**Tourism**

Tourism is a proven economic driver, playing a significant role in the overall development of Limerick. The sector is uniquely positioned to contribute strongly to job creation and reversing unemployment in communities throughout Limerick. As a significant economic activity, Limerick City and County Council in partnership with local and national stakeholders, seeks to increase tourist numbers and support sustainable job creation, through targeted tourism initiatives including the development of new tourism products and leveraging natural and built heritage assets to support tourism across Limerick.

Limerick is strategically positioned in the Mid-West Region with excellent connectivity nationally by rail and road corridors and internationally by its proximity to Shannon International Airport, which has capacity to cater for 4.5 million passengers per annum.

The RSES acknowledges Shannon International Airport as a national and infrastructural driver of tourism growth and as an international gateway to the tourism assets of the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area, Mid-West and wider region.

Failte Ireland’s Wild Atlantic Way Gateway Plan for Limerick is currently in development and provides a focused roadmap to deliver this collective ambition to transform Limerick into a compelling visitor destination and base for exploring the Wild Atlantic Way. In this regard, the MASP aims to ensure collaboration between Local Authorities and tourism agencies.

The Limerick Tourism Development Strategy 2019-2023, the Limerick 2030 Economic and Spatial Plan for Limerick and the River Shannon Tourism Masterplan, are key strategic plans which will form the basis for the development of tourism in Limerick.

4.8.1 Urban Tourism:

City Centre and Environs:

Urban tourism is enabled not only by festivals, historic buildings, heritage sites etc., but also by perceived confidence and self-assuredness of citizens, reflected in citizens’ choices, and manifest in entrepreneurship, creativity, spirit of generosity, embracing new ideas and leadership in same, common-sense, environmental awareness, people-centred approach to planning, awareness and respect for history, genuine care for vulnerable citizens, high level and usage of non-car transport, low rates of anti-social behaviour and safe streets by night and day. Over time it becomes evident to casual visitors, and attracts favourable comment from national and international media, including social media, and in particular media concerned with travel and tourism.

As part of this development plan, Limerick City and County Council will build on the feel-good factor that is currently in Limerick due to such confidence/self-assuredness being evident in sport (traditionally rugby but now hurling as well) and initiate a forum for interested citizens to explore how such traits can contribute to Limerick’s ongoing development as a tourist destination. Such action would also grow the visibility of Limerick.

In respect of same, the following would be (just some) examples of reputation enhancement that would cost very little and yield significant dividends.

* Renaming Limerick City and County Council to Limerick Council. This would boost the integrity and identity of the brand Limerick.
* Renaming of King John’s Castle to Limerick Castle. The focus would then be on Limerick, rather than King John – or St. John, as many people mistakenly call him – and would indicate the pride that we have in our name. Apart from small costs in rebranding, publicity etc., it would be cost-free.
* Energy and commitment will be put into revitalising Limerick Lace, to capitalise the current interest in arts and crafts. The possibility of an Arts/Crafts Festival focusing on lacemaking but also including different North Munster crafts (with Limerick taking the lead and being the principal focus) should be considered.

(See 4.8.2, b) and c) below also)

During the lifespan of the Draft Plan, Limerick will increase the range of day and evening experience options for visitors by working collaboratively to deliver an improved visitor environment.

Ongoing public realm improvement works in the City Centre and a new Wayfinding Orientation and Signage Plan will enhance the visitor experience, by introducing and orientating visitors through the City, delivering new and coherent visitor experiences.

The tourism sector in the City Centre has experienced growth in recent years with hotel occupancy rates improving. The café and restaurant sector has also expanded and provide an important source of employment in the City, while the City’s Waterfront has seen a notable increase in river activities and engagement. New developments such as the International Rugby Experience, currently under construction, will enhance Limerick’s sporting culture and identity.

Improvements to existing venues will also be supported to achieve international visitor experience status. Improved connectivity will see the city positioned as a gateway and base for visitors to the stunning natural and built heritage sites of the county and the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW), offering visitors stress free accessibility and choice of experience.

Critical success factors for the development of Limerick as a WAW Gateway City include:

* Continuous development of new visitor experiences across the day and evening economy (Anything specific in mind here?? Would a city centre cinema be viable? Safe streets are essential for a thriving evening economy).
* The development of the City as a coherent visitor destination through a Wayfinding, Orientation and Signage Plan in 2021 (Very good idea)!!
* The development of new globally significant attractions and activities that provide reasons to visit Limerick. (The Rugby Experience I assume, and anything else in mind here)??
* Capitalising on the cultural and urban edge of Limerick to build a global tourism positioning; (What does this sentence mean – is it an error/typo)??
* Sustained economic success achieved through domestic and international visitor numbers growth, increased dwell time, bed nights and new levels of employment supported through an extended tourism season
* Maximising the tourism potential of the Medieval Quarter/Nicholas Street, Georgian Quarter and Market Quarter. (The Georgian Quarter would need not only significant financial input but also a culture change among citizens – i.e. choosing to live and work in Newtown Pery. This is linked to confidence, taking a risk etc. mentioned above).
* Supporting existing tourist attractions including King John’s (Limerick) Castle, Hunt Museum, St. Mary’s Cathedral, Limerick City Gallery of Art, Limerick Museum and the People’s Museum of Limerick

