

Fingal County Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025 - 2030

June 2025



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Ár dTodhchaí
Tuaithe
Our Rural
Future



Comhairle Contae
Fhine Gall
Fingal County
Council



 **Outscape**
Shaping Outdoor Recreation

Contents

Introduction 3

Strategic context 4

Consultation summary 5

Current situation 6

Strategic objectives and action plan 14

This project has been supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development



Introduction

The need for a Fingal County Outdoor Recreation Plan

In 2022, a national outdoor recreation strategy 'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors 2023-2027' was launched by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). The strategy specifically called out the development of County Outdoor Recreation Plans (CORP) across Ireland:

“At County level, our ambition is to achieve a more planned and coordinated approach between the many stakeholders, with the introduction of a County Outdoor Recreation Committee and the development of an Outdoor Recreation Plan for each County.”

Aside from the national ambition, there is a collective recognition within county Fingal amongst key stakeholders that the development of a County Plan provides an opportunity for a more collaborative approach towards optimising the positive impacts of outdoor recreation.

What is Outdoor Recreation?

Outdoor recreation means activities that take place in the natural environment such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming. It does not include activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches (such as golf, football, show jumping) or motorised activities (such as quads/scramblers) except for motorised mobility aids. A full definition and activities list can be found in 'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors 2023-2027'

Benefits of Outdoor Recreation

The development of the national strategy and significant financial investment has been in response to an acknowledgement of the many benefits outdoor recreation brings to communities in Ireland. This includes mental and physical health benefits, as well as economic and social benefits. 'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors' outlines evidence of the increased demand for outdoor recreation and the substantial benefits it brings.

- Overseas visitors who participated in outdoor recreation spent €1.7 billion in 2019.
- Visitors to Coillte forests have nearly doubled between 2018 and 2021.
- 97,000 cases of disease were prevented in Ireland due to physical activity participation in 2019 providing a total cost saving of over €405 million.
- Recreational walking is by far the most participated in sport or physical activity in Ireland.

Development of the Plan

The development of this Plan was led by Outscape between November 2024 – March 2025 on behalf of a Steering Group of Fingal county outdoor recreation stakeholders. The process followed the guidance set out in 'Guidelines for Development - County Outdoor Recreation Plans' developed by DRCD (2024). The Project Team included:

- Fingal County Council
- Fáilte Ireland
- Fingal Leader Partnership

- Fingal Sport Office (Local Sports Partnership)
- Local Authority Water Programme (LAWPRO)
- Technological University Dublin
- Ardgillan Castle

In line with the national guidelines, the Steering Group guided the direction of the Plan's development, reaching consensus on strategic priorities and actions following a period of:

- Desk research, GIS mapping, and site visits
- Key stakeholder consultations
- In-person public consultation events
- A public online survey

This document represents a summary of the outputs of the development process and sets out the strategic priorities and actions for the next five years in County Fingal.

This Plan is subject to SEA/Appropriate Assessment screening.



Strategic context

Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors

‘Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors 2023-2025’, Ireland’s national outdoor recreation strategy, aims to strengthen the sustainable development of the outdoor recreation sector and drive economic and health benefits to communities, while protecting landscapes, habitats and built heritage. The implementation of the strategy is a key deliverable under ‘Our Rural Future’ rural development policy 2021-2025.

Several actions within this Fingal Plan have been adopted as a direct response to the national strategy, including the establishment of a County Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC) and a County-wide Stakeholder Forum.

Other national strategies

Several other national strategies have also informed this Fingal Plan, including:

- National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025
- National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030
- Tourism Policy Framework 2025–2030
- Child and Youth Participation Strategy 2019–2023
- National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland (2016, reviewed 2020)
- Sport Ireland Policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the Outdoors (2020)
- Sport Ireland Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities (2017)
- Coillte Strategic Vision (2022)

Regional and local strategies

The development of this Plan has also been shaped by regional and local strategies including;

- Fingal Development Plan 2023-2029
- Dublin Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023-2027
- Fingal Tourism Strategy 2024-2029
- Future Fingal: An Economic Development Strategy (2024)
- Local Economic and Community Plan 2023 - 2028
- Local Sport and Physical Activity Plan 2024 - 2029
- An Active Travel Strategy for Fingal (2023)
- Keeping it Green - An Open Space Strategy for Fingal (Draft)
- Climate Action Plan 2024-2029
- Fingal Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 - 2030
- Fingal Heritage Plan 2024 - 2030
- Leader Local Development Strategy for Dublin Rural 2023 – 2027
- Space for Play – A Play Policy for Fingal

Key trends

Several national and global trends have informed the development of the Fingal Plan:

Increase in demand: A growth in interest and participation in outdoor recreation in Ireland and globally.

Activities: Soft activities, such as walking and cycling, represent the most significant segment of outdoor recreation and consumer demand for soft activities is set to continue. There is a rise in new activities such as open water swimming and stand up paddleboarding.

Ageing population: The population in Ireland is getting older and the number of older people taking part in outdoor recreation is expected to increase, along with a growth in multi-generational participation in outdoor recreation.

Closer to home: People are seeking opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation ‘closer to home’.

Sustainability: People are increasingly concerned about the environment and behaving more sustainably.

Wellbeing: The global trend to improve our physical and mental wellbeing is driving a desire to integrate health and wellbeing into leisure and tourism choices.

Consultation summary

Consultation with national stakeholders, and Fingal stakeholders, including the public, has been critical to informing the current position of outdoor recreation in Fingal and the five-year actions included in the Plan.

National stakeholder consultation

National organisations and strategic governing bodies were informed of the Plan development process and invited to engage in the Plan development process. These included:

- Dept of Rural and Community Development
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- Fáilte Ireland
- Coillte
- Leave No Trace
- Active Disability Ireland
- Sport Ireland Outdoor
- National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Inland Fisheries
- National Built Heritage Service
- National Monuments Service
- Heritage Ireland
- Office of Public Works
- Mountaineering Ireland
- Ireland’s Association of Adventure Tourism
- Irish Farmer’s Association
- Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmer’s Association
- Irish Natura and Hill Farmer’s Association
- Irish Creamery Milk Supplier’s Association
- Cycling Ireland
- Canoeing Ireland
- Horse Sport Ireland
- Speleological Union of Ireland

- Angling Council of Ireland
- Water Safety Ireland
- Swim Ireland

Fingal consultation:

Local and regional organisations: One-to-one consultation took place with the following stakeholders, some of whom were represented on the Steering Group:

- Fingal County Council Officers:
 - Biodiversity
 - Heritage
 - Park and landscape
 - Greenways
 - Accessibility
 - Economic development
 - Water Safety Development
 - Tourism
- Fingal Sports Office (Local Sports Partnership) – including Active Cities and Healthy Fingal co-ordinators, Outdoor Swimming Programme
- Fingal LEADER Partnership
- Fáilte Ireland
- Local Authority Water Programme
- Technical University Dublin

Public consultation: Public consultation was carried out in early 2025 through:

- 2 Public ‘drop in’ events held in Malahide and Blanchardstown Libraries
- An on-line survey which remained open for three weeks

These provided an opportunity to obtain input from local people, activity providers, educators, outdoor recreation clubs, the land-owning community, and visitors to the County.

They presented a series of questions that were designed to ‘test’ the extent to which the public agreed with emerging draft actions.

In total, 241 respondents were received through the on-line survey. 87% of respondents were Fingal residents or landowners with the majority located in the east of the County – Skerries, Swords, Malahide, Loughshinny, Balbriggan and Howth. Rural areas were less represented (2%) likely due to the lack of outdoor recreation provision, fewer settlements and a more dispersed population.

8% of respondents visited the County for outdoor recreation and 2% work in Fingal but live elsewhere (Dublin, Meath and Kildare).

There was good representation from every defined age category.

