

The Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre

Operational Management Plan for South Dublin City Council

Rev 1
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1 Introduction

The proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre has been specifically and deliberately developed to respond to the legislative and policy mandate from central government for tourism development for local government.

This specific project evolution is summarised as follows:

Date	Narrative
Jan 2013	Fáilte Ireland (The National Tourism Development Authority), established the "Grow Dublin Task Force" to revitalise the tourism industry in Dublin.
Jan 2014	Grow Dublin Task Force report is endorsed and launched by the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, and established as national tourism policy. Core insight is to grow tourism <i>beyond</i> a pre-existing exclusive focus on the downtown city centre area – specifically, the recommendation of the Task Force is to focus on two of Dublin's under-utilized natural heritage assets – Dublin Bay and the Dublin Mountains. These are considered to be features that could potentially attract more overseas visitors to Dublin under a new brand and marketing campaign – <i>Dublin – A Breath of fresh Air</i> .
May 2015	South Dublin County Council launches its Tourism Strategy for South Dublin County 2015-2020. This strategy responds directly to the Grow Dublin Task Force recommendation in relation to the Dublin Mountains with a specific objective to develop an Interpretation/Outdoor Pursuits Center in the Dublin Mountains.
June 2016	South Dublin County Development Plan published with specific objectives (ET5 Obj 3, and ET5 Obj 4) restating the intention to develop an Interpretation / Outdoor Pursuits Centre in the Dublin Mountains clearly representing the local government implementation of national policy.
July 2017	Preparation and submission to An Bord Pleanála of EAIR for DMVC
Autumn 2017	Stage 1 Approval from Fáilte Ireland for grant support in relation to funding for DMVC demonstrating support from the national tourism board for the proposed development.

The proposed management structure and associated management and operational arrangements for the proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre (DMVC) reflect the strategic importance of the proposed project and are detailed in this report.

The DMVC development is a joint venture between South Dublin County Council and Coillte underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding with a supporting Service Level Agreement between both parties. This model will ensure a fully managed site with a proactive management approach.

The management structure as outlined in the Diagram 1.0 is proposed to ensure transparency, effective governance and community engagement for the successful operation of the DMVC. It should be read in conjunction with the Design Report and the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) submitted under separate cover.

The report details how the facility will be operated and managed in the event of development consent by An Bord Pleanála (subject to any conditions of consent). It also addresses key commitments to the monitoring and management of the cultural heritage resources, natural heritage resources, and the landscape surrounding the proposed DMVC facility, which have emerged from the EIA process.

The management structure and arrangements set out in this report represent the next stage (should the development be consented by An Bord Pleanála) in the continuing evolution of this project.

Diagram 1.0



2 Management Structure and Responsibilities

2.1 Strategic Oversight Group

A Strategic Oversight Group comprised of representatives at Senior Management/Director Level from SDCC and Coillte will be established to provide formal high-level governance in relation to the proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre. This group will meet at least every two months in the initial year following opening of the centre in order to address strategic and governance issues in relation to the DMVC as well as responding to issues arising from the Management Steering Committee. The frequency of meetings can be reviewed as necessary after the first year of operation.

South Dublin County Council will have direct responsibility for the overall management of the proposed facility through:

- A contract, lease or license associated with the planned engagement of an externally contracted operator who will manage the newly developed core facilities at the DMVC – essentially, the Car Park, Visitor Centre, and the Tree Top Pedestrian Bridge and associated access / parking management, waste management and other related tasks.
- Management and maintenance of the Hell Fire and Massy's Wood properties including:
 - Maintenance of all areas outside of the responsibility of the externally contracted operator; and assuming all maintenance responsibilities in the absence of an externally contracted operator;
 - Annual, or more frequent as required, inspections of (a) the archaeological and architectural heritage features and, (b) identified key ecological receptors (species and habitats), and implementing any repair, improvement or protection works required;

- Liaison with neighbouring landowners, residents and other stakeholders through the appointment of a nominated contact in South Dublin County Council with responsibility for communicating with stakeholders and coordinating responses from within the council's existing resources to site/operational issues i.e. ecology, archaeology, traffic and waste management, etc. In addition, South Dublin County Council's Customer Care section will be the first point of contact for any public queries or concerns in relation to the operation and management of the proposed facility.
- Responding to any issues raised by the externally contracted operator to do with the area outside of the operator's area of responsibility including issues that might be brought to the operator's attention by users).

