



Advisory Note 1

Guidance Notes on Blueway Development & Management "Achieving the Criteria"

Prepared by Outdoor Recreation NI on behalf of the Blueway Partnership

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This advisory note provides information to Blueway Developers on a range of topics to support the planning, development, accreditation and management of Blueways. This advisory note is indented as a support document to the Blueway Management and Development Guide. 1

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1.1 Achieving Blueway Accreditation Criteria

This section provides further details on the requirements for each criterion set for Blueways, coupled with guidance as to how this can be achieved.



1.1. Experience

Engaging landscape, culture and heritage

Offers the visitor an opportunity to appreciate and explore an attractive landscape and engage with the unique heritage and culture of the area

The importance of the setting was highlighted in recent research¹ undertaken by Waterways Ireland which demonstrated that 'tranquillity of location' and 'scenic beauty /pristine environment' were the two most important factors in choosing a waterway to undertake recreational activity.

It should be remembered the Blueway is a way of exploring the areas' culture and heritage and often viewing it from a different perspective. It is essential the Blueway proactively showcases and provides adequate interpretation of the area's assets, points of interest and attractions.

Multi-activity

¹ Waterways Ireland Users Survey 2017

Offers a combination of water and land-based trail (with connectivity to water) options

In order to meet the expectations of the visitor, a Blueway should offer a combination of water-based and land-based trail options. Land-based trails e.g. walking or cycling must have connectivity to the water i.e. where possible they should be adjacent to the waterway. At a minimum, the trail head should be adjacent to the waterway with a significant section of the trail either adjacent to, or providing views of, the waterway.

The land-based trails do not have to run parallel to water-based trails, for example walking trails may be available at various separate locations along the waterway.

Capacity Building

A programme is in place to develop 'Eat / Stay / Go' and 'Activity / Experience' opportunities

The product development will provide a skeleton on which to build the Blueway experience. It is essential that a capacity building programme with activity providers and tourism service providers is delivered both prior to and following the launch of the Blueway. This will be key to:

- Ensuring key stakeholders are aware of the Blueway proposition
- Ensuring key stakeholders are empowered to promote and champion the Blueway
- Developing a range of engaging visitor experiences
- Developing a range of themes and itineraries

The optimum scenario is for Blueways to have a holistic visitor experience in place in advance of launch. However, it is realised that such capacity building can take time and often capital development is a necessary foundation on which to build trade engagement. Therefore, accredited Blueways must demonstrate a robust capacity building programme is in place to develop the sub criteria below within a reasonable period following launch.

Bars, Cafés, restaurants and attractions are easily accessible from trail heads and / or trails

Visitors should be able to access eateries and attractions preferably at trail heads and along the Blueway. As a minimum they should be available within short walking distance. These should be clearly identified within visitor information.

It may be appropriate for trail heads located in a more rural setting to offer mobile catering options. Although these should be sensitive to their setting.

The service provider engagement knowledge programme further discussed below should provide best practice advice as to how to tailor their offering to Blueway visitors e.g. bike racks, Blueway friendly picnics, non-fabric chairs etc.

Guided activity experiences appropriate for 'dabblers' are available and can be booked in advance

Activity experiences which are appropriate to 'Dabblers' are essential. Walking and cycling (with bike hire) can be self-led although guided tours will always enhance the experience. Trail cards, themed guides and interpretation should ensure the visitor can explore and engage with the culture and heritage.

Watersports must be guided by reputable activity providers (further guidance is provided in the Section 0). Whilst the participants will be required to learn the basics to enjoy the experience in a responsible manner, it is important activity providers offer more than a 'splash and dash' watersports

session. Guides should not only be technically competent but also able to confidently provide insights into the culture and heritage of the area.

It is important all activities are bookable in advance and not restricted to bookings by large groups.

Length of time

Offers an experience duration of between half a day to one day

The visitors' optimum time commitment to a Blueway will be between half a day to one day, therefore the activity experiences delivered should cater to this. The entire Blueway proposition may offer several half day to one day options but these should be easily identified through visitor information such as itineraries. Remember a 'Dabbler' will cover less ground in half a day than an enthusiast, so less is more.

As an approximate guide:

Mode	Average Travel Speed	Half Day Experience
Canoeing	3 kilometres per hour	3 – 6 kilometres
Walking	5 kilometres per hour	5 – 10 kilometres
Cycling	10-15 kilometres per hour	10 – 25 kilometres
Sailing & Windsurfing	Introductory sessions typically last 2-3 hours.	

Average Travel Speeds - are dependent on fitness levels, competence, wind strength etc.

Half Day Experience - It is important to remember participants are not seeking a lung busting challenge. A sense of achievement and exploration are important, but time should be left for relaxation, picnics, experiencing local culture and capturing the perfect Instagram shot.

Visitor information

The visitor can access information to allow them plan and enjoy their Blueway experience

Pre-Trip - It is important to remember the visitor experience begins at the decision making and booking stage therefore online information should be available to allow those planning to engage with a Blueway to:

- Understand the Blueway Concept
- Appreciate the unique selling points of the Blueway and component trails
- Assess which trail(s) are suitable for their ability and interests
- Gain information on activity / experience providers
- Gain contact details for further information
- Download appropriate trail cards & guides
- Update trail closures / diversions

Visitor Collateral – As a minimum the Blueway should be accompanied by a hard copy trail card. Depending on the scale of the Blueway this may be separated into a number of print pieces in order to provide an appropriate scale.

