

Coolaney Development Company Ltd
Coolaney Community Centre,
Coolaney,
Co Sligo

Date: 22/01/2019

Re: Draft submission to Northern and Western Regional Assembly – Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy document

Dear Sir, Madam,

I am making a submission in relation to the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) draft report. I am a Sligo resident and live in Coolaney and am a member of Coolaney's Development Company. I am making this submission on behalf of the Development Company (Dev Co).

We believe the current draft of the report would benefit greatly from including Coolaney, and the Coolaney National Mountain Bike Centre, as an area of strategic growth in the North West. The Mountain Bike facility is currently under development on Coillte owned land in the Ox Mountains and will be located on the outskirts of Coolaney village.

The Mountain Bike Centre will offer a significant tourism boost to Sligo and the North West with as many as 50,000 visitors projected to use it annually having a €3.8 million economic benefit locally. The Mountain Bike Centre has received over €1 million in funding in the last 18 months and there will be 30km of trail completed by the Spring of 2019.

Considering the economic boost that other areas in Ireland (and internationally) have received from a mountain bike centre, the Dev Co would consider the Coolaney National Mountain Bike Centre to be as significant a development for Sligo and the North West as Strandhill's National Surfing Centre and its current surf related tourist offering.

In fact when the 80km of trails planned for the Coolaney National Mountain Bike Centre are finally completed we would consider it to offer even greater economic potential. This is because it will be accessible year round to what is becoming a large community of cycling enthusiasts in one of the fastest growing sports internationally - Mountain Biking.

Also, Coolaney Development Company are a great advocate of Greenways and we are glad to see the inclusion in the Sligo part of the draft RSES document the plan for a Greenway from Collooney to Bellaghy. We believe this would be a huge boost for South Sligo and, as it will pass through Coolaney village, our community. We have already made a submission to Sligo County Council to become a trailhead for this Greenway as we have excellent services for the cyclists that will use it. These include safe parking, changing and showering facilities and most importantly a tearoom / coffee shop where cyclists can get refreshments and food. These amenities will be hugely important to attract users to the Sligo Greenway.

One brief point. The Sligo - Mayo Greenway campaign have reported that the wording in objective 115 (a) and 115 (b) in your draft RSES document may make future considerations for a Greenway on all the unused railway line from Collooney to Athenry difficult; and that these objectives do not align with the 2040 National Development Plan. Could you please ensure that any objectives in the final RSES document includes text that would consider all possible uses, including Greenways, for our unused railways lines, including the unused railway line that runs from Athenry to Coolaney.

For your information – Coolaney Development Company’s objective is to become a focal point for Ireland’s cycling community and cycling tourists. As a result, the Dev Co is pursuing the development of a National Cycling Centre in our village. This vision is similar to Strandhill’s one of developing a National Surf Centre and, like Strandhill’s surf amenity, Coolaney’s cycling amenity is both unique and world class.

Coolaney is already an important location for cycling in the North West:

- In 2018 we hosted Irish National Cycling Championships which was a huge success and this success was reflected in the quality of the road cycling routes around Coolaney and in the Ox Mountains.
- Our National Mountain Bike Centre is well underway with trails currently being built for completion in Spring 2019.

Having a trailhead for the Greenway located in Coolaney village is the third component of what we believe will be a world class cycling offering for both Irish and international cyclists. A Greenway trailhead in Coolaney would only be 1.5km from our National Mountain Bike Centre. This allows for a joined up approach to accessing, by bicycle, Sligo’s various cycling amenities (N.B. we are currently looking at options to link Coolaney Community Park to the Mountain Bike Centre)

Having a National Cycling Centre designation will allow Coolaney to promote our unique cycling offerings nationally and internationally.

We are currently in discussion with various public bodies with a view to bringing National Cycling Centre Coolaney to fruition over the next few years.

Ireland’s cycling community does not yet have a focal point – a National Cycling Centre. Coolaney Development Company proposes to be the first to provide such an important offering to the ever-growing Irish cyclist community.

A National Cycling Centre in Coolaney is a unique and exciting opportunity for the North West. It is a perfect fit with Sligo’s ‘Adventure Capital, tourism marketing position. It will encourage national and international tourists to choose Coolaney, Sligo and the North West as their holiday destination, from which local rural businesses will be created and sustained.

Coolaney Development Company would welcome discussing our consultation submission further with representatives of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly. Please feel free to contact Brendan Flaherty ([REDACTED]) or Damien McGuinn, Coolaney Development Company Chairperson ([REDACTED]), for more information or to clarify any of the above details.

Yours sincerely,

Brendan Flaherty