TOURISM MASTERPLAN FOR THE BEARA BREIFNE WAY

Summary Report

Fáilte Ireland

OUTDOOR RECREATION NORTHERN IRELAND

Contents

01

Introduction

Introduction

The existing Beara Breifne Way is a 700km long walking trail, stretching from Dursey Island in Co Cork to Blacklion in Co Cavan. In February 2019, Fáilte Ireland commissioned ORNI to develop a Tourism Masterplan for the walk.

Objectives & Scope

The primary objective of this study was to guide Fáilte Ireland's future investments and developments to ensure the Beara Breifne Way realises its potential as an internationally compelling visitor experience.

» Audit the existing trail and identify works required

» Develop an Action Plan with order of magnitude costs

» Identify linkages from the trail to towns / villages and other sites of interest

» Identify visitor accommodation along the trail

» Present proposals for a governance structure

» Benchmark against two similar long-distance routes

A Community Project

The Beara Breifne Way is a unique grass-roots community-led initiative and is the largest community-based project undertaken in Ireland. Its development has been supported by stakeholders since 2001 including The Heritage Council, Fáilte Ireland and the Local Authorities along the Trail. Beara Tourism have championed this project over the past 17 years, passionately led by Jim O'Sullivan.

The study sought to outline the way forward for

the Beara Breifne Way and provide a platform for the community to continue to lead with the support of government partners such as Fáilte Ireland.

The Vision

Based on the vision and aspirations of Fáilte Ireland and the regional destination brands, the primary aim of the Beara Breifne Way is to attract visitors 'off the beaten track', creating significant economic and social benefits to the rural communities, towns and villages along the route by:

» becoming a long-distance walk of international significance as well as a 'soft' product for the masses to explore nature and cultural experiences;

» providing a framework to hang engaging visitor experiences therefore increasing visitor dwell time and delivering the proposition of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Ireland's Ancient East and Wild Atlantic Way.

Methodology

The methodology comprised the following key actions:

» Extensive fieldwork along the route of the Beara Breifne Way

» Stakeholder consultation events in Portumna

» Desk research including Sport Ireland trail

reports and Fáilte Ireland research

» One-to-one consultation with managers of a medley of best practice case studies

» One-to-one consultation with Fáilte Ireland representatives; selected tour operators; walkers; community groups; local development companies, local authorities.

Report

This report summarises the study's key findings and recommendations. A more detailed report is available.

The existing Beara Breifne Way

Beara Breifne Way Route

The existing Beara Breifne Way stretches from Dursey Island in Co Cork to Blacklion in Co Cavan. It runs for over 700km and traverses the counties of Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, Offaly, Galway, Roscommon, Sligo, Leitrim and Cavan. The Beara Breifne Way is made up of 12 existing National Waymarked Trails or long-distance walking routes and sections of trail that link these.

The Beara Breifne Way runs through the experience brand region of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and is a signature visitor experience in this destination. The route also traverses the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East destination brands.

The Beara Breifne Way Cycle Trail, currently in development, primarily uses minor roads close to the walking trail with some short sections on the Beara Breifne Way walking route.

An Historic Route

The trail generally follows the route of the legendary march taken by Dónal Cam O'Sullivan Beara and visits many of the places and communities shaped by his story. On New Year's Eve 1602, he led one thousand men and women, including four hundred soldiers, on the epic march north, hoping to join forces with rebel leaders in Ulster. They sheltered and ate where they could, but were ambushed time and again by native chieftains, who hoped to protect their stores of food and ingratiate themselves with the English. After fourteen days, O'Sullivan Beara and his people reached Leitrim Castle, stronghold of the rebel O'Rourke of Breifne. Of the one thousand who had started out, only thirty-five remained.

The Beara Breifne Way existing route and Regional Experience Brands

02

The Visitor

Who will use the Beara Breifne Way?

Those who will come to enjoy the Beara Breifne Way will be made up of walkers and visitors. Visitors will make up an estimated 85%, whilst walkers will make up an estimated 15%*.

Walkers

As well as those characteristics outlined, out-of-state walkers who come to walk in Ireland, prefer coastal landscapes in recognised walking destinations including Kerry, Dingle and Wicklow. Given the Beara Breifne Way's location, it will require a strong proposition to attract walkers.

Visitors

Although visitors want to 'get off the beaten track', they have low awareness of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and its offering. This is a broader destination challenge, but the Beara Breifne Way could provide the opportunity to 'hang' tourism experiences and concentrate the offering along the route.

Fáilte Ireland's 'Innovation Screener' online research tested the concept of the Beara Breifne Way. Research participants were attracted to the concept of the 'natural landscape and scenery of the walk', however, they were put off by its challenging nature and length as well as its positioning as a march.

Walker
- » Niche: 15% of all visitors to Beara Breifne Way
- » Segments: Regular, long-distance and through-hiker
- » Beara Breifne Way is important or primary reason for visit
- » Several days' walking from a base or point-to-point
- » Long weekend or week-long itineraries
- » Walk for distances of 15km to 25km per day

Visitor
- » Mass: 85% of all visitors to Beara Breifne Way
- » Segments: Culturally Curious & Great Escaper
- » Beara Breifne Way is one part of visitor experience
- » Walk from hubs or visitor attractions
- » Walk for distances of 1km to 5km

* Based on quantitative research and consultation from several long-distance trails in Great Britain including the Wales Coast Path and South West Coast Path.

What do users want?

The Critical Success Factors' table details the factors that ensure a long-distance trail can meet the needs of the visitor and walker segments. Each factor has varying levels of importance and has therefore been rated (1 is least important and 10 is most important). It is imperative that these drive the development of the Tourism Masterplan and actions are prioritised accordingly.

	Importance to Walker	Importance to Visitor
Landscape		
Natural beauty & variety of landscape	10	9
Wild and remote	5	3
Physical Trail		
Off-road	10	9
Multi Use	1	6
Varied difficulty	4	6
Well maintained path	10	10
Fully waymarked	9	10
Route Interpretation	7	9
Short Trail Options	3	9
Services		
Quality of accommodation on route	7	3
Walker-friendly accommodation	5	2
Accommodation at end of each day	10	2
Luggage Transfer	8	1
Evening meal at end of the day	9	1
Additional services - shops	4	8
Access to start/end points of trail - walker	8	3
Public transport to start / end sections	8	1
Access points along length of trail - visitor (with toilets and parking)	3	9
Experience		
Access to outdoor activities on / close route	3	5
Access to experiences on / close route	6	8
Fits within a week's holiday	9	n/a
Promotion and Information		
Promotion of trail	10	8
Integration of trail in tourism brand	8	10
Maps and guidebooks	9	9
Websites	10	9
Start / Finish Markers	7	5
Certificates / Stamping	5	2

03

Physical Trail:
Findings &
Recommendations

Physical Trail: Key Findings and Recommendations

A range of physical trail issues were encountered on the existing route of the Beara Breifne Way.

