Visitor Management Guidelines for the Wild Atlantic Way

June 2020

Fáilte Ireland
National Tourism Development Authority

DISCLAIMER

The following Guidelines have been prepared by Fáilte Ireland. Any representation, statement, opinion or advice, expressed or implied in this document is made in good faith but on the basis that Fáilte Ireland is not liable (whether by reason of negligence, lack of care or otherwise) to any person for any damage or loss whatsoever which has occurred or may occur in relation to that person taking or not taking (as the case may be) action in respect of any representation, statement or advice referred to in this document.

COVID -19

These Guidelines were produced during the Covid-19 pandemic. Having consideration for this it should be noted that all advise given in these Guidelines must comply first and foremost with Government restrictions and Public Health Guidelines in this respect and should be consulted as the situation evolves.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The success of the Wild Atlantic Way has occurred from rising above the level of individual sites and routes – to create a large-scale and overarching brand that has international visibility.

Similarly, the future success of the endeavour will need everyone to be mindful of the requirement for visitor management approaches and practices that span strategic level in policy and plans right down to individual projects and sites.

These guidelines are set out under two parts[1]:

Part One: Offers an overview of visitor management at a strategic level and is intended to be used by policy and plan makers in the space of tourism strategy and planning.

Part Two: Shares experience and success of good design and management through practical example at project or site level. These can be used for the design of future projects as well as change and improvement at existing sites and are intended for those who own and manage sites as well as for those who design and regulate their improvement.

PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES

The intention of these guidelines can be summed up in the following points:

- To make the visitor experience even better – while protecting the natural assets throughout the entire extent of the Wild Atlantic Way,

- To promote a very simple goal that every future decision for every policy, plan, project and action along the Wild Atlantic Way should always keep the experience Wild or make the experience 'More Wild' (refer to Appendix 1 for details on "More Wild"),

- To resolve two opposites - increasing benefit while reducing risk – to allow tourism to grow and to thrive, while also making sure that the reason for visiting – wildness – also grows and thrives, and

- To provide practical help and guidance to parties involved in visitor management both at strategic and site level.

---

1. These guidelines should be considered and applied having consideration for the *"Site Maintenance Guidelines (remedial works guidelines)"* which forms part of the Wild Atlantic Way Operational Plan as well as *"Wild Atlantic Way Signature Discovery Points- Visitor Management and Design Considerations*

PART ONE

Guidelines for Strategic Planning of Visitor Management on the Wild Atlantic Way

INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES

1.0 PART 1: GUIDELINES FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING OF VISITOR MANAGEMENT ON THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

Part 1 of these guidelines provides guidance on strategic concepts as well as explanations about terms, objectives and aims that can be used when preparing documentation that is likely to be used at the early stage of plans and projects along the Wild Atlantic Way.

The guidelines take us through a process which considers asset protection, what is success and guiding the decision-making process. Case study practical examples are set out and useful checklists are provided when considering policy and planning in this space.

1.1 STRATEGIC CONSIDERATION 1 - INVOLVED PARTIES

MANAGED BY ALL - FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL
The Wild Atlantic Way is owned and managed by the whole community, for the benefit of all. Its future needs a shared vision of what needs to be achieved for all, by all. Its future will depend on many actors – landowners, County Councils, local businesses, engineers, designers, scientists - all contributing their best, for the best. 'Wild' is not the result of a 'do nothing' approach. Every acre and mile of the Wild Atlantic Way is owned and managed by someone. Its appearance and character are the results of thousands of everyday decisions and actions, large and small.

A SHARED VISION
The community who own and manage the Wild Atlantic Way need to have a shared vision of the approaches and standards that will sustain its attraction. That needs consistency of strategic approach at a high level and also at the level of design details at site level.

The extraordinary Wild Atlantic Way experience is the result of many small experiences in many places that are owned and managed by many people. Unless every person in every place shares a vision of quality and standards, then the experience will be ordinary and disappointing.

This natural appearance is apparently effortless. In reality it is the result of pains-taking planning, maintenance and partnership in a shared vision.

1.2 STRATEGIC CONSIDERATION 2- ASSET PROTECTION

The continued success of the Wild Atlantic Way depends on establishing and maintaining a brand – not a location. A brand is a promise about a type of experience that the visitor will have. The essence of the promise is to experience a 'wild' place. This sense of 'wildness' is the asset that the brand depends on – it must be protected. This requires a shared understanding under the following headings;

BRAND PROTECTION
Protecting and preserving wildness is critical to protecting and preserving the unique selling proposition and the brand promise of the Wild Atlantic Way. Protect wilderness because it is the brand.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
Much of the route passes through areas with the highest level of ecological, landscape and cultural sensitivity. These are the ingredients of the asset. Failure to protect these will diminish the experience and will also create legal liabilities that could result in the loss of access to critical parts of the Wild Atlantic Way. Environmental protection is asset protection.

VISITOR PROTECTION
Near-coastal locations are inherently dangerous – especially during and after weather events. It is critical not to direct visitors towards locations with dangerous access arrangements. The visitor is the most critical asset – they must be protected.

EXPERIENCE PROTECTION
Visitors experiences will be improved by removing traffic congestion, site over-loading and poorly designed facilities that lack distinctiveness and authenticity. Attention to planning, design and detail are key to the improvement and protection of the quality of the asset.

PRODUCT PROTECTION
It is likely that the green credentials of tourism products will be increasingly scrutinised by discerning visitors and professional experts alike. Understanding of the significance and sensitivity of key landscape, heritage and ecological resources is required to protect the authenticity and quality of experience each element of the Wild Atlantic Way.

A safe, exciting experience of the wildness of the Atlantic is the promise. Its successful delivery requires a shared vision at every level from landowner and local entrepreneur to the County Council and national agencies.
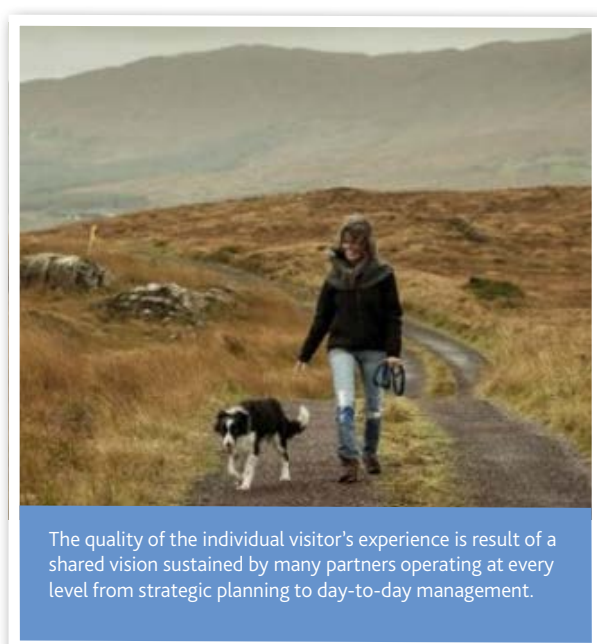
1.3 STRATEGIC CONSIDERATION 3 – SUCCESS

Visitor management solutions for the Wild Atlantic Way needs a clear vision about what success will look like.

Success will be the result of a sustained effort by many players in many places. It is crucial that all are aware of and committed to delivering the six fundamental factors for success.

- The Wild Atlantic Way must deliver experiences that are unique, genuine and emotionally fulfilling.
- The Wild Atlantic Way Experience must be Wild and Atlantic.
- The Wild Atlantic Way must be memorable, comfortable, enjoyable – and safe.
- Wild Atlantic Way Products must be less seasonal, more dispersed, more special and more profitable.
- The Wild Atlantic Way brand promises wildness – this asset must be sustained.
- The Wild Atlantic Way is a living community – which must be served as the first priority of any strategy.

The quality of the individual visitor's experience is result of a shared vision sustained by many partners operating at every level from strategic planning to day-to-day management.

The achievement of '*Leave No Trace*' is easily overlooked. Outside peak season this road at Marble Hill has no parking or surfboard hire equipment. Note the beach and dunes in the background where natural processes are dominant with no visibility of any development or structures.

VICE MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The VICE (Visitor, Industry, Community and Environment) Model for Sustainable Tourism is an approach that Fáilte Ireland adopts in all of our activities and outputs and forms the foundation for an approach to successful & sustainable visitor management and asset protection along the Wild Atlantic Way.

1.4 STRATEGIC CONSIDERATION 4 - GUIDING DECISION-MAKING

Here are the basic techniques common to all decisions about Wild Atlantic Way Areas and sites. Use them to explain how proposed plans and projects will help to achieve these.

