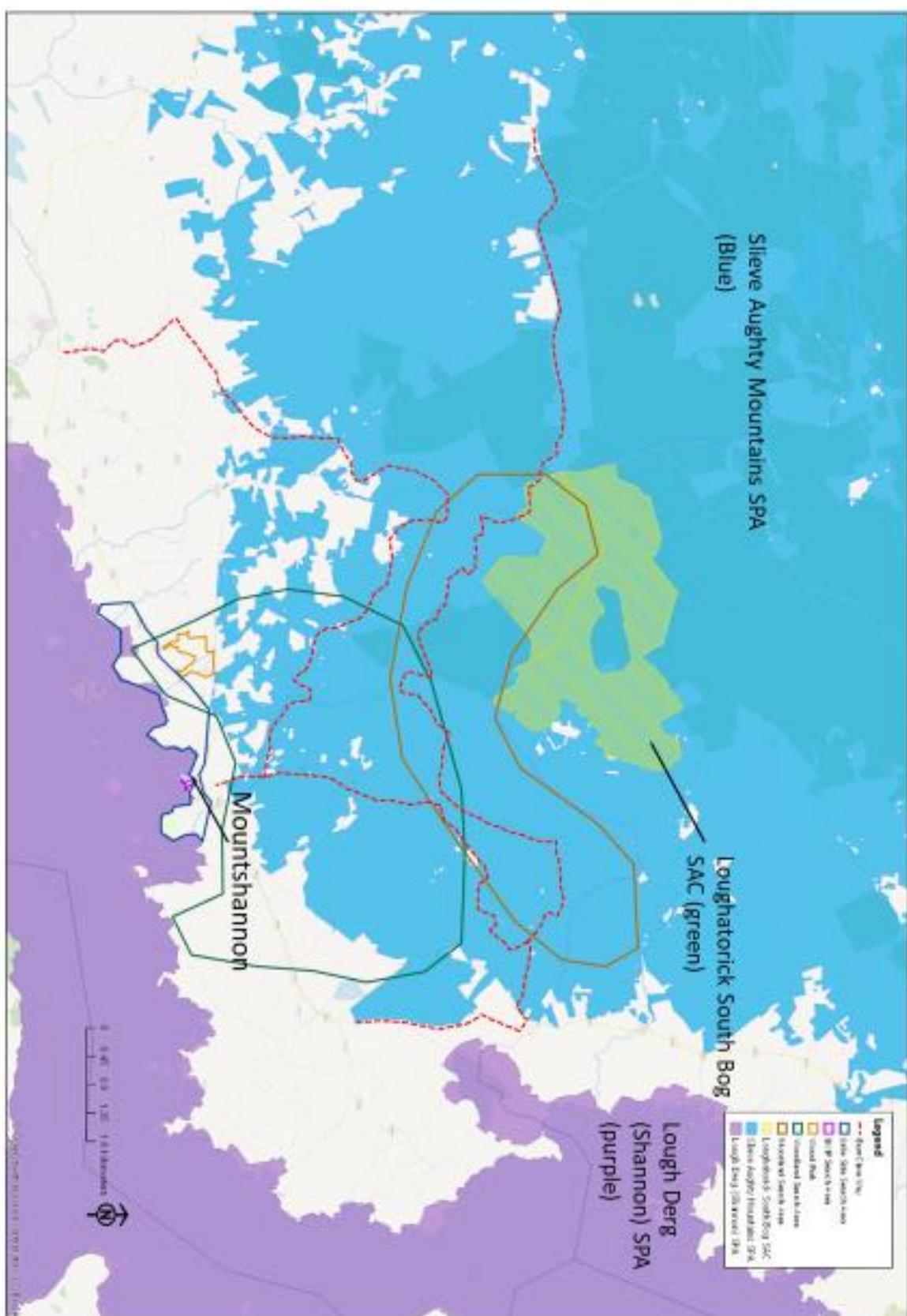
The project will comprise a range of elements which are not all contiguous and may utilise a range of existing features over a wide area (e.g. existing trails)

The area lies to the west of Lough Derg and falls adjacent to or overlapping 3 European sites as well as a wide range of habitat types out-with the designated sites including farmland, forestry and woodland, human sites, roads and watercourses.

The village of Mountshannon and its lake-side and harbour form the likely central point of the plan project area.

