



Commissioners of
IRISH LIGHTS

Navigation
and Maritime
Services



Údarás na
Gaeltachta

From **VISION** *to* **OPERATION**

A practical guide to community-led
lighthouse development





About this Guide

Commissioned by **Údarás na Gaeltachta** in collaboration with **Irish Lights** this **guide** is designed to **support local communities, potential operators, tourism and heritage stakeholders**, and others interested in developing a lighthouse site in Gaeltacht area.

This may be as a visitor attraction, an accommodation offer, a community hub or for other sustainable use that delivers **local and cultural value**.

Drawing on the insights and experiences of those who have successfully developed similar initiatives, the guide **highlights the opportunities, challenges, and risks you may encounter** along the way.

We thank those who contributed to our case studies, staff with experience of community lighthouse projects at Irish Lights, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Fáilte Ireland, Great Lighthouses of Ireland and Department for Infrastructure Northern Ireland for their insights and advice.

Empowering Lighthouse Tourism in the Gaeltacht

Údarás na Gaeltachta and Irish Lights are working in partnership to develop new lighthouse sites in the Gaeltacht region.

This initiative aims to:

- Promote sustainable tourism
- Showcase the maritime heritage of Ireland
- Support community-led rural tourism enterprises
- Preserve and celebrate the cultural and historical significance of lighthouses
- Stimulate local economic growth



Údarás na Gaeltachta

As the regional development authority for Gaeltacht areas, **Údarás na Gaeltachta** plays a pivotal role in turning community ambition into reality. Through funding, mentoring, and strategic support, Údarás helps local groups to develop lighthouse visitor experiences that are rooted in place, language, and sustainability.

Their commitment to regenerative tourism is demonstrated in the success of projects like **Fanad Head** and **Blacksod Lighthouse**, where collaboration with Irish Lights and community partners has delivered lasting cultural and economic benefits

Commissioners Irish Lights and Great Lighthouses of Ireland

Irish Lights is the maritime organisation responsible for delivering essential navigation services around the entire island of Ireland, North and South. With a proud legacy spanning over two centuries, it plays a central role in supporting mariners and saving lives at sea. Today, Irish Lights maintains more than 60 operational lighthouses, many located at some of Ireland's most iconic coastal landmarks. As custodians of these historic sites and of a remarkable archive of maritime records, Irish Lights is equally committed to preserving safety and heritage.

Recognising the unique value of these coastal assets, Irish Lights established **Great Lighthouses of Ireland**¹, an all-island initiative that enables lighthouse buildings to be creatively reimaged for sustainable tourism and community use.

¹ **Great Lighthouses of Ireland** is a partnership of public, private and community organisations working together under a shared brand. It supports local communities to bring lighthouse stories to life, generate local income, and foster pride of place all while conserving maritime heritage for future generations.



Contents

1. Community Lighthouse Attractions in the Gaeltacht

Why they matter, potential, opportunity and experiences

2. Our Guiding Lights: Learning from Experience

Case studies, practical insights, and voices from Fanad, Valentia and Blacksod

- Project snapshots
- Voices of experience
- Top six lessons

3. Working with Irish Lights: Your 5-Step Process

1. Make Early Contact
2. Initial Proposal
3. Irish Lights Internal Review
4. Detailed Feasibility Study and Business Plan
5. Final Approval

4. Great Lighthouses of Ireland Brand Partnership

What it is and how It can help your project

5. Sources of Help

Key contacts, agencies, and resources

1.

Community lighthouse attractions in the Gaeltacht



Lighthouses are powerful symbols of identity, resilience, and place. They stand not only as guardians of the coast but as **anchors of our place, our community, culture, language, and local pride**. Across the Gaeltacht, lighthouses offer much more than scenic views and maritime stories they can become powerful catalysts for sustainable, community-led tourism.

Why Lighthouse Community Attractions Matter

Recent socio-economic impact research commissioned by Irish Lights and Great Lighthouses of Ireland has shown just how much lighthouse attractions can deliver. They bring in visitors, boost the local economy, and help put the locality and wider area on the map.

For Gaeltacht communities, these projects do even more. They help create jobs, keep the Irish language alive, and give visitors a chance to connect with the real spirit of the place. Lighthouses are a perfect fit for community-led tourism².

Lighthouse Visitor Attractions

Lighthouses are naturally compelling visitor attractions. With their rich maritime heritage and dramatic settings, they attract local, domestic and international visitors including history buffs, families, photographers, and explorers who value:

- Stories and maritime history
- Architecture and stunning views
- Guided tours and interpretation
- Events and exhibitions

All which help create memorable and meaningful visitor experiences.



2 KHSK Socio-Economic Impact of the Great Lighthouses of Ireland Initiative 2024

Unique Accommodation

From lightkeepers' cottages to repurposed outbuildings, accommodation at or near lighthouse sites is a major draw.

Many sites include lightkeepers' cottages and auxiliary buildings and when restored and adapted sensitively, these spaces become:

- Unique and immersive places to stay
- Income generators for community that support the delivery of other experiences offered onsite
- Catalysts for extended visits



Trailheads and Gateways

There are many international and national examples of how Lighthouses can act as starting or stopping points for walking and cycling trails, coastal routes, and wider heritage journeys.

