

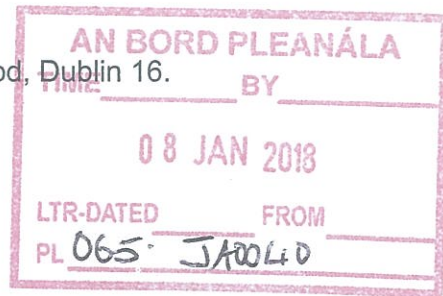
Location: Hellfire Club / Montpelier Hill / Massy's Wood, Dublin 16.

Applicant: South Dublin County Council.

Reference No: JA0040.

Observer: Selina Guinness

Observer Address: Tibbradden, Mutton Lane, Rathfarnham, Dublin 16.



Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a local landowner, and farm in the immediate neighbourhood of this application. As a registered objector to the above application, I would like to respectfully submit some observations in relation to the additional information submitted by the applicant.

1. My principal objection focused on the impact of this development on its receiving environment. I note that the additional information submitted by Cunnane Stratton Reynolds fails to address a number of core issues raised in my submission:

a) **Zoning.**

From the zoning maps of SDCoCo and DLRCoCo, it is apparent that a very narrow skirt of farmland divides the high amenity areas of the Dublin Mountains from the advancing suburbs. The pressures on this land, **zoned "to protect and improve rural amenity and to provide for the development of agriculture"**, are well documented in the planning decisions of both local authorities with regards to applications for one-off rural housing. The guidelines on rural housing in this area are strictly enforced to prevent the suburbanization of this landscape. The guidelines for rural development are similarly **restrictive and precautionary**. I would respectfully submit that inadequate consideration has been given in the initial proposal and the additional information submitted to the council's obligation to honour and uphold these zoning objectives of the land adjoining the subject site. Instead, I would submit the council has failed to understand and mitigate for the legitimate concerns regarding the development of agriculture in the Dublin Mountains.

The skirt of farmland between the city and the Dublin Mountains is narrowing all the time. This land is zoned 'to protect rural amenity and to promote agriculture'. It is hard to farm on the edge of a city. It is all about scale and cumulative effect. We have had sheep killed and maimed by dogs let off the lead by well-intentioned

walkers who didn't understand the damage their pets could do. A man out for a walk in fields nearby with his dog was charged by cattle and nearly killed, not understanding the danger he was putting himself in. Livestock are damaged by litter / glass thrown or blown into the fields from refuse sacks constantly dumped on the boundaries. The agricultural use of the land, and the amenity enjoyment of it, should be compatible, but it all depends on scale. It is the type of amenity use, and the intensification of amenity enjoyment, that threatens the viability of agriculture in this buffer zone. The proposed increase in visitor numbers from 30,000 to 300,000 within Massy Woods and on Montpelier Hill causes farmers real, justifiable and considerable alarm.

The proposed development effectively turns Montpelier Hill into a suburban park without regard for its impact on the neighbouring farmland, and the obligation to **protect, improve and develop agriculture** within the adjacent area.

This skirt of land around the Dublin Mountains is largely farmed under GLAS contract with the DAFM, to promote sustainable farming methods that protect biodiversity. These farms provide the real boundary between city and countryside and provide real properly managed and undisturbed habitats for biodiversity to flourish. This area, on the edge of the capital, is under enormous pressure both from property development, and increasingly, from the demands of amenity users. This is acknowledged in the county development plans of both local authorities.

Applicants' Response to Agricultural Concerns.

The applicants have essentially dismissed the issues raised in my submission and in the IFA submission with regard to the detrimental impact on farming as irrelevant. These concerns are itemised in the original submissions.

Under 'Objectives of the Development,' the applicant states that concern about the impact on adjacent farmland and the sustainability of farming livelihoods in this area are essentially misplaced – the city has expanded and the Dublin Mountains are for amenity use in the same way as the urban parklands – e.g. Phoenix Park.

*“The city has expanded, and for a long period that expansion was at unsustainably low density. The city must continue to increase its population capacity, and accordingly the more recent and future urban development will have greater density. This is precisely why better access to **the extra-urban landscape** must now be developed, to offer this growing urban population access to the open space,*

landscape amenity, cultural and natural heritage. (06S.JA00040D, 32),

This assertion blurs the vital distinction between the demands of Zone RU and Zone HA, in effect turning the Dublin Mountains entirely into an amenity area for the use of the urban population. It also fails to give sufficient weight to the equal needs of agriculture as outlined in Strategic Recommendation RR5:

□ *“Needs of leisure and rural tourism to be addressed in a multi-disciplinary manner in high pressure locations, taking into account natural, economic, social and cultural policy objectives and plans. **Balance is required between the need to preserve the natural environment; the needs of modern farming** and also making the countryside and natural areas accessible to those who wish to avail of it. Feasibility studies and best scientific evidence can be utilised to ensure that this balance is achieved.”*

I would contend that **modern farming as promoted by the EU Common Agricultural Policy** and as implemented nationally, is to farm upland areas using sustainable grazing practices that promote biodiversity. This is supported by the submission prepared by Phillip Gallagher on behalf of the IFA.

