

IRISH BLUEWAY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Phase 3: Blueway Management and

Development Guide

August 2018

(Revised August 2020)

Prepared by Outdoor Recreation NI

on behalf of Sport Ireland, Waterways Ireland & Fáilte Ireland

Contents

1. Acknowledgements.....	5
2. Introduction.....	6
3. Aim.....	6
4. What is a Blueway?.....	7
4.1. Definition.....	7
4.2. Blueway Brand Proposition.....	7
4.3. Key Characteristics.....	7
4.4. Blueway Descriptions.....	8
5. The Blueways Visitor.....	9
5.1. Introducing the Dabbler.....	9
5.2. Best Prospect Tourist.....	10
5.3. Local Community.....	11
5.4. What about the enthusiasts?.....	11
6. Blueway Accreditation.....	12
6.1. Rationale.....	12
6.2. Roles & Responsibilities.....	12
Blueway Developers should contact these organisations directly. See.....	12
6.3. Benefits.....	15
7. Accreditation Criteria.....	17
8. Achieving the Criteria.....	20
8.1. Experience.....	20
Engaging landscape, culture and heritage.....	20
Multi-activity.....	20
Capacity Building.....	20
Length of time.....	21
Visitor information.....	22
8.2. Technical.....	23
Shared Use Trails.....	23
Walking Trails.....	23
Cycling Trails.....	24

Snorkel Trails.....	24
Paddling Trails.....	24
Sailing & Windsurfing Sites.....	24
Signage.....	25
Trailhead Facilities.....	25
Managing User Conflict.....	25
Accessibility / Inclusivity.....	25
8.3. Access.....	28
Landowner / Authority Agreement.....	28
Insurance.....	29
8.4 Safety.....	30
Suitability.....	30
Responsibility.....	31
Activity Providers / Experience.....	31
8.5 Conservation and the Environment.....	32
Statutory Approval.....	32
Biosecurity and Invasive Alien Species.....	37
Environmental Education.....	38
Litter.....	39
8.6 Sustainability.....	40
Management Group.....	40
Management Plan.....	40
Monitoring.....	45
9. Accreditation Process.....	46
10. Blueway Planning Process.....	48
10.1 Scoping – Concept Generation.....	49
10.2 Establish Development Group / Frame of Reference.....	50
10.3 Feasibility Study and Development Action Plan.....	51
10.4 Initial Application.....	52
10.5 Refine the development plan.....	52
10.6 Secure Funding.....	52
10.7 Plan and Complete the Development Work.....	53
10.8 Final Application and Inspection.....	53

10.9	Launch and Promote	54
10.10	Manage and Monitor	54
	Appendix 1: Blueways Ireland Steering Group	55
	Appendix 2: Review of International Best Practice.....	56
	Appendix 3: Visitor Segmentation.....	60
	Overseas Visitors.....	60
	Domestic Visitors	60
	Appendix 4: Technical Advisory Panel - Key Contacts.....	62
	Appendix 5: Snorkel Trail Guidelines.....	63
	Appendix 6: Blueway Paddling Trail Guidelines	65
	Appendix 6.1 Paddling Trailhead Guidance.....	69
	Appendix 7: Blueway Signage Guidelines.....	74
	Appendix 8: Activity Provider Accreditation	78
	Appendix 9: Biosecurity & Invasive Species.....	80
	Appendix 10: Responsibility Statement.....	81

1. Acknowledgements

The development of this document has required the review and update of existing standards for Canoe and Water Trails. Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland would like to acknowledge the previous work to develop the following documents which have acted as a strong reference during the development of this document:

- A guide to planning and developing Small Vessel Water Trails in Ireland (2013). Developed by Waterways Ireland and the Irish Sports Council / National Trails Office in conjunction with Irish Leisure Consultants (ILC)
- Blueway Soft Infrastructure Guidelines Discussion Document. Developed by ILC for the Irish Sports Council / National Trails Office
- Blueway / Water Trail Development Standards Ireland (2015). Developed by the Irish Sports Council / National Trails Office, Canoeing Ireland and Irish Underwater Council
- A Guide to Planning and Developing Recreational Trails in Ireland (2012). Developed by the Irish Sports Council / National Trails Office
- Principles and Standards for Trail Development in Northern Ireland (2013). Prepared by Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland
- Toolkit for the development of Community Trail Networks (2014). Prepared by Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland

2. Introduction

The rivers, loughs and coastline on the Island of Ireland provide a vast array of opportunities for exploration and enjoyment by visitors and locals alike. The relatively recent development of Blueways in Ireland has sought to maximise this opportunity.

This Blueway Development and Management Guide has therefore been designed as a resource to assist developers to develop, manage and promote Blueways more effectively.

Furthermore, the Blueway Ireland Steering Group (See Appendix 1) has taken the strategic decision to establish an accreditation system to ensure that any Blueways developed are sustainable, visitor focused and of a consistent high quality. This guide therefore outlines the accreditation criteria, process and support mechanisms.

It is recognised that many excellent guidance documents were already in place for the various components of a Blueway, however, this guide seeks to update and consolidate these through cognisance of:

- extensive benchmarking of international best practice (See Appendix 2)
- primary customer research
- one-to-one consultation with key stakeholders
- learnings from existing Blueway developments
- a constantly evolving tourism industry
- the broadening concept of a Blueway

3. Aim

The guide has been designed with the aim of providing detailed information and advice in order to answer the following queries:

- **Definition** – What is a Blueway?
- **Target Market** – Who will be attracted to a Blueway?
- **Benefits** – Why become accredited?
- **Criteria** – What are the fundamental components of a successful Blueway?
- **Achieving Success** – How to achieve Blueway Accreditation
- **Planning** – How to plan the development and management of a successful and sustainable Blueway

4. What is a Blueway?

The Blueway definition, brand proposition and key characteristics have been developed with visitor focus to the fore. This rationale is further outlined in Section 5.

4.1. Definition

A Blueway is defined as:

'A network of approved and branded multi-activity recreational trails and sites, based on and closely linked with the water, together with providers facilitating access to activities and experiences.'

4.2. Blueway Brand Proposition

The Blueways Ireland brand represents:

- Being active in nature
- Exploration of waterscapes
- Service providers enabling easy access for all
- Multi-activity trail options
- Set within the context of places to stay, eat and go
- Enriched by local culture, heritage, arts and visitor attractions
- Responsible recreation within the environment

4.3. Key Characteristics

The definition and brand proposition are further explained through the following key Blueway characteristics:

- The core of the offering is a series of accredited and branded trails, on and alongside water.
- Central to the concept is the availability of a water trail or site (hence the term 'BLUEway').
- Land based trails (i.e. walking and cycling) with strong connectivity to water must also complement the water trails.
- The proposition is an activity tourism and outdoor recreation initiative therefore facilitating healthier lifestyles, social interactions and economic development.
- With a strapline 'Blueway, do it your way!' the ethos of the Blueways Ireland brand is to encourage active participation in outdoor recreation by offering a range of activity options and making it as easy as possible for all ages and abilities to engage in visitor experiences in a suitable environment. Blueways should therefore focus on 'soft adventure' i.e. the offering should appeal to those with limited skills or prior experience.
- The rationale for the brand is to package saleable product (½ day, full day or short-break packages) and make the booking process easy, to encourage exploration of the waterways, and increase visitor dwell time.
- The Blueways experience is enriched by promoting it within the context of the local culture, heritage, arts and artisan food offerings.
- It is a partnership between public and private sectors, with service providers and tourism businesses combining soft adventure/slow tourism experiences, (guided canoe trips, SUP, bicycle hire) together with visitor services (accommodation, food, attractions, toilets).

- Blueways should be planned, developed and managed to ensure their sustainability. As a minimum a Blueway should avoid any negative impact on the environment and ideally add to or improve the environment e.g. through education and access

4.4. Blueway Descriptions

By definition, a Blueway is a network of recreational trails or sites, concentrated within a reasonable travel time within one area / destination. It is therefore important the Blueway is appropriately named to ensure resonance with the visitor, the naming of individual trails can focus on specific areas. As further explained in Section 5, the visitor will often have selected the destination first and will wish to use the Blueway as a conduit through which to explore its unique selling points.

A **Blueway Trail** does not have to encompass the entire area/destination; however, each component trail should offer an attractive proposition in their own right. For example, the 'Lough Derg Blueway' is comprised of several component Blueway trails e.g. 'Portumna Forest Walking Trails' and 'Mountshannon to Holy Island Paddling Trail.' For more information see <https://www.bluewaysireland.org/destinations/lough-derg>

A **Blueway Site** will typically relate to a coastal environment e.g. beach, marina or harbour from which a range of multi-activity trails can radiate. The extent of each trail must be defined e.g. a snorkel trail or kayak trail must be defined by mapping and information. For example, the Achill Island Blueway is comprised of Doogart Kayak Trail and Keem Beach Snorkel Trail. For more information see https://failtecdn.azureedge.net/tcs/media/5d9fb7c2-1314-46ed-b97b-6c2b1fba256c_91605.pdf

Blueways will typically include a combination of:

- Walking Trails
- Cycling Trails – off road / segregated trails
- Paddling Trails / Sites – Canoeing / kayaking / Stand Up Paddleboarding
- Snorkelling Trails / Sites
- Sailing and Windsurfing Sites may also be included, however, given the needs of the 'Dabbler' this will be included as either Royal Yachting Association Recognised Training Centres or Irish Sailing Training Centres

It is recognised outdoor recreation is an innovative sector with ongoing evolution in activity offering, therefore additional activities may be considered as they arise.

