



D u b l i n M o u n t a i n s V i s i t o r C e n t r e

Design Report

by

Paul Keogh Architects

for

South Dublin City Council

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D e s i g n T e a m

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1 Introduction

1.01 Foreword

The Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre is a joint development proposal - by South Dublin County Council, Coillte and the Dublin Mountains Partnership - to create a new “gateway” to the Dublin Mountains; to accommodate a larger number and wider range of users and to enhance the experience of the Dublin Mountains for the population of South Dublin, and visitors from elsewhere in Ireland and abroad.

The combined Massy’s Wood and Montpelier Hill sites currently attract approximately 100,000 visitors per annum, with this number projected to increase exponentially as the population of Dublin and visitors to the city grow over the coming decades.

The proposal will expand the mountain’s current recreation and cultural offer, while conserving the landscape, ecology and heritage in a manner that is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

The concept of developing the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre was first proposed in the 2007 Dublin Mountains Strategic Development Plan for Outdoor Recreation. It was subsequently included as a specific objective in the 2016 – 2022 South Dublin Development Plan and identified in the South Dublin Tourism Strategy (2015) as a key component in the delivery of that strategy. It states, “The county’s principal resource with potential for development for tourism is the Dublin Mountains...”

The improved walks, access and parking facilities proposed will expand the mountain’s recreation offer. Accommodating a café, shop, toilets, walkers lounge and

an interpretative exhibition / education facility, the visitors centre building will provide services for walkers and other visitors to the mountains.

The project proposal also includes improvements to the setting of the Hell Fire Club, thereby assisting in branding this generally little-known national monument as a ‘must see’ attraction for day-trippers and tourists alike.

Accommodating a café, shop, toilets, walkers lounge and an interpretative exhibition / education facility, it will provide services for walkers and other visitors to the

mountains for the people of South Dublin County and visitors from elsewhere in Ireland and overseas.

As a tourist facility, the development is fully aligned with the 2015 Fáilte Ireland / Grow Dublin Tourism Alliance strategic plan - Dublin – A Breath of Fresh Air - and its campaign to reposition the city and county as a destination for overseas visitors.

The Dublin Mountains Visitors Centre will also be an economic driver for the South Dublin area; the projected growth in visitor numbers will increase people’s “dwell

time” in the locality, thereby generating increased spending on goods and services and with it, growth in the local economy.

The South Dublin County Council Corporate Plan 2015 -2019 describes the mission of the County Council thus: “to make our county the best possible place in which to live, work and do business”. The proposed development’s provision of enhanced recreation and cultural facilities for the citizens of South Dublin - and visitors from elsewhere in Ireland and abroad - is a key development in advancing this mission.



Walkers on the Dublin Mountains



Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre proposal model

2 Context

2.01 Project Overview

Population and tourism growth projections estimate that the number of visitors in the Dublin Mountains will grow to 300,000 by 2022. It is imperative that the landscape, heritage and recreation potential of the mountains is optimised accordingly - and managed sustainably - so as to enhance the quality of life of the people of South Dublin and the experience of those visiting the area.

The 2016 Dublin Mountains Visitors Centre feasibility study - commissioned by South Dublin County Council and Coillte - assessed the scale and type of facility that might best be developed to meet these objectives. The location chosen was the combined Massy's Wood / Montpelier Hill site that straddles the R115 Military Road, which connects the city to Glencree via Rathfarnham and Glencullen.

The feasibility study envisaged that the Hell Fire and Massy's Wood sites could be combined to become a single "destination"; one that provided a range of landscape experiences for walking in and around the site itself and the Dublin Mountains generally. The potential for expanding the extent of the existing walks and trails in Massy's Wood and Montpelier Hill, to make these more attractive and accessible for persons of all ages and abilities was identified.

The proposed visitors centre building was considered an essential element: both to enhance the site's attractiveness and to accommodate the projected growth in visitor numbers to the mountains. It was envisaged as providing a café, shop, toilets, education and interpretative facilities on both the subject sites and other attractions beyond the immediate location - such as the Dublin Mountains Way.

The feasibility study stressed the importance of a careful conservation and management strategy in relation to the archaeological and architectural heritage features in the locality, such as the Hell Fire Club and the two passage tombs on Montpelier Hill, as well as the walled garden and protected structures on the Massy's Wood site. In addition to improving access and parking, the development would include for the provision of a shuttle service from Tallaght to cope with peak summer and weekend demand.

The proposal also includes for conversion and enhancement of the mountain landscape - by replacing large areas of commercial coniferous forest on the eastern slopes of Montpelier Hill with broad-leaved woodland.



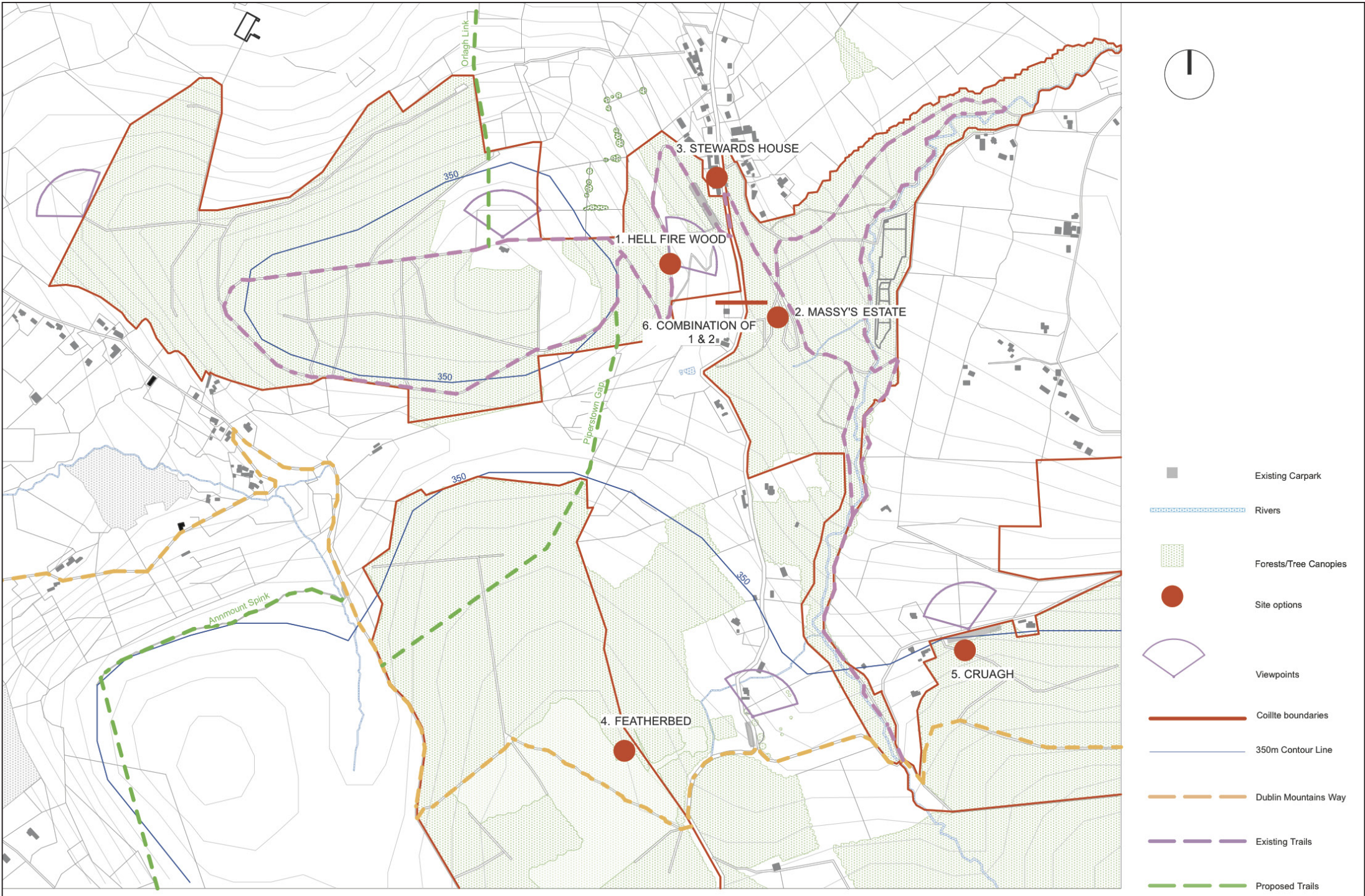
Wordsworth Centre, Grasmere, England



Slabh Gullion Visitor Centre, Co. Armagh, Ireland



Rosmuc Visitor Centre, Co. Galway, Ireland



Proposed walks and trails for the Dublin Mountains

2.02 Vision: The Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre

The Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre development is founded on a vision that the history, landscape, heritage and amenity of the Dublin Mountains should be exploited as a resource for the enjoyment of the people of South Dublin and for visitors to the area from elsewhere in Ireland and abroad.

The visitor centre builds on this vision, by proposing to provide enhanced facilities and services for persons seeking: a) to learn about the history, archaeology, geology and nature of the Dublin Mountains and b) to enjoy the recreational amenity of the mountains in a manner that does not diminish their overall attractiveness or heritage value.

Based on this mission, the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre development sets out to deliver the following key objectives:

- To optimise the potential of the Dublin Mountains as a recreation and tourism destination for the people of South Dublin and beyond.
- To enhance the recreation and amenity offer of the

- mountains with improved walks and trails in and around the subject sites.
- To provide a point of orientation and interpretation on the heritage and landscape of the mountains for visitors to the area.
- To develop a visitor centre facility providing essential services for visitors to Massy's Wood, Montpelier Hill and the Dublin Mountains.
- To provide an interpretative exhibition and education facility for people – tourists and schools – to come to learn about the unique natural and man-made heritage of the Dublin Mountains.
- To promote the growth and expansion of the tourism offer in the South Dublin County Council area.
- To conserve the archaeological and architectural heritage of the sites in accordance with best practice.
- To improve the quantity and quality of walks and trails in and around the subject sites, for people of all ages and abilities.
- To provide increased car parking and improved access - including public transport - to the sites.
- To boost the economy and generate employment in the South Dublin County area.

- To manage the existing commercial forestry in a manner appropriate to the site's landscape, cultural and historical significance.

As outlined in the 2016 feasibility study and elaborated in the accompanying environmental impact assessment, the proposed development has been subjected to careful environmental, visual, landscape and traffic assessments to ensure the project delivers an overriding objective of conserving the unique, natural and man-made environment of the Dublin Mountains in a manner that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.



Tree-top canopy walkway



View of proposed Visitor Centre



Airfield panoramic window, Dundrum, Ireland (PKA)



Panoramic window at Grizedale Visitor Centre, England

2.03 The Development Site

The 2016 feasibility study explored a range of sites for the proposed development and the location chosen was the combined Massy's Wood / Montpellier Hill, sites straddling both sides of the R115 that connects the city to Glencree, via Rathfarnham and Glencullen. Both properties are in the ownership of Coillte.

The site is located within the Dublin Mountains High Amenity zoned area of South Dublin. The properties are integral to the forested upland landscape of South Dublin and between them they have a significant concentration of landscape and visual amenity resources, cultural and natural heritage and recreational uses.

The Montpellier Hill / Hell Fire Woods site is characterised by steeply sloping topography, rising approximately 130 metres from the R115 to the summit and the ruined 1725 Hell Fire Club structure, from which there are panoramic views over the city, Dublin Bay and the Dublin and Wicklow Mountains to the south. The Massy's Wood site is on the opposite, east side of the R115. It slopes gradually in a northeasterly direction as far as the river Cruagh or Glendoo Brook, a tributary of the Owendoher River.

There is no vehicular access or parking on the site and pedestrian access is via a gateway on the opposite side of the R115 to the Montpellier Hill entrance. There are secondary pedestrian entrances to the site along its eastern boundary from Cruagh Lane - in private ownership - and off Cruagh Road at the south end of the property where the Dublin Mountains Way passes the Massy's site.

Managed primarily as a productive forest, the site has a single access point to the forest road and visitor's car park adjacent to the forest entrance with a capacity of 80 spaces. Montpellier Hill is used intensively for recreation use by walkers ascending to the Hellfire Club, with current visitor numbers reaching 80,000 / year, along the forest road of the numerous tracks that weave across the site.

