

The Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre

Operational Management Plan for South Dublin City Council

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1 Introduction

The report has been prepared to outline the management structure and the management and operational aspects of the proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre project. It should be read in conjunction with the Design Report and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report submitted under separate cover.

The report explains how it is currently envisaged that the facility would be managed in the event of development consented by An Bord Pleanála (subject to any conditions of consent). It also addresses key commitments to monitoring and management of the cultural and natural heritage resources and the landscape of the proposed facility, which have emerged from the EIA process.

2 Management Structure and Responsibilities

It is proposed to establish a permanent management steering group comprised of SDCC, Coillte and the DMP. This steering group would have responsibility for:

- a) Managing the contract, lease or license of the private operator of the facilities;
- b) Management and maintenance of the Hell Fire and Massy's Wood properties. Such management will include:
 - Maintenance of all areas outside of the responsibility of the private operator;
 - Annual inspections of (a) the trails, (b) the archaeological and architectural heritage features, (c) identified Key Ecological Receptors (species and habitats), and implementing any repair, improvement or protection works required;
 - Carrying out an ongoing programme of works for the conversion of existing conifer plantations (on the 26 ha portion of the Hellfire property the subject of a Memorandum of Understanding between Coillte and SDCC) to permanent native mixed woodland, until the conversion is completed;
 - Coordination of all forest operations to ensure minimal conflicts with recreational use of the site and vice versa.
 - Liaison with neighbouring landowners, residents and other stakeholders, facilitated through the consultation forum of the Dublin Mountains Partnership.
- c) Responding to any issues raised by the operator to do with the area outside of the operator's area of responsibility (e.g. issues that might be brought to the operator's attention by users, such as issues with the trails).

2.1 Private Operator of the Parking Area, Visitor Centre and Pedestrian Bridge

It is envisioned that the core built visitor facilities, i.e. the parking area, the visitor centre and the pedestrian bridge, will be managed by a private operator with commercial experience in the leisure / tourism sector. The private operator would have responsibility for management, maintenance and operation of:

- Non-commercial facilities: These include the parking area, the pedestrian bridge / tree canopy walk, the Ramblers' Lounge, public toilets and amenity areas.

- Commercial facilities: These include the audio-visual and exhibition facility, educational facility, the café, kiosk and shop.

The Business Plan prepared by CHL Consulting Ltd (submitted with the application for development consent) suggests three possible arrangements which might be made between the management steering group and the private operator following a public call for expressions of interest, subject to negotiation:

- Contract Management: The steering group makes an annual payment to the preferred bidder in order to have the required services delivered on site.
- Operator Lease: The steering group leases the facilities to the preferred bidder for a defined period of time at prevailing market rates.
- License with Profit Share: The steering group lets the facilities to an operator for a token / minimum rent.

Subject to development consent, once the management steering group is formed it will decide on the optimal means of forming an arrangement with a private operator.

2.2 Exclusion of Certain Facilities from Commercial Operation

It is proposed that certain elements of the facilities for which the private operator will have management responsibility be identified in the constitution of the steering group and in any arrangement with the operator, as being non-commercial. This is to ensure that they are not operated on a commercial basis, i.e. that payment never be required for their use by the public.

These elements include the parking area, the pedestrian bridge / tree canopy walkway, the Ramblers' Lounge and public toilets.

The reason that these elements are proposed to be included in the private operator's area of responsibility is that they may require day-to-day management and maintenance and the operator will have a daily staff presence on site during operating hours.

It is proposed that the education facility be the subject of bespoke conditions regarding its commerciality. Such conditions may limit the cost of the facility's use to schools and other selected groups (e.g. local community groups, scouts, historical societies, etc.).

It is proposed that the café and audio-visual and exhibition facility be the subject of bespoke conditions to ensure that any exclusive corporate use not restrict access by the public excessively.

2.3 Waste Management

It is proposed that bins will be provided on the site in the following locations:

- In the parking area;
- At the visitor centre: On the terrace outside the Rambler's Lounge and the kiosk, and in the courtyard between the café and the AV-exhibition facility;
- At the Hell Fire end of the pedestrian bridge.

The bins will allow for separation of general, recyclable and compostable waste.

It will be the responsibility of the private operator of the facility to ensure that the bins are emptied on a regular basis - as often as is required.