Stakeholder insights (in brief):

Walking is the most popular activity followed by passive enjoyment of the outdoors (wildlife watching, picnicking), leisure cycling, watersports (canoeing, sailing, SUP), open water/wild swimming and running.

Whilst existing outdoor recreation facilities are generally high quality, there is a need for greater provision – notably community trail development within rural areas, open water swimming facilities and greater walking and leisure cycling connectivity along the coast

Beaches play a significant role in outdoor recreation across the County. It is recognised that they have a high standard of cleanliness and environmental protection. However, there is a desire for greater accessibility programming to allow more people to enjoy them, and for beach management to protect and restore coastal eco-systems.

People in Fingal enjoy the outdoors for outdoor recreation and appreciate the landscapes and heritage in which their activities take place.

There is an opportunity for greater collaboration amongst all those involved in outdoor recreation development, management and promotion across the County.



Blanchardstown Library, January 2025

Current situation



Environment & heritage

Fingal has a rich and varied landscape comprising coastline, rolling countryside and historic demesnes. What the County lacks in upland areas, waterfalls, lakes, valleys and forestry estates, it more than makes up for with its varied coastline of beaches, dunes and cliffs. This is its biggest draw, and the County celebrates it by embracing its natural and built heritage.

Away from the coast, the landscape is less dramatic but no less beautiful. Comprising many houses and estates from the 17th to the 19th centuries close to historical settlements, all of which give way to its inner, agricultural and rural heartland.

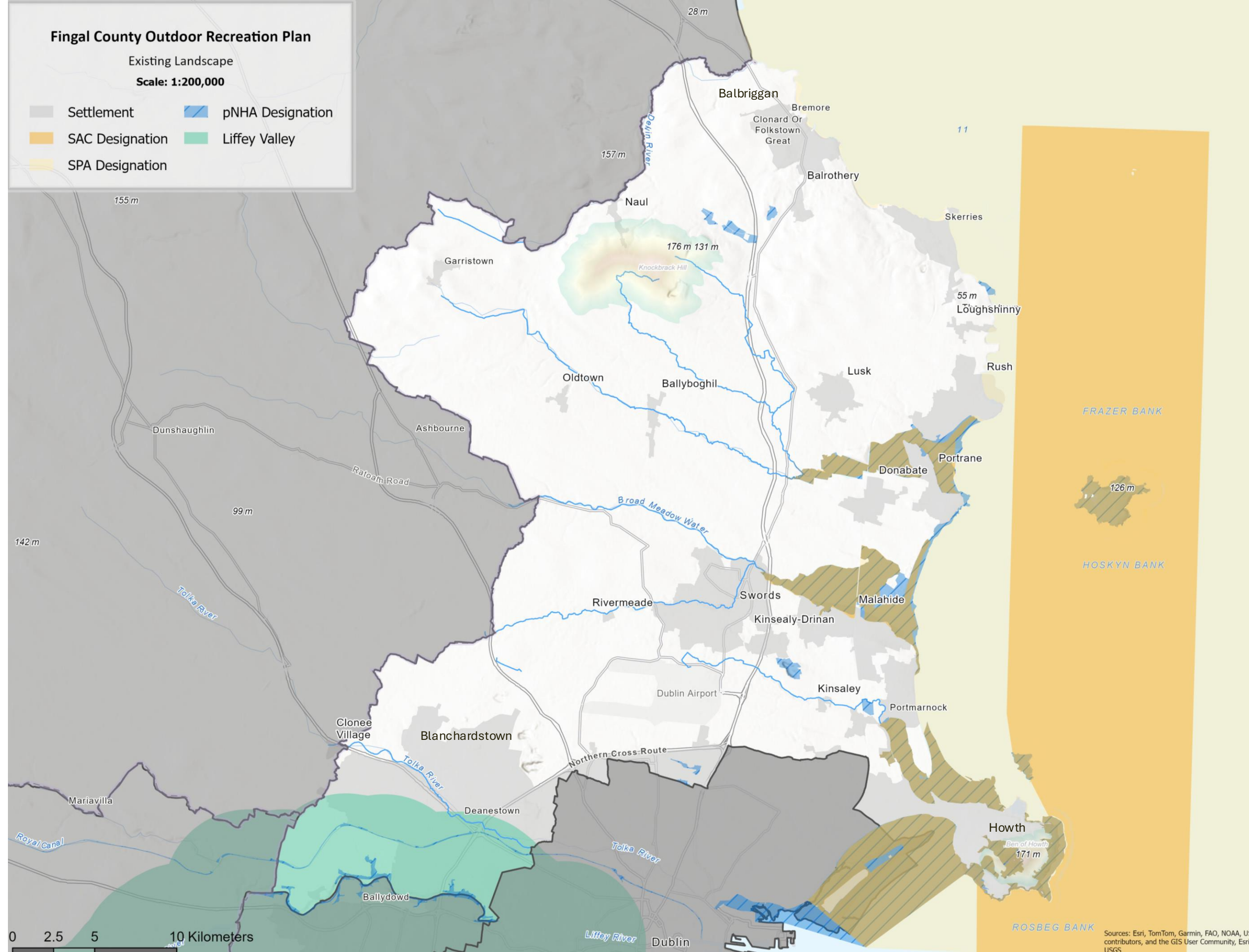
Multiple international and national environmental designations* are in place along the east coast of Fingal to help protect and conserve its beaches, cliffs, dunes, islands, estuaries and coastal waters. These include Rogerstown Estuary SAC and SPA, North Dublin Bay SAC, and Skerries Island NHA.

Despite this, it is acknowledged that there is impact from recreation through loss of habitat and disturbance.

It is also recognised that the condition of many of the designated areas is decreasing – notably the estuaries and around Howth Head.

*Environmental designations in County Fingal:

- SPA = Special Protection Area
- SAC = Special Area of Conservation
- NHA = Natural Heritage Area
- pNHA = Proposed Natural Heritage Area



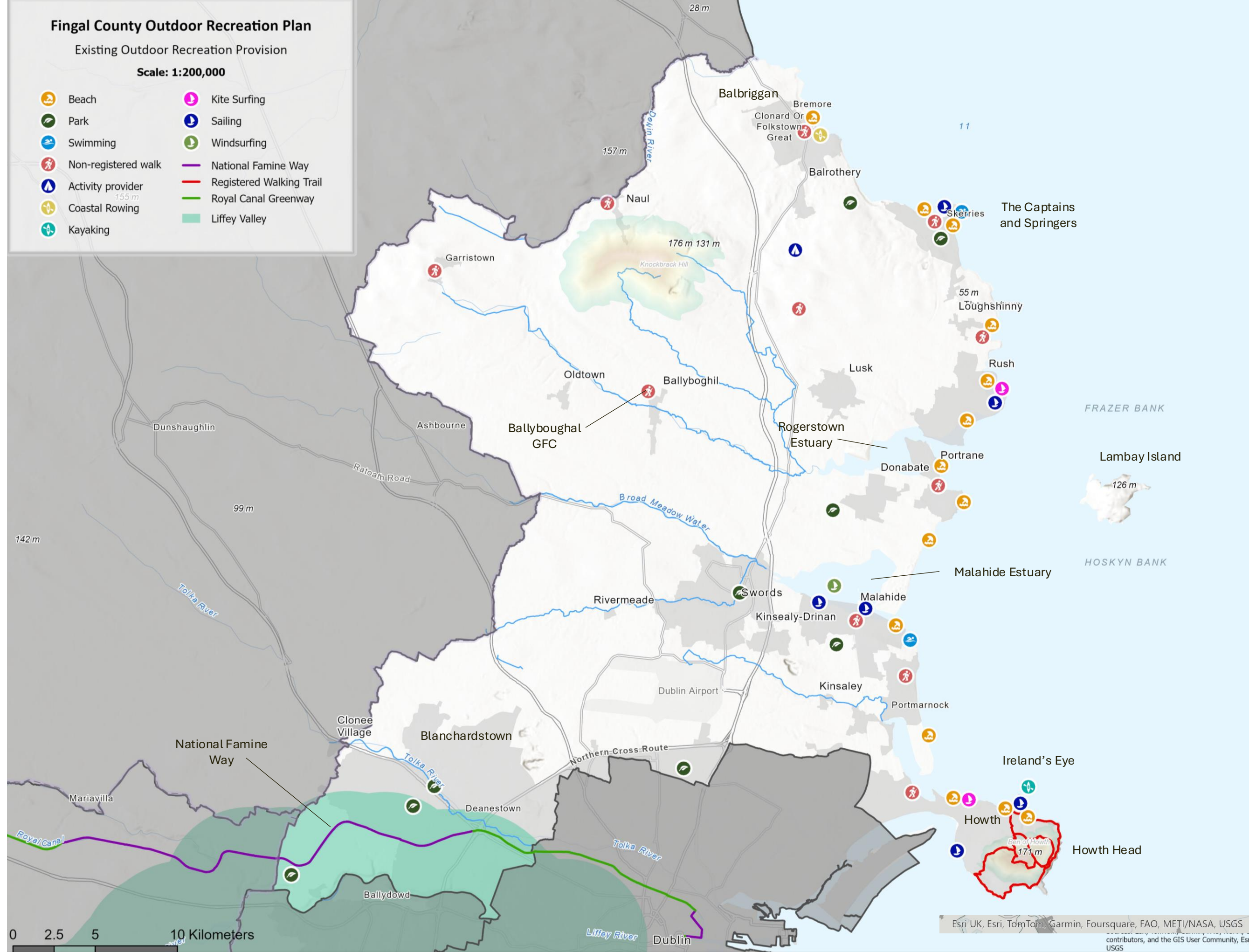
Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, contributors, and the GIS User Community, Esri, USGS