5. The Blueways Visitor

Whether a Blueway user is a member of the community enjoying their local waterway or a visitor exploring a new destination, it is essential the Blueway delivers a memorable experience.

To do this successfully, it is crucial to understand the customers and their needs before initiating any development:

5.1. Introducing the Dabbler

Research¹ has provided clear evidence that the 'Dabbler' or 'Novice' will be the best prospect visitor for Blueways in Ireland i.e. those that have **little to no skills or prior experience in undertaking adventure activities.**

The '**Dabbler**' is seeking the following from a Blueway:

Features

- A mixture of land and water activities
- A rich opportunity to experience Ireland's culture, history and scenery
- A safe experience

Locations

- Attractive locations - not simply just anywhere with water, but scenery unique to Ireland which visitors do not find closer to home
- Coastal locations – especially important to attract overseas visitors
- Sheltered waters - i.e. not the brunt of the ocean

Water-based activity offering - should be:

- Delivered by guides
- Focus on the easier entry level
- Follow high safety standards

It is clear that potential Blueway users are attracted by the proximity to water, however it is evident the preference remains to be alongside water rather than in or on the water. Hence the importance of multi-activity options.

¹ Research was undertaken by Strategic Marketing on behalf of Fáilte Ireland and Waterways Ireland in 2016. The research was conducted to gain an understanding of consumers' preferences for the development of Blueway experiences in key markets (Ireland, Britain, France, Germany) and the likely appeal of such a product. Methodology included online panel surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups.

When asked 'If you were to use a Blueway while on holiday, what would be the top three available activities in order of importance to you?', the following responses were obtained:

	Domestic	% respondents ranking the attribute in top 5	Overseas	% respondents ranking the attribute in top 5
Walking routes near water	1	64%	1	66%
Cycle paths near water	2	48%	2	48%
Swimming	3	43%	3	46%
Canoeing / Kayaking	4	29%	4	27%
Sailing / Boating (non-motorised)	5	22%	5	23%

5.2. Best Prospect Tourist

Further understanding of the best prospect Blueway visitor can be gained through making reference to domestic and overseas visitor segmentation developed by both Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland.

In terms of overseas visitors, it is important to recognise that the physical activities (whether water or land based) will not be enough on their own to differentiate Ireland from many other destinations. Overseas visitors will require a full package of unique cultural and historical attractions and experiences to be enticed to visit. Care is required to ensure these experiences remain authentic and are not over developed.

Domestic visitors will be an excellent foundation for a Blueway, often providing welcome cash flow to businesses outside peak season.

	Tourism Northern Ireland	Fáilte Ireland
Overseas Visitors	Great Escapers – Primary Culturally Curious – Secondary	
Domestic Visitors	Open to Ideas Active Maximisers	Connected Families

Further details on the aforementioned visitor segments is available within Appendix 3: Visitor Segmentation

5.3. Local Community

The attachment of the Blueway brand to a local waterway should act as a catalyst for local participation initiatives for example through school, youth organisations, clubs and sports partnerships.

An example of such an initiative is a Teen Adventure Kayaking Course being delivered by Tipperary Local Sports Partnership. This initiative is aimed at people aged 13+ and focuses on the fundamental movements in kayaking, Journeying along the River Suir Blueway.

As further explored in Section 7, the local community will not only be participants but also have the potential to be key ambassadors for their local Blueway.

5.4. What about the enthusiasts?

Activity enthusiasts will typically undertake trips self-guided and with their own equipment. They will engage with Blueways but to a lesser degree than the aforementioned best prospect segments and should not be the key focus for development.

The development of a visitor focused Blueway may not be possible in certain areas due to a range of issues such as topography, lack of sheltered conditions, lack of support services etc. However, offerings such as waymarked ways, canoe trails and cycle touring trails may be more appropriate and therefore appealing to the enthusiast market.

6. Blueway Accreditation

6.1. Rationale

An extensive review of international best practice (see Appendix 2) identified several excellent systems have been developed to externally inspect and accredit water trail and land trail networks. Under these systems, trails developed by a range of developers in different locations are inspected and accredited by an external body or bodies.

Accreditation has been identified by the Blueway Ireland Steering Group as fundamental to ensure a consistent high standard of Blueway development in Ireland.

6.2. Roles & Responsibilities

The Blueway Ireland Steering Group has set the criteria required for Blueway accreditation and will also act as the awarding body.

The Steering Group is supported by a Blueways Accreditation Advisor who will support and facilitate the accreditation of Blueways in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The Steering Group and Blueways Accreditation Advisor is supported by a Blueways Technical Advisory Panel which provides direct guidance to Blueway Developers on technical and safety aspects of Blueway development / accreditation as required.

For example, a Blueway which:

- includes a significant volume of Snorkelling Trails will require specialist advice from the Irish Underwater Council
- has specific challenges around developing access infrastructure for canoeists will require specialist input from Canoeing Ireland or the Canoe Association of Ireland
- has specific challenges around providing access to open water in a public space may require specialist input from Irish Water Safety

Blueway Developers should contact these organisations directly.

See

Appendix 4: Technical Advisory Panel - Key Contacts for contact details:

Remit	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland
Paddlesports	Canoe Association Northern Ireland	Canoeing Ireland
Snorkelling	Irish Underwater Council British Sub Aqua Club – Ireland Region	
Sailing & Windsurfing	Royal Yachting Association Northern Ireland	Irish Sailing
Water Safety	RNLI	
Water Safety		Irish Water Safety

Sport Ireland Outdoors will also be able to provide guidance relating to shared use, walking and cycling trails.

It is important to note that the awarding of Blueway Accreditation does not pass liability onto the Blueways Ireland Steering Group, Blueway or Blueways Accreditation Advisor. It will remain the responsibility of the Developer to ensure the Blueway is managed in accordance to operating procedures and standards as inspected.

The table below provides an overview of responsibilities:

Blueways Ireland Steering Group	Blueways Accreditation Advisor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversight and accreditation of Blueways • Recruitment and management of a Blueways Accreditation Advisor • Custodians of the Blueway brand and brand guidelines • Raise awareness of Blueway accreditation to funding bodies • Establish a Blueway Technical Advisor Panel • Stakeholder communications relating to Blueways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the Blueways Development & Management Guideline as developed by the Blueway Steering Group. • Convene and support a Blueways Developers Forum and a Blueway Technical Advisory Panel • Develop and implement a Blueways accreditation process in conjunctions with the Blueways Steering Group and Blueways Technical Advisory Panel partners. • Review applications from new Blueways and make recommendations to the Blueways Steering Group for accreditation • Undertake Blueway Registration Inspections on new and existing Blueways and make recommendations to the Blueways Steering Group for accreditation • Manage and update information and advice for Blueways online • Ensure that the Blueway Brand Guideline is applied consistently to all Blueway projects.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend Blueway Steering Group meetings • Make recommendations for modification and updates of the Blueway Development and Management Guide and accreditation system to the Blueway Steering Group as necessary.
Blueways Technical Advisory Panel	Blueways Developer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist & support Blueway Developers with technical and safety related aspects of Blueway Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blueway Development • Ongoing Management – Upholding Procedures • Marketing

The criteria and process for Blueway accreditation is explored in further detail within Section 7.

6.3. Benefits

The award of accreditation by the Blueways Ireland Steering Group will bring the following benefits:



Brand

Brand Guidelines - An accredited Blueway will be afforded the opportunity to avail of the official Blueway brand which can be utilised within visitor information and signage.

Brand Guidelines is only to be granted when Phase 1 approval is given

Brand Recognition – Further to the pragmatics of brand guidelines, external accreditation will also provide enhanced consumer recognition of the proposition. Blueways remain a relatively new concept on the island of Ireland, therefore a critical mass of accredited Blueways which follow the same high standard will help raise awareness. This in turn will generate a cross sell effect, particularly within the domestic market i.e. visitors who have a positive experience on one accredited Blueway will be attracted to visit another.

Quality Standard – External accreditation will help reassure key stakeholders that a best practice approach is being implemented. This may include:

- Key decision makers within your organisation
- Key funders
- Local community and business

In addition, an approved brand is more marketable.

Private Landowner Insurance (Republic of Ireland only) - Sport Ireland maintains a public liability insurance policy which indemnifies private landowners who give permission for trails to be developed on their property. Accreditation will also reassure landowners of the quality of the Blueway development.