A currently unknown area of Lough Derg would fall within the search area for development of the project.

Figure 3.1 – location of Mountshannon and search areas in relation to European sites



#### 4. PROVISION OF INFORMATION FOR STAGE ONE SCREENING

#### **4.1 Zone of Influence of the Proposed project**

While there is no recommended distance from a proposal for which European sites are considered as being relevant for AA the guidance (NPWS, 2010) recommends that 'the distance should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with reference to the nature, size and location of the project, and the sensitivities of the ecological receptors, and the potential for in combination effects'.

As a general rule, it is often considered appropriate to look at Natura sites which fall within 15km of the project, however, those which might introduce significant ecological or environmental factors such as significant traffic or pollution risk for example, may require sites to be examined at greater distance through potential catchment effects.

Similarly where large scale territories or ranging of important bird species may take them beyond the boundaries of a designated site then a development in excess of 15km may have the potential to impact upon qualifying interests of a European site.

For projects or plans which are likely to have lower levels of impact or a more restricted range of impacts, smaller more discrete areas may be appropriate within which to search for relevant designated sites.

In this case the plan has:

1. A currently undefined boundary within which the individual proposals are small scale in nature
2. Proposals for projects which will require to undergo assessment in their own right on a case by case basis

For significant effects to arise, there must be:

1. A risk from a 'source' (e.g. construction works at a site)
2. A 'receptor' (e.g. a Natura site or its qualifying interests)
3. A pathway between the source and the receptor (e.g. a blockage obstructing a flightpath to or from a Natura site).

The presence of a pathway does not necessarily mean that significant effects will arise. The likelihood for significant effects will depend upon the characteristics of the source (e.g. duration of construction works), the characteristics of the pathway (e.g. water quality status of a watercourse receiving run-off from construction) and the characteristics of the receptor (e.g. the sensitivities of the European site and its qualifying interests).

#### **4.2 Relevant European Sites and Qualifying Interests**

Given the notes regarding the nature of the project and its zone of influence in Section 4.1 above, this assessment will regard those European sites of relevance as being those with which the project search areas overlap or are within 5km of. There are no clear receptor pathways to sites beyond this range but this may change in future with regard to the specific details of proposals to be further developed. The sites are:

1. Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA (Site Code 004058)
2. Loughatorick South Bog SAC (Site Code 000308)
3. Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA (Site Code 004168)

These sites and their incidence in relation to the project search areas are shown in Figure 3.1.

Table 4.1 below provides an analysis of all qualifying interest features on the site in the context of their receptors and pathway, a brief analysis of the likelihood of impact and whether this impact may be significant.

*Table 4.1 European Sites with Associated Conservation Objectives and Identified Threats and Pressures*

Qualifying interest	Conservation Objectives	Present in proposed project area or potentially affected by project?	Potential Threats/Pressures from proposed development
<b>Site: Loughatorick South Bog SAC</b>			
7130 Blanket bogs	Objective: To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) and/or the Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected	No	This site lies within the moorland search area – no direct habitat take of moorland is planned so no effect likely on this site or its qualifying features
<b>Site: Lough Derg SPA</b>			
A017 Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA	Yes	Cormorants nesting on Lough Derg use the lake around Mountshannon for feeding and the wooded islands for loafing and potentially roosting - increased boat traffic from more visitors may cause some additional disturbance
A061 Tufted Duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i>		Yes	Small numbers of Tufted Duck use the bays in and around Mountshannon during their wintering period and increased boat traffic and shoreline disturbance from more visitors may cause additional disturbance and displace some of the birds present
A067 Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>		Yes	Small numbers of Goldeneye use the bays in and around Mountshannon during their wintering period and increased boat traffic and shoreline disturbance from more visitors may cause additional disturbance and displace some of the birds present
A193 Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>		Yes	Common Tern do not nest within the project area but do use the lake to hunt increased boat traffic and shoreline disturbance from more visitors may cause additional disturbance and displace some of the birds present
<b>Site: Slieve Aughy Mountains SPA</b>			
A082 Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i>	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA	Yes	Hen Harrier nest and hunt within the SPA and an increase in visitors may cause additional disturbance and displace some of the birds present
A098 Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i>		Yes	Merlin nest and hunt within the SPA and an increase in visitors may cause additional disturbance and displace some of the birds present

