



Section 177 AE Application

Project Explanatory Report

Fáilte Ireland

Platforms for Growth

Facility Centre for Water Based Activities

MAGHERABEG

22/05/2024

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1.0 Introduction

‘Platforms for Growth’ is Fáilte Ireland’s new multi-annual capital investment programme designed to support Fáilte Ireland’s strategic imperative of Building Brilliant Visitor Experiences. Platforms for Growth is part of the Grants Scheme for Large Tourism Projects 2016 – 2020. It is Fáilte Ireland’s intention to base our future investments in large-scale capital projects on ‘platforms’ over the medium term. This is the second ‘platform’ to invite applications under the Platforms for Growth Investment Programme. This platform will enable sector growth and support the recovery of Irish tourism.

1.1 Background

In order to be recognised internationally as a best-in-class activity destination, it is crucial that Ireland invests in compelling activity infrastructure, the visitor experience and building the capacity of the activity providers to ensure the Irish experience meets and exceeds visitor expectations. With a temperate climate, Ireland has the potential to offer high-quality outdoor experiences for a minimum of nine months of the year, however, the quality of activity experience currently lags behind international standards due to the lack of adequate visitor facilities and an ad hoc approach to the delivery of activity experiences.

This scheme is designed for Local Authorities only and is anticipated to deliver an appropriate range of new activity visitor facilities around the country via a collaborative approach. The outcomes Fáilte Ireland is aiming to achieve with the addition of activity visitor facilities are all-weather changing facilities at existing water sports locations, the key components of which will be;

- sustainable and accessible design
- toilet provision
- shower provision
- changing provision
- secure storage
- induction space
- external terrace
- equipment washdown facilities
- orientation points and security

The facilities are likely to be a combination of new builds or appropriate repurposing of existing facilities on the identified sites.

1.2 Audit of Activity providers

In order to align the scheme with the strategic objectives of investment in activity tourism infrastructure and experiences, Fáilte Ireland conducted a spatial mapping exercise to identify

potential priority locations and suitable sites for the development of an Activity Facility Centre. This mapping identified a range of ‘activity hotspots’ and clusters across the country that are considered to have the potential to become significant ‘activity hubs’.

When conducting the spatial mapping, a series of criteria were applied to the exercise. It was a requirement that the potential locations and sites identified comprised or displayed particular features and characteristics. These included (but were not limited to) the following:

- Candidate locations should include two or more commercial water sports activity operators.
- Candidate locations must be at or in close proximity to Blue Flag or Green Coast beaches or a Blueway or well-established destinations for water sports activities.
- Candidate locations should be in close proximity to other visitor provision such as accommodation facilities, food and beverage outlets/services, visitor attractions and other visitor experiences, and other things to see and do in the locality

1.3 Site shortlisting process

Fáilte Ireland initially identified 136 eligible locations. This long list was distilled down to a shortlist of 22 locations. This was done in consultation with three key stakeholders; Fáilte Ireland’s local programme team, Industry representatives and the Local Authorities. Please note that there are now 21 perspective sites.

Programme Team Consultations

The “long list” of potential locations was shared with and discussed with Fáilte Ireland programme Teams to reinforce and verify the list of identified locations, taking into consideration the local knowledge, alignment with VEDP’s, destination priorities and Local Authority capacity. This engagement further refined the list and identified a number of locations for further investigation and formed the basis for the Local Authority consultation phase. Ongoing dialogue continued with the Programme Teams throughout the design of the scheme.

1.4 Industry Engagement

A representative sample of industry providers specialising in water sports in the candidate locations were interviewed to ascertain the gaps and opportunities in the delivery of best-in-class water-based visitor activities. At least two letters of support from water sport operators, from each candidate location, were included in the Local Authorities’ initial application.