Issue	Description	Recommendation
Route confusion	No definitive line of the route mapped. Confusion over start point of the route.	Clear definition of linear route starting at Dursey Sound and finishing at Blacklion. An extension to connect with the Ulster Way is a long-term aspiration.
Trail standard	Holistic visitor experience trail standards for a strategically important tourism product are not currently in place.	In partnership with Sport Ireland develop a 'plus' standard for trails that are of strategic tourism importance.
Trail condition	No strategic approach to trail condition. Sport Trails Ireland is the only level of accountability – current assessments are infrequent and the trail standards are under review.	Commission Technical Trail Audit for the entire Beara Breifne Way to identify all sections of trail that are in poor condition and that require new build, upgrade and minor works. Ensure all walks are in the Walks Scheme.
Trail build	Beara Breifne Way is not a sustainable trail - lack of funding for sustainable trail design and construction - no agreed approach to standards.	Ensure that funding is made available for the design and construction of sustainable trail, as identified through the Technical Trail Audit.
Off-road walking	68% of route is off-road. Securing private land access is hampered due to historic uncertainty regarding Walks Scheme.	90% of route off-road. 80% of the route should be taken off-road as a medium-term target (off-road trail development is resource-intensive). Ensure all walks are in the Walks Scheme.
Waymarking	A piecemeal approach to waymarking has occurred to date and the Beara Breifne Way is not fully waymarked or navigable.	Commission the development of an Interpretation Framework setting out requirements for waymarking and interpreting the Beara Breifne Way (this Framework will also recommend visitor access and viewpoints).

Unsustainable trail build and poor trail conditions on the Beara Breifne Way

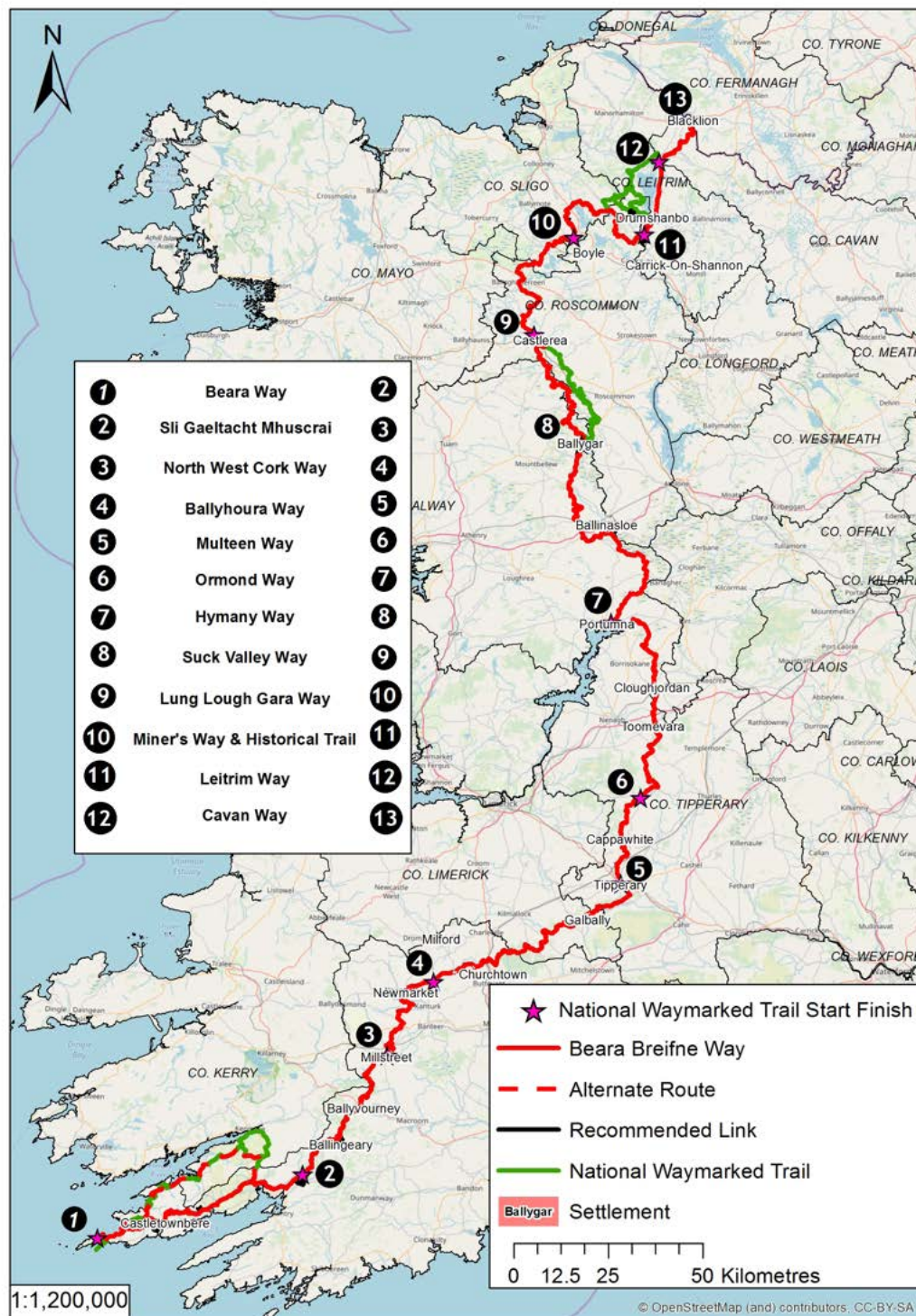# Recommended Route of Beara Breifne Way

A re-route of the Beara Breifne Way is recommended primarily due to trail confusion and the high percentage of trail on-road. Many factors were considered when defining the recommended route including the route of the historic O'Sullivan Beara march, availability of state-owned land and presence of private land (its usage and owners' attitude to access provision) and proximity to urban areas for services and amenities.

The Cycle Route

It is recommended that the development of the Beara Breifne Way as a walking route takes priority over a Beara Breifne Way Cycle Route for a number of key reasons:

» focus and significant effort will be required to improve the walking trail to meet visitor expectations

» given the terrain, there are few opportunities to develop cycle trails along the Beara Breifne Way walk route

» fewer visitors will be attracted to the on-road cycle route

However, any opportunities that arise in the development of the walking route to support the development of the cycle route should be embraced.

