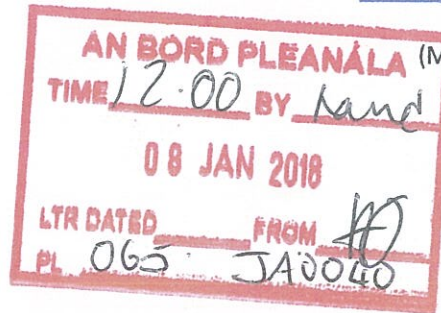


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Mr Kieran Somers

An Bord Pleanála
64 Marlborough Street,
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15th Dec 2017

Re: Objection to the Dublin Mountains Project, An Bord Pleanála Application (Ref: JA0040) by South Dublin County Council Objection No. 83 David Stanley

Dear Sir/Madam.

For ease of reference I have written my additional comments in red italics and underlined same below those in my original letter.

Many inadequacies have been highlighted in the EIA in many of the 80 plus submissions yet SDCC have not undertaken any additional site survey work prior to submitting their additional information and have rather chosen to try and justify their position based on an inadequate survey which is not tenable. They have now been given two opportunities to deal adequately with environmental/wildlife/biodiversity issues and have not done so and I believe that this alone is sufficient reason for a refusal of planning.

The Further Information Response is littered with vague comments resulting from the inadequate survey work (Sect 2 the site is UNLIKELY to support nesting sites for Long Eared Owls or Woodcock, Sect 4 Pine martens are UNLIKELY to be affected by the project and sect 7.2.4 pine martens are LIKELY to nest away from the site, Sect 6 users will be ENCOURAGED to stay on paths, Sect 7.2.6 Merlin MAY nest in conifer plantations. However, given that there are vast areas of heath and blanket bog, the preferential nesting habitat of Merlin, close by, the conifer plantations are UNLIKELY to provide an important nesting resource for this species etc). Such vague statements which are not backed up by concrete evidence are not acceptable as they do not rule out disturbance to protected species

SDCC are intent on turning Massy's wood into an urban park whereas its location adjacent to other protected areas and its wild nature would be much more suitable as a nature reserve managed in collaboration with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

I am a concerned resident of Killakee. I have lived in the area for 33 years. I have been taking a keen interest in the proposed development, the Dublin Mountains Project and I wish to object to the scheme currently under consideration by an Bord Pleanála for the following reasons:

General Comment

Massy's wood and the Hellfire club is a wild forested area which has provided recreation facilities to Dublin lovers of nature, particularly children, for generations, and it is unique to have a such a wild area so accessible to a capital city. Massy's wood is a particularly sensitive area and is well described in the Landscape report (page 10 of30); "Massy's Wood offers a unique broadleaved

woodland experience with its distinctive trees and character, sense of nature, its child friendly experience and its sense of romance, magic, fun and idyllic woodland. Whilst not universally accessible it does offer relative ease in walking. Massy's Wood is very beautiful and timeless – this characteristic enhanced by its romantic ruins and the story behind them, and the Glendoo Brook corridor and its habitat”

SDCC's track record and experience is in developing and maintaining urban city parks and an inspection of their Principle Consultants websites also confirms that their experience is almost solely in urban environments. No dedicated environmental representative has been present at any of the consultation meetings I attended and I am led to believe that SDCC do not have one. The Architects Design report (item 2.02) lists 11 key objectives for the development and preserving biodiversity; the ecological environment and wildlife of the Massy's and the Hellfire woodlands does not even get a mention

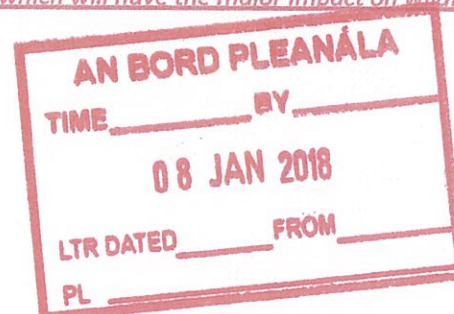
SDCC acknowledge that preserving biodiversity, the ecological environment and wildlife is not listed as a key objective. Their suggestion that this key element is vaguely included in another general comment (Appendix B of SDCC additional information, 2nd last page) is a very weak response again demonstrating their lack of awareness and concern for environmental matters. The document also confirms that the two staff who undertook the walk through have only two years and one year's experience. SDCC have advised that in their view they are experienced ecologists???. The fact that details of transect routes were not kept and the decision not to include a bird survey is further evidence of the inadequacy of the survey and its unsuitability as a baseline survey.

