



Advisory Note 2

Blueway Planning Process

Prepared by Outdoor Recreation NI on behalf of the Blueway Partnership

10. Blueway Planning Process

This section outlines the recommended process for successfully planning and developing Blueways in Ireland. The reality of outdoor recreation means the steps in this process may not be delivered in a linear fashion i.e. there will inevitably be overlap, however, it is important each step is delivered.



10.1 Scoping – Concept Generation

A high-level scoping exercise is important to establish an overview concept for a potential Blueway. This concept document will be key to encouraging the necessary partners to engage with the remaining stages of the planning process.

It should be made clear the concept is a discussion document on which input is welcomed. This will ensure stakeholders feel they have a key role from the outset. The initial concept document can be quite brief; however, it is recommended it includes the following:

Aims & Objectives – see 10.2

Scope and Scale – see 10.2

Concept Map

A concept map is a useful tool to spatially present the opportunities and challenges. Although care should be taken to ensure its confidentiality so as not to upset any potential stakeholders (e.g. private landowners) that have not yet been made aware of the project.

The most effective method of Concept Map development is via GIS in order to:

Identify:

- Public / Private land boundaries
- Existing recreation infrastructure / trails
- Connectivity of towns and villages
- Statutory designations
- Council boundaries
- Relevant attractions

Annotate

- Proposed Trails / Trailhead
- Proposed water access / egress point

Calculate

- Length of trails

Analysis of strengths and weaknesses vs accreditation criteria

This should include a snapshot analysis of the proposed Blueway's potential to meet the accreditation criteria (See section **Error! Reference source not found.**). Engagement with relevant experts may be required. There will inevitably be 'unknowns' identified at this stage, however, it is important they are outlined along with indicative methods of address.

Initial guidance and feedback from the Blueways Accreditation Advisor will add value and direction at this stage. **Engagement with the Blueways Accreditation Advisor is essential prior to making any applications for funding.**

Key Stakeholder Identification

Successful Blueway development will require a partnership approach. It is therefore important to identify the relevant bodies, organisations and individuals that will add the required resource and expertise to bring the project to fruition. A key stakeholder workshop is a useful technique to begin engagement. This process should begin to identify those:

- Responsible for the delivery of the Blueway
- Responsible for the ongoing management of the Blueway
- Who will have a key role in the delivery

10.2 Establish Development Group / Frame of Reference

Project Development Group

The aforementioned key stakeholder engagement should identify the most relevant representatives to add value to a Project Development Group. It is important from the outset to state clearly the commitment expectations of group members. The group should be formally established with a designated chairperson from the lead organisation

Key stakeholders may include:

- Local Authority
- Local Development Company
- Tourism Organisations
- Local Sports Partnership
- National Governing Bodies of Sport
- Public Landowners / Managers
- Navigations authority
- Non-Governmental Environment Groups
- User groups – e.g. local canoe club

Frame of Reference

The development of a formal Frame of Reference will guide and inform the project throughout. It is also essential to secure partner buy-in and ensure that everyone is working to the same agenda.

The Frame of Reference should identify:

- Scope and Scale
- Aims and Objectives
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Concept Plan

Scope and Scale

Establishing the intended scope and scale means agreeing the significance and the size of the project. This is essential if the right outcomes are to be achieved.

Establishing the scope and scale of any trail development involves answering key questions such as:

- Who is the target market? e.g. is this for local community, day visitors or tourists?
- What is the significance of the trail project within the area in terms of existing or other planned provision? e.g. is this the only trail or is it one of many in the local area/ region?
- What is the desired economic and social impact of the trails? e.g. to create jobs, lead to increased visitor spend, provide a place for local people to get active outdoors, to increase participation in the sport, etc.
- Is the project of community, regional, national or international significance?
- How many people and communities is the development likely to affect/ impact upon?

Aims and Objectives

Clearly defined project aim(s) and objectives are important to ensure all partners are in agreement about what the Blueway will achieve.

Generally, there is one clear overall aim for the project; this is the main reason why the project is taking place. The objectives should then all relate to the achievement of this aim. These will be shaped by the project scope and scale, as previously identified. The project aim(s) and objectives can be extremely varied and can relate to the following:

- Creating a tourism facility of regional, national or international importance
- Creating a community recreation resource
- Managing the impact of current recreation on land use
- Managing the impact of recreation on a landscape or habitat
- Managing safety and liability
- Managing user conflict

In order to provide the necessary clarity, it is advised to employ either

- SMART Goal Setting – **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, **T**ime-Bound

Or

- **O**utcome **B**ased **A**ccountability (OBA) – stating Outcomes, Indicators of Success and Measures of Success

Define Role and Responsibilities

It is essential to define roles (including project lead) and responsibilities for the development of the project. This will initially relate to the development of the project; however, it is also essential to identify the roles and responsibilities for ongoing project management.

