

THE SHANNON

MIGHTY RIVER OF IRELAND

A TOURISM MASTERPLAN (2020-2030)

Reimagining the River Shannon and the Shannon Erne Waterway

Volume 1/5: Executive Summary



Prepared for Waterways Ireland

SLR Consulting: 501.00573.00001 R2 Vol. 1 of 5
February 2020



This report was prepared on behalf of Waterways Ireland, supported by Fáilte Ireland, by SLR Consulting Ireland in association with TellTale, Alan Hill, AECOM and The Way. The support of the Steering Group and the Executive Teams of the ten Local Authorities adjoining the Shannon and Shannon Erne Waterway is gratefully acknowledged:

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Cover Photo: Cruising on the Upper Shannon c. Sarah McCarthy, Fáilte Ireland

VOLUME 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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ACCOMPANYING VOLUMES TO THE TOURISM MASTERPLAN FOR THE SHANNON

Volume 1: Executive Summary (*this volume*)

Volume 2: The Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030

Volume 3: Baseline Report

Volume 4: Environmental Report

Volume 5: Natura Impact Report (NIR) - Habitats Directive Assessment

Introduction

Waterways Ireland, in strategic partnership with Fáilte Ireland, commissioned SLR Consulting and partners to develop a *Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon*. The key objective is to revitalise the combined Shannon Navigation and Shannon Erne Waterway as a key destination within Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, identifying world class visitor experiences based on the region's natural and cultural assets.

The *Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon* considers the strategic tourism development opportunities for the entire length of the Shannon Navigation and the Shannon Erne Waterway (collectively referred to hereinafter as 'The Shannon')¹, from Cavan-Leitrim southwards to Limerick City. The Shannon study area includes 5km on either side of the central navigation, forming a 10km wide corridor for consideration (see Figure 1).

Although the Tourism Masterplan concerns itself with a relatively narrow geographical area, the Shannon sits in the core of the wider *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* tourism region and should be viewed in this wider strategic context. The Shannon Masterplan is one of two major plans that will unlock the tourism potential of the region, the other being the *Beara Breifne Way Tourism Activation Plan*. These two tourism plans are complementary and should be read in reference to one another.

The Tourism Masterplan and supporting evidence base is set out in five volumes:

- **Volume 1: Executive Summary (this volume)**
- Volume 2: The Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030
- Volume 3: Baseline Report
- Volume 4: Environmental Report
- Volume 5: Habitats Directive Assessment

This Executive Summary comprises Volume 1 and is supported by Volumes 2 - 5.

Aims of the Tourism Masterplan

The masterplan presents a strategic development framework to guide the future sustainable development of the Shannon as a compelling tourism destination within *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands*. It will serve as a roadmap for future tourism investment and resources, all of which should be directly aligned to the core proposition and experience development themes for the Shannon. It will also act as a reference document for each of the Local Authorities along the Shannon and will inform the review of County Development Plans and Tourism Strategies.

This masterplan is designed to achieve better regional spread of tourism and visitor activity, that will allow coordinated development and maximise beneficial outcomes derived from both public and private investment. This will have the combined effect of harnessing the economic and social potential of the Shannon's natural and cultural assets in both a socially and environmentally sustainable way.

The expected outcomes and benefits that will be derived from implementing the Masterplan are as follows:

- Growth in the visitor economy of the region through the creation of new enterprises and jobs;
- A better regional spread of tourism;

¹ For ease of reference the collective term 'Shannon' will be used to include both the Shannon Navigation and the Shannon Erne Waterway throughout the text, except where specific references are made to each.

- An increase in the vitality and vibrancy of local communities;
- A greater awareness of the special environmental qualities of the Shannon and the protection of its environmental quality;
- A more co-ordinated approach to the development of tourism along the Shannon;
- An underpinning of the *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* brand by establishing the Shannon as a compelling tourism destination for both the domestic and overseas visitors.

The masterplan sets out a strategy that will develop tourism in the region with the aim of driving sustainable economic and social benefits, while protecting environmental sensitivities. The Tourism Masterplan defines the Shannon's unique tourism offer and establishes:

1. **Products and Themes** with the most potential and offering a unique differentiator
2. **Destination Vision** – establish a shared view of the destination's desired qualities (and profile) in the long-term, including land- and water-based activities, and suggest best options to deliver on this.
3. **Make recommendations on other influencing factors** that will stimulate a varied product offering and quality experience.

Map showing the Area of the Shannon Masterplan



The 'blue corridor' shows the study area along the Shannon Navigation and the Shannon Erne Waterway

Developing the Masterplan

A five-staged approach to developing the masterplan was adopted. In stages 1 and 2, significant baseline research, statutory and broader stakeholder consultation were undertaken to identify the core issues to be addressed in drafting the masterplan (stage 3). The final two stages pertain to the completion of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (stages 4, 5). Results of each stage are presented in Volumes 2-5 of the Masterplan.

The research and consultations identified nine key issues to be addressed, through the identification of development opportunities based on the Shannon's rich natural and cultural assets.

An overarching **Vision for the Shannon** was defined, which informs a new **thematic and interpretative framework** for all future tourism development in three defined spatial zones, called **Shannon Discovery Zones**.

A series of **Strategic Initiatives** was subsequently defined as catalysts for sustainable tourism development on the Shannon over the 10-year life span of the masterplan (2020-2030) in each of the three Discovery Zones. The conservation and protection of the Shannon's unique environments is at the core of the strategic initiatives, while encouraging visitors to explore the region both on the water and 'off the beaten track'.

The Shannon – What Makes it Special?

The River Shannon and the Shannon Erne Waterway together form the longest waterway in Ireland and Britain. Although historically a strategic waterway, the Shannon offers relatively accessible and tranquil waters, passing through landscapes of mountains, farmlands, peatbogs, wetlands and floodplains that provide the unique backdrop to the towns and villages along its banks.

The Shannon offers the freedom of cruising, sailing, rowing or swimming in open waters; kayaking or cycling along blueways; and expansive peatlands displaying wetland ecology and huge Dark Skies. The Shannon's special qualities lie in its unspoilt environments, offering a unique mosaic of on-water and land-based blueways and greenways, many of which facilitate growing demand for 'soft adventure' and outdoor activities, in contact with nature. The region is dotted with traditional pubs, restaurants, cafés and organic food growers, as well as a vibrant arts and culture scene.

The modern Shannon invites the visitor to stimulate their senses by experiencing the sounds and textures of nature, fun activities, wonderful foods and up-close encounters with local people.

The Shannon - Policy Context

The Shannon lies at the core of *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands*, the new experience tourism proposition for Ireland, launched in 2018, to sit alongside *The Wild Atlantic Way*, *Ireland's Ancient East*, and *Dublin – Surprising by Nature*. Ireland's Hidden Heartlands promises to "bring to life for visitors the Midlands' rich natural assets".

Given this mix, the international target market segments will be 'Culturally Curious' and 'Great Escapers', while the domestic market will focus largely on 'Connected Families' and 'Indulgent Romantics'. Encouraging visitors to discover their own unique experience of the natural beauty should be part of all Shannon experiences.

Data shows over 9.5 million overseas visitors came to Ireland in 2018, with growth recorded across key markets of GB, USA, Germany and France, that continued into the first half of 2019. Given its potential, the Shannon has historically under-performed as a holiday destination, with *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* attracting 885,000 tourists, or just 3% of both international and domestic visitors. Conservative masterplan projections of cumulative 3% growth per annum in visitor numbers to the Shannon will introduce an additional 304,000 domestic and overseas visitors by 2030. This will require the provision of additional tourism services and infrastructure in food, transport, amenities, activities and entertainment.