Infrastructure and access

Access refers to the infrastructure and arrangements in place that facilitate people to enjoy their natural places and spaces for various forms of outdoor recreation.

The County's landscape and its proximity to Dublin City shape the outdoor recreation offer and possibilities.

Most outdoor recreation activities are carried out on the east coast of Fingal, near urban centres where the County's primary formal and informal recreation assets are found. This includes beaches, public parks, amenity areas, water access points, walking trails, active travel routes, recreation hubs etc.



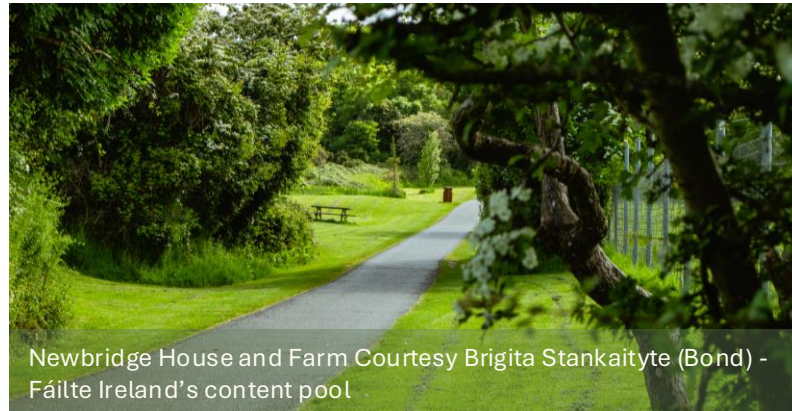
Infrastructure and access

Walking

Walking is largely confined to the coast, Greenways, public parks, formal demesnes, beaches, pitch loops and coastal walks.

Only 5 formal walking trails are included on the Sport Ireland Outdoors National Trails Register. These are the Cliff path, Black Linn trail, Bog of Frogs trail and Tramline trail at Howth, and the Royal Canal Greenway (comprising the National Famine Way). Additionally, Public Footpaths are designated in the Howth Special Amenity Area.

The remainder of the formal walking routes are found within the 2000 hectares of public parks and greenspaces across the County, including Malahide Castle and Demesne, Ardgillan Castle and Demesne, Santry Demesne Regional Park and St Catherines Park.



Other waymarked routes are promoted as coastal walks, including St Patricks Way and Art Trail, Howth to Baldoyle, Malahide to Portrane and Loughshinny to Skerries.

All of the beaches in the County are accessible for walking.

Within the rural west of the County, there is a lack of formal, safe off-road community walking trail provision. However, there is anecdotal evidence that sports pitches are used for walking and running within rural communities – including Ballboughal GFC, Man O'War GFC and Clann Mhuire GFC.

Cycling

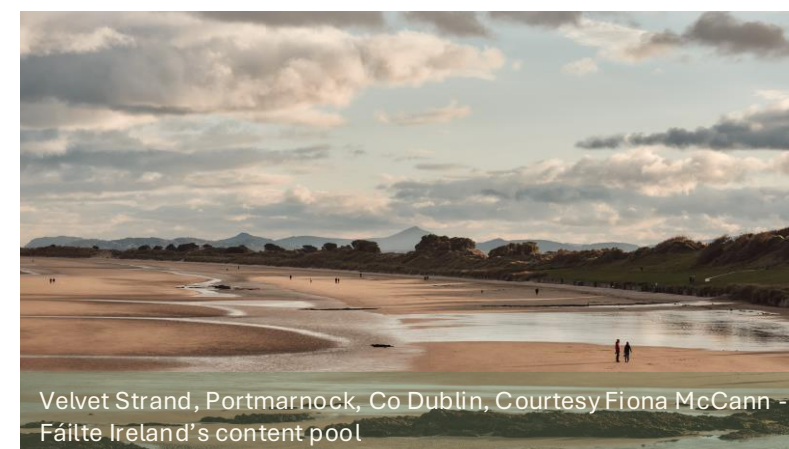
There is an exciting and ambitious programme of Greenway and active travel infrastructure development across the County. To date, two Greenways have been developed - Royal Canal Greenway (at Ashtown) and Baldoyle - Portmarnock Greenway Cycle Route, as well as segregated cycleways in Hartstown / Huntstown and Rivervalley Swords.

Although quite limited, off-road, leisure cycling is provided within publicly accessible regional parks and demesnes, as well as recreational hubs at Millenium Park and Swords which provide Learn2Cycle Tracks.

Like walking, provision is limited within rural areas.

Beaches

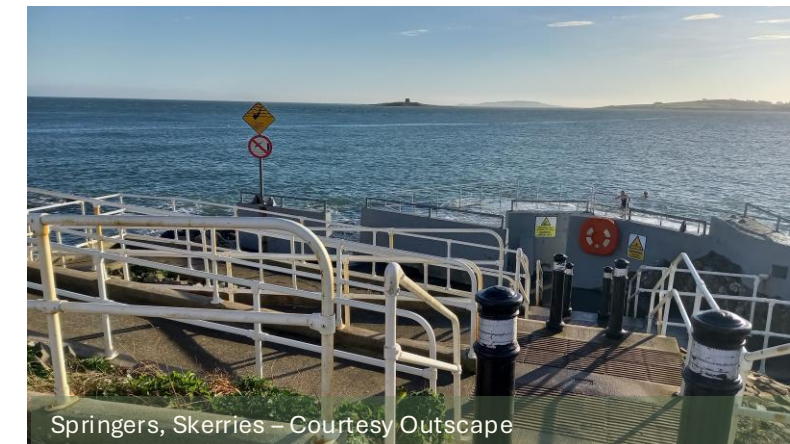
Beaches form a central part in the provision of outdoor recreation within Fingal. There are 14 beaches in the County, of which 10 have seasonal



Two of the beaches are Blue Flag beaches (Donabate / Balcarrick and Portmarnock / Velvet Strand) which acknowledges their high-water quality (to Bathing standards – published on the Fingal County Council website) sound environmental management, environmental education, safety and facilities. Donabate / Balcarrick also holds a Green Coast Award for its natural and unspoilt environment.