1	Beara Way	2	
2	Sli Gaeltacht Mhuscrai	3	
3	North West Cork Way	4	
4	Ballyhoura Way	5	
5	Multeen Way	6	
6	Ormond Way	7	
7	Hymany Way	8	
8	Suck Valley Way	9	
9	Lung Lough Gara Way	10	
10	Miner's Way & Historical Trail	11	
11	Leitrim Way	12	
12	Cavan Way	13	

★ National Waymarked Trail Start Finish
Beara Breifne Way
Alternate Route
Recommended Link
National Waymarked Trail
Ballygar Settlement

0 12.5 25 50 Kilometres

1:1,200,000

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Beara Breifne Walking Route

Cost of Trail Works

Capital Cost of Remedial Works

Works required to increase the current quality of the trail include:

» Trail construction – new build trail, trail upgrade (work required to bring the trail up to a sustainable standard), and minor works (such as installation of water bars for drainage)

» Waymarking – a full waymarking and interpretation audit is required, but indicative costs are included based on the audit of the trail at all key junctions

» Other infrastructure – a full infrastructure audit is required, but based on the audit, the costings for infrastructure have been estimated

The estimated cost is not a conclusive figure as a Technical Trail Audit is required to identify all works required and should be viewed as minimum costs.

Trail Section	Trail Construction	Waymarking	Other infrastructure	Total (€)
Beara Way	186,631	7,095	/	193,726
Sli Gaeltacht Mhuscrai	190,990	9,675	/	200,665
North West Cork Way	/	5,676	/	5,676
Ballyhoura Way	404	14,536	/	14,940
Multeen Way	80,392	13,416	/	93,808
Ormond Way	4,418	4,835	/	9,253
Hymany Way	505,768	11,094	/	516,862
Suck Valley Way	47,226	11,997	7,084	66,307
Lung Lough Gara Way	15,550	14,221	/	29,771
Miners Way	133,773	13,011	8,448	155,232
Leitrim Way	/	11,672	/	11,672
Cavan Way	69,906	6,094	17,232	93,232
Total (€)	1,235,058	123,322	32,764	1,391,144

Capital Cost of Increasing % of Off-Road Trail

One of the key issues identified on the Beara Breifne Way is the high percentage of on-road walking. 68% of the route is off-road and significant investment would be required to increase the % of the route off-road.

These costs reflect the maximum amount of trail build required to increase the off-road percentage i.e. the worst-case scenario. It should be noted that the trail audit may identify that trail upgrade is required rather than newbuild trail, or that no trail construction works are required, and therefore the costings would be reduced.

Trail Name	Cost to achieve 80% off-road (€)	Cost to achieve 90% off-road (€)
Ballyhoura Way	783,500	1,218,500
Beara Way	354,227	782,338
Cavan Way	67,369	177,284
Hymany Way	288,851	748,755
Leitrim Way	0	77,709
Lung Lough Gara Way	670,397	947,823
Miner's Way & Historial Trail	261,372	528,036
Multeen Way	149,567	328,608
North West Cork Way	1,108,863	1,319,431
Ormond Way	1,066,391	1,484,371
Sli Gaeltacht Mhuscrai	0	131,612
Suck Valley Way	0	185,006
Average		
Total (€)	€4,750,535	€7,929,494

Total Costs

Additional costs include:

» Contingency - 10%
» Professional Fees - 5%
» Additional Studie - 2%
» Inflation - 3% per annum

The total costs are highlighted below.

	80% Off-road	90% Off-road
Capital Cost - Remedial Works	1,391,144	1,391,144
Capital Cost -Increase Off-Road	4,750,537	7,929,493
Additional Costs	1,412,587	2,143,747
Total	7,554,268	11,464,384

04

Trail Management: Findings & Recommendations

Governance Structure

To date the efforts to lead and manage the Beara Breifne Way have been led by the Beara Tourism and Development Association, in a volunteer capacity, along with Trail Committees, championed by Jim O'Sullivan. However, a more comprehensive governance structure is required due to a number of factors including, the large number of stakeholders and complex environment and its growing tourism importance requiring greater strategic direction.

Three potential structures were proposed; however, it is recommended that further investigation and consultation with stakeholders takes place before a decision is taken on the most appropriate governance structure. Given that the Beara Breifne Way is a Signature Experience of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, a short-term solution to facilitate action may be to develop an IHH Working Group.

Members of the Waymarked Trails Committees along the Beara Breifne Way, Senator Maura Hopkins and Paddy Matthews of Fáilte Ireland

Walks Scheme and Trail Maintenance

There are currently two main ways in which maintenance occurs on the Beara Breifne Way, those who are employed through the Walks Scheme and those involved in volunteering.

Walks Scheme

The Walks Scheme offers payment to qualifying landowners to complete maintenance works on the Beara Breifne Way, where it crosses their land.

Along the Beara Breifne Way, only the Beara Way, the Suck Valley Way and the Miners Way and Historical Trail were included in the original Walks Scheme. Funding for the scheme was doubled from €2 million to €4 million and the scheme reopened for submissions in 2019. By July 2019, 14 Local Development Companies had submitted 46 Expressions of Interest to the Department. In December 2019, 10 new trails were added through Phase 1 of the new Walk Scheme, with up to 30 trails being added in Phase 2 of the scheme in 2020.

Volunteers

Volunteers help maintain the trails often through their involvement in community groups with an interest in individual waymarked routes or through the Rural Social Scheme (RSS).

Community groups currently carry out work on an ad hoc basis with regards route development and maintenance. For example, members of the Sli Gaeltacht Mhuscrai trail committee carry out works on the trail itself as well as carrying out development works such as completion of funding applications.

Recommendations

Going forward, it is recommended that both the Walks Scheme and volunteering continue to play a significant role in trail maintenance.

Walks Scheme
» All long-distance walking trails on the Beara Breifne Way are in the Walks Scheme » Training courses should be developed and provided for landowners carrying out works

Volunteers
» Trail volunteers should be actively recruited, managed and trained » Only minor maintenance works should be carried out by volunteers, under the supervision of an appropriate management authority

Management
» Clear management structure to coordinate trail works for entire trail » Appropriate insurance in place for volunteers » Trail build and large infrastructure works should be led by the RRO and/or the Local County Council

Trail Standards

Sport Ireland Trail Standards

Eleven of the twelve sections of Beara Breifne Way are National Waymarked Trails and should adhere to the Sport Ireland Trail Standards. There are many positive and beneficial aspects to the current standards, but there is also room for improvement, evidenced by the formal review of the documents, plus feedback received from stakeholders during the process of this study.

It is noted that Sport Ireland recognises the need to develop the standards further and has commissioned a review of trail standards and the development of new trail standards. The work is ongoing and therefore the new standards are unknown. Once the new standards are available, a more advanced standard may be required for long-distance trails of strategic tourism importance such as the Beara Breifne Way.