Support – Those engaging in the accreditation process will be able to avail of the support of the Blueways Accreditation Advisor, Blueways Technical Advisory Panel and also best practice knowledge sharing from other Blueway developers / managers through an annual Blueway Forum meeting.

Promotion – Whilst it will ultimately remain the responsibility of the Blueway Manager to effectively promote their Blueway, accreditation will provide additional promotional benefits.

BluewaysIreland.org <http://www.bluewaysireland.org/> will provide a web portal for all Blueways in Ireland. This portal will provide an overview listing with a link to each Blueway's own website. Blueways will also receive a listing on <https://www.sportireland.ie/outdoors> (Republic of Ireland only).

In addition, the National Tourist Boards will provide prominence to accredited Blueways within relevant campaigns, website listings, FAM trips etc.

Funding – The Blueways Ireland Steering group will continue to engage with the relevant funding bodies to ensure the recognition of the importance of accreditation within funding measures.

7. Accreditation Criteria

Extensive international benchmarking (see Appendix 2) has identified the external assessment of high quality recreation trails utilise a holistic criterion encompassing all aspects of the visitor experience.

As such, the Accreditation Criteria for Blueways in Ireland combines a visitor focused approach with fundamental safety, technical, access and environmental components. All of these are underpinned by sustainable management techniques and processes.



In summary:

Experience – Are the visitors’ expectations met?

Safety – Is risk being appropriately managed?

Technical – Does trail infrastructure and signage follow best practice?

Conservation / Environment – As a minimum does the Blueway avoid any negative impact on the environment or ideally how does it add to or improve the environment e.g. through education and access?

Access – Will the Blueway be open for public use for at least ten years following accreditation?

Sustainability – Are they management structures / partnerships, plans and processes in place to ensure the Blueway can continue to meet the required standard?

In order to achieve accreditation, a Blueway must demonstrate how it meets the following criteria.

Experience	
Engaging Landscape / Culture and Heritage	Offers an opportunity to appreciate and explore an attractive landscape and engage with the unique heritage and culture of the area
Multi-activity	Offers a combination of water and land based trail (with connectivity to water) options
Capacity Building	A programme is in place to develop 'Eat / Stay / Go' and 'Activity / Experience' opportunities
Eat / Stay / Go	Bars, Cafés, restaurants and attractions are easily accessible from trail heads and / or trails
Activity / Experience Providers	Guided activity experiences appropriate for 'dabblers' are available and can be booked in advance
Length of time	Offers an experience duration of between half a day to one day
Visitor Information	The visitor can access information to allow them plan and enjoy their Blueway experience
Technical	
Walking Trails	Walking Trails are compliant with the Blueways Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails
Cycling Trails	Cycle Trails are compliant with the Blueways Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails
Shared Use Trails	Shared Use Trails are compliant with the Blueways Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails
Snorkel Trails	Snorkel Trails follow the guidelines of the Irish Underwater Council
Paddling Trails	Paddling Trails follow the Blueway Paddling Trail Guidelines
Sailing & Windsurfing Sites	Sailing & Windsurfing Activities will be compliant with Irish Sailing and/or RYANI Accreditation standards.
Signage	All signage follows with Blueway Signage Guidelines
Trailhead Facilities	Trail heads are clearly identified and offer adequate parking. Toilet and changing facilities are available within close proximity of water

	based trail heads.
Managing user conflict	Consideration and identification of steps to mitigate against potential conflict with waterway / trail users has been undertaken
Accessibility / Inclusivity	Reasonable steps have been undertaken to provide disabled access
Access	
Landowner / Authority Agreement	Access is permitted by all landowners and relevant authorities – public and private for a minimum period of 10 years.
Insurance	Public liability insurance is in place providing indemnity for all infrastructure, land-based trails and water trails' access and egress points.
Safety	
Suitability	The experience is suitable for the 'dabbler / novice' with little to no skills or prior experience in undertaking adventure activities
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.
Activity Providers / Experiences	A programme is in place for activity providers to demonstrate their safety credentials
Conservation and the Environment	
Statutory Approval	Evidence of consultation and approval with appropriate statutory bodies can be demonstrated
Biosecurity & Invasive Species	Proactive measures are in place to stop the spread of invasive species and harmful pathogens
Environmental Education	The Leave No Trace Ireland Principles have been incorporated
Litter	The Blueway is free from litter and fly-tipped waste
Sustainability	
Management Group	A Blueway Management Group is in place – led by a Local Authority or State Agency
Management Plan	A Blueway Management Plan is in place

Monitoring	A formal process is in place to monitor the impact of the Blueway
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8. Achieving the Criteria

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

8.1. 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 research² 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

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

² Waterways Ireland Users Survey 2017

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.

8.2. 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 Appendix 5: Snorkel Trail Guidelines

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

Appendix 6: Blueway Paddling Trail Guidelines

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 0), 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 guidelines³ 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

³ Best Practice Access Guidelines – Designing Accessible Environments – Irish Wheelchair Association (July 2014)

and language needs are taken into account during the initial design phase. Universal Design 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 Trust⁴ 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

⁴ A Good Practice Guide to Countryside Access for Disabled People – Fieldfare Trust

<http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Toolkit-to-Success-Accessible-Walks-Scheme-ORNI-2012.pdf>

- 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/>

8.3. 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 5.1.

Section 8.2 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 ⁵	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

⁵ 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 Group⁶

'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 Appendix 7: Blueway Signage Guidelines 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

⁶ Managing Visitor Safety in the Countryside – Principle and Practice (2011), Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group

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 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 0
- 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.d.aera-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.daera-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.daera-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.daera-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.

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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 Group⁷ 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.

⁷ 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

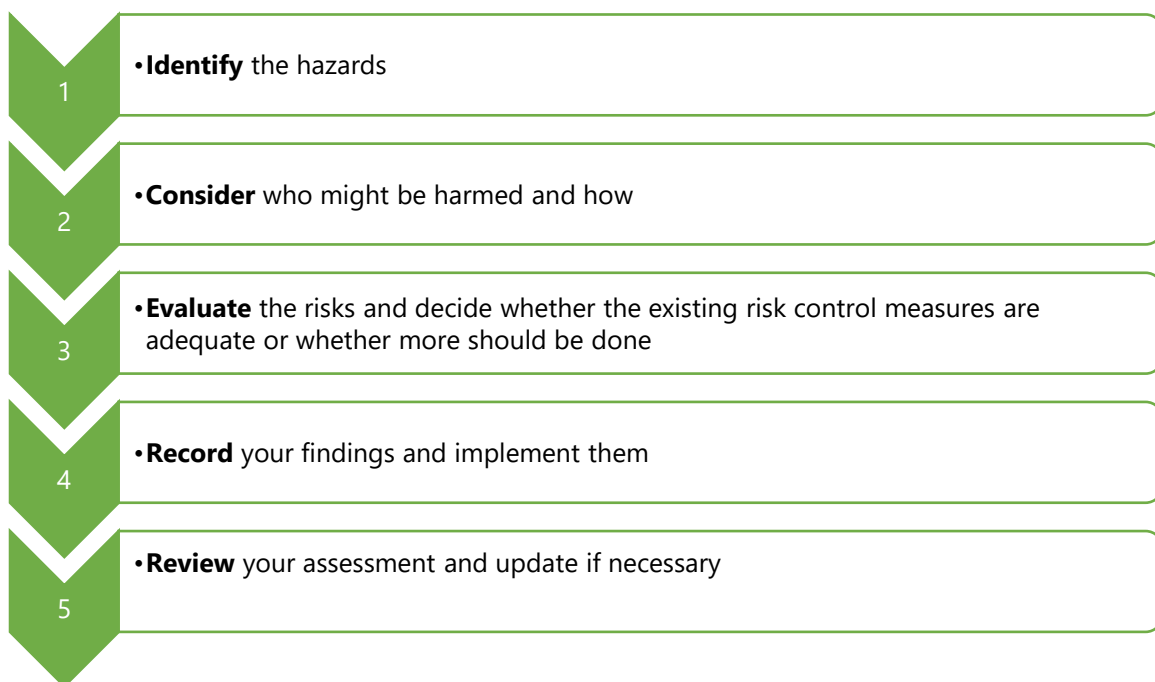
Who will complete maintenance?

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

9. Accreditation Process

Process for the accreditation of Blueways:



Initial Application

Initial applications will provide the opportunity for a review of the potential for a proposed Blueway to meet the requirements within the holistic 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 are invested. The feedback may provide an endorsement of the current proposal, advice on areas for improvement or determine if the proposal is viable in its current form.

Recommendation to Steering Group - Detailed Submission & External Inspection

Following the Initial application and assessment, the developers will have the opportunity to take on board any feedback before preparing and submitting the final detailed application against the holistic criterion. A key element of this application process will involve an on the ground inspection of the proposed Blueway by the Blueway Officer.

Ratification of inspection report recommendations

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

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

Ongoing management and maintenance

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.