The waste will be temporarily stored in the waste storage area of the visitor centre, along

with the waste generated by the centre, and collected from the site as often as required by a private waste collection company.

The waste management procedures will be specified in the contract, lease or license of the private operator of the facility.

Signage at the facility and any pamphlets, trail maps and online information for visitors / facility users will promote a 'Leave-no-Trace' policy.

2.4 Dublin Mountains Partnership Volunteer Rangers

It is proposed to provide a base for the Dublin Mountains Partnership Volunteer Rangers Service¹ in the visitor centre. It is envisioned that the rangers will be present at the visitor centre at busy times, stationed in the Ramblers' Lounge and at the trail head or at features of the site, to provide information and advice to walkers / visitors, assist in educational activities, guided walks, etc. The rangers may also assist in marshalling of traffic at peak periods if required.

3 Opening Hours

It is proposed that the facilities will operate approximately during daylight hours.

3.1 Parking Area

- April to September: 7am to 10pm.
- October to March: 8am to 6pm.

There will be an emergency phone number provided at the entrance for any walkers returning to their cars after closing time, and a call-out / opening charge will be payable.

3.2 Visitor Centre

- April to September: 8am to 8pm.
- October to March: 9am to 5pm.

3.3 Special Events

With its unique characteristics (facilities and heritage features) it is anticipated that there may be opportunities for the site to host special events occasionally, and such events may require opening of the facilities outside of the normal opening hours described above. For example, there may be opportunities for cultural events such as Halloween story-telling at the Hell Fire Club, or sports events such as a trail running competition. Such usage would enhance the value of the facility to residents of South Dublin and make optimal use of the upgraded facilities and investment.

It is proposed that such occasional special events usage would be facilitated by means of the normal outdoor events licensing procedures operated by SDCC, with input from the facility management steering group and the private operator.

¹ http://www.dublinmountains.ie/volunteer_rangers/volunteer_ranger_service/: The Volunteer Ranger Service aims to:

- Assist the public in appreciating the Dublin Mountains through education and communication
- Increase community involvement in, and awareness of, the management of the forest and mountain lands
- Develop volunteers' personal understanding, knowledge and sense of belonging to the Dublin Mountains
- Promotion of the Leave No Trace principles
- Assist in practical conservation tasks

4 Trails Monitoring and Management

It is proposed that the management steering group carry out an annual inspection of the site trails. The inspections will be carried out by the DMP and Coillte.

The annual inspections will establish the condition of all trails with reference to National Trails Office standards. If necessary, repair works will be specified and implementation will be supervised by the DMP and Coillte.

The trails inspection and specification of works will be informed by the results of the annual archaeological and architectural heritage inspection and the annual ecological surveys in order that any necessary protection measures for heritage resources are incorporated.

5 Archaeological and Architectural Heritage Monitoring and Management

It is proposed that - for an initial period of five years - the management steering group carry out or arrange to have carried out an annual inspection and repair (if necessary) of all architectural and archaeological features (visible on the ground) of the site. The inspections will be carried out by a conservation architect and archaeologist.

The inspections will establish the condition of each structure / feature and its setting.

If necessary, i.e. if deterioration of the feature is evident, repair works will be specified and implementation will be supervised by the conservation architect or archaeologist. If necessary, management measures will be prescribed to protect the feature. This might take the form of additional signage/information requesting visitors' assistance in conserving the features. Alternatively or additionally, trails might be re-routed away from the feature, and/or the feature might be sensitively enclosed by fencing or the feature might be hidden with vegetation to reduce its exposure.

After the initial five year monitoring period, the requirement for annual cultural heritage inspections will be reviewed and a new regime of inspections at wider (or shorter) intervals will be implemented.

6 Ecological Monitoring and Management

It is proposed that - for an initial period of five years - the management steering group carry out or arrange to have carried out an annual inspection/survey of all Key Ecological Receptors² (habitats and species) on the site. The inspections will be carried out by an ecologist.

The inspections will establish the condition / prevalence of each habitat or species on the site. If necessary, e.g. if deterioration of a habitat, or significant reduction in the number of a species, or significant increase in the spread of an Invasive Alien Plant Species (IAPS) is identified, management measures will be prescribed by the ecologist. Such measures might take the form of additional habitat development, or restriction of public access to certain areas for a prescribed period, or IAPS clearance programmes.