International Accreditation Schemes

Accreditation systems for walking trails exist in many markets but international schemes have not yet been widely adopted. There are two primary international walk accreditation schemes, ERA Leading Quality Trails and Green Flag Trails. These standards consider physical trail standards, as well as the walker experience.

These accreditation standards have stringent criteria that are only aspirational for the Beara Breifne Way at this stage. In addition, international accreditation is currently not an influencing factor for visitors choosing a walking trail.
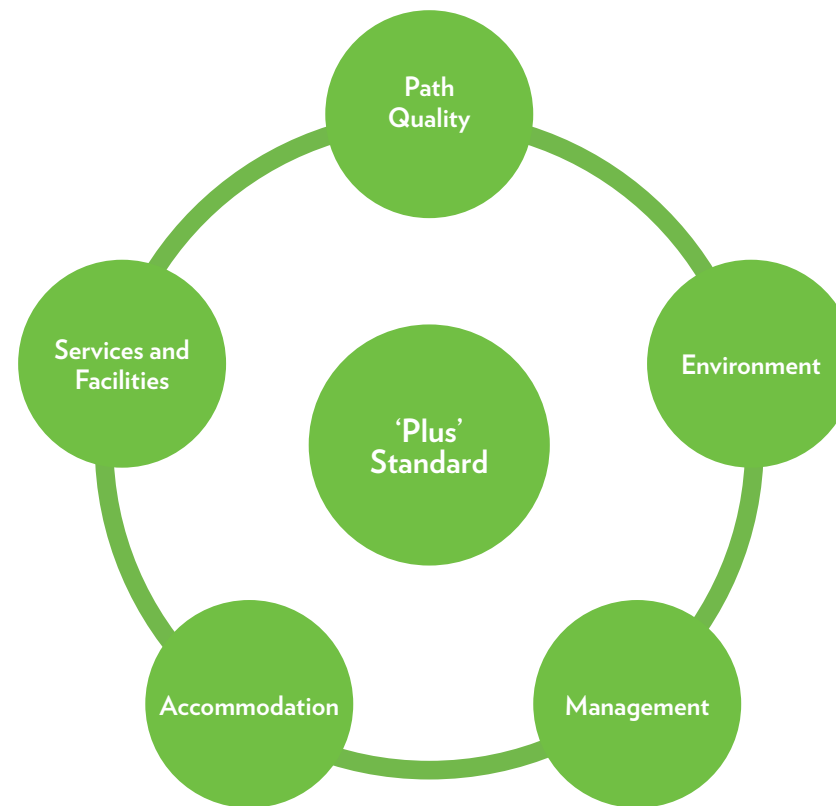
Recommendations

It is recommended that:

» Work in partnership with Sport Ireland to develop a 'plus' standard for long-distance trails of strategic tourism importance. The 'plus' standard should be based on the new trail standards (under development), with additional visitor experience elements providing a more holistic standard.

» Fáilte Ireland does not pursue international accreditation for the Beara Breifne Way but the scheme standards are taken into consideration in the development of trail accreditation in Ireland

What would a 'Plus' standard look like?

The development of the 'plus' standard should ideally build on the new Sport Ireland's Trail Standard and include holistic criteria encompassing all aspects of the visitor experience of a long-distance walking trail. Criteria would consist of fundamental components including 'path quality', 'environment', 'management', 'accommodation' and 'service and facility'. All of these would be underpinned by sustainable trail management techniques and processes.

05

Visitor Experience: Findings & Recommendations

Trail Experience Findings

Landscape

The natural beauty of the landscape is of great importance to the visitor segment as they seek to use the Beara Breifne Way as a conduit to experience it. Walkers prefer routes that offer a variety of landscapes and terrain.

Overall the Beara Breifne Way crosses areas of great natural beauty, although some sections are weaker than others and described unfavourably by visitors. The trail was found to be scenically varied as well as having a variety of terrains. Visitors will naturally be attracted to areas where the landscapes have greatest natural beauty, which are often the traditional tourism areas.

Trail Length

By definition, a long-distance route will be considerable in length. Most walkers want to participate in one week's walking (Saturday to Saturday) by completing long-distance trails in their entirety (e.g. West Highland Way) or large sections of longer trails (e.g. week section of Camino). Other walkers will complete various day walks as part of their trip. Visitors require access to shorter, scenic sections of easy to moderate walks.

The Beara Breifne Way stretches for over 700 km and the distance is daunting for anyone other than the through-walker. In order to increase the appeal of the trail, it is recommended that the Beara Breifne Way is broken down into easily

digestible zones. This will allow the visitor and walker in the pre-planning phase to understand and choose which area of the trail to walk.

Short walks suitable for visitors along the Beara Breifne Way should be identified in tandem with the development of access points. It is not recommended in the short to medium term to specifically develop looped walks.

Start and Finish Points

A definitive start and finish point are required for all long-distance trails and a marker located at these points adds greatly to the walker experience.

The official start point of the Beara Breifne Way is signposted at Dursey Sound, adjacent to the Wild Atlantic Way Discovery Point. Other than the brown signage, there is currently nothing of significance to mark the official start point.

The Beara Breifne Way currently ends on completion of the Cavan Way section in Blacklion. There is no signage or interpretation to signal this is the end point. The O'Sullivan Beara march ended at Leitrim Castle, yet there is an underwhelming level of interpretation at this key site. An opportunity exists for interpretation, of a scale commensurate with the significance of the site.

It is recommended that the start and finish points of the Beara Breifne Way are signalled with a significant marker detailed within the Interpretation Framework.

Trail Experience Findings

Access Points

Walkers require clearly defined trail entry and exit points allowing access to the trail at the start and end of each day's walking. Current access for walkers to the Beara Breifne Way varies significantly across the 12 component trails. Many of the access points are not clear as there is poor or inconsistent waymarking and fingerposts.

For visitors, fewer access points are required but these should be located at tourism points along length of trail such as at a visitor attraction or a heritage site close to, or on the walking trail. These access points should offer an enhanced visitor experience (compared to walker access points). Visitors can currently access the trail from some key settlements (eg Portumna) and many of these are well signed. Aside from access from settlements, there are no access points that offer a visitor experience.

It is recommended that access points for both visitors and walkers are enhanced and developed within the Interpretation Framework.

Viewpoints

In order to enhance the visitor experience along the trail, it is recommended that 'viewpoints' are identified and developed along the route. This could also widen the appeal of the trail to visitors, create a cohesive feel for the trail and disperse visitors from more traditional visitor attractions.

There are few existing viewpoints along the Beara Breifne Way however, there are many locations along the Beara Breifne Way that would benefit from installation of a viewpoint, for example Gougane Barra or the Glens of Aherlow. Additional locations would be identified as part of the Interpretation Framework.