A badger from Massy's wood is a regular visitor in summer to my property at the top of Killakee road (refer photo on P5) but his visits tail off/cease in winter, which is a known trend as badgers hibernate. Therefore the fact that the badger survey was undertaken in December and February further highlights the insufficiencies in the ecological data collection.

In addition, the original ecological report did not find many red squirrel dreys. However, a recent walkthrough identified 16 dreys of this protected species in approximately a 4 acre area which also calls into question the sufficiency of the original ecological report which has not been updated in the latest submission.

It is hardly surprising therefore that the emphasis throughout has been on “The Building” and on increasing the footfall with very little consideration to what this will do to the wider forest environment. If this plan is allowed to go ahead, the entire area including Massy's wood will become another SDCC urban park. Urban parks obviously have a very important role to play within the city but turning the Hellfire and Massy's situated in the Dublin mountains into an urban park is not appropriate or in the interests of the people of Dublin.

There continues to be undue emphasis on the effect of the building and its construction on the environment, wildlife, biodiversity etc. which completely misses the point that it will be the increased footfall resulting from the development which will have the major impact on wildlife for generations to come.

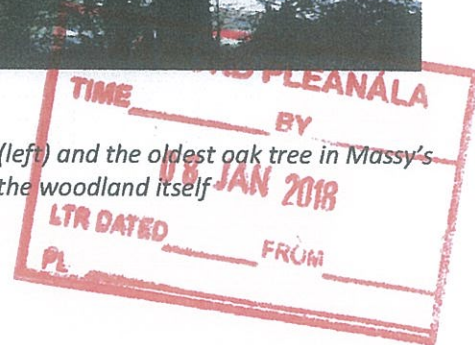




A selection of the diversity of mushrooms seen in Massy's wood, a sign of the health of the ecosystem.



A healthy forest floor in Massy's wood in autumn time (left) and the oldest oak tree in Massy's wood (right), whose age predates the woodland itself



Pedestrian Bridge

Currently the report estimates that approximately 100,000 people per annum visit the Hellfire Club but that only 20,000 visit Massy's wood. Despite the lower footfall in Massy's there is plenty of evidence of damage to the environment, specimen trees vandalised, damage due to trampling by people not keeping to paths, erosion and soil run off into the river due to paths not being maintained and new random unsurfaced paths being opened up by users, rubbish, pollution of the river, removal of cut stone items from the garden, graffiti etc (refer to photos below).

However, the proposed treetop walkway will act as a magnet and it is estimated that 80% of the estimated 300,000 people who will visit the area will cross the walkway into Massy's.

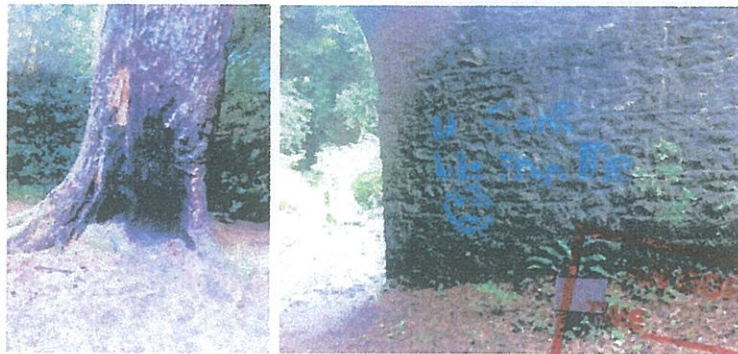
This is a 12 times or a 1200% increase in visitor numbers to Massy's wood.