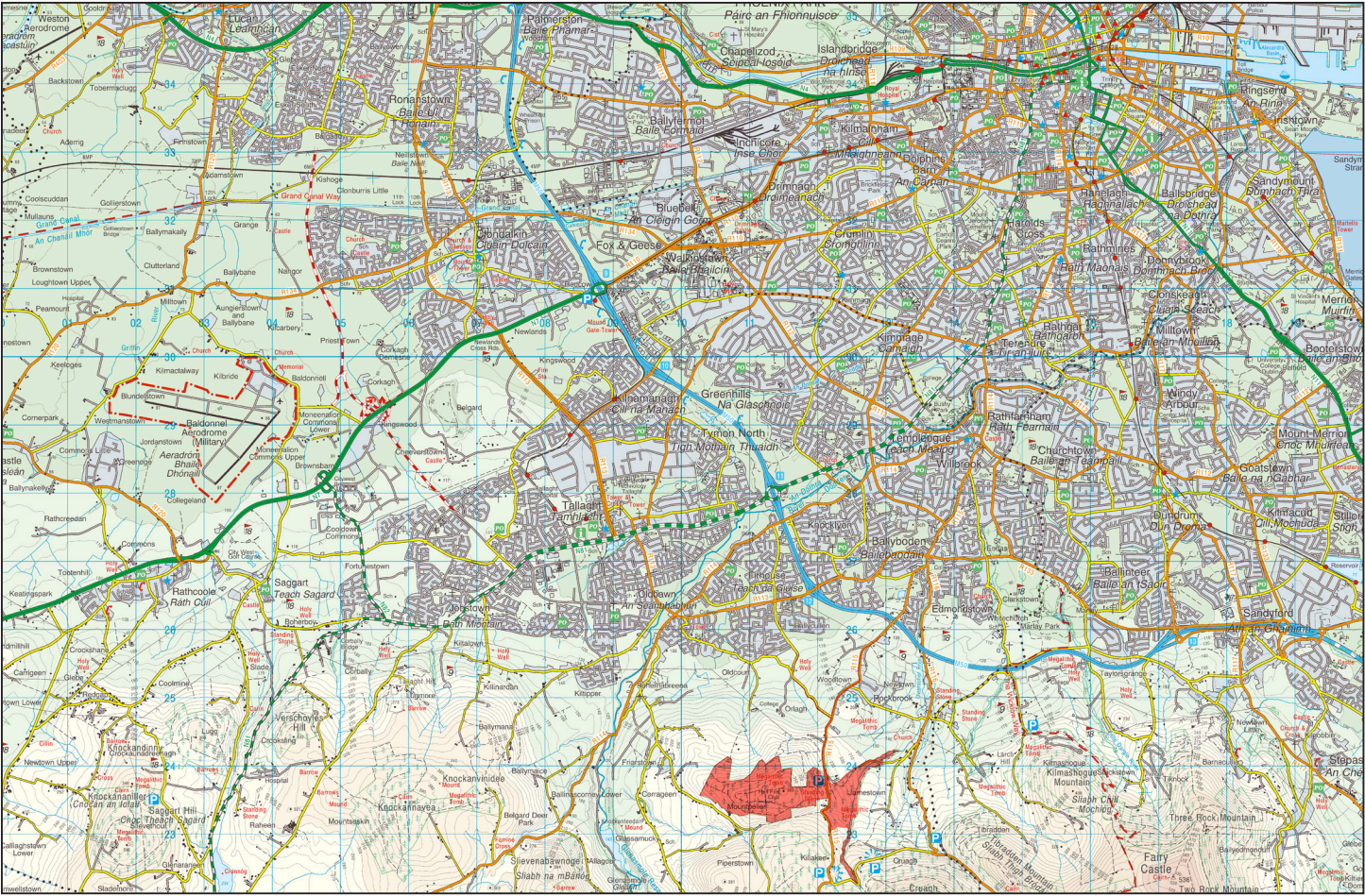
Massy's Wood is covered in broadleaved woodland of beech, oak, ash, fir, larch and spruce, the property is managed as mixed woodland. The lands are used extensively for walking and to a lesser extent, cycling and horse riding. Massy's Wood is rich in cultural heritage features, the most notable being the walled garden, gate lodge, icehouse, ruined cottage and numerous bridges, which are designated collectively as a protected structure in the current South Dublin Development Plan.



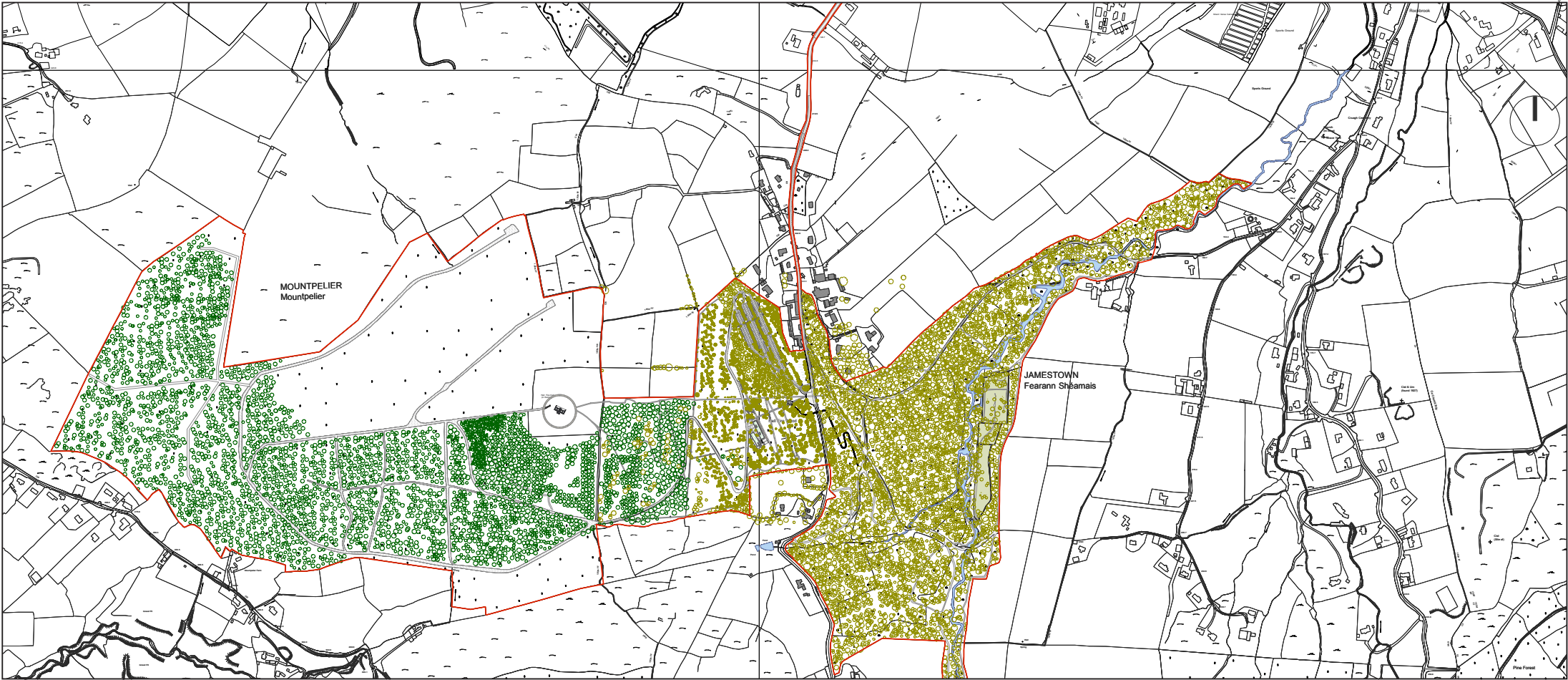
Existing trees in Massy's Wood



The Hell Fire Club



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Site location map showing proposed walks and trails in the Dublin Mountains

2.04 Public Consultation

South Dublin County Council and Coillte have engaged in an extensive public consultation process in developing the plans and the environmental impact assessment for the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre with the purpose to involve as expansive an audience as possible with the evolution of the design and to enable the project team to take account of issues raised and incorporate them into the development of the scheme and EIA process.

The public engagement process was undertaken in accordance with the statutory consultation guidelines as part of the EIA planning process - including a pre-planning scoping engagement with an Bord Pleanála. The 2016 feasibility study was presented to and endorsed by the members of the county council and public input was obtained by way of two stakeholder meetings and two public open-days in Tallaght Stadium, as well as an on-line consultation with website / social media presence.

Coillte engaged in one-to-one liaisons with neighbouring landowners, residents and other stakeholders. Relevant

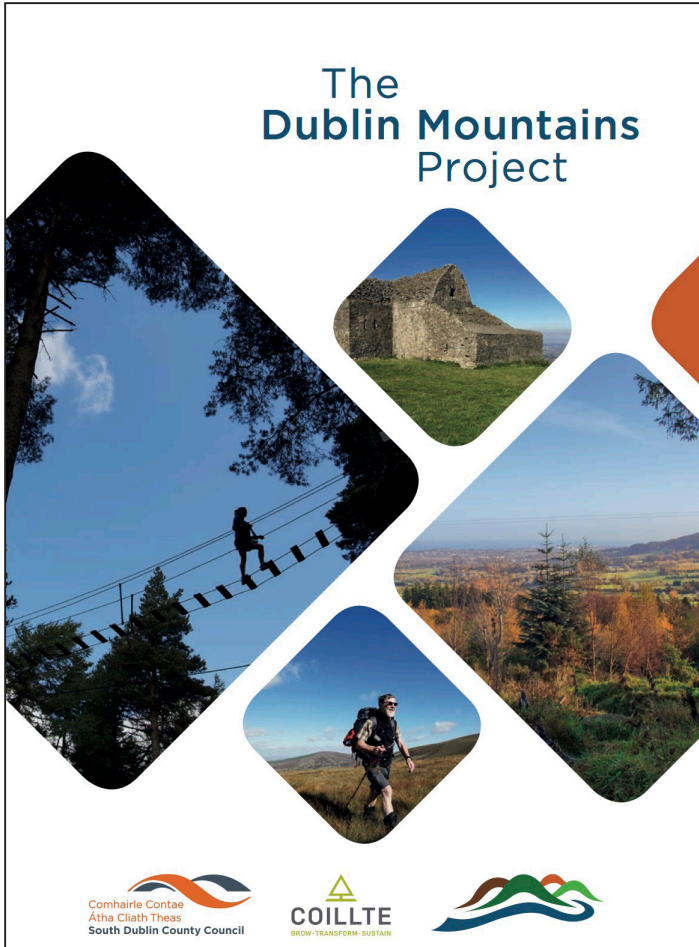
organisations and identified individuals were consulted, as were statutory and non-statutory bodies who were invited to submit observations in advance of the public meetings that took place from February 2017 onwards.

The following are some of the major considerations identified:

- The environmental sensitivity of the site, particularly its biodiversity and landscape.
- The cultural, historical and archaeological importance of the site.
- The visual quality of the site, including views and prospects to and from the Hell Fire Club.
- The ecological and geological values of the site and its environs.
- The risks that the project would set a precedent for further development in the area.
- The issue of road safety and congestion arising from the proposed development.
- The risk that the development would impact on adjoining residential and farming uses.
- The protection and enhancement of the site's amenities for the benefit of local citizens
- The economic development imperatives of SDCC in initiating the proposed development.



Public consultation at Tallaght Stadium



Dublin Mountains information booklet, front cover



Dublin Mountains information booklet, back cover



Presentation of proposal to SDCC

3 Proposed Development

3.01 Development Description

The Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre development is designed to provide a place of introduction to the natural and man-made heritage of the Dublin Mountains. As well as expanding the extent of area's existing walks and trails, access and parking facilities will be improved.

The amenity, landscape and recreation value of Montpelier Hill and Massy's Wood would be celebrated by an iconic and sensitively designed new visitor centre facility and pedestrian tree canopy level walkway.

The proposal includes the construction of a visitor centre building, accommodating a café / restaurant, services, interpretative exhibition, walkers lounge and an education facility.

The various elements comprising the development are as follows:

- Landscape changes, including modifications to the existing forest roadway,
- Construction of tree-top walkway / bridge from Montpelier Hill to Massy's Wood.
- Provision of new/ improvement to existing walk / trails.

- Construction of the visitor centre building and supports.
- Conservation works to architectural and archaeological heritage features on the site.
- Road improvements and construction of a new footpath.
- Increase in the capacity and size of the existing Hell Fire Wood parking area.
- Improve the existing vehicular entrance to the Montpelier Hill car park and mountain road.
- The provision of new utilities and drainage infrastructure to serve the proposed development.

- The maintenance and management of key areas of trees and forestry in Montpelier Hill and Hell Fire Wood.

In summary, the development proposed interventions in the landscape are designed to be of the highest quality, sympathetic to the receiving environment and sustainable in their use of resources, both natural and man-made. The overarching strategy in designing the proposal has been to make the least possible interventions while facilitating greater access to enhance the recreation and cultural value of the mountains for the people of South Dublin and visitors from elsewhere in Ireland and abroad.



View of context model



Reference: green roof for the Visitor Centre



View of Hell Fire Club showing proposed information interpretation



Reference: Bridge House corten steel canopy

3.02 Landscape

The changes proposed to the landscape, including modifications to the existing forest roadway and trails, seek to enhance the visitor experience and make the combined sites more accessible as a destination for walkers of all ages and abilities. In addition, the project involves the careful insertion of new buildings, structures and facilities into a sensitive landscape.

The proposed development will enhance the landscape aesthetically and environmentally by replacing large areas of commercial coniferous forest on the eastern slopes of

Montpelier Hill with predominantly broad-leaved woodland species. The remaining areas of the site will remain in commercial forest use.

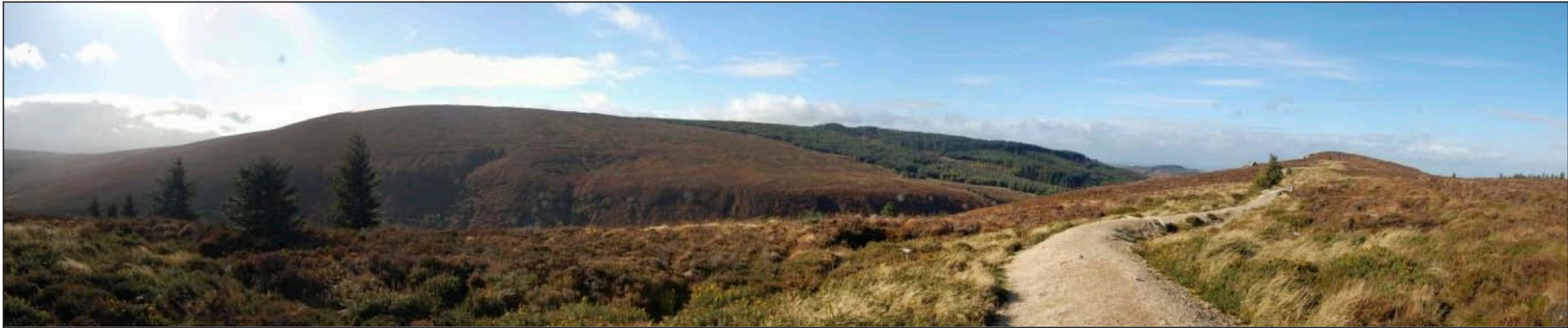
The proposals for upgrading the existing trails and the creation of new ones will provide a varying range of walks - in terms of character, length, gradient - and degree of difficulty - accessible, easy, moderate or strenuous. The existing use of the site for horse riding will be retained by incorporating several dedicated equestrian trails, located mostly around the perimeter of the Hell Fire Wood and Massy's properties.

The design of the visitor centre, car park and tree-top walkway have been carefully considered so that these interventions will have minimal impact on the landscape quality of the receiving environment. Careful considerations in relation to scale, form and materials will ensure the impact on the character and quality of the mountain landscape will be generally benign.