After the initial five year monitoring period, the requirement for annual ecological inspections/surveys will be reviewed and a new regime of inspections / surveys at wider (or

² KER1: Red Squirrel

KER2: Badger

KER3: Otter

KER4: Bats (all Irish species except Lesser Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros*)

KER5: Ponds

KER 6: Invasive Alien Plant Species (IAPS)

KER7: Glendoo Brook

shorter) intervals will be implemented.

7 Access and Parking Management

7.1 Car Park Monitoring and Variable Message Signs

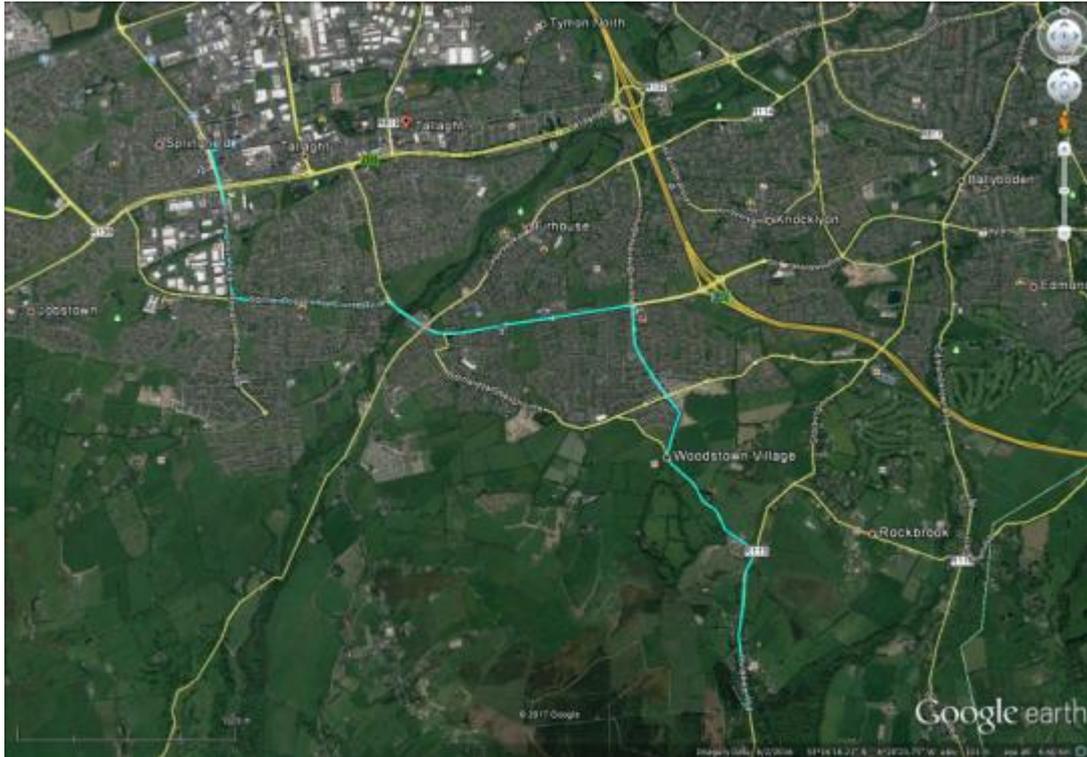
A permanent electronic car park monitoring system will be provided to record the occupancy rate at the Hell Fire Car Park. This will link to Variable Message Signs (VMS) to the north on the two main approach routes from the city and M50 directions. At unusually busy periods the VMS signs will alert drivers to the lack of parking spaces at Hell Fire and will instead direct them to the Park & Ride site (refer to 4.3 below).

As the visitor centre will be manned (by the staff of the private operator and by volunteer rangers of the DMP, who will have a base in the visitor centre), during opening hours there will be personnel on hand to marshal traffic at peak periods and to manage any risk of overspill parking on Killakee Road. Such arrangements are in place at Sliabh Gullion Forest Park in County Armagh, which is operated by a similar arrangement joint venture between the local authority and the Forestry Service.