Page 9 of the Landscape Design Report states that "The broadleaved woods of Massy's whilst also enclosing in terms of views out, are by contrast, inviting to the walker to explore the woods off trail"

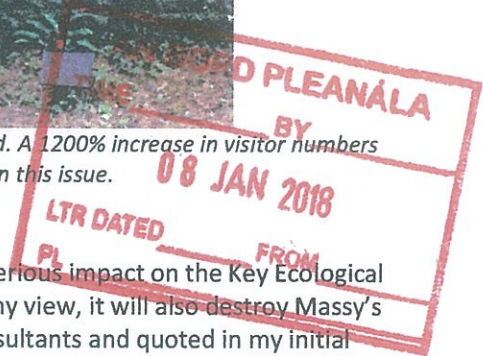
How any group of professional consultants can propose to increase the footfall by a factor of 12 in an area already exhibiting signs of stress, and then invite visitors to roam freely across the woods and claim that it will have no negative effect beggar's belief!



Areas of Massy's wood already show signs of erosion due to walkers at current usage rates. An increase of 1200% in visitor numbers would cause enormous pressure and damage to the woodland.



There are already signs of vandalism and misuse of Massy's wood. A 1200% increase in visitor numbers would have a major negative impact on this issue.



Increasing visitor footfall through the woodland will have a serious impact on the Key Ecological Receptors identified in the report but, equally important in my view, it will also destroy Massy's wood as the magical place recognized by SDCC and their consultants and quoted in my initial comment on this letter.

Massy's wood cannot be preserved in its current state with a footfall of 240,000 per year and with no specific mitigation measure proposed its demise will be very rapid indeed. Currently 80% of visitors visit the hellfire club only and are happy with that experience; why then invite the destruction of Massy's wood by building the bridge thereby increasing the footfall in Massy's wood from 20% of the total to 80%? The Engineers drawing DMCV-ROD-20-00-DR-C-001 Rev P1 shows a pedestrian crossing either side of the main entrance roundabout which is perfectly adequate for safe access across the road for a more sustainable footfall into Massy's wood.

The additional information document reiterates that there will be minimal work undertaken within Massy's wood and therefore minimal effect on its environment. This again completely

avoids the point that it is not the project work undertaken in Massy's wood which will impact the environment but the vastly increased footfall (12 times existing) which results from same. SDCC have refused to address this point in pre submission meetings and now formally in their additional information document which indicates that they do not have a satisfactory answer to the problem.

For example how will Squirrels Pine Martens, Merlin, Owls, Bats etc react to a 12 fold increase in footfall in Massy's wood? The impact will be negative.

Every effort has been made to make the bridge look slim and unobtrusive in the document. However, the reality is that most pedestrian bridges in the SDCC area are encased in a tube of steel mesh for health & safety reasons. There is no reference in the document as to how the health, safety and security of those passing underneath the bridge or those crossing the bridge will be guaranteed with the current design.

SDCC have again failed to address this point (10.2) and particularly now that it has been formally brought to their attention demonstrates a total disregard for health & safety. When reviewing the bridge design I believe that the Bord should do so on the basis that it will be encased in a cage as is the case on other SDCC pedestrian bridges. Whether SDCC do this as part of the initial construction or after the first major incident remains to be seen but health and safety will demand its inclusion at some point.

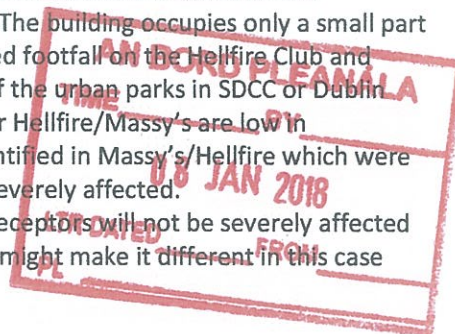
A pedestrian crossing/light is a perfectly safe means of crossing the road without acting as a magnet for the massive increase in footfall which the bridge will attract.

Biodiversity and Wildlife

The EIA is big in volume but short on detail and many of the sweeping statements are not backed up by any real mitigation proposals.