Already managed by Coillte as an amenity woodland, the development proposal includes for ongoing management and conservation of Massy's Wood for amenity purposes; including conservation and repair works to the existing

(protected) structures on the site, and clearing overgrowth as required to enhance the legibility of the historic garden's plan in accordance with conservation architect's report summarised hereunder.

In summary, the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre proposal has been designed around a sensitive approach to the management and conservation of the receiving landscape; the visitor centre building and associated landscape works will have minimal impact on the landscape, history, archaeology and heritage of the receiving environment.



Panoramic view of Dublin Mountains



Felled trees in Killakee Wood



View of Dublin Bay from Montpelier Hill

3.03 Trails Proposal

The network of trails and walks proposed as part of the visitors centre project has been planned with a view to making the mountains landscape more accessible while conserving the existing character and quality of the combined sites.

Promenading through both forest and bare landscape, the trails have been designed in accordance with the standards set out in the Classification and Grading of Recreational Trails published by the National Trails Office. Three of the most important walks and trails proposed are described below.

The plan proposes a suite of walks of varying lengths and difficulty, combining existing and new routes, based on surveys which audited the character and quality of existing trails, both on Montpelier Hill and in Massy's Wood. Existing equestrian routes throughout the combined sites were also surveyed.

Five of the most significant elements of the plan's walks and trails proposals are described hereunder:

- The existing direct route to the Hell Fire Club will be

- repaired as necessary to enhance this most dramatic of walks, with lengths of steps in places to improve its safety and aid accessibility for people of all ages and abilities.
- A circular route is proposed to circumnavigate the Hell Fire Club and the two adjacent passage tombs. This will provide an unprecedented experience for walkers making the ascent to the Hell Fire Club and onwards to the Dublin Mountains Way and beyond.
- Modifications are proposed to the existing trails along the Glendoo Brook corridor in Massy's Wood; these will be undertaken in tandem with

- habitat enhancement works to the river corridor.
- The pedestrian bridge over the R115 will link Montpelier Hill to Massy's Wood, thereby expanding the network of trails in and around the combined sites.
- Access to the visitor centre building will be by way of a zig-zag ramped walkway which has been designed to a gradient not exceeding 1:20, thereby enabling people of all ages and abilities to enjoy the amenity of the forest landscape.

best practice; providing both easy and more challenging walking experiences through the subject sites. Routes of different grades and duration will be colour coded on signs and maps, with improvements to the quality of surfaces and gradients where needed.

In summary, the proposals for upgrading the existing trails and the creation of new ones will to provide a varying range of walks, in terms of character, length, gradient and degree of difficulty - accessible, easy, moderate or strenuous - to make the mountains landscape accessible to a wider range of users.

These routes are divided into classes in accordance with



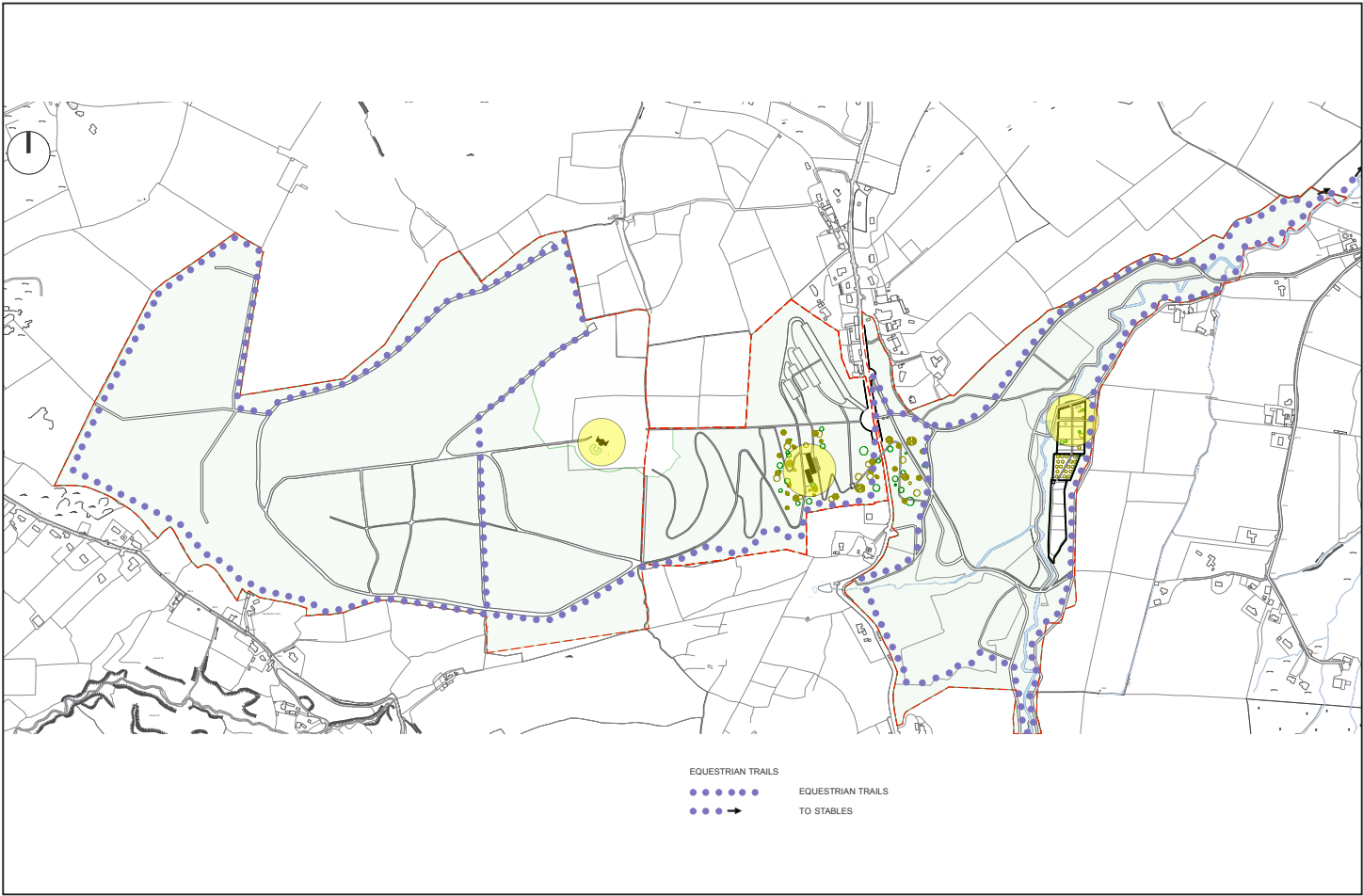
Existing walking trail towards Hell Fire Woods



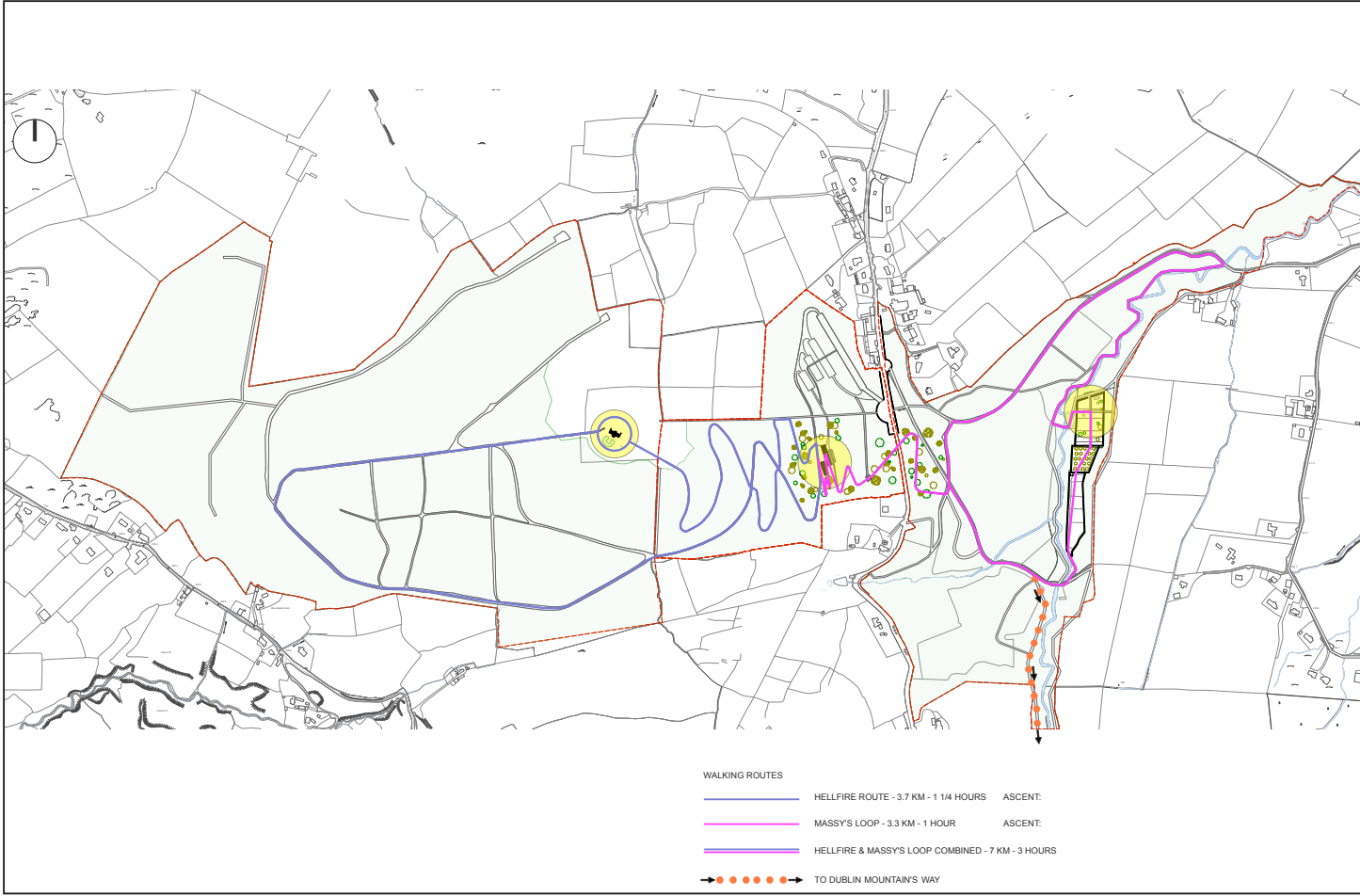
Existing equestrian routes in Massy's



Existing walking trail on Montpelier Hill



Map showing proposed equestrian routes



Map showing proposed walkers trails

3.04 Tree-top Walkway

The proposed tree-top walkway and bridge over Killakee Road into Massy's Estate is designed to be both a means of connecting the two parts of the site as well as being an iconic element of the project.

The 330 metre walkway will follow a meandering route that will fall at a gradient of 1:20 from ground level on Montpelier Hill to ground level in Massy's Wood. Providing a high-level promenade through the forest will allow visitors enjoy the canopy of the trees as they change from season to season.

The tree-top walkway and bridge will also provide a safe crossing, enabling people of all ages and abilities cross the R115 without walking on the roadside, thereby improving safety by reducing pedestrian footfall along the R115 for the projected increase in visitor numbers to the combined sites.

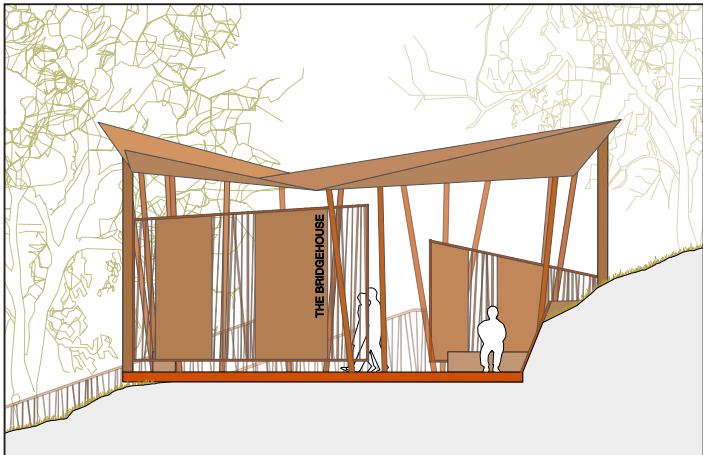
The design has been developed in detail to ensure that the walkway can be constructed economically, elegantly and in accordance with all building and safety regulations. Discreet lighting along the bridge will be integrated into the handrails. With a hardwood handrail and balusters and columns in corten - rust coloured - steel, the bridge structure will have a lightweight appearance that will sit unobtrusively in its woodland setting.



Tree-top walkway



Corten steel walkway



Proposed corten steel bridge house



Aerial view of proposed walkway in model

3.05 Massy’s Wood

The visual and recreational value of Massy’s Wood offers a vast ecological resource of flora, wildlife, tree species, estate artifacts and items of geological interest. A forest road called the ‘Nature Trail’ goes around Massy’s Wood, along with many smaller tracks and shortcuts crossing the forest. As all the paths lead to the main road, the proposed trails will be able to connect to these existing tracks.

A detailed survey of Massy’s Wood and Walled Garden has identified areas of repair and protection of trees, wildlife and existing structures. The 18th century walled garden in Massy’s Wood is to be conserved as a ruin, with minimal

intervention, with removal of scrub vegetation, invasive ivy and trees where they undermine or mask the ruined structures. Selected trees will be retained where they provide an amenity value to the garden.

Annual inspections and repairs to the walls and other structures in the walled garden will be implemented, with appropriate attention to the maintenance of the meadow grassland to establish a low-maintenance ‘wild’ walled garden.

Monitoring of the protected structures will be outlined in a management programme with information regarding the access and interpretation of visitors of the area. The provision of adequate signage will allow for universal access and interpretation of the site with safety and quality standards being met.