The aims of protecting biodiversity and habitat and increasing access to the countryside are very finely balanced. The balance is one of scale. The difficulty with this proposal is its proximity to the capital city. A population of 1.3 million exists within an hour's drive of the site. This potential scale of daily use at Montpelier is different to the interpretive centres cited as examples by the applicants. The Connemara Interpretive Centre is accessed equally by coachloads of tourists as it is by home-grown visitors; it is a place where most visits are occasional, it is remote from the metropolis. Montpelier, situated in Dublin 16, but surrounded by hill farms, is different.

In addition, I would respectfully submit that the section of the site that falls within Zone RU (Massy Woods) demands a distinct and different development plan to honour the zoning objectives as set out in the SD Co Co development plan.

The link between the two sites, via the corten steel gangway, brings a farming area into high amenity use. The chief concerns of local farmers whose livestock graze adjacent to the site is the danger to livestock through dogs, ingestion of litter, damage to livestock through contact with broken glass, and the danger to trespassers entering fields where cattle graze. None of these issues have been

properly addressed in the management plan. Nor do the above remarks in the section on the site's objectives inspire any confidence in the developers' capacity or willingness to address these legitimate concerns. Farmers are concerned that the business plan submitted, and the management plan that turns the site over to a private company, will make complaints difficult to address.

We anticipate frustration when it comes to working out who can be made responsible for the litter in our fields from passing traffic to the site, who to approach when walkers stray onto adjacent land and damage is caused to fences. We are concerned that the applicants will not monitor dogs let off the leash that endanger the sheep grazing in the fields alongside the site. We are concerned that Coillte no longer propose to manage the invasive herds of Sitka deer that shelter in the woods overnight and then graze our pastures down to nothing. We are concerned that without an annual cull of the deer (as happens in the Phoenix Park), our marginal incomes from producing livestock will be further threatened. We are concerned that the lack of transparency will devolve responsibility for managing the countryside back onto adjacent landowners who farm on marginal incomes. Nothing in the further information has been added to reassure us on any of these fronts.

The argument that Coillte and the local council must 'do something' to address the issues of anti-social behaviour, litter, trespass, damage to fences, dog attacks to sheep, damage to grazing by uncontrolled population of Sitka deer, the danger to livestock, traffic congestion is exactly right. However, I would respectfully submit that to argue that the way to address existing problems is by increasing annual visitor numbers to 300,000 plus at a site with an admittedly substandard road network, and by establishing a private management company to run the site without full transparency and public accountability, is unpersuasive.

Compatibility with Zoning Objectives.

Contrary to the assertions in the appendix of 06S.JA00040D, I do not believe that the following zoning objections in my original submission have been adequately addressed in the further information.

"Under section 2.3.3, the summary of the SDC Development Plan notes that

- i) Cultural use is open for consideration if 'directly linked to the heritage and amenity value of the Dublin Mountains'. □
- ii) Recreation facilities are open for consideration if 'directly linked to the

heritage and amenity value of the Dublin Mountains’.

- iii) Restaurant/Café use is open for consideration if ‘in existing premises’ and not above the 350m contour.□
- iv) Shop-local is open for consideration if in existing premises and not above the 350m contour.

I would respectfully submit that:

- the proposal betrays a lack of knowledge of the existing heritage of the site, in particular in relation to Massy’s Wood, and disregard for the archaeological value of the site, currently being uncovered.
- The zoning objectives specify that both the heritage AND the amenity value must be satisfied by development in this category.
- That the proposed cultural and recreational uses capitalise commercially on the area’s heritage, but do not integrally seek to protect or enhance this heritage and as such are only indirectly linked.
- Further, that the proposed restaurant and shop runs counter to the zoning objective in its location, scale and use (neither being directly linked to the heritage value, not in existing premises).

Adverse Impact on Zone RU: “To Protect AND Promote Rural Amenity AND To Provide for the Development of Agriculture.”

The zoning of the Dublin Mountains is designed to protect rural amenity and provide for agricultural activity within this sensitive landscape. In the summary of the relevant portions of the SDC Development Plan in Section 2.3.3, the applicant concedes that the compatibility of these two objectives relies on scale. Where amenity users are limited in number and managed by the local agricultural economy, there is little conflict between these two user groups. This is not the case in the Dublin Mountains.