## 5. ASSESSMENT OF LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS ON EUROPEAN SITES

### 5.1 Likely Direct, Indirect or Secondary Impacts

Table 5.1 below illustrates the potential sources of impact within the plan

*Table 5.1 Sources and likelihood of potential direct or indirect impacts*

Plan element	Nature of activity	Is a significant direct effect likely without mitigation?	Is a significant indirect or secondary effect likely without mitigation?
Development of Management structure and project operations administration			
Commission Development Plan	Current plan	No – report production only	No – individual plan elements may impact but the plan itself is advisory only
Input into Lough Derg Strategy	Communication with stakeholders	No - communications	No
Agree management structure and role profiles	Administrative	No	No
Agree operational schedule	Administrative	No	Yes- potential for overall plan impacts
Funding bids - Centre, interpretive elements, Aistear interpretative upgrade, signage	Administrative	No	Yes- potential for overall plan impacts
Identify key strategic partnerships;	Communication with stakeholders	No	Not additional
Work with Blue Way	Communication/promotional with stakeholders	No	Not additional
Get ready for Hidden Heartlands call	Administrative	No	No
Appoint Project Manager	Administrative	No	No
Decision on Café – concession or self-operated	Administrative	No	Yes – potential impact from operation
Volunteer Programme	Operational	No	Not additional
Bid to Hidden Heartlands for feeding station (Raptor Safari)	Administrative	No	Yes- potential for overall plan impacts
Nature conservation activity			
Develop conservation objectives	Administrative	No	No
Conservation action programme	Operational	No	Yes – potential impact from operations
Development of marketing plan and media			

Marketing plan	Communications/promotional	No	Yes- increased visitors
Aim to lead for Mountshannon	Communication/promotional with stakeholders	No	No
Website/Social Media revamp	Communications/promotional	No	Yes- increased visitors
Bring single brand into play for as many activities as possible	Communication/promotional with stakeholders	No	No
Social media maintenance	Communications/promotional	No	Not additional
<b>Development of events &amp; education programme</b>			
Develop calendar of events	Administrative	No	Yes – potential impact from operations
Reach out to schools	Communications/promotional	No	Yes- increased visitors
Trial field trips/excursions	Operational	Yes – disturbance	No
Deliver calendar of events	Operational	Yes – disturbance	No
Deliver selected field trips/excursions	Operational	Yes – disturbance	No
<b>Development of trails and interpretation</b>			
Commission interpretative ‘design and deliver’ for Centre and Aistear	Communications/promotional	No	Yes- increased visitors
Bid to LEADER for Trail enhancement	Administrative	No	Yes- increased visitors
Construction phase for Trails	Operational	Yes – disturbance &/ or construction effects	No
Construction phase for feeding station (Raptor Safari)	Operational	Yes – disturbance from construction effects	No
Feeding station operational by Q2 or Q3 – review staff requirement or partner-up.	Operational	No – designed to cause no disturbance	Yes- increased visitors
<b>Development of a new eagle centre</b>			
Centre Construction phase	Operational	Yes – disturbance and other impacts from construction Invasive species	No
Centre Operational phase	Operational	No – contingent on no significant impact	Yes – increased visitors

There are a range of potential significant impacts both direct and indirect or secondary. These may derive from the source - receptor pathways identified in table 5.2 below

Table 5.2 Receptors, pathways and potential for control

Receptor	Likely pathways	Contingency and potential for mitigation
Disturbance to key bird species	Increased visitor numbers to lake and countryside areas or construction causing disturbance or displacement	Provision of designed trails, hides and viewpoints to avoid disturbance Construction activities planned to avoid areas and periods of disturbance
Qualifying habitats or habitats supporting qualifying species	Trails and discovery points may affect habitats  Visitors causing erosion or pollution  Construction or watercraft introducing invasive species	Careful routing of trails and siting of discovery points  Use of existing infrastructure Centre development adhering to planning regulations  Biosecurity provision through planning control and licensing of watercraft
Water quality impacts	Visitor centre operation and increased visitor numbers	Centre development adhering to planning regulations.  Ensuring capacity of waste water treatment measures