1.2. Technical Shared Use Trails

Shared Use Trails are compliant with Blueways Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails

At a minimum, Shared Use Trails should be compliant with Blueways Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails. In order to comply:

Republic of Ireland – Trails should be listed on the National Trails Register managed by Sport Ireland. Existing trails which have been inspected within the past two years do not need further inspection. New trails and existing trails which have undergone significant alterations since the last inspection will require a new inspection.

Trails will be inspected in accordance with **Sport Ireland Registration Inspection Request Form – Shared Use Trails** – <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-06/sport-ireland-outdoors-registration-inspection-request-form-walking-trails-23-06-20.docx>

Northern Ireland – All trails should be inspected in accordance with **Blueways Ireland Registration Inspection Form walking trails (link will be inserted when developed)**

Walking Trails

Walking Trails are compliant with Blueways Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails

Trails should be appropriate to the needs of the Blueway Visitor and therefore the majority of walking trails should be Class 1 or Class 2 Walking Trails as per **Sport Ireland - Classification and Grading of Recreational Trails**. However, Class 3 trails may also be incorporated.

https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/classification_grading_of_recreational_trails.pdf

In order to comply:

Republic of Ireland – Trails should be listed on the National Trails Register managed by Sport Ireland. Existing trails which have been inspected within the past two years do not need further inspection. New trails and existing trails which have undergone significant alterations since the last inspection will require a new inspection.

Trails will be inspected and assessed in accordance with **Sport Ireland Registration Inspection Request form-** <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-06/sport-ireland-outdoors-registration-inspection-request-form-walking-trails-23-06-20.docx>

Northern Ireland – All trails should be inspected in accordance with **Blueways Ireland Registration Inspection Form – walking trails (link will be inserted when developed)**

Cycling Trails

Cycling Trails are compliant with Blueways Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails

Cycling Trails should be compliant with Blueways Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails. Trails should be appropriate to the needs of the Blueway Visitor. Off-road cycling trails should be Class 1 or Class 2. Road Based Cycling Trails should be 'Easy' i.e. on dedicated or segregated cycle tracks as per **Sport Ireland -Classification and Grading of Recreational Trails**

https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/classification_grading_of_recreational_trails.pdf

In order to comply:

Republic of Ireland – Trails should be listed on the National Trails Register managed by Sport Ireland. Existing trails which have been inspected within the past two years do not need further inspection. New trails and existing trails which have undergone significant alterations since the last inspection will require a new inspection.

Trails will be inspected and assessed in accordance with **Sport Ireland Registration Inspection Request Form – Cycling Trails** -<https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2020-01/sport-ireland-checklist-for-trail-registration-cycling-trails-ver-20-september-2019.doc>

Northern Ireland – All trails should be inspected in accordance with **Blueways Ireland Registration Inspection Form – Cycling Trails (link will be inserted when developed)**

Snorkel Trails

Snorkel Trails follow the guidelines of the Irish Underwater Council

Snorkel Trails should follow best practice guidelines as developed by the Irish Underwater Council. See **Error! Reference source not found.**

A Blueway which incorporates a snorkel trail(s) should be able to demonstrate how they have consulted and taken guidance from the Irish Underwater Council. Trails should be appropriate to the needs of the Blueway Visitor and therefore should be 'Grade 1'.

Paddling Trails

Paddling Trails Follow the Blueway Paddling Trail Guidelines

Paddling Trails should follow the Blueway Paddling Trail Guidelines. See **Error! Reference source not found.**

A Blueway which incorporates a paddling trail should be able to demonstrate how they have consulted and taken guidance from Canoeing Ireland / Canoe Association for Northern Ireland. Trails should be appropriate to the needs of the Blueway Visitor (see Section 0).

Sailing & Windsurfing Sites

Sailing & Windsurfing activities will take place in centres that have either Irish Sailing or RYANI accreditation.

Signage

All signage is compliant with the Blueway Signage Guidelines

The Blueway should be compliant with Blueway Signage Guidelines and the relevant elements of the aforementioned trail standards / guidelines. See Appendix 7.

Once potential Blueways have successfully passed the Initial Application Stage (see section **Error! Reference source not found.**), they will be in a position to utilise the brand in order to enable the design of signage and collateral. Final approval will be required on all artwork to ensure compliance to brand guidelines.

Trailhead Facilities

Trail heads are clearly identified and offer adequate parking

Toilet and changing facilities are available within close proximity to water-based trail heads

Each of the aforementioned trail standards and guidelines provide requirements relating to trail heads.

Managing User Conflict

Consideration and identification of steps to mitigate against potential conflict with waterway / trail users has been undertaken

The aim of Blueway development is to enhance recreational opportunities therefore it is important that consideration is given to the impact development may have on existing formal or informal recreation. For example:

- A local gun club may have shooting rights within a forest being considered trail development
- A local motorsports club may hold events within a forest being considered trail development
- A section of waterway proposed for the paddling trail development may be a popular angling beat

Through proactive engagement, the majority of issues can be addressed to provide an amicable outcome.

Accessibility / Inclusivity

Reasonable steps have been undertaken to provide disabled access

Blueway developers should avail of the opportunity provided by developing a new outdoor recreation experience to undertake reasonable steps to provide disabled access through policies and practice.

Design

The Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) base their guidelines² on the principle of 'Universal Design' i.e.

'designing products, buildings, services, facilities and exterior spaces to allow the maximum number of people to use them without the need for adaptation or specialised design. Physical, sensory, cognitive and language needs are taken into account during the initial design phase. Universal Design

² Best Practice Access Guidelines – Designing Accessible Environments – Irish Wheelchair Association (July 2014)

eliminates the necessity for specific disabled access provision, while at the same time reducing barriers and promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities.'