For more information on the costs for undertaking Blueway assessments and accreditations inspections, please contact Anna Grant agrant@sportireland.ie

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 7). 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 7 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.

Appendix 1: Blueways Ireland Steering Group

The Blueways Ireland Steering comprises

Sport Ireland – Sport Ireland Outdoors www.sportireland.ie/outdoors

Sport Ireland Outdoors is the unit within Sport Ireland that coordinates the recreational trails programme and is dedicated to promoting and supporting participation in all forms of outdoor sport in Ireland and supporting the sustainable development of this sector in Irish sport.

Waterways Ireland <https://www.waterwaysireland.org/>

Waterways Ireland is one of the six North/South Implementation Bodies established under the British Irish Agreement in 1999. Waterways Ireland manages, maintains, develops and promotes over 1000km inland navigable waterways principally for recreational purposes. The waterways under the remit of the body are the Barrow Navigation, the Erne System, the Grand Canal, the Lower Bann, the Royal Canal, the Shannon-Erne Waterway and the Shannon Navigation.

Fáilte Ireland <http://www.failteireland.ie/>

Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority for the Republic of Ireland

Sport Northern Ireland <http://www.sportni.net/>

Sport Northern Ireland is the leading public body for the development of sport in Northern Ireland.

Tourism Northern Ireland <https://tourismni.com/>

Tourism Northern Ireland is responsible for the development of tourism and the marketing of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination to domestic tourists, from within Northern Ireland, and to visitors from the Republic of Ireland.

Appendix 2: Review of International Best Practice

The preparation of this document requires a robust review of international best practice to:

- review standards used for water based trails in other countries
- review systems in place to verify that trails comply with standards
- review how water trails are monitored and managed
- document how activity providers are approved / accredited to provide visitor experiences on water trails in other countries

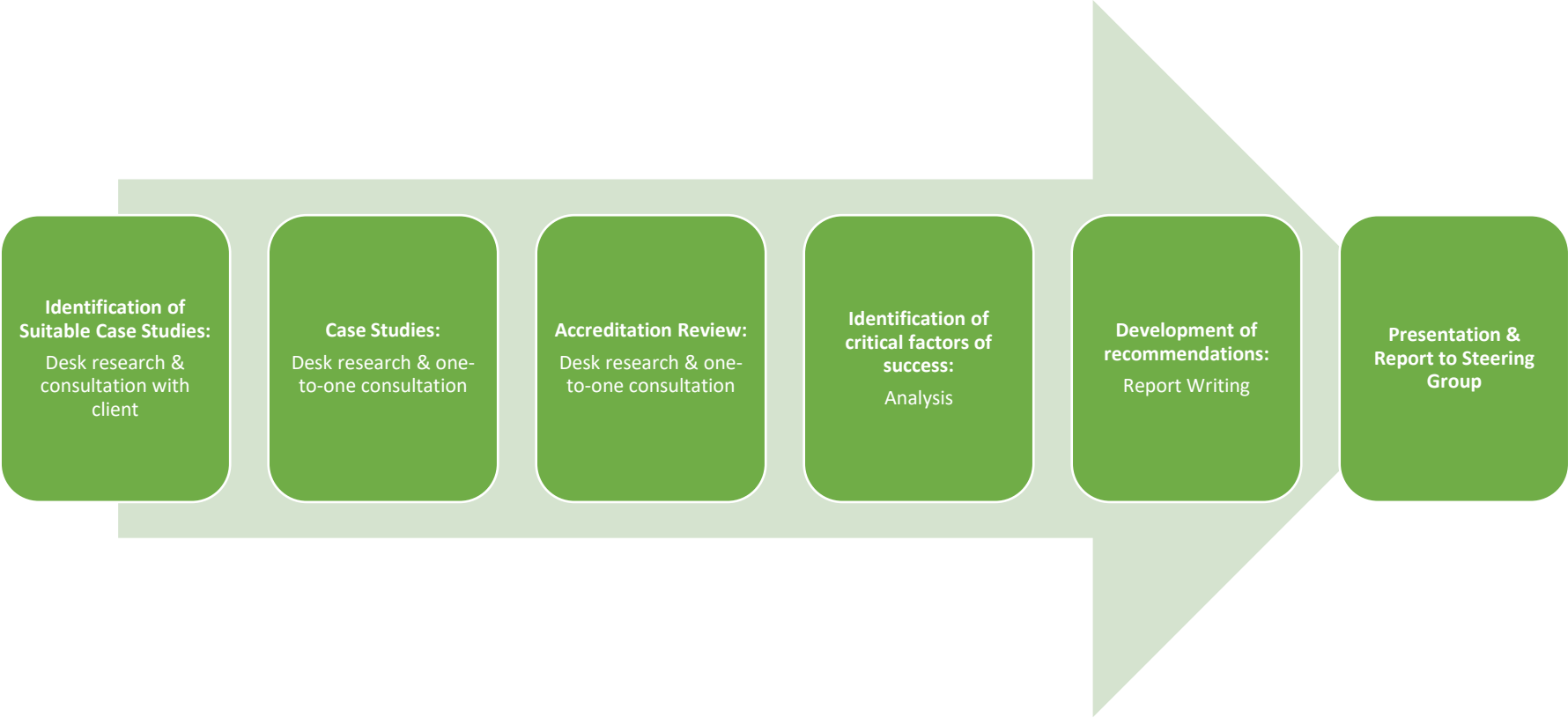
The

following

methodology

was

employed:



Water Trail Network Case Studies included:

- National Water Trails System – United States of America
<https://www.nps.gov/watertrails/>
- Outdoors Finland
<http://www.outdoorsfinland.com/>
- Scottish Canals
<https://www.scottishcanals.co.uk/>
- Great Glen Canoe Trail
<http://greatglencanoetrail.info/>
- Scottish Wildlife Trust Snorkel Trails
<https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/things-to-do/snorkel-trails/>

Walking Trail Network Case Studies included:

- European Ramblers Association – Leading Quality Trails
<http://www.era-ewv-ferp.com/programs/lqt/>
- Green Flag Trails
<http://greenflagtrails.org/>

The review also considered accreditation schemes for activity provider including:

- An overview of the current position of Statutory and Voluntary Accreditation Schemes in Northern Ireland / Ireland
- National Governing Body Schemes relevant to Northern Ireland / Ireland
- Tourism Board Schemes – Visit Wales / Visit Scotland and Tourism Northern Ireland

Detailed recommendations relating to the critical factors of success were identified. A summary is outlined below:

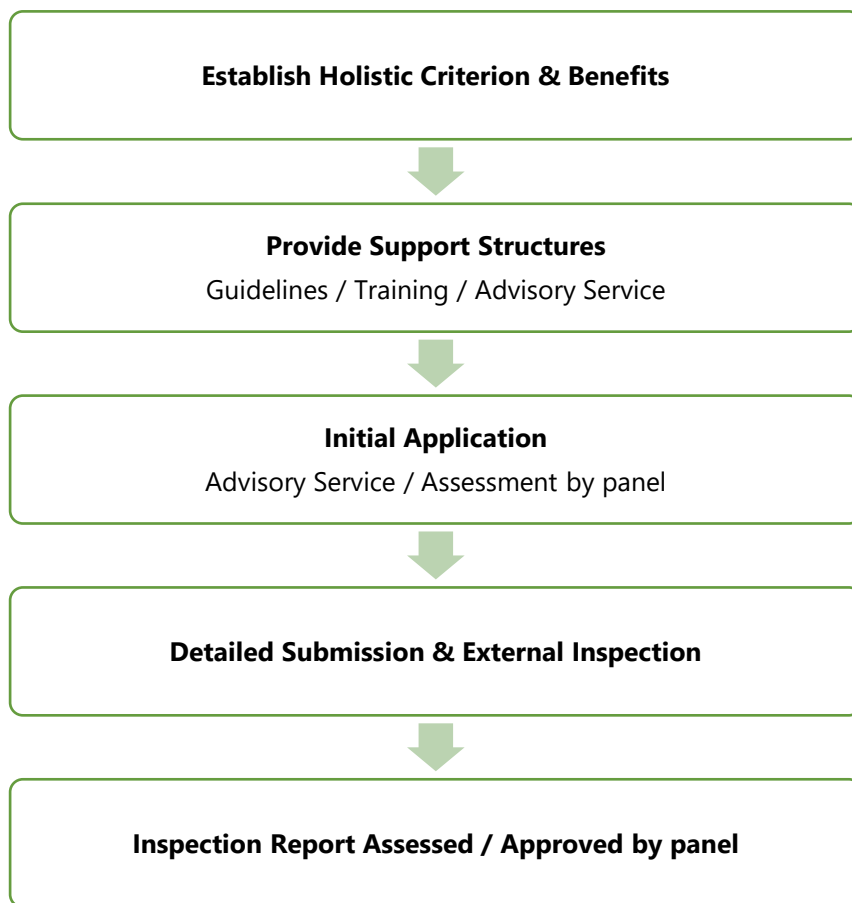
Recommendation 1:

Holistic criterion is developed to assess the quality of Blueways in Ireland.