The Vision for the Shannon

The Tourism Masterplan establishes a long-term vision for the Shannon upon which to build a highly distinctive and internationally attractive tourist destination.

The mighty Shannon will become Ireland's surprising heart. It will be highly valued for its special environmental qualities and biodiversity by locals and visitors alike. It will be a haven for on-water experiences offering the visitor a wide range of ways to get active in nature in a sustainable manner. The Shannon will invite the visitor to slow down, stay longer and to engage with its heritage and communities, providing a sense of the real Ireland and creating an unforgettable holiday experience.

The vision for the masterplan is framed within the international **VICE** model for sustainable tourism development as the interaction between **V**isitors, the **I**ndustry that provides services to them, the **C**ommunity and culture that hosts them and their collective impact on, and response to, the **E**nvironment where it all takes place.

Thematic & Experiential Framework for the Shannon

The Shannon requires a shared understanding of what the target visitor segments will seek, expect and remember of its unique qualities and distinctive sense of place. A thematic and experiential framework was developed as part of the masterplan, to underpin proposals for experiences and activities.

Three inter-weaving **Shannon Themes** underpin all masterplan propositions, as follows:

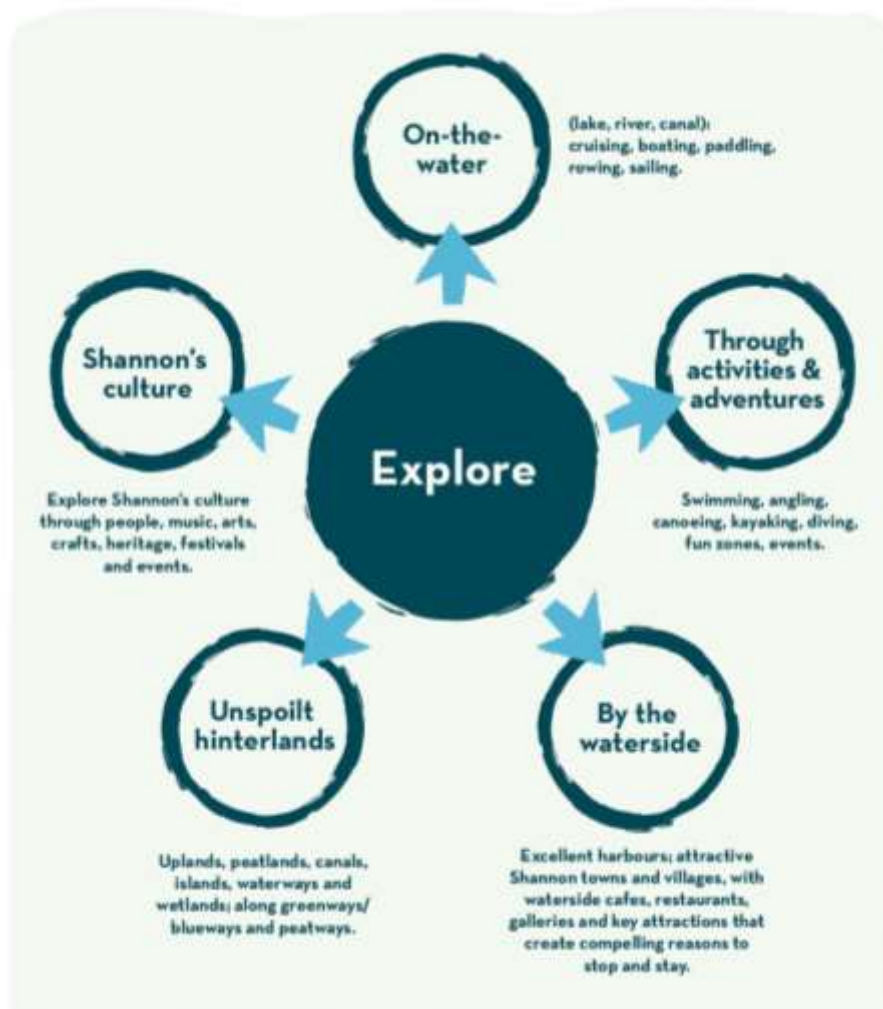


Each theme is supported by differentiating **Shannon Inspirers**, to create distinctive experiences of the Shannon, linked to three main themes. It is implicit in the masterplan that all of these themes and inspirers will provide vital contacts with local people, which visitors to Ireland expect and cherish.

**Differentiating Inspirers -
being distinctively 'Shannon'**



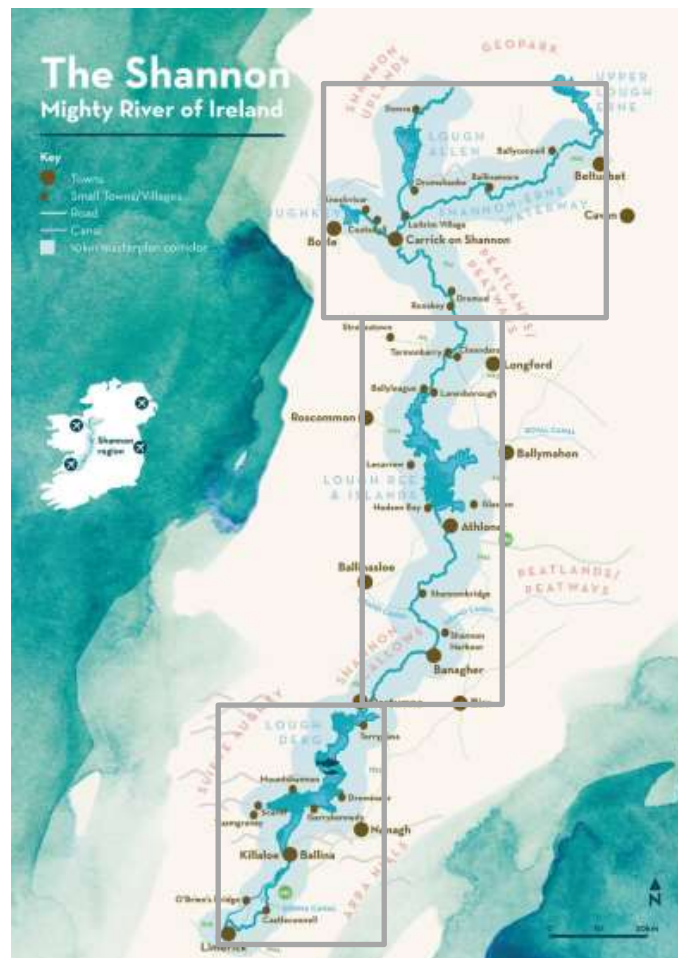
The Shannon may be explored and experienced by visitors in many ways:



Shannon Discovery Zones

Three distinctive spatial **Discovery Zones**, characterising the distinctive geographies and assets of the Shannon are proposed with specific experience development recommendations, linked to the thematic framework.

