

Media Release

Friday, 15th September, 2023



**An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development**

Our Rural Future: Ministers Humphreys and Joe O'Brien look forward to promoting outdoor recreation and community engagement at the 2023 National Ploughing Championships

- ***8-metre climbing tower for visitors to try out skills***
- ***Department exhibit to showcase supports available to communities***
- ***Hands-on computing and robotics demonstrations***
- ***Mobile library and games to feature***

The sustainable development of outdoor recreation in rural areas will be a key focus for the Department of Rural and Community Development at this year's National Ploughing Championships, due to begin in Ratheniska, Co. Laois on Tuesday 19th September.

The Department's exhibit, '*Our Rural Future - Supporting People and Communities*' will be located in the heart of the Government of Ireland Village (Block 3, Row 22, Stand 348).

It will include an eight-metre climbing tower, supplied in partnership with Mountaineering Ireland and Awesome Walls, where visitors can try out their climbing skills and learn more about how to embrace Ireland's outdoors.

Speaking about the benefits of outdoor recreation Minister Humphreys said:

“Last year I launched a new government strategy - ‘Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors’ which is helping us to shape the future of outdoor recreation in Ireland.

“The strategy provides a framework to support the sustainable development of outdoor recreation activities such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming which will, in turn, provide social, economic and health benefits for all.

“Indeed in the last five years Government has invested over €2.4 billion in outdoor recreation related amenities and the National Ploughing Championships is an ideal event to showcase what has been delivered, and what is planned for the future.”

While the Department is encouraging people to embrace Ireland’s outdoors it is essential that it is done in a safe and respectful manner.

The Department’s exhibit will include Water Safety Ireland demonstrations, advice and support from Rural Recreation Officers and an area focusing on responsible dog ownership.

The issue of dog attacks on livestock is of grave concern to the farming community.

Local authority vets and dog wardens will be at the exhibit discussing the importance of keeping dogs under control, the issues of livestock worrying, the requirement to have a dog licence and general animal welfare.

In relation to responsible dog ownership the Minister added:

“Visitors to our exhibit will notice the focus on responsible dog ownership where we will be emphasising the importance of keeping dogs under control in rural areas and dog owners responsibilities.

“We will be reminding attendees of the need to respect landowner’s requests and about where dogs are welcome and where they are not.

“Attacks by dogs on livestock cause huge emotional and economic harm to our farming families.

“It is vital that we promote responsible behaviour so everyone can enjoy the countryside without causing harm to farmer’s livelihoods.”

The exhibit will also include; information on rural and community funding, Public Participation Networks, Volunteer Ireland, coding and robotics demonstrations, a mobile library, and more.

**Minister of State with responsibility for Community Development and Charities
Joe O’Brien TD said:**

“My Department’s presence at the National Ploughing Championship is always a highlight of the year and is an important opportunity for ministers and officials to engage directly with those who have a specific interest in rural Ireland.

“We play a vital role in supporting rural communities across a range of programmes and initiatives. The exhibit at the Ploughing Championship is a

fantastic opportunity to both highlight that work and to listen to feedback and suggestions on how best we can continue to support rural Ireland.”

The ‘Our Rural Future Supporting People and Communities’ exhibit will also include stands from:

- Unfair Trading Practices,
- Revenue Commissioners,
- Competition and Consumer Protection Commission,
- Workplace Relations Commission,
- Department of Social Protection, and
- Health Insurance Authority.

For further information visit gov.ie/ploughing

Follow the Department for regular Ploughing updates on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

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Notes to Editors:

The exhibit is located at (Block 3, Row 22, Stand 348) in the Government of Ireland Village.

Our Rural Future Supporting People and Communities - Exhibitor List

- Tidy Towns
- Rural Funding - includes; Town and Village Renewal Scheme; Local Improvement Scheme (LIS); Rural

Regeneration and Development Fund; Town Centre
First and the LEADER Programme

- Water Safety Ireland Demonstration area
- Peace Programmes
- Community Services Programme Demonstration area
- Digital Connectivity
- Volunteer Ireland
- Seniors Alert Scheme
- Community Funding – includes; Community Centre
Investment Fund, Community Recognition Fund &
CLÁR

Our Rural Future

Our Rural Future represents the Government's blueprint for the development of rural Ireland. It is supported by a range of rural funding schemes and initiatives including; Broadband Connection Points (BCPs), Town and Village Renewal Scheme, CLÁR, Local Improvement Scheme, Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Scheme, the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and LEADER.

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors: National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027

Outdoor recreation is defined as physical activities that take place in the natural environment, such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming. It does not include activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches (such as golf, football, and show-jumping) or motorised activities (such as quads/scramblers) with the exception of motorised mobility aids.

Examples of some of the key actions which will be delivered through *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors* include:

- The Department of Rural and Community Development to take a lead role ensuring a more strategic approach to outdoor recreation at a national level.

- Sport Ireland to assume a co-leadership role, with the Department of Rural and Community Development, with a particular focus on guidance and technical experience.
- Establish county structures including County Outdoor Recreation Committees and County Stakeholder Forums which will bring all the key stakeholders together.
- Develop County Outdoor Recreation Plans - identifying the amenities that are in the County and also the gaps. Agree the key priorities for the county to create a more strategic approach and ensure value for money.
- Ensure greater emphasis on the management and maintenance of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure.
- Continue to provide support to outdoor recreation businesses/enterprises through the Local Enterprise Offices, Local Development Companies and other channels.
- Communicate updated information to landowners and recreational users on access and liability so that there is greater clarity and awareness.
- Further expand the Walks Scheme.
- Review approaches and models for physical access used in other countries, based on principles of respect for land ownership and responsible conduct.
- Explore cross-border cooperation on key initiatives.
- Develop new visitor management approaches for Ireland's most crowded outdoor recreation sites.
- Develop a communications campaign on responsible behaviour in the outdoors.
- Increase the number of programmes and participants engaged in outdoor recreation, particularly from under-represented groups.
- Establish methods to measure and review the engagement in, and the benefits of, outdoor recreation.