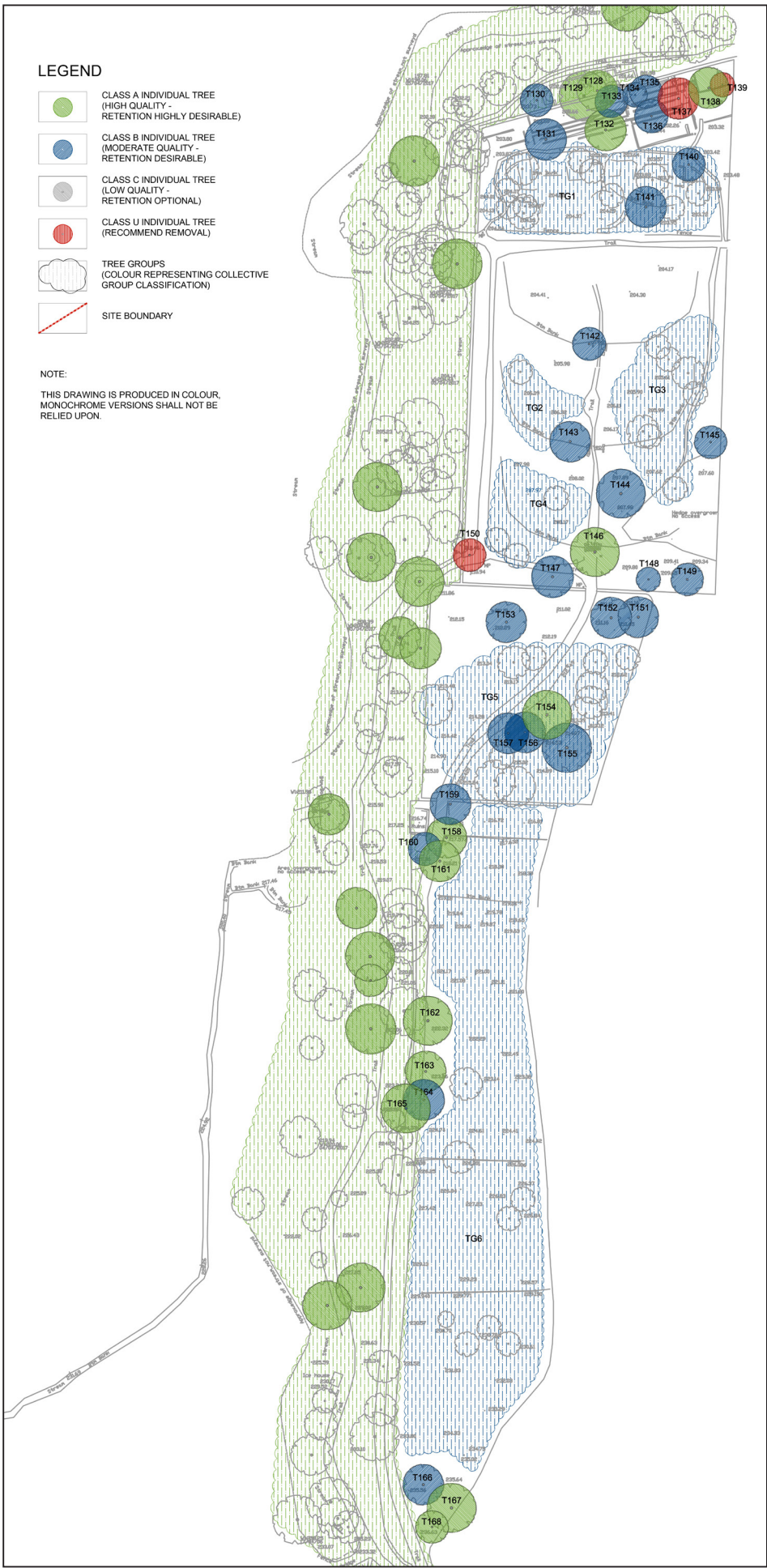
Existing trees in Massy’s Wood



Equestrian activity in Massy’s Wood



Massy’s Walled Garden



Massy’s Walled Garden site plan

3.06 Montpelier Hill

Montpelier Hill and the adjacent Massy’s Wood will accommodate the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre - gateway, entrance and expanded parking facilities, new visitor building and a tree canopy bridge over R115 to Massy’s Wood. The visitor centre will be integrated into the evolving landscape, localised to the northeastern flank of Montpelier Hill, addressing ecological, visual and related heritage impacts and opportunities.

Existing mature broadleaved specimen trees, currently

within the forest canopy, will be retained while key areas of trees on Montpelier Hill will be managed to enhance panoramic views. Tracks and trails will be upgraded where appropriate including stylised interventions at viewing points.

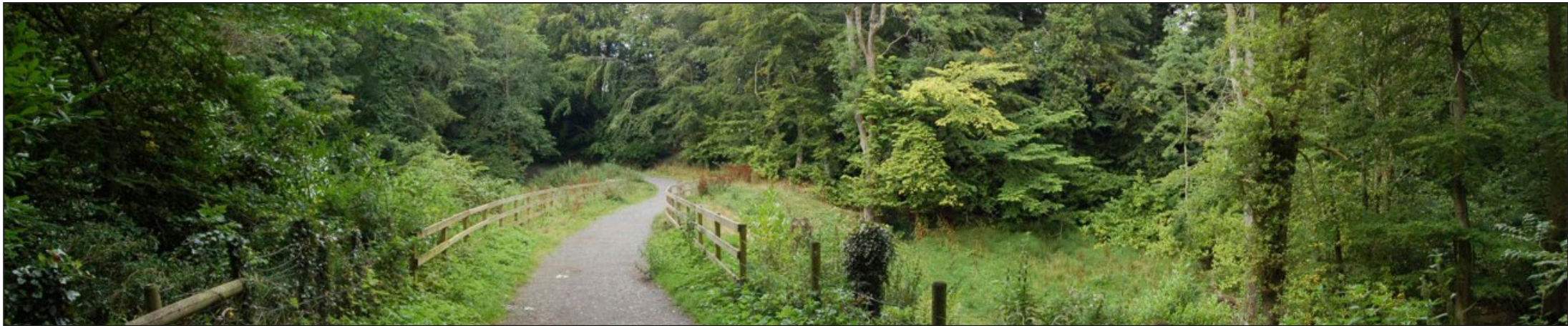
The proposal seeks to enhance and improve the robust character of the Montpelier Hill landscape, with an overall intention to maintain the upland working forest and character of this area. SDCC have control and direct responsibility over defined areas of Montpelier Hill and as project coordinators, will proactively engage in trail

development and management activities.

Long term forestry activities - ploughing and harvesting - are projected to cease on the northerly slopes of Montpelier Hill, allowing a permanent landscape to be established. Scope for proactive recreational amenity development including trails and routes will be the objective.

The presence of archaeological features on Montpelier Hill has been identified as a resource, adding areas of interest and interpretation to the site. This archaeology will

be supported by the trails proposal, with new links, sitting areas and related features being incorporated into the design. The proposal creates an enhanced understanding of the archaeological and heritage layer of Montpelier Hill.



Walking trail through Montpelier Hill



Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre model



View of Dublin Bay from Montpelier Hill

3.07 The Hell Fire Club

Described as the ‘unique selling point’ of the flagship project - on account of its architecture, history, location and inherited stories - the Hell Fire Club is a unique focal point within the Dublin Mountains. In view of the large increase in visitor numbers projected to visit the site, the current ruinous condition of the monument was appraised in terms of heritage protection, access and safety.

The Hell Fire Club is a national monument, with two ancient passage tombs discovered on site in a recent

excavation commissioned by SDCC, UCD and other bodies. Great caution and sensitivity will be employed to preserve the building and the tombs in their setting.

Consideration was taken regarding whether the Hell Fire Club should be preserved as a ruin, restored to a conjectural original condition or conserved in a manner that allows it to be accessed safely for sustainable purposes associated with the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre. It was decided that the 18th century lodge is to be conserved as a ruin with minimal intervention planned for the Hell Fire Club.

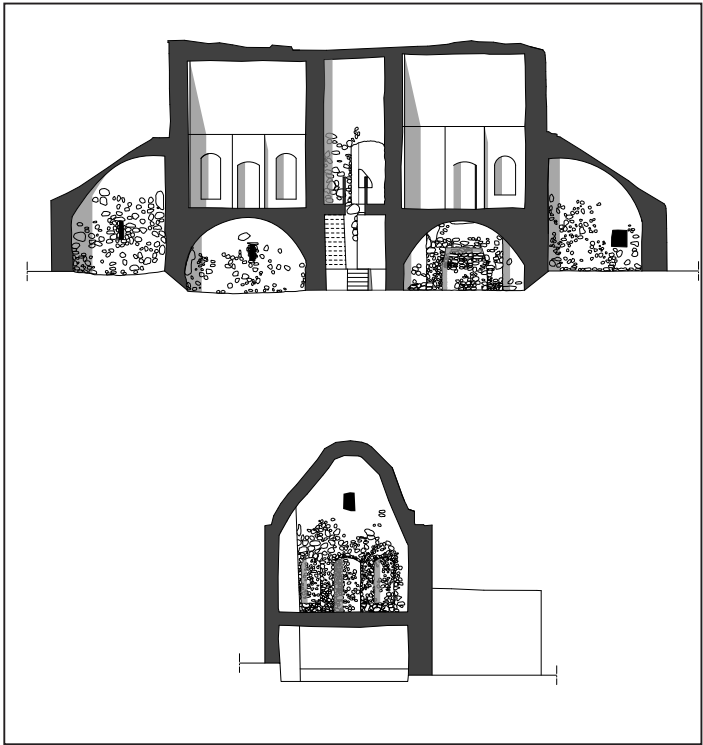
Alterations include repairs to roof, replacement of concrete stairs with a sensitive, conservation grade alternative, sealing of chimney flues, removal of vandalism on the walls and repairing of the roof. Investigation of floors will be carried out to better understand its present condition, with a stone floor deemed appropriate. Discreet lighting is proposed on the interior of the building as part of a long-term monitoring, repair and access management of the Hell Fire Club.

The opportunity for informing visitors of the history, folklore and heritage of the Hell Fire Club on the Dublin Mountains

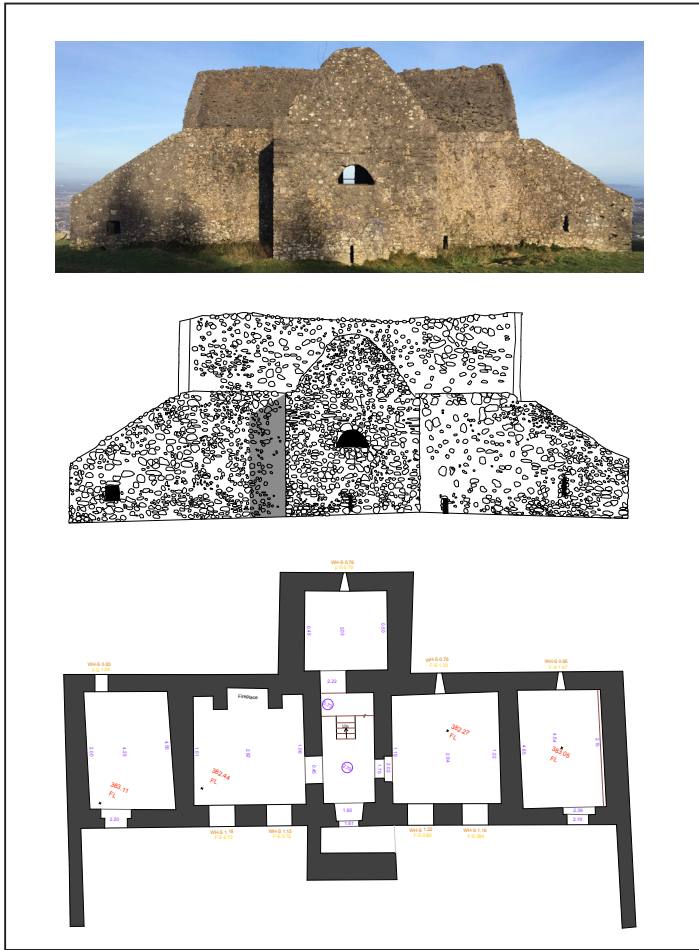
has been incorporated in the proposal. New trails including a circular walkway to the summit of Montpelier Hill, encircling the Hell Fire Club and the Neolithic Passage Tombs, will incorporate information panels for visitor information and interpretation.



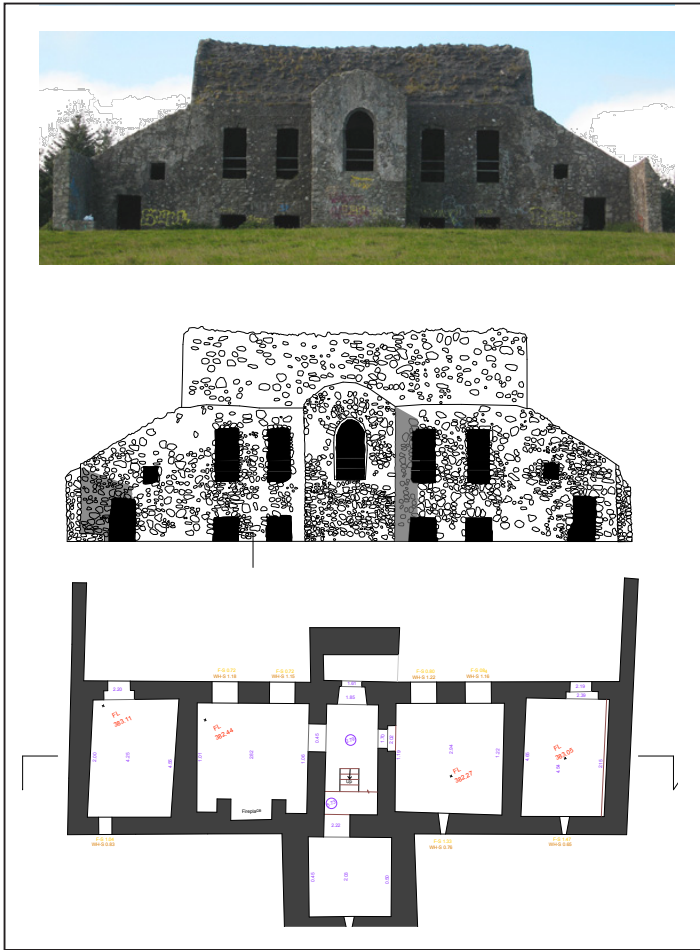
Approach to Hell Fire Club with information panels incorporated



