Delivering A Sustainable Tourism Industry

A KEY REPORT BY
THE IRISH TOURISM INDUSTRY CONFEDERATION
IN ASSOCIATION WITH AIB

AIB

PROUD PARTNER

Contents

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Introduction

With Irish tourism's volume and value having collapsed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the long road to recovery has only finally commenced. Despite the war in Ukraine, business inflation, and labour shortages, there is a degree of cautious optimism that pent up demand combined with the speedy restoration of much of the air access links and industry resilience can see a positive 2022. As difficult as the pandemic was – estimated to have cost Irish tourism and hospitality businesses as much as €12.2 billion – it also presents an opportunity to reimagine Irish tourism for the years ahead. In that context being a sustainable industry is of most concern, and sustainability across the three spheres of commercial, social and environmental is what matters.

This key report by the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation (ITIC), the representative body for all key tourism and hospitality stakeholders in the country, is the first staging post on an ongoing journey in search of a sustainable tourism industry. The report – put together with the able assistance of an industry steering group and approved by ITIC's Board and Council – sets out a strategic roadmap whereby the sector can enjoy a sustainable future, one where businesses can be viable and profitable, communities are benefitted, and the existential environmental challenges are addressed head-on. Critically all three areas of sustainability – economic, social and environmental – need to co-exist. The economic benefits of tourism must be preserved for industry and the exchequer whilst minimizing the sector's carbon footprint and ensuring social cohesion.

Ireland's tourism industry is up for this considerable challenge as this report articulates.

The report sets out 26 key policy recommendations which will need to be implemented to enable industry become more sustainable. Critically, and for the benefit of both people and planet, the Irish tourism sector will need to address the environmental sustainability agenda and ITIC, on behalf of the country's tourism industry, make a commitment that Ireland's tourism industry will play its full role in Ireland's obligations. And those obligations – as set out in the Climate Action Plan 2021 – are demanding with a 51% reduction in green house gases (GHG) by 2030 and carbon-neutral by 2050. Achieving such reductions in carbon whilst regrowing an industry will be extraordinarily challenging.

This report outlines opportunities and challenges as Irish tourism aims to become more sustainable. Many businesses within the sector are already well on the journey with a number of case studies outlined below.

The Irish Government is set to publish a new national tourism policy early next year with sustainability at its heart. This report by ITIC aims to state the industry's viewpoint clearly to help Government put in place a national policy that is aligned with businesses, and one that can overcome challenges and maximise any opportunities.

Chairperson
Ruth Andrews

CEO
Eoghan O'Mara Walsh

DEFINING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"

UN World Tourism Organization

For the purposes of this report ITIC has used the UN World Tourism Organization definition of sustainable tourism.