Sea swimming

Sea swimming has been cited as growing in popularity and demand, no longer a 'niche' activity throughout the country. This reflects national trends strongly supported within the national swimming strategy 2024-2027. This upward trend is also seen within Fingal.

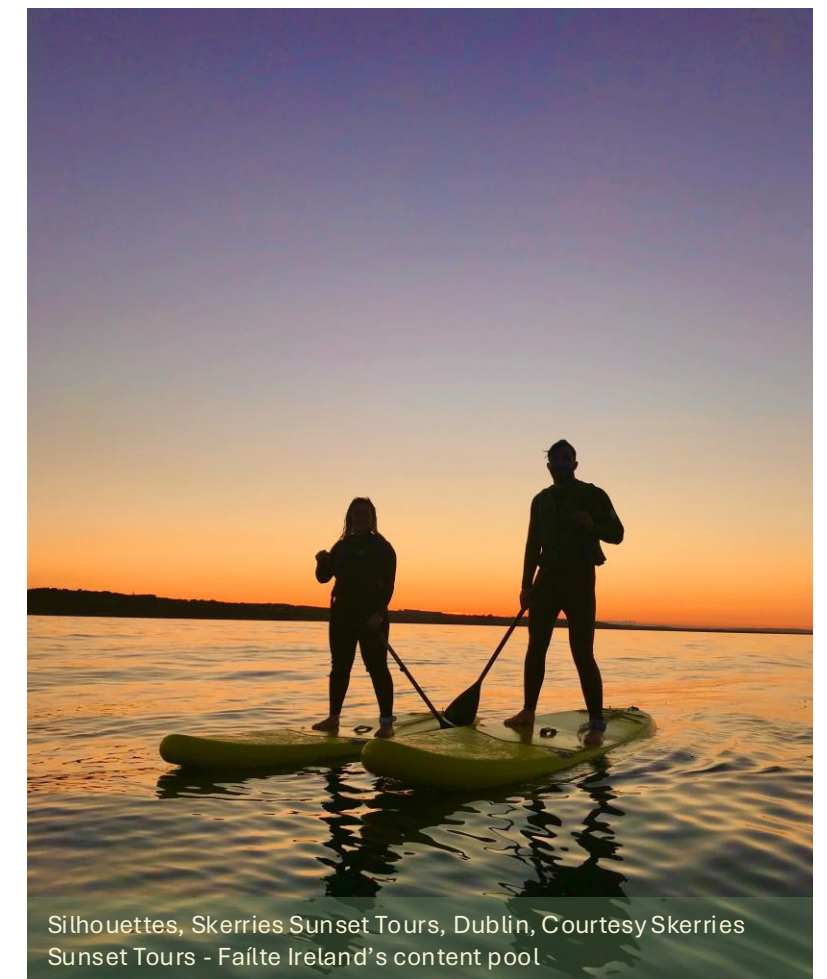


Access for sea swimming is possible at the County's beaches and designated swimming access points - The Captains and Springers, Skerries, and Low Rock, Malahide. In some areas, communities have laid marker buoys to create courses and designated swimming areas. An audit of sea swimming provision being carried out by Council seeks to understand current provision and future development opportunities.

Watersports

There are a range of watersports activities carried out all along the coast of Fingal, including sailing, coastal rowing, Stand Up Paddleboarding (SUP), kayaking and canoeing, windsurfing and kitesurfing. However, it is widely considered that there are many barriers to these activities due to membership costs, equipment hire, accessibility of training etc.

There is limited access to inland waterways due to a lack of infrastructure.



Fingal recreation assets

The coastline

The coast of Fingal is one of the County's greatest attractors due to its natural beauty, heritage and the enduring appeal of its pristine beaches and dramatic cliffs. For those visiting Dublin, it provides an opportunity to escape the City and enjoy the sea air and open space.

Fingal's coastline is a playground for walking, cycling and watersports activities. Access to beaches can be difficult due to the challenging and dynamic environment with shifting sands and coastal erosion. Seasonal programming helps to increase participation; however, it is recognised that more can be done to encourage those with disabilities and from under-represented groups to participate in activities.



Courtesy Fingal Co Co

Howth Head

At Howth Head, a series of National Trails registered walks and public footpaths within the Howth Special Amenity Area take visitors along a stunning section of coastline within the County and through heathland and woodland. Positioned above spectacular sea cliffs, the walking trails provide exceptional viewpoints to Irelands Eye, Dublin Bay and surrounding coastline

The area forms part of Howth Head SAC and Howth Head Coast provides an iconic backdrop for Fingal recreation as a unique offering when compared to the remainder of the County. Its location close to Dublin City, and excellent public transport links, means it has become a key visitor destination within the County attracting c.500,000 per year. This brings visitor management and environmental protection issues to this sensitive landscape.

Malahide Castle and Gardens

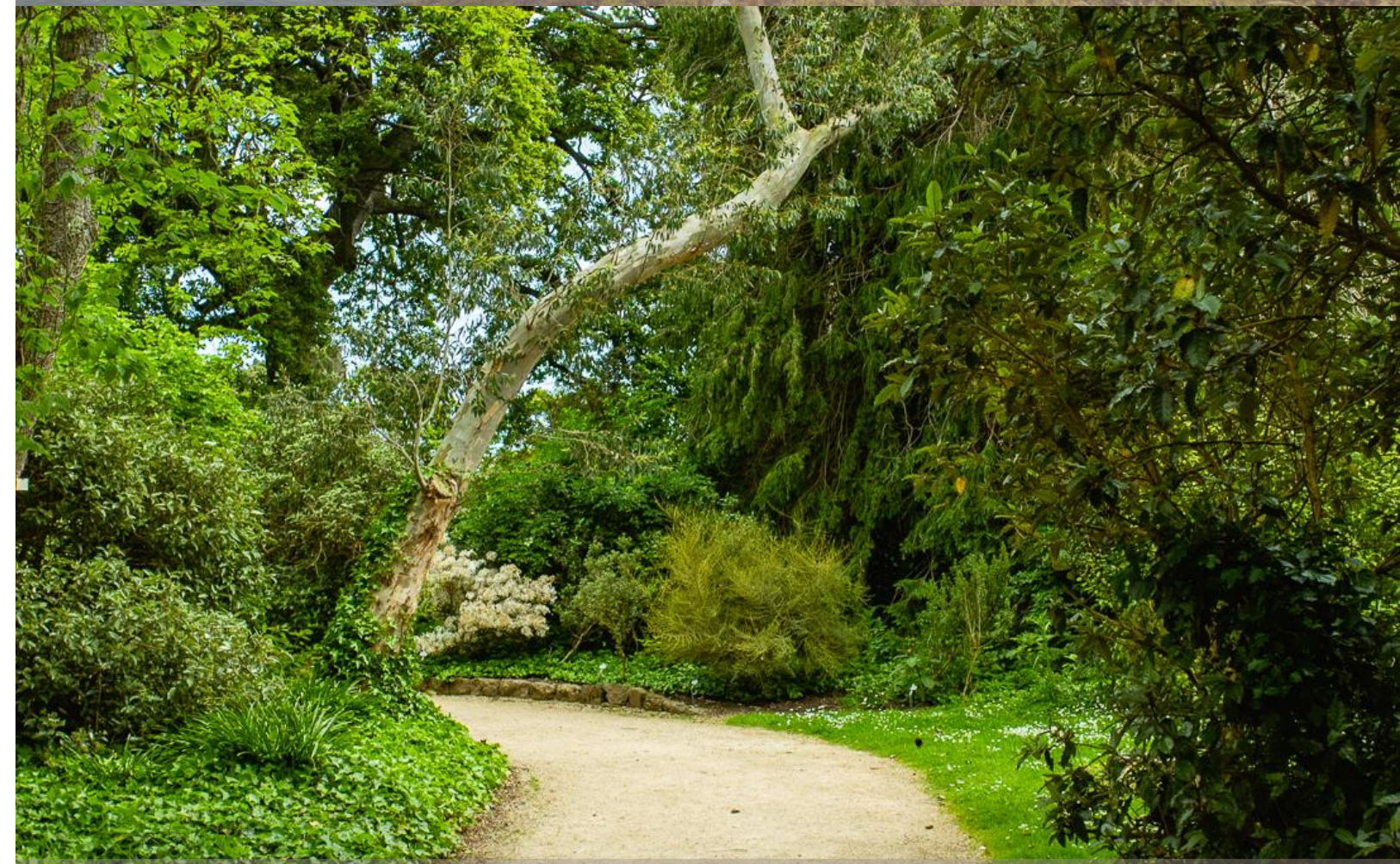
Located in the heart of Malahide town, the 800-year-old castle at Malahide is one of Ireland's most iconic landmarks and marketed as a tranquil retreat just minutes away from Dublin.