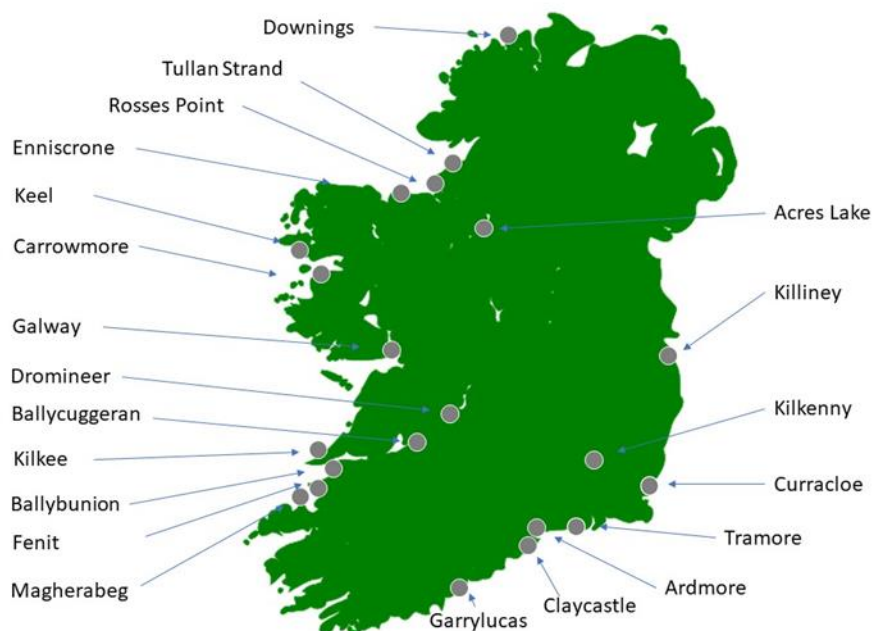
1.5 Local Authority Engagement

Conversations were had with a number of Local Authorities as part of the scoping phase of the scheme. This confirmed the need and appetite for the scheme. More detailed engagement with Local Authorities examined each prospective site in detail. In December 2020 the Local Authorities were invited to formally nominate sites which were subsequently evaluated against eligibility criteria by Fáilte Ireland’s Investment Analysis Division.

1.6 Environmental Constraints & Opportunities

Fáilte Ireland developed a four phased environmental assessment approach to contribute to the site selectin process. Further details on this approach can be viewed under “Environmental Assessment”

Final site locations



1.7 Exemplar Design

The concept and strategy behind the scheme's design-led approach was to appoint one design team (procured by Fáilte Ireland) that developed universal and standardised design options for all of the Activity Facility Centres delivered under the scheme, but which can be adapted to suit individual location and site specifications (size, dimensions, capacity, etc.) as well as the surrounding environment and landscape.

The design-led approach is anticipated to deliver the following benefits:

- A consistent approach to activity visitor product, service, and experience provision across the country (including minimising possible variance in provision between different locations and sites)
- A readily recognisable facility by way of its physical structure and composition and associated branding
- An 'off-the-shelf' exemplar design solution informed through stakeholder consultation and engagement and 'proof of concept'
- A collaborative approach with Local Authorities, Activity Operators and key stakeholders with robust, ongoing support and expertise from Fáilte Ireland
- Cost savings due to economies of scale and efficiencies in delivering the Activity Facility Centres

1.8 Design Development

An outline brief was created by Fáilte Ireland which informed the project aspirations. MCA were awarded the contract. Three sample water sport operators were consulted by MCA in order to inform practical elements of the design. A concept design was created based upon a number of clear project aspirations including;

- Structural requirements, robustness, life cycle and reduced maintenance over time
- Sustainable service provision and low running cost
- Universal access – fully accessible regardless of ability or disability
- An aesthetic design which had a clear relationship to and was complementary to its environs



MCA concept design sample

The concept design was presented back to the local authorities for further consultation and a cost check performed by external quantity surveyors in order to ensure that the concept design was affordable within parameters of the Platforms for Growth scheme.

This Exemplar Design was shared with the Local Authorities along with a works document which outlines how Fáilte Ireland envision the design to be used. The level of detail shared with each authority constitute design intent. It is intended that each authority adapt the Exemplar Design to each site context. A set of design points within the works document specifies key features which are to be retained irrespective of any other adaptations. This will help to ensure a level of brand consistency across all site locations.

1.9 Environmentally Sustainable principles of Design/Build

As a condition of the investment grant scheme, all new build facilities are required to conform to nearly zero energy building standards and be appropriately and sensitively designed to integrate with the site's natural environment and surrounding location. The facility should be built to the highest possible environmental specifications, including the following solutions:

- The development of carbon neutral buildings
- The use of sustainable building materials that are sourced locally (projects should use recycled building material where possible)
- The use of solar heating panels for hot water
- The use of windows and natural daylight to reduce the need for electricity usage
- Being sympathetic to the environment and landscape of the selected location and site
- Planting trees and native plants on the site
- Installing high efficiency utilities
- Construction stage environmental management plan
- Consideration for innovative and sympathetic construction methodologies e.g., floating foundations

The above solutions are not an exhaustive list, and Local Authorities are encouraged to adopt any further appropriate and environmentally sound actions and measures for the ongoing management and operation of the facility.