<p>Discovery Zone 1: Upper Shannon</p> <p><i>Lough Allen and Shannon Erne Waterway</i></p>	<p>The source of the Shannon, characterised by hills and blanket bogs; subterranean caves; with winding rivers and canals meandering through towns and villages in the lowlands, offering a unique blend of hills, rivers, canals, forests and opportunities to fully immerse in a natural way of living. Dispersed rural villages, with key Shannon crossing points, lie at the hub of the zone, many of which are exemplars of sustainable living.</p>
<p>Discovery Zone 2: Mid-Shannon</p> <p><i>Lough Ree, Shannon Callows & Peatlands</i></p>	<p>The harmonious landscapes of the Shannon lowlands are punctuated by lakes, wetlands and peat bogs, fringed by low ridges and islands, with Shannon’s monastic and medieval heritage at the core, marked by crossings, canals, trade and refuge over centuries. Small rural villages, with population centres located at historic crossing points.</p>
<p>Discovery Zone 3: Lower Shannon</p> <p><i>Lough Derg and Lower Shannon to Limerick</i></p>	<p>The Shannon flows south to Lough Derg, fringed by picturesque lakeside villages and forest walks; passing Inisceiltra, the holy island, before harnessing the power of the mighty Shannon at Ardnacrusha, on its final journey to the sea at Limerick. The visitor can truly experience a full array of fun and exciting water activities in this vibrant adventure zone.</p>



Based on Fáilte Ireland guidance, Experience Framework models were produced for each of the Discovery Zones, to illuminate how each Zone links the full experiential framework to the overarching themes and inspirers.

Experience Development Framework



A destination promise and overarching themes were identified for each of the Discovery Zones, leading to proposals for development and enhancement of a series of hero products and supporting experiences. Ancillary experiences available in the surrounding environments, complementing the core thematic experiences and activities, were defined for each of the Discovery Zones. Specific experiences are common to each zone e.g. angling, boating and monastic heritage, as well as the traditional social and trading dimensions.

Some of the experiences are in existence, but require strengthening, while others will evolve and develop over the lifetime of the 10-year masterplan.

Discovery Zone1: Upper Shannon

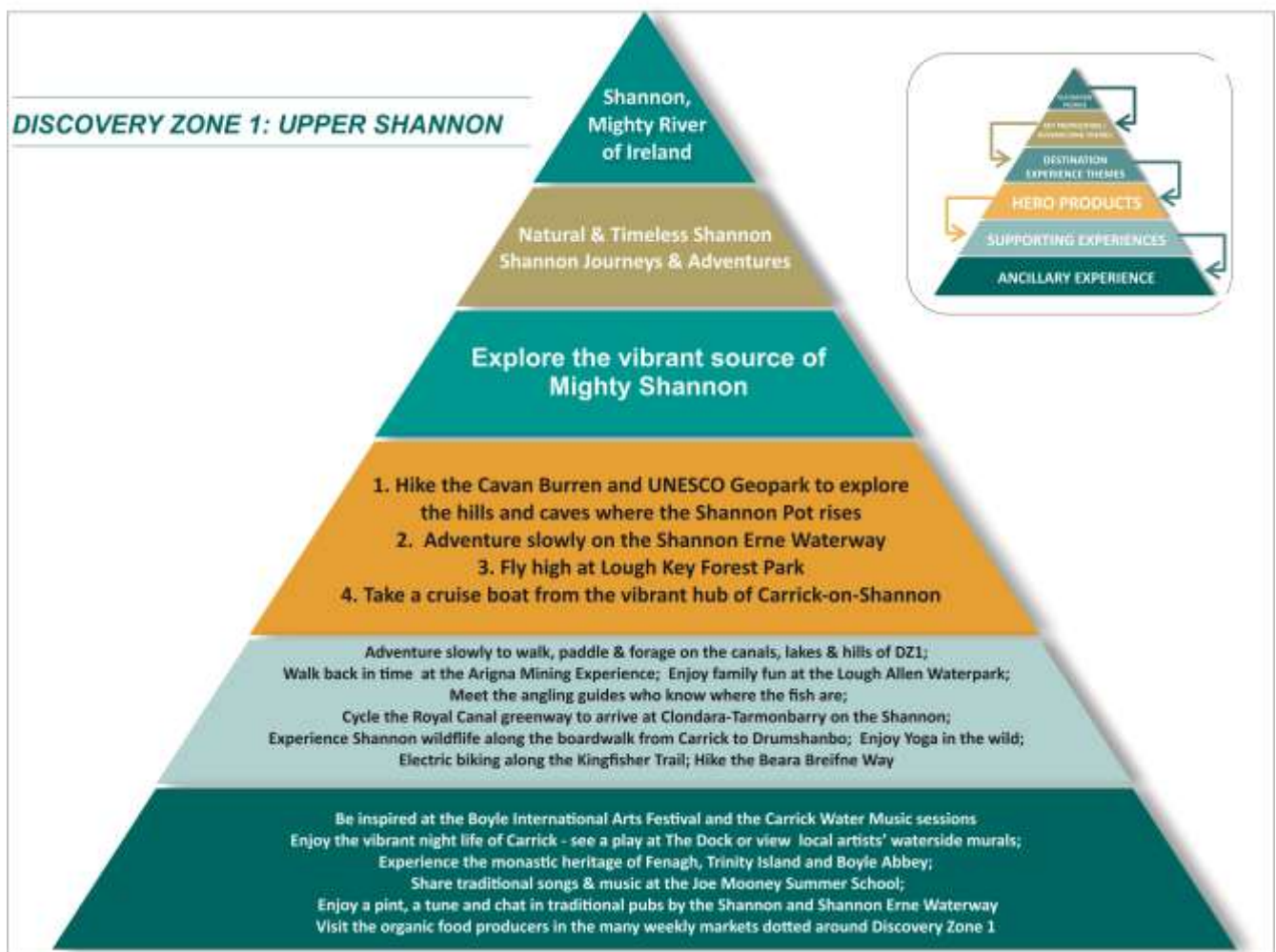
Discovery Zone 1 Upper Shannon is where the mighty Shannon starts its journey, rising quietly from the underworld at the Shannon Pot, flowing southwards via majestic Lough Allen to the river-lands of Carrick-on-Shannon. The Shannon-Erne Waterway provides a stunning lake-and-canal blueway link to the River Erne, while Lough Key offers adventure for all the family. Dotted with welcoming villages and towns, this zone offers exceptional opportunities to experience sustainable living, many local foods or to enjoy a chat or a tune in its many traditional pubs.

Upper Shannon - Building Compelling Experiences

The promise of Discovery Zone 1 is to “explore the rising sources of the Shannon” – alluding to the physical and metaphorical sources of river, geology, time, culture and foods of the region. The key proposition is based on the ‘source’ concept and the start of the journey of the Mighty Shannon, the longest river in these islands.

Upper Shannon’s ‘hero products’ are linked to the themes of multi-modal Journeys and a genuinely exciting ‘get away from it all’ suite of experiences suited to the *Culturally Curious* and *Great Escapers* in this relatively unknown part of Ireland.

Destination Model for Discovery Zone 1 – Upper Shannon



Discovery Zone 1: Upper Shannon Priority Projects

Upper Shannon (DZ1) will benefit from investment in the following proposed priority projects:

DZ1.1 Development of a Destination & Visitor Management Plan for the Shannon Pot:

- As per Cavan Co. Council's development proposals for Cavan Burren Park.
- Enhance green linkages to the Cavan Burren and international Marble Arch-Cuilcagh Mountains UNESCO Geopark.

DZ1.2 Develop waterside recreational infrastructure, building linkages and filling 'gaps' where feasible:

- Carrick-to-Leitrim Boardwalk; linking alongside the water to Acres Lake and Lough Allen;
- Strengthen links from the Shannon-Erne Waterway - Lough Allen - Lough Key, through development and promotion of both blueways and waterside trails.

DZ1.3 Lough Key Greenway

- Proposed greenway links from Boyle to Lough Key; with ultimate links to Carrick-on-Shannon (see DZ1.5 below).

