2020 VISION

for Kildare Tourism
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### Action 2 — Support the identification and development of new tourism infrastructure within the County.

### Action 3 — Champion the improvement of service quality across all visitor experiences in Kildare.

### Action 4 — Encourage towns and local communities to be more actively involved in tourism.

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### Action 2 — Devise and implement a fully integrated marketing plan for Kildare tourism.

### Action 3 — Work with national and international partners to attract more visitors from non-traditional emerging tourism markets.

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Irish tourism is experiencing record-breaking performance at present. 2016 was the best ever year with over 9 million overseas tourists visiting the country, a commendable 50% increase on the levels recorded just five years ago. The Irish tourism industry is now worth over €8 billion annually, which is also a new record. All key source markets performed well in 2016 and visitor feedback is positive, with value-for-money ratings steadily increasing over recent years. Domestic tourism revenue is also expected to show an increase of at least 1.5% to €1.75 billion. Feedback from businesses across the country suggests that the boost in demand seen in 2016 was well distributed and that growth was experienced in most areas with the western seaboard gaining an increased share of tourism traffic and expenditure. Employment in tourism is also buoyant, with up to 20,000 new jobs created across the industry in 2016. This means that the tourism and hospitality sector now employs over 230,000 people throughout the country.

The Irish Tourist Industry Confederation (ITIC) has identified a number of factors that have combined to drive this growth:

- The quality and competitiveness of the Irish tourism industry. Additionally, the decision by the government to maintain the 9% VAT rate on tourism services, and the suspension of the Air Travel Tax have boosted competitiveness.
- Positive economic conditions in source markets.
- Expanded airline services, particularly from the US and continental Europe.
- The strength of the US Dollar and UK Sterling (prior to the Brexit vote) against the Euro.
- Effective destination marketing.

This performance is naturally welcome and the medium term outlook remains positive but the industry faces significant concerns ahead, not least of which are the potential negative impacts of Brexit which has already resulted in some softening in visitor numbers from Britain due to the recent drop in the value of Sterling. Furthermore, ITIC has defined a number of notable challenges:

- Competitiveness will remain a key concern for the industry in 2017 and beyond, with the prospect of currency shifts making the UK a more affordable destination.
- Although tourism businesses have increased their investment in marketing over recent years, the real-term spend by the government has significantly reduced.
- Capacity constraints are beginning to impact the ability to cope with demand in specific locations at peak periods. In particular, the shortage of hotel accommodation in Dublin is potentially damaging for the industry as a whole.
- Geo-political and economic uncertainty will impact on demand.\(^1\)
- Despite these challenges, in 2017, Tourism Ireland aims to attract 10.6 million overseas visitors and grow overseas tourism revenue by +4.5%.

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\(^1\) Irish Tourist Industry Confederation Annual Review 2016
Tourism is an important industry in Kildare and now contributes almost €120 million annually in direct revenue to the local economy. In 2015, the county hosted 214,000 overseas visitors and an additional 230,000 visitors from Ireland. Recent tourism trends in the county are summarised:

**Trends in Overseas Tourists (000s) 2012–2015:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRIPS (000S)</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>214</td>
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<tr>
<td>REVENUE (€M)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>89</td>
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</table>

**Trends in Overseas Tourists (000s)* 2012–2015:**

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</tbody>
</table>

* Domestic trip data for Kildare and Carlow are combined within Fáilte Ireland statistics. Based upon a comparison of overseas tourism performance by these counties, it is estimated that Kildare attains 75% of the combined numbers and revenue and it is those figures which are shown above.

Source: Fáilte Ireland Regional tourism performance data 2012–2015
RECIENT TOURISM PERFORMANCE IN KILDARE

Overseas tourism growth in Kildare has been strong with a 50% increase in visitor numbers. Revenue has more than doubled between 2012 and 2015. Domestic tourism numbers have grown by around 20% over the same period, which exceeded performance in comparable counties such as Meath (13%) and Wicklow (17%). In 2015, Kildare was ranked 13th nationally in terms of overseas tourism performance by county and 16th with regard to domestic tourism. The recent tourism performance in Kildare has therefore been encouraging, but with competition between counties increasing all the time there is no room for complacency. In particular, revenues from domestic tourism are proportionally low when compared to those for overseas tourism so there is a clear need to enhance the added value potential of domestic tourism to the county.