THE TEST
We need to test every decision by asking – 'Will this make the place More or Less Wild?'

This is achieved by asking; -

- What need are we meeting?
- What problem are we solving?
- What are the options or alternatives?
- What changes will happen?

THE FUNDAMENTALS
Obey the old rule '*Measure Twice – Cut Once*' – by understanding the area first.
- Understanding full picture - ownership, use, management, significance and sensitivities.
- Understand the needs and views of other users too – especially fulltime and year-round farmers and fishermen, residents and those involved in businesses, maintenance and safety.
- Manage first, build as a last resort.
- Seasonal uses first – build as a last resort
- Always consider alternatives – no designing until options are considered.
- Consider the reversibility of what is being proposed.

THE BASICS
- Protect the horizon – keep it horizontal, clear, un-obstructed.
- Accommodate weather - erosion, corrosion, rain, wind, movement.
- Understand vegetation – none or slow, little screening.
- Understand coastal processes especially erosion, deposition by water, wind and storms.
- Access, Privacy, Property, Commonage, Foreshore.

UNDERSTANDING CONSEQUENCES
- Consider the effects of excavations for services and access.
- Consider the effects of drainage and compaction in high-energy environments.
- Anticipate the effects of new access and resultant desire lines.
- Consider future management and maintenance.

Appendix 2 sets out three case studies which demonstrate how the above approach and principles might be considered at a practical level in the instance of coastal planning along the Wild Atlantic Way.

A useful way to make decisions about development is to look at the location and ask, '*Will this place look more wild or less wild afterwards?*'

The highest achievement is to minimise the intrusion of any man-made development between the visitor and the Atlantic. Make do with less. This is what success looks like.

A sense of vastness is one of the Wild Atlantic Way's most powerful characteristics. It can dwarf any human projects. Good site or route selection exposes visitors to these huge vistas – without diminishing them.

1.5 CHECKLIST TO GUIDE DECISION MAKING

Set out below are checklists designed for both policy and plan level to be used by relevant parties when considering tourism related strategies and plans.

POLICIES

		IN NEAR-COASTAL AREAS DO POLICIES INCLUDE: -	YES	NO	UNCERTAIN	ACTION REQUIRED
POLICY REQUIREENT CHECKLIST	1.1	A requirement for an integrated consideration of visitor management – including resilient service hubs, access routes and low-impact parking and coastal facilities?				
	1.2	A requirement to include policies that direct facilities away from the near-coastal zone?				
	1.3	A requirement for plans and projects to have regard to relevant tourism guidance documents?				
	1.4	A requirement to take account of environmental capacity and resilience of near-coastal areas – with new developments being restricted to robust areas?				
	1.5	A requirement to direct high-capacity, standardised facilities for accommodation, catering, transport or entertainment away from the near-coast zone?				
	1.6	A requirement to include policies that emphasize locally distinctive seasonal events?				
	1.7	A requirement to explore potential for a core of winter activities?				
	1.8	A requirement to consider maintenance and daily cleaning of remote sites?				
	1.9	A requirement to provide the preparation and implementation of a Tourism Visitor Management Programme?				
	1.1	A requirement to identify sites that require the presence of specialists during design, construction and particularly during operations?				
	1.11	A requirement to include policies with separate peak and off-peak provisions in intensely used visitor areas?				
	1.12	A requirement to include policies with separate peak and off-peak traffic provisions?				
	1.13	A requirement to include policies to facilitate local pre-application consultation for larger tourism projects in smaller communities?				

2. PLANS

		IN NEAR-COASTAL AREAS DO PLANS INCLUDE: -	YES	NO	UNCERTAIN	ACTION REQUIRED
PLAN REQUIREMENT CHECKLIST	2.1	A requirement to consider the durability and safety of access and viewing points?				
	2.2	A requirement to avoid exposed or unstable locations that will require major works for visitor safety?				
	2.3	A requirement to provide Visitor Management Plans for tourism in near-coastal zones that integrate visitor access, parking and facilities with natural sensitivities?				
	2.4	A requirement to specify 'grades' of access that illustrate locations that are accessible to all as well as those that require appropriate fitness, clothing and knowledge?				
	2.5	A requirement for larger-scale standardised visitor facilities to be located in larger settlements?				
	2.6	A requirement to avoid locating demanding land-uses to hold crowds or large vehicles on sensitive, near-coastal areas?				
	2.7	A requirement to plan for different seasonal uses in the same areas used by tourism and other uses?				
	2.8	A requirement to plan for efficient maintenance of sites.				
	2.9	A requirement to cluster visitor and/or routes for efficient service?				
	2.1	A requirement to specify if sites are manned in peak season?				
	2.11	A requirement for Visitor Sites to be planned and scheduled according to different types and intensity of visitor management regime – according to site sensitivity?				
	2.12	A requirement for Visitor Site Management to be classified according to whether general or specialist staffing is required – according to site sensitivity?				
	2.13	A requirement for plans to include clearly separate provisions for peak and off-peak infrastructure and services?				
	2.14	A requirement for plans to include seasonal traffic patterns?				
	2.15	A requirement for plans to include local concerns to provide pre-design advice to external developers?				

1.6 FROM STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS TO IMPLEMENTATION IN PRACTICE

Set out below is a table which highlights overarching principles of visitor management and how these can cascade from a strategic level down to project and site-specific levels.

HIGH-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS			IMPLEMENTATION IN PRACTICE		
PRINCIPLES	OBJECTIVES	ISSUES	POLICIES	PLANS	PROJECTS
More Safety and Comfort	**Visitors will experience a genuinely Wild Atlantic – in Safety and Comfort – without barriers**	Steep, elevated areas are favoured viewing points. These can be dangerously exposed to high winds and/or large waves. Visitors can be unaware of the dangers of near-coastal areas.	Include policies that require an integrated consideration of visitor management – including resilient service hubs, access routes and low-impact parking and coastal facilities.	Consider the durability and safety of access and viewing points. Avoid exposed or unstable locations that will require major works for visitor safety.	Ensure that locations of public access offer views towards steep coastal features – but avoid direct access without careful planning for environmentally compatible safety measures. Direct public access to steep areas should be a last resort.
		Areas that feel 'wild' are devoid of man-made features. Providing facilities for the convenience or safety of visitors can lessen the sense of wildness.	Include policies that direct facilities away from the near-coastal zone. Require plans and projects to have regard to relevant guidance documents.	Require Visitor Management Plans for tourism in near-coastal zones to integrate visitor access, parking and facilities with natural sensitivities.	Minimise the extent of new building in the near-coastal zone. Minimise the need for new roads, septic tanks or new piped services. Re-used structures or temporary projects should be the preferred approach
		Visitors to remote areas are often ill-prepared for weather or topography. The provision of facilities – shelters, toilets or paths and steps – can lessen the sense of wildness.	Include policies that recognise the need to take account of environmental capacity and resilience of near-coastal areas – with new developments being restricted to robust areas.	Consider 'grades' of access that illustrate locations that are accessible to all as well as those that require appropriate fitness, clothing and knowledge.	In remote or environmentally fragile areas always give priority to developments that are seasonal, removable or which have a minimal environmental footprint. Build new as a last resort.