In 2015 the UN developed a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals in order to frame the UN member states' agendas and policies up to 2030. Following this in 2018 the Irish Government set out how Ireland intends to implement the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) through development of actions and targets around each goal. It is incumbent upon all Government Agencies and Departments to ensure these actions and targets are adhered to and that each sector contributes to Ireland's realisation of these goals. Specifically there are four Sustainable Development Goals (8, 12, 14 & 17) that have targets relating to tourism. The most relevant SDG is Goal 12 namely *"Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products."*
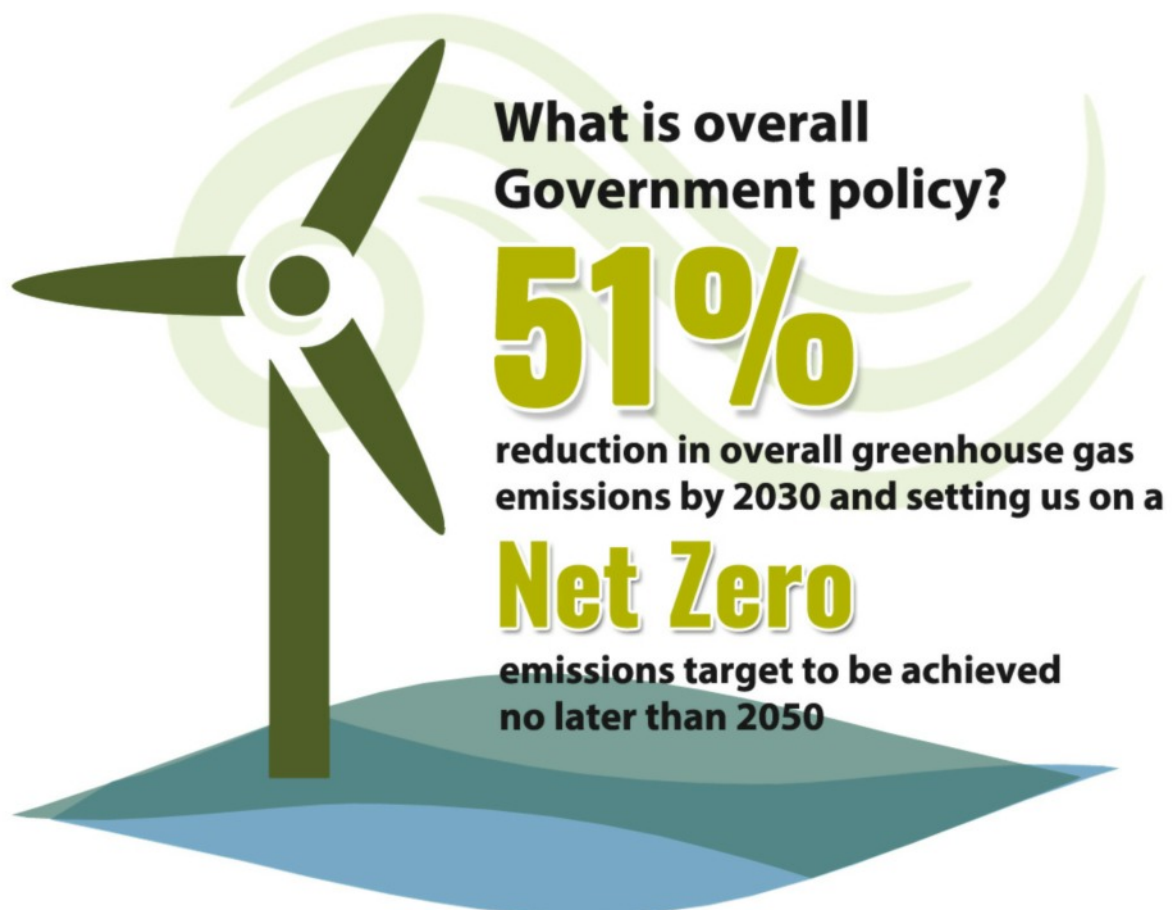
It is welcome that early next year the Irish Government is set to publish a new national tourism policy and sustainability will be central to this. This ITIC report, and the recommendations within, aim to influence that policy and ensure that Ireland becomes amongst the world leaders in sustainable tourism practices.

OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

There are both opportunities and challenges within Irish tourism's journey to a more sustainable future.

Becoming sustainable is simply a "must do". Implementing transformational change will be good for the planet and, if done correctly, also good for businesses' bottom line as well as supporting the communities within which tourism is embedded. In an Irish tourism context successful implementation of sustainable tourism practices should deliver metrics that will help to establish a better understanding of carbon and financial costs and help mitigate against both. It has long been recognised that collaborative agendas are necessary to ensure that tourism can be a force for sustainable development and Government, the tourism agencies and the tourism industry must commit to working together to ensure that the sustainable tourism agenda is a central part of the thinking for practitioners, policy makers and visitors.

It has been shown that building a sustainable business promotes longevity and more interaction with key stakeholders. Prior to the pandemic there had been a growing realisation among individual tourism operators that sustainable practices were not necessarily a cost. Changing consumer preferences has led to many enterprises taking steps to make their offering more sustainable and generating more business as a result. It is clear that industry needs to continue moving in a sustainable direction – both because of the benefits to the environment and communities, but also to individual businesses. Over time, sustainability must become the norm rather than the best practice exception.

What is overall Government policy?

51% reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and setting us on a

Net Zero emissions target to be achieved no later than 2050

The challenges though of the sustainability agenda cannot be underestimated. ITIC estimate that Covid-19 cost the industry over €12 billion and only financial support from Government kept tourism enterprises afloat along with business from the domestic market. That is the context from which Irish tourism is coming from and recovery to pre-pandemic levels will take a number of years. This will put an enormous strain on the commercial sustainability of tourism businesses whilst dealing with a chronic labour shortage and soaring business costs. This is at the very same time that Ireland, through its Climate Action Plan published last year, has committed to reducing its green house gas (GHG) emissions by 51% by 2030 and being carbon neutral by 2050.

