

Cork County Council Launches Major Coastal Reports

Recognising that Cork's long and varied coastline is one of its greatest assets, the Mayor of Cork County, Councillor Kevin Murphy, and the County Manager, Martin Riordan, today launched two major reports on Cork's coastal areas; a Marine Leisure Strategy for South Cork, and a Draft Study of Cork Harbour

Marine Leisure Infrastructure Strategy for South Cork, 2010-2020

Councillor Kevin Murphy said that, following completion of the Marine Leisure Strategy for South Cork, survey information on marine leisure infrastructure and activities is now available for the entire coastline of Cork. In 2008 Cork County Council and the Coastal and Marine Research Centre (CMRC), UCC, produced *A Marine Leisure Infrastructure Strategy for West Cork*, covering the coast from the Kerry border to Courtmacsherry (700km). In 2010, they completed the picture, with the South Cork Strategy covering another 500km of coastal inlets, bays, beaches and harbours, from Timoleague to Youghal. This involved auditing the coastal infrastructure and assessing the current offering in relation to tourism and leisure. As a result, Cork is uniquely placed to take advantage of the marine leisure opportunities offered by its coast.

There is an extensive legacy of marine infrastructure all along the coast of Ireland, from the heyday of the 20th century fishing industry. The 21st century brought a change in how much of this marine infrastructure was used, so that in certain areas it became less critical to livelihoods. The motive behind the 2008 Strategy was to use these resources, re-assess their value and tap into the potential of marine infrastructure to develop sustainable products, services and jobs, as well as encourage investment along the coast.

Preparatory research for the Marine Leisure Infrastructure Strategy for the Southern Division of Cork County Council included asking over 100 stakeholder organisations to submit suggestions on the future development of marine infrastructure and recreation on the South Cork coast. The responses from people directly involved in marine leisure and

tourism at local level have informed the development of this Strategy, and will help promote future use of Cork's coast as part of a sustainable tourism product.

The Marine Leisure Strategy is an Action Plan for the coast, developed with inputs from these stakeholder organisations and a Steering Group with representatives from Cork County Council, CMRC, Fáilte Ireland, the ports of Kinsale, Cork and Youghal, the Town Councils of Kinsale, Cobh and Youghal, funding partnership groups (South and East Cork Area Development and West Cork Development Partnership) and Inland Fisheries Ireland. It identifies the untapped potential of the coast, contains extensive information on marine leisure activities and infrastructure, and outlines the next steps key to creating a top class coastal tourism and leisure product for County Cork.

Draft Cork Harbour Study

The Draft Cork Harbour Study looks at the most intensively used part of the South Cork coastline, on a broader and longer term basis, which includes the other activities on Cork Harbour as well as marine leisure, and looks forward up to the middle of the 21st century.

Cork harbour is one of the largest in the world, but the range, scale and importance of its functions is also exceptional - as a major port, as the setting for Cork City, most of its satellite towns and the main energy and pharmaceutical industry clusters in the State, as an over-wintering site for birds area, as a centre for boating and fishing, and as the country's main naval base, both currently and historically, with the historical aspect represented by an exceptional coastal defence heritage. All of this happens in a Harbour in which agriculture and forestry still account for more than half the land within 0.5 kilometres of the shoreline.

However, this balance will not maintain itself. The proportion of land adjoining the Harbour which was developed rose from around one ninth in the 1930s to around one third now, and on a trend basis will be around two-thirds in the 2050s. This trend is not sustainable in the longer term, and the Draft Study seeks a shift in approach. More

development can occur on disused or underused Harbour side industrial land, for port uses and dockland type re-development, and perhaps also for new industries such as wave power devices, which may be a thousand tons each, and need to be built beside deep water and launched like a ship. Greenfield land adjoining the Harbour should not be developed for uses that have no strong reason for being there. In practice, a balance between the development and amenity roles of the Harbour is only likely to be maintained if there is public support for this. Greater use and better public access to its amenities and recreational facilities will make this more likely.

The Study tries to understand what is happening in Cork Harbour and where it might lead, partly through analysis of around 60 shoreline areas. It is often clearest at this level how different activities interact with the inherited landscape and each other, where potentially dynamic activities offer new opportunities, and where there are tensions to be resolved. Characteristic features of Cork Harbour - such as the position of many settlements on steep slopes with their centres on narrow level areas between the base of the hill and the sea, and the concentration of transport corridors close to the shoreline - become obvious as they recur in numerous local areas

As well as having numerous different activities, Cork Harbour also has numerous organisations involved in its management and development – public, private and community based. There is growing recognition of the importance of an integrated approach to coastal areas, and Cork County Council has been a partner with other local organisations in the COREPOINT and IMCORE projects (supported by the EU INTERREG programme), and is represented on the Cork Harbour Management Focus Group. A general framework to support a more integrated approach thus already exists.

However, the Harbour will change as a result of specific choices made in particular places, and the ultimate test of an integrated approach is whether it has practical influence at that level. Cork County Council has produced a Draft Study outlining possibilities, not a Plan saying what should definitely happen next, to promote discussion of options, in the hope that a greater degree of consensus will emerge at this more practical level.

The County Manager said that it was important that Harbour residents, businesses, community and recreational groups are part of these discussions, as well as public agencies with a responsibility in the Harbour area. The Draft Study will be on public display until 15th July, in Libraries and Council Offices, and on the Council's website, and Cork County Council would welcome comments from all concerned during the next seven weeks.