HIGH-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS			IMPLEMENTATION IN PRACTICE		
PRINCIPLES	OBJECTIVES	ISSUES	POLICIES	PLANS	PROJECTS
More Special, Less Seasonal	Tourism Offerings will become more Special, less Seasonal	Larger numbers of visitors have high standards that encourage the adaption of robust, proven approaches. These may be very standardised and may seem bland and placeless.	Include policies to direct high-capacity, standardised facilities for accommodation, catering, transport or entertainment away from the near-coast zone.	Plan for larger-scale standardised visitor facilities to be located in larger settlements	Re-used structures or temporary projects should be the preferred approach in the near-coastal parts of the site.
		Safe design for vehicles and crowds requires adherence to strict rules. Uncompromising Safety Design can be incompatible to sensitive natural, historical or scenic areas.	Include policies to match uses and projects with the environmental capacity and resilience of near-coastal areas.	Avoid locating demanding land-uses to hold crowds or large vehicles on sensitive, near-coastal areas.	Locate demanding features away from sensitive natural, historical or scenic parts of near-coastal sites.
		Tourism in more remote areas has a very short season. Viability can be difficult, and it is difficult to recoup investment. Expensive public facilities such as schools often go un-used in summer.	Include policies that emphasise locally distinctive seasonal events. Include policies to explore potential for a core of winter activities.	Consider land-use plans for different seasonal uses in the same areas used by tourism and other uses.	In small, remote settlements, designs should consider how features such as parking, toilets, halls and green spaces could have different uses during different seasons

HIGH-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS			IMPLEMENTATION IN PRACTICE		
PRINCIPLES	OBJECTIVES	ISSUES	POLICIES	PLANS	PROJECTS
More Care and Protection	**Nature, Scenery & Culture will enjoy more Care and Protection**	Wild Places are often remote from settlements or service centres. Maintenance of such areas can be difficult, expensive and slow.	Include policies that require consideration of maintenance and daily cleaning of remote sites.	Plan for efficient maintenance of sites. Consider clustering and/or routes for efficient service. Plans should specify whether or sites are manned in peak season.	Projects should include locations and designs for waste collection that is adequately sized, weather secure and visually unobtrusive. Do not include waste facilities if these cannot be serviced daily during peak season. Un-manned projects should not include high-maintenance grass areas or floral planting.
		Despite extreme weather exposure, Wild Places often contain features that can be both significant and sensitive. Unmanaged Visitors can lead to damage to natural, cultural and scenic resources in remote places	Include policies that require the preparation and implementation of a Tourism Visitor Management Programme.	In accordance with site sensitivity, Visitor Sites should be planned and scheduled according to different types and intensity of visitor management regime.	Projects should include a consideration of the necessity for site and visitor management. Site Management costs and arrangements should be integral to design from the outset, Avoid designs that may require toilets and septic tanks for staff in sensitive remote areas.
		Care of wild places can require specialist knowledge and approaches, which can be more costly and complex than more ordinary places	Include policies that require the identification of sites that require the presence of specialists during design, construction and particularly during operations [eg ecologists during nesting or flowering season]	In accordance with site sensitivity, Visitor Site Management should be classified according to whether general or specialist staffing is required.	Projects should consider the practicality of managing and/or staffing sites that require the on-site presence of specialists.

HIGH-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS			IMPLEMENTATION IN PRACTICE		
PRINCIPLES	OBJECTIVES	ISSUES	POLICIES	PLANS	PROJECTS
First Priority	Local Communities will be the First Priority	Seasonal visitor numbers are often much larger than the year-round population in remote areas. This can create seasonal surges of demand that the local facilities find expensive to maintain.	Include policies with separate peak and off-peak provisions in intensely used visitor areas.	Plans should include clearly separate provisions for peak and off-peak infrastructure and services.	Infrastructure projects and services in intensely used visitor areas should; - be sized to allow efficient peak and off-peak operation - provide for separate charging/ costing that differentiates between year-round local and seasonal visitor use.
		Fatigue during peak season can lessen the patience and welcome of local communities.	Include policies with separate peak and off-peak traffic provisions	Plan for seasonal traffic patterns.	Give circulation priority and convenience to local traffic.
		Large-scale local investment is often not realistic in small, remote areas. External investor can sometimes be insensitive to local concerns.	Include policies to facilitate local pre-application consultation for larger tourism projects in smaller communities.	Plans should reflect local concerns to provide pre-design advice to external developers.	Allow sufficient time and resources for meaningful local pre-application consultation when larger tourism projects are to be located in smaller communities.

PART TWO

Guidelines on Design & Management of Projects on the Wild Atlantic Way

2.0 PART 2: GUIDELINES ON DESIGN & MANAGEMENT OF PROJECTS ON THE WILD ATLANTIC WAY

Part 2 of these guidelines provides guidance on the design and management more specifically for projects at site level. In order to achieve successful site management at this level these guidelines explore the aim, risks, mistakes, learning from example, getting it right and maintenance.

2.1 THE AIM

The overall aim of these guidelines in to provide practical advice so that the 'Leave No Trace' approach to visitor management can be achieved in ways that are easily implemented by landowners, site managers and those developing services or businesses in the area.

A successful example of how to provide visitor service in a remote and sensitive site. It uses removable structures and natural materials for the summer season only. For the rest of the year the site is wild.

Example of Overall Approach – The image above contains a number of the elements used in the successful provision of facilities and amenities for visitors along the Wild Atlantic Way. It demonstrates the need for the absence of conflict between visitor activity, business and the protection of fragile natural resources, by implementing the correct plan, siting, design and materials.

Plan – to avoid permanent building projects wherever possible. The activities are seasonal and in very harsh weather-exposed locations. This approach provides facilities only when they are required during each day of the summer season. Visitors can stay and be entertained in nearby settlements in the evenings. All mobile structures are removed during the winter months – the wildness is un-affected.

Siting – both the parking, the access and the activity businesses are all located set back from the shore –so that the unspoiled appearance is preserved. This also lessens pressure on the ecology of the beach.

Design – the boundary of the access road and the parking area is formed by an adaptation of local materials [sand] and self-replenishing vegetation [grass].

Materials – the seasonal businesses are inviting and bright – to attract attention and custom – while the permanent features blend in with the appearance of the natural environment.

Before considering any advice or guidelines about good examples it can be instructive to reflect on the risks – both to visitors and to nature.

2.2 ADMIT THE RISKS

KEEP NATURE & VISITORS SAFE

It is important for all parties to accept the existence of risks associated with increasing visitor numbers at sites along the Wild Atlantic Way.

Groupthink, involving a denial of the existence of risk, is the single biggest cause of failure in most systems. Risks can only be anticipated and avoided if they are admitted in the first instance.

- Visitors can be at risk if exposed to steep or unstable coastal edges.
- Nature is at risk from erosion caused by excessive visitor numbers in fragile environments.

Design and choice of materials can increase risks if they fail to take account of the severity of exposure and weathering in coastal locations.

Clifftops offer the best views – but they often contain the most sensitive ecological features – such as the vegetation. **Photos 1 and 2** shows how these can easily be damaged by trampling. This can take many years to recover and can expose visitors to danger see **Photo 3**.

The weather and exposure of the Irish Atlantic shores create very challenging and unforgiving environment for artificial materials and structures See **Photo 4**. Considerable expertise is required to ensure that designs will be robust – without becoming intrusive.

WHAT GOES WRONG & WHY?

Design and management problems occur on coastal projects because of a recurrence, and occasional combination, of four main reasons.

1. LACK OF CO-ORDINATION

The plethora of signs in Photo 1 illustrates that many coastal areas and attractions are often owned and/or managed by a number of groups. All are legitimate and all are well-intentioned – but over time their individual and un-co-ordinated actions can combine to produce visual blight, like this example, that detracts from the wild character of the background. The lack of co-ordination of materials, designs, maintenance and facilities in Photo 2 illustrates how these foreground factors combine to create an unkempt first impression of this beach.

2. OVERDESIGN

Vehicular and marine access, parking and erosion protection are usually designed by civil and structural engineers who, rightly, place great emphasis on strength and durability. Such considerations may not be appropriate when applied to more 'ordinary' features' such as the field edges in Photo 3, where a simple hedge or earth embankment would have retained the rural character needed for an amenity area.

3 INAPPROPRIATE DESIGN DETAILS

A typical example of this would be the development of a conventional path (e.g. excavation, fill, kerbing etc). across a sensitive bog area. A more appropriate design and solution here would be a board walk which would have appeared much more natural, while protecting the ecology.

4. POOR OR ABSENT SITE MANAGEMENT

Many coastal sites are remote, seasonal and have complex, multiple arrangements of ownerships. As a result, access, movement, litter control and maintenance/ repair can be occasional or even haphazard – see Photo 4.

2.3 GETTING THE DETAILS RIGHT

Selection of design solutions is critical. There are a wide range of options for types of development in sensitive coastal zones. Not all of these are equally suitable for all locations.

Considerable care and expertise are needed at every stage from plan conception through to project execution. Consideration for alternatives, siting, design and materials is key.

ALTERNATIVES

A key technique is to ensure that a wide range of alternatives are considered and that each one is evaluated against an appropriate range of criteria, including; -

- Environmental compatibility,
- Quality of visitor experience,
- Health and safety in use,
- Capacity to recover from periodic storm events,
- Need for maintenance [and availability of expertise and resources to implement],
- Cost of maintenance and repair versus initial capital costs, and
- Monitoring and Mitigation Strategy.

SITING

The location of a project or activity is the single most important way of protecting the environment – and of ensuring a safe and enjoyable visitor experience. Sites need to be selected because of suitability – not availability.

Irish tourism lasts for a short season. Temporary structures and facilities – especially in sensitive areas – create lighter and more reversible environmental effects.