The EIA was undertaken as an afterthought following the ruling by An Bord Pleanála that it was required. At this stage the visitor center was already designed, thereby pressurizing the environmental consultant to justify the center as it was already designed rather than influence its design to suit the environment.

The EIA focuses primarily on the building and many of its conclusions are based on the construction phase or the operation of the building only. The building occupies only a small part of the woodlands and therefore the effect of the increased footfall on the Hellfire Club and Massy's wood as a whole is much more significant. Any of the urban parks in SDCC or Dublin generally with a footfall approaching what is proposed for Hellfire/Massy's are low in biodiversity and wildlife and any of the key receptors identified in Massy's/Hellfire which were present in those parks have either disappeared or been severely affected. The argument in the documents therefore that the Key Receptors will not be severely affected does not stand up, and specific mitigation measures that might make it different in this case have not been proposed.



Massy's Wood is a refuge for wildlife from the higher mountains in wintertime and it also forms a corridor for wildlife from the mountains to the farmland and urban areas below. Any disturbance to wildlife in Massy's wood will therefore have a knock on effect on the mountains and the Wicklow Mountains National Park, Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Wicklow Mountains Special Protection Area (SPA) and Glenasmole Valley SAC.

SDCC note that the Dublin mountains way path does not link with the protected areas listed above and offer this as a reason why wildlife does not use Massy's and the Hellfire Club in wintertime to shelter and find food. I would respectfully point out however that wildlife does not follow human pathways (in fact they avoid them, particularly the ones with very heavy footfall). Wildlife from the protected areas does come down to Massy's and the Hellfire club in winter to shelter and find food as the area acts as one large ecological unit



Images of some of the rarer and important species found in Massy's wood captured by local residents; a badger (left) and a greater spotted woodpecker (right). Increased visitor numbers would severely affect the behaviour and persistence of these animals in Massy's.

Roads & Sewer

Running a sewer from the proposed development along Killakee road to join the city network will open up all the area below the Hellfire club for development. Previous councils have worked hard to prevent such development, and the lack of a sewerage connection was frequently used as a reason for refusing planning. Removing this restriction will lead to more development higher up the mountain thereby further damaging the unique mountain landscape, biodiversity, cultural heritage, views and prospects which the development is purporting to exploit. Whilst the sewer connection may be the preferred option from a technical/engineering point of view there are plenty of other options available which can treat the sewerage locally in an area such as this with impermeable rock with limited overburden.

SDCCs advice that the proposed 150mm sewer (sect 8.3) is only suitable for a maximum of 20 dwellings is interesting. 20 additional dwellings along the line of the proposed sewer would constitute significant development which again is indicative of the SDCC intent to urbanise the area and undermine the work done by their planning department in the last 10 years to preserve the rural character of the area.

The traffic study and the road design is flawed in particular in relation to the one-way section proposed between the Gunny hill junction and Mount Venus road. The survey in this area was done over a weekend whereas the busiest time on this section is during weekday rush hours. It is used as a rat run for those coming from Tallaght direction heading eastwards and wishing to avoid the M50. When the M50 was first completed traffic on this section reduced but is now increasing again as the M50 approaches capacity and will get much worse over time. The advent of traffic information on Google maps (and others) is compounding the situation as it makes people aware of blockages on the M50 early enough for them to get off the motorway in time and use the rat run. These spikes in traffic flow may not be picked up in a once off survey but

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they are very real. They also lead to spikes travelling up Killakee road and across to Glencullen which are not picked up by the traffic survey.

This point was not addressed in their submission (11.0). It should be noted that there has been a marked increase in traffic using the road as a rat run in recent months due to the increased frequency of M50 backups associated with the improving Dublin economy. This was evident before the unfortunate situation leading to the closing of Edmonston road below Rockbrook.

There is no reference to possible lighting of the footpath. Such a strip of light up the mountain would cause significant lighting pollution.

This was not dealt with in the submission. Light pollution is of concern for a number of reasons, in particular the impacts this has for nocturnal wildlife such as bats.