1.10 Management and Maintenance

The concept behind the scheme's collaborative design-led approach is to drive innovation, create efficiencies, leverage economies of scale and deliver a consistent, world class experience for visitors. The investment grant scheme proposes that following the initial capital investment by Fáilte Ireland in the construction and fit-out of the facility centre, the Local Authority will own, operate, maintain, and reinvest in the facility.

It will be a condition of an award of investment grant funding that the Local Authority agrees to enter into a Management Agreement for the ongoing management cleaning, maintenance, and repair of the facility centre to ensure its upkeep to the highest possible standards and the facilitation and promotion of users' health and hygiene.

The Management Agreement will be put in place for the term of the investment, a period of 15 years.

Fáilte Ireland and Local Authorities recognise that these facilities should be of the highest hygiene standards to meet and preferably, exceed visitor expectations at all times. This will require a consistent approach to the day-to-day operation and maintenance of the facilities.

As such, a Standard operating procedure (SOP) for cleaning and maintenance of the facility will be established as a condition of the Investment Grant Agreement in line with industry best practice and will contain a detailed cleaning and hygiene of the facility including specifications for cleaning, minimum cleaning frequencies and maintenance responsibilities.

The facility should be visited, inspected, and cleaned in accordance with this cleaning schedule, in order to ensure compliance with the standard operating procedure and grant terms and conditions. SOP's will be developed based on environmentally sustainable best practice.

2.0 Environmental Assessment

Note : This section deals primarily with Failte Irelands approach to the Habitat Directive Assessment (the likely significant effects on a European Site) and all other environmental considerations beyond the Directive has been detailed as part of the planning application.

Fáilte Ireland developed a four phased approach to ensuring that environmental protection and promotion form an integral element of the development, assessment and implementation of this Platforms for Growth and resulting proposed facility.

An initial list of 47 potentially suitable sites were considered under this Platform for Growth and this environmental approach contributed to refining the final list of proposed sites to 21

In developing this approach, it was intended that the following are achieved:

- The Platform is in line with the VICE Model for Sustainable Tourism Development
- Compliance with all required environmental legislation & regulation
- Aid the applicants in choosing suitable sites
- Contribute to suitable design, siting, construction & operation of facilities
- Ensure full compliance with the Habitats Directive i.e. consider the requirement for Appropriate Assessment for each site that is considered under the Platform
- Develop environmental mitigation and monitoring that will be implemented during both development & operation

The following are a summary of the four phases

Phase 1 – Environmental Opportunity & Constraints Assessment

- Scope: Desktop review of initial list of sites resulting in matrix table and categorising sites through a traffic light system
- Purpose: To aid local authorities to refine site list.
- Output: Traffic Light Matrix for all sites
- Parameters Considered:
 - Ecological Sensitivities: SAC/SPA, Annex I habitats present, known threats & pressures to the ecology at that site.
 - Planning Issues
 - Archaeology
 - Landscape/ Scenery
 - Traffic
 - Water Services

A traffic light system was used to categorise the sites according to the following criteria:

Green	Mild Amber	Deep Amber	Red
No obvious ecological constraints	Ecologically sensitive site with potential to be managed appropriately	Ecologically sensitive site which may provide supporting habitat for protected species.	Clear ecological constraints are evident

Phase 2: Site Visits – Site Visit & Habitat Assessments

- Scope: Ecologist to visit sites from refined list in order to carry out detailed habitat and environmental mapping
- Purpose:
 - To determine further site constraints and opportunities
 - To gather relevant information required for future appropriate assessments
 - To review current site issues (e.g. traffic, wastewater, other site activities) beyond ecology
 - To offer input to design process –suitable locations, environmental solutions etc.
- Output 1: Habitat & Environmental Mapping for each site
- Output 2: Update & finalisation of Environmental Opportunity & Constraints Assessment

Phase 3 – Further Detailed Surveys for the Purposes of the Habitats Directive

- Scope: Complete specialist ecological surveys for sites that identify the requirement for same form Phase 1 and 2 e.g. wintering bird surveys
- Purpose and Output: To ensure all required survey work is completed on sites going forward in the scheme in order to fully inform the Appropriate Assessment (AA) process if required for that site.