Some viewpoints might only be accessible to the walker, for example an elevated viewpoint on the Sli Gaeltacht Mhuscrai as proposed by the route committee. Other viewpoints would aim to target the visitor and would be accessible by car, or through a short accessible walk.

Visitor Services Findings

An extensive visitor service audit was completed for the length of the Beara Breifne Way. A summary is outlined in this section

Accommodation

Walker

Accommodation on or close to the Beara Breifne Way is critically important to the walker segment. This includes accommodation available at the end of each day's walking and appropriate quality of accommodation on route. Walker-friendly accommodation is not a requirement, although a bonus if provided.

There are currently gaps in accommodation at various points along the route. Some sections require multiple nights' stay in one location and a reliance on pick-up at the end of the walking day and drop-off at the start of the next day. Hospitality along the route comes highly recommended, with accommodation providers keen to assist in this respect. In some sections, accommodation is 5 to 10km from the trail.

There is good provision of bed and breakfast accommodation along the route and a number of hotels are well placed along the route.

There is currently inadequate camping provision along or close to the route. Many walkers choose to wild camp and whilst tolerated in many areas, this is not legal and comes with risks attached.

There is insufficient budget accommodation along the route. Only a few hostels exist along the Beara Breifne Way including the Ballyhoura Luxury Hostel which was identified as a standout facility. Many of the long-distance walkers interviewed have previously completed long-distance walks such as the Camino, and referenced the abundance of lower cost accommodation.
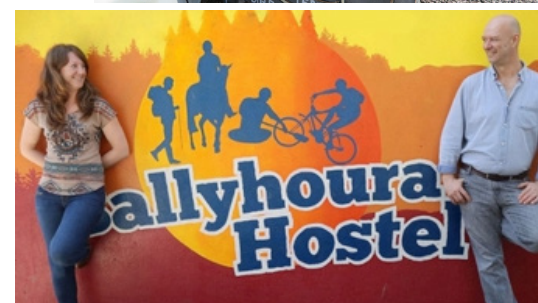
Visitor

The visitor segment will not choose accommodation based on the Beara Breifne Way as this only represents one part of their visit.

The visitor experience audit shows that there is ample and varied accommodation in the tourism destinations that the Beara Breifne Way passes through. There are a number of standout properties close to the trail including Gougane Barra Hotel, Kilronan Castle and Clonalis House.

Evening Meal

The availability of an evening meal at the end of a day's walk is imperative for the walking segment. For visitors there is no such requirement.

Mirroring the gaps in accommodation, some areas suffer from a lack of food provision at the end of a day's walk. Whilst there are outlets listed that offer food, opening hours are often limited and many of the businesses appear to be seasonal. With pre-planning a walker can achieve a good meal at the end of most days, but many days will be reliant on a packed lunch.

Visitor Services Findings

Public transport

It is anticipated that the majority of visitors will be accessing the trail by a hire car as part of a wider touring holiday. However, public transport to the start and end of the Beara Breifne Way is critical for the walker segment. In addition, some walkers would like public transport to the start / end points of itineraries, or day walks.

Rail - current access points on the rail network that are directly on, or close to (under 10k) the Beara Breifne Way are: Millstreet, Tipperary Town, Ballinasloe, Nenagh, Cloughjordan, Castlerea, Boyle, Carrick-on-Shannon and Ballymote. This allows walkers to quickly travel to a location on or close to the trail from where they can avail of local public transport to arrive at the start/finish of the trail or day walks.

Bus – bus transport across all areas of the Beara Breifne Way is good. Local Link provides rural bus services in villages and rural areas, however operating times are limited and would not necessarily tie in with a walker's daily start and end times. Therefore, there is currently a great reliance on private pick-ups and drop-offs provided through the hospitality of the accommodation owners along the route.

Luggage Transfer

Luggage transfer is very important for walkers who are walking the route from point to point. Typically, a service provider moves the walker's luggage from one accommodation base to another, so that the walker does not have to carry their luggage.

Currently there are no commercial operators providing a luggage transfer service along the Beara Breifne Way, however there are several individuals who offer luggage transfer services on an informal and no cost basis. These are predominantly accommodation providers closely linked to their section of trail.

Varying Level of Services

In general, it must be noted that the Beara Breifne Way travels through areas of differing economic standing, with some rural areas clearly suffering from rural economic depression, evidenced as boarded-up buildings. This clearly affects the service offering for the walkers and visitors to the Beara Breifne Way. There is an opportunity for the Beara Breifne Way to be part of the stimulus and solution to regenerate these more deprived areas.

Itineraries

Itineraries

The Beara Breifne Way stretches for over 700 km and the trail distance can be overwhelming for most visitors and walkers. It is difficult for the visitor and walker in the pre-planning phase to understand and choose which area of the trail to walk.

It is recommended that manageable itineraries for the walker and for the visitor are created to both help them select the area to visit and route to walk once at their destination.

Segment	Itinerary Types	Important elements
Visitor	Short walks and day walks	» Routes are scenic » Up to 5 miles, easy to moderate » Looped where possible » Start from 'visitor access points' (located at visitor attractions or at a site of visitor interest) » Integrated into tourist itineraries for the area
Walker	Entire route	» Day by day itinerary of entire route » Start and end points are variable and dependent on the individual walker's ability and speed
Walker	Sections » week sections » weekend sections	» Strong visitor experience must be in place » Reflect the proposition of the destination » Itineraries can be differentiated as each offer a different walk experience » Public transport to start/end points

Developing Itineraries

When developing the itineraries, it is essential that the following is taken into consideration:

» Visitor information
Visitor information relevant to the segments is included. This could include how to get to the start by public transport; services nearby including accommodation; luggage transfer; terrain and elevation.

» Rich content
A rich narrative should be developed for each itinerary in order to attract visitors and walkers onto the trail.

» Integrated
Itineraries should be integrated into the overall tourism proposition for the regional destinations. Visitor and day walks should be fully integrated into tourist itineraries for the area and activities to do.