4.8.2 Rural Tourism

Limerick is fortunate to have a broad geographic spread of visitor experiences across the county from the Munster Vales and Ballyhoura Country in the East, through to Lough Gur and Curragh Chase and on to the Limerick Greenway and Shannon Estuary Way in the west. Our rich tapestry of historical and heritage sites both built and natural, have the potential to animate the stories of this place and its people in an engaging way for our visitors.

Limerick City and County Council works collaboratively with West Limerick Tourism, Munster Vales and Ballyhoura Failte to support the sustainable geographic spread of tourism development across rural Limerick and actively seeks collaboration opportunities for cross promotion and development with neighbouring Local Authorities and national agencies.

The Limerick Greenway’s ongoing development and ambition to connect the City with West Limerick, through sustainable travel options will play a key role in the development of tourism amenities and attractions in the area as part of the West Limerick Tourism Strategy. Similarly, Limerick City and County Council will continue to support the objectives of the Munster Vales Strategic Tourism Development Strategy 2020 – 2025.

Limerick also boasts the fifth highest peak in Ireland – Galteemore, and the route from the Anglesborough and Ballylanders is particularly attractive – rising as it does over Lyracapull at 825m, all in Co. Limerick. A way-marked, safe, ‘Limerick Galtee Trail’ could be established joining the two towns to the Galtee peaks. This would not need major infrastructural work and could be marketed at families as well as more adventurous hill walkers.

Adare Manor and Limerick will play host to the Ryder Cup in 2027. Limerick City and County Council will work collaboratively to ensure that the appropriate infrastructure and transport provisions are in place, capitalising on the event to ensure economic and social benefits for the region.

Limerick City and County Council continues to work in partnership with Failte Ireland and local stakeholders to maximise the potential of tourism attractions on the Shannon Estuary Way including Glin, Askeaton and the Foynes Flying Boat and Maritime Museum.

The Implementation of the WAW Gateway City Plan and development of improved transport links in the area, will optimise the region’s potential to increase visitor numbers drawing on the success of the WAW.

A task force within Limerick Council will meet stakeholders to see if Limerick can capitalise on the potential of the WAW and at the same time increase the international visibility of Limerick.

1. Sailing is an activity in which there is growing interest and with the reduction in fossil fuel use it is likely that it will become more fashionable leading to an increase in popularity. The Shannon Estuary offers unparalleled opportunities for same, encompassing both sheltered waters and wildness. Limerick, as a WAW Gateway City, is well placed to take advantage of this. A site will be identified below the Shannon Bridge (perhaps Corcanree or similar area) to construct a safe, sheltered, secure marina which will facilitate this wonderful activity on the Shannon Estuary with a hub and principal focus in Limerick.
2. Limerick is host city of the historic Ilen sailboat, and boat construction could be a significant craft activity that would increase water tourism.
3. Limerick City (and the Shannon Estuary) has its own traditional boat, known as the gandelow. There are still boat-builders who practice the craft of gandelow building, in Limerick, Coonagh, Askeaton, Bunratty and further along the Estuary. An annual gandelow regatta could be initiated which would be a uniquely Limerick – Shannon Estuary event. Traditional boats have been major tourism events in other coastal parts of Ireland.

Objective ECON O36 Tourism:

It is an objective of the Council to:

a) Support strong growth in the tourism sector in Limerick and to ensure that the economic and societal benefits of tourism are effectively distributed throughout the county, by making vital connections between complementary sites and attractions, by encouraging visitors to move around the county and to enable them to do so with ease.

b) Support the development of Limerick’s capacity for largescale group tourism, through improved transport amenities for bus tours, group tours and cruise ship visitors.