From an enterprise and employment perspective, there are over 500 enterprises involved in accommodation and food services in Kildare employing 4,900 people.

Trends in Overseas Tourists (000s) 2012–2015:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACTIVE ENTERPRISES</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMPLOYEES</td>
<td>4,896</td>
<td>4,489</td>
<td>4,087</td>
<td>4,290</td>
<td>4,521</td>
<td>4,895</td>
<td>4,904</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSO Business Demography 2014
This proliferation of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kildare tourism is well understood, but it is notable that the number of enterprises and employment levels have been relatively static since 2008, which indicates that there is potential to grow tourism employment within the county. Tourism SMEs have significant support needs throughout their lifecycles and achieving consistent quality levels across such a fragmented industry is a challenging but crucial goal if the visitor experience in Kildare is to exceed expectations.

The promotion and development of tourism in the county is a priority for Kildare County Council and a core objective for the Council is ‘to promote, protect, improve, encourage and facilitate the development of tourism throughout the county as an important contributor to job creation in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area’. Tourism and recreation make a positive contribution to the economic and social wellbeing of the county. Kildare’s close proximity to Dublin offers significant opportunities to expand the existing tourism offer and brand. With Dublin being the sixth most popular city region in Europe for city breaks, Kildare’s location, its rich natural heritage, along with its horse racing and golfing attractions, provide opportunities to attract spin off tourism from the city region and neighbouring counties, including Wicklow.

Kildare County Council explicitly recognises that Kildare’s tourist attractions are important assets for the development of the county and fundamental to the enjoyment by both visitors and residents. Both through direct involvement and via its support of Kildare Fáilte, the Council seeks to optimise the benefits that tourism can bring to all stakeholders in the county. These benefits do not materialise by chance but rather are a result of the ongoing planning and management of tourism within the county.
The previous strategic plan for Kildare tourism covered the period 2013–2016 and achieved some notable successes:

- The development of the ‘Into Kildare’ brand and proposition, the supporting marketing strategies and the extensive promotional campaigns implemented over recent years have contributed to:
  - International visitor numbers to Kildare rising from 139,000 in 2012 to 214,000 in 2015.
  - Domestic trips growing from 188,000 in 2012 to 230,000 in 2015.

- The transformation of the existing Into Kildare website into a comprehensive digital marketing platform for Kildare tourism is already having a major impact in terms of visibility and visitor traffic.

- The county’s presence within Fáilte Ireland’s new tourism proposition and brand, Ireland’s Ancient East, continues to be consolidated.

- The development and launch of new trails such as Arthur’s Way, the Shackleton Trail and the Food Trail have greatly enhanced the experience offering in the county.

- Kildare Fáilte has commenced implementation of a dedicated strategy focused on leveraging the county’s real potential within the business tourism sector.

- A new OPEN Kildare website was developed to promote a range of events and activities across key towns, relating to the Dubai Duty Free Irish Open at the K Club.

- The level of community engagement in tourism increased over the period of the plan via national initiatives such as The Gathering and a growth in local festivals and events.

- The FoodScape Kildare initiative is repositioning the county as an attractive destination for food tourism.

- The Kildare Tourism Showcase at Punchestown and the Dubai Duty Free Irish Open was highly successful.

- The appointment of tourism ambassadors such as Gay Byrne, Yvonne Keating and Ray Darcy has...
The potential to further develop tourism in the county remains considerable given its proximity to Dublin, which receives 4.9 million overseas visitors, and to Dublin Airport where increased passenger numbers hit a record 27.9 million in 2016. To plan ahead to 2020, Kildare Fáilte engaged in extensive consultations with tourism stakeholders to ensure that the momentum attained from the previous plan evolves into a new ‘2020 Vision for Kildare Tourism’. All stakeholders agreed that the preparation of this strategic plan had to be cognisant of the likely challenges that will emerge over the period. Creating a plan that sought to define all aspects of tourism development in the county to 2020 was considered inappropriate on this occasion, as this approach would not allow for remedial responses to changing circumstances. Instead, it was deemed more prudent to identify strategic goals and priority actions at this point and to introduce a stronger annual planning process to help realise them. The planning framework adopted is shown below:

Strategic Management Process

This strategic management framework provides clear direction for all tourism stakeholders by defining the strategic goals and priority actions to 2020. Through the integration of a robust annual planning component, the framework also ensures that plans can be adjusted annually based on outcomes achieved to date and in response to unforeseen circumstances.
Ten guiding principles were identified at the outset of the planning process that have underpinned the preparation of this strategic plan and related actions. These include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GUIDING PRINCIPLES</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT</strong></td>
<td>Tourism is everybody’s business and an important aim of the strategic management process is to grow the industry across the county in a manner that is good for visitors, entrepreneurs, employees and local communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. OPTIMISING POSITIONING</strong></td>
<td>The benefits derived from Kildare’s close proximity to Dublin, the main access hubs into Ireland, and its importance to the Ireland’s Ancient East initiative, must be maximised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. FOCUSED ON STRENGTHS</strong></td>
<td>Kildare tourism cannot be all things to all visitors, but instead must identify its core strengths and play to them. Efforts will be focused in attracting markets and segments where Kildare is shown to, or can have, a sustainable competitive advantage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. PARTNERSHIP BASED</strong></td>
<td>Partnership will lie at the heart of tourism development within the county, bringing together industry stakeholders, local government officials, experts and communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. ENVIRONMENTALLY AWARE</strong></td>
<td>Enhancing the natural environment and reducing the negative footprint of tourism will be a primary concern in all development efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. EMPLOYEE FOCUSED</strong></td>
<td>Ensuring that employees across the industry in Kildare are adequately trained and professionally managed so that they can deliver great experiences for visitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. BUSINESS FRIENDLY</strong></td>
<td>Supporting the establishment and growth of local enterprises that create meaningful and rewarding employment opportunities will also be a priority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. QUALITY ASSURED</strong></td>
<td>Working together with all stakeholders to ensure that the visitor experience across the industry in Kildare is consistently at a high level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9. TECHNOLOGY DRIVEN</strong></td>
<td>Maximising the use of technology in marketing, visitor information and enterprise support delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10. INNOVATIVE</strong></td>
<td>Stimulating innovation in tourism, particularly at the level of the enterprise, to ensure that the county outpaces competition by the appeal of its offering.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These principles have provided overall direction for the strategic planning effort.
The 2020 Vision for Kildare tourism is to:

*Build an exciting, sustainable tourism industry in County Kildare where stakeholders work together to design and deliver quality experiences for domestic and international visitors, create jobs, boost local economies and protect the natural environment.*

Achieving this vision will require integrated development efforts across six interlinked pillars shown here:
Within each of these six pillars a number of strategic goals have been defined. These goals include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pillar</th>
<th>Strategic goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| PILLAR 1 Visitor Experiences | ▶ Support the development of world class and demand-driven visitor experiences in Kildare.  
▶ Stimulate investment in tourism infrastructure across the county, particularly for products where identifiable shortfalls exist such as traditional accommodation, business tourism and Eco-Tourism initiatives. |
| PILLAR 2 Marketing & Promotion | ▶ Increase overseas visitor numbers by 25%, island of Ireland visitors by 30%, and grow total visitor revenue by 40% over the period.  
▶ Maximise the benefits gained from Ireland’s Ancient East and Kildare’s proximity to Dublin and Dublin Airport. |
| PILLAR 3 People & Professionalism | ▶ Support the creation of an additional 1500 direct and indirect jobs within hospitality and tourism across the county by 2020.  
▶ Enhance professional skill levels and improve service quality across all sectors of tourism. |
| PILLAR 4 Business Supports | ▶ Help new and existing enterprises to deliver quality experiences for visitors.  
▶ Improve the variety of accessible supports to help operators raise enterprise competitiveness. |
| PILLAR 5 Research & Insights | ▶ Improve the range and quality of available research to guide tourism decision-making in the county, including the introduction of an annual business sentiment survey. |
| PILLAR 6 Stakeholder Management | ▶ Expand working relationships with key stakeholders such as Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS), Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Education and Training Board, Maynooth University, Waterways Ireland, Office of Public Works and industry and sector associations. |
## Strategic goals

County Kildare Fáilte will work closely with national, regional and local industry stakeholders to:

1. Support the development of world class and demand-driven visitor experiences in Kildare.
2. Stimulate investment in tourism infrastructure across the county, particularly for products where identifiable shortfalls exist such as traditional accommodation, business tourism and eco-tourism initiatives.