Shuttle Bus

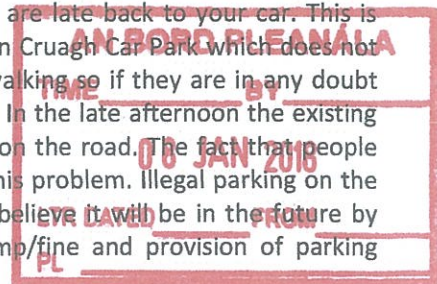
When the Dublin Mountains way was first opened a shuttle bus was provided to link up with Killakee Car park, Cruagh & the Hellfire Club and was subsequently suspended due to lack of use. It regularly passed empty and only occasionally carried a handful of people. The current proposal to run 2 buses on a 15-minute rota is therefore completely financially unviable. There is no way that people will drive to Tallaght pay for parking there, pay for a bus ride and take in excess of half an hour on the bus including waiting time to get to the hellfire and the same back again. They will much rather take their chances and park illegally in the vicinity of the hellfire club as they do at present. Likewise, a tourist travelling from a hotel in the city will need to walk to the Luas travel to Tallaght and then get the bus a total travel time of 1.5 to 2hrs. Very few tourists are going to be that resilient.

Some people from the Tallaght area who do not have access to their own transport will travel on the bus. The majority of these are young people which will place a further responsibility on SDCC.

I have lived in the area for over 30 years and unfortunately what I have witnessed is that most of the vandalism is done by the younger age groups. A limiting factor on the amount of damage done has been the fact that in the main each group required an adult to drive them there who provided an element of supervision. I realise the benefits of younger people having access to the mountains and I am supportive of the concept but it must be balanced by adequate supervision to ensure that the forest is not allowed to deteriorate. The financial unviability of the bus service allied to the additional cost of supervision/patrolling will place a heavy burden on the running costs of the facility. There is no evidence in the SDCC submission that they have any plans to adequately patrol/ supervise the woodland and therefore the above when allied to the 12 times increase in footfall in Massy's will further hasten its deterioration.

Management Plan

There are major deficiencies in the management plan again reinforcing the fact that SDCC are greatly underestimating what is involved. Opening hours for the car park are 7am to 10pm summer and 8am to 6pm winter with a callout charge if you are late back to your car. This is similar to the existing system in the Hellfire carpark and also in Cruagh Car Park which does not work. Users find it difficult to predict how long they will be walking so if they are in any doubt about getting back in time they will park illegally on the road. In the late afternoon the existing car park regularly has lots of spaces with people still parking on the road. The fact that people like to climb the hellfire club for sunset further exasperates this problem. Illegal parking on the road is not policed at the moment so there is no reason to believe it will be in the future by SDCC. Volunteer Rangers do not have the authority to clamp/fine and provision of parking wardens especially at weekends comes at a significant cost.



SDCC have confirmed that they intend to persist with the system of closing the car park at dark and then charge a callout fee for anybody still inside (operational management plan P7). This will lead to car parking continuing on the road (refer to my comments above) thereby negating the major benefit that the project could have brought – taking parking off the main road. People also climb the Hellfire club at night-time and they will still have to park on the road.

Ecological Monitoring is put forward as a solution to deal with deterioration of the environment. In particular, without a proper and comprehensive ecological survey at the planning stage, it would not be possible to detect any changes based on monitoring post-construction. Either way, monitoring is not a solution, and merely indicates there is a problem. This is useless once the facility has been already constructed, and is an attempt to kick the issue down the line in the knowledge that once the facility is up and running there can be no turning back. We are therefore dependant on An Bord Pleanála insisting on measures upfront to protect the Ecological environment (especially Massy's Wood)

Bins are only to be provided in the carpark/visitor centre and hellfire end of the pedestrian bridge. With about the 240,000 people visiting & picnicking in Massy's wood and the 300,000 people doing likewise around the Hellfire Club, there will be huge volumes of rubbish produced. This will likely be dumped in the woods without sufficient bins provided.

