

Chapter 9 Tourism

9.0 Aim

Tullamore holds a wider role in tourism in the promotion of the town, the County and the region. In particular, Tullamore plays a pivotal role in the development of tourism generally in the County and it must continue to strive to increase its attractiveness to visitors. This will bring direct benefit to Tullamore where there are a number of tourist attractions and destinations in the town.

The main aim for tourism in Tullamore is to maximise the potential of existing attractions such as Tullamore Dew Heritage Centre, Charleville Castle, local hotels and local, national and international festivals and events.

Tourism has the potential to bring economic benefits to the town and can also benefit residents through the improvements of the town's environment which results from ancillary developments. While it is acknowledged that individual physical projects are required to expand the tourism sector, the existing assets of Tullamore which makes the town attractive for visitors should be protected. To this end, the main aim outlined below for tourism in Tullamore asserts the promotion of tourism in an environmentally sustainable manner.

- To promote Tullamore as a tourism destination and to continue to support and facilitate the development and diversification of tourism in Tullamore in an environmentally sustainable manner.

9.1 Tourism Strategy

A tourism strategy for County Offaly was published in 2006 (McIver Report) on behalf of the Board of the Offaly LEADER+ Company with the co-operation from the Interagency group of the Offaly County Development Board. The town of Tullamore is recognised as being of importance within this strategy in that it will support and sustain a higher order of tourism services. The Councils also recognise that Tullamore is critical to establishing strong economic links with other tourist areas in the County and the Midland Region in its entirety, particularly in light of its Gateway status.

Fáilte Ireland's strategy for Tullamore is to raise its profile as a 'Hub Town' within Ireland's Lakelands and Inland Waterways. It is acknowledged that there is a potential for the development of further visitor (and local) attractions to be developed in the town which would add to the tourism infrastructure providing additional reasons to visit Tullamore.

A national audit of tourism products (excluding accommodation) highlighted a deficit in the number and quality of tourism products in most parts of Ireland and, particularly within the Midland Region. Fáilte Ireland's priority now, over the term of the National Development Plan (2007 - 2013), is to aid the development of tourism attractions to attract increasing numbers of overseas visitors to the region. To that end, Fáilte Ireland has produced a Tourism Product Development Strategy. It is hoped that future development and investment will have an integrated approach and be aligned to the strategies already in existence or to bring underdeveloped areas to "Centre of Excellence" standard.

Coupled with this, it was widely accepted, by all partners to the Interagency group in Offaly, that the pillars recommended by the McIver report would be the focus for development and promotion of the county. Tullamore was among the identified pillars and more specifically include:

- **The Waterways**
- **Tullamore / Heritage Centre / Grand Canal**
- **Sports, Leisure and Culture**
- **Lifestyle/Culture including food, crafts, music, etc.**

The Waterways

Fáilte Ireland together with Waterways Ireland, Shannon Development, North West tourism, West tourism, Fermanagh Tourism and Northern Ireland Tourism Board have identified a number of initiatives for the area from Lough Erne to the

Shannon River. Under the banner of 'Lakelands and Inland Waterways' the working group will set about improving infrastructure and amenities around identified hubs along this corridor. This marketing initiative includes Tullamore as one of its hubs. The focus is ultimately to raise the profile of Tullamore as a tourism hub within Ireland's Lakelands and Inland Waterways.

The role of the waterways as an alternative route into Tullamore proved very popular during the All Ireland Fleadh which was held in Tullamore for 3 years consecutively from 2007. The Grand Canal offered not only an alternative route into the town but also provided accommodation for boats/barges to moor. Its potential is full acknowledged by the Council and its use will be encouraged and promoted at every available opportunity.

Tullamore/Heritage Centre/Grand Canal

Under the identity of Ireland's Lakelands and Inland Waterways, the emphasis will be put into both the Grand Canal and the Shannon Waterways. On-shore facilities and activities, as well as improving how premises are viewed from the water, will be a priority.

