



**Comhairle Contae  
Dhún na nGall**  
Donegal County Council



# Planning Policy Statement

for

Donegal County Council

*Downings Facility Centre for Water Sports Activities*

at

Crocknamurleog, Na Dúnaibh, Co. Donegal

December 2025

**Feaver.**

## Preface / Introduction

This statement has been prepared by Feaver Planning on behalf of Donegal County Council & Fáilte Ireland in support of the proposed Facility Centre for Water Sports Activities at Main Street carpark, Crocknamurleog, Downings, Co. Donegal. The proposed development consists of the construction of a facility centre for water sports activities and associated works including safety improvement works to the access lane to Na Dúnaibh beach, wayfinding signage, site drainage, landscaping works, carpark realignment, demolition of existing public toilets, connection to existing utilities, accommodation works and supporting ancillary works.

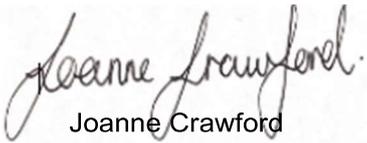
The proposed facility centre for water sports is a single-storey facility comprising accessible changing rooms, showers, a “Changing Places” toilet, public conveniences, storage areas, and associated external amenities. Enhancements to the surrounding public realm include the provision of formal parking spaces, safety improvement to beach access paths, new seating, bicycle facilities, landscaping, and signage.

Situated adjacent to a Blue Flag beach along the Wild Atlantic Way, the development supports the regional tourism strategy and aligns with national, regional, and local planning objectives relating to infrastructure investment, coastal resilience, and the provision of inclusive public facilities.

As the proposed development is being undertaken by a local authority and is located within Sheephaven Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (001190), the application is required to be made directly to An Coimisiún Pleanála, in accordance with Section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and Article 249 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended). A public notice must also be issued stating the intention to submit the application to An Coimisiún Pleanála.

### Document Control:

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## Site Context and Planning History

The subject site is located at Main Street carpark, Crocknamurleog, Na Dúnaibh, Co. Donegal, adjacent to Downings Blue Flag beach, a key amenity on the Rosguill Peninsula and along the Wild Atlantic Way. The site is currently occupied by a single-storey public toilet block of approximately 40m<sup>2</sup>, situated at the western edge of the existing public carpark. The site is bounded by the Downings Bay Hotel to the east, a Family Resource Centre to the northwest, and existing caravan park facilities to the southeast and west.

The location is well-used by beachgoers, residents, and seasonal visitors, with strong pedestrian access to the shoreline and views across Sheephaven Bay. The surrounding area is characterised by a mix of tourism-related uses, local services, and residential properties.

Fáilte Ireland understands 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. Downings has the potential to offer high-quality outdoor experiences, however, the quality of activity experience currently and existing site facilities lags behind international standards due to lack of adequate visitor facilities, this project aims to address these shortcomings with the new fully accessible Facility Centre for Water Sports Activities which offers, toilet provision, shower provision, changing provision, secure storage, induction space, external equipment washdown facilities and orientation points.

There is no record of recent planning permissions relating directly to this site for a similar form of development. However, as the development is being undertaken by a local authority and is located within Sheephaven Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (001190), the application is required to be made directly to An Coimisiún Pleanála in accordance with Section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and Article 249 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

It is also noted that a separate flood relief scheme for Downings is being advanced by Donegal County Council and the Office of Public Works, with the aim of mitigating coastal and fluvial flood risk in the village. While the Facility Centre for Water Sports Activities is not directly within the core flood intervention area, this strategic investment reflects broader efforts to enhance coastal resilience and public safety infrastructure in the locality. The proposed development is consistent with these aims and complements the overall objective of improving the amenity, accessibility, and environmental robustness of the area.

### Maritime Area Consent (MAC)

A successful Maritime Area Consent (MAC) application has been lodged in accordance with the Maritime Area Planning (Map) Act and granted, providing the necessary statutory approval to lodge this application to An Coimisiún Pleanála.

## Proposed Development

The proposed development comprises the construction of a facility centre for water sports activities and associated works including safety improvement works to the access lane to Na Dúnaibh beach, wayfinding signage, site drainage, landscaping works, carpark realignment, demolition of existing public toilets, connection to existing utilities, accommodation works and supporting ancillary works.

The new building will provide:

- Accessible unisex WCs and ambulant facilities
- Multiple shower and changing rooms
- A “Changing Places” toilet and accessible washroom
- Plant and electrical rooms
- Secure external lockers, benches, bike repair station and equipment washdown facilities

In addition to the building, the proposal includes significant public realm improvements:

- Reconfiguration of the existing car park, providing formalised parking spaces including accessible bays
- Relocated recycling facilities with stone-clad enclosure
- Construction of a fully accessible segregated pedestrian & vehicle beach access laneway with retaining structures
- New footpaths, public seating, lighting, and wayfinding signage
- Soft landscaping including raised grass areas and planting beds
- High-quality finishes including corten steel cladding, precast concrete panels, and a sedum green roof

As part of the commitment to safety and accessibility, the development will provide improved access between the carpark and beach through the creation of a dedicated pedestrian walkway. This walkway will be located to the side of the existing vehicular access, ensuring safe segregation of foot traffic and enhancing the experience and safety of beach users.

