

To : The Secretary,
An Bord Pleanála,
64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1.

AN BORD PLEANÁLA	
TIME 12.14	BY Hand
25 SEP 2017	
LTR-DATED _____	FROM SM
PL _____	

AN BORD PLEANÁLA	
Received From:	4 Redwood Lawns, Kilnamanagh, Tallaght, Dublin 24
Fee:	
Receipt No:	

25 September 2017.

Re : Application by South Dublin County Council under Section 175(3) of the Planning and Development Act 2000(as amended) for permission to construct the "Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre" of 980 m2 at an elevation of c.300 metres at the Hell Fire Wood, Killakee, Dublin 16, to enlarge the Coillte Car Park to 275 car spaces and 5 coach spaces, construction of a "tree canopy walk"/pedestrian bridge over the R115 to link the Visitors Centre building with Massy's Wood, conversion of 26ha of Coillte's Hell Fire Forest from commercial coniferous to broadleaf forest, further development along the R113 and R115 Roads and installation of a 1.5mile long new watermain line and sewage pipe under the R115 from the Hell Fire property to Gunny Hill where it links with the R113 as well as creation of a new footpath along the same stretch of the R115.

AN BORD PLEANALA REFERENCE: OGS, JA0040

Dear Secretary,

We wish to formally object to the proposed development of the proposed Visitors Centre for the following reasons :

1. While the proposed Visitors Centre is permitted under the South Dublin County Development Plan it is clearly an anomaly under the zoning of the High Amenity area where the emphasis is on permitting necessary buildings only. The proposed Visitor Centre is not a necessary building here.
2. The proposed Visitors Centre building is clearly visible from the photomontages supplied regarding the views from Zone A-Close Views and Zone B-Mid Range Views mostly due to the elevation of the proposed building at around 300 metres and because of its sheer length which makes it prominent in the landscape.
3. The proposal to extend water and sewage services out to the site of the proposed centre at Hell Fire Forest via a distance of 1.5 kilometres along the R115 from Gunny Hill is undesirable as effectively it will mean the developed area of South Dublin County will extend right up to the proposed development.
4. While considerable emphasis is placed in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report by the applicant that the proposed Visitors Centre is to facilitate as stated in Volume 1, page 26 "The County's principal resource with potential for development for tourism are the Dublin Mountains", the actual proposal is to create a Visitors Centre just inside the Dublin Mountains combined with "a wow factor" of providing views over Dublin City and Dublin Bay which people can obtain already from the summit of the Hell Fire Forest at the Hell Fire Club building.
5. The proposal aims initially to double the number of visitors to 200,000 and to further increase it to 300,000 within 10 years of construction of the proposed Visitors Centre. This will be facilitated by the applicant in its role as a planning authority encouraging private development in the vicinity of the proposed Visitors Centre so the Centre if permitted will become a stimulant for such development. Bord Pleanála in refusing permission for both the Wicklow Mountains Interpretative Centre and the Burren Interpretative Centre were concerned by the potential of such centres to create further development in such sensitive locations.

Yours Sincerely,

Denmot Deering
Mickey Wallner
Jonathan Barry

Sinead

AN BORD PLEANÁLA	
Received:	25/9/2017
Fee:	€50 - cash
Receipt No:	B140556

Response to South Dublin County Council application for “Dublin Mountains Visitors Centre” : 2.

6. In Chapter 2, Page 16, Section 2.3.3.1

It is stated that “The majority of the application site including the entire Hell Fire Forest property and the south and western part of Massy's Wood fall into the area zoned HA-DM High Amenity Dublin Mountains with the objective :

“To protect and enhance the outstanding natural character of the Dublin Mountains area.”

The remainder of the Massy's Wood property is zoned RU Rural and Agriculture with the objective :

“To protect and improve Rural Amenity and to provide for the development of Agriculture.”

In summary here we have the planning authority for this area namely South Dublin County Council who formulated the adopted South Dublin Development Plan for this area now attempting to argue why they should be allowed to breach their own Development Plan for this area in order to impose a “Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre” upon this area.

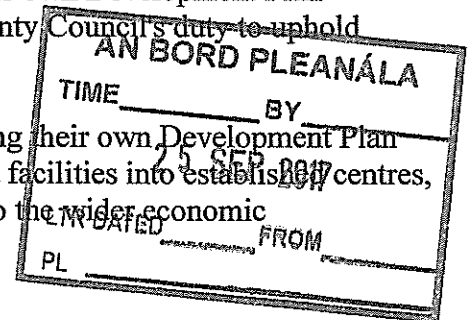
7. In Chapter 2, Page 17 of the ELAR :

Restaurant/Cafe use is “open for consideration” if located in existing premises only and if it is not located above the 350 metre contour.

Shop local is “open for consideration” if located in existing premises only and if it is not located above the 350 metre contour.

So here we have South Dublin County Council proposing to An Bord Pleanala that it the Bord should grant South Dublin County Council permission to breach its own Development Plan standards for this area in direct contradiction to South Dublin County Council's duty to uphold its own Development Plan standards for the area.

8. South Dublin County Council are in this application undermining their own Development Plan policy in ET5 where they state their objective is :“To direct tourist facilities into established centres, in particular town and village centres, where they can contribute to the wider economic vitality of urban centres.”