» Differentiation
It is important that the itineraries and walks are richly described and clearly differentiated so that the walker and visitor can select their walk and area to visit with confidence.
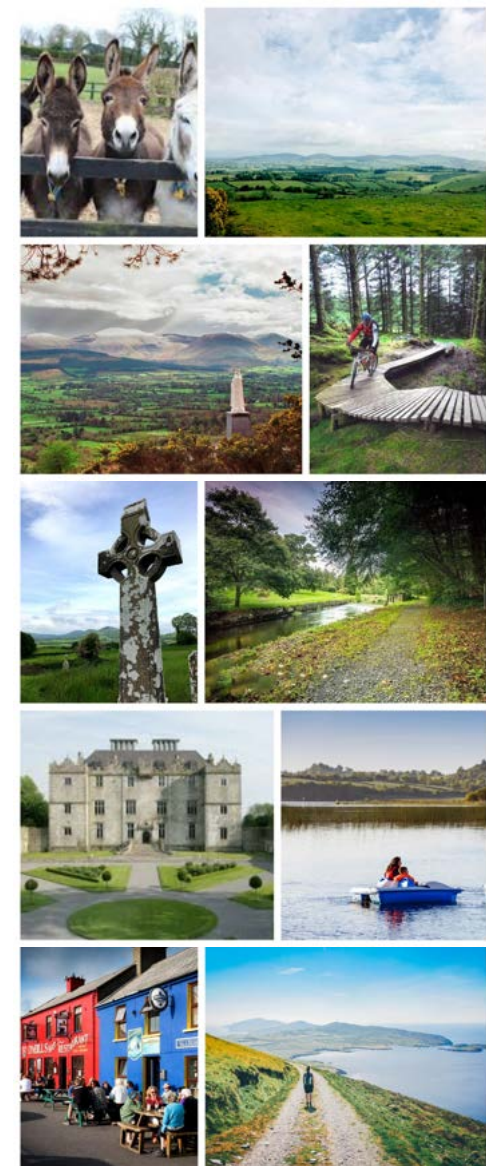
Community Engagement Programme

Community-led Programmes

It is recommended that community programmes are developed and delivered to facilitate and support communities to identify gaps in service provision and provide them with the skills and equipment to deliver solutions. The primary service gaps to plug are accommodation, luggage transfer and evening meals.

Some issues can be plugged with short-term solutions achieved through the Community Engagement Programme. Others require a more long-term solution with state or commercial support or intervention. The aim is that where possible development is community led, with support provided as required.

Community Engagement Programme

A programme should be created to educate and engage communities along the Way to deliver a cohesive vision and action plan. A Community Engagement Programme would deliver workshops and training to inform communities on delivery of the following:

» Advocacy and promotion of the Beara Breifne Way
» Ability to assess and plug gaps
» Engage in development role / volunteer role
» Tools to enhance the visitor experience
» Official Beara Breifne Way 'Meet & Greet' representatives
» Formalise ad hoc services offered and market them

» Co-ordinate with neighbouring communities, encouraging cross-trail collaboration
» Guidance to produce downloadable trail service guides

Facilities Programme

In addition to the Community Engagement Programme, it is envisaged that further intervention may be required over the long-term to plug critical gaps in service provision. It is recommended that a Facilities Programme is developed to:

» Identify gaps requiring built facilities – capital projects
» Identify solutions to address these gaps in provision
» Identify eligible funding streams to finance required capital projects
» Prioritise delivery of capital projects based on suggested phasing of routes to bring to market.

Accommodation

Through consultation, innovative solutions to plugging the accommodation gap have emerged. The Community Engagement Programme and a Facilities Programme should help the communities to assess these solutions and put them in place.

Pick-ups / transfers

Feedback from long-distance walkers who have recently completed the Beara Breifne Way consistently praise the levels of hospitality received along the route. This extends to walkers being collected at the end of a day's walk and returned to the same place the following morning to continue along the trail. Currently there is no formal provision for this. In the short-term, service arrangements like this can be formalised and potentially a charge or donation applied.

A longer-term challenge is addressing gaps in accommodation in very remote areas. Best practice from long-distance walks elsewhere demonstrate the success of initiatives from mountain huts, to bunkhouses to hostels. These can be private commercial enterprises or state run / volunteer-led initiatives.

Designated Safe Nights

Several consultees along the route expressed an interest in offering garden space / secure space for camping in areas lacking accommodation. This included public houses along the route who offered food but no accommodation. It was felt by the Publican that this arrangement could benefit both parties. The camp site would be free or minimal cost or involve a donation to the local community association. An opportunity exists to formally compile a list of designated "Safe Nights" along the route that agreed to offer this facility. This list would be available to

visitors, pre-trip, on the official Beara Breifne Way site.

It is recommended that the Fáilte Ireland standards team review how this service could be formalised (for example a charter developed) within local communities.

Homestay programme / Gaeltacht

The Sli Gaeltacht Mhuscrai sections runs through a Gaeltacht area with a strong tradition of Irish speaking homestay programmes, although these have dwindled in recent years. Consultation identified an opportunity to rejuvenate a homestay programme and offer a unique experience to visitors. An example of a successful homestay programme currently operating in Ireland is 'Irish Host Family', an enterprise award-winning programme based in County Kerry. http://irishhostfamily.ie/learn-english/

An opportunity exists to re-evaluate the potential of Irish speaking homestays within the Gaeltacht area and to use this as a unique selling point for walkers visiting this area.

Community Engagement Programme

Luggage Transfer

An opportunity already exists to formalise currently informal arrangements by designating key community representatives responsible for onward luggage transfer. Once a critical mass is reached in terms of visitor numbers requiring transfer, this becomes a viable commercial enterprise.

Food / Entertainment / Transport

A current issue that has been referenced is inconsistent food provision. This mirrors many bars being open on weekend nights only, or in some instances, just one night a week. As part of the proposed Community Engagement Plan, consideration should be given to formalising an arrangement of pub nights on rotation, ensuring food is available each night of the week.

Community consultation suggested transportation could be arranged with support from local clubs and groups (e.g. GAA clubs currently offering local transportation / village taxi services).

Community Regeneration SME incentives

The Beara Breifne Way passes through several isolated rural communities. Economic decline is apparent – public houses and other businesses have closed down and facilities are lacking. Consultation identified wider issues requiring rural regeneration .

Opportunities exist through community-led programmes, to seek funding and support to repurpose some of these buildings. Community buy-outs are increasingly common across the UK and in other areas of Europe and is something that could be explored further.

Service Gap	Short-term	Long-term
Accommodation	Pick-ups / transfer Designated "Safe Nights" camp spots	» Remote: Mountain Huts / Bunkhouses » Urban: Community Hub accommodation » Re-use for derelict buildings » Community Regeneration SME incentives » Homestay programme / Gaeltacht
Luggage Transfer	Formalise currently informal arrangements between accommodation providers	Critical mass commercial business opportunities
Food / Entertainment	Pub nights on rotation Local transport – GAA / Community Association / "Trail Custodians"	Critical mass commercial business opportunities

Potential solutions to address gaps in provision on Beara Breifne Way

Interpretation Framework

It is recommended that an Interpretation Framework is commissioned to consider:

» location and design of access points and view points
» start and end points markers
» interpretation along the route
» waymarking and signage

Access Points

Walker access points should clearly define entry and exit points for each day's walking based on the proposed walk itinerary.

