

ISSUE: DETI OFFICIALS AND SEUPB MEETINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Minister Foster met with the SEUPB Chief Executive Pat Colgan on 30th November to express her concern at delays in the processing of cases and to offer ongoing DETI support in expediting projects. Mr Colgan assured the Minister that SEUPB is doing everything possible to progress the cross border partnership projects.
2. Officials have also met directly with representatives of each of the cross border groups to discuss their enterprise and tourism applications. This process has been useful in identifying issues faces by the groups. Officials have also been able to provide advice in shaping projects in a way which increases their chances of success when they are eventually presented by SEUPB to DETI for approval.
3. DETI is committed to working with the SEUPB and DFP, as their sponsoring Department to expedite the INTERREG IVA approvals process for enterprise and tourism related projects.

ISSUE: ST. PATRICK'S TRAIL AND THE PILGRIM TRAIL ROUTE

St. Patrick's Trail

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board identified in its Strategic Framework for Action 2004-2007 (available at www.nitb.com) Saint Patrick/Christian Heritage as a Signature Project, a theme which has the potential to deliver a unique Northern Ireland experience to the visitor. The Saint Patrick's Trail was developed in 2006. This 92 mile linear signed driving route extends from Bangor and Ards Peninsula to Downpatrick, Newry and Armagh and links many key sites which have been identified as having some connection with the life, legacy or mission of the Saint.

In 2009 NITB was given £3.5 million under the Programme for Government, to provide financial assistance through the Tourism Development Scheme to develop the Saint Patrick's Signature Project. In 2010 NITB will continue to progress and develop the 22 successful applications under this scheme at sites identified along the Saint Patrick's Trail.

In the spring 2010 there will also be an educational visit to Santiago de Compostela which will endeavour to identify best practice which could be incorporated into the various Saint Patrick clusters thus improving the visitor experience through marketing, events, and use of innovative technologies.

Individual local Councils and stakeholders involved in the promotion and development of the Trail have established links with various Christian Heritage groups and societies across Europe, particularly North Down in relation to St. Columbanus and Dr. Tim Campbell, Director of the St. Patrick's Centre in Downpatrick who has strong links across Europe and the United States of America. In order to maximise these opportunities in terms of the development of the St. Patrick's Trail, NITB has set up an Advisory Group comprising a mix of public/private sector individuals with an interest in the St. Patrick/Christian Heritage product. Initial meetings have taken place and it is anticipated that NITB will build upon the established Advisory Group links across Europe through Tourism Ireland (who are represented on the Group) to develop packages and relationships with interested parties to further promote and develop the St. Patrick's Trail.

Further information on the progress of the Saint Patrick Signature Project can be found at www.nitb.com alternatively if you require further information on the trail this is available on www.discovernorthernireland.com.

The Pilgrim's Trail/Route Initiative

In late 2008 NITB and Failte Ireland commissioned consultants to undertake a Feasibility Study into the concept of developing a long distance pilgrim walk from Westport, County Mayo to Downpatrick (approx. 300km) based upon the theme of St. Patrick.

The key areas the consultants were asked to consider were:

- Investigate the market for this type of “pilgrim walk”. The Camino de Santiago in Spain attracts over 100,000 registered pilgrims per annum.
- Undertake benchmarking of other pilgrim routes to identify best practice.
- Develop an authentic route following in the footsteps of St Patrick.
- Investigate potential routes from Croagh Patrick to Downpatrick, utilising off road tracks or minor roads. This will include the identification of Patrician and Christian Heritage clusters along the route.
- Conduct liaison with key stakeholders, including, TIL, RTPs, CAAN, FI and NITB.
- Deliver a “walking plan” including route descriptions, potential overnight locations including accommodation and services.
- Investigate incorporating new technologies to aid the pilgrim in following the route.

In summary, the report suggested that while there is an interest in both pilgrim trails and long distance walking routes there are three issues that suggest that implementation of the Trail in totality was not a viable option at this time:

- **Authenticity** – there is a very real concern in some sectors regarding the authenticity of sections of the proposed route in relation to St. Patrick and his life and travellings.
- **Quality** – through Tourism Ireland it was made clear that the markets in relation to long distance walking routes want off road walking. Sections of the proposed Trail, especially in the Republic of Ireland are on road.
- **Funding** – it was made clear that in the current climate, resources are not available, again especially in the Republic to implement the Trail at this time.

However, the Northern section of the Trail (from Armagh to Downpatrick) is not affected by any of the above issues and NITB is currently scoping out the projected costs and opportunities to implement the Northern section of the Trail during 2010 – 2011 with a view to Failte Ireland considering options to implement the Trail when appropriate.