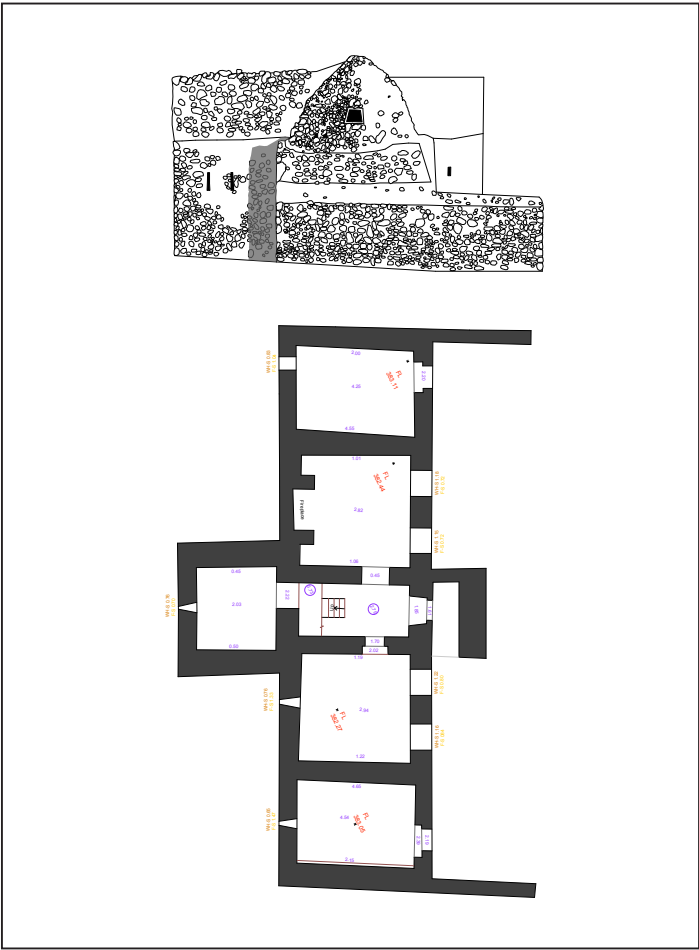
Hell Fire Club sections



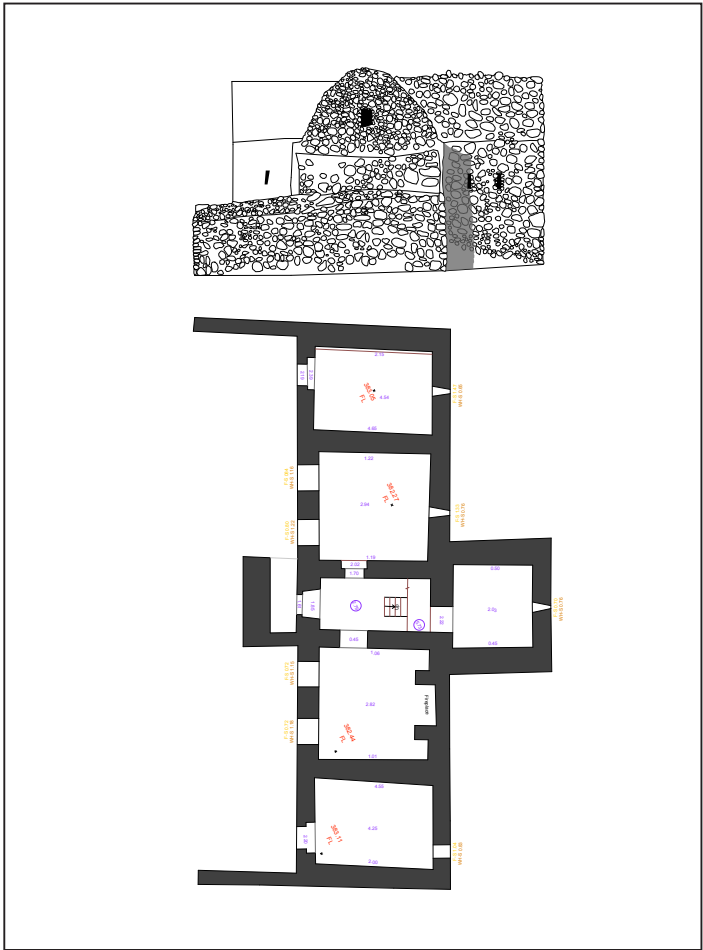
Hell Fire Club front elevation



Hell Fire Club rear elevation



Hell Fire Club side elevation



Hell Fire Club side elevation

3.08 Visitor Centre

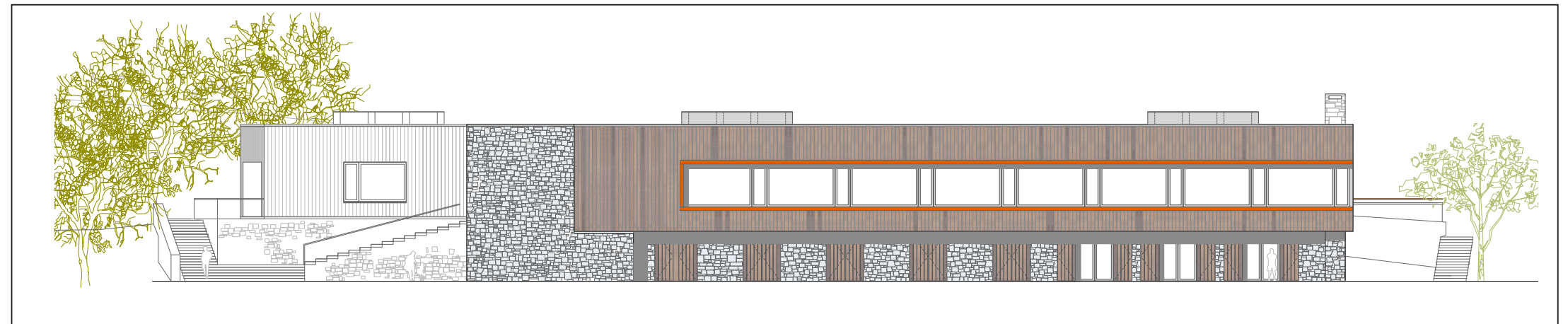
The proposed visitor centre building on Montpelier Hill is the largest 'construction' element of the proposed development. Accommodating a café, shop, toilets, walkers lounge and an interpretative exhibition / education facility, it will provide services for walkers and other visitors to the mountains for the people of South Dublin County and visitors from elsewhere in Ireland and overseas.

The 2016 feasibility study explores a number of locations for the proposed visitor centre. The selected location is on the east side of the Montpelier Hill forest road, above the existing car parking area. This site was chosen on the basis of criteria such as its proximity to the new car park area, its accessibility for walkers of all ages and abilities, the availability of vehicular and service access, its views over the city and Dublin Bay, and its minimal impact on views and prospects.

The design seeks to be a site-specific response to its woodland context, in terms of building's scale, form, plan and materials. The site slopes steeply from west to east and the design exploits this slope to its advantage. Considered as one 'building', the accommodation is distributed across two side-by-side pavilions; so as to reduce its scale and impact of the proposal, create the impression of the visitor centre being an 'outdoor' experience, to create a courtyard space between the two, and to form a series of outdoor terraces and seating areas.

Each of the two structures has an extended linear plan – with flat 'green' roofs to mitigate against the possible intrusiveness a larger footprint would have in this mountain landscape. The larger – two-storey – element contains a café / restaurant on its upper floor, and the walkers lounge, DMP offices, shop, plant, toilets and coffee kiosk below. Behind this, the smaller – single storey – pavilion contains the interpretative exhibition and education facility, plus ancillary toilet accommodation.

The 75-seat, self-service café / restaurant is designed to provide for all the needs of the visitors. With a fully-glazed east elevation and panoramic views over Dublin Bay, it is envisaged as both a place for walkers to relax after their exertions in the mountains, and for day-trippers to have lunch or tea in a unique setting. The restaurant is serviced by a kitchen with the capacity to adapt a wide variety of menu choices.



Below it, the walker's lounge and Dublin Mountains Partnership shop / office will be a walkers' resource, with maps, information and accessories for sale and / or hire. The kiosk and outdoor terrace seating at this level will dispense take-away drinks and snacks. Toilet and disabled / baby changing facilities are also provided at this level.

Containing the interpretative exhibition and education facility, the second structure is envisaged as a place for people – tourists and schools – to come to learn about the unique natural and man-made heritage of the Dublin

Mountains. The interpretative exhibition will include an audio-visual display and stand-alone exhibition panels and artifacts. The 50-seat education room is intended to accommodate school, tourist and special interest groups, as well as small corporate conferences for companies and organisations who would use this in association with the café / restaurant for team-building exercises.

The outside area between the two buildings are envisaged as a landscaped 'place', providing resting and sitting space on the ascent to the Hell Fire Club.

This connects via a network of steps and ramps to the three-tier car park tree-top bridge and the forest road. Insofar as is possible on a site as steep as Montpelier Hill these have been designed to be accessible for all – with ramped walkways not exceeding gradients of 1:20 and flights of steps complying with the maximum ambulant disabled pitch stipulated in the building regulations.

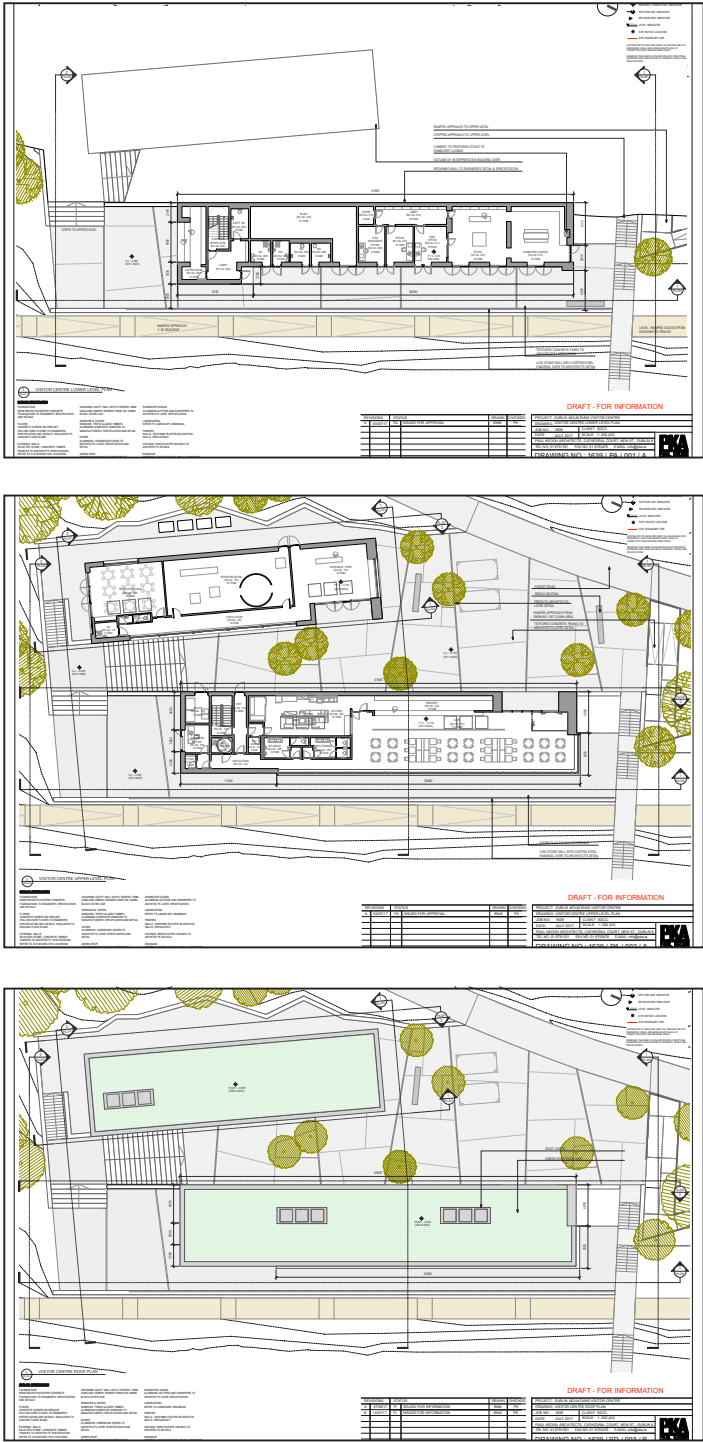
Finished in natural and indigenous materials – granite and timber cladding with green roofs – the design is intended to merge into the landscape setting. The granite cladding will relate aesthetically to the walls of Massy's Wood; the

timber cladding will blend with the woodland setting, and the 'green' roofs will ensure that the view from higher up Montpelier Hill is not unduly disrupted.

The visitors centre development has been planned to environmentally sustainable; with the maximum amount of indigenous and recyclable materials, green roofs and SUDs rainwater disposal systems and renewable energy systems designed to meet the Nearly Zero-Energy Buildings (NZEB) standards required for new buildings owned and occupied by public authorities after 31st December 2018.



View of the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre proposal from Hell Fire Wood



3.09 Vehicular Access

The 2016 feasibility study considered vehicular access as a major factor in determining the appropriateness of the Massy’s Wood / Montpelier Hill location as the most suitable site for the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre.

As part of the current design and planning stage, a transport impact assessment was carried out to analyse the traffic impacts of the proposed development, as per the requirements of an environmental impact assessment. The key concerns relate to the increase in numbers of

pedestrians, cars and coaches using the R115 to access the visitor centre, while not interfering with traffic using the road between Rathfarnham and Glencree.

This narrow regional road carries moderate levels of traffic consisting of both local access traffic and visitors entering the mountains. In its present condition, it is suitable to cater for the increase in traffic that might be attracted by the proposed visitor centre. However, there is no footpath and the road is a popular recreational cycle route.

The proposed development includes proposals to modify

the existing roadway locally to accommodate a traffic calming layout for the benefit of cyclists and to provide a footpath between the Massy’s Wood and Montpelier Hill gateways by way of the footbridge.

The existing Montpelier Hill forest road / car park entrance will be improved to facilitate pedestrian and equestrian access, as well as to provide suitable visibility splays and turning radii at the R115 site entrance. These works will necessitate removal of the existing boundary wall for approximately 100 metres. This will be reinstated on completion using the same materials.