DZ1.4 Delivery of long distance, themed journeys to meander slowly into and within the zone:

- Enhancement of the *Beara Breifne Way*²;
- Support emerging spiritual *Pilgrim Way* along the Shannon-Shannon Erne Waterway, with onwards links to Lough Erne³;
- Revitalise the *Humbert Trail* that meanders into Leitrim, with links to the Wild Atlantic Way.

DZ1.5 Enhancement of the Lough Key Forest Park experience –

- Support proposals to enhance the family-friendly Lough Key adventure experiences.
- Enhance blue-green linkages to and from Boyle under provisions of *Boyle 2040* strategic plan.
- Consider long term green/blueway linkages from Lough Key to the Shannon via Knockvicar.

² To be based on the recommendations of the forthcoming '*Beara Breifne Way Tourism Activation Plan*'.

³ Noting this project is at feasibility stage and may not advance to full commissioning.

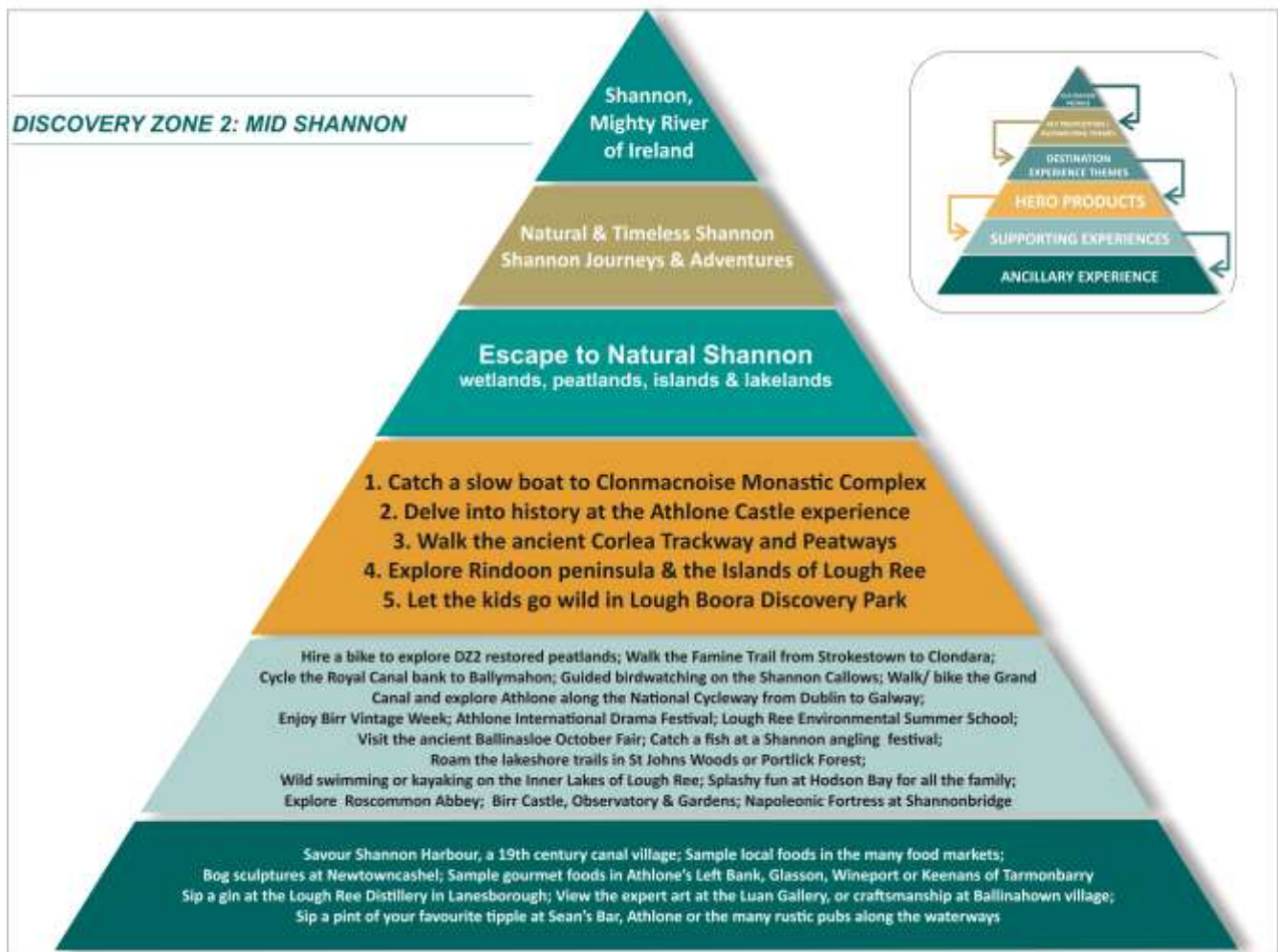
Discovery Zone 2: Mid Shannon

Discovery Zone 2 Mid Shannon is an elemental zone where Lough Ree and the Shannon Callows meet; where land melts to a mosaic of lakes, wetlands and peatlands; a place of open skies and expansive bogs merging on the horizon; where the visitor will experience a sense of timelessness and of total immersion in nature.

Mid Shannon Building Compelling Experiences

Discovery Zone 2 Mid Shannon promises to allow visitors to escape to ‘the waters and the wild’ – a reflection of the integrated mosaic of lakes, rivers, canals, wetlands and peatlands, and their related habitats and species, offering real opportunities to immerse in nature. The proposals to build on this unique combination of assets, led to the adoption of the key Shannon theme ‘Natural Shannon’, with inspirers ‘timeless and natural’. These underpin the range of immersive experiences proposed for Discovery Zone 2 in the Masterplan

Destination Model for Discovery Zone 2 – Mid Shannon



Discovery Zone 2 Mid Shannon: Priority Projects

Mid Shannon will benefit from the development and enhancement of key visitor experiences at the following locations, subject to agreement of landowners, statutory agencies and local authorities.

DZ2.1 Development of a Visitor Management Plan for Clonmacnoise (Oct. 2019) to:

- Consider reconfiguration of access points and facilities to enhance the visitor experience;
- Develop on-water linkages with service hubs upstream and downstream, inclusive of Athlone, Shannonbridge, Shannon Harbour and Banagher.
- Enhanced off-road links from Athlone to Clonmacnoise and Shannonbridge/ Shannon Harbour with links to Lough Boora Discovery Park via Grand Canal to allow immersive experiences.

DZ2.2 Enhanced interpretation and access to Rindoon Medieval Walled Town

- Consider options for an enhanced Visitor Experience based at Lecarrow / Portrunny, to include access to Rindoon Walled Town and peninsula; and
- Consider options for visitor access to the Lough Ree Islands (subject to landowner agreements) from Lecarrow or Portrunny harbours and/or Lanesborough-Ballyleague/ Hodson Bay harbours.

DZ2.3 Wet'n'Wild Peatlands of Mid Shannon

- Develop integrated Discovery Zone focused on peatlands' environmental heritage and industrial histories; recreational opportunities such as walking, hiking, cycling, guided tours or bog trains;
- Outdoor educational classroom/ summer schools to demonstrate climate change in action;
- Range of family fun 'bog snorkelling' or mud-slinging; and
- Creative 'slow' initiatives such as bog carving and sculpture, photography & 'art in the open'.

