

## **SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK BY SLIGO TOURISM LTD**

### **SLIGO TOURISM LTD**

The Board of Directors of Sligo Tourism Ltd recognise the county's significant potential in the area of tourism and the need to act collectively to promote, develop and safeguard Sligo's sustainable tourism product. Sligo Tourism Ltd aim is to collectively promote and develop Sligo as the economic driver of the Northwest and as an attractive location for tourism, investment, and employment. Tourism success in the county will also act as a catalyst for growth in other sectors, including the creative arts, food and education. To maximise the potential of the Tourism sector as a key economic driver for the County, Sligo needs to position itself as a '*must stop and see*' destination in the North West.

For almost 21 years, Sligo Tourism Ltd has been at the forefront in marketing County Sligo and its tourism products. Working in close partnership with Failte Ireland, the Local Authorities, tourism providers and other relevant agencies, Sligo Tourism has delivered an extensive range of services and supports in a cost effective and efficient manner. In doing so, it has established itself as the first point of contact for tourism providers, and as an organisation recognised for its expertise, experience and proven track record in delivering desired results.

Collectively, its Board of Directors possesses considerable sectoral knowledge and is representative of the County's varied tourism interests. Furthermore, as an independently established Limited Company, Sligo Tourism is able to secure funding from sources where public bodies are excluded.

### **LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE CONTEXT**

With Tourism being one of the key economic drivers for County Sligo, the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) prioritised Tourism as a key objective in its Local Economic Community Plan LECP 2016-2017. Action 1.5.1 of the County Sligo LECP 2016-2017 which was to "establish a forum to lead local tourism development". The objectives set out in the LDCP defines a vision for tourism in the county, establishes priorities for developing the visitor experiences/products to meet market needs, festivals and events along with marketing and promotion as well as setting targets and partnership actions required to realise the tourism potential.

### **TOURISM STATISTICS FOR SLIGO <sup>1</sup>**

Tourism is an important driver of economic activity for Ireland. As well as being our longest standing source of service export earnings, it also directly and indirectly supports employment across the country, both urban and rural.

2016 was a good year for overseas tourism to Ireland, delivering 9.6 million overseas visitors representing the sixth successive year of double digit growth. During this time domestic tourism also experienced growth both in tourism numbers and tourism revenue.

- During this period of tourism expansion, Sligo too has enjoyed tourism growth with overseas visitors rising from 129,000 in 2013 to 186,000 in 2015 an increase of 44%.
- In 2015, total tourism revenue for overseas and domestic visitors is estimated at €112m. (FI).
- Revenue from an estimated 186,000 overseas visitors who spent at least 1 night in county Sligo was €51m which was an increase of 16% on 2013.
- Approximately 240,000 Irish residents also visited County Sligo in 2015, spending an estimated €61m.
- Mainland Europe is currently Sligo's largest overseas and fastest growing market. Sligo has also benefited from an increase in demand from visitors to the Wild Atlantic Way.

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<sup>1</sup> Failte Ireland statistics

## **ADDRESSING LECP ACTIONS**

In 2016, Sligo County Council addressed Action 1.5.1 of the County Sligo LECP 2016-2017 which was to “establish a forum to lead local tourism development”. With a multiplicity of tourism organisations and agencies operating in Sligo’s best interest, gaps existed in the co-ordination and overall strategy along with a lack of resources. Under the leadership of Sligo County Council, involving other key tourism stakeholders such as Failte Ireland, a review was conducted of structures, leadership and resources in the tourism sector in the county. This has resulted in Sligo Tourism Ltd receiving an expanded role for tourism development and tourism promotion in Sligo and operating to an overall strategy.

The expanded role and remit of Sligo Tourism Ltd includes the drafting of Tourism Policy/Strategy that defines product/investment and priorities. Sligo Tourism Ltd has a Board membership made up of key public and private stakeholders in the Sligo Tourism Sector including: Sligo County Council, Failte Ireland, Local Enterprise Office, Sligo LEADER Partnership Co Ltd, IT Sligo, Sligo Chamber of Commerce, Sligo Food Trail , accommodation sector, community and attractions sectors.

## **CHALLENGES**

The challenge of promoting and marketing Sligo on both the national and international platform is of key importance and almost limitless potential. The catalyst of Sligo Tourism Ltd acknowledged success is its partnership approach it has adopted with other interested players, including the Sligo Local Authority. The continually developing tourism infrastructure has increased awareness and appreciation of Sligo in national and international markets. Sligo Tourism Ltd is the vehicle to drive tourism forward, it has a strong structure representing the grass roots providers, the community, and has a proven track record. Sligo Tourism Ltd will work towards a coherent and cohesive vision with a realistic plan to creating a more sustainable tourism .

## **DEVELOP A TOURISM STRATEGY**

In 2017, a Tourism Strategy will be developed for county Sligo for the period 2017-2023, which will be vested in the democratic body. It will give strategic focus and vision for tourism development for Co Sligo over a 6 year period. This overarching tourism policy strategy will provide the necessary direction to support a competitive and sustainable tourism industry and give clear direction to the tourism agencies for carrying out their operational programmes. The Tourism product exists in Sligo, the priority objective is to co-ordinate the marketing effort and to package the existing product and communicate this message effectively to our consumers. The need to set and agree what the priorities for tourism in Sligo is paramount in terms of work programme and funding. Sligo needs a co-ordinated policy across every single aspect of tourism and to set priorities over a five year programme.

The vision, goals and objectives which will be developed as part of the Co. Sligo Tourism Strategy will be integrated with those set out in the LECP and this Tourism Statement of Strategy. The overarching vision set out in the Co Sligo LECP depicts Sligo as:

*“...an enterprising, inclusive, resilient and environmentally sustainable place which values and celebrates its unique landscape and rich culture and heritage and where the wellbeing of future generations is central to everything we do”.*

Central to the development of the County Tourism Strategy and Action Plan is the development of the unrealised tourism potential of Co. Sligo. The strategy will focus on all areas of tourism development in the county which can be summarised in the three areas of:

- i. Product
- ii. Services (including accommodation)
- iii. Marketing of the county as a tourist destination aligned to the Wild Atlantic Way proposition.

**NATIONAL INITIATIVES:**

It is the quality of the destination that is the primary factor which inspires potential tourists to visit. More specifically the real driver for holiday visitors is the number of places to see and things to do. It is a challenge to maintain and enhance the quality of the range of attractions and activities on offer while staying relevant to what potential visitors are looking for. Some National Initiatives which have a major impact on building the future direction of tourism in Sligo are: The Wild Atlantic Way, Failte Ireland Capital Investment, National Festivals and Events Programme and regional Festivals and Events.

**SUMMARY**

Growing Sligo's visitor economy will deliver significant economic benefits as well as sustaining the social, cultural and environmental values for local communities. Tourism presents an opportunity to boost economic activity within the county, to support existing employment and businesses while also creating new enterprise and jobs. Tourism success will act as a catalyst in other sectors, including the creative arts, food and education sectors.

Signed on behalf of the Board of Directors Sligo Tourism Ltd



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