7.2 Proposed Shuttle Bus from Tallaght

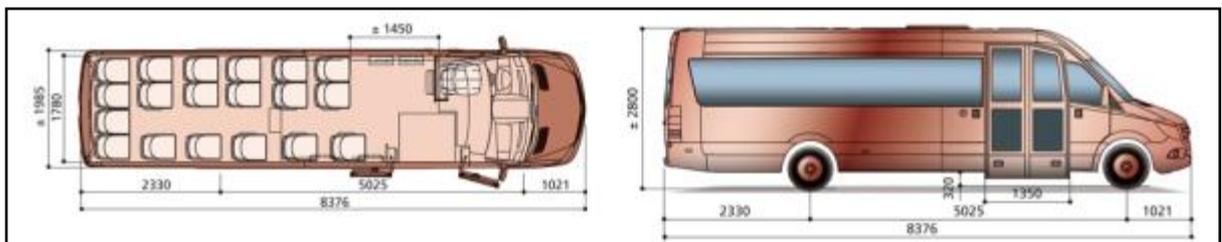
In order to make the proposed visitor centre properly accessible by public transport, South Dublin County Council proposes to operate a shuttle bus service from Tallaght LUAS stop and Public Transport Hub at Tallaght Town Centre. The proposed route will be 7.5km long via Oldbawn and Ballycullen as shown in the following map. It will also serve a proposed Park & Ride facility at Tallaght Stadium (details described later in this report), which is owned by South Dublin County Council. At Woodstown Village the shuttle bus can also interchange with the No.15/15B Dublin Bus route.

This shuttle bus service will operate 7 days a week year round, with a frequency of 15 to 30 minutes according to varying seasonal and daily demand. A public transport operation licence will be required from the National Transport Authority for this service, which will determine details such as fares, capacity and operating hours. The potential demand for the bus service has been determined as part of the overall transport demand assessment. The estimated journey time is 12 to 15 minutes at an average speed of 30km/h to 40km/h. Two vehicles will be required for a 15 minute frequency service.



Proposed Shuttle Bus Route from Tallaght to Hell Fire Wood (in light blue)

A suitable vehicle will be a 20 to 30 seater midi-coach that will have sufficient capacity for the peak period demand. This type of vehicle is 2.0m wide (as shown in the following photograph), compared to over 2.5m for a full-size coach, and can therefore fit more easily on the narrow roads in the Dublin Mountains.



Typical Midi-Coach Vehicle with full wheelchair accessibility and 22 seats

Such a shuttle bus arrangement is provided from the town of Llanberis to Pen-Y-Pass in Snowdonia in North Wales as shown in the following photograph.

7.3 Proposed Park & Ride Facility at Tallaght Stadium

It is proposed to encourage a proportion of visitors to transfer to public transport for the last part of the journey, especially at peak periods. The proposed shuttle bus service from Tallaght LUAS stop and Public Transport Hub at Tallaght Town Centre to Hell Fire Wood will provide the required service for a Park & Ride facility located along the route. South Dublin County Council therefore proposes to provide a Park & Ride facility at Tallaght Stadium, which is owned by the County Council.

There are 400 parking spaces available at this site, which is accessed from Whitestown Way just south of the N81 Tallaght Bypass. The charge for this service will be determined under licence from the National Transport Authority on the same basis as for the proposed shuttle bus service. The stadium parking is only used occasionally for football matches on Saturday afternoons or mid-week evenings, and will therefore be available most of the time for the Park & Ride activity.

7.4 Promotion of Park & Ride Service

Marketing for the proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre will actively promote the Park & Ride service to visitors, and will advise of potential peak period capacity limits at Hell Fire Wood. Fixed direction signs will direct motorists towards the visitor centre on the main approach routes and will also show the direction to the Park & Ride site at Tallaght.

7.5. Potential Special Tourist Bus Route

In the event of development consent a specially themed tourist bus service could be developed from the city centre to the new Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre. This could be called the "Art O'Neill Tour Bus" service from Dublin Castle direct to Hell Fire generally following the historical escape route taken by Art O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell in January 1592. The route could follow the historical Military Road that was constructed after the 1798 Rebellion to enable access to the wild rebel Wicklow Mountain fastness from which raids were launched on The Pale. Intermediate stops could be made at Rathfarnham Castle and the Pearse Museum at St. Enda's Park. Such a special service could encourage visitors to Dublin to undertake a wider experience of the city and surroundings.