



Dublin Mountains Project

What's happened?

The period 2014-2015 witnessed the coincidence of strategic plans from central Government, Fáilte Ireland, the Dublin Mountains Partnership (DMP), Coillte and South Dublin County Council, that supports facilitating the inevitable and growing interest in fitness, health and well-being and, accessing the great outdoors for locals and visitors alike. Not only does DMP data suggest increasing visitor numbers to the Dublin Mountains, in particular at Hellfire and Ticknock, but CSO (Central Statistics Office) data shows that the Greater Dublin Area continues to be the fastest growing area of Ireland and that projections indicate that by 2031 the population of this area could rise to 2.2million, an increase in excess of 400,000.

The combination of these factors necessitates a sustainable plan, with a long term vision to manage current and future access to and within the Dublin Mountains.

June 2015 – March 2016

In this context, in 2015 a Steering Committee was formed comprising representation from the Dublin Mountains Partnership (DMP), South Dublin County Council and Coillte to commission and oversee the feasibility and concept development for a gateway facility in the Dublin Mountains.

In this context some key objectives for the Council, Coillte and the DMP in setting out on this Project included;

- A gateway to welcome and orientate visitors to the Dublin/Wicklow Mountains - acting as the recognised launching point to access the network of walks and trails in the Dublin Mountains to provide the highest possible quality visitor enjoyment of the landscape's key cultural, archaeological, geological and natural features
- Improved managed, balanced and sustainable access across all modes and improved





visitor experience of the Dublin Mountains through the provision and enhancement of services and infrastructure;

- A project that makes the Mountains a legible and coherent destination for visitors - in physical and service terms;
- A plan to protect and interpret the heritage of the Dublin Mountains, including opportunities for interactivity and learning, including a calendar of events and exhibitions;
- Supporting local and regional tourism and related sector businesses and employment levels;
- A proposal that sustainably balances the commercial forestry operations of Coillte with the growing demand for recreation access in the Dublin Mountains.

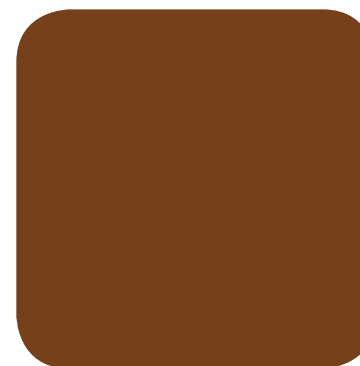
To facilitate progression, in recognition of Coillte's role as the main landowner and a lead agency in recreation access in the Dublin Mountains, the Council agreed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Coillte, (the main landowner in the area), to procure a Feasibility and Draft Master Plan for a gateway facility in the Mountains in South Dublin County.

Following a public procurement process a consultant team led by Paul Keogh Architects were engaged. Key considerations identified at the outset by South Dublin County Council, Coillte and the DMP included transport/traffic/access, heritage protection and environmental factors. The team analysed 6 potential sites with these considerations in mind.

Following assessment with the Steering Committee, Hellfire/Massy's was selected as the best option for such a concept. There was already demonstrable interest in the Hellfire-Massy's location as evidenced by the visitor numbers to these forests from DMP data and the recent archaeological excavations, combined with the CSO population statistics for the Greater Dublin Area, which will only see the existing levels of interest in accessing the Hellfire location increase. Following agreement on the potential location the consultant team developed the feasibility/draft master plan(s) for Hellfire/Masseys.

This plan was presented to the Council's elected members and agencies via the Steering Committee and presentations and discussions with South Dublin County Councils Corporate Policy Group, Strategic Policy Committees and the full Council, and Coillte.

This concept proposal was presented to the [Council in March 2016](#) where it was broadly welcomed.





June 2016

[Failte Ireland launches its Grants Scheme for Large Tourism Projects](#) in respect of which an amount of up to €65m in total grants is available over the period 2016-2020. The scheme provides for investment to develop new, or boost existing, tourism experiences and attractions across Ireland. In order to bring the marketing proposition of *“the natural outdoors side by side with city living”* and *“A Breath of Fresh Air”* to life the Scheme specifies *“Access to the Coast and Mountains”* as a key priority for Dublin.

August 2016

South Dublin County Council sign a further MOU with Coillte to facilitate the progression of the concept to planning stages.

September-November 2016

A procurement process results in the appointment of a multi-disciplinary consultancy team led by Paul Keogh Architects being appointed to review the concept/feasibility study and commence the detailed studies, technical reports and environmental assessments necessary to prepare a planning application for the proposal, with a view to submission to An Bord Pleanála in April 2017.

In the same period South Dublin County Council funded an [archaeological excavation of the passage tombs on Montpelier Hill](#), South Dublin County under the County Heritage Plan. Excavations were led by archaeologist Neil Jackman of Abarta Heritage, with an experienced team of archaeologists and with additional volunteers from University College Dublin. The project was also supported by Coillte who own and manage the Hell Fire Club Woodland site and by the DMP, University College Dublin, the Discovery Programme, the National Monuments Service and National Museum of Ireland. [Findings from the dig are being reviewed.](#)