The review of International Best Practice has identified holistic criteria should combine a visitor focused approach with fundamental safety, technical, access and environmental components. All components are underpinned by sustainable management techniques and processes.

Recommendation 2:

Refine and adopt the following system for ensuring trails comply with standards / criteria



Recommendation 3:

Adopt the following approach in terms of systems for activity provider accreditation:

Minimum:

- Establish Activity Provider Permit Guidelines for administration by Trail Developer / Promoter

Future:

- Recognise / Adopt a National Safety Accreditation Scheme
- Recognise / Adopt a Tourist Board Visitor Experience Assurance Scheme

Appendix 3: Visitor Segmentation

Overseas Visitors

Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland have identified the following overseas segments as best prospects for engagement with a Blueway in Ireland:

Primary – Great Escapers

They are often couples, approximately 30 years old, some with babies or quite young children. Most are in serious need of time out from busy lives and careers. They are specifically interested in rural holidays and travel very much as a couple or family. Great Escapers are on holiday for a break, to get physical with nature, and to reconnect with their partner. More likely to take part in slightly more strenuous, but not extreme, exploration. More interested than other segments in getting connected to nature especially the more remote and exciting places.

Further detailed information is available at <http://www.failteireland.ie/International-sales/International-sales/Great-escapers.aspx>

Secondary – Culturally Curious

They choose their holiday destinations carefully and are independent 'active sightseers' looking to visit new places, and expand their experience by exploring landscapes, history and culture. They are unlikely to return for some time once they have visited a new place, and often travel in a couple or as individuals and rarely in a family group. The age group for this demographic is 40 plus.

Further detailed information is available at <http://www.failteireland.ie/International-sales/International-sales/Culturally-Curious.aspx>

Domestic Visitors

The respective national tourism authorities have identified the following best prospect segments for their respective domestic markets.

Fáilte Ireland – Connected Families

Connected Families make up 23 percent of the domestic market, the single largest segment. They are made up of relatively young families. They are made up of parents in their thirties and early forties and children generally under the age of ten. For Connected Families, family holidays are the best weeks of the year and a special opportunity to spend quality time together, creating memories to last a lifetime.

Further detailed information is available at

http://www.failteireland.ie/Failtelreland/media/WebsiteStructure/Documents/2_Develop_Your_Business/3_Marketing_Toolkit/9_International_Sales_Toolkit/Connected-families-brochure.pdf

Tourism Northern Ireland – Open to Ideas

- Conduct a lot of research online
- Consider reviews and influenced by media
- Open-minded and interested in the outdoors, sport, music and history
- Seeking organised 'active' but not adventurous activities; motivated by nature/outdoors
- Like to plan and have an itinerary

- Value for money important and influenced by deals
- Like 'easy to get to' destinations and scenic natural surroundings

Further detailed information is available at

<https://tourismni.com/globalassets/events/misc/603102-roi-taskforce-brochure-st6-spreads.pdf>

Tourism Northern Ireland - Active Maximisers

Like to squeeze in as much as possible on a short break

- Enjoy energetic activities (but not extreme sports) and have a strong sense of adventure
- Passion for outdoors and the natural environment
- Looking for unique and mind broadening experiences
- Digital a very significant influence
- Focused on getting a good deal
- Actively research online
- Need to be connected (Wi-Fi etc.)

Further detailed information is available at <https://tourismni.com/globalassets/events/misc/603102-roi-taskforce-brochure-st6-spreads.pdf>

Appendix 4: Technical Advisory Panel - Key Contacts

Organisation	Website	Email	Phone
British Sub Aqua Club – Ireland Region	https://www.bsac.com/this-is-bsac/bsac-team/regional-coaches/ireland-region/	irl.coach@bsac.com	
Canoe Association of Northern Ireland	http://cani.org.uk/	office@cani.org.uk	+44 (0)28 9543 8094
Canoeing Ireland	https://canoe.ie/	info@canoe.ie	+353 (0) 1625 1105
Irish Sailing	https://www.sailing.ie/	info@sailing.ie	+353 (0) 1280 0239
Irish Water Safety	http://www.iws.ie/	info@iws.ie	+353 (0) 9156 4400
Irish Underwater Council	http://diving.ie/	info@diving.ie	+353 (0) 1284 4601
Royal Yachting Association Northern Ireland	https://www.rya.org.uk/rya-regions/rya-ni/Pages/hub.aspx	ryani@rya.org.uk	+44 (0)28 9182 7154
Sport Ireland Outdoors	www.sportireland.ie/outdoors	agrant@sportireland.ie	+353 (0) 1860 8826

Appendix 5: Snorkel Trail Guidelines

The following are suggested criteria for a coastal snorkel trail, as provided by Comhairle Fo-Thuinn (CFT), also known as the Irish Underwater Council. These guidelines assist in the promotion of snorkelling trails amongst all participants; however, the focus for Blueways should be Grade One Trails.

These guidelines assume that best use will be made of existing infrastructure, rather than incurring significant expense in new-build or costly investment.

Snorkelling Trail Grades

The following are guidelines regarding the potential grading of a snorkelling trail:

GRADE	LENGTH	DEPTH	CONDITIONS	LEVEL
Grade One	Less than 1km	Less than 2 Metres	No Current	Beginner
Grade Two	Less than 3km	Between 2-5 Metres	Some movement	Intermediate
Grade Three	More than 3km	Greater than 5 Metres	Tidal Currents	Advanced

Access and Egress

- Entry and exit to and from the water should be possible at all stages of the tide, either via steps, a slip or across a beach.
- Entry and exit to and from the water should also be possible at all stages of water flow conditions for river or lake snorkels.
- Avoid using entry and exit points that pass over seaweed covered rocks.
- If a working pier is being used, entry and exit should be well away from the working area of the pier or harbour.
- Avoid any outfalls where there is a possibility of contaminated water is entering the watercourse.

Design and Length

- Because snorkelling attracts mixed age groups, ensure that the trail is suitable for all levels of experience in the first instance, or if possible identify shorter routes for those less experienced.
- Ideally the trail should be circular – thus avoiding long walks in wetsuits. However linear 'out-and-back' trails, such as snorkelling along the coast to a point and back, or up to a marker buoy and back, are also feasible. The advertised trail length of these types of linear trails must include both the out and back elements.
- Because snorkels involve complete emersion, the time spent snorkelling will be very much dependent on temperature conditions. It is best to plan for snorkels that last no longer than 45 minutes.
- The typical trail should be no longer than 1km.
- Longer snorkelling opportunities can be identified for more experienced snorkelers, and advice on the appropriateness of these routes should be sought from CFT.

- Exit points along the trail should be clearly identified, both on promotional material, and through the use of appropriate trail signage.
- The trail should avoid crossing deep water areas (deeper than 2 metres), and areas prone to tidal movement.
- Ideally there should be a good range of marine life observable along the trail.
- Try to identify entry and exit points that have interesting features close by, this is to keep up interest while getting ready.
- Identify and describe the main plants and animals that are likely to be seen along the snorkel in supporting information materials.

General

- If the trail makes its way through and around islands and islets, consider preparing a simple sketch map to show the main topographical features along the route.
- Where the trail is being developed for a festival or a similar event, consider buoying-off the trail to mark the way.
- Each snorkel trail will require a risk assessment.

Legislation

- Ensure that all entry and exit points are on public land.
- Ensure that snorkel trails are not close to or over sites that are protected for archaeological reasons, or sites that require a license to explore.

Parking

- All trails should have ample parking on public space at the trailhead. Ideally, this should be a public car park or a pier, with public toilet facilities.

Appendix 6: Blueway Paddling Trail Guidelines

Grading & Suitability

Blueway Paddling Trails should be primarily be appropriate for the 'dabbler' or 'novice' i.e. those that have little to no skills or prior experience in undertaking adventure activities. However, it is recognised that Blueways will also attract more experienced paddlers and it is not unreasonable to have sections of water within the Blueway experience that provide a higher degree of challenge. Where this is part of the Blueway product there should be **very clear information** that the product is geared for more experienced paddlers **or** on suitably guided trips by accredited providers.

The Blueways partnership is proposing that developers adopt a clear approach to communication on the type of water to be encountered coded as per the information below



Also there should be very clear descriptions in any text that highlights right at the start the difficulty that is like to be encountered and what experience is needed to paddle this section.

Therefore, Blueway paddling trails should be developed as follows:

Rivers

Ideally, Blueways will be developed on simple rivers (that are classed by canoeists as grade 1) but may encompass short sections of more challenging water (that is classed by canoeists as grade). The Blueways partnership recognise that all waters have an element of risk and this is mitigated through experience, skill levels of participants, appropriate equipment, qualified and competent leadership and knowledge. It is recognised that novices can fairly easily negotiate simple waters without any guiding or being led and that under appropriate leadership novices can also enjoy paddling more challenging waters. Above grade 2 requires the paddler to have some level of personal experience and skill.

