

An Bord Pleanála

Observation on the Further Information Response provided to An Bord Pleanála in relation to the proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre.

Your reference: 06S.JA0040 Submission number 70

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Development	Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre
Location	Hellfire Club/Montpelier Hill/Massey's Wood
Planning Authority	South Dublin County Council
Reference Number	JA0040

My submission raised a number of concerns about the proposal, these included –

- Appropriateness of the location
- Anticipated visitor numbers
- Changing nature of visitor centres due to technological change

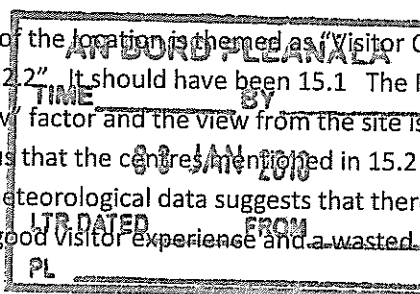
While the Further Information Response addresses such issues, much of it is in the form of verbiage rather than hard information which alleviates the concerns.

Location

In relation to location the Response expounds the wide range of public policy supporting tourism development in Ireland and Dublin region in particular. I have no argument with this – indeed I strongly support it. However, it is really just 'policy' and does not justify the proposed siting.

The Response cites, amongst other things, that the site is closest to Dublin, is publicly owned, inadequately managed, not a Natura 2000 site etc. These things in themselves do not mean that the site is appropriate for a Visitor Centre. We own a problem block of land, we have a plan for visitor centre so we must put them together? Maybe for this particular land there is a less intrusive answer.

In Appendix A of the Response, my questioning of the location is termed as "Visitor Centre Alternatives" and the notes say "See Section 15.2.2". It should have been 15.1. The Response continues the argument that the site has a "wow" factor and the view from the site is 'exceptional'. My concern is that the site lacks the kind of focus that the centres mentioned in 15.2 possess and that, while the view may be great sometimes, meteorological data suggests that there is more than a 50% chance of the view being obscured. Not a good visitor experience and a wasted investment.



Visitor Numbers

Basically section 16.3 of the Response is a reiteration of previous data and confirms the need for the proposed Centre to be actively promoted and marketed. As suggested previously a more accessible location further south would be a more natural positioning potentially requiring considerably less support from the public purse.

Technological change

While the Business Plan did recognise the role of technology in tourism promotion, there appears to be no further thought in the Response to the assertion that the development of more sophisticated applications will continue to erode the value of stand-alone visitor centres such as proposed.

In 15.2 the Response indicates that the team has looked a wide range of visitor facilities. However, there is no analysis of the relevance of these to the proposal or the extent to which social and technological change is affecting their future.

Red Squirrel

The Red Squirrel Conservation Management Plan clearly shows that the project could have a significant adverse impact on the endangered Red Squirrels in the area and, I would suggest, presents an argument for the area to remain undeveloped. Management Plans to mitigate potential impacts are just that – “plans”. There is no guarantee of success attached to them.

It would be really unfortunate if the project were to proceed and deprived Ireland of one more significant habitat for the native Red Squirrel.

Conclusion

My previous intervention expressed concern about the business case behind the proposed Centre in terms of location, facilities/character, the reality of the visitor numbers projected and the capacity of the road network, as well as needlessly and irrevocably changing the environmental character of the area to the detriment of alternative environmental management options.

The Further Information Response supplied by the applicant does not alleviate these concerns about building the proposed Visitor Centre in the Hellfire Club/Montpelier Hill/Massey’s Wood location.



Peter O'Clery AM

4 January 2018