Coillte will have direct responsibility for:

- 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 on the site and vice versa.
- Annual inspections and management of the trails.
- Emergency responses as required -clearing blown-down trees, culvert repairs, trails etc.

In the absence of an externally appointed contracted operator, South Dublin County Council will ensure the delivery of all necessary services at the centre through direct labour provision.

2.2 Dublin's Mountains Visitor Centre Management Steering Committee

It is proposed to establish a permanent management steering group comprised of suitable representatives from South Dublin County Council, Coillte and the Dublin Mountains Partnership as well community representatives.

Reporting to the Strategic Oversight Group, the DMVC Management Steering Committee will be responsible for oversight of the key operational and management functions relating to the proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre including all services provided by any externally appointed contractors but this is underpinned by a commitment from South Dublin County Council to take ultimate responsible for all management and operational matters through its property management, environmental services, tourism, economic development, parks, recreation and other functions.

The steering committee will also provide a direct avenue of communication for the local community through the local stakeholder representatives. It is envisaged that the stakeholder representation will be decided by and come from the groups/individuals/organisations that have engaged in this process through an independent stakeholder forum (that can be resourced and /or facilitated by the project partners if requested). This provides a direct route to address matters arising within the local community (including businesses) regarding the operation of the site with formal representation from the local community on the management steering committee. This committee will also be the public interface between the various stakeholders in relation to the facility.

This committee will meet at a minimum of bi-monthly basis (i.e. every two months) for the first year of operation and thereafter as required but not less than quarterly and will report any significant matters arising to the Strategic Oversight Group for resolution.

2.3 Planned Externally Contracted Operator for the Parking Area, Visitor Centre and Pedestrian Bridge

It is envisaged that the core facilities at the newly developed DMVC, i.e. the visitor centre, the parking area and the pedestrian bridge, will be operated and managed by an externally contracted operator with commercial experience in the hospitality/leisure/tourism sector procured and managed by South Dublin County Council. The operator will have responsibility for the operation, maintenance, and management of:

- Non-traded activities and facilities. This refers to activities and facilities where no charge will be introduced for the general public. These include the parking area, the pedestrian bridge / tree canopy walk, the audio-visual and exhibition area, educational facility, the Ramblers' Lounge, public toilets and amenity areas.
- Traded activities and facilities. This refers to activities and facilities where it is planned to introduce a charge. These include café/restaurant, kiosk and shop. It is noted that the provision of a café/restaurant is a customary feature of a leisure amenity/tourism facility such as the proposed DMVC, and that the scale of the proposed café/restaurant is in keeping with the scale and facilities at the DMVC itself. There may be opportunities to utilise the exhibition/educational area of the facility for corporate events for which charges may apply.

In the absence of an externally appointed contracted operator, South Dublin County Council will ensure the delivery of all necessary services at the centre through direct labour provision.

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 an externally contracted 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.
- Licence with Share of any operating surplus arising: The steering group lets the facilities to an operator for a token / minimum rent.

Subject to development consent, once the Strategic Oversight Group is formed, it will decide on the optimal means of forming an arrangement with an externally contracted operator. It is understood that in arrangements of this sort, a considerable amount of negotiation can take place before an agreement can be established that works for both the externally contracted operator and SDCC. Equally, the final detail of the arrangement will only become clear once this point has been reached, and once the obligations and commitments of both parties have been documented in a Service Level Agreement (SLA) structure. It can be expected however that no operator will be incentivised to come on site under any arrangement other than one that provides for full operational cost recovery.