Simple waters: "The water is stationary or slow moving, there are small riffles and waves and few if any obstructions that are easily avoided. Paddlers need little or no skill to manoeuvre in such conditions and if they make a mistake there are minimal consequences" (Grade 1 water)

Challenging waters: "The way down a river is clear but simple obstructions do exist. Small recirculating waves and drops can be present. There are places where the flow accelerates but there is a clear choice of routes. Paddlers do need to be guided or have sufficient experience that they can effectively control their boats to line up to paddle over the drops or negotiate obstacles" (grade 2 water)

Where there are sections of challenging waters some basic principles apply:

1. There must be clear information in any guides, maps, panels about the type of water that will be encountered and information on whether this section is within the participant's skill level.
2. There must be good signage in the lead up to any section of challenging water and also good egress points so that the section can be portaged or avoided.
3. There should be opportunities to access suitably competent and accredited guides or instructors to lead people on these sections.
4. Developers should liaise with Canoeing Ireland/Canoe Association of N. Ireland on the classification of any rivers.

NOTE: The grading of rivers is not an exact science and usually a grading is reached on the consensus of a number of experienced paddlers. It is therefore somewhat subjective and should be used with some caution.

Man-made weirs do not fall under a river grading system and have many inherent risks. They are rarely designed with recreation in mind and function to manage water levels or reduce flow but also occasionally for fish counting. Weirs are usually classed as "safe" or "dangerous." There are a range of factors in this including height, steepness, uniformity, and shape. Under high water flows many "safe" weirs can become dangerous and **generally weirs need to be treated with extreme caution.**

All weirs on Blueways must be very clearly signed and also be easily portaged.

Where any weirs are being upgraded it is ideal for the developer to engage with the agency and consider the creation of canoe slides

Canals (Simple paddling trails)

Canals are generally relatively safe and very sheltered waterways with minimal flowing water, have controlled depth and are designed for navigation. The greater risk is where there is still a lot of other motor boat usage and also where bank access is limited. For any lock gates there should be good access for paddlers (see landing stage heights).

Lakes

There is a huge range of lakes across the island of Ireland from Loughs Neagh and Corrib as the largest through to small scale ponds and inter-drumlin lakes.

Small lakes are defined as those that are no broader than 250m from shore to shore and are therefore very sheltered and could therefore be categorised as simple trails. However, it is recognised that Blueways may include sections of larger lakes (Lough Allen and Derg are good examples as part of the Shannon). Large lakes need to be considered in like manner to coastal waters (other than issues of tides) and one of the key principles is that there would be easy egress from the water. All larger lakes should be categorised as challenging trails. However, it is recognised that there may be small enclosed bays within these lakes that are suitable as "stay and play" locations that are more simple waters.

There needs to be good information provided to users about the associated risks especially in any specific wind directions.

The Sea

Being an island, it is recognised that the coastline is one of our most important assets. While the Blueways concept was originally designed for inland water ways it is inevitable that some coastal Blueways will be developed. While our coast can be a fantastic place for recreation and water sports the level of risk is inevitably higher and so any coastal Blueways need to be carefully thought through and managed. All coastal Blueways should be classed as challenging trails

Sea conditions are dependent on many factors including:

- fetch (the distance over which the wind has blown) and resultant swell
- wind strength
- duration the wind has been blowing
- depth of water
- nature of shore line including landing zones
- currents
- tide
- air and water temperature

Blueways should be focused on very sheltered tidal water where there is minimal possibility of being blown offshore. This can include enclosed harbours with a minimum of commercial traffic, enclosed on three sides, small enclosed bays, defined beaches (a short section of beach with easy landing throughout and that isn't exposed to Atlantic swell) and the upper reaches of some suitable, slow moving, estuaries.

Coastal Blueways should not include areas where there are strong tidal currents of more than 2 knots and where the coastline does not facilitate easy landings (i.e. cliffs).

There needs to be good information provided to users about the associated risks especially in offshore breezes. **Coastal Blueways must be orientated towards more experienced paddlers or to those who will be led by a competent provider.**

Paddle sport providers who operate in coastal waters need to be specifically trained and hold a recognised qualification to operate on the sea.

Route / Trail:

- A Blueway paddling trail must have a series of defined access / egress points
- Distance between access and egress points should generally be no more than 3km.
- All sections of the waterway must be unobstructed and passable
- Any significant hazards or obstructions must have a clear portage option with associated access and egress points

Access / Egress Points:

Trailheads

These will be the formal of entry and the main locations at which visitors are encouraged to access / egress the waterway

- On a linear river trail this will often be at the most logical upstream and downstream location – bookending the other access points.

- On coastal and inland lake trails – the majority of Blueway excursions will be circular. However, there may be a number of trailheads from which to begin and end a journey.

These trailheads will therefore have the highest volume of use and should adhere to the following minimum criteria (further guidance is provided in Appendix 4.1):

- Parking
 - Off-road parking for a recommended minimum of 10 spaces (including space for trailers)⁸
 - No Parking / Loading Bay in close proximity to water
- Information Panel – see Signage
- Toilets and Changing Facilities
- Fresh water tap
- Formal staging area i.e. a hard surface staging area (min 3m x 3m) out with the car park to allow gathering of equipment and preparation
- Unrestricted and easy access from parking to water access
- Water access infrastructure should be fit for purpose, robust and safe at all points of water level
- Consideration of the requirements of activity operators

Access and Egress Points

Secondary access and egress points should adhere to the following minimum criteria (further guidance is provided in Appendix 4.1):

- Parking
 - Off-road parking for a recommended minimum of 5 spaces (including space for trailers)⁹
- Information Panel – see Signage
- Formal staging area i.e. a hard surface staging area (min 3m x 3m) out with the car park to allow gathering of equipment and preparation
- Unrestricted and easy access from parking to water access
- Water access infrastructure should be fit for purpose, robust and safe at all points of water level

Signage

See Appendix 7

⁸ The Blueway Developer is tasked with determining the scale of the trailhead required

⁹ The Blueway Developer is tasked with determining the scale of the trailhead required

Appendix 6.1 Paddling Trailhead Guidance

Car Parking

Car parking at trailheads should be within designated parking i.e. off the public highway.

It is the task of the Blueway Developer to determine the scale of the trailhead. If an existing car park / amenity is being used it is important to consider the current volume of use, for example if the car park is already full on most weekends then additional provision will be required.

When developing new car parks, consideration should be given to the surface most appropriate to the setting. Products such as TRUCKPAVE provide useful alternatives to tarmac or gravel.

<http://www.terram.com/projects/truckpave-grass-paver-install-in-liverpool.html>

When designing a car park consider the following:

- the space required for the parking and navigation of vehicles and canoe trailers as well as their loading and offloading 'flow' requirements
- the nature of paddling activities (canoes, kayaks, stand up paddleboards) require the need for generous parking bays
- car park height restriction barriers can prevent inappropriate use, however these barriers should take into account the requirement for cars carrying canoes on roof racks or mini buses with trailers. A minimum height of 2m is required for cars, however a management process should be considered for when barriers are likely to prevent access.

Toilets and Changing Facilities

Remember the 'dabbler' will have higher expectations for toilet and changing facilities than an enthusiast. Toilets and changing facilities should therefore be provided within close proximity.

Composting toilets offer an environmentally friendly solution and have lower construction costs with respect to power and effluent treatment, however care is required in their location and they require occasional management especially in high use areas of the trail.

Given their likely proximity to a watercourse, non-composting type toilets will require either an advanced waste water treatment system or a holding tank. The latter will require the on-going management of this waste water. Chemical toilets should be a last resort option.

Formal Staging Area

Formal staging areas are congregation spaces which facilitate the gathering of equipment in the trailhead close to the parking and en-route to the water access area.

Informal staging areas in the car park leads to the casual positioning of water-sports craft and equipment, the blocking of user flow as well as an increased potential for theft and slip, trips and falls. A three meter by three meter concrete or compacted gravel staging area should be sufficient.

Unrestricted and easy access from parking to water access

Passage between the water and the trailhead will typically require a short section of walking trail.

These trails should not act as drainage slopes as this can lead to erosion and the transfer of soil and other contaminants into the water trail. The following principles and criteria are suggested for such trails:

- The trail from the parking area to the launch should be a maximum of a 10% gradient
- Maximum trail cross slope 2%
- Resting intervals (max 3% slope), are required for trails in excess of 100 metres with a slope in excess of 5%. Especially at water egress trailheads
- No dips on trails or other features that increase the risk of ponding
- Minimum trail width of 2 metres
- Minimum overhead clearance of 2.5 metres
- Swing clearance on bends of 2 metres either side of the trail.