Their symbolic value, physical presence, and scenic location make them natural anchors associated with:

- Walking and cycling trails
- Scenic loops and coastal touring routes
- Interpretation hubs for nearby attractions and region

They can help disperse visitors and link wider experiences.



Boat Tours and Maritime Experiences

Many lighthouses' sites and areas around them offer rich potential for water-based activities, from wildlife watching and boat tours to kayak trails and sea angling. These experiences add value for visitors and open up new entrepreneurial opportunities.



Language, Culture & Community Connection

In the Gaeltacht, lighthouse attractions offer a powerful way to celebrate the Irish language and culture. Through bilingual interpretation, Irish-speaking guides, local crafts, and food storytelling, visitors connect deeply with place and people. With the right vision, a lighthouse site can evolve into a **living cultural hub**, offering:

- Shared spaces for events, workshops, and artisan showcases
- Places for community pride and cultural gatherings
- Platforms for Irish language, education, and youth programmes
- A welcoming café and craft shop to foster local connections and encourage repeat visits
- Deeper visitor engagement through authentic, meaningful experiences

These sites don't just reflect our Irish culture they help sustain and grow it.



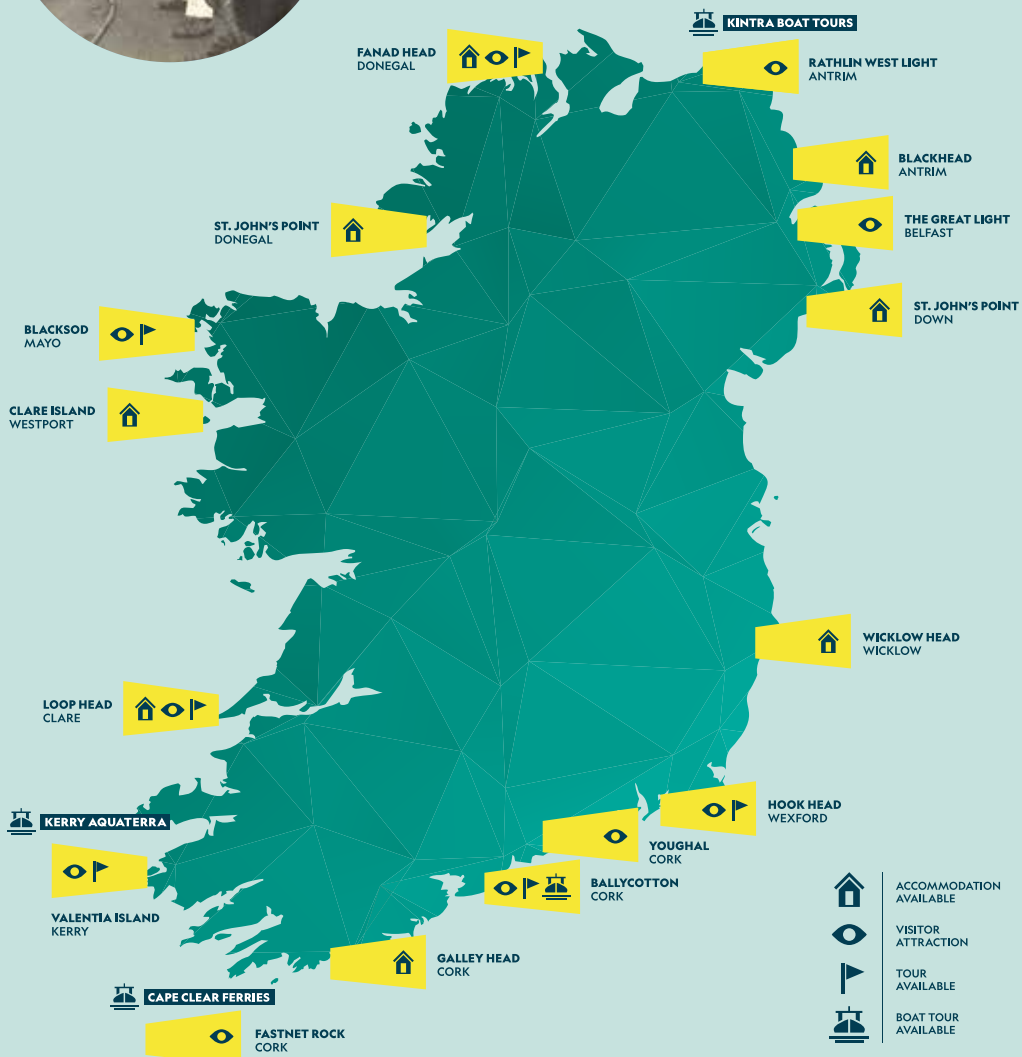
Unlocking Local Potential

By linking heritage with hospitality, environment, and enterprise, lighthouse attractions can become year-round anchors for regional development. They're not just places to visit, they're places to start journeys, meet communities, and spark ideas.