Table 5.3 Screening of relevant European sites/qualifying interests

Qualifying interest	Conservation Objectives	Present in proposed project area or potentially affected by project?	Potential Threats/Pressures from proposed development	Likely significant impact or information gap
<b>Site: Loughatorick South Bog SAC</b>				
7130 Blanket bogs	Objective: To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the Annex I habitat(s) and/or the Annex II species for which the SAC has been selected	No	This European site lies within the moorland search area but no direct land take from moorland habitats is planned	<b>No impact likely</b> on this site or its qualifying features
<b>Site: Lough Derg SPA</b>				
A017 Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA	Yes	Cormorants nesting on Lough Derg use the lake around Mountshannon for feeding and the wooded islands for loafing and potentially roosting increased boat traffic and shoreline disturbance from more visitors may cause additional	Increased disturbance may cause temporal and spatial displacement at an unknown level – <b>information gap</b> exists for all features at this site  Emissions or noise from construction activity may cause impacts including

			<p>disturbance and displace some of the birds present</p> <p>Emissions or noise from construction activity may cause impacts</p>	<p>disturbance or possibly from degradation of wetland habitats at un unknown level – <b>Information gap</b></p>
A061 Tufted Duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i>		Yes	<p>Small numbers of Tufted Duck use the bays in and around Mountshannon during their wintering period and increased boat traffic and shoreline disturbance from more visitors may cause additional disturbance and displace some of the birds present</p>	
A067 Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i>		Yes	<p>Small numbers of Goldeneye use the bays in and around Mountshannon during their wintering period and increased boat traffic and shoreline disturbance from more visitors may cause additional disturbance and displace some of the birds present</p> <p>Emissions or noise from construction activity may cause impacts</p>	
A193 Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>		Yes	<p>Common Tern do not nest within the project area but do use the lake to hunt increased boat traffic and shoreline disturbance from more visitors may cause additional disturbance and displace some of the birds present</p>	

			Emissions or noise from construction activity may cause impacts	
<b>Site: Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA</b>				
A082 Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i>	To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA	Yes	Hen Harrier nest and hunt within the SPA and an increase in visitors may cause additional disturbance and may displace some of the birds present  Emissions or noise from construction activity may cause disturbance impacts	Increased disturbance may cause temporal and spatial displacement at an unknown level – <b>information gap</b> exists for all features at this site
A098 Merlin <i>Falco columbarius</i>		Yes	Merlin nest and hunt within the SPA and an increase in visitors may cause additional disturbance and may displace some of the birds present  Emissions or noise from construction activity may cause disturbance impacts	

## 5.2 Likely Changes to European Sites

Any potential changes to the European Sites are described in Table 5.4

*Table 5.4 Likely Changes to European Sites*

<b>Reduction of Habitat Area</b>	No proposed reduction of habitats on any relevant European Site
<b>Disturbance to Key Species</b>	Likely impacts without mitigation – disturbance may be caused by increased tourism traffic on trails on moorland, lakeside areas and on the lake itself and may impact on waterbirds or on raptors. The level of significance cannot be assessed at this stage as there are information gaps which can be filled by more detail in project proposals
<b>Habitat or Species Fragmentation</b>	Disturbance or possibly pollution effects are possible without mitigation. Invasive species incursion may cause an impact if it is not controlled The level of significance cannot be assessed at this stage as there are information gaps which can be filled by more detail in project proposals
<b>Reduction in Species Density</b>	Disturbance effects are possible without mitigation. Invasive species incursion may cause an impact if it is not controlled

	The level of significance cannot be assessed at this stage as there are information gaps which can be filled by more detail in project proposals
<b>Changes in Key Indicators of Conservation Value</b>	Unknown but this is unlikely as effects are likely to be limited spatially and temporally
<b>Climate Change</b>	Climate change may affect the sites in the long-term through changes to species distribution, hydrology etc. In the absence of mitigation, this project may cause additional disturbance to waterbirds or raptors and this may exacerbate climate change impacts affecting species distribution or numbers which may impact on the condition of the site. The level of significance cannot be assessed at this stage as there are information gaps which can be filled by more detail in project proposals

## 6. Effect of the Project in Combination with Other Plans or Projects

### 6.1 Interaction with other plans and projects

This plan forms part of a large range of tourism based plans and initiatives within the wider area. Individual elements of the plan if delivered without mitigation could impact on the interest of European sites at a currently unknown level and therefore have the potential to result also in cumulative or in combination effects to European Sites and associated habitats and species.