The Just Transition Fund, that is part of the Climate Action Plan, represents an opportunity for Irish tourism enterprises to draw down badly needed investment that will enable more carbon-friendly business practices. The fund is estimated to be €9.5 billion by 2030 and Irish tourism, similar to other sectors, must be facilitated to access this financial assistance to help with the transition. This would allow businesses to retrofit premises, move to renewable energy sources, and minimise resource use and waste production. The vast majority of Irish tourism and hospitality businesses are indigenous SMEs with modest profit margins. Therefore financial support and incentives will be required to move the industry to a more carbon neutral environment.

A note on aviation:

Maintaining and growing international air connectivity is of fundamental importance and critical to the future success of tourism in Ireland. 75% of Ireland's tourism economy is made up of international visitation and as an island nation air and sea access is vital. The Government's own Climate Action Plan, published last year, refers to action being taken at an EU and international level to address emissions from these sectors and Ireland and its tourism industry will support appropriate measures taken at this supranational level.

ITIC welcomes the commitments of the Aviation industry to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Recognising that new technology aircraft and cleaner fuels will be the key drivers to reach this goal, ITIC strongly supports greater use of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) as a key mitigation lever for the decarbonisation of aviation. In addition to mandates currently being considered within the ReFuel EU Directive at European level, there is also a requirement for incentives to significantly increase the production and supply of SAF in Europe.

ITIC welcomes the ongoing investments by Irish Aviation in new technology aircraft which are more fuel and noise efficient and also the commitments made by Irish airlines to powering at least 10% of their flights with Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) by 2030. These commitments can only be achieved with the right policy frameworks at both regional and global levels, with essential support for SAF.

A note on a circular Irish tourism off-setting project:

To meet the ambitious goal of a reduction by 51% of GHG within just 8 years innovative medium-term solutions will be required. Accredited carbon offset schemes to which businesses and visitors could contribute located on the island of Ireland may have a role to play here. We recognise that our landscape is a key driver for tourism. Offset schemes that reduce GHG emissions, improve biodiversity, engage local communities, and create the potential for employment would have the added benefit of improving the broader tourism product. They could act as an engine of sustainable growth for the tourism sector, particularly in the midlands and west of the country. The state should consider actively developing such schemes, specifically for the sector, given its

extensive landholdings through semi-state companies in areas of high amenity and scenic value. In addition a communications strategy targeting domestic and international visitors is required with the aim of creating awareness of actions being taken by the sector to mitigate climate change and biodiversity loss.

A note on sustainable tourism certification – why do it?

Sustainable tourism certifications, which are guided by the **UNWTO definition of sustainable tourism**, are a crucial tool in the efforts of the Irish tourism industry to evolve into a truly good force in Irish society – environmentally, socially and economically.

Sustainable tourism certifications enable tourism organisations to understand what they are doing right and can also help them identify key areas of sustainability management where they are weaker. Certifications require that policies are put in place, check if they have been implemented, and measure the impact of those policies. They enable in-depth analysis of process and practice.

Credible sustainable tourism certifications, which use independent auditors, help tourism businesses and organisations to:

- Establish best practice systems for measuring and managing impacts (positive and negative) on both the community where they are based and the environment (energy, waste, food waste, water etc).

- Map out a clear plan for businesses to make step-by-step changes to lessen their impacts and to continuously improve.

- Understand and avoid greenwashing – either intentional or unintentional.

- Communicate and market their credible sustainability credentials to customers, the local community and all stakeholders a visible and verifiable way.

- Gain a competitive edge and improve the positive reputation of a business/organisation/destination as customers (both B2B and B2C), stakeholders and government bodies are increasingly demanding sustainability credentials.

- Save money and resources but implementing systems and process that promote efficiency.

Growing evidence shows that sustainable companies, or those with good Environmental Social Governance (ESG) and certification, deliver better financial performance, and investors now value them more highly.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following policy recommendations form part of this report. ITIC looks forward to resuming its role within the Departmental Sustainable Tourism Working Group, and industry working with government and tourism agencies will continue to collaborate in this area. The recommendations below are based on the three pillars of sustainability, namely economic, social and environmental. These will be reviewed on an annual basis based on the pace and shape of tourism's recovery.

A more economically sustainable tourism industry

Pro business policies from Government to enable tourism sector to thrive

The vast majority of tourism and hospitality businesses are SMEs and profit margins are modest due to the often seasonal aspect of tourism and the labour-intensive nature of the sector. Government must do all within its power to pursue pro-enterprise and pro-competitive policies. Connectivity links – air and sea – are particularly important for tourism to an island such as Ireland and to this end Government must be mindful of

the critical importance of air and sea ports and carriers.

