

Chapter 2 Need for the Proposed Development

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter sets out the need for the proposed Dursey Island Cable Car and Visitor Centre development and provides an overview of the planning and development policy context under which the proposed development is being progressed. It also presents a description of the existing context of the site and an overview of the studies which have informed the design progression of the proposed development. The objectives of the proposed development are also presented herein.

2.2 Existing Environment

The site of the proposed development is that of the existing Dursey Island Cable Car, situated on the Beara Peninsula, in west Co. Cork. The cableway connects the western end of the peninsula (at the townland of Ballaghboy) with the easternmost tip of Dursey Island. It is the only cableway in Ireland, and one of the only aerial ropeways in Europe to traverse open ocean. The mainland-side cable car site is at a distance of approx. 22km from the nearest major town of Castletownbere, approx. 145km from Cork City, and approx. 12km from the smaller village of Allihies. Primary access to the site is via the R572 Regional Road from Castletownbere.

The cableway is situated in the rural electoral division (ED) of Kilnamanagh, which takes in the western tip of the Beara Peninsula and Dursey Island. The ED has an area of 37km² and, in 2016, had a population of 342 (CSO, 2017a). Of these, just two individuals currently live permanently on Dursey Island. The population of the island, which has decreased dramatically from 53 in 1966 (CSO, 2017b), is now in danger of disappearing completely.

The cableway conveys visitors and tourists – and to a much lesser degree, islanders – to-and-from the island. Island residents are entitled to skip queues (which at times are very long) and also travel on the cable car free-of-charge. The existing cableway consists of a pair of pylons, the cable car itself, the steel ropeway upon which it travels, a mainland-side driving station (which houses the operator, cableway hauling mechanism and welfare facilities), an island-side return station, landing platforms with steel guardrails on both mainland and island, an informal 70-space visitor car park on the mainland, and a small (approx. 10-space) residents' car park on the island. The cable car (which carries a maximum of six passengers) departs from the mainland landing platform (adjacent to the station) and travels approx. 374m over the visitor car park and the Dursey Sound to the Dursey Island landing platform in 6 – 7.5 minutes (one direction).

British Ropeway Engineering Co. Ltd. provided the original cable car (in 1969), which was subsequently replaced in 1981 and again in 2004, making the current cable car the third incarnation. Due to corrosion of the steelwork, the pylons were dismantled, and two new galvanised steel structures were erected in their place in 1977. Apart from these upgrades, and the replacement of serviceable components such as ropes and fixings, many of the original components remain. The cableway is situated on Cork County Council (CCC) lands and the service itself is operated by the County Council. The landmark cableway and its history constitute an important part of the area's cultural heritage.



Plate 2.1 Existing Dursey Island Cableway and site of proposed development

The surrounding environment is one of exceptional natural beauty. The rugged, treeless landscape is dominated by undulating landforms, indented rocky coastline and open Atlantic seascapes. Thin soils are punctuated by exposed purple and green sandstone and siltstone. CCC have classified the local landscape type as 'Rugged Peninsulas' under their Draft Landscape Strategy (2007) – a landscape type considered to be of national importance, with 'Very High' value and 'Very High' sensitivity. Holiday homes and farmsteads are scattered along the approach road from Castletownbere. Both the island and mainland are highly scenic, and panoramic views abound. At the mainland side of the site, the landform slopes steeply towards and overlooks Dursey Sound, creating an impressive vista of the island and cableway. On a clear day, the Skelligs can also be made out when looking north-west from this point.

The vegetation on both mainland and island is a mosaic of dry siliceous heath and dry-humid acid grassland habitats. Grazing pressure is particularly heavy on the island, where vegetation is consequentially somewhat stunted. There are a number of designated protected sites of ecological importance within and/or in the vicinity of the study area, including the Beara Peninsula Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Kenmare River Special Area of Conservation (SAC). A number of protected species of flora and fauna are found in the area, including Betony (*Betonica officinalis*), red-billed chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*), fulmar (*Fulmarus glacialis*), peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*).

Durseley Island itself has an area of approx. 5.98km² (Google Maps, 2019) and is orientated in a north-westerly to south-easterly direction. It is separated from the mainland by the Dursey Sound – a rocky and dangerous tidal channel seldom traversed by boat. A high elevation spine runs along the length of the island, from its south-western to its north-eastern points. Punctuating this spine from south-west to north-east are a series of distinct peaks at 144m, 252m, 193m, 152m and 171m AOD, respectively. Farmland is concentrated on the sheltered south-eastern flank of the island, while the less accessible, windswept north-western flank and hilltops are dominated by open heathland. Access to residences is via a tarmac road which runs from the cable car landing point through the settlements of Ballynacallagh and Kilmichael and terminating at Tilickafinna – the most westerly settlement on the island. The built environment consists of scattered ruinous houses, renovated

houses and traditional farm buildings. Field boundaries are low, stone-faced, earthen embankments or dry-stone walls – some surmounted by post-and-wire fencing.

Principal land uses in the area are transportation (automotive and cable car), recreation/amenity/tourism and agriculture. The recreation value of the site is high. The cableway itself is the primary visitor attraction. Additionally, both the island and mainland are popular with hikers following the Beara-Breifne Way (also refers to the overlapping Beara Way). This national waymarked walking route – which follows the legendary 1603 march of O'Sullivan-Beare and his supporters from Cork to Leitrim – starts on Dursey before crossing onto the mainland – and, as such, taking in the cable car journey. The island also offers a number of sight-seeing and recreational activities to visitors, including St. Mary's Abbey, the 360° views at the old signal tower, and sign-posted whale-watching and rock fishing spots. Farming in the area is almost exclusively pastoral, with both dry stock cattle and sheep farming represented.

