

Dublin Mountains Project

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What is the background to the project?

The Dublin Mountains, and in particular the areas around [Cruagh](#) and [Montpelier Hill](#), have been attractive locations for locals and visitors in South Dublin County over many years.

The [Local Government Reform Act 2014](#) became law in 2014 and sets out a formal statutory role for local authorities in economic and tourism development. This includes development of Local Economic and Community Plans (LECP), and related strategies for economic development and promotion, creating and sustaining jobs, augmenting economic performance of the region, and a general requirement to support and promote improved quality of life for our citizens. In this context, and in light of the Grow Dublin recommendations, South Dublin County Council commissioned a Tourism Strategy.

[The 2015 Tourism Strategy](#) for South Dublin County was developed in consultation with Failte Ireland, a local Tourism Working Group comprising industry and local elected members, other state agencies and the Councils Strategic Policy Committee for Economic Enterprise and Tourism Development.

The Strategy identified the Dublin Mountains as the key opportunity for this part of Dublin to sensitively develop a sustainable tourism profile, with the absence of a gateway facility as the factor both inhibiting access to the mountains, limiting the visitor experience and requiring attention. More information on the background to the Dublin Mountains Project is available [here](#).

What is the Project?

The Dublin Mountains Project is a proposal by South Dublin County Council, Coillte and the Dublin Mountains Partnership to develop Coillte's Montpelier Hill (incorporating the Hell Fire Club) and Massy's Wood sites as a key recreation site and a gateway to the heritage and recreation amenities of the Dublin Mountains. The site was selected for its position at the threshold between city and mountains, its unique combination of landscape, natural and cultural heritage representing the essence of the Dublin Mountains, and its established and growing use as a recreation facility.

It is proposed to develop enhanced visitor facilities on the site in a manner sensitive to the environment, the local community and existing users. The concept (under review as



part of the ongoing design process) presently includes development of a mixed forest to replace conifer plantations, improved networks of trails including a footbridge over the road to connect Hellfire and Massy's forests, conservation measures and sensitive interpretation of heritage, and visitor facilities such as a café, toilets and services to cater for the needs of local people, dedicated ramblers and tourists.

Please see [What is the Concept](#) and [What's Happening](#) for project updates

Why is the Dublin Mountains Project needed now?

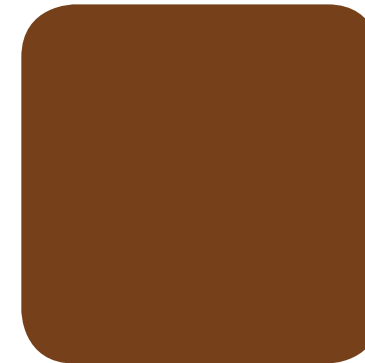
The Dublin Mountains is an amenity already used by a minimum of 350,000 recreation users annually based on data from visitor counters to a selection of forests. The trend towards greater awareness of the health and wellbeing benefits of outdoors activity coupled with [upward population projections in the Dublin area](#) and growing visitor numbers to Dublin is inevitably going to see this number climb. This calls for a strategic assessment of the situation and a plan for the future.

Whilst the Dublin Mountains Partnership (DMP) and its volunteers have done an excellent job by providing the [Dublin Mountains Way](#), other looped trails and car parking facilities in the Coillte owned forests of the Dublin Mountains since 2008, the capacity issues in the mountains are apparent at peak periods and even at weekends in non-peak times. This requires a managed and sustainable solution to cope with current and future visitor numbers, from among Dubliners and further afield.

In addition there is at present an absence of what one would expect to see in a visitor focussed environment close to the edge of a capital city, with minimum expectations from the Dublin population and visitors not addressed adequately.

This calls for a long term sustainable and managed solution both to address current service and access deficiencies and also to accommodate the growing numbers of visitors to the area.

[The period 2008 - 2016](#) has also seen the coincidence of plans from the key agencies with responsibilities relevant to recreation access and enjoyment of the Dublin Mountains and in this regard a unique opportunity now exists to address many of the above concerns through a collaborative inter-agency project.



Why Hellfire/Masseys?

Based on the recommendations of the [Tourism Strategy](#) 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 facility in the in the Mountains in South Dublin County that served as a gateway to the area.

Following a public procurement process a consultant team led by Paul Keogh Architects were engaged. The team analysed 6 potential sites assessing key planning and environmental considerations. Following discussion with the project steering committee, (representative of SDCC, Coillte and the Dublin Mountains Partnership), Hellfire/Masseys was selected as the best option for a proposed development.

The site was selected for its position at the threshold between city and mountains, its unique combination of landscape, natural and cultural heritage representing the essence of the Dublin Mountains, and its established and growing use as a recreation facility.

Of all sites in the South Dublin area of the Dublin Mountains, the Hellfire holds a special interest and offers a compelling combination in terms of heritage and spectacular views. This interest is evident in that existing Coillte data shows numbers of a minimum of 95,000 per annum (Hellfire & Massys).

