

**Private and Confidential**

Una Doris & Christine Charlton  
Tourism Office  
Westmeath County Council  
Aras an Chontae  
Mullingar  
Co. Westmeath

Format: Online Portal Submission  
Deadline: 12:44pm 29<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Dear Una and Christine,

**Re: *Submission Westmeath Tourism Strategy 2023 – 2027  
Mullingar Chamber Second Submission***

Many thanks for facilitating the meeting this afternoon to discuss the County Westmeath Draft Tourism Strategy. This follows on from our previous public submission of 20<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and exchanges over recent weeks since the document was published.

**Overall Observations**

We would like to commend the excellent work done in preparing the County Westmeath Draft Tourism Strategy [2023-2027]. The Strategy does endeavour to address a very wide and diverse range of issues and locations and items and agendas and, overall, should form the basis of an excellent period of implementation for Westmeath, once completed and all stakeholders are aligned.

Please note for the sake of repetition that all observations put forward are cognisant of the relevant habitats directives and should only be carried out where these are respected, as per the law.

At this stage our final refined observations outstanding are as follows:-

- 1. Strategic Space** – We would welcome a slightly more detailed analysis of the Strategic Space Westmeath is in vis. a vis. Ancient East, Wild Atlantic Way and the Hidden Heartlands. This might feed more opportunities into the SWOT analysis around initiatives that are particular to the area and clarify positioning and provide easier interpretation
- 2. Stakeholder Mapping** – There is no stakeholder map of the positioning of all key stakeholders who are involved in Westmeath Tourism. We feel this is essential to clarify where the various Stakeholders sit and who the Primary Stakeholder is and what the relationships are with the other stakeholders. It also provides clarity around positioning, responsibility, and easier interpretation. We look forward to seeing it in the final draft

3. **Belvedere House and Gardens** – We feel this is the number one **Strategic Priority** asset for tourism in the MKMD, if not the county of Westmeath. This is an asset and location of outstanding natural beauty and, we feel, enormous potential

We note the 2023 Adopted Budget for Westmeath County Council and a EUR324kpa provision for losses there in 2023. We estimate that losses at Belvedere since 2010 exceed EUR4m at this juncture. We would feel that these losses are a representation of an asset that is simply not performing under present operational structures and management, as evidenced by constant ongoing losses. This situation would simply not be sustainable in the private sector, albeit a public amenity, and causes us concern in terms of an appropriate use of public funds

We also feel that current commercialisation opportunities, particularly the LIFE Festival is an inappropriate use of this amenity. This festival, in particular, causes considerable anti-social upset to the town and environs

Finally, we feel there is almost a total absence of amenities provided at Belvedere and, as such, it has massive potential, given its location and quality of infrastructure supporting it. Such amenities might, in the future, include an improved food and beverage offering, lakeside activities, a large playground, a zipwire and cultural and musical events on more frequent basis

For these and many other reasons we would like to put forward the position that Belvedere is a **strategic asset of high importance** and that this strategy should treat it as such. We feel that to be Strategic and to act in the best interests of tourism and hospitality in Westmeath, a **Strategic Review of Belvedere is absolutely essential** at this juncture

We are calling for Westmeath County Council to plan for a Strategic Review of Belvedere in 2023 and 2024 at the very latest as part of this strategy to identify the best possible use of this asset going forward, as a public amenity

4. **Lake Access Points** – We feel that the current standard of lake parking and picnic amenities provided in Westmeath, particularly at Lough Ennell and Lough Owel are substantially deficient at best and not fit for purpose at worst. This can be evidenced by areas with large amounts of uncoordinated warning signage, picnic areas with galvanised metal seating and overflowing bins in close proximity and, and overall, an appearance of a poor and low quality visual and tourism amenity

We would strongly encourage a specific objective to substantially improve the visual amenity of these areas. This is particularly the car parking and picnic areas as well as the access points to the lakes over the term of this plan

We feel this should be focussed on Carrick and Ladestown [Lough Ennell], Donore and Crookedwood [Lough Derravaragh] and Tullaghan and Levington [Lough Owel] to improve these areas substantially and the overall tourism amenity as a result



5. **Hotel Data** – We would encourage particular mention of the number of hotel rooms in each district town noting 2,800 bed spaces mentioned in the report. We feel this would give greater clarity to the visitor number metrics and possibilities
6. **Conferences and Expos** – We feel that these need to be included in the Strategy and that to omit them as at present is erroneous given the economic impact of a conference on a town
7. **National Transportation Museum** – I note this and other museums fall outside the remit of this strategy. We will address this separately at the SPC and with the elected members when the opportunity arises
8. **Destination Mullingar** – I note the stated objective around this and agree fully that this makes perfect sense to combine all stakeholders in one location supported by a marketing initiative. We will bring forward a proposal around this and seek to adopt it in 2023

We hope this submission is received in the constructive fashion with which it is sent and look forward to seeing what the final tourism strategy looks like once completed.

Yours sincerely,

*John Geoghegan*

---

John Geoghegan  
**Spokesperson – Economic Development, Enterprise & Tourism**  
**Mullingar Chamber**

cc. **All Members MCC**  
**All Elected Members WCC**  
**4 No. Local TDs**