DZ2.4 Expanding the Lough Ree Experience

- Continue to develop Athlone's waterfront amenities to build a critical mass of attractions and activities, linking the Glasson-Coosan-Wineport-Killinure-Hodson Bay activity-food nexus;
- Completion of the National Cycleway and the new bridge that will deliver 'slow tourism' into the core of Athlone town and DZ2;
- Development of the planned cycleway south from Athlone to Clonmacnoise, linking the National Cycleway to the monastic complex; consider cycle links south to Shannonbridge;
- Completion of the Athlone-Mullingar-Royal Canal circuit to deliver 'active in nature' experiences across the peatlands, directing visitors via Ballymahon-Clondara, thence to Portlick - Athlone.
- Develop an enhanced range of cruise options, boating and guided tours from Athlone waterfront linked to onshore attractions (islands, monastic sites, activity centres, bike tours) and hinterland.

DZ2.5 Improvement of the Visitor Centre at the Corlea Iron Age Trackway

- Prepare an improvement plan for the centre which would explore the expansion of its story and experience to include the Iron Age in Ireland'.

DZ2.6 Surf in the Turf – Surf Wave Centre

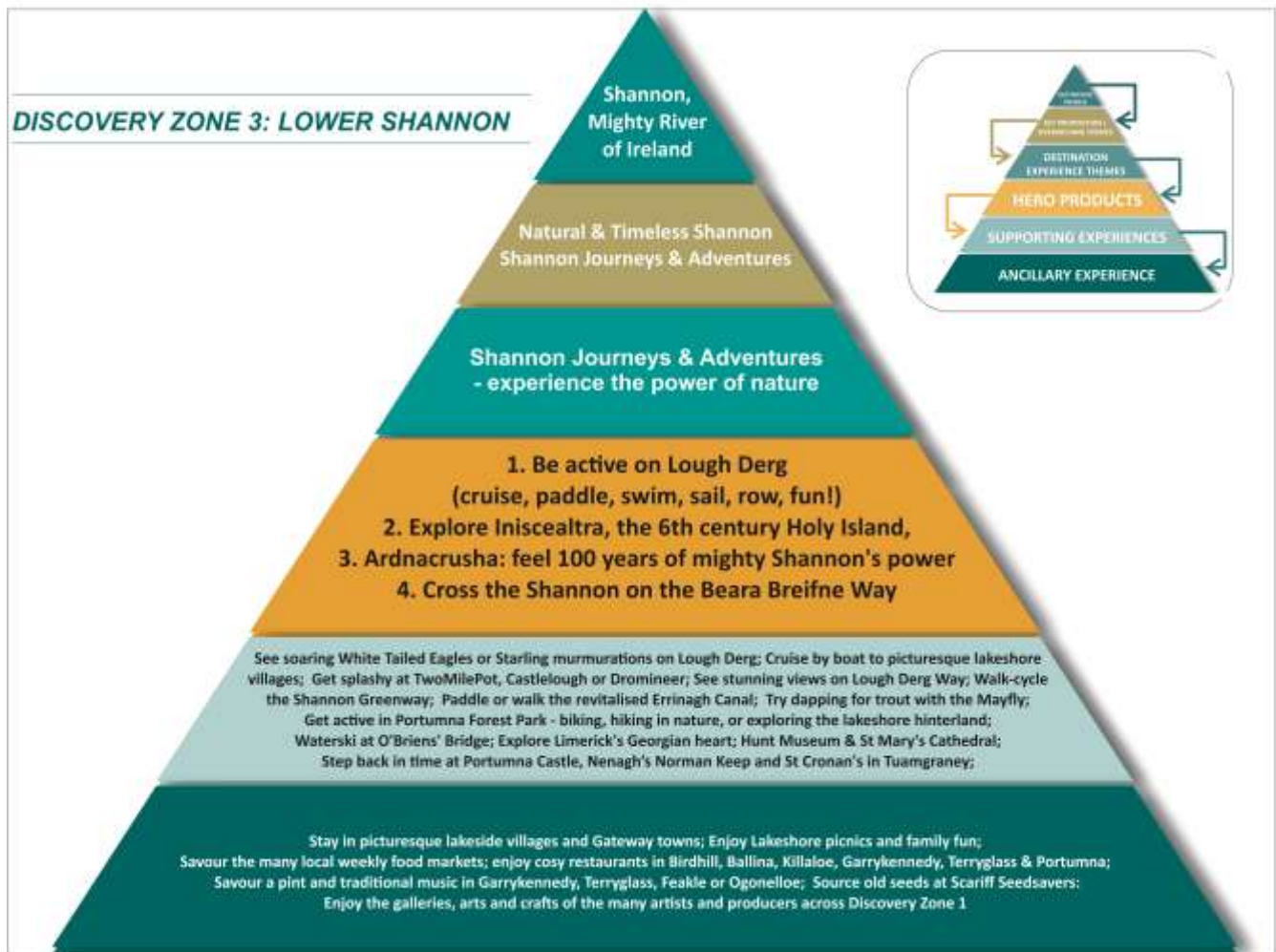
- Prepare a Feasibility Study to explore the potential of developing Ireland's first artificial Surf Wave Centre on a cutaway bog powered by renewable energy.

Discovery Zone 3: Lower Shannon

Lower Shannon offers a vibrant array of outdoor activities, centred on Lough Derg and the last ‘fall’ of the Shannon before entering the sea at Limerick. The landscape is stunning, framed by Slieve Aughty and Arra Mountains, offering on-water adventures in angling, sailing, kayaking, birdwatching and lake cruising, and off-water hiking, walking and cycling, before the capture of the mighty Shannon’s energy

Discovery Zone 3 Lower Shannon promises to deliver an active and adventurous experience to the visitor, inviting the visitor to “be active, be enthralled!” The combination of the natural and cultural assets available led to proposals to develop Shannon-themed experiences linked primarily to the ‘Power of Nature’, with inspirers based on ‘Journeys and Adventures’ as well as ‘mighty Shannon’ to reflect the sheer energy of the Lower Shannon. These underpin the range of experiences proposed for Discovery Zone 3 in the Masterplan.

Destination Model for Discovery Zone 3 – Lower Shannon



Discovery Zone Lower Shannon: Priority Projects

The following signature projects are proposed for Discovery Zone 3:

DZ3.1 Ardnacrusha – Feasibility Study for redevelopment of Visitor Centre and Visitor management- (subject to ESB approvals & collaboration)

- Provision of reconfigured visitor facilities, to accommodate larger groups.
- Assessment of transport options by land and water to and from site.
- Options to consider on-water and beside-water development links with service hubs upstream and downstream, inclusive of Limerick, O’Brien’s Bridge, Killaloe/ Ballina, Lough Derg.

DZ3.2 Develop enhanced Castlough & Portroe Lookout; Active Amenity Zone & Slow Travel Interchange

- Enhance the amenity zone at Castlough Bay & Woods with safe swimming/ boating/ canoeing access; linking to iconic Portroe Lookout; facilities to enhance visitor experience.
- Enhanced links to Castlough Woods onwards to Ballina/ Killaloe (south) and Garrykennedy / Dromineer (north) along Lough Derg Way and/ or by boat along the lake.

DZ3.3 Feasibility Study for Development of ‘Shannon Greenway’

- Linking Limerick, via Clonlara, Ardnacrusha, O’Brien’s Bridge, Killaloe/Ballina, Tuamgraney and Scariff*
- Utilise public lands (canals, forests, amenity zones) where possible.

**Consider future links to Mountshannon, with direct links to Iniscealtra Visitor experience.*

DZ3.4 Implementation of the Iniscealtra Visitor Management Plan

- It is strongly recommended that the recommendations of the VMP for Iniscealtra (Holy Island) be expedited as soon as possible. Critically the development of a Visitor Centre at Mountshannon, with guided access to the island, will provide a springboard for a unique visitor experience in the East Clare corridor adjacent to the Shannon, from Killaloe, to Tuamgraney (St. Cronan’s), Scariff and Mountshannon, and northwards towards Portumna.
- Development of potential cross-Shannon visitor boating links from other villages around Lough Derg to Iniscealtra Visitor Centre and island experience.