Sports, Leisure and Culture

Festivals and events are vitally important to the regional spread of visitors, they provide an excellent vehicle through which a visitor can interact with local people and to experience their culture. The sporting culture provides a further opportunity to enrich a visitor's experience in Tullamore and County Offaly. Tullamore is well positioned to accommodate and cater for festivals and events at a national level.

Lifestyle – to include Food/Music

The vision for the region is an area offering a selection of authentic traditional cuisine experiences alongside many recreational activities and attractions. Events such as the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann focus on a wealth of traditional musical talent which again provides an opportunity to enrich a visitor's experience.

The Councils will continue to encourage and promote tourism within Tullamore in association with relevant bodies and agencies and strategies devised to promote tourism.

9.2 Visitor Attractions in Tullamore

Tourism provides many economic and social benefits to an area. Tullamore's tourist attractions are therefore important assets for the development of the town. They are fundamental to the enjoyment of the town by both visitors and residents. The attractions can be categorised under a number of headings outlined briefly below:

9.2.1 Built Heritage



Tullamore Dew Heritage Centre: This is the birthplace of the world famous Tullamore Dew and Irish Mist Liqueur where you can learn the history of the town and sample the product. The Tullamore Dew Heritage Centre houses the Tourist Information office also. This international brand name is a significant attractor.

Plate 9.1: Tullamore Dew Heritage Building (Source: Andy Mason)



Plate 9.2: Charleville Castle (Source: Andy Mason)

Charleville Castle: Charleville is Ireland's finest gothic revival castle. It is considered to be Francis Johnston's masterpiece, he also designed the G.P.O in Dublin. The castle was built between 1798 and 1810. The massive dining room was designed by Sir William Morris. This castle was once home to the Earls of Tullamore. The estate also provides a large amenity area that is enjoyed by tourists and residents alike.

The Councils will continue to protect the character of structures and buildings on interest in Tullamore which take account of the importance of the town's tourism industry.

9.2.2 Sport and Leisure

Tullamore is a sporting town with strong traditions. There is a wide variety of sporting and leisure facilities (both public and private) in the town which continue to be beneficial to promoting tourism in the area. Tullamore as the County town has the provision of many facilities for the viewing of traditional sporting events such as GAA games in O'Connor Park.

The Grand Canal waterway and associated walkways (The Grand Canal way) provides an alternative access route to Tullamore, as opposed to by road or public transport. This amenity is used for both leisure and recreational purposes and provides an alternative means to visiting and staying in Tullamore.

Plate 9.3: Grand Canal



Plate 9.4: Tullamore Canoe Club



Source: Andy Mason.

The Council will continue to promote and improve the sporting and leisure base of Tullamore where in particular, the provision of facilities will contribute to the attraction of people to the town.

9.2.3 Lifestyle, Arts and Culture

Tullamore has much to offer the visitor in terms of accommodation and socialising. Tullamore has become noted recently for its role in hosting major festival and events of national and international importance. This can largely be attributed to its central and accessible location of the town. In 2007-2008 Tullamore played host to successful Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann festivals. In addition, Tullamore hosted the National Ploughing Championship in 2007. Both events attracted hundreds of thousand of visitors to the town.

Plate 9.5: National Ploughing Championship, Tullamore



Plate 9.6: Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, Tullamore



Source: Andy Mason.

The Councils will continue to facilitate the staging of events such as those highlighted above and will seek to build on Tullamore's successful experience in hosting such events. In addition, the Councils will continue to promote, facilitate and support festivals and events, particularly because of the contribution that such events bring to the town.

9.2.4 Conference Facilities

The Councils recognises that conference business is a sector of the tourism market where Tullamore is well placed to maximise on and has significant potential to contributing to tourism revenue in the town. The Councils will encourage building on the opportunities that this established tourism attraction can offer.