A copy of the new 'Access Outdoors' publication provides guidance to developers on this subject and can be obtained from <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/great-outdoors-a-guide-for-accessibility.pdf>

The Fieldfare Trust³ provides further pragmatic advice i.e. 'In most countryside networks all the paths and trails cannot and should not be made fully accessible. The two questions that arises are:

- what level of accessibility can be reasonably expected by all users?

and

- what level of accessibility can be reasonably provided by access managers?

The task of the countryside service provider is to balance these two questions and come up with a practical answer.

The Fieldfare Trust defines an accessible network as one which:

- gives all disabled people choices in the experiences they can enjoy in the wider countryside, the countryside immediately around settlements and urban green spaces
- gives disabled people the same range and quality of choices as everyone else
- includes fully accessible paths (i.e. to BT Countryside for All Standards)
- includes paths where the least restrictive access has been achieved;
- has all development and maintenance work leading to increased accessibility.

It is not a network which:

- has to have all its paths fully accessible;
- has just those routes which were easy to make accessible as the only ones available to disabled people;
- has generally good accessibility but not at the most popular or special sites

Blueway Developers are therefore encouraged to incorporate best practice during development. Useful references include:

- Sport Ireland – Classification and Grading of Trails
https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/classification_grading_of_recreational_trails.pdf
- Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland - Principles and Standards for Trail Development in Northern Ireland
<http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com/publication/outdoor-recreation-ni/best-practice/guidelines/principles-and-standards-for-trail-development-in-northern-ireland/>
- Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland – Accessible Walks Scheme
<http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Toolkit-to-Success-Accessible-Walks-Scheme- ORNI-2012.pdf>

³ A Good Practice Guide to Countryside Access for Disabled People – Fieldfare Trust

- Irish Wheelchair Association - Best Practice Access Guidelines – Designing Accessible Environments
<https://www.iwa.ie/downloads/about/iwa-access-guidelines.pdf>
- Irish Wheelchair Association - Access Outdoors
<https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-10/great-outdoors-a-guide-for-accessibility.pdf>
- Fieldfare Trust - A Good Practice Guide to Countryside Access for Disabled People
http://www.eau.ie/~bell/Recreation_course%202008-9/Countryside%20for%20All/Introduction.pdf
- Disability Sports Northern Ireland – Accessible Sport Facilities Design Guidelines
http://dsni.co.uk/files/Guide_1_Accessible_Sports_Facilities_Design_Guidelines_2016.pdf

Activity Delivery

There are a number of key considerations that outdoor activity providers need to be aware of when planning and running outdoor recreation activities for people with disabilities. The following toolkit provides practical guidance to assist providers to offer a safe, meaningful and enjoyable experience.

- Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland – Making Outdoor Activities Accessible
http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Toolkit-to-Success-Making-Outdoor-Activities-Accessible_ORNI-2012.pdf

Further guidance and support is available CARA the national organisation in the Republic of Ireland which promotes and supports sport and physical activity opportunities for people with disabilities. CARA offer specific training on Inclusive Adventure Activities. <https://caracentre.ie/training/>

1.3. Access Landowner / Authority Agreement

Access is permitted by all landowners and relevant authorities – public and private for a minimum period of 10 years.

The Blueway developer must provide documented evidence of permitted access from all landowners and relevant authorities.

Water and Land Ownership Considerations

Knowledge of land ownership and the land owners' requirements is crucial to Blueway Development. The official agreement of all the relevant landowners, sporting rights and navigation authorities is required to develop and in turn publicise a Blueway.

Identification of Land Owners

Public land - GIS has become an invaluable tool for identifying public land ownership. Many public agencies have provided land ownership data via sources such as www.heritagemaps.ie and <https://www.spatialni.gov.uk>.

Private land – Private landownership can be identified via a combination of

- Land registry searches – although the lack of registration does not necessarily mean the land is not owned by anyone
- Local consultation – with well-informed residents or local authorities
- Registry of deeds search – this often has to be conducted by a solicitor and should be a last resort

Other Considerations

Sporting Rights – A landowner may have sold or lease shooting rights e.g. for Pheasant.

Riparian Rights – This is a system allocating water amongst those who own land along its path, typically either side of a river or water body.

Harbour and Navigation Authorities – They are responsible for navigation and landing rights. It should be noted that existing navigation channels have priority over any subsequent water based trail

Fishing Rights – These can be owned by private individuals, state agencies or groups such as angling clubs. Useful sources on information include:

- Inland Fisheries Ireland <https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/State-Fisheries/state-fisheries.html>
- NI Direct <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/angling/where-can-i-fish-northern-ireland>
- National Governing Bodies and Local Angling Clubs

Identification and engagement with the fishing rights owner is key for three main reasons:

- Paddlers can become entangled in an angler's line
- Anglers should not be hindered in or prevented from exercising their fishing rights. Inappropriate actions by the water trail users such as splashing, loud noise or passing too close to the anglers or their lines can scare off fish and also undermine the angler's enjoyment of their activity
- Canoes often at low states of water can damage spawning beds

In many cases visitor information and activity provider education can reduce the potential for such conflict. In some cases, anglers and canoeists have amicably agreed to restrict their respective activities to set periods of the year.

Consultation and Agreement

Ideally consultation with landowners should take place before any trail route is communicated in detail to the general public. This occurrence has the potential to damage any future relationships with these stakeholders.

Whilst all landowners alongside the trail should be consulted out of courtesy (often this opportunity is provided through a public consultation or workshop), it is essential to consult and gain agreement with land owners and rights holders on which physical development will take place.