Support the competitiveness of Irish tourism

Commercial viability is critical for enterprises and the soaring costs of business risk impeding recovery. Energy costs, insurance hikes and labour increases are all hurting business and government must work to suppress inflation. Government must accelerate insurance reform and the Vat hike scheduled for September 1st must be deferred until recovery has taken hold. The current Vat rate is comparable to the rest of the EU and for competitive and inflationary reasons should be left unchanged.

Maintain tourism investment at current levels

It is welcome that tourism investment increased in the last budget as business continuity grants and much needed increased overseas marketing funding was put in place. It is vital that such funding remains to allow agencies to invest in key sustainable tourism initiatives for industry. Investment in overseas marketing will also need to be retained at current levels so that Ireland maintains global awareness as a holiday destination.

Staff retention and recruitment incentive

Staffing issues and a labour-supply shortage are a significant barrier to recovery for Irish tourism and measures must be put in place to assist the commercial viability of industry. Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, in February 2022 estimated that there were 40,000 vacancies within tourism and hospitality. With Ireland at near full employment these vacancies are likely to only be filled by EU residents or non-EU nationals. In that context agencies should assist industry in recruitment roadshows overseas and work permits must be fast-tracked. It is incumbent on industry to make the tourism and hospitality sector as attractive as possible for new entrants and ensure that current employees see a rewarding career path.

Ireland and EU to be leaders in Sustainable Aviation Fuel – Fit for 55 and the Refuel EU directive

The majority of the current SAF supplies (albeit limited) are produced in the US where there are tax credits and incentive mechanisms in place to drive production. In addition to the proposed mandates within the draft Refuel EU directive, there is also a requirement for financial incentives to significantly increase the production and supply of SAF in Europe and potentially in Ireland in order to accelerate the pace of aviation decarbonization.

A more socially sustainable tourism industry

Make tourism in Ireland inclusive and available for all

Support the development of inclusive tourism in Ireland, which aims to create products and destinations where everyone feels welcome. Funding and grants should be made available to historic tourism buildings to allow for accessibility and all new capital development projects should have social sustainability at their core.

Make sustainability key part of curriculum within every tourism and hospitality education course

There are multiple tourism and hospitality courses available across the whole education spectrum. These are vital to give students the necessary skill-set to pursue a career in tourism. With 40,000 vacancies currently

within the tourism industry (ref: Fáilte Ireland research, February 2022) it is evident that people must be attracted to the sector and education plays a key role in this. Within that context ITIC recommends that every tourism and hospitality course across the education sector has sustainability embedded within the curriculum. This will mean that future tourism workers become ambassadors for sustainability both within their own businesses and to all visitors. Likewise all current employees within tourism should be provided with training on the importance of the sustainability agenda as part of upskilling and CPD programmes.

Tourism as a long-term career choice

Pre-pandemic the tourism sector employed 1 in 10 people and in tourism 'hotspots' such as Killarney this grew to 1 in 7 jobs. It is critical that these jobs become long-standing careers if possible and staff attrition (a worldwide phenomenon) is reduced. Initiatives should be supported to improve the quality of jobs across the tourism and hospitality sector, ensure career progression, and make the sector as attractive as possible to new recruits. Along with the work of Fáilte Ireland, the Department of Further and Higher Education must take a more proactive role in positioning tourism as a career of choice supporting the development and redesign of tourism education programmes and ensuring the co-ordination of course content at national level.

Strengthen tourism's role within communities

Fáilte Ireland must be supported with its ongoing engagement with local authorities, brand destination liaison groups, and their regional account management teams to have a strong communication strategy in place to ensure local populations understand the economic and social value of tourism.

Enhance and improve research data relating to visitors and residents

Irish tourism recovery efforts are being undermined by the fact that the CSO have not resumed their data collection of tourists and ITIC urge this to be addressed as soon as possible. Alongside the reinstatement of reporting new forms of research and data collection need to be made available to Ireland's tourism industry including from the banking and telecoms providers. Such data can be anonymised and reported on in real time and can give strong feedback to industry and policymakers as to visitor behaviour, spend, regional location and other valuable insights. Fáilte Ireland should be supported in their efforts in this area and should be resourced appropriately.

Improve regional and seasonal penetration of tourism to benefit communities and provide employment

The regional spread of tourism across all regions is very important for sustainability purposes and all efforts should be supported to ensure that visitor volume and value is spread as equitably as possible. Positive efforts and trends were apparent pre-pandemic. New products and visitor experiences in less visited parts of Ireland should be developed, funded and promoted. Events, activities and festivals have the ability to stretch the season beyond the busy summer months.