The combination of the existing appeal of Hellfire and Massys along with the interest generated as a result of the recent archaeological excavation at Hellfire, coupled with wider developments such as the [Greater Dublin Areas rising population](#) and the growing societal interest in health, well-being and outdoor activities, will inevitably see visitation to the location increase.

In this context the current visitor experience is limited by the absence of visitor focussed services and access issues, which need to be addressed given current and projected usage of the sites.

What has happened so far?

See [here](#) for a summary of activity in 2015-2016



What is the project status now?

See [What's Happening](#) link for project updates.

Why is the planning application for the Project being submitted to An Bord Pleanála?

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 consultant's team analysed 6 potential sites with these considerations in mind.

During the concept stage it was viewed that an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) would be required and on this basis the process statutorily required was the lodgement of a planning application and EIS with [An Bord Pleanála](#) under [Section 175 of the Planning and Development Act 2000](#) . It is anticipated this will occur in May/June 2017.

[An Bord Pleanála](#) is the independent national body in Ireland that operates as an impartial third party to ensure that physical development and, in particular major infrastructure projects in Ireland respect the principles of sustainable development, including the protection of the environment.

A baseline survey of the environmental conditions has taken place and the results will inform (a) detail design and (b) consultation-landscape, visual impact assessment.

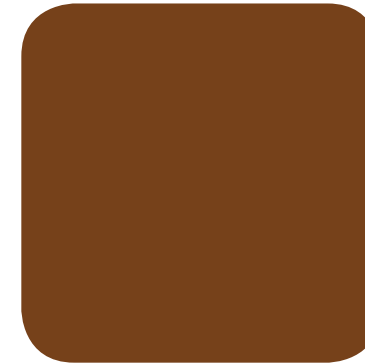
A request for determination from An Bord Pleanála has been submitted. This asks key questions – Is EIA technically required (“EIA Screening”)? This is a requirement of the Planning & Development Acts.

Potential outcomes include;

EIA required = application for consent by South Dublin County Council to An Bord Pleanála (“Part 10” planning process).

EIA not required = application for consent to South Dublin County Council (“Part 8” planning process).

A decision on this matter from An Bord Pleanála is awaited.



South Dublin County Council has carried out EIA Screening and is recommending to An Bord Pleanála that EIA must be carried out. The EIA will continue in parallel with design. Key issues such as archaeology, fauna and flora, visual impact, traffic, will be considered throughout the design process.

How will the project be funded?

The Council has funding in place for the planning process. A funding application has been lodged with Failte Ireland under their "[Grants Scheme for Large Tourism Projects 2016-2020](#)".

What is the project timetable?

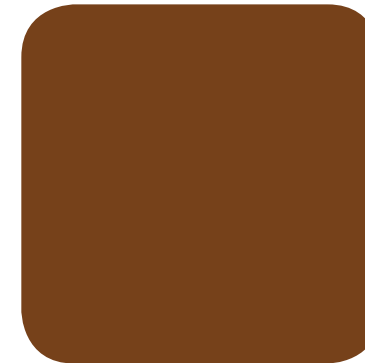
It is envisaged that a planning application will be lodged with An Bord Pleanála by June 2017. Planning will incorporate a full Environmental Impact Statement. Subject to positive decisions on both planning and funding detailed design and tender could be completed by end 2017 with construction commencing in 2018.

What about transport/traffic and other environmental issues?

Access to the mountains needs to be reviewed in the context of the trend of growing visitor numbers. Clearly long term planned and managed solutions are required, and this was included in the consideration at Feasibility Stage and is now actively being scoped in more detail.

An Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared as part of the planning process. The initial traffic analysis that formed part of the original feasibility/master plan will be further assessed as part of the planning preparation.

Access to the Dublin Mountains via a mix of modes – walking, cycling etc. are central to supporting the future recreation use of the Dublin Mountains and to sensitively preserving the rural character of the area. It is evident that interest in the sites throughout the mountains is



creating safety issues on road for the mix of cyclists, walkers and motorists. A key objective of the EIS and proposals is to establish solutions that balance the needs of all users and make this access better and safer, in a way that preserves the rural nature of the area.

Trails and signage proposals will include dedicated routes for different users to spread visitor numbers and plans will also align with ongoing DMP efforts to expand trails in the mountains. The proposed footbridge will also facilitate safe access between Massys and Hellfire and onwards to the Dublin Mountains Way while keeping visitors off road. It is intended that parking will be free, as is presently the case. Enhancing opportunities to access the facility by walking and cycling will also be a priority, especially given the clear demand for this both from Dubliners and visitors.