As the examples in this guide show, the most successful lighthouse projects connect many layers of experience and in doing so, they shine a light on everything that makes the Gaeltacht special.



Great Lighthouses of Ireland Partners all work together to unlock this potential



Lighthouses in the Gaeltacht



2.

Guiding Lights - Three Great Lighthouses

What we have learned from those who have done it



This Guide is based on the combined wisdom of people and operators with deep experience of community lighthouse developments.

This section highlights three successful lighthouse projects: Fanad Head (Co. Donegal), Valentia Island (Co. Kerry), and Blacksod (Co. Mayo)

Three Great Lighthouses

Each featured lighthouse has its own story, but they all share a common thread: passionate local people working together to turn a lighthouse into something special for visitors, for their community, and for the future.

We are grateful to the teams at the lighthouses for talking time to reflect on their project and share the important lessons they have learned.

We hope their stories will inspire and guide you on your own journey





Fanad Head / Teach Solais Fhánada

Location: Fanad Peninsula, Co. Donegal

Opened to the public: 2016

Managing Entity: Company Limited by Guarantee with voluntary board

Operating Model: Not-for-profit social enterprise

Fanad Lighthouse is a thriving community visitor attraction on the Wild Atlantic Way, offering guided tours, local maritime stories and overnight stays in three beautifully restored lightkeepers' cottages.

Their journey began in 2012, when Irish Lights secured funding through the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) to help restore six lighthouse sites across Northern Ireland and Donegal. This early support laid the groundwork for Fanad's transformation into a visitor destination.

In 2018, a new reception centre and permanent exhibition space opened with support from Fáilte Ireland, Irish Lights, Donegal County

Council, and Údarás na Gaeltachta. Since then, the experience has continued to grow. Visitors can now enjoy audio installations, multi-lingual audio tours, a virtual reality lighthouse experience, a wildlife exhibit, a shop, and a café, all adding depth and character to this unique coastal attraction.

Fanad is now an important local employer offering valued jobs both full time and part time. In 2024 over 65,000 visitors came onsite, with over 22,000 purchasing tower tours. Occupancy rates for the three Keepers cottages are at 90%, well above the national average

Fanad: Voices of experience



The community ultimately chose to take full ownership—managing both the tours and the accommodation themselves. This decision proved crucial to ensuring long-term sustainability and keeping control of the business model within the community.



The lighthouse provides direct employment, seasonal roles for students and volunteering opportunities.

This has strengthened local capacity and ownership. We hire seasonal staff locally which is important to the community.



Pobal support was a gamechanger – it enabled full-time staffing and helped us to reach new markets.

Donegal Tourism provided vital support in developing our website and accommodation booking engine.



Don't rely on ticket sales alone. Fanad's high occupancy in its three lightkeepers' cottages provides essential income that supports operations year-round, while the craft and coffee shop is essential for repeat business supporting local artists and producers.



Fanad scaled quickly and found it tough to keep up.

A phased approach gives breathing room to learn and grow.



Fanad Head celebrates maritime traditions and Gaeltacht culture.

The Irish language is embedded in our visitor experience, reinforcing local identity.

Top six lessons from the Fanad Lighthouse team

1. Own it locally and lead

Take full control of your project and its offer, including tours, accommodation, café, retail and overall visitor experience. Work with partners and agencies (Irish Lights, Fáilte Ireland, Pobal) **but keep leadership and decisions rooted locally.**

2. Secure accommodation where possible

Overnight stays are vital for financial sustainability. Accommodation underpins the whole operation and helps spread visitor spend.

3. Build the foundations first

Sort out the infrastructure (water, toilets, access, Wi-Fi) and legal agreements (leases, licensing) early. These basics can block progress if not addressed up front.

4. Invest in skills and governance

Develop strong governance, finance, marketing, compliance, and storytelling capability.

5. Start small and grow over time

Phased development works best. Start simple (Fanad began with a hut and container shop), learn what works, and build from there. Don't wait for perfect – just begin.

6. Craft a Compelling Visitor Experience

Visitors come for the views but return for the story. Use local guides and interpretation to bring your lighthouse to life. Diversify revenue through retail, events, food & drink, and accommodation.





Valentia Island Lighthouse / Teach Solais Dairbhre

Location: Valentia Island, Co. Kerry

Opened to the public: 2013

Operating Model: Registered Charity with community led committee.

Managing Entity: Valentia Island Development Company (VIDCO) / Lighthouse Committee

Valentia Lighthouse is a shining example of how community vision and hard work can bring a historic site to life. The lighthouse offers guided tours and fixed multimedia interpretation. It was one of the founding members of the Great Lighthouses of Ireland partnership.

The project is run by a volunteer-led Lighthouse Committee under the umbrella of Valentia Island Development Company (VIDCO). From the outset, the committee used its strong local knowledge and credibility to access funding, expertise, and resources enabling them to get the project up and running with limited means but big ambition. Strategic use of VIDCO's community networks

and supports played a vital role in mobilising resources and people.

Since opening, visitor numbers have grown steadily to nearly 25,000 annually. The committee continues to enhance the visitor experience while contributing to the wider destination and island economy.