Relaunch Tourism Day with purpose of educating domestic and international visitors on sustainability

Tourism Day was an event organised by ITIC scheduled for April 2019 that had to be cancelled due to the emergence of the pandemic. It was a day when tourism would be celebrated and tourism products and businesses would give special offers and free admissions to the public. ITIC recommend that this initiative recommence with a focus on both celebrating the tourism industry and its employees, whilst at the same time educating visitors on sustainability.

Explore concepts of sustainability pledge for visitors to Ireland

This concept is under consideration as an action within the Department of Tourism's Sustainable Tourism Working Group. This initiative should be explored and assessed to see if such a pledge has merit.

A more environmentally sustainable tourism industry

Set baseline and emission targets now to achieve individual and 2030 & 2050 sector goals

Irish tourism's carbon footprint needs to be established so progress on reducing it can be monitored on an annual basis. Only when a true and accurate reflection of the green house gas emissions caused by Irish tourism is determined, can an appropriate target be set for both 2030 and 2050. Evidence-based analysis needs to be applied in an Irish context to commence a process to establish a benchmark CO_2 value for Irish Tourism.

Monitor & report progress

Once baseline and emission targets for Irish tourism are established, they need to be monitored and reported on an annual audit basis so industry knows if it is on track or behind schedule. In the case of the latter, the audit needs to determine which sector or area within tourism and hospitality is facing challenges in reducing its carbon footprint and allow industry to respond.

Provide finance and investment to industry for the transition

The Government's Climate Action Plan published last year sets demanding targets of a 51% reduction in GHG by 2030 and net zero by 2050. A Just Transition Fund is part of the Climate Action Plan and is estimated at collecting €9.5 billion by 2030 through the carbon levy. Ireland's tourism and hospitality industry, like other sectors, must be facilitated to avail of this scheme to help businesses move to more climate friendly model. Equally a representative of the tourism industry should be part of the Just Transition Commission. With margins modest within the sector tourism and hospitality businesses throughout the country will need financial support for retrofitting, using green energy, managing waste and the like. Incentive and capex schemes need to be designed industry to stimulate transformational change.

Roll out carbon calculator for businesses

Work in this area is at an advanced stage and Fáilte Ireland is set to roll out a carbon calculator for businesses this summer. This is an important aspect of monitoring and setting metrics. ITIC welcomes the initiative and urge as many businesses as possible to adopt it. The carbon calculator needs to be user-friendly so as to encourage business buy-in.

Roll out Climate Action toolkit for industry

Similarly Fáilte Ireland are set to publish a Climate Action toolkit for the tourism and hospitality industry and this is very welcome as it should help guide business-owners and help them mitigate their carbon footprint.

Develop an off-setting project of scale in Ireland – circular tourism sustainability model

To meet the ambitious and necessary goals of carbon reduction, innovative medium-term solutions will be required. Accredited carbon offset schemes to which businesses and visitors could contribute located on the island of Ireland may have a role to play here. Offset schemes that reduce GHG emissions, improve biodiversity, engage local communities, and create the potential for employment would have the added benefit of improving the broader tourism product. The state should consider actively developing such schemes, specifically for the sector, given its extensive landholdings through semi-state companies in areas of high amenity and scenic value. This would complement the Government 'Circular Economy Strategy' which was launched late last year.

Create ecotourism visitor experience of scale

Irish tourism would benefit from the development of a world-class visitor eco-tourism experience of scale and international appeal. This would have the dual benefits of educating tourists whilst also, if interpreted correctly, providing an enjoyable experiential visit. Ireland's Midlands would seem an appropriate location, with its peat and boglands terrain, and is easily accessible from all parts of the island. Capital funding should be allocated to such a project, following a feasibility study and subject to a robust business plan. An ecotourism visitor experience has the added benefit of employment and economic activity for the local community.

Simplify planning to allow for expedited energy efficiency developments

Energy efficiency developments such as wind or solar can be held up by planning objections. In certain cases these should be expedited and fast-tracked to ensure that businesses can benefit themselves and the planet from clean energy. Without such improvements to the planning process, the ability of industry to meet its targets will be potentially compromised.