Infrastructure in the area is limited. On the mainland, there is no public water supply system – although there is a well at the site of the existing visitor car park. There is no public wastewater treatment drainage network. Existing public toilets at the mainland cableway station are serviced by a septic tank which is periodically desludged. On the island, there is a small-scale water supply network serving approximately 25 properties, but not extending to the eastern end of the island. The island has a single phase electricity supply network. There is no gas networks supply to either the mainland or island sides of the site. There is no formal waste collection service on Dursey Island.

2.3 Overview of Proposed Development

The proposed development will include the construction/completion of the following elements at the site of the existing Dursey Island Cable Car and on the R572:

- Erection of a two-car desynchronised reversible ropeway cableway ('cableway' hereafter)¹ with a capacity of 200-300 passengers per hour in each direction;
- Erection of two supporting line structures ('pylons' hereafter) - one on the mainland and one on the island;
- Construction of a mainland-side drive station ('mainland station' hereafter) including all necessary operating machinery, facilities for operating staff, and a platform for embarking/disembarking;
- Construction of an island-side return station ('island station' hereafter) including all necessary operating machinery, platform for embarking/disembarking, a sheltered waiting area and welfare facilities;
- Construction of a mainland-side interpretive exhibition centre with a gift shop ('Visitor Centre' hereafter);
- Construction of a mainland-side café with seating for 40 indoors, an additional 44 seats on an outdoor terrace/balcony overlooking the Dursey Sound, and welfare facilities;
- Construction of a mainland-side visitor car park with approx. 100 no. parking spaces and 1 no. bus bay;
- Retention of the existing residents' car park on Dursey Island;

¹ The term 'Cable Car' refers to the carrier cabin which conveys passengers to and from the island via the cableway.

- Upgrades of associated utilities infrastructure (including mainland water supply and telecommunications connectivity and mainland and island wastewater treatment systems);
- Completion of road improvement works (construction of 10 no. passing bays and 1 no. visibility splay, and completion of a number of local improvements to enhance forward visibility) on an 8km stretch of the R572 (between the R572-R575 junction at Bealbarnish Gap and the mainland side of the cable car site);
- Demolition/removal of some elements of the existing cableway infrastructure (ropeway, island-side pylon), mainland-side visitor car park and island and mainland station buildings;
- Erection of interpretive/informative signage at strategic locations;
- Erection of 4 no. Variable Message Signs (VMS) at four locations along the approach roads to the site:
 1. Bealbarnish Gap;
 2. R572 at Castletownbere;
 3. R575 at Eyeries Cross; and
 4. N71 at Glengarriff;
- Retention of the cable car, mainland pylon and a section of the mainland-side hauling machinery of the existing cableway in order to facilitate ongoing appreciation of their industrial architectural and cultural heritage value;
- Soft and hard landscaping; and
- All other ancillary works.

2.4 Objectives of the Proposed Development

The overriding objective of the proposed development is to create a coherent, distinct environmentally sensitive and considered tourism destination at the existing location of the Dursey Island Cable Car.

CCC's vision for the proposed development, as set out in the project brief, includes the following:

- The Council expects *“a design led integrated approach [...] having regard to the unique and sensitive site context”* and *“a strong embedded sustainable and contemporary engineering and architectural design ethos, informed by the unique and sensitive context which will deliver an iconic and award-winning design outturn for a unique location”*.
- The design of the mainland-side visitor interpretive centre *“is to be simple and respectful of the site context and with an expression that reflects its function, with robust architectural language that is appropriate to its function and relates to its context. The building is to offer a unique and dramatic heritage destination that will deliver a compelling experience offering discovery and informative opportunities for the visitor and local people alike. [...] The external finishes and layout shall be sympathetic and in harmony with the surrounding landscape [...] The building shall be bespoke and be of a very high architectural standard befitting the unique nature of the site and project. The building shall be an iconic landmark destination point on the [WAW]”*.
- The island-side visitor waiting area *“shall at a minimum, comprise of a large seated open space, audiovisual and information/interpretative display area and internal toilet block. [...] The building, although basic in function, shall be of a*

very high architectural standard befitting the unique nature of the site and project. The building shall be an iconic welcoming landmark for visitors onto the island”.

- The external finishes of all structures *“shall be sympathetic and in harmony with the surrounding landscape [and] capable of withstanding a severe marine environment with minimal yearly maintenance. [...] The major structural elements are to have a 50 year design life with all other components to meet the design life of the applicable Regulations and Standards with necessary increases in specifications to reflect the exposure conditions”.*
- The site shall be *“fully landscaped [and] low maintenance”.*

2.5 Need for the Proposed Development

Originally constructed primarily for the use of local inhabitants and farmers, the cableway is now predominantly used by tourists, many of whom visit the island to use its walking routes (including a section of the national, waymarked Beara-Briefne Way). The site itself is located on the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) tourist route (which runs the length of the west coast) and Dursey Island is one of fifteen ‘Signature Discover Points’ of the route.

However, in recent years, the limited capacity and the slow turnaround of the cable car have resulted in substantial untapped tourism potential. In the peak in-season months of July and August, the cableway is currently operating continuously during its opening hours, transporting approx. 4,650 persons to-and-from Dursey Island per month. This number is roughly the upper monthly limit which can be accommodated by the existing infrastructure (assuming it continues to operate with the same hours). Thus, the existing infrastructure is incapable of meeting current or future demand at peak times.