This project is a valuable model of how local ambition, smart partnerships, and a strong community structure can turn a lighthouse into a sustainable visitor attraction that protects heritage and strengthens community pride.

Valentia: Voices of experience



The idea was born when local guesthouse owners visited Loop Head lighthouse in Co. Clare.

Inspired by the potential, they returned with a **'why not here'** mindset and rallied local support.



Our lighthouse development committee came together quickly, six or seven highly experienced individuals from varied backgrounds in business, public service, and tourism. Their **strong national networks proved invaluable**. But the most important step we took was becoming a legal entity early on. That gave us credibility, access to funding, and the ability to move forward with confidence.



We started with almost no money, just determination and a good idea. Every small win-built momentum, helping us secure bigger grants like €100,000 from Fáilte Ireland. It wasn't quick, **leases, planning, and infrastructure all take time**. But if you stay patient and keep pushing, it does come together.



Invest the time in a thorough **feasibility study**, look at your market, costs, access, and community capacity. It's the foundation for everything that follows. And don't underestimate how long lease negotiations and legal agreements can take. **Build in the time, seek good advice, and keep your momentum**.



Think Beyond Opening Day. The lighthouse extended the tourist season and helped local businesses.

A strong visitor experience benefits the entire community.



Bringing the community together through local engagement and the launch of **'Friends of the Lighthouse'** sparked a renewed sense of pride in our maritime heritage uniting people around a shared vision and deepening their sense of ownership in the project.

Top six lessons from the Valentia Lighthouse team

1. Take time to define a shared vision

Valentia's journey began with a visit to Loop lighthouse that sparked what became a big idea. It took passion and persistence to pursue, but it grew into a community-wide effort.

2. Use what you have

Don't wait for perfect. Valentia made smart use of existing resources, CE/Tús schemes, volunteer skills, local knowledge, and a legal structure under VIDCO. Most communities already have more than they realise.

3. Get the basics right from the start and an early legal structure matters.

Talk to local and national stakeholders and contact Irish Lights and other partner agencies. Research and define your visitor experience, establish a governance model, clarify roles, and build local credibility. This makes it easier to access funding, form partnerships, and get momentum.

4. Keep your community close

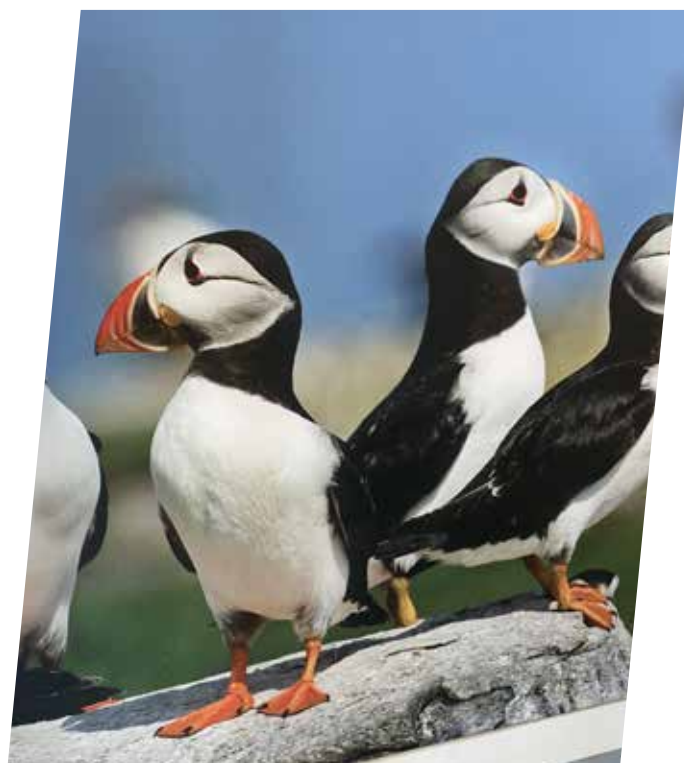
Ongoing community buy-in is vital. The Valentia team regularly shared progress, invited input, and kept the wider island business community informed ensuring the project stayed rooted in local priorities.

5. Be smart and patient with funding

Valentia started small and showed results, which helped unlock bigger supports. Expect red tape and delays, especially with grant applications and infrastructure development, but stay the course.

6. Think long-term from day one

Always look beyond opening day to sustainability and community benefit. Valentia is still growing, developing trails, hosting events, and establishing a "Friends of the Lighthouse" scheme to support community and other businesses.





Blacksod / Teach Solas an Fód Dubh

Location: Eachleim, Mullet Peninsula, Co. Mayo.

Opened to the public: Lighthouse 2019. Solas Visitor Centre 2024

Operating Model: Community Development Co-operative

Managing Entity: Ionad Deirbhile (Comharchumann Forbartha Ionad Deirbhile – CFID)

Blacksod Lighthouse is a powerful example of how a small Gaeltacht community turned a unique piece of maritime heritage into a living visitor experience. It offers guided tours led by locals, many with direct family connections to lighthouse keeping, bringing the stories of the sea to life in an authentic and personal way.