Alongside the castle, the demesne is known for its exotic plants, natural beauty and greenspace, where locals and visitors can avail of its network of formal trails through its parkland, formal gardens and woodland.

It provides safe, off-road walking and leisure cycling opportunities within Malahide. Its gentle topography and consistent surfacing makes it accessible for much of the population.



Howth Cliff Walk, Howth Head, Co Dublin, Chair Davitt, from Fáilte Ireland's content pool



Malahide Castle, Gardens,, Courtesy Brígita Stankaityte (Bond), from Fáilte Ireland's content pool

Opportunity and awareness

Opportunity

Walking, leisure cycling, running, open water swimming and watersports are the most popular activities carried out in Fingal. This is reflective of a relative abundance of access, clubs and participation programmes that engage people with these activities.

These trends broadly reflect national patterns of participation in outdoor recreation (*Irish Sports Monitor 2023*).

Fingal Sports Office (Local Sports Partnership) is one of the key providers of participation opportunities, through a variety of programmes supported by ‘Active, Together’ – the County’s Local Sports and Physical Activity Plan (2024-29) with the aim of

Inspiring Active Lifestyles for all in Fingal

These programmes exist to engage with the community through weekly and monthly events and leadership training:

- **Walking:** Men's Walk and Talk, Woodlands for Health, Get Ireland Walking, Active Cities Dublin, Revive and Thrive, parkrun (at 14 venues) and junior parkrun (at 7 venues), Communities get Moving, walking buses.
- **Cycling:** Cycling Without Age, Learn2Cycle, cycling buses.
- **Open water swimming:** water safety and education programmes in partnership with Swim Ireland, Dance and Dip.
- **Watersports:** Watersports Camp for All, Community sailing.

- **National and local events:** Women in Sports Week, HER Outdoors Week, Bike Week, National Walking Day, beach festivals.
- **Activity providers:** Several outdoor recreation activity providers offer a diversity of participation opportunities that include walking tours, kayaking/canoeing, SUP, sailing.
- **Key partnerships:** Sport Ireland, Cycling Ireland, Swim Ireland, Active Disability Ireland, Vision Sports Ireland, Get Ireland Walking, Mental Health Ireland, Technological University Dublin.

Consultation identified that several barriers to participation exist, including a lack of access to equipment, perception of ‘hard to reach’ activities (e.g. sailing, kayaking/canoeing) and awareness of programming. Access to beaches was one of the key barriers – notably for those with disabilities.

Awareness

Awareness is about linking people to their outdoor recreation opportunities by providing them with the right information with which to encourage and enable responsible* participation.

Platforms that promote outdoor recreation in Fingal include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- **Visit Fingal and Fingal Walks:** Managed by the Tourism section of Fingal County Council and embedded within the Council website.
- **VisitDublin.com:** Managed by Fáilte Ireland, promotes activities to do in and around Dublin – including Fingal through Dublin Discovery Trails (Balbriggan and Malahide) and Dublin Coastal Trail (Skerries, Malahide, Howth).

- **Discoverireland.ie:** Including Visit Dublin and Dublin Coastal Trail under the 'Dublin Surprising by Nature' brand proposition.
- **Getirelandactive.ie:** A Sport Ireland database with information on participation opportunities including clubs, events, and access locations.
- **Activity provider websites:** Including details of multi-activity adventure tours and details of activity-specific opportunities.

Although there are multiple platforms, these are largely tourism driven. The County is lacking a single, centralised resource that can promote, and champion the outdoor recreation offering and engage with the local population.

*Responsible participation

The need to promote responsible behaviour in the outdoors is recognised among all Fingal stakeholders. Responsible behaviour in the outdoors messaging is included on most platforms, but to a limited extent.

Active Cities DUBLIN 12 HIKES, 12 MONTHS
MEN'S WALKING CHALLENGE
 MAKE THE COMMITMENT
 ALL LEVELS of FITNESS WELCOME
 MEN'S WALK CHALLENGE takes place on the **LAST SUNDAY** of each month
NEXT WALK: SUNDAY 23RD FEBRUARY
MEETING POINT: Millbank Theatre
MEETING TIME: 8:45am (walk begins at 9am)
WALK NAME: Rush coastal walk
WALK DURATION: 8km light walk
 WEAR APPROPRIATE OUTERWEAR & FOOTWEAR
BRING WATER!

SEACHTAIN AMUIGH FAOIN AER DI **GET IRELAND WALKING**
HER OUTDOORS WEEK
Visit Fingal
Dublin Surprising by Nature

Examples of opportunities and awareness platforms linking people to outdoor recreation opportunities in Fingal

Outdoor recreation stakeholders in Fingal

Fingal has an engaged and motivated array of stakeholders who already play an active role in the development, management, and promotion of outdoor recreation.

However, there is a collective recognition amongst stakeholders that the development of this Plan provides an opportunity for a more collaborative approach towards optimising the positive impacts of outdoor recreation.

The County does not currently have a County Outdoor Recreation Officer (CORO) to lead on the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation. In the absence of a dedicated staff resource, the project Steering Group has brought together key statutory stakeholders to direct the development of this Plan.

This stakeholder map outlines the primary stakeholders involved in outdoor recreation in Fingal and their roles and responsibilities.

Users	
General public	Wide range of residents from local communities and visitors
Clubs	A range of clubs across most activities – predominantly walking

Tourism/Promotion Organisations	
Fáilte Ireland	Visit Dublin
Fingal Co Co	Visit Fingal

Environment & Heritage	
National Parks and Wildlife Service	North-Eastern Division Statutory responsibility to manage, maintain and develop state owned National Parks and Nature Reserves Ensure compliance of designations
Fingal Co Co	Biodiversity and Heritage Officers overseeing the implementation of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fingal Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 - 2030 Fingal Heritage Plan 2024 - 2030
Howth Special Amenity Area	Howth Special Amenity Area Management Committee

Landowners	
Fingal Co Co	2000 hectares of publicly accessible greenspace Recreational Hubs Trails and waymarked ways
Private landowners	West of County is largely private, agricultural land

Participation Organisations	
Fingal Co Co	Participation programmes (alongside partners)
Fingal Sports Office (Local Sports Partnership)	Participation programme Infrastructure development Walking and Cycling Officers Sports Development Officers
Swim Ireland	Participation and engagement programmes in partnership with Fingal Sports Office
Cycling Ireland	Participation programmes in partnership with Fingal Sports Office
Technological University Dublin	Participation programmes in partnership with Fingal Sports Office

Development, Management & Maintenance Organisations	
Fingal Co Co	Greenspace management Development of infrastructure ORIS applications
Fingal LEADER Partnership	Administer funding Community engagement
Transport Infrastructure Ireland Fingal Co Co	Proposed Greenways

Fingal’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges (SWOC)

This SWOC presents an at-a-glance summary of the current situation of outdoor recreation in Fingal. It has helped to steer the direction of the County's strategic priorities and ultimately influence the specific actions within this Plan.