A new building is not always the best way to provide new tourism facilities beside the sea. Mobile and seasonal outlets create a small environmental footprint; they are less affected by winter weather and the area remains unchanged after they leave.

In many instances the details of design and materials are secondary to the selection of the correct location. Siting that takes account of natural shelter [both from weather and from visibility] can greatly reduce visual impact – while increasing visitor comfort. The siting of toilets and parking in Malin Head Photo 1 takes full advantage of a local outcrop to minimise the effects on the surrounding landscape – so that the visitor experience of the wildness of the headland is less affected.

Movement within a site can be significantly governed by slope. Pedestrians follow lines of least resistance. This example, also from Malin Head Photo 2, shows how a small local rise is used to make the path appear to follow or flow around contours very naturally – avoiding harsh straight lines - while confining visitors to the path. This type of skilful blending with local topography means that only a small part of the path is visible – which also reduce visual impacts.

DESIGN

Design of elements must strive to reinforce the wild character of the near-coastal zone. Overdesign is the single biggest cause of loss of character in these locations.

It is very important, from the outset, to ensure that every decision is made by referring to the 'Wild' aspect of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Consider the selection of seating, as an example.

Photo 3 illustrates the common assumption that a 'natural' material – such as timber will automatically fit in with a natural location. The photo shows how the colour, shape and detail all contrast strongly with the natural environment – with the unintended consequence of drawing attention to the chair and detracting from the natural setting.

Photo 4 illustrates a common assumption – especially by professional designers – of the need for 'honest' designs that employ highly contrasting materials shapes and forms – stainless steel and concrete in this example.

Photo 5 illustrates that sometimes the best chair is not a chair at all. These large rocks provide seating in a way that is not visually intrusive and that fits well with the ecology and natural character of the area.

MATERIALS

Careful and wise selection of materials can significantly improve the perception of the wild and natural character of the area. However, 'natural' materials need to be carefully considered – to take account of the wild and peripheral nature of costal sites.

Everyone is accustomed to thinking about ensuring that their clothes and interior designs consist of 'matching' materials and patterns.

The same applies when considering the selection of materials and patterns for use at the special coastal sites along the Wild Atlantic Way.

In the first place the materials need to fit in with a natural environment – so uncut stone and unpainted timber should be the first choice.

Steel and concrete should be used sparingly because these are durable – but not flexible – which is a requirement in many-near-shore locations.

Ocean exposure, moving sand and winter storms cause rapid weathering and frequent damage to coastal projects.

Materials should be capable of being readily repaired or even partially replaced using locally available materials and labour.

Photos 1 – 3 from Murvagh Beach provide a good illustration of the 'palette' of materials that work best in the near-coastal environment.

Photo 4 from Ros Golli shows how walls made out of unbedded stone fit in well with the appearance and natural environment.

For more details on durability and intrusiveness of materials refer to **Appendix 3**.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

Any proposals for managing or developing parts of the Wild Atlantic Way should commence by considering the range of options that are available to deal with a proposed project. Typically, projects arise from a desire to improve, protect or provide visitor facilities. Typical questions include;

• How to improve the visitor experience?

• How to protect existing assets from overloading?

• How to provide a new visitor attraction?

The following sections provide a range of practical options of how to: -

• Use appropriate approaches to projects

• Use appropriate techniques

• Use appropriate design details

• Match materials and methods to local conditions

It also provides examples with discussions of use, type, issue and suitable locations for each of the main types of potential projects associated with the Wild Atlantic Way including; -

• Pedestrian Access

• Vehicle Access

• Monitoring and Managing – by design

Developments that robustly protect the environment remain unobtrusive, so that a sense of enjoyment and nature remain dominant.

The use of simple material with least embellishment often produces the best and most robust results in near-coastal environs. This example also shows how sharp and clear separation between natural and man-made materials and forms allows the natural elements to be visually dominant.

Many countries now successfully employ seasonal walkways on beaches and in dunes. These can be removed during the winter.

2.4 LEARNING FROM EXAMPLES

The following tables set out practical examples of success, mistakes, details, materials used, access to site and potential ideas for monitoring & maintenance at sites.

	EXAMPLES	USE APPROPRIATE APPROACH TO PROJECT
LEARNING FROM SUCCESS		Layby Developments, like this example, allow views of sensitive coastal areas without any construction within the sensitive near-shore environment. This location – set back from the wave zone and exposed cliffs – allows safer viewing by visitor – with no loss of experience of the wildness.
		Alternative Access Developments – such as this cycleway – permit use of less intrusive projects that can be more compatible with the type of sensitive environs that are found within the near-shore zone. Developments should always explore the option of using less intrusive methods and materials within 'the last kilometre of land' – which defines the more sensitive near-coastal zone
		Seasonal and Temporary Uses and Structures should always be the preferred option in sensitive near-coastal locations. These create less environmental effects, are completely reversible and allow the use of relatively fragile structures that can be removed during the stormy winter season.
		Removable structures – such as this beach walkway through dunes - can be employed during peak visitor season in very sensitive environments. Such environments cannot sustain permanent structures – due to ecological sensitivity as well as exposure to extreme weather.

EXAMPLES	USE APPROPRIATE TECHNIQUES

Flexible and adaptive structures, such as this partially floating walkway – allow access through sensitive tidal areas – without the requirement for intrusive permanent civil engineering projects.

Appropriate Techniques that are most suitable for the receiving environment.

This example of a boardwalk is fixed directly onto a sandy, well-drained surface – which permits these attractive flowing lines.

These are suitable for areas in the vicinity of dunes.

Appropriate Applications, such as the construction of this boardwalk involves elevation of the structure above the saturated peats in this example.

The supporting timber framework results in a very difference appearance – with a defined edge composed of straight segments.

These are suitable for areas commonly found near cliff edges and rock shores.

EXAMPLES	INAPPROPRIATE TECHNIQUES
	Good Technique – Wrong Place Boardwalks can be successful in wetland or dune sites – but winter storm waves and surges on exposed beaches can quickly damage them.
	Good Materials – Wrong Place Stainless steel, insitu concrete and grass sward have very high resistance to extreme weather – but not to the actions of the sheep who roam this visitor attraction.
	Good Design – Poor Management Mown grass paths can be unobtrusive and robust. However, they need to be regularly rotated with due consideration to the resilience of the specific species of the underlying vegetation.
	Good Intention – Poor Execution Concerns about controlling erosion, traffic, safety and convenience appear to have squeezed natural features from a number of coastal locations on the coast.
	Good Intentions – Wrong Place Artificial floral displays that are appropriate in parks and urban areas are not compatible with the aim of sustaining the wilderness character of the WAW. They also require levels of care and maintenance that are often unrealistic at more remote coastal sites.

EXAMPLES	SMALL DETAILS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE
	In this instance the cliff-top path is located within a fenced-off portion of an ordinary paddock. Spectacular cliff scenery is visible across the field boundary. Visitor safety and ecological protection are assured by the simple detail of locating the path on the correct side of the field boundary.
	This is a very successful example because the path marks the junction between unmanaged wild shore habitats to the right and more conventional farmland to the left. All paths should, where possible, be located along the boundary between wild and farmed areas.
	A simple path through grass creates an orderly appearance – while gently directing visitor access away from sensitivities. This have a very significant advantage of being easily moved from year-to-year to further reduce pressure on the soil and vegetation – while allowing trampled areas to recover.
	The colour of the timber boardwalk together with its location at the lowest point in the gap are important details that allow this vital protection to 'disappear' and sustain the visitor's experience of a wild shore. Protection of visitor safety and ecological integrity must take account of visual amenity.

DETAILS MATTER

EXAMPLES	MATCH MATERIALS & METHODS TO LOCAL CONDITIONS
	Wherever possible, always consider the re-use of existing paths and roads instead of new construction. No matter how skilfully materials and methods are used for new designs, it will take decades to match the experience of using long established routes.
	These timber steps and rail are flexible and suitable for the dynamic environment of a dune system. The use of timber readily lends itself to removal and repair after winter storms – which often disturb or damage the portions nearest the beach. This type of construction requires regular inspection and maintenance – to repair emerging damage and to ensure safety of visitors.
	These concrete and steel materials are durable in the harsh near-coastal environment – but they are only suitable for use on a stable base – such as the rocky foreshore here. The path is also set well back from the area of wave action – which helps to minimise the need for repairs due to winter storms.
	These very large stones have been inserted into an exposed steep slope overlooking coastal cliffs. Such installation requires significant effort and expertise. It also requires regular monitoring to facilitate the detection and correction of emerging patterns of wear. The management of such paths may occasionally require closure or diversion to alternative routes to allow recovery and repair.