The idea began in 2018, sparked by a benchmarking trip to other lighthouse attractions. Recognising the potential to build on the area's natural appeal and strong local pride, the community group CFID (Comharchumann Forbartha Ionad Deirbhile) working with Irish Lights, Mayo County Council, and Údarás na Gaeltachta led to development.

Today, the lighthouse and nearby SOLAS Visitor Centre (opened in 2024) offer an integrated experience, showcasing the area's unique coastal, island, and wartime heritage. The successful ERDF application that helped fund SOLAS was rooted in the strength and early success of the lighthouse project.

Blacksod's experience highlights the value of community leadership, smart partnerships, and phased planning. Future plans include improved facilities, more interpretation, and high-end bespoke experiences, all driven by a clear vision for sustainable tourism in the North Mayo Gaeltacht.

Blacksod: Voices of experience



Travel and learn from others:

Visit other lighthouse visitor sites and talk to the people running them. See how they operate, how they work with Irish Lights and local authorities. Look at their governance structures what's working, what isn't. Take advice and shape your own model with confidence.



Partnering with Solus gave us the structure and support to focus on what we do best, welcoming visitors and sharing our story. Its establishment is a testament to the community's commitment to protecting and promoting their heritage, while creating meaningful educational and tourism opportunities.



Having respected local leaders with national connections made a huge difference.

Their credibility opened doors we couldn't have knocked on ourselves.



Our guides are trained by Fergus Sweeney whose father, uncle and grandparents were all lightkeepers and employees of Irish Lights.

Family connection is important and provides personal, authentic storytelling and we **enhance this with digital technology** and other methods to deliver.



We learned that operational success is tied to strong visitor management, sustainable staffing resources and effective communication.

We needed to **harness public funding** such as Pobal, CE RSS and Failte Ireland support. You need to follow the money!



All lighthouse sites come with limits that may include access, visitor numbers, and what you can offer. Looking back, we wish we'd planned earlier for this by considering interpretation and visitor flow. This would have saved time and helped us manage expectations.

Top six tips from Blacksod Lighthouse team

1. Start simple - but start

Learn from others, take advice and then begin with what you have. Blacksod opened with a modest welcome point and donation box, growing into a full visitor experience over time. Progress matters more than perfection.

2. Let the story lead

A unique local story, like the WW2 weather forecast that delayed D-Day, can give your lighthouse global appeal. Build your visitor experience around authentic narratives only your place can tell and harness technology and a variety of methods to tell your story

3. Build on what's local

From reusing a pier office to drawing on community volunteers and donated expertise, Blacksod shows how local assets, people, places, and skills can stretch resources further than you think.

4. Follow the money and know how to leverage funding

Map out every possible source of public and community funding early on. CE, RSS, and Pobal schemes can be gamechangers. Build the right relationships, seek advice, and learn how to leverage what's out there to keep your project moving.

5. Keep it real and respectful

Low-impact development, Irish language use, and cultural sensitivity kept the project grounded in place. Stay true to your lighthouse's setting. Don't overdevelop.

6. Grow with the flow

The team adapted gradually to visitor demand, managing flows with minimal infrastructure. Flexibility and patience helped them evolve sustainably while protecting the long-term vision.



Critical Success Factors for Community-Led Lighthouse Projects



3.

Working with Commissioners of Irish Lights



If you're planning to develop a lighthouse site, Irish Lights will be a key partner from the outset.

As the statutory authority responsible for lighthouse properties, Irish Lights provides the permissions, frameworks, and technical insight needed to move from idea to reality.

They are also an active supporter of projects that align with their vision for sustainable reuse, balancing heritage protection, community value, and tourism potential.

Engage early. Irish Lights can help you navigate complexities, unlock opportunities, and ensure your project is grounded in best practice.

The following five-step process outlines how a project can progress from concept to operation over approximately 18 months.

Depending on your site and level of readiness, some stages may move faster or slower.

Step 1: Make early contact with Irish Lights

Any proposed development must first receive approval from the Irish Lights Executive and ultimately its Board.

Before developing plans, contact Irish Lights to:

1. Confirm whether your site is eligible for 'Alternative Use'
2. Clarify which parts of the property may be made available to a third party

Early engagement is essential. This initial conversation will help you understand site boundaries, permissions, and any relevant constraints, setting your project on the right path from the start.

Contact:

Dave Ward, Commercial Manager
dave.ward@irishlights.ie



Step 2: Initial Proposal

This stage helps Irish Lights assess your project's suitability, strategic alignment, and the potential for a successful long-term partnership.

If your site is confirmed as eligible for **Alternative Use**, the next step is to prepare and submit a high-level proposal to Irish Lights. This should clearly outline your vision, demonstrate the viability of the project, and show that your group has the capacity to deliver.