It is recommended that the agreement is documented and signed by the relevant parties. Public bodies will often have their own processes which will have to be followed. Agreements can often be established on a 'permissive' basis. This means the landowner gives permission for the trail to pass through their property. This permissive access means:

- the trail can be used by the public with the permission of the landowner in a way the landowner has specified and subject to any conditions he or she has agreed
- the landowner can withdraw this permission should they so wish, subject to reasonable notice
- the owner retains the right to divert or close the trail if they so wish, subject to reasonable notice

Insurance

Public liability insurance is in place providing indemnity for all infrastructure, land-based trails and water trails' access and egress points.

The Blueway developer must be able to provide evidence to demonstrate all infrastructure, land-based trails and water trail access points are indemnified under a public liability policy or policies.

In terms of a paddling trail the indemnity for private landowners is required for access and egress points and not for lands adjacent to the waterway.

In the Republic of Ireland, Blueway developers should liaise with Sport Ireland who in conjunction with Local Authorities retains a public liability insurance policy. This policy provides indemnity to private landowners and occupiers whose property/land is crossed or adjoins the trails listed on this policy.

Cover under this policy provides an indemnity to private landowners in respect of legal liability arising from claims involving personal injury or property damage sustained by persons whilst on landowners' land. The indemnity is valid whether the walker is on the trail or has strayed off it.

8.4 Safety Suitability

The experience is suitable for the 'dabbler / novice' with little to no skills or prior experience in undertaking adventure activities

The Blueway should be suitable to the needs of the 'dabbler' i.e. those that have little to no skills or prior experience in undertaking adventure activities. See Section **Error! Reference source not found..**

Section 1.2 provides clear guidelines relating to the technical suitability of trails.

These are summarised in the table below:

Activity / Trail	Grade	Guideline
Paddling Trails	River <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Grade 1 Flat Water' Inland Waterways <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Very Sheltered Inland Waterways' 'Sheltered Inland Water' Sea <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Sheltered Tidal Areas' 	Blueway Paddling Trail Guidelines – Appendix 6
Snorkelling Trails	Grade One	Snorkel Trail Guidelines – Appendix 5
Walking Trails	Class 1 or Class 2 ⁴	Sport Ireland - Classification and Grading of Recreational Trails
Cycle Trails	Off-road cycling trails <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class 1 or Class 2 Road Based Cycling Trails <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Easy' 	Sport Ireland - Classification and Grading of Recreational Trails

⁴ Trails should be appropriate to the needs of the Blueway Visitor and therefore the majority of walking trails should be Class 1 or Class 2. However, Class 3 trails may also be incorporated.

Responsibility

Visitors are not exposed to hidden dangers.

Visitors should be aware of the risks they will face and that safety is a shared responsibility between the visitor and the Blueway Manager.

As outlined by the Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group⁵

‘Visitors should be aware of the risks they will face. They also need to understand that although they have the right to appropriate protection they also have a responsibility to behave sensibly and take reasonable care for their own safety and the safety of others. Safety is a shared responsibility between the visitor and the land owner / manager.’

The signage guidelines in **Error! Reference source not found.** provide further guidance regarding providing awareness of risk. Further guidance on Visitor Safety Management is included with Section 0.

To demonstrate the shared responsibility between the visitor and the Blueway Developer / Manager the Responsibility Statement within Appendix 10 provides a useful basis for adaptation by individual Blueways.

Activity Providers / Experience

A programme is in place for activity providers to demonstrate their safety credentials

Blueway developers should establish and administer an activity provider permit system. Only those with permits should be included in Blueway promotional activity.

Many of the National Governing Bodies already provide robust external accreditation systems for activity providers within their discipline (See Appendix 8) and therefore these should be utilised where relevant. For those activities that do not provide external accreditation, it is recommended as a minimum the provider should provide evidence of:

- Relevant Technical Qualifications
- First Aid Qualifications
- Public Liability Insurance
- Risk Assessment
- Emergency Response Plan

In addition, Blueway developers may wish activity provider to demonstrate:

- Attendance at capacity building workshops
- Knowledge of the culture and heritage of the area
- Customer Service Experience

8.5 Conservation and the Environment

Blueways provide a unique way to engage with natural and built heritage assets. It is therefore essential that as a minimum Blueway development and management avoids any negative impact on

⁵ Managing Visitor Safety in the Countryside – Principle and Practice (2011), Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group

the environment. Fundamentally, the maintenance of a high level of water quality is vital to the success of a Blueway. In addition, the Blueway can add to or improve the environment e.g. through education and appropriate access.

It is essential to take a proactive approach to the potential impact of Blueway development on the environment for the outset of project planning. The following initial steps are recommended to guide project planning, design and mitigation:

- Ensure local ecological and heritage expertise is included within the Project Development Group - further discussed in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**
- Undertake an appraisal of 'constraints'. It is important to commission the relevant expertise, for example, an ecologist constraints study conducted by a reputable ecologist will ensure the project is in an informed position
- Engage in pre-planning consultation with the local authority
- Consult and comprehend actions and recommendations with District River Basin Management Plans (Northern Ireland) and Areas for Action for the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2018 – 2021 (Republic of Ireland)
- Engage with Local Authority Water and Communities Office (Republic of Ireland) and DAERA Catchment Officers (Northern Ireland)

Statutory Approval

Evidence of consultation and approval with appropriate statutory bodies can be demonstrated

The nature of Blueways means that it is likely that development proposals may impact on sensitive sites and species of nature conservation. It is therefore essential Blueway developers take cognisance of the ecological assessment, project authorisation (e.g. planning permission) and ongoing project management considerations at an early stage.