It is recommended that access points are located at visitor attractions or at a site of visitor interest such as a heritage site. Four primary access points have been identified, but it is recommended that further visitor access points are identified through the Interpretation Framework.

» Cavan Burren Geopark
» Acres Lake Drumshambo
» Lough Key Forest Park
» Arigna Mining Experience

Visitor access should provide enhanced facilities compared to those outlined for the walker. In many instances such as at a visitor attraction, many facilities will already be in place. However, the proposed Interpretation Framework would detail specific requirements for each visitor access point and would include a prescription for each of the following elements where required:

» Car parking facilities
» High level of interpretation
» Location - urban or at existing attraction / key site
» Links to scenic quality section of trail
» Accessibility
» WC facilities

The development of an Interpretation Framework will include identifying all proposed access points along the trail (walker and visitor).

Viewpoints

The location and design of viewpoints identified through the Interpretation Framework should be developed with input from communities along the route. There are many examples of existing viewpoints installed in other parts of the world and the Interpretation Framework should consider the best approach for the Beara Breifne Way.

Interpretation Framework

Start and end point markers

Both the start and finish points of the Beara Breifne Way should be marked with the installation of commissioned artworks and sculpture. This should be considered in more detailed within the Interpretation Framework.

Interpretation along the route

The story of the march of O'Sullivan Beara is very powerful and was the original reason the Beara Breifne Way was developed. Although the story of the march is not key in attracting visitors to the trail, it brings great authenticity and therefore the march should form the lead for trail interpretation along the course of the trail.

The Beara Breifne Way has many key points of interest along the way relating to the march, for example Leitrim Castle. Opportunity exists for these points to be defined on the ground with iconic sculpture or enhanced waymarking that helps highlight the scale, significance and history of the story and the trail.

Marketing

As trail development of the Beara Breifne Way is still underway, it is not yet ready for market. It is therefore to be expected that minimal marketing activity has been carried out to date, however some progress has been made.

Marketing Strategy

A marketing strategy was developed in 2014 for the Beara Breifne Way (carried out by Adjust and funded by the Heritage Council) although this has largely not been actioned. Whilst many of the identified actions are valid, it was carried out not knowing the target market or the phasing of the trail, nor does it take into consideration the existing Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland structures and platforms.

It is recommended that a new marketing strategy and action plan is developed taking into consideration the following elements.

Branding

The current trail name is 'Beara Breifne Way' and the brand is centred on the historic march of O'Sullivan Beara. It was developed through a consensus of opinions from the National Waymarked Trail Committees who represent the

local communities.

As the trail name has been agreed by those representing the local communities, it is recommended that the trail name is retained. However, there are several reasons why the name may prove challenging:

» Based on case studies, it is known that history does not attract walkers or visitors to a trail, although it is of great interest when they are on the trail

» Visitors and the local population are not familiar with the march of O'Sullivan Beara

» The brand does not align with Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' proposition which centres in 'Active in Nature'

Based on this, it is recommended that:

» sub-branding is created to align the brand with Ireland's Hidden Heartland (active in nature / engaging with landscape). This may be a simple descriptor below the name

» the graphic logo and brand design are reviewed

» additional marketing and promotion effort is dedicated to increasing the awareness of the O'Sullivan Beara march and the route name

The story of the march of O'Sullivan Beara is very powerful in its own right as well as bringing great authenticity to this long-distance route. The O'Sullivan Beara march should form the lead for trail interpretation and bringing the trail to life for tourists and visitors.

Should the Beara Breifne Way be extended into Northern Ireland, taking in the Ulster Way, it is recommended that the re-naming of trail is considered.

Content and Channels

Currently little information is available on the Beara Breifne Way. The main sources of information are the website, a trail guide and passport. The information that is available is either incorrect and/or incomplete and is no longer fit for purpose. The information is relevant only to the walker and not to the visitor.

It is recommended that the first priority in content creation is developing accurate and user-friendly information on the trail, including maps, route directions and images. This information should be hosted on a new dedicated trail website (targeted at both walkers and visitors). Other channels such as published guidebook and social media would follow.

In collaboration with tourism partners, further visitor-focused content should be created in order to meet the needs of tourism campaigns or other marketing activity. The 'first to market' itineraries should be prioritised.

There is a need to grow the awareness of O'Sullivan Beara march and the route name within Ireland. This will require additional promotion effort as well as a significant education programme within communities along and close to the trail.

Resource

Currently there is no marketing resource in place for the Beara Breifne Way. In order for it to succeed as a tourism product it is strongly recommended that an annual marketing resource is allocated to the Trail. The need is further reinforced given that the Beara Breifne Way is a Signature Experience for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands.

It is recommended that dedicated resource (human and financial) is secured. Key tasks to complete include:

» Commissioning Marketing Strategy
» Sourcing and creating basic trail information
» Developing content for walker and visitor
» Commissioning the development of the website
» Disseminating content and engaging with tourism partners
» Developing first-to-market itineraries
» Commissioning the re-branding of the Beara Breifne Way
» Implementing campaigns targeted at walkers

06

The Way Forward

Summary of Key Recommendations

Proposal Type	Recommendation	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Governance	Investigate options further and consult with stakeholders	✓		
Trail works	Commission Technical Trail Audit (concept trail design for new build, upgrade and minor works; waymarking; access point; viewpoints; linkages and re-routes)	✓		
	Carry out consultation with local landowners to identify a route that is a minimum of 80% off-road and secure formal permission for access	✓	✓	✓
	Commission detailed trail design once route has been agreed with landowners	✓	✓	
	Work with relevant statutory bodies to assess need for surveys and assessments to secure relevant consents and permissions	✓	✓	✓
	Secure funding for all trail works, waymarking and infrastructure, access points and viewpoints	✓	✓	✓
	Construct and upgrade trail as identified in Detailed Trail Design	✓	✓	✓
	Prioritise capital funding projects (not covered by the Walk Scheme) according to strategic importance	✓		
	Connect trail with Ulster Way and develop looped walks			✓
Trail Maintenance	Encourage the Department of Agriculture to include all long-distance walking routes on the Beara Breifne Way in the Walk Scheme	✓		
	For non-Walk Scheme sections, coordinate works to be carried out by volunteers and other schemes workers	✓		
	Manage and train volunteers and scheme workers to complete maintenance works. Train landowners to complete upgrade works	✓		
	Safeguard funding for all identified maintenance requirements on all sections of the Beara Breifne Way (not covered by Walk Scheme) and prioritise required maintenance works strategically	✓		
Trail Standards	Work in partnership with Sport Ireland Trails to develop a 'plus' standard for long-distance trails of strategic tourism importance	✓		
	Implement a program of education and promotion for the new standards	✓	✓	✓
Visitor Experience and Interpretation	Commission the development of an Interpretation Framework and action plan for signage, interpretation, viewpoints and access points	✓		
	Develop the Industry & Community Engagement Programme and Facilities Programme to help plug service gaps and increase engagement with local communities and businesses	✓	✓	✓
	Develop manageable itineraries, rich in content, for the walker and visitor	✓		
Marketing	Review trail branding (alongside development of Interpretation Framework)	✓		
	Commission development of a Marketing Strategy	✓		
	Develop content and platforms		✓	✓
	Integrate with destinations and tourism campaigns		✓	✓

The table summarises the recommendations for the development of the Beara Breifne Way as a compelling visitor experience.