Your proposal should include:

- **Details of the project sponsor** - who is leading the project, **the legal status of the organisation** seeking to lease or license access to the site.
- **Vision and proposed use** - a description of your proposed development, its intended purpose and how it sits in the context of the site/surrounding area.
- **Letters of support** - a letter from Údarás na Gaeltachta and, ideally, from your Local Authority confirming their support and interest in the project.
- **Funding overview** - a development funding plan, indicating sources of investment (grant, debt, equity) and confirmed or potential funding partners.
- **Tourism alignment** - demonstrate how your proposal aligns with regional tourism strategies or destination development goals.
- **A property development outline** (including drawings, planning status, site scope) that includes consideration of utilities and services (e.g., electricity, water, sewage, access, parking).



Step 3: Irish Lights Internal Review

Agreement in Principle – What It Means

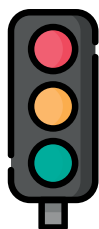
Once your high-level proposal is reviewed, Irish Lights will assess the project's viability based on the information provided in Step 2.

If the project is progressing well, this stage leads to an **Agreement in Principle**, a formal indication that Irish Lights supports the idea in theory and is open to moving to the next phase.

As part of this stage:

- A **draft Heads of Terms** will be developed, outlining the core conditions of a future lease or license.
- Typically, this will be a **full repairing and insuring lease**, where your group takes responsibility for maintenance, insurance, and repairs.

The draft agreement will then be submitted to Irish Lights' **Executive and Board** for approval to proceed further.



Funding and Investment

Developing a lighthouse attraction or community space is a major undertaking and can require **significant financial investment**.

Depending on the nature and scale of the development, projects may need an initial investment of **€500,000 to €5 million or more**, especially where infrastructure works, site access, interpretation, accommodation, or visitor facilities are involved.

It's important to be realistic about costs and start shaping your funding plan early.

Irish Lights offers use of the property for under a commercial lease or licence and places responsibility for maintenance and day-to-day operations of the demised area as set out in the lease/license with the local group or operator.

Údarás na Gaeltachta, the **relevant Local Authority**, and other agencies can play a critical role helping community groups identify funding opportunities, support applications, and make the case for investment to government departments and funding bodies.

Top Tip from existing providers

Establish a legal entity early and work closely with Irish Lights, Údarás, and your Local Authority to build a strong funding and investment strategy that aligns with tourism, heritage, and community development priorities.

Step 4: Detailed Feasibility Study and Business Plan

With approval in principle from Irish Lights, your next milestone is to develop a full feasibility study and 5-year business plan. Your study should address:

1. Vision & Proposition:

- Clear project vision and goals
- Description of your proposed experience
- Alignment with local/destination priorities
- Marketing and sales strategy

2. Site Assessment and Development Needs:

- Site audit: structures, conditions, access, services
- Traffic access and service requirements
- Environmental and safety considerations

3. Operations & Visitor Management:

- Operating model and visitor journey
- Projected visitor numbers, and capacity
- Staffing and volunteer model/ plan
- Opening times, ticketing, retail and accommodation

4. Governance & Partnership Approach:

- Legal status & structure
- Governance arrangements
- Roles and responsibilities
- Stakeholder and partnerships
- Risk assessment and mitigation

5. Financial Viability (5-Year Outlook):

- Development and operational cost estimates
- Cashflow forecasts
- Potential income streams, pricing model
- Confirmed and potential funding
- Loan repayment plan

6. Sustainability & Legacy:

- Environmental and heritage care
- Digital readiness
- Monitoring, KPIs, and evaluation

Step 5: Final Approval

All being well and subject to final financial and operational due diligence carried out by Irish Lights, your Feasibility Study and Business Plan will lead to final approval being granted.

Irish Lights will then prepare the legal documentation to be signed by both parties.

These include:

- Irish Lights to issue commercial Lease/ Licence to Project Sponsor
- Deed of Renunciation – required to be signed
- Evidence of appropriate insurance cover in place, to include but not limited to;
 - Public (€6.5M) & Employers (€13M) liability
 - Property Insurance
- GLI Membership – brand charter, annual fee invoiced and partner introductions

From **VISION** to **REALITY**

Once you've completed the five key steps and secured agreement with Irish Lights, you're ready to bring your lighthouse vision to life.

This is the moment where your vision starts become a lived experience, for visitors from around the world, celebrating your local heritage, place, and community.

Irish Lights will remain a committed partner, supporting your official opening, guiding your launch activities, and helping you integrate into the **Great Lighthouses of Ireland** partnership.



4.

Great Lighthouses of Ireland



The purpose of Great Lighthouses of Ireland is to be the leading partnership model and voice for lighthouse tourism, its maritime heritage, and culture on the island of Ireland. By collaborating with community, public and private partners, we deliver innovative experiences and projects that benefit coastal communities both socially and economically in a sustainable manner.

Great Lighthouses of Ireland comprises 14 members, across 16 sites who collectively offer over 20 visitor experiences including tower tours, guest accommodation and boat tours

Great Lighthouses of Ireland Partners include:

Kintra Boat Tours

Irish Landmark Trust

Royal Society for Protection of Birds Northern Ireland (RSPB)

Forbairt Fhanada Teoranta (Fanad Community Group)

Ballycotton Sea Adventures

Valentia Island Development Company

Clare Island Lighthouse

Maritime Belfast

Kerry Aqua Terra Tours

Cork County Council

Ionad Deirbhile

Hook Heritage Ltd.