It is essential to consider the impact of the Blueway in its entirety rather than only focusing on sections in or close to natural and built heritage assets. It is important not only to consider the direct impact of physical developments such as access points but also the impact of an increased volume of visitors using the entire Blueway route. For example, whilst an access points may not be developed within a sensitive site, its placement may increase the volume of people passing a nearby sensitive site e.g. seal haul out.

Natural Heritage Designations

The impact on following natural heritage designations should be considered during planning, design and development:

International

- **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** are designated under the EU Habitats Directive. These are the prime wildlife conservation areas in the country and are considered to be important on a European as well as an Irish level. Most SACs are in the countryside, although a few sites do reach into town or city landscapes e.g. rivers. SACs include – rivers woodlands, raised/blanket bogs, sand dunes, machairs, lakes, estuaries, sea inlets, etc.
- **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** are designated under the EU Birds Directive. Because birds migrate long distances it is not sufficient to protect them over just one part of their range,

and hence the EU Birds Directive provides for a network of sites across all the Member States which protects birds at their areas of breeding, feeding, roosting and wintering. It also identifies species which are rare, in danger of extinction or vulnerable to changes in habitat, and which thus need protection. Wetlands are particularly important habitats for these species.

- **RAMSAR** - The Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) is an intergovernmental treaty whose mission is "the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world". As of January 2016, 169 nations have joined the Convention as Contracting Parties, and more than 2,220 wetlands around the world, covering over 214 million hectares, have been designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Republic of Ireland Specific

- **Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs)** are designated under the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2010. NHAs are so designated because they are considered important for the habitats present, or they contain species of plants and animals whose habitat needs protection. There is a wide range of NHAs – raised bogs, blanket bogs, roosting sites for bats, woodlands, lakes, etc. Some sites are afforded designation as proposed Natural Heritage Areas e.g. Royal and Grand Canals.
- **Nature Reserves** are areas of importance for wildlife which are protected under Ministerial Order, in accordance with the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2010. Most are owned by the State, however, some are owned by private landowners or organisations.
- **National Parks** are designated in accordance with the criteria set down by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The purpose of National Parks is to conserve plants, animals and scenic landscapes which are both extensive and of national importance, and under conditions compatible with that purpose, to enable the public to visit and appreciate them. There are six National Parks in the country, all of which are State owned and managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Northern Ireland Specific

- **Marine Conservation Zones** safeguard vulnerable or unique marine species and habitats of national importance in the Northern Ireland inshore region based on an ecosystem approach. These MCZs fulfil the obligations of The Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 (the "Act") to contribute to an ecologically coherent UK network of MPAs as well as wider biodiversity commitments at European and global level.
- **Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs)** are protected areas that represent the best of our wildlife and geological sites that make a considerable contribution to the conservation of our most valuable natural places. The law relating to ASSIs is contained in the Environment Order (Northern Ireland) 2002

Natural Heritage Designations can be identified by:

- National Park and Wildlife Service (Republic of Ireland)
<http://webgis.npws.ie/npwsviewer/>
- NIEA Natural Environment Map Viewer (Northern Ireland)
<https://apps.daira-ni.gov.uk/nedmapviewer>

Other Protections

In addition, the aforementioned Natural Heritage designations there are a range of other habitats/species of high conservation value which must be considered.

- NIEA Guidance (Northern Ireland)
<https://www.daira-ni.gov.uk/articles/plant-or-animal-species-protected-by-law>
- NPWS Guidance
<https://www.npws.ie/development%20consultations>

Biosecurity / Invasive Alien Species

The quality of the local water environment and the need to protect it is paramount. At an early stage Blueway developers should consult with River Basin Management Plans and engage with the following:

- DAERA District Catchment Officers
<https://www.daira-ni.gov.uk/articles/delivery-and-public-participation>
- Water and Communities Office – Community Water Officers
<http://watersandcommunities.ie/community-water-officers>

Due to the importance of this issue, further detail is outlined in a separate section below.

Consultation

The following organisations should be consulted and guidance of the appropriate is available below:

National Parks and Wildlife Service

<https://www.npws.ie/development%20consultations>

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

<https://www.daira-ni.gov.uk/articles/when-niea-consulted>

Built Heritage

The impact on built heritage within the following designations should also be considered

Republic of Ireland

The impact on the following designation should be considered:

- Monuments protected in the following ways:
 - Recorded in the Record of Monuments and Places
 - Registered in the Register of Historic Monuments
 - National monument subject to a preservation order (or temporary preservation order).
 - National monument in the ownership or guardianship of the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht or a Local Authority.
 - Guidance is provided at <https://www.archaeology.ie/monument-protection>

- Archaeological sites listed under Archaeological Survey of Ireland's Site and Monuments Database <https://www.archaeology.ie/contact-us/archaeological-survey-ireland>
- Protected Structures – these are listed in each Local authority area within the Register of Protected Structures
http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/housing/building_or_altering_a_home/protected_structures.html

Northern Ireland

The impact on the following designation should be considered:

- Historic Parks, Gardens and Demesnes
- Scheduled Sites or Monuments
- State Care Site or Monuments
- Scheduled Zones
- Listed Buildings

These and other relevant considerations can be viewed via the Historic Environment Map Viewer

<https://dfcgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=6887ca0873b446e39d2f82c80c8a9337>

Consultation

The following organisations should be consulted and guidance is available below:

Historic Environment Division (Northern Ireland)

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/historic-environment-division-structure-and-contacts>

National Monuments Service (Republic of Ireland)

<https://www.archaeology.ie/contact-us>

Other Permissions and Permits

Trail developments may require a number of other permissions from State Agencies, depending on the type and location of the development.