Plate 2.2 Portion of existing cableway infrastructure, including the cable car and the pylon

Additionally, in its current state, the attraction provides site visitors with a suboptimal – and, at times, unpleasant – visitor experience. During the peak months of July and August, there are substantial wait times, with some visitors queuing for over two hours to use the cable car on mainland and island, sometimes in inclement weather. Protracted waiting times are the principal complaint of site visitors. Furthermore, there is inadequate shelter and seating for site visitors on both the island and mainland, and there are no public toilets on Dursey Island. Visitors have also complained about the lack of practical and interpretive information at the site and on Dursey Island. There is insufficient signage, for instance, regarding the routes, durations and difficulty levels of walking trails on the island.

Furthermore, inspections of the existing cableway carried out by ROD have found evidence of substantial corrosion on the structures, including both pylons. While there are no immediate safety concerns for cable car users, the existing infrastructure is not (and cannot be) compliant with the European Standards for '*The Safety Requirements for Cableway Installations Designed to Carry Persons*', S.I. No. 470/2003 or S.I. 766/2007. As such, to ensure the continued safe transportation of persons (particularly island residents and farmers) and goods/services to-and-from the island, the Dursey Island Cable Car will need to be upgraded/replaced in the short to medium-term.

While the island's population increases during the summer months, there are currently just two permanent residents on Dursey Island. According to the *West Cork Islands Integrated Development Strategy 2010*, the island is "*threatened by permanent depopulation*" (p. 96). Abandonment of agricultural land (and subsequent encroachment of scrub) is also in evidence on the island – and this poses a threat to the resident population of red-billed chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*), which requires a tightly grazed sward for its foraging habitat. In order to prevent total depopulation and further land abandonment, it is imperative that the cableway continue to operate in the long-term.

In light of the current scenario, the proposed development will be beneficial principally in the following ways:

1. It will allow a greater number of visitors to travel on the cableway to Dursey Island and will attract a greater number of visitors to the site in general. As a result, following the payback period, the site will generate greater revenue for CCC. It will also create direct and indirect economic benefits for the locality, region and broader area (particularly along the WAW). On Dursey Island, in particular, where annual visitor numbers will increase substantially, there will be opportunities for the establishment of new businesses. There will be a greater number of employees at the proposed development (20 – 30 at any one time during the construction phase and 3 – 5 more full-time roles during the in-season months of the operational phase). Additionally, a survey of visitors carried out for the purposes of this EIAR indicates that many site visitors also visit other attractions in the locality, region and/or on the WAW in the same trip. As such, increasing visitor numbers at the site is also likely to result in increased visitor numbers elsewhere.
2. Completion of the proposed development will substantially enhance the overall experience for site visitors. Comfort and welfare of guests will be significantly improved by the provision of proper welfare facilities, shelter, seated waiting areas, and heated buildings (including a café) on the mainland. Additionally, the provision of interpretive information on the cultural and natural heritage of the area, and practical information on available activities on the island – all presented in a state-of-the-art Visitor Centre – will serve to enrich the overall

experience. Since Dursey Island is a Signature Discovery Point of the WAW, completion of the proposed development will also serve to enhance the quality of the overall offering of the WAW experience brand.

3. Unlike the existing infrastructure, the proposed cableway will be fully compliant with all relevant European safety codes. Its completion will substantially improve the safety and comfort of visitors and local persons travelling in the cable car over the years to come.
4. Completion of the proposed development will ensure the future provision of a safe, comfortable, sustainable means of access and transportation of essential goods and service to-and-from the island for island residents and farmers. When visitors are not traveling on the outbound journey, and in general on the return journey (i.e. island to mainland), the cable car journey will also be faster for residents (max speed of 6 m/s as opposed to 0.8 m/s at present). As a result, the proposed development may increase the viability of full-time residence/work on the island, thereby acting against the ongoing trend of population decline and land abandonment on Dursey Island. At the very least, it will ensure that the declining quality of the existing infrastructure does not exacerbate the ongoing depopulation problem.

2.6 Policy Context

A range of multilateral, European, national, regional and local planning policy documents have been reviewed in order to inform the design progression of the proposed development. The review established that the proposed development is consistent with objectives of Irish planning policy and supports the sustainable development of Dursey Island. The key policy documents that have informed the proposed development are outlined in the following sections.

Table 2.1 Planning policies with which the proposed development is consistent

	Policy Documents:
Multilateral Policy	United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
European Policy	Europe 2020 Strategy
National Policy	Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (2018) and the National Development Plan (2018-2027)
	Rural Development Plan (2014 – 2020)
	Realising Our Rural Potential – Action Plan for Rural Development (2017)
	People, Place and Policy - Growing Tourism to 2025 (2015)
	Building on Recovery – Infrastructure and Capital Investment (2016 – 2021)
	National Spatial Strategy (2002-2020)
Regional Policy	Draft Southern Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy (2019 – 2031)
Local Policy	Cork County Development Plan (2014 – 2020)
	Kerry County Development Plan (2015-2021)
	Cork Tourism Strategy 2016: Growing Tourism in Cork – A Collective Strategy
	West Cork Municipal District Local Area Plan (2017)

	Policy Documents:
	West Cork Islands Integrated Development Strategy (2010)

The respective objectives of these policy documents and how the proposed development aligns with these objectives is outlined in the following sections.

2.6.1 Multilateral Policy Context

United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Since 2015, Ireland has been a signatory to the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which enshrines the 17 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) in UN policy. The SDGs frame national agendas and policies to 2030. By facilitating increased visitor numbers at the site and on Dursey Island, the proposed development is consistent principally with SDG no. 8, 'Decent work and economic growth'. The proposed development is also consistent with SDG No. 9 "Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure" and SDG No. 11 "Sustainable Cities and Communities".