Strengths

- Highly attractive landscape, rich natural environment and abundance of built and cultural heritage
- A young, diverse and fast-growing population
- Proximity of high quality, accessible green and blue spaces
- Ambitious leadership focused on delivering strategies and plans on active travel, sport, leisure and biodiversity
- Proximity to Dublin

Opportunities

- Greater collaboration and co-operation amongst those involved in outdoor recreation at County level
- Secure funding for the appointment of a new County Outdoor Recreation Officer within Council
- Remove barriers to, and increase opportunities for participation
- Support ongoing development projects - Greenways, Fingal Camino, Phase 2 of the Dublin Coastal Trail
- Develop a consistent voice and approach to messaging
- Ensure environment and heritage are incorporated in planning and development of outdoor recreation

Weaknesses

- Limited County-scale collaboration on projects
- Geographic distribution of infrastructure and access is along the coast and Dublin 15
- Lack of community provision in rural west Fingal
- Limited offering for those with disabilities
- Some examples of harm to environment and heritage
- Lack of centralised information on facilities and programmes

Challenges

- Resourcing - need for a new County Outdoor Recreation Officer to drive forward the implementation of the CORP
- Change can be challenging
- Reliance on outdoor recreation in protected areas
- Fingal as a brand gets lost due to its proximity to Dublin
- Ensuring responsible behaviour in the outdoors

Strategic objectives and action plan



Fingal, a world of activities for all



Strategic priority statement

‘The priority for outdoor recreation in Fingal over the next five years is to enhance and expand the outdoor recreation offer and explore sustainable development opportunities, fostering a vibrant community which encourages all to enjoy the natural environment and heritage, and experience a high quality of life’

Strategic objectives

The strategic objectives are defined within the 6 themes of 'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors'.

Leadership & collaboration

To create a more co-ordinated, cohesive approach across Fingal to ensure co-ordination and collaboration and ensure best use of our resources

Environment & heritage

To protect and restore Fingal's environment and heritage through better planning and development of outdoor recreation

Access & infrastructure

To protect and improve access to Fingal's outdoors, for the benefit of all across the County

Awareness

To create awareness of Fingal's outdoor recreation opportunities and how to enjoy them responsibly

Opportunities

To increase and support the number of people active in the outdoors across Fingal, especially young people and under-represented groups

Expertise

To improve the knowledge, skills, and expertise of Fingal's stakeholders and partners

Leadership and collaboration

Why is this important?

Ireland's National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors' (2022), calls out the need for a joined-up and cohesive approach to outdoor recreation at County level

Across Fingal there are numerous organisations involved on a day-to-day basis in the planning, development, management, maintenance and promotion of outdoor recreation. These include public and private landowners who own or manage land on which outdoor recreation takes place, the local authority, and associated state bodies. In addition, Fingal Sport Office (Local Sports Partnership) and several private sector businesses are involved directly in facilitating participation in outdoor recreation activities.

With so many organisations involved, it is essential that everyone works together collaboratively to learn from each other, prevent duplication of effort, and maximise scarce resources. This will ensure that those using the outdoors will be rewarded with the best outdoor recreation experience possible.

However, to sustainably grow the outdoor recreation offering and continue to develop quality experiences additional resource and strengthening of relationships is vital.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to ensure that those involved directly or indirectly in outdoor recreation work together in a supportive and collaborative way to provide a seamless approach across the county to outdoor recreation.

As set out in the national outdoor recreation strategy each County in Ireland is required to set up a

- County Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC).
- County Stakeholder Forum.

The CORC will ensure co-operation and collaborative working between the key stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in outdoor recreation whilst the Stakeholder Forum will provide a mechanism to allow wider stakeholder representation in decision-making.

To help drive forward the delivery of the CORP, we will seek to:

- Secure funding for the appointment of a new County Outdoor Recreation Officer (CORO).
- Establish a cross-directorate committee to bring together key internal outdoor recreation stakeholders.

In the absence of a CORO, the responsibilities for delivering the CORP will fall to appointed Council departments overseen by the working group.

To create a more co-ordinated, cohesive approach across Fingal to ensure co-ordination and collaboration and ensure best use of our resources



Leadership and collaboration

Objective				
To create a more co-ordinated, cohesive approach across Fingal to ensure co-ordination and collaboration and ensure best use of our resources				
No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisation	Stakeholders
1.1	Establish a County Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC) in line with ‘ <i>Guidance for Establishment of County Outdoor Recreation Committees and County Outdoor Stakeholder Forums</i> ’ (Dept of Rural Community and Development) to ensure co-operation and collaborative working between the key stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in outdoor recreation at a County level.	2025	FCC	Key strategic County stakeholders
1.2	Establish a Stakeholder Forum to ensure wider stakeholder representation and consultation on outdoor recreation in Fingal.	2025	CORC	Public / communities, PPN, Tidy Towns
1.3	Establish a cross-directorate Council Outdoor Recreation Committee to bring together all staff involved in outdoor recreation projects to ensure collaborative working within the Council.	2025	FCC	Key Council departments
1.4	Secure the funding to appoint a County Outdoor Recreation Officer (ORO) to lead and coordinate the CORC and Stakeholder Forum and drive forward the implementation of the County Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP).	2025	FCC / CORC	Key Council departments

FCC – Fingal County Council

CORC – County Outdoor Recreation Committee

PPN – Public Participation Network

Environment and heritage

Why is this important?

Fingal has a rich and diverse environment with unique landscapes and habitats including beaches, sand dunes, cliffs and rolling agricultural land. The County's built and cultural heritage also play an important role in preserving its history for communities and visitors.

Enjoying time in the outdoors to connect with nature and heritage is a core motivator for outdoor recreation participation. However, the natural environment is a precious and finite asset and recreation relies on a healthy and sustainable natural environment. Similarly, heritage must be protected for future generations to enjoy and to reconnect with our past.

There are several areas that are protected and designated by environmental legislation in Fingal such as Malahide Estuary, Howth Head, North Dublin Bay and Ireland's Eye. Likewise, built heritage is protected by multiple Sites and Monuments Records and associated zones, including Newbridge Demesne and Portrane Martello Tower.

All stakeholders in the County have a shared responsibility to fulfil the legal obligations to protect these natural and built heritage assets.

It is imperative that the environment and heritage is at the heart of Fingal's recreation planning and development in the future.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to ensure that environment and heritage is woven into the fabric of all outdoor recreation decision-making to secure the quality of our outdoor recreation experiences for future generations.

We hope to do this by:

- Ensuring the enhancement or restoration of environment and heritage will be considered from the earliest stages within project and programme development. This includes exploring areas where nature can be left to thrive and heritage enjoyed without the impact of human development.
 - Ensuring greater collaboration between Council departments involved in outdoor recreation, as well as Biodiversity and Heritage teams to inform approaches and messaging around sustainable outdoor recreation in line with existing and future action plans.
 - Exploring additional opportunities for safe, designated walking and leisure cycling routes within rural areas of the County. This will help to disperse visitors from popular, often sensitive areas which are seeing impacts due to high visitor numbers – particularly along the coast. Additionally, it will reduce the need for some people to travel by vehicle to engage in outdoor recreation activities resulting in an overall reduction in carbon emissions.
- Where possible, seeking to ensure that public transport and active travel opportunities are developed to connect local people and visitors to recreation sites.
 - Ensuring that measures to reduce the impact of recreation on the natural environment in Special Amenity Areas are implemented so they can continue to be enjoyed by future generations whilst preserving and enhancing their special qualities. At Howth Head, this will include carrying out an annual pathway condition assessment of the trail system.