Mass roll out of electric charging points aimed to reduce carbon emissions, air pollution, and congestion

Transport within Ireland is currently a significant cause of carbon emissions and needs to be electrified at a much quicker pace but is dependent on national infrastructure. This is very relevant to Ireland's tourism industry where visitors often enjoy an Irish experience as part of a coach tour or through the hire of private vehicle. There are circa 2,000 charging points currently in Ireland but it is estimated that Ireland will need close to 30,000 if the goals of decarbonising the transport system are to be met. Ireland, with a state-owned energy supplier in the ESB, can and should roll out significantly more charging points to allow visitors enjoy their Irish tourism experience by electric vehicle.

Incentivise businesses to apply for environmental accreditation

Sustainable tourism certifications, which are guided by the UNWTO definition of sustainable tourism, are a crucial tool in the efforts of the Irish tourism industry to evolve into a truly good force in Irish society – environmentally, socially and economically. They also by definition reduce the danger of 'greenwashing' where companies can convey a false impression of their sustainability credentials. Government and agencies must play a leading role in encouraging and incentivising the industry to be more sustainable and certification is central to this. Grants should be made available to businesses to help them get certified which in time could become as important a trading pre-requisite as any other requirement for tourism registration.

Ireland to sign up to Glasgow Declaration

Ireland should formally adopt the Glasgow Declaration, which was initiated at COP 26, and calls for an increased urgency about the need to accelerate climate action in tourism and to secure strong actions and commitment to

support the global goals to halve emissions over the next decade and reach Net Zero emissions as soon as possible before 2050.

Protect & enhance Ireland's natural and cultural heritage and biodiversity

Ireland's natural and cultural heritage as well as its biodiversity is a key demand-driver for visitors across all regions. These should be supported at all times and consideration must be given to carrying capacity of certain regions and attractions to reduce negative impacts.

An industry representative on Reducing Food Waste Prevention taskforce

Food waste is a significant cost for the Irish tourism and hospitality industry as well as having a detrimental environmental impact. The Department of Environment, Climate and Communications is set to shortly publish a a National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap. This is to include a taskforce to monitor and review periodically and assess the impact of national food waste prevention measures. This taskforce is due to comprise of key sectors and organisations and it is vital that the tourism and hospitality industry is represented.

CASE STUDIES

The Irish tourism industry is already doing excellent work within the environmental sustainability field.

- Irish Boat Rental Association

- Airfield Estate

- Dublinia

- Mayo County Council

- Vagabond Tours of Ireland

- Irish Hotels Federation

- Ballygarry Estate Hotel

Irish Boat Rental Association

"In preparing a Climate Action Plan for the Irish Boat Rental Association, we have thought deeply about how best to celebrate the navigable waterways Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, with its focus on rural communities, slow tourism, and 'off the beaten track' opportunities for adventure and relaxation, with new sustainable tourism products to align with regional strategies.

In our Climate Action Plan, we are not only working towards the decarbonisation of the product but also towards sustainable and thoughtful new product development. The proposed development of the Shannon Region will make it into a major ecotourism destination, one of the largest in Europe.

In the short-term, we need to examine the current fleet of rental boats to assess retro-fitting options that will enable us to reach 2030 targets; in the longer term, we feel research and technology advances will play a huge part in renewable power and green energy production. We are hoping to collaborate with the Technical University of the Shannon not only in tourism development but also the technical aspects such as methods of propulsion, and battery and electronic application. We will also need to look at how to reduce emissions at our marinas and buildings.

Energy is only one aspect; there are tremendous opportunities for us to support local biodiversity. Boating on inland waterways enables the visitor to access places they wouldn't otherwise see, and I would love to see tranquillity moorings, dark sky regions, kayaking and cycling, and carefully developed angling and ornithology tourism experiences. Working with stakeholders on the inland waterways, I can see a future sustainable tourism product that enhances the natural aspects – carefully designed, used with care, and opening up great new things for visitors."

Stephen Conlon

Executive Secretary
Irish Boat Rental Association

Airfield Estate

"Airfield is an urban farm of 38 acres, located within a stone's throw of Dundrum Shopping Centre, and its surprising location means we can bring our passion for sustainable, local, seasonal food to city dwellers.

Most aspects of our food system on the estate are truly circular – planted or raised on our grounds, prepared in our restaurant, and composted on the estate. We abide by 'GLAS' principles – Good soil and nutrition; buying Locally and seasonally; Avoiding food waste; and having Sustainable food systems.

We understand we are in a fairly unique position, with the scale of our estate, but there are so many opportunities for food businesses to choose one or more sustainable food goals to work towards, and in doing so, contribute to an improved food landscape for the wider sector.