Clare County Council

Cape Clear Ferries

Together, they represent public, private, and community sector partners, and are supported by a number of public agencies including Fáilte Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Tourism Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland, Bord Iascaigh Mhara, and relevant local authorities.



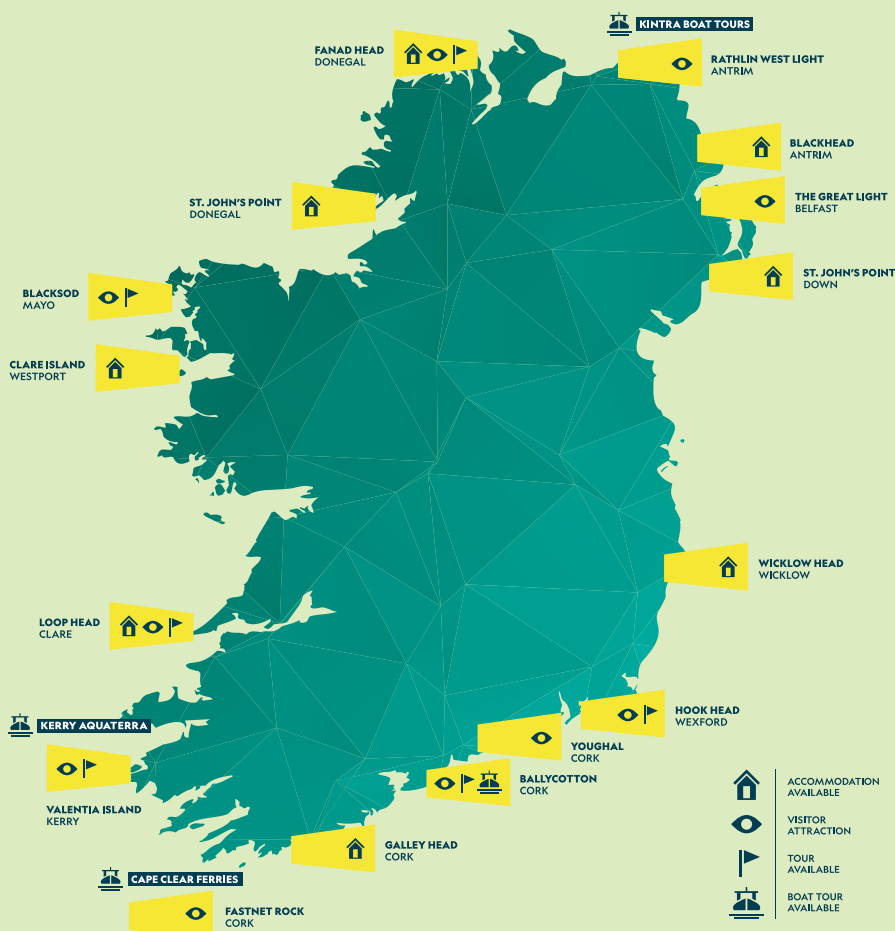
Great Lighthouses of Ireland Partnership

The partnership is resourced by Irish Lights and GLI partners pay an annual membership fee

The model for delivery is underpinned by its Charter, Strategy and Shared Contributions

Great Lighthouses of Ireland Partnership Charter

This is a partnership representing community, public and private operators who offer valuable, innovative and sustainable lighthouse and maritime experiences that benefit coastal communities and their destinations both socially and economically in a sustainable manner.



Our ambition is to ensure our partnership is recognised by visitors, funders, agencies and communities as a model that is sustainable, creative, innovative and one that they value and support.

Our values

Shared values guide and inform all our actions and relationships with each other, stakeholders, visitors and communities.



Togetherness



Sustainability



Collaboration



Creativity & Innovation

In 2025, the strategic plan was published, marking a decade since the launch of the original brand partnership

VISION



By 2035, Great Lighthouses of Ireland is celebrated both nationally and internationally as a leading all-island brand and partnership, providing sustainable and innovative coastal tourism experiences, recognised for its commitment to protecting and sharing its rich natural and built lighthouse heritage and delivering economic, social, and environmental benefits to coastal communities.

PURPOSE



Our purpose is to be the leading partnership model and voice for lighthouse tourism, and its maritime heritage, and culture on the island of Ireland. By collaborating with community, public and private partners, we deliver innovative experiences and projects that benefit coastal communities and their natural environments both socially and economically in a sustainable manner.

PRIORITIES

Brand Partnership Growth & Development

Great Lighthouses of Ireland (GLI) is recognised as an exemplar in the delivery of quality maritime and inclusive tourism experiences that benefit partners, stakeholders and the island of Ireland.

Protecting And Sharing Irish Lights History & Heritage For Future Generations

Leveraging Irish Lights history, built and natural heritage, and marine community together with its expertise and leadership is maximising development opportunities and support from public agencies, funders and leaders on the island of Ireland for the benefit of all partners and stakeholders.