DZ3.5: Portumna Attractions - Integrated Tourism Development Plan

- Prepare an integrated tourism development plan incorporating Portumna Castle, Forest Park, Harbour, Friary and Portumna Town, to ensure that the visitor experience and yield is greater than the sum of the parts.

DZ3.6 Link to Lough Derg Destination Development Plan (LDDDP) proposals

- All Lower Shannon experience development initiatives around Lough Derg should be aligned to the Destination Strategy and VEDP currently in progress.
- Support proposals for a network of camping/ RV sites, in suitable locations around Lough Derg.
- Development of Dromineer Sailing Training Hub, as centre of excellence for sail training and national and international sailing events, through enhanced experience development.

Creation of linked boating experiences; support enterprises and clubs to deliver linked visitor experiences at destinations around the lake; build on stories such as Brian Ború; Iniscealtra and the pilgrim experience; and trade on the Mighty Shannon; that leverage existing strengths.

In developing these tourism propositions for each the Shannon Discovery Zones, the masterplan’s Thematic Framework will support Experience Development in each zone. Examples are included in the following table:

Shannon Discovery Zones: Thematic Framework supporting Experience Development

Shannon Themes



**The Shannon,
Mighty River
of Ireland**



**The Natural,
Timeless
Shannon**





**Shannon
Journeys &
Adventures**

Shannon Inspirers



-  Adventures
-  Journeys
-  Slow
-  Contact with Water
-  On-water
-  Local People
-  Environmentally Aware
-  Relates to Whole River

Discovery Zone 1: Upper Shannon Lough Allen, Lough Key & Shannon Erne Waterway

The Shannon, Mighty River of Ireland

- Hike the Cavan Burren and UNESCO Geopark where Shannon rises 
- Explore the Shannon Pot, mythical source of the Shannon 

The Natural, Timeless Shannon



- Adventure slowly on the Shannon-Erne Waterway 
- Go out with an angling guide who knows where the fish are 

Shannon Journeys & Adventures





- Sunset Cruise from Carrick-on-Shannon to Roosky 
- Walk, paddle and forage in the hills and lakes of Leitrim 
- Explore the tree-top walks and zipwire at Lough Key Activity Park 
- Adventure & fun at Lough Allen Waterpark 
- Enjoy a pint, a tune and a chat in Shannon pubs and bars 
- Explore the Arigna Mining Experience 
- Cycle the Royal Canal Greenway 

Discovery Zone 2: Mid Shannon Lough Ree, Shannon & Callows Peatlands

The Shannon, Mighty River of Ireland

- Be intrigued by the story of the Siege of Athlone in Athlone Castle, at this historically important fording point on the Shannon 
- Catch a slow boat to Clonmacnoise Monastic Complex 

The Natural, Timeless Shannon

- See the Dark Skies of Boora Bog with a local guide 
- Circumnavigate the islands of Lough Ree 
- Cycle around Longford's restored wetlands 
- Guided bird-watching in the wetlands of the Shannon Callows 

Shannon Journeys & Adventures

- Walk the ancient Corlea Trackway and Peatways 
- Walk the Famine Trail from Strokestown to Clondara 
- Let the kids go wild at Lough Boora Discovery Park 
- Enjoy splashy fun at Hodson Bay 
- Enjoy a pint, a tune and a chat in Shannon pubs and bars 
- Explore vibrant Athlone, a vital hub on the Shannon 
- Cycle the Royal Canal Greenway 

Discovery Zone 3: Lower Shannon Lough Derg & lower Shannon to Limerick

The Shannon, Mighty River of Ireland

- See stunning views from Tountinna hiking on the Lough Derg Way 
- Enjoy traditional music sessions at the many lakeshore pubs 

The Natural, Timeless Shannon

- Explore Iniscealtra (6th century 'Holy Island') 
- Ardnacrusha: 100 years of Shannon power 
- View white-tailed eagles or startling murmurations on Lough Derg 
- Go out with an angling guide who knows where the fish are 

Shannon Journeys & Adventures

- Cruise on the Shannon from Killaloe or Portumna 
- Water-based, fun activities around Lough Derg 
- Biking, hiking or exploring the lakeshore 
- Explore Limerick, Shannon's oldest city and historic crossing 
- Paddle or walk the revitalised Errinagh Canal 
- Walk/cycle the Shannon Greenway 
- Enjoy a pint, a tune and a chat in Shannon pubs and bars 

Strategic Initiatives

In developing an integrated development approach for the whole Shannon, the thematic framework and key issues were used to define **seven strategic initiatives** that would catalyse the development of a world class and sustainable tourism destination.

Seven Strategic Initiatives for the Shannon



These seven interlinking initiatives aim to forge long-term impacts by creating sustainable conditions for experience development, building on the inherent strengths of the Shannon.

Development proposals have been made under each Signature Initiative, linked to the themes and inspirers, with the Shannon as a singular destination within *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands* at the heart of all.

These are summarised in the following table.

Key Proposals under Seven Strategic Initiatives for the Shannon

Shannon: Strategic Initiatives 1- 7	
Strategic Initiative 1: Communicating a Clear & Consistent Message	Relates to Theme/ Inspirer
<p>SI1.1 Vision for the Shannon aligned with Ireland's Hidden Heartlands:</p> <p>Develop consistent communications and interpretation to reflect the shared vision, aligned with that of Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands (IHH). All local authorities and statutory authorities to embrace and reflect this shared vision across all print and digital media platforms.</p>	<p>Mighty Shannon</p> <p>Relating to Whole Shannon</p>
<p>SI1.2 Develop distinctive visual representation for Shannon:</p> <p>Design a series of distinctive cascading logos to reflect the embedded, inter-linked nature of the IHH, Shannon and three Discovery Zones.</p>	
<p>SI1.3 Shannon Integrated Interpretation Strategy and Design Guide :</p> <p>Develop Guide for co-ordinated landscape-scale interpretation for the Shannon, including interventions for interpretation for all stages of the visitor journey. Prepare detailed guidelines on appropriateness and use of a range of interpretation media and methods</p>	
<p>SI1.4 Interpretation Planning:</p> <p>All new experience and interpretation developments should include an Interpretation Plan aligned to the Shannon Integrated Interpretation Strategy.</p>	
<p>SI1.5 Shannon Visitor Experience and Interpretation Toolkit:</p> <p>Develop toolkit with linked training and supports for local providers and local guides should be developed to support shared standards of high-quality interpretation across the Shannon region.</p>	
<p>SI1.6 Environmental Code of Conduct:</p> <p>Develop a Code of Conduct to highlight and encourage positive behaviours that reflect care for the Shannon environment for local people and visitors. This should be accompanied by research and monitoring of visitor behaviours, beliefs and motivations.</p>	
<p>SI1.7 Marketing Requirements:</p> <p>Integrated Marketing Strategy and allied resourcing, closely aligned with the themes and experiences proposed in the Masterplan. Align with promotion and marketing of Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands as part of integrated thematic communications strategy for the region.</p>	