The development is designed to integrate into its sensitive coastal setting, using durable, low-maintenance materials and a low-profile form that complements the landscape. It will serve beach users, water sports activity users, local residents, and the wider tourism economy by providing modern, inclusive facilities that support active recreation and environmental sustainability.

## Policy Context

The proposal is assessed in the context of the applicable planning policy framework at national, regional, and local levels. The development aligns with strategic goals for sustainable tourism, coastal amenity enhancement, and community infrastructure.

### National Planning Framework (NPF)

The NPF establishes a long-term strategy for compact growth, environmental sustainability, and enhanced quality of life through targeted public investment. The proposal in Downings aligns strongly with several key objectives, including:

NPO 14 – Strengthen and diversify rural towns – Promotes regeneration and targeted investment. The proposal contributes to revitalising Downings by supporting year-round tourism and leveraging its coastal setting to enhance local economic and social activity.

NPO 20 – Vibrant Towns and Villages - Supports development that stimulates population, employment, and activity in existing settlements. The proposal enhances Downings vitality by providing improved public amenities for both residents and visitors.

NPO 23 – Sense of place and culture and the quality, character and distinctiveness of the Irish rural landscape - The proposal supports National Policy Objective 23 by enhancing Downings distinctive surf and coastal identity through a sensitively designed, inclusive facility. The low-profile building, coastal materials, and integration with natural features strengthen the town's character while protecting the scenic and cultural value of the rural landscape.

NPO 24 – Reversing Rural Decline - Aims to counteract rural decline through investment in amenities and public infrastructure. The scheme delivers high-quality recreational infrastructure and durable public realm upgrades, contributing to long-term community resilience.

NPO 26 – Appropriately designed development in rural towns - Encourages context-sensitive, well-designed interventions that support regeneration and renewal, including improvements to the public realm. The proposal delivers a landscape-integrated design aligned with Downings character and coastal tourism profile.

NPO 27 - Sustainable Mobility and Access - Supports the development of a comprehensive and safe network for walking and cycling. The proposal incorporates new and improved pedestrian footpaths, an accessible boardwalk to the beach, and cycle-friendly infrastructure, encouraging active travel and safer connectivity.

NPO 34 – Tourism - The proposal supports National Policy Objective 34 by delivering sustainable, low-impact recreation infrastructure along the Wild Atlantic Way. It enhances tourism and public access while aligning with biodiversity, climate resilience, and environmental compliance goals.

NPO 37 – Covenant alternatives to car - The proposal supports National Policy Objective 37 by improving pedestrian and cycling access through new footpaths and an accessible boardwalk, encouraging active travel and inclusive recreation.

Summary: This proposal at Downings delivers a high-quality, inclusive facility that addresses both local infrastructure needs and wider strategic planning priorities. It enhances public access to a valued coastal amenity, supports tourism and recreational activity, and strengthens Downings' identity as a vibrant, year-round destination along the Wild Atlantic Way. The development is sensitively designed to integrate with the surrounding dune landscape, placing emphasis on environmental protection, climate resilience, and universal accessibility. It replaces informal infrastructure with durable, purpose-built facilities, improves pedestrian and cycling connections, and ensures safer, more inclusive access to the beach. The proposal is fully aligned with the principles of the National Planning Framework (NPF), including compact growth, rural regeneration, sustainable mobility, and inclusive design. It represents a balanced, policy-consistent response to the needs of Downings and the wider region, and planning approval is respectfully sought in support of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

## Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) – Northern and Western Region

The site lies within the North-West Strategic Growth Area and benefits from its location on the Atlantic Economic Corridor and the Wild Atlantic Way. Key Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs) supported include:

RPO 4.1 – Coastal and Countryside Access – Supports improved access to coastal areas and the maintenance of trails and paths. The proposal contributes to this by delivering a formalised, accessible route to the beach that enhances safe public access and protects the surrounding environment.

RPO 4.3 – Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDPs) - Encourages implementation of regional tourism strategies to enhance visitor infrastructure and promote destination development. The proposal directly contributes to this by providing upgraded beachside recreational infrastructure that supports surf tourism and coastal activity.

RPO 4.4 – Wild Atlantic Way Network – Supports upgrades to visitor infrastructure along the Wild Atlantic Way to accommodate increased use by tourists. The proposal contributes to this by improving beachside amenities, parking, and access routes for visitors arriving by car, bus, or on foot.

RPO 4.5 – Coastal Walking and Cycling Routes – Promotes the development of coastal walking and cycling routes connected to the Wild Atlantic Way. The proposal supports this objective through the delivery of an accessible boardwalk and enhanced pedestrian pathways that link key recreational assets in the area.

RPO 5.6 – Natural Heritage and Well-being – Promotes awareness of the benefits of natural heritage for health, wellbeing, and ecosystem services. The proposal supports this by enhancing access to Downings coastal environment in a way that encourages outdoor activity, nature appreciation, and environmental stewardship.