Some people describe Airfield as 'a hidden gem', but we are keen to reach out beyond 'the hidden' and beyond our immediate community and pass holders. Education is key to appreciating food and its provenance, and we use a visit to Airfield to engage the public and get them to know their food through meeting our guides, attending courses and signage throughout the estate. and we also have a number of programmes to support this. 'Farmer time' matches a farmer to a school: we have set up zoom chats, information exchange, and the children as future consumers begin to develop and tangible connection with their food. We offer a Junior Cycle short course on food sustainability, and we have for several years now worked with TU Dublin – with one of the more novel partnerships being the BA in Botanical Cuisine, where student chefs grow their own food in their own allotment on the Estate.

I believe that 18-35 year olds are more and more making considered and ethical choices regarding food, and will increasingly seek out businesses that have recognised accreditation for their sustainable practices. They are acutely aware of food miles and provenance, food poverty, and initiatives to reduce food waste such as Too Good to Go.

Education, consumer choice, and observing sustainable food principles will be key, and there are huge opportunities to capitalise on Ireland's already excellent food credentials, by taking bold, purposeful and thoughtful steps to create an appealing and responsible food experience to visitors."

Claire MacEvilly

CEO, Airfield Estate

Dublinia

"Dublinia, Ireland's Viking Museum, is located in the heart of old Dublin, in a 19th century heritage building beside Christ Church Cathedral. We welcome almost 200,000 visitors a year, and in our busy urban setting, we knew we would face challenges in achieving climate actions goals. However, we used the lockdown period to look really hard at our business practices, and signed up to a programme to help us become greener.

My first piece of advice to any business starting on the journey to become greener would be to set up a green team, and to empower that team to engage with the wider staff to ensure everybody is on board. Our focus was to reduce our water usage, energy, and waste. It is often said that you cannot manage what you haven't measured, and our first step was to figure out exactly how much we were using and spending.

One year on, we have substantially reduced the amount of general waste, and our recycling has improved dramatically. We have taken plastics out of our café, and have developed new processes for handling food waste. We have joined up to MODOS, Dublin City Council's circular economy programme for SMEs. We have taken small steps so far, but already we have embraced the culture and ethos of becoming a greener visitor attraction. We know we will have challenges ahead, but there is a great sense of pride in what we have done already."

Gert Lambert

**Duty Manager
Dublinia**

Mayo County Council

The Mayo County Council Development Plan promotes and facilitates a sustainable and well-managed, year-round, high-quality tourism industry that generates economic benefits to all areas of the county, contributing to the wider tourism industry of the region.

Mayo has outstanding natural assets, and existing recreational attractions. Visitors come to the area to see and experience the beauty, and local communities want to protect that: communities understand that a sustainably managed tourism experience is one that will be a long-time driver of visitors and will also benefit their quality of life.

The highly successful Great Western Greenway from Westport to Achill which has been added to with the Turlough Greenway, the cycle network in Castlebar, and the Railwalk route in Westport, is a great example of this.

Mayo is renowned for its unspoilt and richly diverse landscape, and is home to Ballycroy and Nephin National Park, and the Dark Sky Park. The forests, woodlands, lakes, islands, and coastal areas are major natural assets and significant components of the county's overall tourism offering. However, the economic benefits are largely felt in the towns and villages, and it is here that we have focussed our efforts to address carbon. Mayo County Council asked communities to come together with decarbonising proposals, and there was a high level of interest with terrific engagement and new ideas committing to protecting the environment and decarbonising. In a competitive process, Mulranny became our first Decarbonising Zone, showing tremendous vision and community spirit, but right across Mayo, we see very active local communities who have come together with new initiatives – biodiversity planting, smarter travel options, conservation of beaches and dunes, for example. Community engagement is extremely powerful, and 'local heroes' can make things happen.

Not only are we creating a more sustainable tourism product for visitors to enjoy, but we are protecting our environment, sustaining employment, creating economic advantages, and developing more holistic futures for our visitors and towns.

Laura Dixon

Climate Action Officer
Mayo County Council

Vagabond Tours of Ireland

Few business sectors rely on the natural environment in the way that tourism does, so it is very much in our interest to preserve the natural world. We believe it is our responsibility to be constantly monitoring our business methods to make sure that our environmental impact is as low as possible.

We want our children (and grandchildren) to be able to enjoy authentic travel experiences into the future. That's why we're a certified B Corp. We aim to bring long-term benefits to both our community and our planet.