Strategic Initiative 2: Enhancing the On-Water Visitor Experience	Relates to Theme/ Inspirer
<p>SI2.1 Cruising/ Day-Boating/ Passenger Cruising:</p> <p>Carry out techno-economic feasibility study to examine viable rejuvenation & greening options for the cruise hire fleet; increase on-water access options through day-boat /passenger cruising</p>	<p>Mighty Shannon</p> <p>Journeys and Adventures</p> <p>Contact with Water</p> <p>Slow</p>
<p>SI2.2 Development of an additional Cruise Hire Hub(s) to ‘spread’ the options for on-water experiences.</p> <p>Options to be assessed for technical, commercial and environmental feasibility including Tarmonbarry / Clondara, Killaloe, Athlone on Shannon and Ballinamore on Shannon-Erne Waterway.</p>	
<p>SI2.3 Marina Development:</p> <p>Technical Assessment of Marina capacity to establish requirements for additional jetty space; consider options of Carrick-on-Shannon; Hodson Bay; Connaught Harbour; and new Marina in Parteen/Clarisford. Consider enhanced jetty capacity up-and down-stream of Clonmacnoise at Athlone and Shannonbridge.</p> <p>Review shore-based Service Block provision; assess potential use of smart technologies to enhance delivery and monitoring of usage patterns.</p>	
<p>SI2.4 Water-Based Activities & Adventure:</p> <p>Provide timely visitor information on range of 'soft adventure' activities (swimming, rowing, sailing, kayaking, waterskiing etc), where to go and amenities within each of the Discovery Zones. Develop improved networking and promotion of family-friendly activity zones (in association with the 'Shannon 100' network).</p>	
<p>SI2.5 Angling:</p> <p>Identify angling hubs in association with WWI/ IFI and FI, linked to the Shannon Towns and Villages strategy (SI3). Develop family-friendly angling experiences, linked to activities in nature.</p>	
<p>SI2.6 Blueways:</p> <p>The accreditation of the existing trails should be carried out with a view to supporting the promotion and optimisation of the existing and newly developed Blueway network over the medium term.</p>	
<p>SI2.7 Tranquillity Zones:</p> <p>Pilot selected sites on the Shannon as tranquillity zones in the short term, with a view to extending along Shannon water bodies over the lifetime of the Masterplan. If successful, protocols will require to be developed.</p>	
<p>SI2.8 Small Scale Accommodation Options:</p> <p>Define appropriate locations using a criteria-based approach, linked to Shannon Towns and Villages. Consider options for e.g. floating pods; glamping; & camp-sites; serviced parking and amenities for recreational vehicles.</p>	

Strategic Initiative 3: Enhancing the Waterside Visitor Experience	Relates to Theme/ Inspirer
<p>SI3.1 Reimagining Harbour Facilities through Sustained Investment Programme:</p> <p>A programme of investment in harbour infrastructure will be developed to include the upgrade of some harbours, the opening of new destinations and the possible restoration of some waterways.</p> <p>Enhancements of waterfront public realm, amenities and provision of onshore services, charging, pump out and power facilities; use smart technologies.</p> <p>Use existing public infrastructure to stimulate enterprises and community activity</p> <p>Enhanced BBQ, picnic and playground amenities at harboursides on public lands.;</p> <p>Create walk/cycle recreational linkages to settlements, attractions and things to see and do. Provision of serviced camping/ pod/ RV parking at harboursides.</p> <p>Sustained investment in the harbour infrastructure to facilitate growth in tourism.</p>	<p>Timeless</p> <p>Natural Shannon</p> <p>Journeys & Adventures</p>
<p>SI3.2 Nature-Viewing in Forests & Hinterlands:</p> <p>Identify potential for enhanced family-friendly outdoor recreational amenities and nature viewing experiences in the Forest Parks that punctuate the Shannon Corridor.</p> <p>Strengthen and promote access to nature along the Beara Breifne Way, Famine Way and emerging Pilgrim Way, to provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy spectacular scenery while engaging with nature in the Shannon / Shannon Erne Waterway hinterlands.</p>	
<p>SI3.3 Revitalisation of Lesser Used Waterways</p> <p>There is an opportunity to identify and consider measures to increase visitors and activity on waterways such as the Shannon Erne Waterway (SEW), the River Suck, the Boyle Canal and the Limerick Navigation, as well as the Royal and Grand Canals.</p> <p>This can be achieved by refocussing promotional efforts as well as revitalising their potential for waterside, on-water and blueway experiences.</p>	
<p>SI3.4 Reimagining Historic Buildings & Canal Structures</p> <p>Define appropriate locations and opportunities for refurbishment of historic Shannon buildings, using a criteria-based approach, linked to Destination Hub Towns and Villages strategies.</p>	
Strategic Initiative 4: Shannon Towns and Villages	Relates to Theme/ Inspirer
<p>SI4.1 Shannon Hubs</p> <p>Enhance their existing role as hub towns within the Discovery Zones;</p> <p>Expand visitor infrastructure aligned with carrying capacity of residential population;</p> <p>Improve urban layout & public realm for better integration with the Shannon and SEW;</p> <p>Provide a wider range of on-the-water and links to beside-water activities; and</p>	<p>Mighty Shannon</p> <p>Relates to the Whole River</p>

<p>Anchor and enhance access linkages with key attractions and proposed projects within the towns' hinterlands in the relevant Discovery Zone. Where not already in place, Shannon-themed visitor experience development plans (VEDPs) should be prepared for these Hubs.</p>	<p>Mighty Shannon</p> <p>Relates to the Whole River</p>	
<p>SI4.2 Shannon Towns</p> <p>Each smaller town has the potential to develop and explore tourism opportunities provided by their physical proximity to the Shannon. While the Masterplan has identified some development opportunities in relation to each of these settlements, further analysis is required. Where not already in place, Shannon-themed Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDPs) should be prepared for these Towns.</p>		
<p>SI4.3 Shannon Villages</p> <p>Improve interface between waterway and public realm; wayfinding, playground, BBQ facilities Assess provision of walks along rivers and lakes, within a short distance from mooring or jetty Provide information on 'what's on' in the local area – branded Shannon map board at the jetty/ harbour showing nature, activities, landmarks or points of interest. Capitalise on the strengths of food and drink offer in the locality; Facilitate increased availability of berthage for visiting boats Facilitate opportunities to access on-water recreation and boating on a short-term basis Accommodate signature points of interest, including a Shannon Sculpture Trail, with linked greenways, cycle trails.</p>		
<p>SI3.4 Shannon Festivals and Events</p> <p>Develop an integrated calendar of Shannon-themed festivals, centred on water, culture, arts, foods, music and activities that allow visitors to experience the full range of Shannon's unique culture and heritage. Working with the Shannon 100 enterprise and community networks (SI7), to provide support to professionalise, enhance and grow a series of internationally attractive festivals delivering highest quality experiences to visitors.</p>		
<p>Strategic Initiative 5: Protecting & Enhancing the Shannon Environment</p>		<p>Relates to Theme/ Inspirer</p>
<p>SI5.1 Adopting an Ecotourism Approach</p> <p>Establishing a ecotourism toolkit for tourism businesses and code of practice will be essential to becoming a sustainable tourism destination. Develop 'slow tourism' opportunities, allowing visitors to enjoy activities and nature at a slower pace, building appreciation of Shannon's hidden places.</p>	<p>Mighty Shannon</p> <p>Natural Shannon</p> <p>Environmentally aware</p>	
<p>SI5.2 Destination Development and Rewilding Plan</p> <p>To develop access to Shannon Peatlands as well as rewilding, regeneration and recreational proposals</p>		