In addition to the increased car parking provision described hereunder, it is proposed to provide a shuttle bus - seven days a week, all year round - from Tallaght Stadium and a coach drop off / parking area on the site to provide for and encourage more sustainable means of accessing the site.

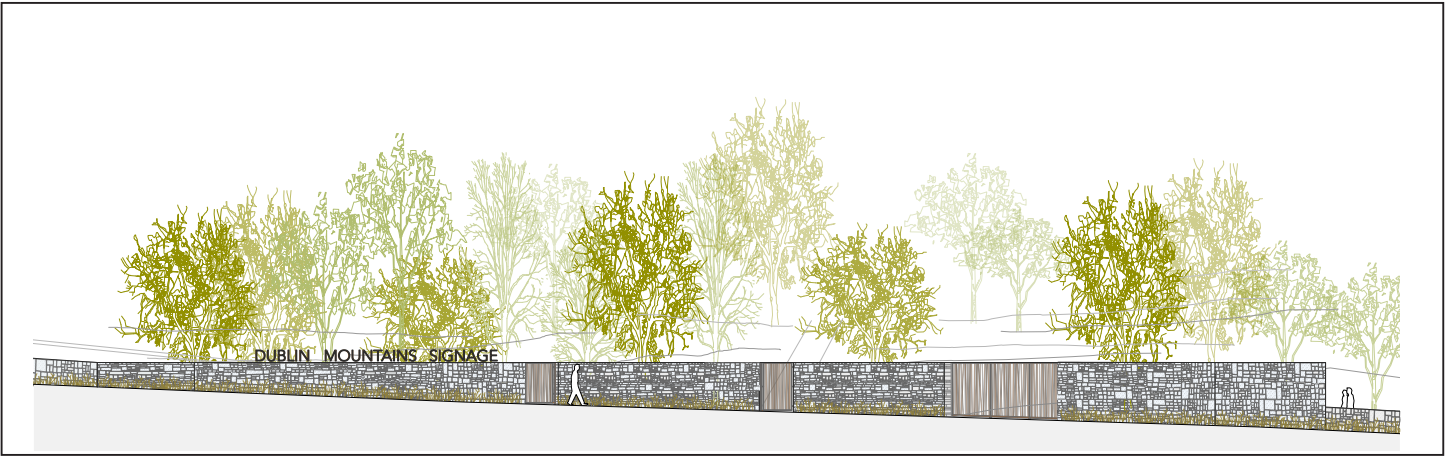
In summary, as detailed in the attached environmental impact assessment, the impacts of the proposed development on roads and traffic in and around the subject sites is expected to be minimal as a result of the proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre development.



Proposed planting for the entrance to the Visitor Centre



Proposed planting for the entrance to the Visitor Centre



Elevation of proposed entrance to the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre



Model of proposed entrance to the Visitor Centre



Plan of proposed entrance to the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre

3.10 Car Parking

The Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre development requires an increased area of parking to cater for the 300,000 annual visitors projected to use the Dublin Mountains for recreation and leisure within the next decade.

This increase in visitor numbers is catered for by increasing the capacity of the Montpelier Hill parking area from its existing capacity of 80 spaces to 275 – 14 of which will be disabled spaces. In addition, 5 coach spaces are proposed. It is also proposed to include two

electric car recharging station.

The increased parking area is laid out in three parallel tiers which ascend the hillside from the existing parking area entrance. The three tiers are separated by retaining walls and earth banks with strips of planting to soften the appearance of the parking in the woodland setting.

Conifer trees around the parking area that are due for felling, will be replaced by sustainable broadleaf planting. The vehicular carriageways are proposed to be finished in asphalt with a coloured exposed aggregate finish and the

parking areas themselves will be surfaced in “Grasscrete” or a similar permeable paving product.

Footpaths from the car park lead in three directions: directly up the face of Montpelier Hill to the Hell Fire Club; towards the “bridgehouse” and treetop walkway across the R115 to Massy’s Wood; towards the proposed visitor centre building.

Access to the visitor centre building will be by way of a zig-zag ramped walkway which has been designed to a gradient not exceeding 1:20, thereby enabling people of all ages and abilities to access the building on foot from

the car park. In addition to the 14 disabled spaces in the main parking area, there are more spaces adjacent to the visitors centre building for those unable to walk the route from the main car park.

The many challenges presented by steep gradient of the Montpelier Hill site - in terms of access, servicing and parking - have been addressed in the proposed plan with mitigation measures to ensure the facilities of the visitor centre are accessible by all and designed in a manner to minimise their impact on the landscape character and quality of Montpelier Hill.



Proposed car-parking in the Dublin Mountains



'Grasscrete' used in carpark paving



'Bodpave' plastic mesh used in carpark paving



Proposed parking in the Dublin Mountains

3.11 Universal Access

The Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre has been designed with the ambition that best practice in the principles of universal access will be applied to every aspect of the development, so that the experience of the mountains is available to people of all ages and all abilities.

Application of best practice will underpin decisions through the various design stages to ensure that the visitor centre itself, and the routes in and out of it are attractive, convenient and safe for all.

The new paths and trails throughout the site have been designed whenever possible to be no steeper than a 1:20 gradient, i.e. in accordance with the Class 1 trail route classification for multi-access.

The three elements making up the visitor centre building have been designed as self-contained suites - as a response to the challenging site gradients and to reduce the impact of the development in the landscape. There is no internal circulation between the café / restaurant, the walkers lounge / coffee kiosk and the education / interpretive exhibition. Each is designed to be accessible by all in terms of approach, internal layout and facilities.

Access to the visitor centre building from the disabled spaces in the main car park will be by way of the zig-zag walkway which has been designed to a gradient not exceeding 1:20, thereby enabling people of all ages and abilities to both access the building and enjoy the amenity of the forest landscape.

Fine compacted gravel will be used for the surface material on this and whenever possible, on other walkways, to make these suitable for buggies and wheelchair users. Where the terrain is steeper than 5% the design includes for additional zig-zag paths; these interventions are localised and indicated on the accompanying drawings.

A smaller number of disabled spaces are located adjacent to the visitor centre building for use in exceptional circumstances by disabled drivers; otherwise it is anticipated that a disabled passenger will be dropped at the entrance and the car returned to the main car park by its able-bodied driver.

The footbridge has also been designed to universal access codes, making it suitable for wheelchairs and buggies. The bridge will have a gradient less than 5% and

there will be level access for the main car park's disabled spaces.

Well-designed signage throughout the site and audio-visual interpretation in the visitor centre will provide for a complete and inclusive experience of the amenities the mountains has to offer - for people of all ages and abilities.

The project design incorporates appropriate and well-designed seating and street furniture, to provide occasions for people of all ages and abilities to relax and enjoy the experience of the Dublin Mountains landscape.



Typical disabled access parking spaces



Disabled access spaces at Visitor Centre

3.12 Views and Prospects

The proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre building is located on the eastern side of Montpelier Hill, adjacent to the existing forest road. The siting, location and design concepts have been informed by a landscape appraisal and visual analysis within the wider context of the mountains and the city. The CGIs attached to the environmental impact assessment indicate that the building will have a minimal, and generally benign impact on the landscape of Montpelier Hill from both local and distant viewpoints.

The impact of the visitor centre on these views has informed the architectural design and material language of the building. The dominant finishes are stone and wood

- materials that are indigenous to the Dublin Mountains, which will visually integrate the new structure into the landscape, as well as providing a visually impressive piece of architecture for visitors to the location.

Save for the new visitor centre building, no significant changes are proposed to be made to the receiving environment or views and prospects to, and from the site. Where there may be potential impacts, these will be mitigated by the reinstatement of shrubs, trees and planting to assist the integration of the building into its landscape.

The proposed tree-top walkway will be a feature both in itself and as a destination within the wider Dublin and Wicklow Mountains landscape. Meandering through the canopy of Massy's Wood, the structure will offer a unique view of the beauty of the woodland. As the bridge is within the canopy of the existing trees, it will have minimal impact on views and prospects.

Two areas of Montpelier Hill were clear-felled in 2016, exposing views of the hill from places in the southern suburbs and the M50. The proposed reinstatement of these areas with broadleaf species will have a benign

impact on views and prospects.

In summary, the new structures proposed are to be built into the existing hillside landscape and carefully screened by existing and proposed new trees, notwithstanding that a primary objective is that the café / restaurant and outdoor terraces, especially, enjoy panoramic views over the city and thereby meet the objective of the building being a destination for tourists and day-trippers to the Dublin Mountains, while being sensitive to its impact on views and prospects to and from the mountain.



View of proposed tree-top walkway



View of proposed visitor centre



View of proposed visitor centre from Hell Fire Wood

3.13 Archaeology and Architectural Heritage

The archaeology, architecture and cultural heritage of the Dublin Mountains is of huge significance, ranging as it does from prehistoric times to the modern era. Focusing on the immediate areas of Massy’s Wood and Montpellier Hill, all known historical sources were consulted to determine the extent of known archaeological and architectural heritage sites within the boundaries of the Dublin Mountains project area.

A total of six sites of archaeological significance are listed in the Sites and Monuments Record: two Neolithic Passage Tombs in the surroundings of the Hell Fire Club; a standing stone to the east of the Hell Fire Club; an enclosure to the east of the standing stone; a wedge tomb in Massy’s Wood; and the Hell Fire Club itself.

The SDCC Record of Protected Structures and the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage were inspected to determine the extent of buildings and structures of special historic, architectural, artistic, cultural, social or other interest within the boundaries of the project site.

Those identified consist of the ruined eighteenth century Hell Fire Club; the post-1798 Military Road from Rathfarnham to Glencree and Aughavannagh; the Massy’s Wood walled garden, Gothic lodge, ice house, sluice, saw mill, water wheel, well, millers cottage, bridges and culverts.

An understanding, knowledge and sensitivity to the archaeological, architectural and cultural significance of these artifacts has informed the plan and detailed design of the visitor centre development.

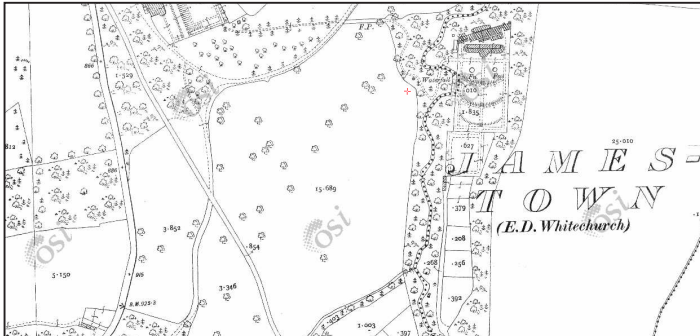
The overall intention of the proposal is to make provision for a larger number and wider range of users to experience the Dublin Mountains by expanding the mountain’s current recreation offer. This will be done within the context of conserving the landscape, ecology and heritage in a manner that is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

This will be achieved by ensuring the works in and around the vicinity of artefacts of archaeology, architecture and cultural significance will be carried out in accordance with international best practice and the principle of doing “as little as possible and as much as is necessary” to:

- Improve the condition of the structures and ensure their physical integrity, and
- Facilitate improved access to and appreciation of the structures by visitors to the location.

The interpretive and education facility in the proposed visitor centre building will seek to highlight and interpret the heritage of the site and the wider range of visitors projected to use the mountains for leisure, recreation and cultural purposes in the years ahead.

Further details of the measures proposed to conserve and interpret the archaeology, architecture and cultural heritage within the boundaries of the project site are contained in the attached environmental impact assessment.



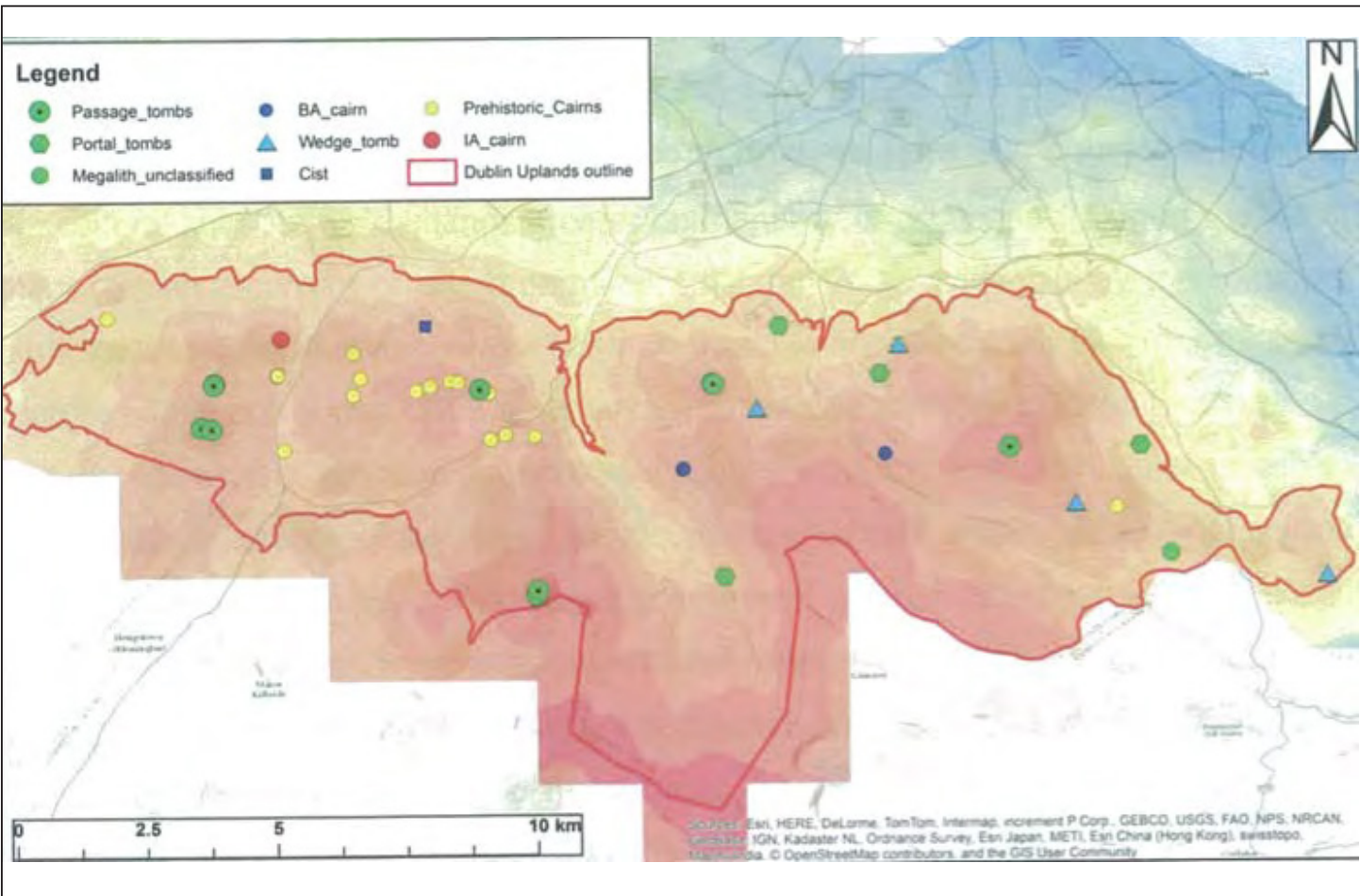
Massy's Estate historic map circa. 18th century