Other Omissions

- Fulltime rangers (volunteers will not have the authority for enforcement) to prevent vandalism, enforce security and protect the environment
- Maintenance work in the greater wooded area (paths, fences etc.)

Omitting the above will hasten the deterioration of the facility and including them will add to the financial unviability of the project.

Business Plan

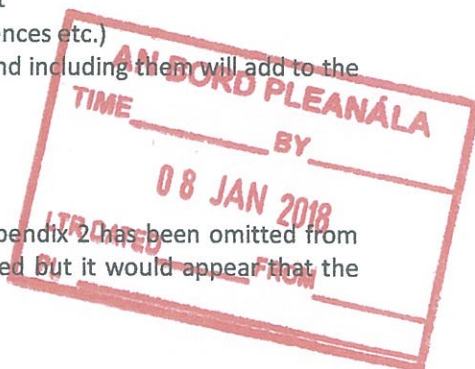
The business plan concentrates solely on the visitor centre. Appendix 2 has been omitted from the document so it is unclear as to the detail of what is included but it would appear that the following are not included:

- Maintenance costs (carpark, trails, fences etc.)
- Shuttle bus subsidy
- Ranger costs
- Costs resulting from recommendations of the Annual Ecological Monitoring
- Costs resulting from the annual Archaeological and Architectural Heritage monitoring
- Costs resulting from Trails Monitoring and Management
- Insurance

The above costs are very significant and will far outweigh any benefit to the local economy from increased tourism numbers generated by the project

SDCC state that the running and maintenance costs will be cost neutral (16.2 & on P5 operational management plan). There is absolutely no chance of this happening given the list of cost items outlined above and SDCC have other priorities such as social housing/homelessness to deal with which will lead to maintenance being neglected due to lack of funds, deterioration of the facility and abandonment by tourist groups.

No doubt the books can be balanced by excluding some of the costs listed above from the operators budget but then where does the money for these activities come from?

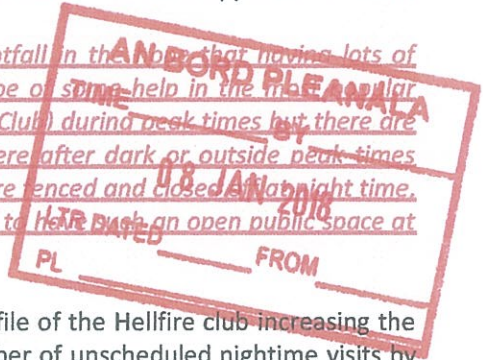


The operational management plan (P4) gives responsibility for maintaining track and trails to Coillte. Tracks and trails in the woods have been mismanaged by Coillte for decades (lack of funding contributed to this) so there is going to be more of the same on a much larger scale. Killakee car park is a good example of what is likely to happen as tourist buses stop there regularly to view the city. It is a very small car park and therefore should be easy to maintain but it is embarrassing to see tourists picking their way through the rubbish, broken glass and used condoms, past the vandalised dustbins, to the wall from which many of the granite copings are missing with graffiti on the remaining ones. The state of this area is a real shame, in particular as often the area is shrouded in mist so the above is all that visitors see. Do we really want to repeat this on a grand scale at the Hellfire Club? Should we not look after what we have before building another White Elephant?

Safety & Security

Anti-social activity in both Massys wood and Hellfire club is commonplace after dark. There are particular issues related to the Hellfire Club history and folklore (Ghosts, Hedonistic parties, Rituals, Raves etc.) which attract visitors after dark and which regularly lead to anti-social behaviour. This has been ignored by Coillte for many years, and even in a do nothing scenario it needs to be dealt with before there is a major unsavoury incident as has happened in recent times only marginally farther up the mountain.

SDCCs answer to anti-social activity is to increase the footfall in the areas that having lots of people around will act as a deterrent (10.3.4). This may be of some help in the major areas (interpretive centre and main path up to the Hellfire Club) during peak times but there are plenty of remaining areas less often visited and everywhere after dark or outside peak times where anti-social behaviour can thrive. Most urban parks are fenced and closed at night time, and so those who practice such behaviour will be delighted to have such an open public space at their disposal.