2.6.2 European Policy Context

Europe 2020 Strategy

The Europe 2020 Strategy is the European Union's agenda for growth and jobs for the current decade. The strategy outlines five key targets which promote "*smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*". Among them is the target of 75% employment among the population aged 20-64. By facilitating greater visitor numbers, promoting local economic growth and introducing new amenities to the site in question (namely, a Visitor Centre and café), the proposed development will create direct and indirect employment opportunities and will be consistent with the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy.

2.6.3 National Policy Context

Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (2018) and the National Development Plan (2018-2027)

'Project Ireland 2040' is comprised of (i) the National Planning Framework (NPF) and (ii) the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027 of the Irish government. The NDP sets out the state capital investment required to support the implementation of the NPF.

The overarching aim of the NPF is "*to cater for the extra one million people that will be living in Ireland, the additional two thirds of a million people working in Ireland and the half a million extra homes needed in Ireland by 2040*" (p. 8). Its objectives primarily address housing, employment, education and connectivity between regions and municipalities.

The proposed development is consistent with a number of the NPF's National Policy Objectives (see Table 2.2) and two of the NDP's ten 'National Strategic Outcomes' (NSOs) – 'Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities' (NSO No. 3) and 'Enhanced Amenity and Public Heritage' (NSO No. 7).

NSO No. 3 – Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities

According to the NDP, investment in "*activity-based tourism*", is required in order to support rural economies, and constitutes a "*priority*" of the plan (p. 49). Additionally, with respect to NSO No. 3, the NDP states that "*The maintenance of sustainable*

island communities off our coast is closely aligned with the National Planning Framework's national policy objective of supporting the growth and development of the maritime economy in coastal communities and on the islands. Safe access by sea for island communities is crucial to the achievement of this aim" (p. 51). By facilitating economic growth and providing safer, more comfortable and faster access to-and-from Dursey Island, the proposed development supports NSO No. 3.

NSO No. 7 – Enhanced Amenity and Public Heritage

With respect to NSO No. 7, the NDP expresses the government's commitment "to maintain and protect heritage assets that are precious to local communities and important contributors to wellbeing and social cohesion" (p. 72). The Dursey Island Cable Car constitutes an important regional landmark of significant historical and cultural heritage value to the local community. By re-developing the existing cableway, providing access to the natural and cultural heritage of Dursey Island, retaining key elements of the existing cableway, and providing interpretive information on the history of the cableway and the locality, the proposed development is aligned with NSO No. 7.

Table 2.2 National Policy Objectives of the NPF with which the proposed development is consistent

	National Policy Objectives:
1c	The Southern Region: around 220,000 (0.22m) additional jobs, i.e. at least 880,000 (0.88m) in total.
13	Protect and promote the quality, character and distinctiveness of the Irish landscape, the sense of place and culture that make Ireland's rural areas authentic and attractive as places to live, work and visit.
16	Enhance, integrate and protect the special physical, social, economic and cultural value of built heritage assets through appropriate and sensitive use now and for future generations.
41	Support the growth and development of the maritime economy, particularly in remote coastal communities and islands.
70	Ensure that all plans, projects and activities requiring consent arising from the [NPF] are subject to the relevant environmental assessment requirements including SEA, EIA and AA as appropriate.

Rural Development Plan (2014 – 2020)

The Rural Development Plan (RDP) of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) aims to (i) promote the competitiveness of the Irish agri-food sector, (ii) bring about more sustainable management of natural resources, and (iii) ensure more balanced development of rural areas.

The RDP outlines six priorities for rural development. Among them is Priority 6, which sets out "the need to support social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas." (p. 66). As stated in the policy document, "there is a body of evidence suggesting that rural towns and their hinterlands have felt the negative impacts of the economic downturn in the recent past more than other areas. [...] In this context, locally based initiatives to stimulate local/rural development are required" (p. 63). An explicit target of the plan is the creation of new rural jobs, and tourism is cited as one sector which has scope for generating local economic growth.

By creating new jobs in the tourism and hospitality sectors and creating opportunities for economic growth, the proposed development is likely to promote local economic development on the Beara Peninsula and is thus aligned with Priority 6 of the RDP.

Realising Our Rural Potential – Action Plan for Rural Development (2017)

Building on the recommendations of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) in their 2014 report, 'Energising Ireland's Rural Economy', and the subsequent Charter for Rural Ireland (2016), the government developed its Action Plan for Rural Development (APRD) in 2017. The plan aims to promote "the economic, social and cultural development of rural Ireland" (p. 9).

The APRD sets out five thematic pillars and corresponding suites of objectives. Pillar 3, 'Maximising our Rural Tourism and Recreation Potential', has four objectives, the first two of which are considered to be of relevance to the proposed development (Table 2.3). By facilitating greater visitor numbers at the site in question, bringing about the creation of new jobs, and building on the success of the WAW experience brand, the proposed development supports the first two objectives under Pillar 3 of the APRD.

Table 2.3 Objectives associated with Pillar 3 of the APRD which are supported by the proposed development

Pillar 3: Maximising our Rural Tourism and Recreation Potential – Objectives:	
1	Increase tourist numbers to rural Ireland by 12% by 2019.
2	Support sustainable jobs through targeted rural tourism initiatives, including through the support of key marketing initiatives such as Ireland's Ancient East and the [WAW], as well as developing the potential of Ireland's Lakelands.