10.3 Feasibility Study and Development Action Plan

This detailed feasibility study will undertake a critical review of the proposed Blueway against the Blueway Accreditation Criteria outlined in detail within Section **Error! Reference source not found.** i.e.

- Experience
- Technical
- Access
- Safety
- Conservation and Environment
- Sustainability

For each of the sub-criteria, the feasibility study should identify:

- Current position
- Potential to meet the criteria
- Recommended action(s) to move from current to required position

It may be necessary to commission external expertise to assess some of the criteria e.g. Technical Criteria. It is essential to be realistic at this stage, if the Blueway is unlikely to meet some the criteria then it is important to alter the proposal whilst remaining in line with the Frame of Reference or cease

the process. The recommended actions should be formed within a Development Plan with defined responsibilities against relevant stakeholders.

Indicative costs and delivery timelines should also be identified at this point.

10.4 Initial Application

The aforementioned Feasibility Study and Action Plan will form the basis of the Initial Application submitted to the Blueways Accreditation Advisor. The Initial application form / questionnaire will be developed by Blueways Accreditation Advisor.

The Initial Application will be assessed by the Blueways Accreditation Advisor. The feedback and recommendations from the assessment will be ratified by the Blueways Ireland Steering Group.

The Initial applications will provide the opportunity for a review of the potential for a proposed Blueway to meet the requirements of the accreditation criteria. The review of a concise Initial application form at an early stage in the process will allow the Blueway Steering Group to provide direction to Blueway developers before further money, time and resource is invested. The feedback may provide an endorsement of the current proposal, advice on areas for improvement or determine if the proposal is not viable in its current form.

10.5 Refine the development plan

Following feedback from the Blueways Ireland Steering Group it may be necessary to refine the development plan accordingly.

It will then be necessary to deliver on the actions required to place the project in a position for a funding application. For example, this may include:

- Securing Formal (written) Agreement with landowners
- Preparation of detailed design Detailed trail / infrastructure
- Preparation of signage concepts
- Preparation of detailed costs
- Securing of planning permission
- Securing statutory approvals – commission additional environmental studies required

10.6 Secure Funding

The aforementioned steps will place the project in a 'shovel – ready' position which is an attractive position for funders seeking a safe return on investment.

Applying for funding requires energy, time and commitment. Prior research and engagement in relation to your project's eligibility against funding criteria is increasingly encouraged by funders.

10.7 Plan and Complete the Development Work

Once all the necessary funding is in place, the project can move to development phase.

Capital

Depending on the capacity and expertise of the project partners, this may involve securing the services of external contractors. In this scenario the appointment of an experienced Consultant Project Management (CPM) Team is recommended to oversee the tendering process. The CPM Team will be able to provide advice on the type and form of contract(s), prepare necessary documentation, assess tender submissions, appoint contractors and oversee works.

Capacity Building

With a timeline identified for capital works, it is important that the capacity building programme is delivered to:

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

Marketing / Visitor Information

The development of visitor information such as website and supporting visitor collateral should also be developed at this stage.

10.8 Final Application and Inspection

Blueway Developers will be required to prepare and submit a final detailed application against the Blueway Accreditation Criteria. Application Forms can be found on www.bluewaydevelopment.org

A key element of this stage will be an on the ground inspection of the proposed Blueway by the Blueways Accreditation Advisor. A representative of the Blueway Development Group, who is familiar with the route must accompany the inspector during the on-the-ground inspection.

The Blueways Accreditation Advisor will prepare a detailed inspection / assessment report which will recommend if a Blueway has achieved accreditation. This will be ratified by the Blueways Ireland Steering Group who will be recognised as the awarding body for Blueway accreditation.

In certain circumstances the Blueways Accreditation Advisor and Blueways Ireland Steering Group may require specialist advice from a Technical Advisory Panel.

Where a Blueway does not apply with the accreditation criteria, a listing of any corrective actions will be provided. Once these actions are addressed and confirmed, the Blueways Accreditation Advisor, the trail will receive accreditation. Further inspection may be required.

10.9 Launch and Promote

Following accreditation, the Blueway can be officially launched and promoted to the public.

10.10 Manage and Monitor

Once the Blueway has received accreditation it will be the responsibility of the Blueway Management Group /developer to ensure it continues to meet the standards set out in the Blueway Accreditation Criteria.

Blueways wishing to retain accreditation will be re-inspected every three years. This will be conducted by the Blueways Accreditation Advisor and ratified by the Blueways Steering Group.

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