MATCH MATERIALS AND METHODS TO LOCAL CONDITIONS

	USE	TYPE	ISSUE	SUITABLE LOCATION	EXAMPLES
PEDESTRIAN ACCESS	**WALKING & CYCLING PATHS AND TRACKS** There is a wide range of options for access. Different types of paths are suitable for different types of locations. **Note** Unsuitable paths in unsuitable locations can be both dangerous and harmful to the environment.	**Temporary Surface** Many proprietary types available – ranging from simple 'roll-up' timber slats to specialist plastic and steel systems.	Some areas only require access in good weather. These are removed in winter or during storms.	Suitable for all areas that are only used on a seasonal or temporary basis. They can be particularly useful in beach areas during peak periods with good weather.	
		Worn path These are formed by regular light traffic – both by walkers and animals. Excessive traffic means paths must be closed.	These must be regularly inspected and repaired. Alternative routes will be needed to cope with potential overloading. Upgrading is not an option	Acceptable in many natural areas – such as shores and uplands areas with regular monitoring, good drainage and very low numbers of users. They are intrinsically unsuitable for large numbers.	
		Mown Grass Path These are formed by regular mowing between areas of meadow or scrub vegetation.	The key to success is to make the path consistently wide, avoid steep areas or concentration	Suitable for many areas with good drainage and low numbers of users. These need to be monitored regularly. More robust paths may need to be installed before damage occurs	
		Boardwalk – elevated. These simple looking structures require a lot of commitment due to significant construction effort as well as annual inspection and repair.	They require very careful site selection and detailed design. A modified version is used in uplands.	Suitable for bogs, heath, wetlands and marshes. These are not suitable for unstable areas such as cliff or stream edges, dunes or beaches.	
		Boardwalk – surface These require very careful site selection and detailed design. They look beautiful and feel lovely in bare feet.	It is very important to avoid waterlogged areas Essential to inspect and repair regularly.	Suitable for dry sandy soil – ideal behind dunes as connections between parking and beaches. They can also play an important role in dune management.	
		Surfaced Path – unsealed. These are very robust, safe and compatible with a wide range of habitats.	The best pathway for coastal access. They require very careful site selection and detailed design. Location along the exact boundary of habitats is critical.	Suitable for junction between improved grassland and splash-zone near the shore. If carefully located and skilfully designed these require low maintenance.	
		Surfaced Path – sealed This is like a miniature road and is particularly suitable for cycling and greenway routes.	These are sturdy, safe and compatible with a wide range of robust habitats. Expensive to develop, low maintenance costs.	Suitable for normal agricultural soils or, occasionally, on the bed of an old existing road/ railway in more sensitive areas	

	USE	TYPE	ISSUE	SUITABLE LOCATION	EXAMPLES
VEHICLE ACCESS	**NO VEHICLE** It is important to be clear about where there are no vehicles	**Green Road**s are old tracks for driving stock – they are not used by vehicles or bicycles – but in places are used by walkers and horse riders. Some parts may not have public access.	The rights of way need to be understood and respected.	These are pre-existing routes. These need to be identified and incorporated into visitor access proposals.	
	OCCASIONAL VEHICLE There are many roads that are only used occasionally. These have a lot of potential for walking access in rural areas	**Grass Tracks** These have evolved over time – usually as incursions into natural and semi-natural areas. They are not to be confused with mown grass paths.	These damage soil, and plants, so are generally unable to accommodate increases or intensification of use.	These are pre-existing routes that usually occur at the edges of beaches, commonage, bogs and uplands.	
		Surfaced Tracks These are old public roads that now receive little or no traffic or maintenance. They are usually dead ends. These are suitable for walking, hiking, cycling or horse riding.	Where road may be used for agriculture, turf cutting etc. there may be times of year where there is some level of traffic on these narrow roads	These are very important visitor resources that need to be identified and incorporated into visitor access proposals.	
	CAR, BUS AND TRUCK ACCESS The length of the Wild Atlantic Way means that most journeys will take place in vehicles	**Minor Sealed Road** These are narrow public roads that receive low levels of local traffic or maintenance. These are suitable for walking, hiking, cycling or horse riding.	Where road may be used for agriculture, turf cutting etc. there may be times of year where there is some level of traffic on these narrow roads	These are very important visitor resources that need to be identified and incorporated into visitor access proposals. Local agreement is critical.	
		County Roads The majority of the Wild Atlantic Way occurs on such roads. These are generally the location of all signage and Discovery Points.	Some locations along these roads will require more laybys, foot paths and cycle-routes	The routing of the Way used roads that would not need to be upgraded to carry extra traffic Some may follow routes parallel to the vehicle touring route.	
	PARKING	Laybys Occasional/ Overflow on Grass Occasional/ Overflow on Mats	It is critical to avoid over-specification of parking facilities	Laybys that extend existing roads are the best approach. Always give first preference to temporary uses – such as parking on grass or sand – these can be re-enforced.	
			These can be sensitive and highly seasonal uses	Overflow parking areas made with reinforced grass can be used in highly seasonal sites.	

	USE	TYPE	ISSUE	SUITABLE LOCATION	EXAMPLES
MONITORING AND MANAGING – BY DESIGN	**RIDGE TRAILS**	Ridge Paths These are formed by regular light traffic – both by walkers and animals	This highly concentrated erosion occurs at the point of maximum natural erosion. Undisturbed, it rapidly reverts to a natural state.	The peaks and final approach ridges of steep-sided hills.	
	HIKING TRAILS	Paved Climbs These are heavily modified steep areas where large shaped boulders are imported and expertly placed to ensure safety and prevent erosion.	These require expert location, design, construction and very regular inspection and repair. Ensure alternatives are available.	These occur on the steeper parts of a climb.	
		Paved Trails These are less modified steep areas where flags and stones are imported and expertly placed to ensure safety and prevent erosion.	These require careful location, design, construction and regular inspection and repair.	These occur on the middle and lower parts of a climb where the route is well defined.	
		Desire Lines Trails of wear in vegetation – that can rapidly become soil-eroding	These can appear gradually or sometimes quickly in response to a local change – such as flooding or a fallen tree. These need to be regularly inspected and repaired.	These occur near the lower parts of a climb – or at transitions where the main trail is not clearly defined	
	EDGE TRAILS	Upland Fences These occur along boundaries of ownership or management	Without forethought, inspection and good maintenance these can rapidly become the location of 'desire-lines' These can be a mixture of animal and visitor trails	Along fences	
		These occur where dune management systems are in place	As above	As above Along dune fencing	
		Cliff Edges These occur along edges of steep ground	These can occur near any cliff edge as a result of regular light traffic – both by walkers and animals	Along edges	

2.5 VISITOR MANAGEMENT

All of the evidence from Ireland's monitoring of visitor activity along the Wild Atlantic Way

demonstrates conclusively that visitor management is the key to ensuring that tourism and environmental protection can be sustainably combined.

Visitor management regimes are established by completing the following steps;

1. Site Designation for Appropriate Visitor Management
2. Adopt Appropriate Visitor Management System
3. Implement Site Maintenance System

SITE DESIGNATION FOR APPROPRIATE VISITOR MANAGEMENT TYPE

From the outset, every site and project should be designated according to the proposed management system.

Key Criteria for the designation of appropriate management system include; -

1. EVIDENCE
- Is there any evidence about existing patterns of use?
- Is there any evidence about existing problems resulting from use?
- The location and type of problem should be mapped and described – ideally the specific cause of the problem should be identified.

2. SIGNIFICANCE
- Is the site subject to any formal designations?
- Are the reasons for the designation known and fully understood?
- Are there legal requirements arising from the designations?

3. SENSITIVITY
- Are there particularly sensitive features on the site?
- Are the threats to this sensitivity known and understood?
- Are the measures to protect this sensitivity known and understood?

Visitors enjoying a safe and sustainable experience within the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Centre that is designed and managed to accommodate the pressure of large visitor numbers

4. LOCATION
- Located in or adjacent to an existing settlement?
- Located in or adjacent to established land-uses and structures?
- Located on a site of established visitor activity?
- Located in a remote location?

5. RESOURCES
- Is the site owned or permanently managed by a public authority?
- Is the site owned or permanently managed by a private enterprise?
- Is there an arrangement in place to finance the proposed site management and/ maintenance?
- Does the management require technical or scientific expertise?