It is recommended that four trail sections are prioritised within Phase 1:

» Castletownbere to Ballyvourney
» Cappawhite to Cloughjordan
» Ballygar to Castlerea
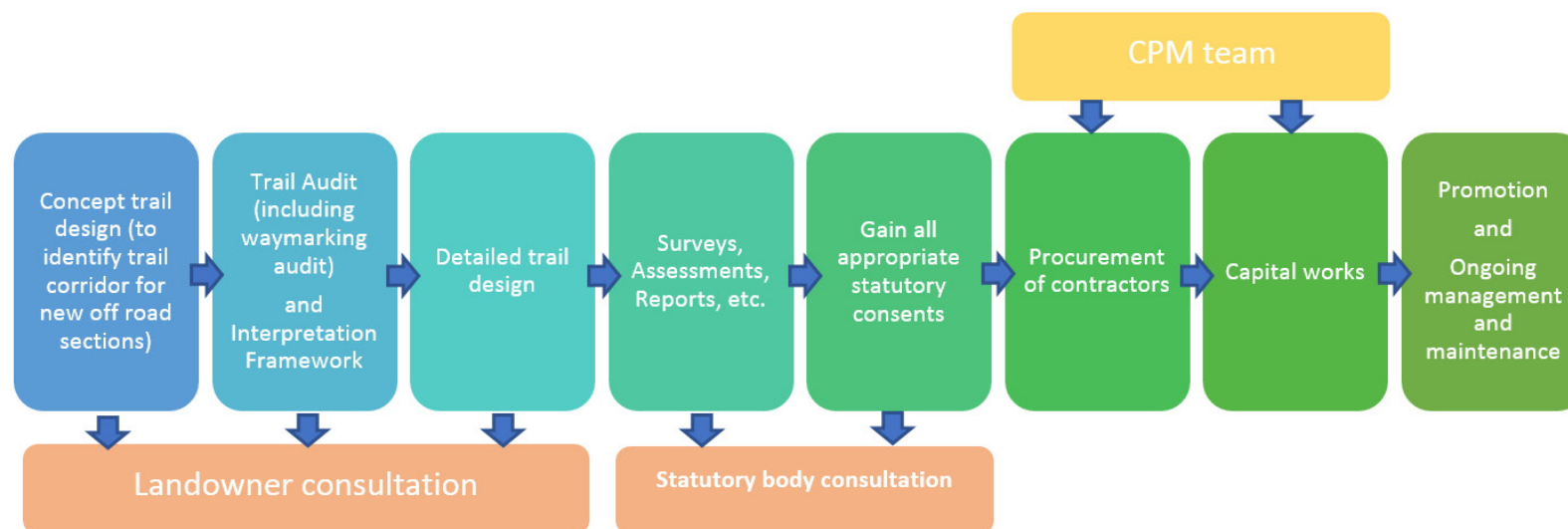» Boyle to Blacklion

It is expected that Phase 1 will take between two and four years.

Phase Two will address the remaining sections of trail whilst Phase Three will address aspirational recommendations (Ulster Way and Looped Walks).

Trail Development Process

The recommendations (previous page) are not listed in order and many need to take place simultaneously. For clarity, the trail development process for capital works for Beara Breifne Way is detailed in the flow chart.

CPM team

Concept trail design (to identify trail corridor for new off road sections)

Trail Audit (including waymarking audit) and Interpretation Framework

Detailed trail design

Surveys, Assessments, Reports, etc.

Gain all appropriate statutory consents

Procurement of contractors

Capital works

Promotion and Ongoing management and maintenance

Landowner consultation

Statutory body consultation

How will the Beara Breifne Way stack up against visitor requirements?

Currently the Beara Breifne Way does not score well on several factors in the Critical Success Factor matrix of visitor requirements. However, should the recommendations be implemented, the Beara Breifne Way has the potential to meet both the visitor and walker experience on most factors and come close to meeting others.

There are also a number of factors in how the project is approached that are key to the success of the Beara Breifne Way. These include:

» Community Involvement: it is critical that the community still maintains ownership of the trail even though there may be other bodies taking the lead on some aspects.

» Resource: a project of this scale will be developed and refined over many years and will require ongoing funding. Key stakeholders should recognise and commit to this resource from the outset.

» Holistic approach: to meet the visitor experience a holistic approach is required that extends to both the experience and the physical trail. If resource is only secured for capital works, then the Beara Breifne Way will not succeed as a visitor experience.

	Importance to Walker	Importance to Visitor	Current Trail Score	Potential Score
Landscape				
Natural beauty & variety of landcape	10	9	8	8
Wild and remote	5	3	8	8
Physical Trail				
Off-road	10	9	4	8
Multi Use	1	6	3	3
Varied difficulty	4	6	6	6
Well maintained path	10	10	4	10
Fully waymarked	9	10	5	10
Route Interpretation	7	9	2	10
Short Trail Options	3	9	2	9
Services				
Quality of accommodation on route	7	3	7	7
Walker-friendly accommodation	5	2	5	5
Accommodation at end of each day	10	2	6	10
Luggage Transfer	8	1	4	8
Evening meal at end of the day	9	1	6	9
Additional services - shops	4	8	4	6*2
Access to start/end points of trail - walker	8	3	4	8
Public transport to start / end sections	8	1	4	6*
Access points along length of trail - visitor (with toilets and parking)	3	9	2	6*
Experience				
Access to outdoor activities on / close route	3	5	4	5
Access to experiences on / close route	6	8	5	9
Fits within weeks holiday	9	n/a	2	9
Promotion and Information				
Promotion of Trail	10	8	2	10
Integration of trail in tourism brand	8	10	3	10
Maps and guidebooks	9	9	1	10
Websites	10	9	1	10
Start / Finish Markers	7	5	1	10
Certificates / Stamping	5	2	4	7

2* The development of a number of visitor servicing factors will also depend on the development of tourism servicing generally and therefore they have been scored as improving but not yet meeting visitor expectations

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