To prevent inadvertent entering into the water, fencing or margin vegetation planting between the trail/car park and the water may be required. Further guidance is available within Risk Control For Inland Sites – Irish Water Safety http://www.iws.ie/fileupload/advice/risk_control_for_inland_water_sites.pdf

Launch points should be fit for purpose, robust and safe at all typical points of water level

Launch points or water access points will often require bespoke solutions to the exact location. The following guidelines provide some recommended approaches:

- Existing in-situ facilities (when possible) should be used to facilitate to trail. This is preferential to constructing additional new infrastructure. However:
 - It should not be assumed that current infrastructure such as a pier, slipway, pontoon or jetty implies access for all water users. It may have been developed for a specific use e.g. anglers, ferries, fishing craft. Consultation and permission is therefore required
 - Existing infrastructure may require adaptations – for example standard floating pontoons can be difficult to use to exit from a kayak as the height of the pontoon from the water can be excessive. Dropped pontoons positioned lower to water level can be attached to alleviate this.
- The design and positioning of water access points must take into account prevailing conditions such as wind, tide, flow direction, varying water levels. The launch site should offer a calm environment to begin a Blueway journey.

Recommended Access and Egress Infrastructure Criteria are as follows:

Infrastructure	Dimensions	Comment
Access and Egress – landing stage heights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal Height of the landing stage above water - 300 mm or less • Maximum Height of the landing stage above water - 700 mm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kayak steps are the most appropriate and cost effective where water levels fluctuate on rivers • A floating pontoon should be used where water levels fluctuate significantly¹⁰ • Heights above 600 mm may need to be supplemented by hand-holds at a lower height • Where there is significant water flow at the landing stage, heights should be closer to the ideal than the maximum • Beaches and slipways also provide suitable access and egress points, where they are uncovered at all stages of the tide, or are at typical lake water levels
Access and Egress – landing stage platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal Height of the landing stage above water - 300 mm or less • Maximum Height of the landing stage above water - 700 mm • Minimum landing stage platform Length - 800 mm, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landing stage platforms should allow for the placing of the participants paddle on the shore, and facilitate the relatively ungainly body movement required in accessing and egressing the canoe/kayak

¹⁰ Standard floating pontoons can be difficult to use to exit from a kayak as the height of the pontoon from the water can be excessive. Dropped pontoons positioned lower to water level can be attached to alleviate this.

	<p>width - 300 mm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal landing stage platform Length - 3 metres, width - 1.5 metres • Slope to and from the landing stage - ideally no more than 1:3 • Risers - typically 250 mm 	
Access and Egress – landing stage obstructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 metres of unobstructed riverbank is recommended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canoes/kayaks range in length from 1.6 to 2 metres
Access and Egress – landing stage surfaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The edge of the landing stage nearest the water should ideally be curved to a 50 degree radius 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduces fall injuries, and rubbing damage to canoe/kayaks
Canoe slides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The tie-off point on lowering stanchions should be higher than the highest point on the slide • Canoe slides should ideally be set at 45 degrees, however the bank's slope will dictate this • Access to either side of the canoe at the end of the slide is preferred • Wood or durable plastic should be used as the sliding surface • Sharp corners are to be avoided on all sliding areas • Slide designs should not facilitate sliding by individuals • Appropriate description and safety signage is required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stanchions heights will typically be determined by the slide height • Canoes are primarily made of plastic and abrade readily on sharp surfaces • An overly shallow slope will require the pulling of the canoe downwards, due to the friction of the canoe on the slide surface • Open canoeists should be encouraged to carry painters (bow and stern ropes), each of which is at least the length of their boat, as painters facilitate the lowering of the canoe on slides
Portage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A portage of less than 100 metres is preferred 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unladen open canoes weigh circa 20 kilos • You may wish to consider

		providing trolley wheels
Portage dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open canoes are up to 6 metres long and 1 metre wide. All turning points on a portage must accommodate this, or facilitate the lifting of the craft 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On land canoes can be raised at one end, in order to minimise their length when turning in tight spaces. However, their weight makes this manoeuvre difficult

Consideration of activity provider requirements

Given activity providers are essential to the Blueway experience, it is important to consider how their services can be incorporated within trailheads. Consideration is required in terms of:

- Physical space required by activity providers e.g. for point of sale, trailers, equipment etc
- The practical operation of a permit system to control the provision of commercial activities

Appendix 7: Blueway Signage Guidelines

Principles Relating to Signs

- A balance must be made between providing sufficient minimal signage to encourage and give practical support to the user while not undermining the aesthetic value of the trail through sign clutter and the urbanising of the unspoilt or wilderness experience.
- Signage should where possible animate the Blueway and encourage the participant to do more.
- Signage should confer quality and be consistent.
- Positive signs indicating what is possible should where practical be used in preference to signs which indicate limitations.

Brand Guidelines will be issued to Blueway Developers once their Blueway is fully accredited.

Irish Language

The Official Languages Act (Republic of Ireland only) sets out the statutory requirements regarding the use of the Irish language by public bodies. Most Blueways will be developed or funded by public bodies and hence it is likely that these requirements will apply. The following is an excerpt of some of these requirements:

- Place names on information signs must be in both Irish and English except:
- In Gaeltacht areas, where the names of places should be in Irish only.
- Where the spelling of a place name is similar in both languages, in which case only the Irish form of the name should be shown
- All Irish text should be in italic print, in lower case lettering, with initial letters in capitals.
- Irish script should be inclined to the right at an angle of 15 degrees to the vertical. All English text should be in upper case roman letters

Note that the content of Blueway information panels must be presented in Irish and English, including Gaeltacht areas. To identify the correct spelling of a place-name in Irish, consult www.logainm.ie

The use of icons instead of text on signs reduces the difficulty in comprehending sign content for non-native speakers of Irish and English.

Directional Signs to the Blueway

- Directions to the main entry trailheads along the Blueway should be signed. Signing should commence at the nearest town, village or junction with the nearest national road. Thereafter all junctions from the first sign en-route to the trailhead must be signed.
- Minor trailheads may be signed similarly to the main trailheads if required. The main trailheads should be easy to find however it may not be appropriate to provide directional signs from centres of local population and national roads to all of the trailheads due to sign costs as well as the risk of confusion where there are signs to multiple Blueway entry points in the same area.
- Signs which are used on Public Roads in the Republic of Ireland should follow the guidelines within DTTAS Traffic Signs Manual – See Section 4.22 ‘Tourist Attractions and Facilities’ 2010 <http://www.dttas.ie/roads/publications/english/traffic-signs-manual-2010>

- Signs which are used on Public Roads in Northern Ireland should follow the guidelines within Transport NI 'The Signing of Tourism Attractions and Facilities' 2014
<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/drd/the-signing-of-tourist-attractions-and-facilities-rsppg-e029.pdf>

Blueway Trailhead Signage

Trailhead Entrance / Identifier Sign

In many cases, a trailhead entrance or identifier sign may be required to identify the trailhead / access points. The requirement for a trail head information panel to be in close proximity to the water often means they can be hidden within busy car parks.

This trailhead entrance or identifier sign will therefore provide reassurance the visitor is in the right place. It should:

- be clearly visible to passing traffic
- not block visibility to those entering or exiting the site / car park
- never be used in place of a white on brown road sign / directional sign

Trailhead Information Panels

Trailhead information panels should be:

- clearly visible from the car park
- positioned so as not to impact visitor flow i.e. visitors reading the panel should not disturb the flow of vehicles or people throughout the site

If a trailhead combines water and land-based trails it is good practice to separate the information relating to the individual activities e.g. one panel for a paddling trail and one panel for a walking trail. An overview panel may be useful to provide insight into the spatial relationship of the component trails.

It is recommended that trailhead panels have a secure updateable section to update visitors on frequently changing aspects for example events, trail closures etc.

Water Based Trails - Trailhead Information Panels

For the majority of newly developed Blueways, the water-based trail will be the new element. Trailhead information panels should be placed close to the water. If the access point is not obvious from the location of the trailhead information panel then additional directional signage may be required. Trailhead signage for water-based trails should include:

Trail Description detailing:

- Named Access & Egress Point
- Distance Km
- Duration
- Difficulty
- Short Description

Map – a large simple trail map

- A clear legend of symbols
- A scale plus kilometre marker
- A north pointer
- The complete trail section¹¹
- 'You are Here' pointer
- Start and Finish Locations
- All defined access & egress points
- Location of obstructions, hazards or increase in difficulty

Other

- Key contacts and emergency information
- Method for visitor feedback – website / email / phone number
- Responsibility Statement
- Invasive Species Messaging – See Appendix 9

Maps must be oriented to suit the map board location for trails next to open water (note this might not be North up)

Water Based Trails – On trail signage

Signage along water-based trails should be kept to a minimum so as not to ruin the natural aesthetic. However, the following signs may be required:

- Colour coded indicator markers – indicating the safe or navigable heights of water levels at access points on river Blueways. These indicators may make use of existing structures such as bridges or slipway walls
- Flags or Wind Socks – are useful to indicate wind strength/direction and also identify access/egress points from the water
- Confirmatory signs -are only to be used where essential, for example where there are multiple indistinct choices some of which have the potential to significantly undermine the Blueway experience – for example routes around river islands

Water Based Trails – Portages

Portages should be provided on inland trails where either the route on the Blueway is impassable for example the presence of a dam or if the route is beyond the ability of the target Blueway user, for example the presence of a weir or rapid on a placid water trail.