To protect
Fingal's
environment
and heritage
through better
planning and
development
of outdoor
recreation

Environment and heritage

Objective				
To protect Fingal’s environment and heritage through better planning and development of outdoor recreation				
No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisation	Stakeholders
2.1	Ensure that environment and heritage are incorporated within the planning and development of all future outdoor recreation projects and programmes – including consideration of suitability, sustainability, education and enhancement in line with existing and future action plans.	2025-2030	FCC	Fingal Biodiversity, Conservation and Heritage Teams, Stakeholder Forum, Council Working Group, LAWPRO
2.2	Ensure that environment and heritage are standing items at all Cross Directorate meetings.	2025-2030	FCC	Fingal Biodiversity and Heritage Teams
2.3	Ensure all future outdoor recreation projects align with the Council’s Climate Action Plan.	2025-2030	FCC	NPWS, OPW, LAWPRO
2.4	Carry out annual pathway condition assessment of looped pathway network on Howth Head and carry out maintenance as required.	2025-2026	FCC	Sport Ireland, FCC, Howth Pathways
2.5	Ensure that visitor management measures in Special Amenity Areas are implemented to reduce the impact of recreational use in the natural environment, whilst enhancing biodiversity and nature connection.	2025-2026	FCC	FCC, SAAO Committee, NPWS

FCC – Fingal County Council

LAWPRO – Local Authority Waters Programme

CORC – County Outdoor Recreation Committee

NPWS – National Parks and Wildlife Service

OPW – Office of Public Works

SAAO – Special Amenity Area Order



Access and infrastructure

Why is this important?

To participate in outdoor recreation, users require access to the land and waterways which is either in state or private ownership.

In Fingal, most outdoor recreation activities take place along the coastline and within publicly accessible greenspace (parks, recreation hubs), located mainly in the east and south of the County.

As there are no forest parks and there is limited public land across the County, managing existing resources to create sustainable outdoor recreation provision is vital.

There is a recognition that the offering for Fingal could be significantly enhanced and expanded geographically to provide more opportunities to all.

The maintenance of current and future infrastructure is also essential to ensure a safe and quality experience.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to build on existing provision by delivering high quality, accessible, enjoyable and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences across the whole of the County. These must be supported by sufficient management and visitor servicing facilities where appropriate, for both local people and visitors to Fingal.

We hope to do this by:

- Continuing to support the delivery of Greenways and active travel routes, whilst exploring future options for safe on and off-road leisure cycling and walking infrastructure and connectivity to encourage greater dispersal amongst communities throughout the County – particularly within more rural areas.
- Ensuring that existing and new facilities meet the needs of currently under-represented groups – including inclusive outdoor recreation facilities and experiences.
- Ensuring sustainable management and maintenance approaches are prioritised and built into future development plans.
- Implementing recommendations within the current ongoing Sports Audits – including provision of open water swimming facilities.
- Monitoring and managing water quality standards along the coast and inland waterways and better dissemination of information to the public.

- Working with businesses and the community to support the development of outdoor recreation opportunities and visitor services (e.g. mobile coffee, catering, saunas etc.) in order to enhance the range, quality and availability of experience opportunities – a key objective within the ‘Fingal Tourism Strategy 2024 – 2029’.

Any recreation planning and development will have the environment and heritage at its fore. It will also be led by the data and trends in outdoor recreation, notably the popularity of walking and ‘closer to home’ opportunities for recreation.



To protect and improve access to Fingal's outdoors, for the benefit of all across the County

Access and infrastructure

Objective				
To protect and improve access to Fingal’s outdoors, for the benefit of all across the County				
No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisation	Stakeholders
3.1	Continue to support delivery of ongoing projects throughout the County, including Greenways and active travel routes, the Fingal Camino and the Dublin Coastal Trail.	2025-2030	FCC	Fáilte Ireland
3.2	Continue to support the Active Travel work programme as a method to increase the connectivity between communities and greenspace throughout the County.	2025-2030	FCC	Stakeholder Forum, Community
3.3	Ensure that all new outdoor recreation projects incorporate active travel and public transport considerations when being planned including, where possible, new connections and linkages to areas of population.	2025-2030	FCC	Fáilte Ireland, FLP
3.4	Ensure future outdoor recreation projects, where possible, meet accessibility standards for all.	2025-2030	FCC	Active Disability, Stakeholder Forum, PPN, Community
3.5	Support the delivery of recommendations from the County Sports Audits, where possible. The recommendations include the provision and improvement of beaches and open water swimming facilities – toilets, buoys, changing shelters, hooks, ramps, steps, signage, showers etc..	2025-2030	FCC	Stakeholder Forum
3.6	Undertake an accessibility and inclusivity audit of all existing recreation sites and facilities (toilets, car parks, buildings etc) across the County.	2025-2030	FCC	FLP, Active Disability, DPRO, Stakeholder Forum, PPN, Community
3.7	Explore potential opportunities for community trail provision across the County.	2025-2030	FCC	FLP, DPRO, Stakeholder Forum, PPN, Community
3.8	Carry out an audit of public water recreation access points and identify areas of need for greater provision within the County.	2025-2027	FCC	Stakeholder Forum, LAWPRO

FCC – Fingal County Council

DPRO – Disabled Persons Representative Organisations

FLP – Fingal LEADER Partnership

LAWPRO – Local Authority Waters Programme

PPN – Public Participation Network

Access and infrastructure

Objective				
To protect and improve access to Fingal’s outdoors, for the benefit of all across the County				
No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisation	Stakeholders
3.9	Pilot a scheme to promote the delivery of safe, leisure cycling routes on rural roads within the County and, if deemed successful, support the delivery of this concept across the County encourage greater connectivity to rural areas.	2025 - 2030	FCC	FLP, Stakeholder Forum
3.10	Continue monitoring water quality along the coast and inland waterways and disseminate results widely to the public.	2025 - 2030	FCC	UE, NPWS, LAWPRO
3.11	Carry out an audit of existing outdoor recreation assets (including trails, signage – interpretation, trailhead - waymarking, fingerposts, benches, parking – bicycle and cars - toilets etc.) within the regional and neighbourhood parks.	2025 - 2030	FCC	-
3.12	Engage with minority sports to explore development opportunities where possible.	2025 - 2030	FCC	Mountaineering Ireland, Swim Ireland, Canoe Ireland
3.13	Continue to support the implementation of ‘Space for Play – A Play Policy for Fingal’.	2025 - 2030	FCC	-
3.14	Undertake a feasibility assessment to identify further Public Rights of Way.	2025 - 2030	FCC	FLP, Active Disability Ireland, DPRO, Stakeholder Forum, PPN, Community

FCC – Fingal County Council

LAWPRO – Local Authority Waters Programme

UE - Uisce Éireann

DPRO – Disabled Persons Representative Organisations

FLP – Fingal LEADER Partnership

PPN – Public Participation Network

NPWS – National Parks and Wildlife Service



Awareness

Why is this important?

Fingal has a wealth of places and opportunities where people can enjoy the outdoors. A key barrier to people visiting the outdoors, is a lack of awareness of what is available. Therefore, it is important to have accurate and accessible information on all places and opportunities, communicated in a coherent manner, promoted to both locals and visitors, users and non-users.

There is a recognition in Fingal that communication on places and opportunities is across a variety of platforms using a range of approaches for promotion. It is important to consolidate this messaging to simplify its delivery. Additionally, it is important to use messaging to assist with dispersing people away from sites and areas which are experiencing pressures due to high visitor numbers.

Raising awareness of how to behave in a responsible manner in the outdoors is also critical. This includes encouraging users to take responsibility for their own safety and minimising their impact on the environment and landowners.

Whilst the Leave No Trace Ireland message is mentioned in some communications in Fingal, there is a need for greater focus on responsible behaviour messaging.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to create a coordinated, collaborative and consistent approach to marketing and promoting the many recreation facilities and opportunities (including participation programmes) that Fingal has to offer, as well as promoting responsible behaviour messaging for both locals and visitors.