The current application seeks to significantly raise the profile of the Hellfire club increasing the visitor numbers by 300% which will at least raise the number of unscheduled nighttime visits by the same percentage, and yet they plan to do nothing about it other than some camera security around the visitor centre. The wall at the main entrance reduces to 1m high on the south end on architects drawing 1639/PA/020/A which is easily scalable. There appears to be no refurbishment work proposed to the Massys wood wall & entrances which are in very poor condition.

Item 3.3.4 of the EIA states "It is considered by the applicant that the wider Hell Fire and Massy's property boundary is too long to erect a fence along its entire length"

Again I am amazed and deeply saddened that SDCC would make such a casual statement as this in a professional application to an Bord Pleanala. In many sections of the boundary the fence is in very poor condition and in some places non-existent (refer to photos below) and in these situations visitors cannot be blamed for inadvertently trespassing. A properly constructed cattle/sheep fence between the forest and adjacent landowners is in keeping with the rural landscape will reduce the impact on adjoining farms, will define the boundary and will act as a moderate deterrent to trespassers. A more robust fence to the properties above and below the main entrance as proposed in item 3.3.4 of the EIA will no doubt be welcomed by the immediate neighbours but please not a palisade fence as it is not an industrial estate. I do recognise that access for wildlife which uses the woodlands as a corridor needs to be maintained but this can be done whilst protecting adjoining landowners from trespassers.

Boundary fences have been neglected for decades by Coillte

SDCC have included the suitably vague statement "Elsewhere existing boundaries will be retained and repaired as appropriate and required" (10.1) presumably in the hope that it will satisfy the Bord in the hope that they will then not deem it necessary to include repair and maintenance of boundary fences as a condition of any approval and neglecting fences can continue as before



Some of the current boundaries around Massy are wood. LH photo shows fence badly broken and RHS no fence at all on the boundary.

Public Consultation Process

The public consultation process was a sham and it was perfectly obvious from the outset that SDCC were going through the process to enable them to tick a box, and that they had no real intention of engaging with local residents, neighbours or the general public. Questions were either not answered at all, or answered in such a vague fashion as to be meaningless. My personal experience was as follows:

- I met with Daithi De Forge on a one to one basis on 3rd February 2017. Minutes of the meeting are attached. Answers to any of the questions recorded were never received
- For the Landowner meeting on 22/3/17 I prepared a list of questions and sent them to SDCC in advance of the meeting so that they would have time to consider them and be able to respond efficiently. When I asked for a response at the meeting I was advised that there were too many questions and that it would take too much of the meetings time to respond to them (copy of the questions attached). There was also no response post meeting.
- I wrote a letter on 8th May 2017 (copy attached) which was sent to the Lord Mayor, County Manager, Frank Nevin and Councillors. SDCC did not reply.

It is my view in the light of the above that SDCC did not meet their statutory obligation to hold meaningful consultations with neighbours, adjoining landowners and the general public.

Consultation (17) I have still not received any communication in relation to the above

Conclusion

I urge an Bord Pleanala to refuse this application for the following reasons:

1. The vastly increased footfall will impact seriously on the biodiversity of the woodlands; the key receptors identified therein, the idyllic nature of Massy's wood and the Wicklow Mountains National Park, Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Wicklow Mountains Special Protection Area (SPA) and Glenasmole Valley SAC.

2. The proposed sewer will open up the farmland immediately below woodlands for development destroying the views that SDCC are endeavoring to exploit.
3. The one way section of road north of the Gunny hill junction does not take account of the increasing traffic resulting from the M50 approaching its capacity.
4. The management plan and business plan are seriously deficient and the additional cost of securing and maintaining the woodland, subsidising the shuttle bus etc. far outweighs any economic advantage from what will be a very limited increase in tourist numbers.
5. The public consultation process did not meet the standard set by SDCC's statutory obligations.
6. The issue of trespassing on adjoining farmlands has not been dealt with.

Yours sincerely,

David Stanley

David Stanley