Phase 4 – Appropriate Assessment

- Scope: Having consideration for Phase 1, 2 & 3 and for the application sites consider requirements under the Habitats Directive e.g. AA Screening & possible full Appropriate Assessment.
- Purpose:
 - To ensure the scheme is compliant with the requirements of the Habitats Directive
 - To develop where required compliance requirements through mitigation & monitoring

- To aid in streamlining the consent process for each applicant
- Output 1: Appropriate Assessment Screening – Screened Out - Part 8 Planning
- Output 2: Appropriate Assessment Screening - Screened in - Full Appropriate Assessment Report – Section 177AE – Application to the Board.

3.0 Policy context

3.1 National Level

Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) The NPF is the overarching planning policy for the state (published in February 2018 under Project 2040) and contains ten National Strategic Outcomes and 75 National Policy Objectives. This planning framework sets out where development and investment should be guided to shape the national, regional and local spatial development in economic, environmental and social terms to 2040. A National Strategic Outcome prescribed in the NPF is ‘Enhanced Amenities and Heritage’ with the objective to;

Invest in and enable access to recreational facilities, including trails networks, designed and delivered with a strong emphasis on conservation, allowing the protection and preservation of our most fragile environments and providing a wellbeing benefit for all.

National Tourism Policy 2015: ‘People, Place and Policy: growing Tourism to 2025’

The Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport published national tourism policy in March 2015 entitled ‘‘People, Place and Policy: growing Tourism to 2025’.

The National Tourism Policy notes that to provide an effective tourism product, there must be a diverse range of activities for visitors. While much of our attractiveness as a tourism destination is down to the natural environment, since the early 1990s, the State has supported the development and improvement of our place by investing in our physical visitor attractions, visitor infrastructure, and facilities for visitor activities.

Policy Proposal 1.3.3 states: The design of future supports for capital investment in tourism will recognise the need for investment in both physical assets and in other areas that provide a lasting improvement in the overall quality of the visitor experience.

In order to be recognised internationally as a best-in-class activity destination, it is crucial that Ireland invests in compelling activity infrastructure, the visitor experience and building the capacity of the activity providers to ensure the Irish experience meets and exceeds visitor expectations. It is considered the proposed development is critically important to implementing on a key national tourism policy.

National Marine Planning Framework

The NMPF contains a vision, objectives, and planning policies for all marine-based human activities. It outlines how those activities will interact with each other in an increasingly pressured ocean space. It is to be the key decision-making tool for Government departments, State agencies, regulatory authorities, and policy makers for decisions on marine activities up to 2040.

The NMPF has numerous objectives and planning policies which supports the development of tourism, tourism facilities and improved access.

Key Objectives of the NMPF are to;

- Increase participation in a range of water-based sports and recreation activities for the benefit of public health and wellbeing, as well as developing our tourism offering.
- Position Ireland as a world-class sustainable coastal and marine tourism destination through the sustainable development of coastal and marine recreation activities and industries in Ireland.

A number of planning policies support the proposed development

Tourism Policy 1

Where appropriate, proposals enabling, promoting or facilitating sustainable tourism and recreation activities, particularly where this creates diversification or additional utilisation of related facilities beyond typical usage patterns, should be supported.

Sport & Recreation Policy 1

Proposals that promote sustainable development of water-based sports and marine recreation, while enhancing community health, wellbeing and quality of life, should be supported, provided that due consideration is given to environmental carrying capacities and tourism pressures.

Sport & Recreation Policy 4

Proposals that improve access to marine and coastal resources for tourism activities, and sport and recreation should be supported, where appropriate, at the applicable scale and aligned with existing development plans.

Access Policy 2

Proposals demonstrating appropriate enhanced and inclusive public access to and within the maritime area, and that consider the future provision of services for tourism and recreation activities, should be supported, subject to the outcome of statutory environmental assessment processes and subsequent decision by the competent authority, and where they contribute to the policies and objectives of this NMPF.

The principal statutory purpose of the RSES is to support the implementation of Project Ireland 2040 and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the Eastern and Midlands, Northern and Western and the Southern Regions. The development of Regional Strategic Outcomes in the RSES is

also closely aligned and supportive of both the NSO's prescribed in the NPF and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

(SRA) Applicable for the following counties:

Wexford/Waterford/Kilkenny/Tipperary/Clare/Cork/Kerry

The Southern Regional RSES highlights that the region has a significant share of Ireland's premier tourism resources – both natural and man-made. The RSES recognises that a successful tourism sector creates significant benefits for many other sectors such as agriculture, food and drinks, transport and retail. The RSES supports the Department of Rural and Community Development's Action Plan for Rural Development (APRD) which seeks to increase tourist numbers to rural Ireland, support sustainable jobs through targeted rural tourism initiatives, develop activity tourism and leverage natural and built heritage assets.