6. SUSTAINABILITY
- Are the resources to manage and maintain the site permanent?
- Are the resources to manage and maintain the site tied to a private enterprise?
- Are the resources to manage and maintain the site dependent on a voluntary group?

Example of a beach management scheme that helps tourists to clean up after their visit.
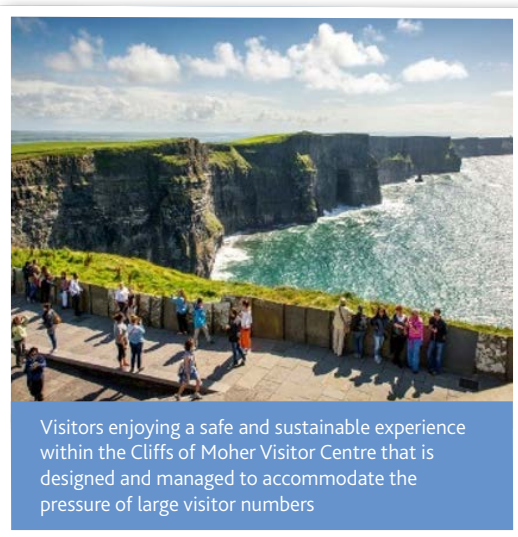
VISITOR MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Once the key criteria for site management systems have been assessed then an appropriate system for management of the site can be designed and implemented. Answering the questions in the previous checklist should help to ensure that the proposed management system is appropriate, effective and sustainable.

There are four types of Visitor Management Systems. These are different and distinct from Site Maintenance Systems – which are considered below;

1. Fully Managed
2. Occasional Managed [Regular weekly inspection - daily at peak]
3. Occasional [Irregular - each season]
4. Rarely/ never

TYPES OF VISITOR MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS	DESCRIPTION	TYPICAL SITE	MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES	TYPICAL MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES
Fully Managed Sites	Full time staffing with access control	National Monument with Building	• All day, every day. • Often open for most of year	• Daily Opening, Cleaning, supervision and guidance • Ongoing repair and renewal. Annual refurbishment • Expert inspection, monitoring and reporting • Site system maintenance
Regularly Managed Sites	Jointly managed with other sites	Popular Beach	• Daily visit peak season, Weekly visit off-season	• Cleaning and litter removal • Checklist Inspection – condition, erosion • Occasional repair • Annual renewal
Occasionally Managed	Inspected at least monthly	Cliff walk	• Seasonal Inspection • Annual repairs	• Checklist Inspection – condition, erosion • Periodic renewal
Rarely Managed	Annual inspection	Mountain Peak	• No management	• Checklist Inspection – condition, erosion • Condition reporting

SITE MAINTENANCE

Site Maintenance is different, but closely related, to Site Management. It is one of the most critical activities required to ensure both environmental protection as well as ensuring visitor satisfaction. It is critical therefore, that arrangements and resources are considered and provided from the outset. There is strong evidence from surveys of visitors that poor site maintenance creates a disproportionate large and negative impression of the entire landscape and experience.

A site without appropriate maintenance should not be promoted.

Maintenance usually refers to regular activities that include:

DAILY TASKS
- Emptying waste bins and replacing liners
- Collecting litter, debris
- Disposal of waste
- Monitoring for damage and wear and tear
- Making minor repairs

WEEKLY TASKS
- Grass cutting
- Checklist inspection for damage, wear or erosion

SEASONAL TASKS
- Repair, renewal or replacement of damaged or worn site furnishings, surfaces, paths, steps,
- fences, signs
- Repair and re-instatement of damaged or worn natural areas – surfaces, slopes, vegetation, walls etc.

The following checklists should be consulted when considering new projects at sites and site management at new and existing sites.

2.6 CHECKLIST FOR PROJECTS IN NEAR-COASTAL ZONES

		IN NEAR-COASTAL AREAS ARE PROJECTS REQUIRED TO	YES	NO	UNCERTAIN	ACTION REQUIRED
PROJECT REQUIREMENT CHECKLIST	1.1	Ensure that locations of public access offer views towards steep coastal features, while avoiding direct access without careful planning for environmentally compatible safety measures?				
	1.2	Direct public access to steep areas as a last resort?				
	1.3	Minimise the extent of new building?				
	1.4	Minimise the need for new roads, septic tanks or new piped services?				
	1.5	Re-use structures or temporary projects as the preferred approach?				
	1.6	Build new as a last resort?				
	1.7	Always give priority to developments that are seasonal, removable or which have a minimal environmental footprint?				
	1.8	Locate demanding features away from sensitive natural, historical or scenic near-coastal areas?				
	1.9	Consider how features such as parking, toilets, halls and green spaces could have different uses during different seasons?				
	1.10	Include locations and designs for waste collection that is adequately sized, weather secure and visually unobtrusive?				
	1.11	Avoid inclusion of waste facilities if these cannot be serviced daily during peak season?				
	1.12	Avoid inclusion of high-maintenance grass areas or floral planting in un-manned projects?				
	1.13	Include consideration of the necessity for site and visitor management?				
	1.14	Ensure that Site Management costs and arrangements are integral to design from the outset?				
	1.15	Avoid designs that may require toilets and septic tanks for staff in sensitive remote areas?				
	1.16	Consider the practicality of managing and/or staffing sites that require the on-site presence of specialists?				
	1.17	Ensure that infrastructure projects and services in intensely used visitor areas are sized to allow efficient peak and off-peak operation?				
	1.18	Ensure that infrastructure projects and services in intensely used visitor areas provide for separate charging/ costing that differentiates between year-round local and seasonal visitor use?				
	1.19	Give circulation priority and convenience to local traffic?				
	1.20	Allow sufficient time and resources for meaningful local pre-application consultation when larger tourism projects are to be located in smaller communities?				

2.7 CHECKLIST FOR SITE MANAGEMENT IN NEAR- COASTAL ZONES

	IN NEAR-COASTAL AREAS HAS SITE MANAGEMENT CONSIDERED?	YES	NO	UNCERTAIN	ACTION REQUIRED
PROJECT REQUIREMENT CHECKLIST	**2.1** Whether there is any evidence about existing patterns of use?				
	2.2 Whether there is any evidence about problems resulting from use?				
	2.3 Have the location and type of problem been mapped and described?				
	2.4 Is the site subject to any formal designations?				
	2.5 Are the reasons for the designation known and fully understood?				
	2.6 Are there legal requirements arising from the designations?				
	2.7 Are there particularly sensitive features on the site?				
	2.8 Are the threats to this sensitivity known and understood?				
	2.9 Are the measure to protect this sensitivity known and understood?				
	2.10 Is the Site located in or adjacent to an existing settlement?				
	2.11 Is the Site located in or adjacent to established land-uses and structures?				
	2.12 Is the Site located on a site of established visitor activity?				
	2.13 Is the Site located in a remote location?				
	2.14 Is the site owned or permanently managed by a public authority?				
	2.15 Is the site owned or permanently managed by a private enterprise?				
	2.16 Is there an arrangement in place to finance the proposed site management and/ maintenance?				
	2.17 Does the management require technical or scientific expertise?				
	2.18 Are the resources to manage and maintain the site permanent?				
	2.19 Are the resources to manage and maintain the site tied to a private enterprise?				
	2.20 Are the resources to manage and maintain the site dependent on a voluntary group?				

APPENDIX 1 – WHAT IS WILD?

WHAT IS WILD?

Most definitions of 'Wild' or 'Wilderness' refer to the absence of cultivation or management by humans as the defining factor.

This very human-centred approach does little to say what the Wild is – just what it is not. Such a definition is of little use when we are looking at the North Atlantic in the middle of a winter storm – no plough or fence will ever tame that.

HOW WILD?

It is not enough to use the word 'natural' and 'wild' interchangeably. A reedbed or pond might be natural – though hardly 'wild'.

'Wild' in this context conveys as sense of scale – being both very large and also very energetic – to the degree that there is no possibility of control.

'Wild' is also a sense of otherness, animal, mysterious, unknowable – what we humans are not.

The Wild Atlantic Way offers visitors the opportunity to experience the Wild. But this cannot be offered lightly.

Danger is a very real part of the Wild. Weather, wind tides and heights cannot be controlled or tamed. All must be approached with great caution.

Ireland's Atlantic coastline is the edge of a true wilderness where natural processes are fully dominant. In this dynamic, changing and unpredictable environment human activity needs to be carefully managed.