2.4 – Examples of other operated visitor facilities overseen by South Dublin County Council and Coillte

Both South Dublin County Council and Coillte have experience overseeing the successful operation of visitor facilities, examples include:

Lough Key Forest Park

Lough Key Forest and Activity Park is a joint venture between Coillte and Roscommon County Council who established the company Moylurg Rockingham Ltd which operates the park as a commercial entity open to the public. The project was originally funded by the Irish Government and part-financed by the European Union under the National Development Plan's Tourism Product Development Scheme, which was administered by Fáilte Ireland. For further information visit www.loughkey.ie. The park is open to the public on a free to access basis with additional attractions and activities available on a pay-to-access basis.

The Round Tower, Clondalkin

Opened in July 2017, the Round Tower Visitor Centre located in Clondalkin Village was conceived by South Dublin County Council in collaboration with the local community to celebrate the 7th Century Round Tower and to respond to the origins of the site and its history. The Round Tower Centre is managed by a contracted operator that is responsible for the daily management and operation of the centre under the terms of a service level agreement between both parties. There are monthly meetings between the Council and the private operator to review operations at the centre. In addition there is a strategic oversight committee which meets on a quarterly basis and includes representatives of senior management from South Dublin County Council, The Happy Pear and Community Representation.

The governance and management structures of the centre demonstrate collaborative partnership between the Council, the Local Community and the Private Operator which has been critical to the success of the project to date. For further information visit www.theroundtower.ie

2.5 Exclusion of Certain Facilities from Commercial Operation

It is proposed that certain elements of the facilities for which the externally contracted operator will have management responsibility, should be identified in the constitution of the Strategic Oversight Group, and in any arrangement with the externally contracted operator, as being non-traded activities/facilities. This measure will be introduced to ensure that such activities/facilities are not operated on a traded basis, i.e. that payment will never be required for their use by the public, and that this position is unambiguously set out in the Final Service Level Agreement document. These elements include the parking area, the pedestrian bridge / tree canopy walkway, the 'Ramblers' Lounge, and public toilets.

Notwithstanding this "free to use, free to enter" principle, these elements are proposed to be included in the externally contracted operator's area of responsibility because they will require day-to-day management and maintenance, and the operator will maintain an appropriate staff presence on site during operating hours. It should also be noted that the conventional and widespread practice of appointing an externally contracted operator in the first instance, is to benefit from the management expertise, cost control and lean systems capability typically associated with such an operator. These operational attributes are not always available internally within a public agency.

It is proposed that the education facility will be subject to bespoke conditions regarding the manner and extent to which it will be made available for private hire. Such conditions may, for example, 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 further proposed that the café, audio-visual, and exhibition facilities will be the subject of bespoke conditions to ensure that any private hire use does not unduly restrict access by the general public.

2.6 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 (or South Dublin County Council in the absence of any such operator) 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 externally contracted 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.

2.7 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, at the trail head or at features of the site, to provide information and advice to walkers / visitors and assist in educational activities, guided walks, etc.

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.

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

3.3 Special Events

With its unique characteristics (facilities and heritage features) it is anticipated that there may be opportunities for the DMVC to host special events occasionally. 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 and significance of the DMVC, enable and activate its potential to contribute as a public amenity 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 Strategic Oversight Group and the externally contracted operator.

4 Trails Monitoring and Management

It is proposed that the Strategic Oversight Group will be responsible for carrying 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 Strategic Oversight Group will 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. A record of the condition of each structure / feature will be retained and updated on each inspection or where repair works or other management measures have been carried out. This will enable the conservation architect and/or archaeologist to track any changes in the condition of each site and its setting and will inform management and repair measures.

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 as appropriate. 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/buffered by fencing or vegetation, where appropriate, to reduce the risk of/exposure to wear and tear and any resulting damage to the feature.

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 Strategic Oversight Group will 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 a suitably qualified and experienced 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, mitigation or compensation 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 additional IAPS clearance.

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 shorter) intervals will be implemented.

The draft Red Squirrel Conservation Management Plan will be agreed with South Dublin County Council and Coillte. This includes a number of targets and actions to monitor red squirrel and grey squirrel, to enhance the habitats for red squirrel and pine marten and to control grey squirrels in Massy's Wood.

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 7.3 below).