The proposed development is supported by Regional Policy Objective 53

It is an objective to:

- a) Enhance provision of tourism and leisure amenity to cater for increased population in the Region including recreation, entertainment, cultural, catering, accommodation, transport and water infrastructure inter alia;***
- b) Promote activity tourism subject to appropriate site selection and environmental assessment processes;***

3.2 Kerry County Development Plan

10.4.1.3 Water-Based Tourism

County Kerry has an extensive coastline of over 1000km which is a major tourist and environmental asset. The county has 14 blue flag beaches which are a popular resource for a number of water sports activities including surfing, swimming, paddle boarding and kayaking and also for activities such as walking and wellbeing in a coastal setting. The protection of the coastline as a tourism asset is of huge importance to ensure long-term benefits from tourism activities. The waterways, rivers and lakes of County Kerry are rich natural resources that attract many visitors to the County each year. In addition, they provide significant leisure and amenity opportunities including fishing, sea-angling, sailing, birdwatching and pleasure boating. Ensuring access to the lakes and waterways and the sustainable management of activities taking place on the water, on the lakeshore and in the riparian zone of waterways is essential to ensure a balance between tourism development and conservation of natural heritage in these areas. The importance of biosecurity and protection of our watercourses from invasive species is particularly recognised due to the potential negative impacts on fisheries, water quality and angling/other water-based amenity tourism. Given the extent of the County's marine heritage and the indigenous strengths of the region's coastal environs it is an objective of the Council, to encourage the sustainable development of waterways, rivers and lakes for marine tourism related uses

KCDP 10-2 Facilitate sustainable tourism development throughout the County and particularly in areas where tourism is currently underdeveloped and where there is a need for local tourism development initiatives including Greenways, Blueways, Peatways, Cycleways, Walkways and Marine Leisure.

KCDP 10-24 Recognise the importance of universal accessibility to tourist services, facilities, and tourist sites and undertake enhancements to overall accessibility where appropriate in conjunction with key stakeholders and to ensure that information on these facilities are clearly promoted and publicised.

KCDP 10-35 Promote and facilitate the sustainable development of outdoor activities including winter and adventure sports, in appropriate locations, such as walking, rambling, cycling, land and sea-based activities with specialised centres and facilities in association with Munster Technological University, Fáilte Ireland, National Trails Office, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Local Development Companies, Sport Ireland, Healthy Ireland, Local Development Companies, Kerry Education and Training Board and other relevant national and County based departments and agencies.

KCDP 10-56 Support the provision of appropriately designed and located toilet and changing facilities at blue flag beaches in the county and at other locations subject to need assessment and environmental compatibility County Development Plan

3.3 County Kerry Tourism Strategy 2016-2022 (KCC, 2016)

The Kerry County Council Tourism Unit together with the Destination Kerry Forum and other stakeholders, prepared a Kerry Tourism Strategy & Action Plan 2016-2022 to support the development of tourism in Kerry. The Kerry Tourism Strategy sets out in detail the importance of this industry both in economic and social terms. The Tourism Strategy works to the principles of the National Tourism Policy as outlined in 'People, Place & Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025' and forms an integral part of the County Kerry Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2022. The Vision for Kerry Tourism is 'to maximise, in a sustainable manner, tourism's contribution to the quality of life, economy, employment and local community development, paying particular attention to nurturing and protecting the natural, built, cultural and linguistic heritage of the county.

1.14.4 Develop a plan for the Improvement of facilities at Kerry's 14 no. Blue Flag beaches/marina, for the promotion of water sports and activities

Corca Dhuibhne Electoral Area Local Area Plan 2021-2027

Importance of Tourism

It is the policy of the Council to promote and develop niche tourism markets. These niche markets can be tailored to meet the needs of an audience/market segment. Castlegregory and the Maharees have specific niche products which can further establish and position themselves, as niche tourism destinations such as camping, water-based activities/events, hillwalking, inland fisheries and sea angling. The further development of these niche activities has the potential to make a significant contribution to the economy of Castlegregory due to their diverse range and wide seasonality.

D-B-02 Support the provision of appropriately designed and located toilet and changing facilities at blue flag beaches in the electoral area and at other locations subject to need assessment and environmental compatibility.