Inland Fisheries Ireland (Republic of Ireland) <https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/>

Where any trail development works are proposed alongside, or close to, a river, lake or watercourse, consultation should take place with Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI). A new slipway, quay or canoe step at a watercourse should also be discussed with IFI, who can advise on precautions to be taken to prevent any discharges of silt or soil.

Inland Fisheries Ireland has developed a Guidance Document to the IFI Environmental Assessment Process describing the process and procedures in place within IFI to facilitate development and conservation works within Ireland's inland and coastal waters.

<https://www.fisheriesireland.ie/NSAD/environmental-assessment-process.html>

Rivers Agency (Northern Ireland) <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/rivers-and-watercourses>

Rivers Agency maintains and inspects watercourses in Northern Ireland to make sure these are free flowing. This helps prevent flooding and improves land drainage.

Discharging into a watercourse, or doing works that will affect the free flow of a watercourse, requires consent to be applied for from Rivers Agency.

Planning Permission

Car park and buildings planning permission is typically required for the construction of a new car park, or a building such as a toilet/shower block. However, slipways, canoe steps and quays are also likely to require planning permission. Early consultation with the planning section of the relevant local authority is recommended where any doubt exists about planning requirements.

Biosecurity and Invasive Alien Species

Proactive measures are in place to stop the spread of invasive species and harmful pathogens

Invasive Species Ireland highlights that invasive non-native plant and animal species are the second greatest threat to biodiversity worldwide after habitat destruction. They can negatively impact on native species, can transform habitats and threaten whole ecosystems causing serious problems to the environment and the economy. Fundamentally, they can be highly detrimental to the key asset on which the Blueway is dependent i.e. water quality.

Unfortunately, waterways both Northern Ireland and the Republic Ireland have been significantly impacted by biosecurity issues (e.g. Crayfish Plague) and aliens invasive species (e.g. zebra mussel) in recent years.

It is essential Blueways undertake proactive measure to stop the spread of invasive species and harmful pathogens. A biosecurity plan is therefore an essential part of Blueway accreditation and should be incorporated within a Blueway Management Plan (see Section 8.6). It is worth noting that the Blueway development is unlikely to be the only factor impacting on the management of biosecurity and alien invasive species within the water catchment. For example, other recreation users such as anglers, marina operators, aquaculturists and horticulturists with also be part of the solution, therefore successful management with require an integrated approach.

It should be recognised that the typical Blueway visitor are mobile i.e. small kayaks, canoes, windsurfers, bikes etc are more likely to cross between catchments and various water bodies on a much more regular basis than general waterways users. It is also recognised that kayakers, canoeists, stand up paddle boarders have direct contact with the water and this can result in them inadvertently becoming a carrier of aquatic invasive alien species.

The overriding principle regarding biosecurity is that prevention is better than cure therefore awareness, education and training are key to successful biosecurity action planning within water catchments. This is an area that requires relevant expertise, an initial contact point for advice and guidance should be:

- DAERA District Catchment Officers
<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/delivery-and-public-participation>
- Waters and Communities Office – Community Water Officers
<http://watersandcommunities.ie/community-water-officers>

Appendix 9 provides a further example guidance developed by Local Authority Waters and Communities Office of how preventative measures can be communicated the Blueway visitors.

Environmental Education

Leave No Trace Ireland Principles have been incorporated

Leave No Trace

Leave No Trace is an outdoor ethics programme designed to promote and inspire responsible outdoor recreation through education, research and partnerships. The programme is delivered throughout the island of Ireland by Leave No Trace Ireland.

At the heart of Leave No Trace are 7 principles for reducing the damage caused by outdoor activities.

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Be Considerate of Others
3. Respect Farm Animals and Wildlife
4. Travel and Camp on Durable Ground
5. Leave What You Find
6. Dispose of Waste Properly
7. Minimise the Effects of Fire

As a minimum Blueway developers should incorporate the Leave No Trace Principles within information boards. However, it is recommended Leave No Trace Awareness Sessions should be offered to service provider. These can be tailored according to the waterway, for example Leave No Trace Ireland has recently developed a 'Coast' edition of the Leave No Trace Ireland Skills and Ethics series to complement the original mainstay edition.

The Coast edition explains how you can best enjoy the coast and its wildlife, without causing harm. The original Leave No Trace Ireland Skills and Ethics programme is applicable for many situations and contains additional information. The practices in the booklet are appropriate for all coastal locations in Ireland. By following the code, and showing it to other people, will ensure that this part of Irish heritage survives for all to appreciate in years to come.

For more information see <http://www.leavenotraceireland.org>

Other relevant well-resourced and robust schemes include:

The Green Blue – Making the environment second nature <https://www.thegreenblue.org.uk/>

The Green Blue is an innovative environmental programme developed by British Marine and the Royal Yachting Association. The programme provides practical advice and information to help recreational boaters, watersports participants and marine businesses to think and act in an environmentally conscious way. The overall aim of the programme is to work towards promoting a sustainable boating community which will help to save money, avoid red tape and safeguard the waters and habitats for the future.

WiSe Scheme

The WiSe (Wildlife Safe) is the United Kingdom Standard for commercial marine wildlife watching. It aims to promote responsible wildlife-watching, through training, accreditation and awareness-raising.

The core element to WiSe, is a modular training and accreditation course aimed primarily at operators of passenger pleasure craft, wildlife cruise operators, dive and service boats, and yacht skippers. These individuals are most likely to come into contact with marine wildlife, as they are out on the water on a regular basis.