- The portage egress should be clearly identifiable from the waterway, either due to the visibility of infrastructure or if necessary appropriate signage. Where the egress for the

¹¹ For paddling trails this should be a line however Blueway sites incorporating may indicate areas for snorkelling or kayaking

portage is reasonably visible from the water, a small courtesy egress sign might be located at this site so as to provide reassurance to the Blueway user.

- The portage route should be safe, as short as possible, clearly identifiable, have a suitable surface and an appropriate egress and access point to the water. Portage is not preferable on Blueways.

Land Based Trails

Where Blueways incorporate land-based trails i.e. wading and cycling trails that are already in existence then it is acceptable to utilise existing trailhead information panels, signage and waymarking as long as they meet the Sport Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails.

However, the development of the Blueway may provide an opportunity to refresh the trailhead panels to follow the Blueway brand and therefore be consistent with the water-based trails.

All new signage and waymarking on land based trails should conform to the requirements of the Sport Ireland – Management Standards for Recreational Trails.

Appendix 8: Activity Provider Accreditation

National Statutory / Voluntary Accreditation Schemes

Northern Ireland

Although there is the provision for statutory licencing of activity providers in Northern Ireland through The Activity Centres (Safety of Young Persons) Northern Ireland Order 1997, the legislation to date has not been enacted. The Department of Communities has currently adopted '**Adventuremark**' as a suitable adventure activity accreditation scheme for activity providers in Northern Ireland in lieu of statutory licensing. This approach was identified following extensive consultation with the outdoor activity industry.

Adventuremark is a non-statutory safety scheme devised by the Adventure Activity Industry Advisory Committee (AAIAC)¹² for providers of adventurous activities that are outside the scope of AALA. Adventuremark allows providers to demonstrate to their customers or users that the provider's arrangements for managing the potential risks of adventure activities have been inspected and found to meet the necessary standards of good practice in the adventure activity industry. Independent external assessment is required.

See <http://www.adventuremark.co.uk/>

Adventuremark is often utilised by activity providers that offer a range of activities. It is particularly useful for those activities which do not have a National Governing Body or centre based accreditation scheme. However, many activity providers (especially those that only offer one activity) still chose to obtain accreditation via a robust National Governing Body scheme – see below.

Republic of Ireland

There is currently no voluntary or statutory accreditation scheme for outdoor activity providers in the Republic of Ireland.

Following an incident at Clogher Head, Co.Louth in 2011 (when six school girls were rescued from the water by a lifeboat whilst partaking in sea kayaking under the supervision of an instructor from an activity centre) the Marine Casualty Investigation Board recommended the relevant Minister consider the regulation of the provision of adventure activities.

In 2013, Minister of State for Tourism and Sport, Michael Ring T.D. asked the Irish Sports Council to examine the issues associated with safety and standards in the adventure activities sector and the development of a register of adventure activity providers.

The Irish Sports Council established the Adventure Activities Working Group 'to assist the Council to define the scope and application of the registration system, and the standards to be applied.' The Group's recommendations for a statutory 'Adventure Activities Registration Scheme for Ireland' were made to the Minister in mid-2014. At the time of writing the scheme is not in place and the timeline for delivery is not known.

¹² AAIAC, the Adventure Activities Industry Advisory Committee, is the sector's lead body for safety in adventure activities. It is representative of a wide range of stakeholders from the UK adventure activities sector and is supported by the Institute for Outdoor Learning.

The Irish Association of Adventure Tourism <https://iaat.ie/what-we-do/> was launched in Spring 2018. In the context of accreditation the IAAT aims to:

‘promote best practise in all areas of our businesses, including: a. The highest service and safety standards (but not to regulate them) in a practical way that is sustainable and workable for the industry’

Blueway developers may find close liaison with this body to be useful.

National Governing Bodies

National Governing Bodies (NGBs) have the responsibility for managing their specific sport. The table below demonstrates the activity provider accreditation schemes (relevant to activities undertaken on Blueways) delivered by NGBs in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Accreditation schemes included within the table apply to the centre / provider rather than the individual instructor.

Activity	Northern Ireland	Republic of Ireland
Canoeing	Not Available	Canoeing Ireland - Course Provider Registration https://canoe.ie/provider-registration/
Cycling	Not Available	Not Available
Sailing	Royal Yachting Association - Recognised Teaching Centre http://www.rya.org.uk/training-support/Pages/thinking-of-running-a-centre.aspx	Irish Sailing – Training Centre https://www.sailing.ie/Training/Clubs-Centres/Become-a-Centre
Snorkelling	Irish Underwater Council – Approved Snorkelling Centres http://diving.ie/	
Walking	Not Available	Not Available

As the table above identifies, there is not an option currently for activity providers to be externally accredited by National Governing Bodies for all the key activities anticipated to be offered by a Blueway.

Appendix 9: Biosecurity & Invasive Species

The Local Authority Waters and Communities Officer highlights that biosecurity best practice is critical to break such pathways and the need to inspect, remove, wash and dry all equipment or clothing will help reduce the risk of spreading pathogens and invasive alien species. To help stop the spread of alien invasive species it is critical that users wash and dry their equipment especially when traveling between different catchments and water courses. It is also critically important that on every occasion a user leaves a watercourse or a catchment that canoes, kayaks and boards should be inspected for aquatic vegetation, mud, materials or living organisms / materials. All such materials should be removed on site.

As a minimum, Blueway developers should incorporate the 'Check – Clean – Dry' message within their visitor information.

It is recommended the following notice appears on information boards, publications and websites for all freshwater Blueways.

Check – Check vessels, equipment and clothing for living plants and animals. Pay particular attention to areas that are damp and hard to inspect.

Clean – Clean and wash all vessels and equipment thoroughly with freshwater

Dry – When removing a vessel, trailer and other equipment drain water from every area that can hold water before leaving the site. Clothing / equipment should be thoroughly dried for as long as possible before it is used elsewhere.

Crayfish Plague Guidance

With specific reference to the outbreak of Crayfish Plague users are asked to remain within their own local area. If gear needs to be moved gear and boats should be thoroughly washed and dried for at least 48 hours before going to another catchment / water course.

Caution: Care should be taken when using hot water to avoid burns to the skin or eye contact.

- Drain water from watercraft.
- Inspect watercraft (inside and out) and other gear. Remove and safely dispose of all attached plant and animal material, mud or debris.
- Rinse and disinfect all gear thoroughly this should be followed by a 48-hour drying period. Milton can be used as a disinfectant, either make a solution or a spray or by washing gear in water over 40 degrees.
- Disinfecting kayaks/canoes/paddles with (Virkon / Milton Solution) or power hose with hot water over 60 degrees Celsius this should be followed by a 48-hour drying period.
- Try to avoid paddling in the water bodies inflected with Crayfish Plague if they are not your local river. This will help prevent the spread of Crayfish Plague to other waterways.
- For anyone travelling to compete in any competition or event, please wash and dry your gear before competing and make use of wash stations at events before you leave.

Appendix 10: Responsibility Statement

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

This statement relates to water based trails:

Your safety on Blueways

We aim to provide an enjoyable Blueway experience and will ensure that our actions do not jeopardise your safety and health. We view the responsibility for your safety as one that is shared between you and us. We have taken reasonable measures to minimise but not eliminate all risks. Water sports are adventure sports and as such should be treated with respect.

New to Water Sports?

Paddling trails on Blueways have been designed with the novice in mind, however, those with limited skills and experience should use a local operator / guide. They will be able to provide:

- Appropriate safety equipment and clothing
- Appropriate itinerary
- Expertise relating to weather and water conditions
- Tuition / coaching

In addition, they will be able to add real value to your Blueway experience through their insight into local culture and heritage, places to eat and visit.

Prior Experience

If you are undertaking the Blueway without a local operator guide, you can help ensure your own safety by:

Take Advice – Make sure you have the necessary skills and experience for the location and the activity, and are aware of your limitations. Consult (website) or local operators / guides.

Plan – Plan your trip well in advance. Tell a responsible adult of your intended route and estimated time of return.

Group – It is not recommended to canoe alone – 3 boats is the minimum required for most rescues

Conditions – Consult weather forecasts, tides / water levels in advance of your trip. Ensure you are properly equipped for changes in weather.

Equipment – Carry essential safety equipment – spare clothes, extra food, warm drink, form of shelter, First Aid kit, means of communication (VHF radio / mobile phone in a water proof case), torch and whistle. Always wear a buoyancy aid. Canoe/ craft buoyancy should be enough to keep it afloat if you capsize.

Emergencies - In the event of emergencies contact 99 or 112 for emergency services. Use VHF Radio Channel 16 to contact Coastguard.