<p>S15.3 UNESCO Biosphere for Lough Ree & Environs</p> <p>Explore the potential for a UNESCO Biosphere Designation for Lough Ree and its environs, through consultations and partnership, for delivery of a zonal biosphere that will enhance the environmental status and create opportunities for low impact, nature-based tourism experiences.</p>	
<p>S15.4 Biosecurity Measures</p> <p>Establish Biosecurity Standards to be used by all craft on the Shannon. Establish Biosecurity Facilities at Designated Entry points, with spot inspections by licensed navigation staff.</p>	<p>Mighty Shannon</p> <p>Natural Shannon</p>
<p>S15.5 Monitoring & Evaluation</p> <p>Monitor the impacts of the various sustainability measures over the timeframe of the Masterplan. Modify strategies to enhance the Shannon environment, where feasible.</p>	<p>Environmentally aware</p>
<p>Strategic Initiative 6: Improving Connectivity</p>	<p>Relates to Theme/ Inspirer</p>
<p>S16.1 Encouraging Sustainable & Slow Travel</p> <p>Implement multi-model slow and sustainable travel options throughout Shannon/ Shannon Erne Waterway over the lifetime of the masterplan. Establish inter-agency monitoring programme of traffic flows. Encourage On-Water slow travel links within & between Discovery Zones.</p>	<p>Mighty Shannon</p>
<p>S16.2 Priority Walking and Cycling Trails Network</p> <p>Assess the technical and environmental feasibility of developing the priority walking and cycling trails identified in the Masterplan. Provide accessible and safe links from Shannon into hinterlands, with access to peatways and natural environments. Develop 'trails of scale' that will direct visitors into the heart of the Shannon, with immersive experience of nature and longer dwell.</p>	<p>Journeys & Adventures</p> <p>Slow</p>
<p>S16.3 Enhancement of Public Transport Links</p> <p>Identify, with the NTA and LCTU, if existing Bus Eireann Regional and local link services can be enhanced during peak visitor period. Provide easily accessible and timely information on Shannon transport options.</p>	
<p>S16.4 Improving Local Link Routes</p> <p>Consider enhanced Local Link routes during peak visitor season Establish the feasibility of developing new Local Link services in collaboration with the NTA and LTCUs.</p>	
<p>S16.5 Development of a Shannon Discovery Bus Route</p> <p>Consider the feasibility of a Shannon Region Discovery Bus Route by 2025, once visitor numbers, attractions and accommodation have shown a measurable increase.</p>	

Strategic Initiative 7: Building Enterprise & Community Networks	Relates to Theme/ Inspirer
<p>S17.1 Create Tourism Network in each of 3 Discovery Zones:</p> <p>Establish a commercially driven Tourism Network in each Discovery Zone, comprising key tourism and development interests that reach into the wider Ireland's Hidden Heartland, with private sector Chairperson, in partnership with Local Authorities, FI and WI, to provide strategic direction to enterprise and community networks. Each network will be supported by a development and training programme.</p>	<p>Mighty Shannon</p> <p>Contact with local people</p> <p>Slow adventures</p> <p>Culture</p>
<p>S17.2 Shannon 100 Enterprise Networking</p> <p>Convene the Shannon 100 network – invite enterprises to enter a structured Shannonwide programme aimed at building and delivering world-class thematic experiences. Design a bespoke, development programme, delivered by an accredited training body. Shannon 100 to develop a sustainability ethos and code of practice across the region. Shannon 100 to define a series of collaborative Shannon Experiences Inter-linked enterprise networks within each Discovery Zone will support the overall delivery of the Masterplan, including existing networks and marketing initiatives.</p>	
<p>S17.3 Shannon Community Networking</p> <p>Establish Shannon Community Network to assist in building and delivery of Shannon experiences, working with existing networks where possible. Align community groups and landowners with thematic Trails developments (working with existing rural development programmes and initiatives). Provide capacity building & mentoring (with RDP/ LEADER) for Community Network to collaborate with Shannon 100 Enterprise developments. Inter-linked community networks within each Discovery Zone will support the overall delivery of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan</p>	

Shannon Tourism Masterplan: Implementation

Implementation Period

The Shannon Tourism Masterplan will operate for a ten-year period from 2020 to 2030.

Governance Structure

A **Steering Group** (SG) will be established to provide overarching coordination and strategic direction to three Discovery Zone Implementation Groups. The Steering Group will monitor and review implementation of the Masterplan and will provide strategic direction and inputs to the Discovery Zone Implementation Groups.

Governance Structure for Implementation of Shannon Tourism Masterplan



While the **Discovery Zone Implementation Groups** will work under the direction of the Steering Group, many of the decisions, depending on their nature, will be the responsibility of the Local Authorities, Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, and/or other State Agencies working in a coordinated manner.

The Discovery Zones Implementation Groups will be responsible for the implementation of the seven **Strategic Initiatives**. The relevant **Statutory Agencies** will be critical in providing both advice and in delivery of key elements of those Initiatives.

Existing structures, both at the Strategic Group level and the sub-Regional level, will be examined and where practicable will be utilised and/or amended to form the Shannon Tourism Steering Group and the three Discovery Zone Implementation Groups.

The **tourism trade, artistic and community partners**, will also be critical actors in the Discovery Zones in the final delivery of compelling tourism experiences, linked to the Strategic Initiatives. Communities will be at the heart of the masterplan, providing the unique welcome and contacts with local culture that visitors enjoy so much.

Membership

Membership of the Steering Group will comprise senior representatives of Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, the ten Local Authorities, industry representatives and other stakeholders as required. The Group will be chaired by Waterways Ireland or Fáilte Ireland.

The Group will meet twice yearly and will review and monitor implementation of the Masterplan and will provide strategic direction and advice to the Discovery Zone Implementation Groups. The Steering Group will undertake

a yearly review of the implementation of the Masterplan and will also undertake a mid-term review of the Masterplan in year 6 of its implementation.

Membership of the Discovery Zones IGs will comprise relevant senior representatives of Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, the Local Authorities as well as relevant public bodies/state agencies, other stakeholders and industry representatives. The Groups will be chaired by a Local Authority CEO.

The DZIGs will be responsible for the implementation of the Strategic Initiatives and associated Action Plan and will report progress to the Steering Group.

Integrated Action Plan

An integrated **Action Plan** is proposed to deliver the key initiatives of the Shannon Masterplan over the ten-year period from 2020 – 2030.

Actions are presented in the following categories:

1. Management and Governance
2. Discovery Zones
3. Signature Initiatives

All of the recommended actions derive from the catalyst propositions within the Strategic Initiatives to develop an outstanding, world class destination along the Shannon.

The Action Plan identifies an indicative timeline (colour coded) for each action over the 10-year implementation period of the Masterplan (2020 - 2030). Order of Magnitude Costings (OMC) are provided for key capital projects. Many actions will require a partnership approach, with Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and the Local Authorities working together, along with tourism enterprises and community actors to achieve the overall ambition of the Plan.

Key Performance Indices (KPIs)

A series of KPIs have been defined for each of the Signature Initiatives of the masterplan. This will be used to measure the performance of the implementation process and progress in reaching the targets and in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Shannon as a world class tourism destination.

Resourcing the Masterplan

The masterplan will require significant and committed resources to deliver the objectives over the ten-year period from 2020 – 2030. A number of public funding sources have been identified that will be open over the 10-year period of the plan, for application through the agency of the Shannon Masterplan Steering Group.

Key capital projects were costed as Order of Magnitude Costs (OMC) for each of the Strategic Initiatives to the tune of €76.5 million over the lifetime of the masterplan (2020 – 2030).

Availability of funding measures will depend on the specific action to be targeted and delivered (tourism, rural regeneration, urban renewal, skills and training, community development, heritage, marketing).