As the visitor centre will be manned by the staff of the externally contracted operator 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

² KER1: Red Squirrel

KER2: Badger

KER3: Otter

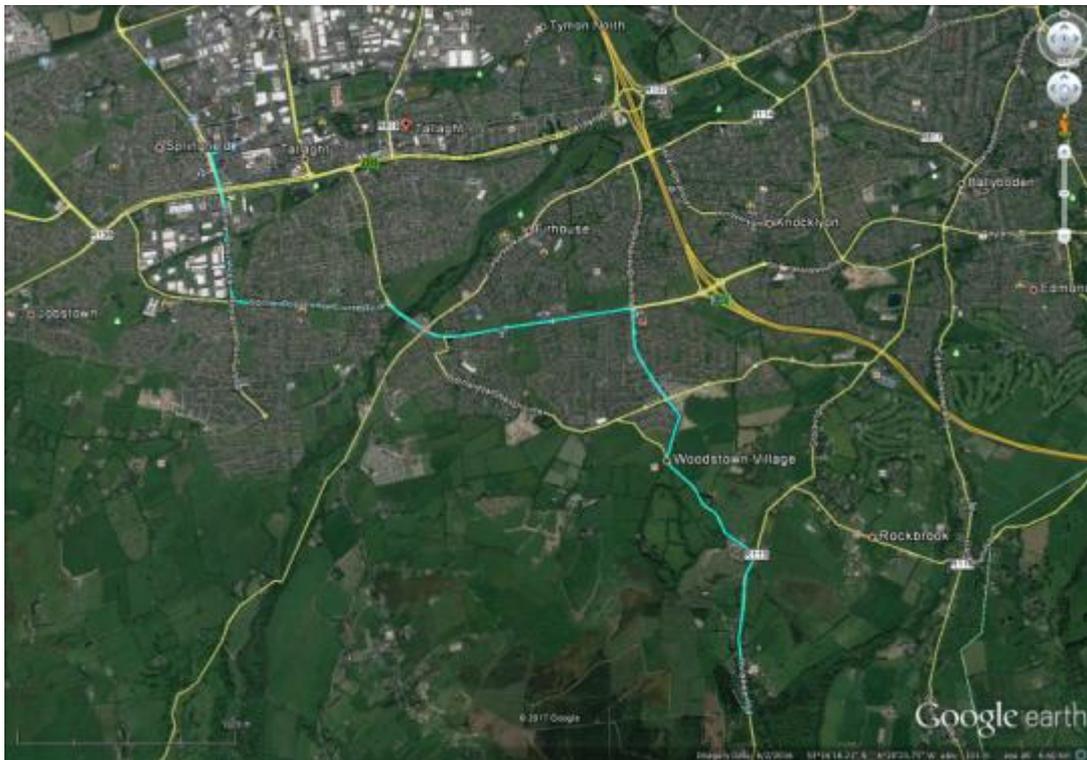
KER4: Bats (all Irish species except Lesser Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros*)

KER5: Ponds

KER 6: Invasive Alien Plant Species (IAPS)

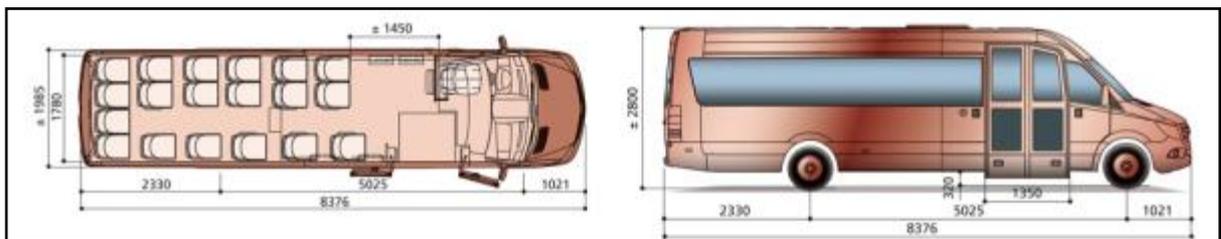
KER7: Glendoo Brook

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 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

As part of the marketing programme for the proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre, the Park & Ride service will be actively promoted 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.