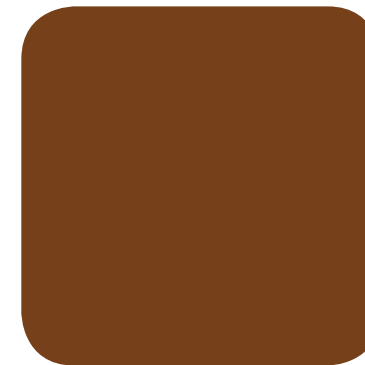
A number of similar facilities in comparable sensitive landscapes were reviewed in developing the concept with learnings from them in relation to sensitively managing access and traffic considered. Solutions implemented at comparable sites in sensitive rural landscapes include interventions such as advance car park notification systems to avoid congestion, satellite parking and shuttling - measures typical of destinations such as Newgrange or the Giants Causeway for example. Options will now be reviewed in greater detail and form part of the traffic, access and movement solutions to be proposed as part of the planning application.

Please see link to [What's Happening](#) for project updates.

How will the proposals influence the heritage of the Dublin Mountains?

There is a shared appreciation from all stakeholders about how vital the natural and built heritage of the Dublin Mountains is. The very nature of the landscape is an amenity and attraction and this needs to be protected in a sustainable way. Long term sustainable solutions must balance protection and sensitive management of impacts on the landscape with facilitating the growing levels of access to the mountains that supports the role it plays in terms of the quality of life of Dubliners and visitors.

The concept stage identified [Massys Wood](#) as rich in biodiversity, given its heritage as an arboretum planted in the the late 1930s, under the then Director of Forestry in Ireland,



Otto Reinard, with a rich variety of species. In acknowledgment of this the study proposed minimal intervention in this environment. The Hellfire/Montpelier Hill is clearly an existing point of interest for visitors and locals as well as a working commercial forest.

In this context the development proposals will include a detailed conservation plan that identifies and protects the built heritage of the area to arrest the deterioration of structures and make them safe for continued public access. It is fully acknowledged that in the context of the growing numbers to the area that this needs to be addressed.

The MOU between Coillte and South Dublin involves long term lease of commercial forest to facilitate the planning application, the area of which will be sensitively managed and in diversified with indigenous deciduous planting that will preserve a mountain parkland setting.

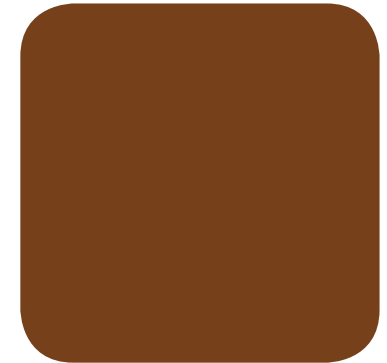
South Dublin County Council, in conjunction with Coillte, the DMP, the Heritage Council, UCD and other agencies has advanced the process of protecting the built heritage of the Dublin Mountains through its funding and support for various archaeological studies in the area. In addition to the recent archaeological investigation at Hellfire the Council are, separately to this Project, in conjunction with the Dublin Mountains Partnership, Coillte and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, already supporting a study on development of an archaeological trail in the mountains, which will interpret and make accessible the archaeology and stories of the mountains and in turn grow appreciation and awareness.

Given the support of Coillte for the Project the “[Leave no Trace](#)” ethos will be promoted throughout the area and the interpretation objectives for the facility will incorporate an appreciation of the flora and fauna of the mountains, further developing positive messages about the protection of the nature of the area.

There is a shared appreciation by all agencies involved that the landscape of the area requires ongoing care and preservation.

Are there detailed plans for the services and how they will be managed?

Whilst the feasibility/master plan demonstrated the potential commercial viability of the project a detailed viable services, facilities and financial model will have to be discussed



and agreed with Coillte as the project moves through planning and (subject to approvals) to detailed design and construction. There is no proposal to charge for parking or access to the trails and forests of the Dublin Mountains.

Were options at the Stewards House and Orlagh examined?

The Stewards House was considered as an option in the feasibility study. The property does not provide the development options provided by the Hellfire site(s). However, it could potentially form part of future project phases subject to agreement as it must be noted that the Stewards House is in private ownership. It should be noted that the existing proposal is based on Coillte-owned forestry that has been made publicly accessible for recreation purposes as part of Coillte's role in recreation development, which offers a more stable and suitable solution on which to proceed with the Project, which is aimed at facilitating access for recreation to the Dublin Mountains.

When Orlagh House was placed on the market PKA were engaged to apply the criteria from the feasibility study. When assessed as part of the overall proposal, it fell short of the current proposed offering. The building was examined in detail and it was felt that the building required substantial immediate work, which would mitigate against purchase by SDCC. We understand that the property is now "Sale Agreed". The Council is willing to engage with any prospective buyer with a view to looking in more detail at the tourism potential for the wider area.

Will there be public consultation?

A robust assessment was carried out in the early Project stages to establish concept viability and this will now be tested rigorously through detailed environmental assessments and engagement before the statutory planning process commences. Opportunities to engage are clearly available both before and during the statutory consultation period, in the form of local workshops. Details be notified in this regard and the statutory consultation phase will include a model of the proposal. Updates are added to our web page on an ongoing basis.