Responsible tourism plays a big role in what we do and by definition takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. We are committed to a code of best practice in all aspects of our business, including our relationship with, and effect on the environment and the communities that we visit.

We are Sustainable Travel Ireland - STI Members

We're always looking for ways to change for the better. That's why we're Members of Sustainable Travel Ireland. Our goal is to continue to look for ways to improve the impact of tourism on the environment. We're acting locally but thinking globally!

Our Goals

- Long-term benefit to our local communities and the planet
- Solar power and EV charging point at VagaHQ
- Respect Irish nature, wildlife and landscapes via Leave No Trace
- Save water, avoid printing and recycle waste at VagaHQ

Our Achievements

- Plant 1 native Irish tree per guest to offset emissions
- Offsetting our carbon since 2016
- Compostable coffee cups for all guests
- Continue to listen, learn, innovate and start conversations

Rob Rankin

Owner/MD
Vagabond Tours of Ireland

Irish Hotels Federation

"The IHF Sustainability Working Group was set up to look at ways of improving practices to support Fáilte Ireland's sustainability agenda.

We have identified a number of critical actions, and this is a time of great collaboration and progress with a genuine momentum building up in our sector. Many hotels and guesthouses have made substantial progress, and this will enable IHF Green to help more members implement practices of excellence.

The key actions we are seeking to achieve include sustainable training and education for the sector; reviewing grants, including their caps and the ease with which they can be availed; energy auditing; waste action; food waste prevention; engaging with Fáilte Ireland on its new Carbon Calculator and Climate Action Toolkit; and having a number of hotels pilot and test these new important initiatives.

The IHF, along with the Restaurant Association of Ireland (RAI), participated in a review of the Circular Economy Advisory Group on a 'Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy.' This goes beyond single use plastics and food waste, and considers initiatives to include green procurement, end-of-life items, and smart design, creating opportunities for research and innovation.

As a sector, we want to not only meet our legal targets, but to position Ireland to take full advantage of opportunities to build a more sustainable tourism future. I am optimistic we can achieve our goals with the many sustainable actions, and a collaborative approach by all involved. It makes good sense, and I can feel it on the ground – from foundations set over 15 years ago – that we are going in the right direction to reduce tourism's carbon footprint and become net zero, maybe even net positive, by 2050."

Michael Lennon

**Irish Hotels Federation
Sustainability Working Group**

Ballygarry Estate Hotel

"We are a third-generation family-owned business, located in North Kerry, at the gateway to the Dingle Peninsula. We have always taken the small steps – recycling, cutting down on waste – but in the last five years, we have taken the strategic decision to incorporate sustainability into our core values and really address the impact our business is having on the planet.

We see sustainability in a two-pronged approach. There is both the traditional green sustainability agenda, such as the hotel outputs like carbon and waste, but also in terms of the long-term development of the hotel, its team and its sustainable position in the local community.

The team have been core to Ballygarry's success over the three generations and we work tirelessly to retain team members; we do our best to provide a positive employment culture, and work to empower our team.

One of the first major hurdles we overcame was removing single use plastics from the hotel bathrooms. We wanted to ensure we didn't lose any of the luxury feel from our amenities. Working closely with Voya, our Sligo-based Irish Spa supplier, we switched over to a seaweed based, organic range of amenities that are presented in bulk dispensers to remove the thousands of little plastic bottles found in all too many hotel bathrooms still. Yes, there have been challenges, but we genuinely believe that hotels that do not take steps to be greener will be at a disadvantage. When our guests see that we take our climate action goals to heart, including green procurement, it creates a sense of trust, and, we believe, elevates our brand to the modern consumer.

Recently we have extended our grounds to 180 acres, on which we have developed wetlands to address both our waste water treatment, and reduce carbon output. The four reed beds, over seven acres in size, consume an equivalent amount of carbon that the hotels power would create if we purchased grey power. However, we buy only green energy, and we purchase carbon offsets in a developing country for our gas supply.

Within the Estate we have just planted 29,000 trees and we have our own apiary. We have just retained a consultant to help us steer into the renewable energy realm. We are currently examining the combination of Solar and Wind Technology to create power, and replacing our existing gas boilers with Air to Water Heat Source for our heating and hot water. As far as we can, we want to be self-sustaining, keep our energy and water circular.

We sincerely believe we deliver a better, more sustainable and more responsible hotel experience, and we are proud to have this ethos embedded into our core values."

Thys Vogels

**Hotel Manager
Ballygarry Estate Hotel**

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