Sustainable Experiences & Regenerative Development

A shared and individual commitment to embed sustainable and regenerative tourism principles in the development of lighthouse experiences is delivering positive environmental, social, and economic benefits to coastal communities.

Interpretation & Storytelling

Creative interpretation and innovative storytelling is engaging a variety of audiences, building awareness and respect for the marine environment, maritime heritage and culture.

Marketing & Communications

Targeted marketing and communications efforts and campaigns are supporting shared objectives and contributing to increased visitor spend and dwell time at each site.



A shared commitment to sustainable tourism

We shine a light on unique and breath-taking experiences by linking to our past and protecting our future.

We are at the heart of where community, nature and enterprise intersect, and we work with our communities via:

- Sharing our heritage and culture with all our visitors and stakeholders
- Providing meaningful local jobs and opportunities
- Featuring local food and crafts
- Promoting Leave No Trace
- A shared commitment to sustainable management systems

WHERE LAND MEETS THE SEA, WE WORK TO CONNECT EVERYONE WITH OUR RICH MARITIME STORY



How GLI can help you

As a GLI partner, you'll gain:

- **National and international visibility** under a trusted partnership brand
- **Marketing and media support** via Tourism Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, and Tourism NI
- **Peer collaboration and learning** through a strong network of lighthouse operators
- **Access to operational guidance**, training, and shared resources via Irish Lights and Partners
- **A platform to tell your story and grow your impact sustainably**

Great Lighthouses of Ireland Resources include the following with more in the development pipeline:

- **Great Lighthouses website - www.greatlighthouses.com**
A user-friendly hub for visitor information, stories, events, and lighthouse experiences.
- **Social media and video content**
Engaging posts, short films, and reels that bring lighthouse stories to life and reach wide audiences.
- **Compelling digital and print materials**
Eye-catching brochures, displays, and branded content used across all sites and campaigns.
- **GLI Strategic Plan 2025–2030**
A shared plan that sets out goals, priorities, and actions for the years ahead.
- **GLI Partnership Charter**
A simple guide to how the partnership works and what partners commit to.
- **StoryKeeper Toolkit**
Tips and tools for telling local stories well, helping visitors connect with each lighthouse.
- **Economic Impact Reports (2018 & 2025)**
Independent reports showing the benefits of GLI for local communities and tourism.



5.

Sources of Help



Irish Lights and Great Lighthouses of Ireland Strategic Partners

- **Fáilte Ireland**
National Tourism Development Authority
www.failteireland.ie
- **Tourism Ireland**
Overseas marketing for the island of Ireland
www.tourismireland.com
- **Tourism Northern Ireland**
Tourism agency for Northern Ireland
www.tourismni.com
- **Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM)**
Supports the seafood industry and coastal communities
www.bim.ie

Funding & Business Development Supports

National & Regional Funding Bodies

- **Údarás na Gaeltachta**
Grants for Gaeltacht-based community, tourism, and cultural projects Fáilte Ireland: Strategic investment for tourism initiatives (check eligibility early).
www.udaras.ie
- **Fáilte Ireland**
Capital funding, development support, and marketing assistance to help communities and enterprises whose efforts align with national tourism priorities.
www.failteireland.ie
- **Local Authorities**
Community & heritage grants and links to Leader
www.ie/en/ireland-local-authorities
- **LEADER / Local Development Companies**
Funding for rural innovation and tourism
www.nationalnetwork.ie

- **Western Development Commission (WDC)**
Supports projects in the western region with tourism and enterprise potential.
www.westerndevelopment.ie
- **Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM)**
Maritime and fisheries-linked tourism development funding.
www.bim.ie

State-Backed Funding Programmes

- **Pobal (administers multiple schemes)**
Supports community and local development initiatives www.pobal.ie
 - Community Services Programme (CSP)
 - Social Enterprise Capital Grants
 - Dormant Accounts Fund
- **Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF):** Capital funding for large-scale rural projects.
- **Town & Village Renewal Scheme / CLÁR / ORIS**
Supports rural tourism, amenity upgrades & access improvements.

Operational & Staffing Supports

- **Community Employment (CE) Scheme:**
Helps with staffing for community-based services.
- **Rural Social Scheme (RSS)**
Provides income support for rural dwellers working part-time on local projects
- **Employment and activation supports**
www.gov.ie/en/service/community-services-programme

Your lighthouse project won't stand still, it will grow, shift, and adapt as funding and capacity evolve. Be pragmatic, but don't miss the chance to be bold when opportunity knocks.

Creative problem-solving is key, especially around access and infrastructure.

Stay flexible, respond to visitor trends, and always be thinking ahead: extend your season, diversify your offer, build a loyal community of supporters, and don't be afraid to mix mission with retail.

That's how you build long-term impact.



We have learned a lot over the last ten years about lighthouse tourism and their alternative use in partnership with communities. Through the implementation of our **Great Lighthouses of Ireland strategy**, we are ambitious to grow social, economic and environmental well-being value for the public good.

Dave Ward,
Commercial Manager,
Irish Lights



Commissioners of
IRISH LIGHTS | *Navigation
and Maritime
Services*



**Údarás na
Gaeltachta**