People, Place and Policy Growing Tourism to 2025 (2015)

This policy document outlines the government's "long term vision" for the tourism sector in Ireland (p. 5). It sets out three overarching goals:

- (i) By 2025, revenue from overseas visitors, excluding carrier receipts, will increase to €5 billion in real terms;
- (ii) Employment in the tourism sector will be 250,000 by 2025, compared with around 200,000 at present; and
- (iii) There will be 10 million visits to Ireland annually by 2025.

The document outlines a series of Policy Proposals that it believes will contribute to the achievement of the aforementioned goals. Policy Proposals of the plan which have been deemed to be of relevance to the proposed project are listed in Table 2.4, below.

Table 2.4 The Policy Proposals of 'People, Place and Policy Growing Tourism 2025' which are supported by the proposed development

Policy Proposals:	
1.1.1	Tourism Ireland's marketing of Ireland as a visitor destination will be evidence based and <u>targeted at a range of geographical and segmental markets</u> with the highest revenue growth potential, and the evidence for these decisions will be shared with industry partners.

Policy Proposals:	
1.3.1	The provision of future State supports for capital investment in tourism shall be designed to <u>support development that fits within the brand architecture and consumer segmentation model</u> and will require that supported projects are compliant with the requirements of relevant European and national environmental regulations.

In accordance with the government’s vision for the overall tourism sector, the proposed development has been designed with the national experience brand framework (the WAW, in this case) and the associated marketing segments (Culturally Curious, Social Energisers and Great Escapers) in mind.

Building on Recovery – Infrastructure and Capital Investment (2016-2021)

‘Building on Recovery’ is the government’s framework for infrastructure investment in Ireland over the period from 2016 to 2021. It states that “*The Exchequer transport capital allocation is largely framed by the recommendations and priorities set out in the recently published Strategic Investment Framework for Land Transport. These priorities are threefold: to maintain and renew the strategically important elements of the existing land transport system; to address urban congestion; and to improve the efficiency and safety of existing transport networks*”. By improving the efficiency and safety of the principal means of transportation to-and-from Dursey Island, the proposed development contributes the achievement of these objectives.

National Spatial Strategy (2002-2020)

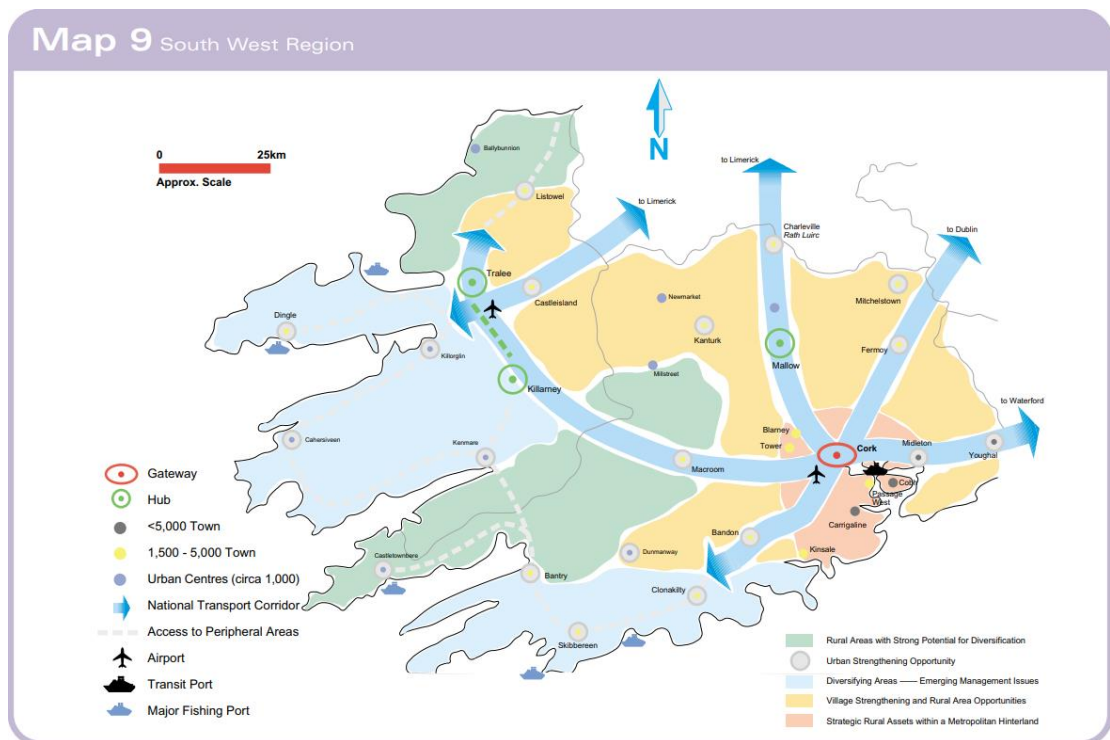


Plate 2.3 National Spatial Strategy – South West Region

The National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 (NSS) aims to deliver a better balance of social, economic, physical development and population growth between regions. The strategy focuses on people, places and building communities. It recognises that, through closer matching of where people live with where they work, Ireland will be

able to sustain (i) a better quality of life for people, (ii) a strong, competitive economic position, and (iii) an environment of the highest quality.

Co. Cork is located in the South West Region of the NSS (Plate 2.3). Dursey Island is identified within an area which falls into the category, 'Rural Areas with Strong Potential for Diversification'. In these areas, there is potential for rural economic diversification and development in the tourism, forestry, enterprise or marine sector, or a mix thereof. The Strategy states that identifying *“such potential and activating it needs to be a focus in these areas for local communities and business groups supported by bodies such as the County Development and County Enterprise Boards and relevant government departments and agencies”* (p. 76). By activating the latent tourism potential of Dursey Island, the proposed development supports the aims of the NSS with respect to rural areas.