9.2.5 Signposting of Tourism Facilities

There is a proliferation of signposting in Tullamore. In the case of tourism facilities and tourist attractions, standardised directional signs may be allowed, by licence, on the roadside margin. Such signs shall be sized and colour coded in accordance with the NRA's publication "Policy on the provision of Tourist and Leisure Signage on National Roads Signs", 2007.

9.2.6 Holiday Homes

Planning permission is required for holiday homes including the conversion of an existing dwelling house to a commercial holiday home. Schemes of commercial holiday homes will be considered in serviced areas where piped water and waste water treatment are available.

9.3 Policy

TTEP 09-01 It is the Councils' policy to promote and foster a growing sense of innovation and entrepreneurial activity in the tourism sector in Tullamore.

TTEP 09-02 It is the Councils' policy to continue to support and encourage increased co-ordination, cohesion and linkages between agencies involved in tourism development for example Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and Offaly Local Authorities and to assist projects which will improve the amenities of the town.

TTEP 09-03 It is the Councils' policy to protect natural resources on which tourism is based through the enforcement of policies in relation to resource protection, architectural conservation, water quality, bio-diversity and holiday home development.

TTEP 09-04 It is the Councils' policy to further investigate the potential of, and opportunities for, the development of trails including walking, cycling and driving, for the provision of appropriate services along these trails and for the development of linkages between trails within the County and adjoining counties.

TTEP 09-05 It is the Councils' policy to favourably consider tourism infrastructure development related to sport, recreation and tourism information including boating, angling, walking and pony trekking routes, golf courses, adventure centres and interpretive centres etc. subject to proper planning and sustainable development and the policies of this plan.

TTEP 09-06 It is the Councils' policy to promote and facilitate conference facilities in Tullamore and to support future tourism opportunities which may offer the opportunity to build on the existing attraction of the town, based on its location.

TTEP 09-07 It is the Councils' policy that where tourism related developments involve the interaction of a number of the above listed activities with accommodation facilities, such proposals should be facilitated where integration and linkage between tourism facilities is promoted and/or such facilities can clearly demonstrate a high level of flexibility for alternative uses.

TTEP 09-08 It is the Councils' policy to encourage tourism related developments where the scale and size of the proposed developments is appropriate and in keeping with the character of the area and respect the setting and integrity of Protected Structures.

TTEP 09-09 It is the Councils' policy to support the continued development of Theatre, Arts, Culture and other tourist events as they may arise.

TTEP 09-10 It is the Councils' policy to facilitate and encourage the provision of a range of accommodation and ancillary tourist services.

TTEP 09-11 It is the Councils' policy to protect the character of the town and its heritage in order to provide a sound basis for the development of tourism.

9.4 Objectives¹

TTEO 09-01 It is an objective of the Councils to co-operate with Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and other relevant bodies and agencies in promoting the waterways of Tullamore in respect of an overall tourism development and marketing strategy.

TTEO 09-02 It is an objective of the Councils to implement the Tourism Strategy for Offaly relevant to Tullamore, published in 2006 (McIver Consulting).

TTEO 09-03 It is an objective of the Councils to establish a signage policy committee to design and investigate funding opportunities for integrated directional and interpretive signage, relating to appearance and location with a timeframe for implementation and guidance.

TTEO 09-04 It is an objective of the Councils to prepare a tourism development and management plan in association with adjoining local authorities for key tourist sites in Tullamore. This plan should include the built and natural features which have an established tourist draw and will set out requirements in relation to tourism facilities and accommodation of visitors.

TTEO 09-05 It is an objective of the Councils to investigate and support best practice environmental management including energy efficiency, waste management and procurement and recycling in tourism enterprises/accommodation providers with Tullamore.

TTEO 09-06 It is an objective of the Councils to work with relevant and interested parties to implement specific projects to develop tourism in Tullamore.

TTEO 09-07 It is an objective of the Councils to protect and enhance the architectural heritage of the town and streetscapes.

TTEO 09-08 It is an objective of the Councils to facilitate the continued development of the Heritage Centre at Bury Quay.

¹ The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Councils' aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of the plan.

