

Seeking Community Views on Outdoor Activities

28 April 2008

As part of a county-wide project to make plans for the future of outdoor recreation in Co. Wicklow, community groups have been asked about activity in their areas.

Every week, increasing numbers of people are taking to the hills, forests, rivers and coast of Wicklow for sports and leisure activities. This activity needs to be managed, to minimise damage and disturbance, and also to improve the recreation opportunities for visitors and local residents. Wicklow Rural Partnership has joined with organisations including Wicklow County Council, Coillte, Wicklow IFA, Fáilte Ireland, the Irish Sports Council, Wicklow Uplands Council and the National Parks & Wildlife Service to prepare an Outdoor Recreation Strategy for Co. Wicklow.

The strategy will deal with a wide range of activities; everything from walking, bird-watching and angling, to orienteering, sailing and horse-riding. One aim of the strategy is to improve the opportunities for local people to participate in outdoor recreation in Wicklow.

Community groups around the county have received a questionnaire asking about outdoor recreation activity in their area and seeking ideas for future development.

Jim Coogan from Tinahely Area Development, who was involved in setting up the popular Tinahely Railway Walk commented on the benefits to communities in having such a facility.

“There are people of all ages using the Railway Walk, it’s a safe place to bring young children and the scenery along by the river is beautiful. In the past there was nowhere for the people of Tinahely to walk other than on the roads. Now we have a lovely amenity, which is also drawing people to the area, but this was only achieved through a lot of voluntary effort from the local community. The goodwill of neighbours and landowners is very important, and that combined with advice and funding from agencies around the county made this possible.” he said.



Enjoying the Tinahely Railway Walk

There are also business opportunities associated with outdoor recreation, in providing facilities, accommodation and activity holidays. Aaron Byrne is one Wicklow man who has got deeply involved. He now runs the Mountain Ventures hostel and the Imaal Bar in the Glen of Imaal, as well his own outdoor activity business.

“We do a lot of outdoor team-building with companies, training for groups preparing to do charity treks abroad and work with youth groups. Environmental awareness; teaching people about flora and fauna is important too. Wicklow’s landscape is ideal for a whole range of outdoor activities. With Dublin’s growing population only an hour away, there is tremendous potential, particularly if you can put together a package including food, accommodation and a choice of activities. You need to understand what people want and you need qualified instructors, but when you look at the level of activity in places like Wales and Scotland you see the scope for Wicklow to benefit more from outdoor recreation”.



Team-building activity with Mountain Ventures

The research for the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy includes an online questionnaire for individual participants in outdoor activities (www.wicklowleader.ie/outdoorrecreation.php). Initial findings will be presented at a public workshop being held on **Wednesday 7th May at 8pm in the Glendalough Hotel**. Speaking about the workshop Brian Kehoe, manager of Wicklow Rural Partnership, emphasised the importance of co-ordinated action in planning for outdoor recreation.

“We’re fortunate in Wicklow to have the National Park and extensive Coillte lands, but to manage the growth in outdoor activities and also maximise the opportunity for local people to participate, we need a structure for public and private landowners, community groups and the various agencies involved to work together on this. There is definitely an opportunity for more community-led facilities, and potential for private landowners to get involved, particularly with the funding which will become available later this year through the new Rural Development Programme. The workshop in Glendalough will provide an opportunity for people to learn more about the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy and give feedback on the work to date.”

Community groups are asked to return their questionnaires at the public workshop on 7th May, or beforehand. Any group that has not received a questionnaire should contact Wicklow Rural Partnership on 0404 46977 or e-mail ruth@rspconsulting.info.

Note for Editors

For further information contact:

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Wicklow Rural Partnership delivers a range of rural development initiatives including the LEADER programme, the Rural Social Scheme and the Rural Transport Programme.