WiSe training consists of instruction in how to responsibly watch wildlife, whilst at the same time minimising any potential disturbance. All WiSe accredited operators received instruction in how to handle their craft whilst in contact with any of these animals, how they may react to the presence of boats, and how to leave them room to carry on with their lives unimpeded.

All WiSe operators receive instruction into their local and national laws relating to wildlife. They will receive instruction on species identification, life history and behaviour of a range of species they may encounter in their local waters. All WiSe operators agree to abide by Codes of Conduct for all of the species covered by WiSe, as well as all relevant local or national laws and bylaws.

WiSe Instructors have been specially selected in all areas around the UK for their years of experience in the field, their knowledge of the species likely to be encountered in their locality, and local conservation issues relating to marine wildlife that are of particular relevance.

Litter

The Blueway is free from litter and fly-tipped waste

This aspect will be assessed under the technical standards relating to specific trails.

8.6 Sustainability Management Group

A Blueway Management Group is in place – led by a Local Authority or State Agency

Partnership will be key to the successful development and ongoing management of a Blueway.

The establishment of a Blueway Management Group should formalise the partnership via a mechanism such as a Partnership Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

A Partnership Agreement or MOU will typically include the following:

- Aims and Objectives
- Spirit of the agreement i.e. collaboration
- Synopsis of overall activities
- Term, Termination and Review
- Specific Agreements – these may include:
 - Key Responsibilities of each party
 - Key Contacts / Representatives
 - Financial obligations / budgets
 - Branding
 - Intellectual Property

To ensure ongoing sustainability the group should be led by a local authority or state agency

Management Plan

A Blueway Management Plan is in place

Every Blueway project should include the development of a Management Plan. This is good practice for a range of reasons that include:

- Blueway management that ensures the safety of users is considered and that trail standards are maintained at a consistent level
- Blueway management that relates directly to the liability of the Blueway Provider. Proper evidence of an implemented Management Plan will reduce the likelihood of the Blueway Provider being found at fault should a claim resulting from injury on the Blueway arise
- Funding – many funders will require evidence of a Management Plan that clearly shows how the Blueway Management Group will ensure that the trail(s) project will be managed for a specified period of time, normally the duration for which their Letter of Offer is valid. This provides evidence that there is a procedure in place to ensure that the Blueway is maintained at the standard and for the purpose for which the project was funded
- Partner buy-in – a Blueway Management Plan ensures that all project partners are clear about the commitment required to managing the project, once completed. The Plan will also clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners.

The Blueway Management Plan should:

- Clearly relate to the requirements of the members of the Blueway Management Group
- Be developed by individuals who have an understanding of Blueway management, provision and development within the context of the area
- Clearly reflect the development process for that Blueway to date

The Trail Management Plan should include (but is not limited to):

- Visitor Safety Management Policy and Plan
- Biosecurity Plan
- Blueway Product Inventory
- Maintenance Plan
- Risk Assessment
- Marketing Plan

Visitor Safety Management Policy and Plan

The best practice in this area is outlined within Managing Visitor Safety in the Countryside – Principles and Practice. <http://vscg.org/publications/> . The Blueway Steering Group encourages the adoption of these risk management techniques.

Developed by the Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group⁶ the guiding principles and risk management techniques have been developed and implemented by all of its members. They have provided their worth in practice and have been recognised by enforcing authorities and courts, as the basis for sensible risk management.



⁶ The Ireland Branch was formed in 2013 and is focused on the issues facing the Irish members such as the visitor risk assessment process and a common approach to information and signage. A number of Irish organisations have been members of the VSCG since the 2013 launch and this continues to grow year on year.

Protocols and Procedures

The Visitor Safety Management Plan should clearly set out the protocols and procedures that will be followed to ensure that the Blueway Provider is meeting the Duty of Care. This will include:

The number and content of inspections:

- Inspections will include formal e.g. once a month, or informal e.g. after a storm, an event, or provided via feedback from a user.
- All inspections should be recorded including the date, time, who completed the inspection and the action to be taken following the inspection.

Who will complete the inspections:

- Consideration should be given as to who will complete the inspections. This may include a paid member of staff, volunteers or a company contracted to deliver the service. It is important to consider the skills and experience required to complete inspections and ensure that the person completing the inspection has the necessary skills.

Actions resulting from inspections:

- The reporting structure of any inspections must be clearly set out to ensure that action is taken where required. The action required can be prioritised in terms of urgency. For example –
 - Priority 1 - within a day
 - Priority 2 - within a week
 - Priority 3 - within a month
 - Priority 4 - within 3 months
 - Priority 5 - within 6 months

For example:

- Missing/ damaged waymarkers/ information or warning signs - Priority 1/ 2
- Fallen trees/ branches across trails - Priority 1
- Waymarkers/information or signs partially obscured by vegetation – Priority 2 /3
- Damage to trail tread – Priority 1 to 5, depending on level of damage

In some cases, for example if a tree has fallen across a section of trail (Priority 1), the section of trail will need to be closed and a suitable diversion put in place. This section of trail should remain closed and users informed of this until the tree has been safely removed. A suitable diversion route will need to be put in place and this will also need to be inspected as part of the normal inspection regime of the trail for the duration of the diversion.

Informing Users:

- The procedure for informing Trail Users of any diversions/ trail closures or other trail related issues must be clearly set out in the Management Policy. This should include clear and appropriate signage/ information at the trailhead, online, and at the start of the relevant section. This information should remain in place until the necessary works have been carried out to address the problem. The Management Plan should also identify who is responsible for ensuring the relevant trail information is put in place and removed again once the issue has been resolved. A clear record of the action taken should be kept.