2.6.4 Regional Policy Context

Draft Southern Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategy (2019 – 2031)

Each of the three regional assemblies – Southern, Eastern & Midlands and Northern & Western – are tasked with developing their own Regional, Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) to facilitate the implementation of the NPF and NDP. The Southern Assembly – whose jurisdiction includes the site of the proposed development – has published a draft RSES. The draft RSES provides a 12-year strategic framework for planning and economic development. It sets out over 200 Regional Policy Objectives (RPOs). The proposed development supports the achievement of many of these RPOs. The most relevant of these are listed in Table 2.5, below.

Table 2.5 Selection of RPOs of the Draft Southern RSES whose achievement is supported by the proposed development

	Regional Policy Objectives:
51.	<p>Tourism</p> <p>It is an objective to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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; c. Sustainably develop the road network and public transport services and facilities for improved visitor access, longer dwell times due to improved connectivity to ports and airports and tourism growth; <p>[...]</p>
52.	<p>Tourism and the Environment</p> <p>Development of new or enhanced tourism infrastructure and facilities should include an assessment of the environmental sensitivities of the area including and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA); Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) if required in order to avoid adverse impacts on receiving environment. Where such tourism infrastructure or facilities are developed, the managing authority/agency should ensure that effective monitoring protocols are put in place to monitor and assess the ongoing effects of tourism on sensitive features with particular focus on natural, archaeological and built heritage assets.</p>

Regional Policy Objectives:	
81.	<p>Island and Coastal Communities</p> <p>It is an objective to seek investment in the sustainable development of infrastructure (physical and social), access (upgraded pier infrastructure, landing facilities, and passenger and cargo ferry services), regional connectivity (transport networks and digital), enterprise growth and deliver initiatives by Local Authorities, UnG, local communities and other stakeholders to strengthen and sustainably grow our region's island and coastal communities. Robust site selection and environmental feasibility is required in advance of seeking investment including all necessary flood risk assessments.</p>
153.	<p>Intra-regional Rural Connectivity</p> <p>Investment in the sustainable development of fully accessible infrastructure that strengthens intra-regional rural connectivity including rural public transport services as 'lifelines' which are important routes on the road network <u>connecting communities in remote locations and smaller scaled settlements with larger scaled settlements to access important services.</u></p>
165.	<p>Tourism Corridors</p> <p>Invest in the sustainable development of infrastructure and service improvements on the transport networks along our region's key tourism corridors, subject to robust feasibility studies to reduce impacts on the environment and required appraisal, planning and environmental assessment processes, including the [WAW], Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland Hidden Heartland Corridors.</p>
194.	<p>Natural Heritage, Biodiversity and Built Heritage Assets</p> <p>To support initiatives that enhance and protect our region's unique natural heritage, biodiversity and <u>built heritage assets.</u></p>
196.	<p>Better Public Access</p> <p>To promote initiatives that provide better public access for abled and disabled visitors to our historic, built and natural environment. Local authorities should ensure that decision making on projects/developments to improve public access and facilities are informed by an appropriate level of environmental assessment.</p>

2.6.5 Local Policy Context

Cork County Development Plan (2014 – 2020)

Local Authorities are tasked with developing 6-year development plans, outlining county planning and development strategy in accordance with regional and national-level policy. The Cork County Development Plan is the county's principal planning and development policy document.

Under the Plan, the County has been subdivided into four 'Strategic Planning Areas': (i) County Metropolitan, (ii) Greater Cork Ring, (iii) North Cork and (iv) West Cork – the site of the proposed development belonging to the latter. Eleven objectives have been set out for the West Cork Strategic Planning Area. Of these, two are of relevance to the proposed development (see Objectives CS 4-4(g) and CS 4-4(i) in Table 2.6, below).

Objectives have also been outlined for a number of key planning and development subject areas, including 'Rural, Coastal and Islands', 'Economy and Employment' and 'Tourism'. Of these, relevant objectives are presented in Table 2.6.

The proposed development, which will facilitate greater access to Dursey Island for both islanders and visitors, promote local economic development, and will do so in a

manner that is informed by environmental and cultural heritage considerations, is in line with the objectives set out in the County Development Plan.

Table 2.6 Objectives of the Cork County Development Plan which are of relevance to the proposed development

	Objectives
CS 4-4 (g)	Recognise the need to encourage the diversification of the rural economy by promoting a stronger tourism and leisure economy both through the protection of [West Cork's] natural and built heritage and by encouraging appropriate new forms of employment development
CS 4-4 (i)	Protect and enhance the natural heritage of the areas coast including the West Cork Islands
RCI 10-1	Supporting the Islands Support the inhabited islands in County Cork and to recognise the special planning and development needs of islands and island communities, particularly access, infrastructure and services.
RCI 10-2	Economic Development on the Islands Support the economic development of the islands for the benefit of island communities generally and to encourage the development of speciality or niche economic sectors that might be appropriate to different islands in a manner that is compatible with environmental and landscape sensitivities as well as nature conservation designations pertaining to the islands.
RCI 10-3	Development Proposals on the Islands a. Support sustainable development proposals that are compatible with environmental and landscape sensitivities as well as nature conservation designations pertaining to the islands; and contribute to the long term economic and social development of the islands. b. Prioritise development that contributes to retention of the year-round population on the islands, that has a clear and identifiable economic and social benefit (that endures beyond the construction phase), and that is compatible with the capacity of the local community to accommodate it. [...] Ensure that new development of any kind is sympathetic to the individual form and character of the islands' landscapes and traditional building patterns.
TO 1-2	Tourism Opportunities Facilitate the development of the tourism sector and provide for the delivery of a unique combination of tourism opportunities drawing on the network of attractions in Cork County and potential future attractions.
TO 2-1	Protection of Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage Protect and conserve those natural, built and cultural heritage features that form the resources on which the County's tourist industry is based. These features will include areas of important landscape, coastal scenery, areas of important wildlife interest, historic buildings and structures including archaeological sites, cultural sites including battlefields, the Gaeltacht areas, arts and cultural sites and the traditional form and appearance of many built up areas.
HE 5-1	Cultural Heritage Protect and promote the cultural heritage of County Cork as an important economic asset.