RPO 7.9 – Public Open Space and Accessibility – Supports provision of inclusive, well-designed recreational spaces at heritage and coastal sites. The proposal achieves this by enhancing pedestrian access and amenities in the area, contributing to the creation of a healthy, walkable, and socially active environment.

RPO 7.11 – Active Living and Health Policy Integration – Promotes planning that supports physical activity and public health. The proposal delivers infrastructure that encourages year-round outdoor recreation, walking, and active living in alignment with Healthy Ireland principles.

Summary: The proposal aligns with the strategic goals of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Region by enhancing sustainable tourism infrastructure, improving public access to coastal amenities, and supporting the vitality of Downings as a key destination on the Wild Atlantic Way. It contributes to regional objectives around active travel, outdoor recreation, environmental protection, and community wellbeing. The development also reinforces the area's role within the North-West Growth Area and the Atlantic Economic Corridor, supporting balanced regional development and long-term resilience.

## County Donegal Development Plan 2024–2030

The proposal is consistent with several key objectives and policies in the County Development Plan, particularly in relation to coastal infrastructure, inclusive design, and environmental integration:

T-O-2 to T-O-4 – County Donegal Development Plan 2024–2030 – Support the delivery of safe, high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure connected to key destinations, including recreational and tourism areas. The proposal contributes to these objectives by formalising pedestrian access to Downings beach through an inclusive boardwalk and path network that enhances connectivity, safety, and non-vehicular movement.

T-P-3 – Requires development to incorporate active travel infrastructure and protect linkages such as trails and greenways. The proposal supports this policy by delivering a coherent access route that integrates with existing public realm improvements and facilitates safe, sustainable travel within the coastal environment.

TOU-O-1 – Sustainable Tourism Development – Seeks to enhance Donegal’s tourism offering while protecting the landscape, heritage, and community character. The proposal supports this by delivering environmentally sensitive, inclusive infrastructure that strengthens Downings coastal tourism appeal without detracting from its natural setting.

TOU-P-1 – Wild Atlantic Way Implementation – Supports development of strategic tourism experiences consistent with the Wild Atlantic Way brand. The proposal aligns with this by upgrading key coastal access infrastructure and visitor amenities at Downings, a recognised tourism node.

Policy TOU-P-5 – Activity-Based Tourism – Supports resource-related tourism such as surfing and watersports where the development is dependent on the coastal setting and delivers wider economic and community benefits. The proposal meets these criteria by enhancing facilities for surf schools, promoting inclusive access, and supporting Downings local tourism economy.

CCG-O-1 – Sustainable and Inclusive Communities – Supports the creation of socially inclusive, healthy, and culturally vibrant communities through the provision of high-quality recreational infrastructure. The proposal contributes to this by enhancing equitable access to coastal recreation and promoting community well-being.

CC-O-2 – Green and Active Infrastructure – Seeks to deliver a network of green, active, and recreational spaces in inclusive locations. The proposal aligns with this by formalising and improving a popular coastal accessway that serves both residents and visitors year-round.

Policies CC-P-1 & CC-P-2 – Promote the provision of new community infrastructure that is well-located, safe, accessible, and compatible with surrounding uses. The development responds to these policies by delivering a well-designed, low-impact facility that integrates with the landscape and existing public access networks.

Policy CC-P-6 – Active Travel – Encourages design that facilitates walking and cycling and reduces car dependency. The proposal supports this by improving pedestrian and cycling connections within the beach precinct.

PROW-O-1 & PROW-P-1 – Public Rights of Way – Seek to protect access to places of natural and recreational value. The proposal supports this by formalising an existing informal public access route to the beach, ensuring continued public connectivity without obstruction.

Summary: The proposal aligns with the strategic aims of the County Donegal Development Plan by advancing sustainable tourism, improving inclusive access to coastal amenities, and providing high-quality recreational infrastructure that integrates sensitively with the landscape. It supports the development of healthy, inclusive communities, encourages active and sustainable travel, and strengthens Downings role as a key coastal tourism destination. The project reflects policy priorities for environmental protection, connectivity, and public amenity, while contributing to long-term community wellbeing and local economic vitality.

## Conclusion

The proposal represents a high-quality, well-integrated public infrastructure project that addresses a clear local need for improved coastal amenities to create internationally recognised best-in-class activity destination. By replacing an outdated facility with a modern Facility Centre for Water Sports Activities which is an accessible and environmentally sensitive development, the scheme will enhance user experience, support sustainable tourism, and strengthen the public realm in a key recreational location along the Wild Atlantic Way.

The proposal is fully consistent with the objectives of the County Donegal Development Plan 2024–2030, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, and the National Planning Framework. It aligns with policy priorities for inclusive design, environmental integration, and the development of resilient public infrastructure in rural and coastal communities.

Accordingly, the development is policy compliant and in the interests of proper planning and sustainable development of the area. Planning approval is therefore respectfully sought.