Blueway Product Inventory

The purpose of this is to establish an inventory for all parts of the Blueway product once it is completed. This will form the baseline standard for inspections. The aim of the Blueway Provider should be to maintain and manage the product consistently at this baseline standard. The Trail Product Inventory should include the following key elements:

- Infrastructure Inventory
- Trail Inventory
- Waymarking Inventory
- Signage Inventory
- Information Inventory
- Product Literature Inventory
- Counter Inventory

Maintenance Plan

A crucial part of the Management Plan is the Maintenance Plan. Records of all maintenance must be kept including the date, time, detail of work completed and by whom. A pro forma should be established to record all maintenance.

The maintenance plan should include –

When maintenance takes place:

There will be regular maintenance required, for example – Clearing back encroaching vegetation on a regular basis especially throughout the growing season

There will also be ad hoc maintenance requirements e.g. repairing trail features. The ad hoc maintenance will be identified during the formal and informal inspections and a clear protocol and procedure for this should be established

The amount of maintenance required will be influenced by a range of factors including level of use, the weather, time of year and the type of trail features. For example, extra maintenance may be required after a busy bank holiday weekend, after an event or following a storm.

The standard to which the trails should be maintained

As previously discussed, it is recommended the standards are based on the Blueway Product Inventory baseline

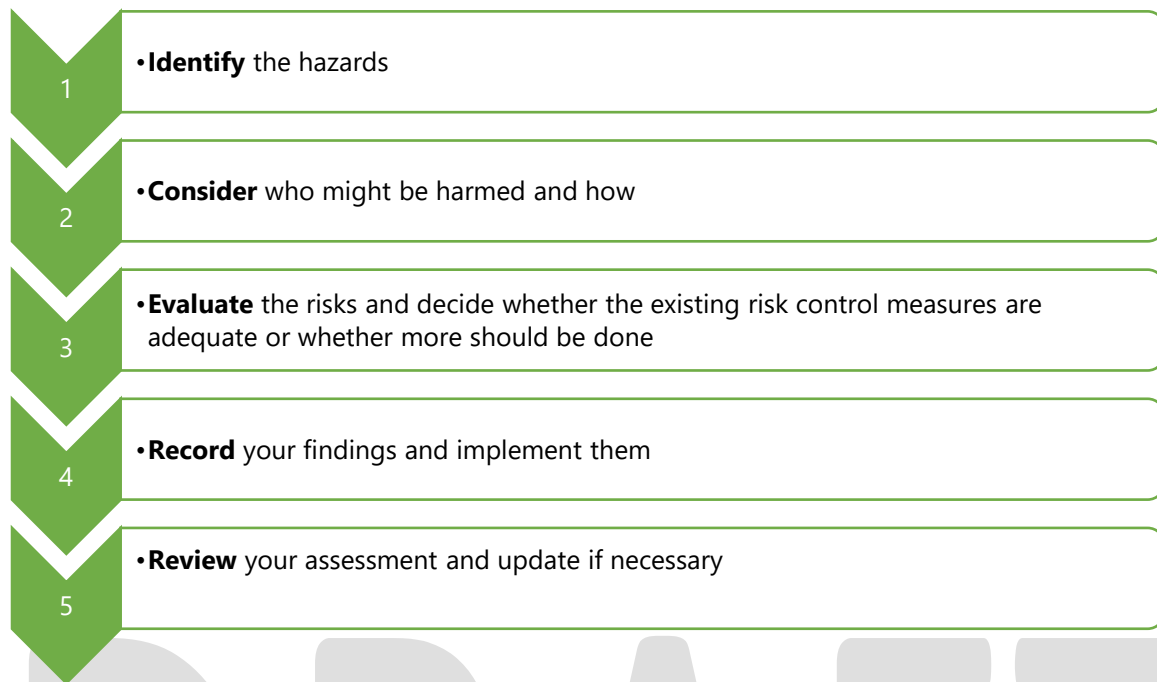
Who will complete maintenance?

It is important the roles and responsibility for maintenance is clearly defined. Different aspects may be maintained by different partners. It is important that the person(s) completing maintenance have the necessary skills/ experience/ qualifications required to complete the works.

Risk Assessment

As per the Visitor Safety Management Policy and Plan, the best practice in this area is outlined within Managing Visitor Safety in the Countryside – Principles and Practice. <http://vscg.org/publications/> . The Blueway Steering Group encourages the adoption of these risk management techniques.

The following five step approach is recommended:



Hazard - is anything with the potential to cause harm

Risk - is the likelihood, high or low, that somebody will be harmed by the hazard, the severity of the harm and the number of people who might be hurt

Risk Control Measures - are precautions to make an incident less likely to occur and / or the results less severe.

Marketing Plan

To ensure that the Blueway is effectively promoted, a marketing professional should create a targeted Marketing Plan. This should clearly identify the relevant target market(s) and how they will be attracted to the Blueway.

A range of factors including the objectives of the Blueway and the marketing budget available will influence the level of marketing activity. It should also be clearly identified who is responsible for implementing the Marketing Plan.

Monitoring

A formal process is in place to monitor the impact of the Blueway

It is essential to monitor and evaluate the impact of the Blueway in terms of both economics and participation levels.

In addition, it is essential to monitor visitor feedback in order to manage, maintain and improve the Blueway offering. Visitor feedback can relate to immediate issues such as damaged infrastructure but it is also important to monitor visitor experience feedback. Techniques may include:

- Electronic Visitor Counters
- Email / Telephone
- Social Media / Review Sites

Questionnaires (e.g. Survey Monkey) via tourism operators