Kerry County Development Plan 2015-2021

The Kerry County Development Plan is the county's principal planning and development policy document. It sets out aims, objectives and policies which provide the framework for the sustainable economic and social development of the county, in accordance with higher level national and regional development policy. The proposed development is situated approx. 13km from Co. Kerry, as the crow flies. Due to the close proximity of the proposed development to Kerry – and, as a result, the potential for direct and indirect effects on development in the County – it is important that the proposed development is in line with the County Development Plan.

A survey of visitors to the Dursey Island Cable Car, conducted for the purposes of this EIAR, in June and July 2019, found that 14% of respondents also travelled to tourism destinations within Co. Kerry (including Kenmare town, the Ring of Kerry, and the Healy Pass) on the same trip. It follows that increasing the number of visitors to the Dursey Island Cable Car is likely to concurrently increase visitor numbers at similar tourist attractions in neighbouring Co. Kerry – and, indeed, at tourist attractions on the greater WAW. In doing so, the proposed development will contribute to the achievement of the strategic aim to *“Support sustainable tourism development in Kerry and strengthen the contribution that tourism makes to the local communities, culture and economy of the County”* (Core Strategy, p.13), and a host of tourism-related objectives of the County Development Plan, a selection of which is presented in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 Objectives of the Kerry County Development Plan 2015-2021 which are most of relevance to the proposed development

	Objectives
ES-9	Promote and support the development of a sustainable tourism economy throughout the County and ensure Kerry develops as a centre of excellence in tourism.
T-2	Maximise the potential of tourism as a 'pillar of economic growth' which will contribute to the balanced economic development of the County and the tourism industry in the South West Region.
T-29	Sustainably promote the [WAW] tourism initiative which incorporates the entire Kerry coastline in partnership with Fáilte Ireland.
H-10	Promote sustainable recreational use of the countryside, marine and coastal areas within Co. Kerry.

Cork Tourism Strategy 2016: Growing Tourism in Cork – A Collective Strategy

The 2016 Cork Tourism Strategy seeks to increase the county's volume of domestic and international visitors by aligning the region closely with the immensely successful WAW experience brand. It aims to market Cork as 'Ireland's Maritime Paradise' and target three core market segments – the 'Culturally Curious', 'Social Energisers', and 'Great Escapers'.

The proposed development is very much aligned with the objectives of the county Tourism Strategy. The site – which is situated on the WAW coastal route – is well placed to match the vision set out in the Strategy. The tourism proposition of 'Ireland's Maritime Paradise' with supporting experience themes of maritime and outdoor leisure activities and a local, creative vibe engaging all of the senses, fits well with the proposed development. The proposed development has been designed to appeal to the aforementioned market segments.

West Cork Municipal District Local Area Plan (2017)

Local authorities are tasked with developing Local Area Plans (LAPs) for all of the municipal districts within their jurisdictions. The LAP sets out the detailed planning and development policy for the municipal district in question in accordance with the national and regional policies.

The site of the proposed development is within the jurisdiction of the West Cork Municipal District LAP. Certain objectives of the LAP point out that developments in the municipal district should be executed in accordance with the County Development Plan. Since the Cork County Development Plan has been discussed above, these particular objectives of the LAP will not be discussed here. The LAP also elucidates some general objectives for West Cork islands and specific objectives for Dursey Island. Of these, relevant objectives have been listed in Table 2.8, below.

Table 2.8 Objectives of the West Cork Municipal District LAP which are of relevance to the proposed development

	Objectives
GO-01	<p>General Objectives for West Cork Island Communities</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>c. Development proposals on the islands should be designed to ensure that water resources and the natural environment are protected. Protection and enhancement of biodiversity resources of the islands will be encouraged. Development on the islands will only be permitted where it is shown that it is compatible with the protection of sites designated or proposed to be designated for natural heritage.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>i. Maintain existing levels of services on the island and facilitate increased medical, emergency and recreational facilities, expanding community facilities where appropriate.</p> <p>j. Encourage sustainable tourist related development based on the natural and cultural heritage of the islands.</p> <p>k. Encourage and support where appropriate the implementation of objectives and actions outlined in the West Cork Islands Integrated Development Strategy, 2010 as it relates to the West Cork Island Communities where these are compatible with the objectives and policies of the West Cork Municipal District Local Area Plan, the Cork County Development Plan [...] and the Conservation Objectives of any Natura Sites.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>m. Support rural transport initiatives and services on the Islands.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>p. Support and promote sustainable economic development on the islands.</p> <p>[...]</p>
General Development Objectives for Dursey Island	
GDO-01	Retain a sustainable population base of the Island and build on the existing facilities and economic activities on the Island [...]
GDO-02	Conserve the landscape and cultural quality of Dursey while recognising the needs of its occupants and improving service provision to the island.
GDO-03	Support the development of sustainable tourism, <u>capitalising on the upgrading of the cable car</u> including the development of coastal and looped walks, and other forms of indigenous employment uses on the island where they can be suitably integrated into the setting of the island in a manner that is compatible with the conservation designations on and around the Island.