Recent initiatives by the Dublin Mountain Partnership have already dramatically increased recreational use, and this exerts pressure on an old road network without provision for pedestrians, and other leisure users. Where much attention is paid to the protection and provision of amenity users within this landscape, there is scant attention paid to the protection and provision of agriculture in the adjacent fields bordering the site and within the local area (zone B). The models of partnership with local landowners mentioned in these plans do not reflect the lived experience of the local farming community.

The continuation of farming activity in the Dublin Mountains is essential to the protection of all the soft targets for development: landscape, biodiversity, heritage, environmental sustainability. Essentially the integrity of this fragile ecosystem, so attractive to amenity users, is preserved and managed by farming. Farmers in the Dublin Mountains are predominantly under contract to farm in an environmentally sustainable manner through GLAS and its predecessor, REPS.

The encroachment of an essentially suburban / urban generated land use with a catchment area across Dublin within the agricultural zone brings with it all the attendant problems of disturbance and trespass.

On page xi of the original proposal, the applicant notes:

“It is possible that increased usage of the site will result in an increase in nuisance and impacts to neighbouring land owners/farms, e.g. trespass and littering on their properties, and disturbance of animals.”

This admission is immediately discounted in a series of assertions without supporting evidence, or further consideration of how this development will impact on the zoning objective ‘to protect rural amenity and to provide for the development of agriculture’ which pertain to part of the site and the surrounding lands.”

Heritage.

The concerns raised in my submission and in the submission of The Irish Georgian Society in relation to the demesne character of Killakee are inadequately addressed by the applicants in the further information submitted. The original house was designed by James Gandon with gardens laid out by Ninian Niven who was responsible for the lay-out of the Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin. See the IGS submission for further details.

1. The additional information still betrays no genuine research, or understanding of the character and history of Killakee. As the interpretation of the local area’s ‘culture and heritage’ is repeatedly stressed as a key objective of the proposal, the very thin knowledge of the area’s archaeological, built and social heritage demonstrated in the design of this proposal, is a matter of key concern.
2. The lack of any proper historical survey of the Killakee site that would identify surviving traces of the original demesne landscape is a key omission.

3. Further, the characterization of the site's current status as 'woodlands' demonstrates a failure to recognise the site's importance as one of the most important arboretums in the 19th Century.
4. The lack of a professional tree survey to accompany the application is a matter of key concern, given that there are surviving specimens of the exotic species planted here by the Massy family.
5. Overall, the proposal pays inadequate attention to the historic fabric of both sites, Hellfire Club, and Massy Woods. This includes inadequate assessment of the conservation required for the surviving section of the Military Road within the grounds of Massy Woods.
6. The lack of real engagement with the history of the site and any engagement with local history groups in the development of this proposal demonstrates the opportunism of the heritage argument to leverage maximum value out of the planning restrictions imposed on this site under the terms of the county development plan.
7. No technical specs or details are provided with regard to the lighting of the proposed carpark so that the claims that this will have minimal impact cannot be properly assessed. The lighting proposals in this application will detract from the dark skies above the Dublin Mountains and further suburbanise this high amenity zone.

Conclusion.

I respectfully submit that the applicants have failed to accurately or adequately assess the impact of the proposal on the landscape character in this High Amenity Area, and have failed to accurately address the zoning objectives that relate to the development of agriculture and the need to protect rural amenity in the adjacent farmland.

I would like to communicate my concern at the lack of knowledge demonstrated by this application both of the heritage and local history of the subject sites. Where it is alleged that the communication of heritage is the primary objective of a landmark building with "a 'wow' factor", it might be expected that the developers documentation would show some appreciation of the site's built and horticultural heritage. The absence of any research relating to the demesne character of Massy Woods informs the paucity of design in this area of the proposal. This concern has also been expressed by the Irish Georgian Society, and I would like to endorse their original submission regarding the deficiencies in the heritage

aspect of this development.

I further submit that the amendments required to the local road network to achieve adequate sightlines on Killakee Road would result in an unacceptable erosion of the rural character of the area, further exacerbated by the erection of suburban features on the access routes – road-bridges, lighting, signage, chicanes, stop-go systems.

Having regard to the deficiency of footpaths, cycle paths and pedestrian crossings on Killakee and Cruagh Road, it is considered that the proposed development would be premature pending convenient and safe pedestrian links mitigation measures are inadequate to address public safety concerns relating to traffic hazard. The proposed development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

I therefore request the Board to refuse permission in the context of good planning practice, and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area including the preservation and improvement of amenities thereof.

I trust that the Board will give due consideration to the grounds set out in this submission and will notify us of its decision in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Selina Guinness.