1. Recognise the heritage value of Limerick’s towns and villages such as Adare, Kilmallock and Askeaton and seek opportunities to enhance their tourism potential.
2. Support and harness the tourism potential of existing rural and heritage site amenities/attractions, including The Clare Glens, Lough Gur, Knockfierna, Muster Vales, Ballyhoura Country, Foynes Flying Boat and Maritime Museum, The Shannon Estuary Way, Curragh Chase, Fullers Folly and Adare Heritage Centre, in a way that promotes sustainable tourism.

e) Actively develop Limerick as an Events location with the appropriate infrastructure to attract international conferences, sporting, cultural and commercial events, including the development of an International Conference Centre and improved public realm, which supports outdoor performance and events of scale (Refer to Chapter 10: Compact Growth and Revitalisation Section 10.4.2.8).

f) To adopt a strategic collaborative approach to the delivery of the Ryder Cup in Adare/Limerick in 2027 to leverage the legacy potential of this major event and ensure maximum return on investment for Limerick and the region.

g) To adopt a leading role in Inland Waterways. Even though the Shannon flows through or borders many different counties, Limerick people are frequently referred to as ‘Shannonsiders’. In many Irish people’s thinking, ‘Limerick’ is synonymous with ‘Shannon’. For example, there is a nationally recognised rugby club of that name, an adjacent International Airport and many commercial ventures. Waterways Ireland and Fáilte Ireland will be major stakeholders in development of the inland waterways activity sector in Limerick by exploring the potential for increased accessibility to Limerick’s waterways for water-based tourism activity (refer also to Chapter 9: Sustainable Communities and Social Infrastructure and Chapter 11: Development Management Standards).

With this in mind, a task force will be initiated to examine such potential. Future tourism strategy will be proactive in:

* Ensuring that it is easy for boaters to transit safely from Killaloe to Limerick, opening up Limerick to the >500km inland waterways, currently connected to the three major Shannon lakes, Enniskillen, Athlone and the Midlands, potentially Dublin, Carlow/Kildare, Waterford and, in future years, with the refurbishment of the Ulster Canal, Lough Neagh and Belfast.
* As the leader in Inland Waterways, Limerick will actively lobby for the improvement and continued maintenance of the Grand and Royal Canals.
* Seeking funding to refurbish the historic and beautiful Errina Canal, with a boat lift (tolled) at Parteen Weir – O’Brien’s Bridge, thereby offering boaters an attractive, exciting and adventurous alternative to the current Head/Tail Race through Ardnacrusha. Currently boat hire companies do not permit hirers to travel to Limerick due to perceived risk to boats through Ardnacrusha and Abbey River. Use of the Errina Canal would mean that travel to Limerick would be safe.
* Refurbishment of the Park Canal + locks, what used to be the Guinness Dock at Lock Quay, and adjacent to Clare St. Park to accommodate boaters from the Inland Waterways, and construction of a modern, secure marina at that location which would be safe, non-tidal, 10-12 mins walk from the City Centre, shops, restaurants, Market Quarter, Nicholas St., Limerick Castle and many other attractions.

4.8.3 Limerick Greenway

The Limerick Greenway is a 40km off road walking and cycling route that follows part of the former Limerick to Tralee rail line. It links the market towns of Rathkeale, Newcastle West and Abbeyfeale.

Following a major investment in 2020/21, it is now a significant recreational and tourism amenity. The greenway extends to the Kerry/Limerick border where the proposed link to Listowel is scheduled to open in 2022. It is anticipated that the North Kerry Greenway will extend to Tralee/Fenit in the lifetime of the Draft Plan.

It is the ambition of Limerick City and County Council to extend the Limerick Greenway to Adare and Patrickswell and develop a wider greenway network. (Refer also to Section 5.3.7 Blue/Green Infrastructure Chapter 5: Environment, Heritage, Landscape and Green Infrastructure). Objective ECON O37 Limerick Greenway It is an objective of the Council to support:

a) The provision of car parking, bike hire and ancillary facilities at suitable locations along the Limerick Greenway.

b) Extend the Limerick Greenway from Rathkeale to Adare/Patrickswell.

c) Extend greenway from the University of Limerick to Annacotty. (Excellent idea – it’s a lovely walk/cycleway)

d) Develop a greenway from the University of Limerick to Montpelier. (As in c)!

e) Support the development of the Limerick to Scarriff/Tuamgraney Greenway in partnership with Waterways Ireland and Clare County Council.

f) Examine the potential for a greenway from Patrickswell, Bruree to the Limerick/Cork Border (Charleville). \*\*

g) Extend the already highly successful Shannon Fields – Plassey walk/cycleway along what is now the Red Path, and then from bottom of Mill Rd. to Bishop O’Dwyer Bridge. This would necessitate a capital investment i.e. bridge over the Limerick-Ennis Railway line, and necessary safety railings along the railway.

h) Restoration of the Island Field Embankment so it can be used as a walkway and cycleway from Bishop O’Dwyer Bridge to Verdant Crescent/Thomond Bridge, thereby extending the ‘Three Bridges’ walk.

i) Twice-yearly clearance of brushwood, brambles and other vegetation – leaving mature trees untouched – will be undertaken along the Shannon Fields – Plassey walk/cycleway to allow better views of the river for users of the facility. (Currently the river is actually invisible for much of the walk).

Tourism projects will be required to adhere to adequate environmental and ecological assessment to ensure that they do not cause adverse environmental and ecological effects.