The plan at this stage however, is indicative and advisory only. Given this outline development plan form, it is not possible to fully assess the potential for cumulative or in combination effects, as likely impacts will become more apparent once the specific sites, nature, design or operational details of specific plans and the resultant projects are developed.

As there is no planned land take from any designated site and each plan element, the most likely source of cumulative effects are where the project may contribute to disturbance of key species in previously undisturbed areas and combine therefore with other forms of disturbance on a wider site basis.

Examples of forms of disturbance which may feature in other plans include other recreational activities such as walking, cycling, boating and angling which are promoted at national, regional and local level.

Other land use activities which have implications for water quality such as agriculture and forestry which may impact upon other site features may also be of relevance. These aspects should be fully considered in the AA process which is required for each element.

The requirement for all projects to be screened and if necessary to undergo appropriate assessment in addition to the screening of this development plan as part of the relevant regulatory frameworks within which they fall provides the most appropriate point for the AA process as full information will be required for each project developed.

### 6.1 Likely significant effects upon European sites

The construction phase of infrastructure elements of the plan may have the potential to result in the following impacts that could negatively affect the status of special conservation interests of Lough Derg SPA or Slieve Aughy Mountains SPA:

- Emissions from construction sites resulting in pollution to Lough Derg.

- Noise emissions from construction sites resulting in disturbance of special conservation interest species of the SPA.
- Light emissions from construction sites, resulting in disturbance of special conservation interest species of the SPA.
- Introduction of non-native alien species during construction works.

The infrastructural and events elements of the plan will be likely to lead to an increase in tourism activity within the plan area. The potential operational effects of the plan primarily relate to the projected increase in tourism activity in the project area through boat and pedestrian traffic, tourism activity at the Eagle Centre and the future promotion of the area as a visitor destination, in combination in particular with the Lough Derg Blueway and with the potential for tourist developments at Inis Cealtra.

This overall increase in potential disturbance to populations of species of special conservation interest is at a currently unknown level and without further detail on the exact nature of the proposed projects and their resultant anticipated visitor footfall, this cannot be fully assessed at this stage.

## 7. Conclusions on Information Provided for Stage One Screening Assessment

### ***Determination of whether a project or plan is directly connected with or necessary to the conservation management of any European sites:***

This plan is not connected with the conservation management of any of the European sites of relevance but may in part contribute to conservation through some specific actions.

### ***Appraising likely significant effects of the proposed project on relevant European sites***

The administrative elements of the plan have no likely impact upon the relevant European sites or their qualifying interests.

Operational, promotional and construction activities associated with individual project proposals within the plan are likely to have impacts, without mitigation, but there significant **information gaps** exist and limit the ability to provide assessment at this stage, as the exact nature or specification of these plan elements is currently unknown and will require significant further planning.

The siting, scale, design, materials or likely outcomes associated with these project proposals may radically change the level or likelihood of impacts occurring and as a result each should be assessed either singly or as part of amalgamated projects or programmes through e.g. the planning authority or in the case of e.g. wildlife events that may fall out of planning, through licensing via NPWS.

As such the elements listed in table 3.1, which are indicatively assigned an approving or competent authority, should be selected for further screening and where necessary proceeding to AA. These are:

- Conservation action programme
- Trial field trips/excursions
- Deliver calendar of events
- Deliver selected field trips/excursions
- Commission interpretative 'design and deliver' for Centre and Aistear Park
- Bid to LEADER for Trail enhancement
- Construction phase for Trails
- Construction phase for feeding station (Raptor Safari)
- Feeding station operational by Q2 or Q3 – review staff requirement or partner-up.

- Development of a new eagle centre
- Centre Construction phase
- Centre operational phase

Those elements not assigned an approving or competent authority fall out with the likelihood of generating significant impacts and can be screened out for further assessment.

**IN LIGHT OF THE ANALYSIS PROVIDED HERE IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THIS DEVELOPMENT PLAN IS SCREENED OUT FOR APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT BUT INDIVIDUAL PLAN ELEMENTS (AS LISTED) ARE FURTHER SCREENED AND WHERE RELEVANT, APPROPRIATELY ASSESSED, ON AN INDIVIDUAL BASIS AS LISTED ABOVE**