## Priority Actions

### Action 1

Ensure that the benefits gained from the current portfolio of experiences available in Kildare are maximised.

### Action 2

Support the identification and development of new tourism infrastructure within the county.

### Action 3

Champion the improvement of service quality across all visitor experiences in Kildare.

### Action 4

Encourage towns and local communities to be more actively involved in tourism development.
STRATEGIC GOALS & PRIORITY ACTIONS

Strategic goals

County Kildare Fáilte will work with Government Agencies, Tour Operators, Horse Racing Ireland etc. to:

- Increase overseas visitor numbers by 25%, island of Ireland visitors by 30%, and grow total visitor revenue by 40% over the period.
- Maximise the benefits gained from Ireland’s Ancient East and Kildare’s proximity to Dublin and Dublin Airport.

Priority Actions

Action 1
Ensure that all Kildare tourism marketing efforts are fully aligned to Ireland’s Ancient East Brand and the ‘On Dublin’s Doorstep’ theme.

Action 2
Devise and implement a fully integrated marketing plan for Kildare tourism, and research the potential for a ‘Kildare Convention Bureau’ to boost the MICE opportunities for tourism businesses in the county.

Action 3
Work with national and international partners to attract more visitors from non-traditional emerging tourism markets.

Action 4
Support tourism SMEs to build marketing, sales and digital marketing capabilities.
## Strategic goals

County Kildare Fáilte will partner with industry employers, sector associations, Kildare and Wicklow Education Training Board, Maynooth University, Local Enterprise and Leader organisations and Private Training Providers to:

### Priority Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conduct a county-wide audit to identify skills shortages within hospitality and tourism sectors.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support the launch of a new skills training facility for hotels and restaurants in County Kildare, offering certificated programmes for new entrants to the industry.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help to broaden the range of training and development opportunities available to existing tourism employees, such as tour and heritage guides.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Action 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve service quality and standards across the tourism industry in Kildare to include a recognition scheme that acknowledges the value of local people to the visitor experience.</td>
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</table>
## STRATEGIC GOALS & PRIORITY ACTIONS

### Strategic goals

County Kildare Fáilte will collaborate with Fáilte Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Kildare and Wicklow Education Training Board (KWETB), Kildare Local Enterprise Office, and industry representative bodies and professional associations to:

- Help new and existing enterprises to deliver quality experiences for visitors.
- Improve the accessibility of business supports to help operators enhance business performance and competitiveness.

### Priority Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action 1</th>
<th>Encourage and support start-up enterprises in tourism across Kildare.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action 2</td>
<td>Help existing business owners and managers to build management and business capabilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action 3</td>
<td>Increase the number of networking events for tourism operators, especially SMEs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action 4</td>
<td>Benchmark industry performance against best in class, nationally and internationally.</td>
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A 2020 Vision for Kildare Tourism // Executive Summary

STRATEGIC GOALS & PRIORITY ACTIONS

Strategic goals

County Kildare Fáilte will collaborate with Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Dept. of Tourism and Transport and the third-level education sector to:

- Improve the range and quality of available research to guide tourism decision-making in the county, including the introduction of an annual business sentiment survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PILLAR 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop a performance ‘dashboard’ for Kildare tourism.</td>
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</table>

| Action 2 |
| Improve the range and quality of data available to potential investors. |

| Action 3 |
| Collaborate with other agencies, the CSO, Fáilte Ireland, third-level education sector etc. to provide in-depth research and analysis on important issues. |

| Action 4 |
| Introduce an annual business survey across Kildare tourism to gauge operator sentiment and to inform the annual business plan for Kildare Fáilte. |

NATIONAL STUD & GARDENS // CO. KILDARE
Strategic goals

County Kildare Fáilte will increase its visibility within tourism in the county and will partner with a variety of stakeholders to:

- Expand working relationships with key stakeholders such as Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS), Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, Education and Training Board, Maynooth University, Waterways Ireland, Dublin Airport, Office of Public Works and industry and sector associations.