	Objectives
GDO-05	This Island is surrounded by the Kenmare River [SAC] and parts of the Island are within the Beara Peninsula [SPA]. This plan will protect the favourable conservation status of these sites. Development proposals as set out above should not be located within the SPA. Development on the island will only be permitted where it is shown that it is compatible with the requirements of the Habitats Directive and the protection of these sites.
GDO-06	Support the provision of public toilet facilities on the Island on a suitable site.

With respect to Dursey, the LAP states that *“the strategic aim for Dursey Island is to ensure that the island community can pursue their economic, social and cultural development, preserve and enhance their unique cultural heritage and engage in viable socio-economic development in order that the permanent population will be sustained and further increased”* (p. 212). It identifies *“the need to stabilise and increase the permanent population”* (p. 212) as the key issue facing the island. The lack of public toilets is flagged as an issue for visitors. According to the LAP, maximisation of Dursey Island’s underexploited tourism potential through the replacement of the cable car is considered to be the most appropriate *“means of attracting residents, visitors and activity to the island”* (p. 213). It is also pointed out that *“sensitivity must be exercised in the consideration of appropriate and sustainable forms of development and a balance must be sought between recognising the needs of occupants and visitors alike whilst respecting the character and sense of place of the island”* (p.213).

The proposed development is fully aligned with this vision for Dursey Island. The anticipated increase in visitor numbers associated with the new cableway and visitor centre will bring economic development and new job opportunities to the area. It will also increase ease of access and transportation of goods/services to the island for residents and farmers. The proposed development will also involve the construction of island-side public toilets, in accordance with GDO-06 (see Table 2.7). The development will be designed and executed in a manner so as to minimise and, where necessary, mitigate against any adverse effects on natural and cultural heritage identified in this EIAR. The potential effects of the proposed development will be considered in an Appropriate Assessment, and a corresponding NIS will be submitted to An Bord Pleanála (along with this EIAR) as part of the planning application for the proposed development.

West Cork Islands Integrated Development Strategy (2010)

In 2010, the West Cork Islands Interagency Group and RPS Planning and Environment published a 10+ year strategy for the physical, economic, social and cultural development of seven West Cork Islands – Dursey Island among them. Similarly to the vision set out for Dursey in the West Cork LAP, the overarching aim for the island expressed in this Strategy is *“to conserve the landscape and cultural quality of Dursey, while recognising the needs of its occupants and improving service provision to the island”* (p. 2). A number of general objectives for all seven islands have been elucidated. Those of relevance to the proposed development are listed in Table 2.9 below.

Table 2.9 General island objectives of the West Cork Islands Integrated Development Strategy which are of relevance to the proposed development

	Objectives
PD7	To improve facilities at island and mainland access points and develop clear programmes for use of infrastructure.
PD9	To improve ferry/cable car services.
PD12	To instil pride of place on islands through appropriately scaled and developed public realm improvements and ongoing maintenance of the islands' built and natural environment.
PD13	To promote and support the conservation and protection of the islands' landscape while acknowledging the challenge that this landscape can present for island communities.
ED5	To support the competitiveness and continued development of existing local business on the islands.
ED7	To expand on the tourist potential of all islands and to ensure a strategic approach to the delivery of tourist facilities on each island.
SC1	To retain and enhance population levels on the islands.

With respect to the Dursey Island Cable Car, the Strategy states:

“The cable car to Dursey Island represents a significant piece of infrastructure that is of strategic importance in terms of tourism in the South West of Ireland. The cable car, which was replaced in 2009, is Ireland’s only such facility. The cable car trip in itself is a unique experience in Ireland and its tourist potential should be maximised. It could attract additional visitors to Dursey, Beara and West Cork, with clear spin-off benefits for the West Cork Islands. A review of operating hours, pricing and promotion would support this objective.”

Additionally, a suite of Dursey Island-specific actions have been developed as part of an island action plan in the Strategy. Those considered to be of relevance to the proposed development are as follows:

- Ensure accurate timetable information for the cable car is displayed year-round;
- Review pricing scheme for the cable car;
- Investigate feasibility of securing additional core staff for the cable car;
- Maintain cable car shelter on the island in a clean condition;
- Ensure protection of the sensitive landscape setting of the island;
- Promote Dursey as a location for bird, whale and dolphin watching and for rock fishing;
- Continue to develop visitor facilities on the island in a sustainable manner; and
- Develop interpretation and education of the island’s history.

The proposed development is very much in line with the objectives and action plan presented in the Strategy. It will provide enhanced access to-and-from the island for residents and visitors alike. By increasing visitor numbers on Dursey Island, it will contribute to local economic growth and job creation. In accordance with the Strategy’s Dursey Island Action Plan, it has been proposed to feature historical information and information promoting the island-side whale, dolphin and bird-

watching opportunities in the proposed visitor centre. It is also proposed to marginally increase the price of the cable car fare (although the precise prices have not been set out yet). The proposed development will be designed and executed so as to prevent, minimise and, where necessary, mitigate against any adverse effects on the environmental and cultural heritage of the site. It is hoped that the completed development will contribute to pride of place among local residents of both the island and mainland, and facilitate the preservation and dissemination of knowledge on the heritage of the area.

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