CG-OO-02 Promote the sustainable development of ecotourism and other niche markets. Encourage the sustainable extension and diversification of tourist facilities at appropriate locations.

CG-TM-01 Encourage the sustainable provision of an all-year-round tourism and recreational facility at an appropriate location

CG-TM-05 Support the creation of a Blueway in Castlegregory and the Maharees to support sustainable tourism development in a sustainable manner.

CG-A-04 Facilitate the development of public toilets and other public facilities at Maharabeg, appropriate locations in the village and surrounding area.

Fáilte Ireland Dingle Peninsula Visitor Experience Plan

A Dingle Peninsula Visitor Experience Development Plan (Dingle Peninsula VEDP) has been developed with the tourism industry and communities to create a platform for destination development to deliver on the mutual goals of all stakeholders. The overarching objectives of the Dingle Peninsula VEDP include providing motivational reasons for international tourists to visit and stay in the local communities throughout the Dingle Peninsula and increase the economic value generated by visitors to the destination

Destination Enabling Projects - Adventure Hub - Assess the creation of an Adventure Hub focus for the North Shore area on the Dingle Peninsula and development of a centre of excellence approach for experience provision in outdoor adventure.



EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT THEME WELLBEING OF ADVENTURE

OVERVIEW

The Dingle Peninsula inspires adventure. It is a hub where adventure has created so many heroes. The walks, trails, beaches and waters provide the arena for visitors to explore their sense of adventure against the contrasting vistas only the Dingle Peninsula provides. Follow the trails of Tom Crean or take to the waters of St Brendan to find a wellbeing through adventure.

Visitors can run one of the longest beaches in Ireland, windsurf on the waters that welcomes World Champions, walk the highest road in Ireland or climb to the peak of Mount Brandon. The waters of the North Shore of the Dingle Peninsula provide the stage for scuba diving and exploring wild Atlantic ocean life. If you prefer to stay above the water, surf, SUP or kayak around some of the country's most renowned landmarks. The Dingle Peninsula provides every opportunity to arouse the wellbeing of adventure across the lands of the peninsula or in the waters.

PRESENTING THE THEME TO THE VISITOR

The Dingle Peninsula offers an unrivalled array of soft adventure opportunities for visitors to engage with, regardless of the time of year. No two days can be the same set against the contrasting backdrops to jump into local adventure. The scale of adventure and local activities provides the visitors with an opportunity to immerse themselves in the landscape and waters of the Dingle Peninsula and appreciate the beauty and uniqueness of the area even more. The range of adventure activity from soft adventure to active leisure offers the visitor an opportunity to deeply explore the diversity of the culture and natural heritage of the area. The theme offers many layers of engagement from visitors interested in active leisure from walking, horse trekking and cycling to more adrenaline fuelled activities. All activities target the visitors sense of adventure and the destination evokes curiosity whether they explore it on foot, bike or water.

HERO PRODUCTS

- ▶ The Dingle Way
- ▶ Climb Mount Brandon
- ▶ Surf the Wild Atlantic Way at Inch Beach
- ▶ Watersports in Castlegregory and North Shore
- ▶ Scuba Diving in the Maharees
- ▶ SUP Tours Dingle

SUPPORTING EXPERIENCES

- ▶ Kayaking and paddle boarding experiences
- ▶ Beach and Mountain Horse Riding
- ▶ Splash Sports
- ▶ Jamie Knox Watersports
- ▶ Deep Sea Fishing Tours
- ▶ Electric Bike Tour of the Sleá Head circuit
- ▶ Round of golf at Ceann Sibéal Golf Course
- ▶ Brandon Bay Beach Half Marathon
- ▶ Dingle Marathon and Dingle Adventure Race
- ▶ Wild SUP and Kite Surfing Tours
- ▶ Range of outdoor experiences with Irish Adventures
- ▶ Celtic Nature Walking Tours
- ▶ Foraging Tours
- ▶ Ceann Sibéal Dingle Links Golf Club
- ▶ Castlegregory Golf Links

EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Creation of a Centre of Excellence approach for the North Shore to position it as central to the Adventure Hub focus for the Dingle Peninsula.
- ▶ Examination of the capacity of niche events such as the Brandon Bay Beach Half Marathon to develop into an international event.
- ▶ Examination of increased off road cycling opportunities to provide visitors with an alternative to cycling on congested roads during peak visitor periods.