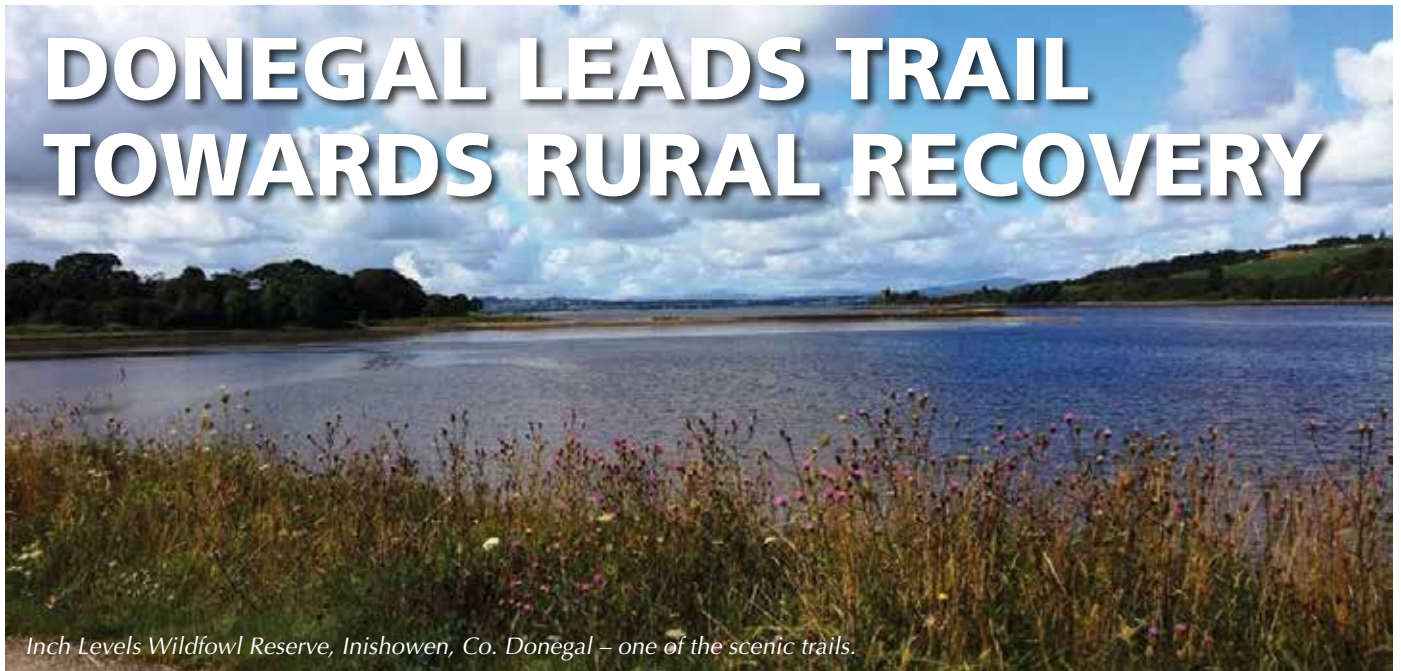


DONEGAL LEADS TRAIL TOWARDS RURAL RECOVERY



Inch Levels Wildfowl Reserve, Inishowen, Co. Donegal – one of the scenic trails.

Donegal County Council is the lead partner of the new Atlantic Area Trail Gazers Project, which includes trails in spectacular locations from Donegal to Portugal. The project aims to stimulate rural community growth by linking strategic walking and recreational pathways in areas of natural, built and cultural heritage with the surrounding towns and villages.

The EU-funded project is being led by Donegal County Council in association with Sligo County Council, and partners from the UK, Portugal, Spain and France. The overall aim is to explore the impact of walking and recreational trails on sustaining rural communities, and to provide incentives for visitors to further explore, experience and enjoy all that surrounding towns and villages have to offer.

Following the online launch of the project's website www.trailgazers.eu in June, Donegal County Council joined the other Atlantic Area Trail Gazers Project partners in an online meeting, to continue the detailed planning on this unique initiative.

Donegal County Council's Project Manager Loretta McNicholas said that despite the difficult times during the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, she was delighted with the progress being made, and with each project partner's commitment to push forward and deliver key outputs over the following months.



For more information on the Trail Gazers project visit www.trailgazers.eu

EIGHT SELECTED TRAILS

The project partners have selected a wide variety of trails to test best practice methods in installing sensors and counters, capturing and predicting footfall patterns to future-proof trail maintenance and service plans.

They will also survey trail users to identify factors that would enhance the visitor experience, and will work with local business to develop Business to Consumer (B2C) initiatives based on feedback from visitors, in addition to developing develop community trail plans that are focused on niche experiences.

The eight trails selected are the 'Knocknarea/Killaspugbrone Loop' in Sligo and 'Inch Levels' in Donegal; 'Chemin De Mémoires' in Bretagne (France); 'Via Verde del Plazola' in Navarra (Spain); 'La Caldera de Taburiente' on the Canary Island of Las Palma; the 'Seven Hanging Valleys' in the Algarve (Portugal); 'Sacred Mountain' in Viana do Castelo (Northern Portugal); and the 'Taff Trail' in West Wales and the Valleys.

In addition, Glasgow Caledonian University and Ulster University in Coleraine are providing the guidance on innovative technology and data capture solutions for each site. In pointing out the vital importance of community input to this project, McNicholas noted that to this end the partnership would like to ensure that key sectors in the rural community are represented on the project advisory groups in each of the regions.

"These groups will guide the development of a 'shared vision' for each trail site that is based on evidence and data captured through the project, providing a range of shovel-ready, community-supported projects through practical trail plans to ensure sustainable rural futures.

"The partnership will continue to ensure that all necessary arrangements are in place so that this work can continue once the Covid-19 restrictions are lifted," she added.

For more information contact Loretta Mc Nicholas, Project Manager of the Trail Gazers Project, Research and Policy Unit, Donegal County Council lmcnicho@donegalcoco.ie