We will develop a Communication Strategy to achieve greater collaboration and consistency in messaging for all stakeholders - making it easy for people to know 'where they can go' and 'what they can do'.

Key to this will be to develop a resourced interactive platform, with one central digital database that details all recreation facilities and opportunities to inspire locals and visitors to make the most of the facilities within the County.

At a local level, the Communication Strategy will include engaging with communities to identify local heroes to help promote the opportunities and messaging through a range of appropriate communication channels.

Engagement with national partners will be central to this ambition to educate, inform and amplify the responsible behaviour messaging to users of the outdoors in Fingal.



Awareness

Objective				
To create awareness of Fingal’s outdoor recreation opportunities and how to enjoy them responsibly				
No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisation	Stakeholders
4.1	<p>Develop a Communication Strategy to achieve greater collaboration and consistency in messaging when sharing and signposting information with locals and visitors, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligning Fingal’s outdoor recreation with existing brand to maintain consistency Creating a single authoritative digital database, interactive maps and website that details all recreation sites, trails, pre-visit information (including in accessible formats), programmes (e.g. participation, hire), events, public transport and active travel connectivity Using ‘local heroes’ to help market and promote the opportunities available particularly to under-represented and hard to reach groups Collaborate with Leave No Trace Ireland to ensure inclusion of Leave No Trace principles 	2025-2026	FCC	Fáilte Ireland, Stakeholder Forum, DPRO, Sport Ireland, LNTI
4.2	Support the roll out of the national ‘ <i>Responsible Use of the Outdoors</i> ’ campaign at a local level.	2027-2030	FCC	LNTI, Stakeholder Forum, PPN

FCC – Fingal County Council

DPRO – Disabled Persons Representative Organisations

LNTI – Leave No Trace Ireland

PPN – Public Participation Network



Opportunities

Why is this important?

Spending time in the outdoors and participating in outdoor recreation brings a multitude of benefits to individuals:

- their physical health improves as they become more physically active
- their mental health improves as time spent outdoors, increases the levels of happiness and life satisfaction
- their social well-being improves as they gain opportunities for social interaction reducing feelings of loneliness, isolation and improving overall quality of life

It is acknowledged however that there is unequal access to the outdoors across society with multiple social and economic barriers preventing people engaging in outdoor recreation. In particular there is under-representation from women and girls, older adults, young people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, unemployed and those from areas of high social need.

In Fingal, there is a range of participation programmes and initiatives that focus on cycling, walking and water safety, and which cater for some of these under-represented groups within the community. This includes – Woodlands for Health, Active Cities Dublin, Revive and Thrive, Men's Walk and Talk and Get Ireland Walking. However, there is a recognition, that opportunities exist to significantly improve the range of programmes and initiatives for these groups. This is of particular importance given the County's diverse and growing population

[Viewing Outdoor Recreation](#)


What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to ensure that as many local people as possible across Fingal can enjoy its outdoors and reap the benefits of doing so. We particularly want to encourage use of the outdoors from local groups that are currently under-represented.

In addition, we want to continue to welcome visitors to Fingal's outdoors and allow them to make the most of facilities that are on offer.

We will achieve this by:

- Considering how recreation sites can be made more physically accessible, especially to those with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities by removing barriers
- Exploring opportunities to introduce, resource and sustain participation in activities for new individuals and groups
- Co-ordinating and delivering a wider range of targeted programmes designed to make outdoor recreation more inclusive by engaging more individuals and specific groups



To increase and support the number of people active in the outdoors across Fingal, especially young people and under-represented groups

Opportunities

Objective				
To increase and support the number of people active in the outdoors across Fingal, especially young people and under-represented groups				
No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisation	Stakeholders
5.1	Co-ordinate the delivery of a wide range of targeted programmes including (but not limited to) Watersports Camp for All, HEROutdoors Week, Woodlands for Health and ParkFit / Beach Yoga, Open Sea Swim events which focus on encouraging the following target groups to engage in outdoor activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women • Children and young people • Disability • Under-represented groups 	2025-2030	FCC	LSP, Stakeholder Forum, FLP, PPN, Community, Active Disability Ireland, Healthy Fingal, Age Friendly Ireland
5.2	Identify and support opportunities to participate in a range of priority activities through coordinating and facilitating a variety of programmes. Priority activities to include; walking, open water swimming, cycling, water sports.	2025-2030	FCC	LSP, Stakeholder Forum, FLP PPN, Community
5.3	Collaborate with Leave No Trace Ireland to ensure all activities and programmes are delivered in line with Leave No Trace principles.	2025-2030	FCC	LNTI

FCC – Fingal County Council

PPN – Public Participation Network

LSP – Local Sports Partnership (Fingal Sports Office)

LNTI – Leave No Trace Ireland

FLP – Fingal LEADER Partnership



Expertise

Why is this important?

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in government funding for outdoor recreation, including capital projects through DRCD's Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme. Concurrently, the number of organisations involved in planning, developing, managing, maintaining and promoting outdoor recreation, from statutory organisations to community groups, has also grown. 'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors' recognises that there has been limited investment in capacity building and the speed of growth has meant that:

“many outdoor recreation practitioners are operating with insufficient knowledge, skills, and expertise”.

In Fingal, several experienced and engaged stakeholders are involved in programme delivery and planning, development, management and maintenance of outdoor recreation. Whilst there are many examples of excellent practice, in some locations such as Howth Cliffs and many of the coastal locations around the County, the pressures from visitors represents an opportunity for greater management.

In addition to the expertise of practitioners, 'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors' recognises that information and evidence is critical to better develop and monitor projects and programmes.

In Fingal, there are a small number of visitor counters but largely there is limited information and evidence that supports decision-makers' plans and improve the offering.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to equip those working, volunteering and participating in the outdoor recreation sector in Fingal with the knowledge, skills, and expertise they need to thrive.

Fingal will work towards exploring funding opportunities (e.g. through dormant accounts) to help resource internal staff on best practice approaches to development and management of outdoor recreation – including identifying training needs amongst stakeholders and communities on aspects of safety, environment, heritage and visitor behaviour.

Continuing to engage with the Visitor Safety Group will be central to developing a more skilled, knowledgeable sector, reflecting good practice throughout Ireland, (e.g. for sea swimming). This will provide opportunities to attend training events and seminars, experience best practice in action and network with other practitioners internal and external to the County.

We understand that gathering evidence such as visitor numbers and patterns of visitor behaviour, compared against emerging trends, will be important to understand and plan for outdoor recreation impacts. Therefore, we will explore opportunities to collate data from a range of outdoor recreation facilities throughout and beyond the period of the CORP.



To improve the knowledge, skills, and expertise of Fingal's stakeholders and partners

Expertise

Objective				
To improve the knowledge, skills, and expertise of Fingal’s stakeholders and partners				
No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisation	Stakeholders
6.1	Continue to support engagement with open water swimming groups to provide training and safety advice.	Throughout	FCC/Swim Ireland	Water Safety Ireland, Stakeholder Forum
6.2	Continue to engage with the Visitor Safety Group (VSG) to build capacity in safety and visitor management issues.	Throughout	FCC	-
6.3	Ensure that visitor monitoring is implemented as part of all future outdoor recreation development to understand usage, help target promotion and support funding of development and maintenance costs.	Throughout	FCC	DPRO, Fáilte Ireland
6.4	Deliver training both internally and externally on the opportunities available under ORIS funding.	Throughout	FCC	Stakeholder Forum, PPN

FCC – Fingal County Council

DPRO – Disabled Persons Representative Organisations

PPN – Public Participation Network

The Stableyard
Barnett Demesne
Malone Road
Belfast BT9 5PB
+44 (0)28 9030 3930
info@out-scape.com
out-scape.com