Priority Actions

**Action 1**
Define the key stakeholder groups and agree expectations and responsibilities with each.

**Action 2**
Continuously work with relevant stakeholders to plan and implement the strategic and business plans for Kildare Tourism, and seek sponsorship and support to achieve its mission and objectives.

**Action 3**
Raise the profile of Kildare Fáilte within all sectors of the tourism industry, the public and the media throughout the county.

**Action 4**
Expand the range, and improve the delivery of services to members, and continuously measure the impact, influence and relevance of these services and integrate the learning’s from the results in to the operational activities of Kildare Failte.
Established in 1991, Kildare Fáilte is the voice of tourism in the county and, apart from its primary remit for the marketing of tourism in the county, the organisation also engages with and enables the actions of other stakeholders in order to drive tourism growth. The mission for Kildare Fáilte is defined as:

Promotes the county at home and abroad as a leading visitor destination with a host of world-class experiences that reflect Kildare’s unique tourism characteristics and are aligned to national initiatives such as Ireland’s Ancient East.

Represents the interests of members at local, national and international levels including at important trade shows such as Meitheal.

Serves as an advocate with national and local government agencies, Kildare County Council and other public bodies to secure the necessary funding required to deliver on its mission.

Helps to identify current gaps in visitor experiences and supports the development of innovative tourism infrastructure that responds to defined needs and further enhances the county’s positioning as a special destination.

Encourages the application of best practices across the industry by working with stakeholders to devise and implement quality assurance programmes, demand-led training courses and business support initiatives.

Lobbies to expand the range and scope of research and insights available on tourism in the county to help guide decision-making by tourism professionals.
Kildare Fáilte will lead the implementation of this strategy but clearly it cannot deliver the desired outcomes alone. Therefore, the organisation will work closely with a variety of stakeholders to achieve the stated goals. To bring the strategy to life, an action-oriented annual business and operations plan will be prepared by the Board of Kildare Fáilte in cooperation with relevant parties. This annual business plan will incorporate the following activities:

<p>| | |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. REVIEWING PAST PERFORMANCE</strong></td>
<td>Reviewing the achievements of the previous year and identifying any changing circumstances that may impact on the next planning period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. PLANNING</strong></td>
<td>Defining the key actions to be conducted in the year ahead under each of the six pillars in order to continue working towards the agreed strategic goals for each pillar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. BUDGETING</strong></td>
<td>Identifying the resources required to implement those actions and sourcing the necessary funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. AGREERING ROLES &amp; RESPONSIBILITIES</strong></td>
<td>Agreeing the lead partner for implementing each action and engaging with them to ensure delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. SETTING TIMELINES FOR COMPLETION</strong></td>
<td>Defining when key tasks must be completed to avoid ‘drift’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The integration of an annual planning process into the strategic management of tourism development in Kildare will enable key stakeholders to monitor progress more effectively over the lifetime of the strategy, and to adjust plans as circumstances evolve—but always within the context of the broader strategic framework.

**Funding and Resources**

Kildare Fáilte will directly invest €800,000 in tourism development over the next four years to 2020. In addition, Kildare Fáilte will encourage stakeholder support and fundraise with partners to source additional direct and indirect resources so that a total of €1.0m will be spent on the development and promotion of tourism in Kildare over the period of the plan.

It is widely accepted that a strengthening of the team at Kildare Fáilte is required in order to better fulfil its remit. To that end, Kildare Fáilte will seek to appoint a full-time Manager with the required strategic, marketing, relationship and project management skills necessary, both to successfully manage the affairs of the organisation, and to effectively lead and oversee the implementation of the defined strategy. This individual will be the de facto CEO of Kildare Fáilte and will be supported by a full-time Administrator who will provide the necessary administrative support and to enhance the provision of member services.
The 2020 Vision for Kildare Tourism offers clear direction to all stakeholders and provides a defined road map to build on successes to date in the development of tourism in the county. The strategic goals and actions outlined will collectively address identified challenges for the industry, and through an effective annual planning process, appropriate responses can be devised to meet changing circumstances whilst remaining true to the overall vision set for the period to 2020. The strategy is ambitious, but achievable with meaningful collaboration between all tourism stakeholders in the county.