CARE IN THE WILD

Visitors are also strangers, unfamiliar with the danger that lurks in the Wild. They need to be guided and cared for as they experience the Wild. Similarly, we need to ensure that they pose no threat – by their expectations or requirements of this wild edge of the world. We must care for those who visit our wild places and we must care for the wild places too.

CARE OF THE WILD

Despite its huge scale and energy, parts of the Wild have curiously fragile aspects. Damage heals slow here

The Atlantic wilderness offers opportunities to experience unconfined weather and wildlife that can evoke a sense of the sublime and awe.

Direct personal exposure to wilderness can provide people with profound and emotional experiences. This requires considerable care to protect both the environment as well as the visitor.

APPENDIX 2 – CASE STUDIES

The Brú na Bóinne Visitor Management Strategy has successfully implemented the concept of separating visitor attractions from visitor facilities at a strategic level and has now been reproduced in many international locations.

This Appendix looks at this site specifically as a practical example. It aims to illustrate how this concept could be applied to attractions in the coastal zone along the Wild Atlantic Way. It also illustrates how visitor facilities can gradually be moved away from the most sensitive and significant near coastal zones and into more robust near-by areas of managed agricultural lands.

CASE STUDY 1 – STRATEGIC VISITOR MANAGEMENT - BRU NA BOINNE

A cluster of 3 large Neolithic passage tombs – Knowth, Newgrange and Dowth, are one of Ireland's most important archaeological sites. They are protected by a Visitor Management Plan.

Located less than an hour from Dublin, the site annually attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors. These ancient sites have a limited capacity to accommodate visitors without causing wear and tear to the fabric and context of the monuments – or reducing the quality of the visitor experience.

Landowners, local and state agencies have collaborated since 1995 to devise a strategy to manage visitor numbers - with the objective of accommodating ever increasing numbers – yet reducing pressure on the monuments.

At the core of the strategy lay two simple approaches;

1. to spread the load more evenly between the three sites
2. to move parking, shops, cafes and visitor facilities away from the monuments.

The diagrams illustrate how the original overcrowding was reduced by a combination of the removal of direct car access to the monuments and by the provision of new visitor facilities at a site south of the river.

This approach has succeeded in reducing 2017 visitor numbers to the Newgrange monument to levels last experienced in 1988.
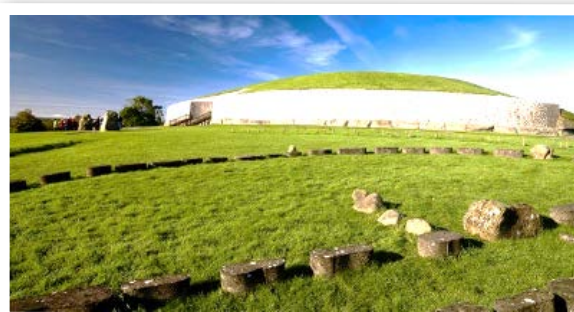
This pioneering technique is now being widely adopted.
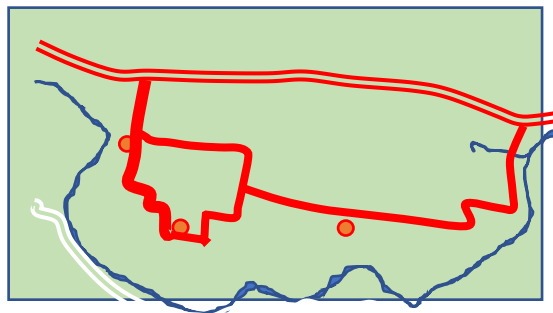
Before the Visitor Centre local roads were congested and the monuments were experiencing unsustainable visitor numbers
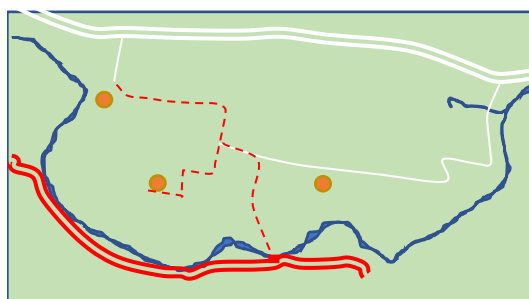
After the Visitor Centre traffic was confined south of the river and pressure on the sites and the monuments was greatly reduced.
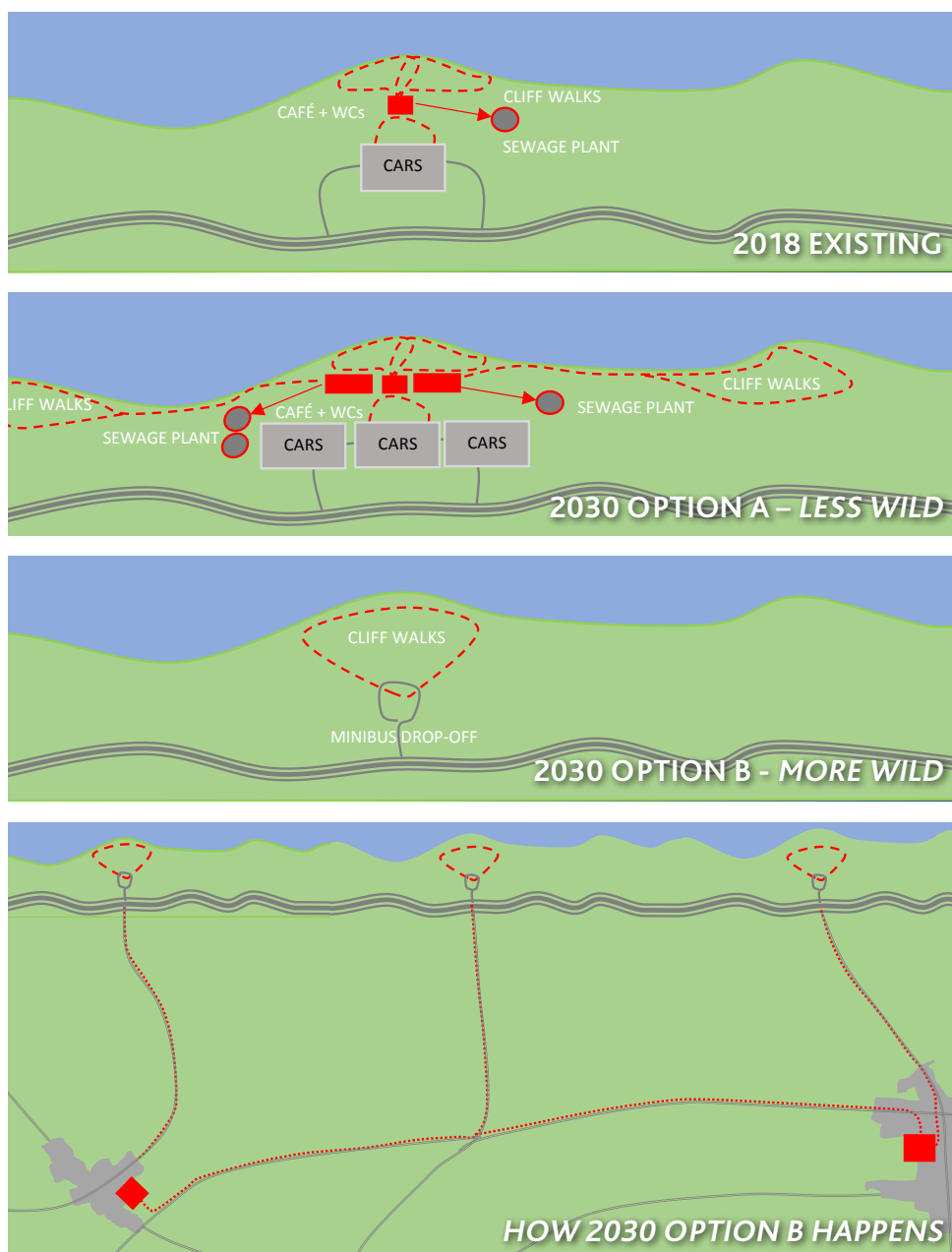

Visitors Experience is greatly improved with better information, more comfort, no traffic congestion, less crowds and full catering and rest facilities.

CASE STUDY 2 - STRATEGIC VISITOR MANAGEMENT – POTENTIAL FUTURE APPLICATION IN BUSY COSTAL ZONE

It is possible to grow visitor numbers while also increasing the wildness of the more intensively used coastal locations by adopting a strategic approach.

The graphic below illustrates the options that might be available to site owners or operators and how considering the "more wild option" could be realised for an iconic cliff-top viewing point. This may be applicable to recommendations and actions coming from the recently completed Wild Atlantic Way Route Review.