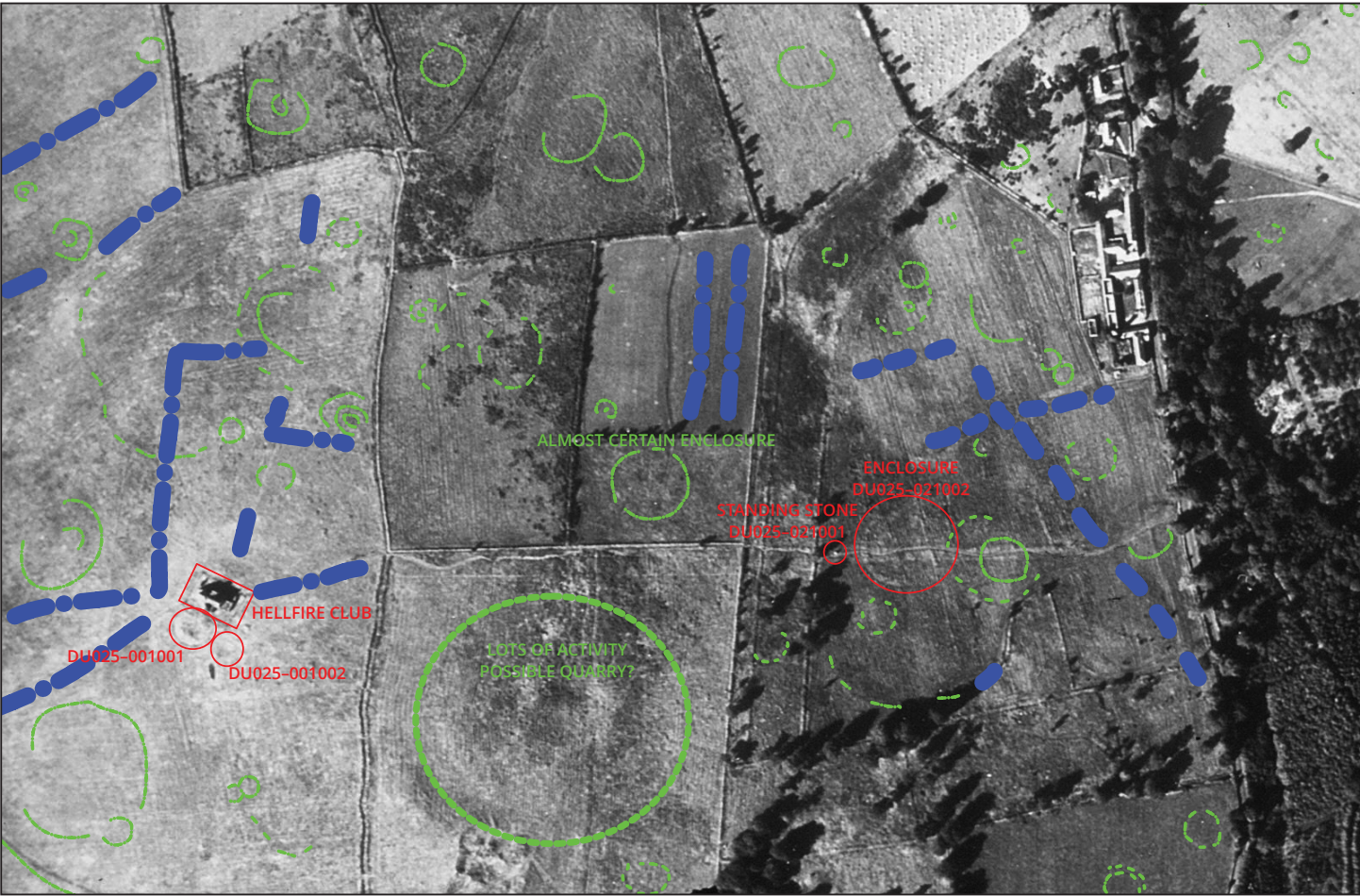
Hell Fire Club and its Environs



Old Military Road



Mapping of tombs and cairns in the Dublin Uplands area



Archaeological and historic monuments annotated on site map

3.14 Infrastructure and Services

The proposal includes for new utilities and drainage to serve the development. A new water supply will be required from the closest existing public water main at the intersection of the R115 - Old Military Road / Killakee Road - and the R113 - Gunny Hill - to the proposed visitor centre building.

Site investigations have determined that bedrock on the Hell Fire property is too shallow to allow for on-site treatment of foul water. It is therefore proposed that a new sewage connection be made from the site to the existing sewer network in the urban area to the north.

Surface water run-off generated by the increased areas of hard surfaces will be minimised by the green roofs of the visitor centre and permeable paving in the parking areas. The surplus will be dealt with by a series of interconnected swales and ponds on the lower slopes of Montpelier Hill, which will be channelled into a new culvert under the R115, which connects to an existing drainage channel on Massy's Wood that feeds into the Glendoo Brook.

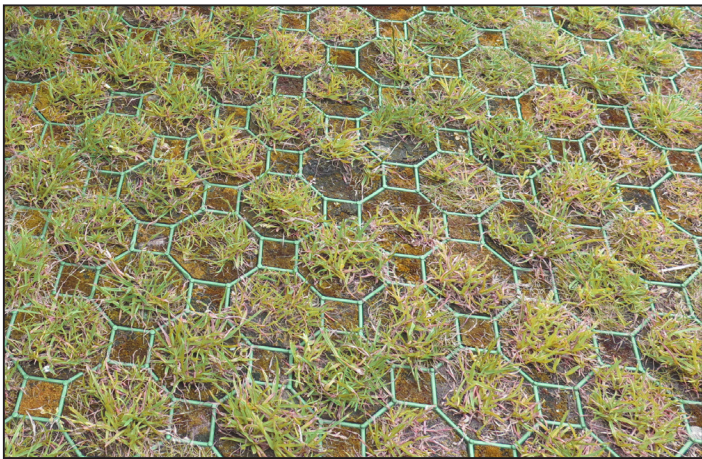
These are connected by narrow ditches and shallow streams on the surface of the rocks and under paths with underground pipes. The water is discharged under the road in an underground pipe into Massy's Estate contained in a shallow stream to the existing open river.

A 150mm diameter sewage pipe running under the R115 will connect the proposed site to the existing sewer network.

This strategy encompasses constructed wetlands, permeable surfaces, shallow ponds that are easy to manage and creates biodiversity, incorporating SDCC's policy and objectives for sustainable drainage systems.



Model of Dublin Mountain Visitor Centre proposal



'Bodpave' permeable surface for carpark



'Grasscrete' permeable surface for carpark



Reeds as part of SUDs

3.15 Mechanical and Electrical Services

The Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre building will be custom-designed to be an exemplar of environmental responsibility, with low energy mechanical and electrical services tailored specifically to the building’s function, size, geometry and location.

Energy efficiency and reliability will be the primary objective in the design of the services, all controlled by a building energy management system (BEMS) to provide a comfortable, healthy and functional environment.

The primary fuel to serve the development will be electricity; based on the site’s close proximity to existing electricity infrastructure and the opportunities it presents to benefit from on-site electricity generation. A new substation is required and this will be located discretely to the rear of the education / interpretation pavilion.

The main energy loads will be for heating and lighting. Heating will be provided by air source heat pumps located at the rear of the education / interpretation pavilion. Low-grade energy from the outside air will be upgraded to the temperatures required for underfloor heating and

domestic hot water.

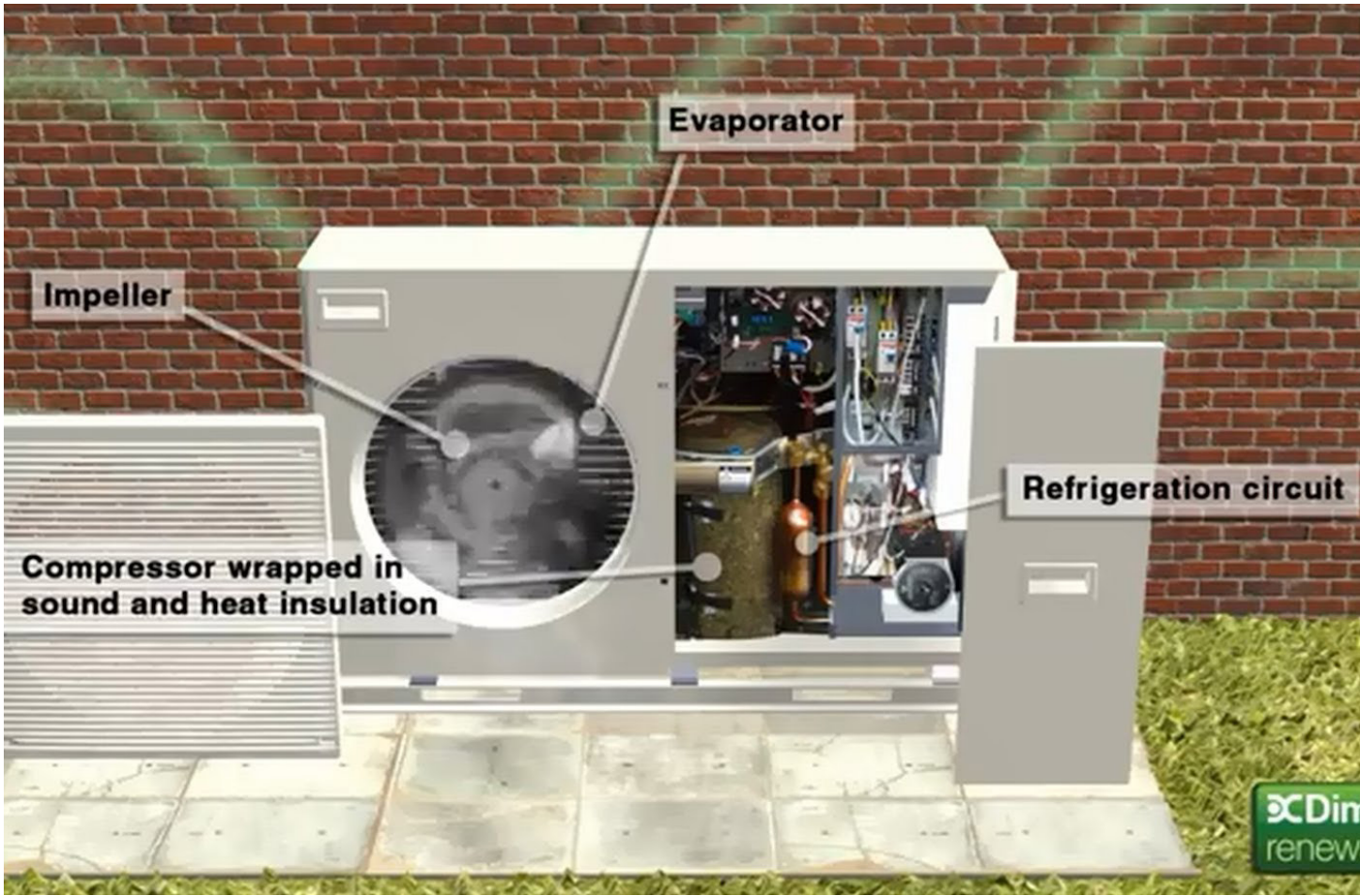
The exposed nature of the site and the east - facing orientation of the café / restaurant and education / interpretation pavilions will enable all public areas to benefit from natural lighting during normal opening hours. Artificial lighting will be provided by light emitting diode (LED) fittings, which use a fraction of the energy of fluorescent and halogen lamps and have a longer lamp life. Lighting will be controlled by presence and absence detectors, in conjunction with daylight sensors, so that lighting is operating only in areas where it is required.

Ventilation will be provided by mixed-mode systems that combine natural and mechanical ventilation. Natural ventilation will be provided through motorised operable windows. Mechanical fans will pull this air through the occupied spaces to provide sufficient ventilation.