As numbers increase, on-site facilities – such as parking, toilets and shops – can be relocated away from the coast to existing nearby settlements and villages. Here, visitors pay for parking in return for a free minibus to the coastal features. Visitors may also opt to hike or cycle to the coast. The visitor facilities would augment the existing business in the settlements, as well as allowing more mixing with locals.


CLIFF WALKS

CAFÉ + WCs

SEWAGE PLANT

CARS

2018 EXISTING

CLIFF WALKS

CLIFF WALKS

CAFÉ + WCs

SEWAGE PLANT

SEWAGE PLANT

CARS CARS CARS

2030 OPTION A – *LESS WILD*

CLIFF WALKS

MINIBUS DROP-OFF

2030 OPTION B - *MORE WILD*

HOW 2030 OPTION B HAPPENS

Built elements gradually re-located away from coast to nearby villages. Visitors travel to a number of smaller dispersed cliff-walks.

CASE STUDY 3 - STRATEGIC VISITOR MANAGEMENT – POTENTIAL FUTURE APPLICATION AIMED AT MAKING THE SHORE MORE WILD

It is possible to grow visitor numbers while also increasing the wildness of the more intensively used coastal locations by adopting a strategic approach that involves co-ordination between landowners, local authorities, tourism interests and agencies that care for habitats.

The graphic below illustrates how a typical Irish rocky coastline might be managed into the future to ensure the "more wild" approach might be achieved while also ensuring continued use by all including visitors.
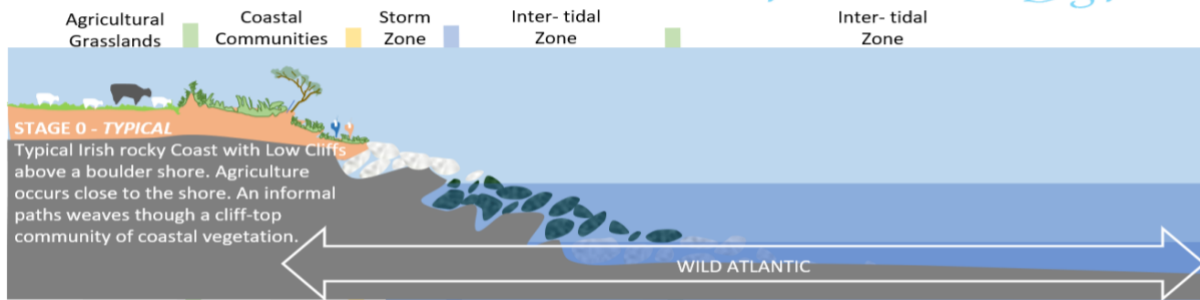

Stage 0 – This very natural situation – an undisturbed wild coast that is followed by a narrow, informal path. This area will be unable to sustain significant increases in visitor numbers without carefully planned management and intervention.
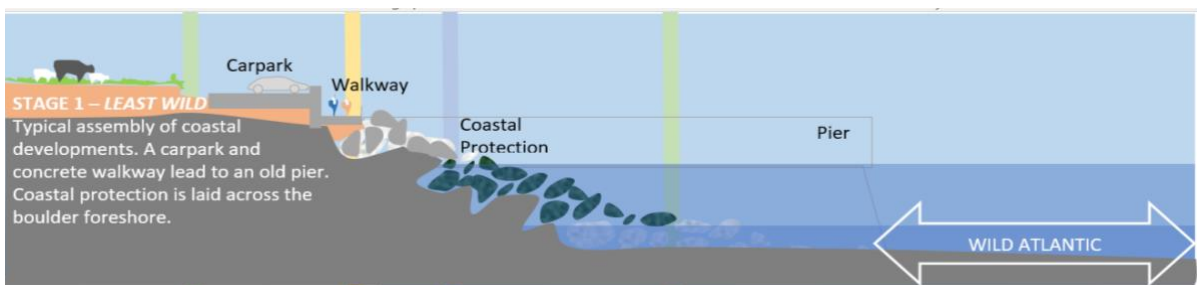
Stage 1 – Many Coastal Sites have a significantly diminished sense of wildness because of an accumulation of un-coordinated and inappropriate projects. Future plans and projects need to halt and gradually reverse this loss of wildness.

Stage 2 'Rewilding' of near-coastal areas can begin to be achieved by gradually moving back all 'hard projects' – carparks, toilets, access roads – so they are not visible from the shore, nor within the special habitats of the coastal environment.
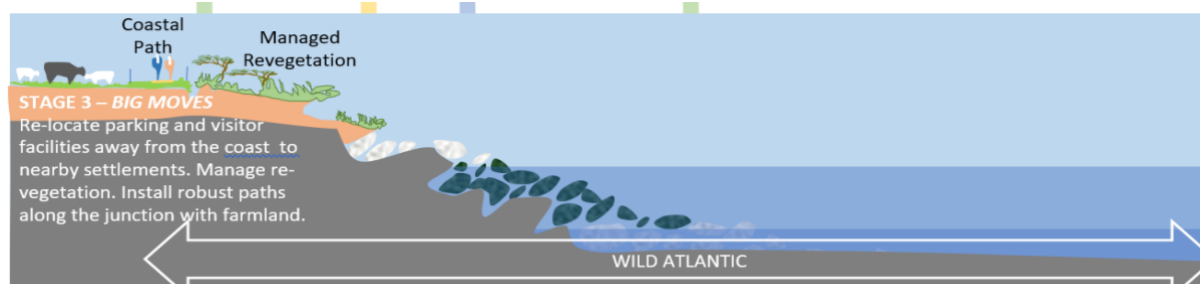
Stage 3 By following the high-level strategy illustrated on the previous page – which applies the lessons learned from Brú na Bóinne – it will eventually become possible to re-establish a completely wild experience of the Atlantic coast. In this strategy a buffer of managed re-vegetation separates [and shelters] the agricultural areas from the natural habitats near the shore. The path follows the junction between the two types of management areas.

APPENDIX 3 – GUIDELINE OF SECTION OF MATERIALS

The tables below compare materials to assist in making selections for their use in the near-coastal zone. Table 1 compares Durability – the ability to resist decay, due to weathering or wear, with visual and natural intrusiveness – the extent to which materials will contrast with the appearance or processes of the natural environment. Table 2 compares Flexibility – the ability to absorb environmental loading – due to waves, wind, erosion or weather - with the ease of repair using local materials and labour.

In general, many designers give excessive priority to durability and insufficient priority to the ease of repair using local materials and labour. Many durable materials – such as stainless steel, brick, toughened glass, paviors and concrete – are very visually intrusive.

Installations in near coastal locations are subject to extreme weathering and wear. When damage occurs in these remote sites – it can be important for repairs to be carried out quickly and inexpensively – often using locally available materials and labour. Visually intrusive materials that have not been repaired can greatly magnify adverse impacts and can quickly give a place a run-down appearance.

More	Visual and natural intrusiveness						Least
Durability	Stainless Steel	Brick	Paving	Geotextile	Stained timber	Shaped earth, sand	Large Rocks – no mortar, minimal shaping
	Toughened glass	Concrete	Concrete slab	Elevated boardwalk	Treated timber	Hedgerow	Drystone walls
	Weathering steel [Corten®]	Blocks	Tarmacadam	Boardwalk on ground	Painted or varnished timber	Earth berm	Mortared coursed stone
	Painted steel	Composite panels	Gravel	Mown grass	Split paling	Drystone or timber retention	Dressed stone
Less	Plastic coated steel	Wire fencing	Quarry screening and quarry dust	Trail	Logs	Wall or fence	Gabions

Table 1 Comparison of Durability of Materials with their Visual and natural intrusiveness

More	Ease of repair using Local Materials and Labour						Least
Flexibility Durability	Stainless Steel	Brick	Paving	Geotextile	Stained timber	Shaped earth, sand	Large Rocks – no mortar, minimal shaping
	Toughened glass	Concrete	Concrete slab	Elevated boardwalk	Treated timber	Hedgerow	Drystone walls
	Weathering steel [Corten®]	Blocks	Tarmacadam	Boardwalk on ground	Painted or varnished timber	Earth berm	Mortared coursed stone
	Painted steel	Composite panels	Gravel	Mown grass	Split paling	Drystone or timber retention	Dressed stone
Less	Plastic coated steel	Wire fencing	Quarry screening and quarry dust	Trail	Logs	Wall or fence	Gabions

Table 2 Comparison of Flexibility of Materials with the Ease of Repair using Local Materials and Labour