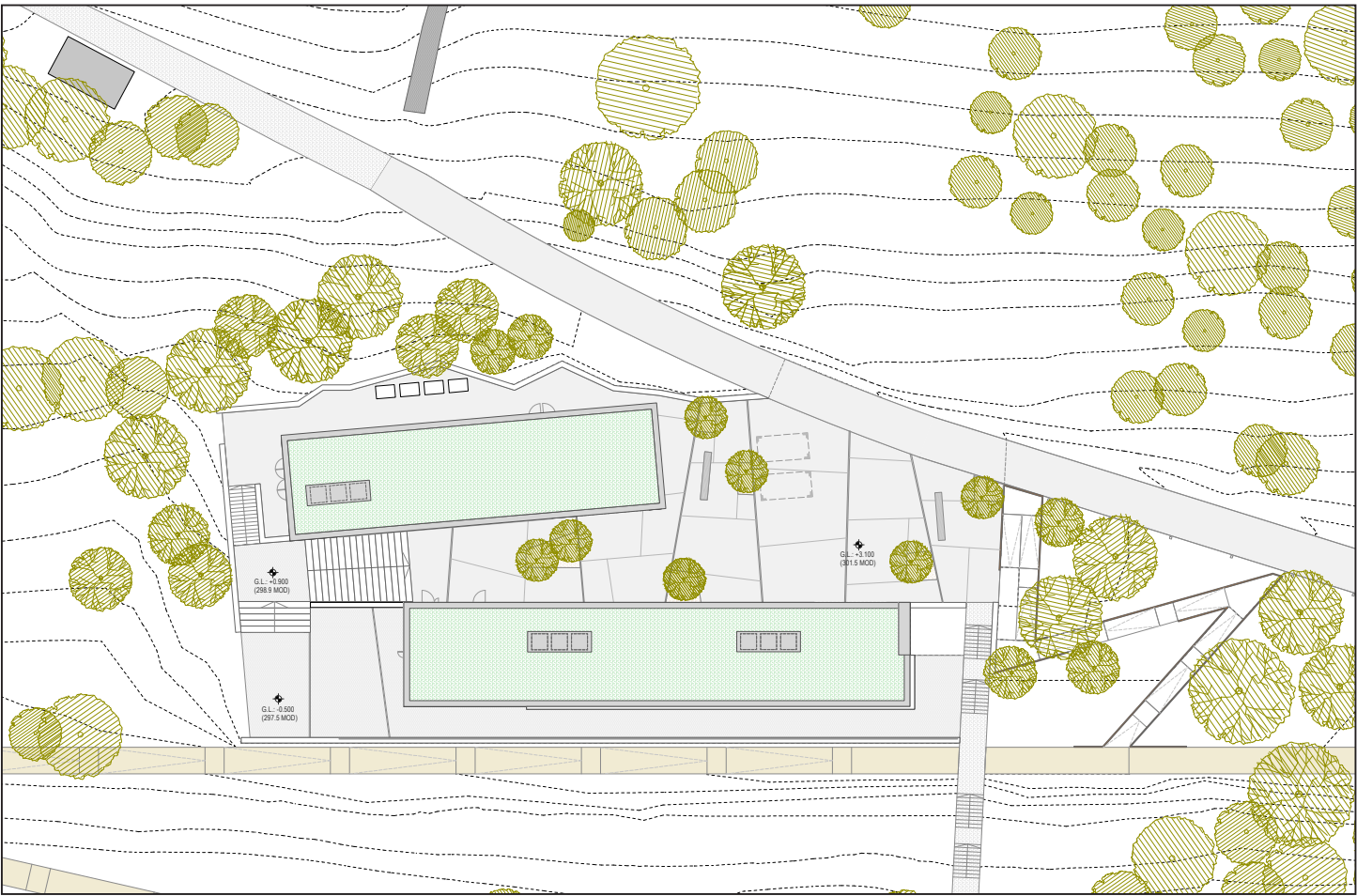
In summary, the visitors centre development has been planned to be environmentally sustainable; with the maximum amount of renewable energy systems designed to meet the Nearly Zero-Energy Buildings (NZEB) standards required for new buildings owned and occupied by public authorities after December 2018.



Natural lighting and ventilation in Airfield cafe, Dundrum (PKA)



Typical air source heat pump



Plan of Visitor Centre showing substation

3.16 Forestry and Arboriculture

The project team’s forestry advisor has carried out a comprehensive forestry report, which has informed ongoing design development and ultimately set out an assessment of impacts on forestry, legal implications and mitigation of forest impacts as accommodated in the EIA process.

The site is contained to the north by the urban fringe at Oldcourt, Woodtown, Newtown and the Dublin Mountains, culminating at Kippure in the south. Careful

design, development and management of the facility and receiving environment, particularly in the context of increased visitor numbers, would be required. The upland working forest and character of the Hell Fire Wood will be maintained with management of key areas of trees to enhance panoramic views.

Trees within the core development area that may be affected by the development have been assessed by the teams’ arborist, with the information of a tree survey prepared to BS 5837 (2012) standards.

The arborist has advised the design team on best practice in maintaining and protecting desirable specimen trees and groups throughout the core area of development. This held precedent in the design of the access and parking area and in integrating the proposed treetop bridge into the existing tree canopy in Massy’s Wood.

The northern and eastern slopes of Montpelier Hill will be converted into a permanent broadleaved/ mixed woodland landscape. The historic woodland patterns evident in remnant historic beech trees after recent

forest harvesting will be restored.

An appropriate setting for historic features will be provided with the Hell Fire Club being restored as a prominent landmark with trees to be set back at least 10m below the summit for legibility in views from the city.

The commercial forestry to the west will be retained and managed to complement enhanced amenity roles; diversification of species, continuous cover of forestry, enhanced ecological functions and exemplar forest practices.



Existing trees on Montpelier Hill



Existing tree in Massy’s Wood



Existing trails on Montpelier Hill



Existing trees in Hell Fire Wood

3.17 Site Lighting, Seating, Furniture and Signage

It is proposed that lighting to the car park area and along the forest road route to the visitor centre building will be provided. This lighting will be designed to have minimal impact on the ecology of the area, in terms of habitat disruption.

The lights will have a low level of light respectful of their surroundings. Discreet LED lighting along the treetop bridge is proposed to be integrated into the handrails. Low-level lighting will be provided by corten steel bollard lighting, mimicking the material quality of the tree-top bridge. Subdued lighting within the Hell Fire Club interior is envisaged at specific points, notably at step thresholds to provide safety where required.

The project design incorporates appropriate and well-designed seating and street furniture, to provide occasions for people of all ages and abilities to relax and enjoy the experience of the Dublin Mountains landscape. The proposed outdoor furniture includes for timber benches with corten steel supports.

The signage is to be integrated into the landscape, generally using low level corten steel supports. They will be located at areas of specific interest on the circular path around the Hell Fire Club, the Bridge House, Massy's Walled Garden and the car park. The signage will incorporate specific information in regard to views, heritage and ecology relevant to its location.



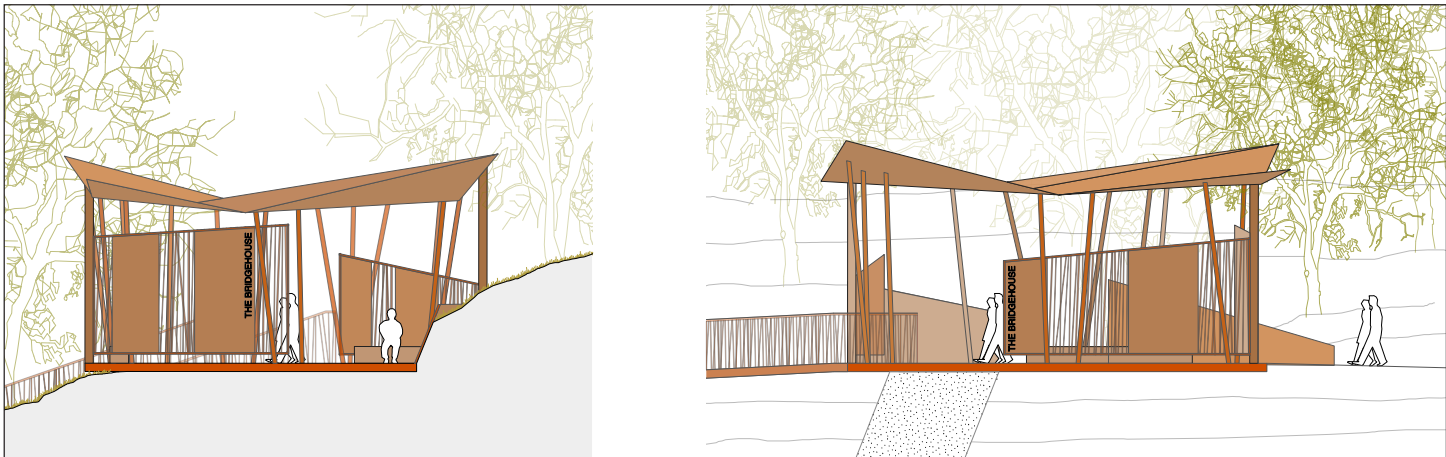
Seating and signage, Padraig Pearse Centre, Rosmuc, Co. Galway



Signage, Padraig Pearse Centre, Rosmuc, Co. Galway



Reference Corten steel sign



Corten steel proposed Bridge House



Reference Corten steel bollard lighting

4 Business Plan

4.01 Operation and Business Management

The 2016 feasibility study contained an economic analysis, which included information on the projected visitor numbers and the target markets at which the visitor centre development might be aimed. This was reviewed as an integral part of the first stage of the current design and planning process.

This review - by CHL Consulting Ltd. - included a detailed economic and market analysis that included an overview of the core markets at which the development is targeted and the range of facilities that might be expected to be included to attract the number of visitors necessary for the development to be viable - from domestic and overseas sources.

The CHL business plan estimated the growth in visitor numbers to the mountains that might be anticipated over the next five-years, and these projections have determined the scale and the range of facilities proposed in this plan. Details are outlined in the attached environmental impact assessment.

The CHL analysis has underpinned decisions in relation to the range of facilities and the scale of the proposed development, including the decision to reduce the size of the visitor centre building from the originally proposed 2,000 square metres to the 980 square metres now proposed, corresponding to a reduction in the capital cost of the overall development from the €22,000,000 originally estimated, to the current figure in the order of €15,000,000.

The CHL report summarises the proposed operation, management and marketing plan for the visitor centre. It concludes that the facility will be able to operate on a self-financing basis - excluding capital construction costs - and without annual running costs being subsidised by SDCC or Coillte, albeit on the basis that the development is expected to have negative financial returns in the first two years of its operation.

In terms of the operation and management of the development, it is proposed this will be done by a joint steering group comprising South Dublin County Council, Coillte and the Dublin Mountains Partnership. This will have responsibility for outsourcing elements of the facilities - under a lease and / or rental arrangement to be decided - to a private entity with commercial

experience in the leisure and tourism sectors.

It is proposed that revenue from the commercial café / restaurant / retail functions of the development will cross-support the non-profitable, interpretative and educational aspects of the visitor centre. Certain elements will be excluded from the commercial operations of the development so that there is no payment for use of these by members of the public, i.e. the parking areas, the tree-top walkway, the ramblers lounge and the public toilets.



Shop in Stonehenge Visitor Centre



Norwegian Mountaineering Centre information display



Information exhibition at Rosmuc Visitor Centre



Self-service at Airfield Café

5 Environmental Impact
Assessment

5.01 EIA Report

An environmental impact assessment has been prepared in respect of the proposed development in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 and associated EU directives, legislation and guidance documents, including the new EIA directive (2014/52/EU) due to be transposed into Irish Law by May 17th 2017.

The proposed development can be classified as “Tourism and Leisure”, identified in Schedule 7 of the 2001 Planning and Development Regulations as one which requires

an EIA screening on the basis of the criteria listed in the regulations. The site of the proposed visitor centre project is environmentally sensitive on account of it being in a mountain and forest landscape of historical, cultural and archaeological significance.

In accordance with the regulations, South Dublin County Council made a request to An Bord Pleanála to determine whether a Part 10 EIA was required for the proposed development. Scoping for the EIA was made by the design team in consultation with South Dublin County Council and Coillte.

An Bord Pleanála confirmed that an EIA is required. The Bord considered that the combined site of Montpelier Hill / Massy’s Wood contained artifacts of cultural, historical, archaeological and ecological interest, and decided that the significant increase in visitor numbers arising from the proposed development required full and proper consideration in terms of their possible impacts on the environment and the potential for mitigation of these. In making its decision the Bord did not accept its inspector’s recommendation.

As a result of the Bord’s decision, the accompanying

EIA is submitted to An Bord Pleanála under Section 175 (3) of the 2000 Act. The report has been prepared by Cunnane Stratton Reynolds and includes for all known environmental impacts of the development including - inter alia - roads, traffic, transport, biodiversity, archaeology, architecture, heritage, water, hydrology and population as required by EIA Directive and Irish law and guidelines.



Aerial view of model of proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre



View of the tree-top walkway in Massy’s Wood



View of the proposed visitor centre



Information representation around the Hell Fire Club

6 Conclusion

6.01 Summary

The Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre development is intended to improve the amenity value of, and provide a place of introduction to, the landscape and heritage of the Dublin Mountains. As the numbers of visitors to the mountains grows in line with Dublin's population - and the increasing number of visitors to the city - in the decades ahead, it is imperative that the recreation, landscape and heritage potential of the mountains is optimised - and managed sustainably - so as to meet this demand.

The 2016 feasibility study - commissioned by South Dublin County Council and Coillte - assessed alternative locations for the type and scale of development that might best meet these objectives. With a unique combination of natural and man-made heritage features - as well as a strategic location between the city and its rural hinterland - the combined Massy's Wood / Montpelier Hill properties are considered to be the ideal location for the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre development.

The improved walks, access and parking facilities proposed will expand the mountain's recreation, leisure and cultural offer, and the sensitively designed visitor centre and tree-top walkway will enhance the amenity and recreation value of the mountains for visitors from Dublin, elsewhere in Ireland and abroad.

South Dublin County Council and Coillte have engaged in an extensive public consultation process; the purpose being to involve as expansive an audience as possible in the evolution of the design, to take account of issues raised and to incorporate these into the development of the scheme. The current plan was presented to the June meeting of South Dublin County Council and the scheme was unanimously endorsed by the elected members.

As a tourist facility, the proposal is fully aligned with the 2015 Fáilte Ireland / Grow Dublin Tourism Alliance strategic plan, Dublin – A Breath of Fresh Air, and its campaign to reposition the city and county as a destination for overseas visitors. The development is also included as a specific objective in the 2016 – 2022 South Dublin Development Plan.

The Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre will be an economic driver for the Dublin South County area; the projected growth in visitor numbers will increase “dwell time” in the locality, thereby increasing spending on goods and services and, with it, employment growth.

While the overall intention is that the development will expand the current recreation and culture offer of the Dublin Mountains and make provision for a larger number and wider range of users, this plan and the accompanying EIA report demonstrates what will be done within the context of conserving the landscape, ecology and heritage of the mountains in a manner that is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.



View of proposed Visitor Centre on Montpelier Hill