9. In Chapter 2, Page 24 of the ELAR :

Montpelier Hill, which is the site of the Hell Fire Forest and South Dublin's proposed “Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre” is identified in Table 9.2 of the South Dublin Development Plan(2016-2022) as a Prospect to be preserved and protected.

The policy in the South Dublin Development Plan is defined in Heritage Conservation and Landscapes (HCL) Policy 8 : Views and Prospects : “It is the policy of the Council to preserve Views and Prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest including those located within and outside the County.”

HCL8 Objective 1 : “To protect, preserve and improve Views and Prospects of special amenity, historic or cultural value or interest including rural, river valley, mountain,hill,coastal,upland and urban views and prospects that are visible from prominent public places.”

Why should An Bord Pleanala facilitate South Dublin County Council as the applicant for the “Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre” to specifically breach its own Development Plan policy in relation to its own defined Views and Prospects for this area? In essence South Dublin County Council as the applicant are seeking permission from An Bord Pleanala to breach specific policies of its Development Plan in order to permit its proposed “Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre”. This is clearly contrary to previously commissioned reports such as that on Landscape Character Assessment produced by Minogue and Associates as a draft report for South Dublin County Council in May 2015 who warned on Page 90 regarding Landscape Character Area 4 River Dodder and Glenasmole Valley that its Landscape capacity to absorb further development there was :

“Negligible. Key Characteristics of the landscape are highly vulnerable to development.

Response to South Dublin County Council application for “Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre”: 3.

Development would result in a significant change in Landscape character and should be AVOIDED IF POSSIBLE.”

This judgement is explained further at Page 134 of the Minogue and Associates Report of May 2015 where they describe the “overall landscape value : High.” of this Landscape Character Area 4 River Dodder and Glenasmole Valley where South Dublin County Council are seeking permission to locate the “Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre” at Montpelier Hill.

“Combination of overall landscape sensitivity (high) with overall landscape value (high) = a capacity assessment of negligible :

Negligible : Key characteristics of the landscape are HIGHLY VULNERABLE to DEVELOPMENT.

Development would result in a SIGNIFICANT CHANGE in LANDSCAPE CHARACTER and SHOULD BE AVOIDED if possible.”

10. In Chapter 2, Page 25 of the EIAR :

“Currently one quarter of people accessing the Dublin Mountains for outdoor recreation do so at Coillte's Hell Fire and Massy's Wood properties. These properties have not been designed and are not managed to accommodate the existing and anticipated future usage.”

We agree with that statement. However the solution is not to propose to locate a “Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre” at Montpelier Hill but to improve the existing Coillte car park and to provide a footpath and a dedicated cyclepath along the R115 from Gunny's Hill to the Coillte car park so as to encourage more of the existing visitors to access this area in a more sustainable fashion and to provide Rangers to monitor the use of the car park. As this car park is not supervised this is creating a vacuum whereby anti-social behaviour happens there which unfortunately is considerable, particularly during working weekdays there as the numbers of visitors is more than on Saturdays and Sundays. Also people tend to park on the R115 on the same side as the Stewards House because they feel their cars are safer there than in the Coillte car park. FROM

AN BORD PLEANALA
TIME BY
25 SEP 2017
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11. In Chapter 2, Page 26 of the EIAR :

This is where South Dublin County Council explains what it means by a “WOW factor”. It defines this “WOW factor” through its “siting and views, architecture and association with a recognised feature of the Dublin Mountains.” It further states that : “The County's principal resource with potential for the development of tourism are the Dublin Mountains.” It goes on to state that the development of a “Dublin Mountains Orientation and Interpretation Centre would be located to provide views over Dublin Bay.” Despite all the emphasis on the Dublin Mountains they were still insisting that any facility must provide “views over Dublin Bay”.

In short this is where South Dublin County Council appear to have lost its way on this issue. It appears the desire is to bulk up tourism so that it would attempt to deliver all the superficially impressive statistics of tourism such as potential employment growth regardless of where it was proposed to site such “facilities”.

12. In Chapter 2, Page 27 of the EIAR :

“A 26 hectare area of the Hell Fire Forest property is the subject of a Memorandum of Understanding between Coillte and South Dublin County Council allowing – subject to An Bord Pleanala's approval for the proposed development - for the removal of this area from Coillte's commercial forest operation and its redevelopment for amenity use.”

The Memorandum of Understanding between Coillte and South Dublin County Council also reveals that Coillte is not contributing any financial assistance towards this project and will retain ownership of Massy's Wood and the remainder of the Hell Fire forest at Montpelier Hill. It appears that South Dublin County Council will be responsible for all of the actual works to

Response to South Dublin County Council application for “Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre”: 4.

create the “Visitor Centre” building and the enlarged Car Park at Montpelier Hill as well as the proposed works to Massy's Wood in addition to the proposed works at the Hellfire Club Building (1725) which apparently it will not own on Montpelier Hill. In summary as of now South Dublin County Council is taking all the risk while Coillte stands to make the most gains from this Memorandum of Understanding.

The Bord should request the applicant to provide a copy of this Memorandum of Understanding, as the original Memorandum of Understanding dated August 2016 ceased to have legal effect in August 2017 but it did provide for a further Memorandum of Understanding to be drawn up. If this was not completed this application would be invalid as SDCC would lack the legal authority to make it.

13. In Chapter 2, Page 31 of the EIAR :

“It is proposed to widen the R115 in places for a section of approximately 100 metres along the Massy's Wood boundary requiring the realignment of the existing boundary wall.”

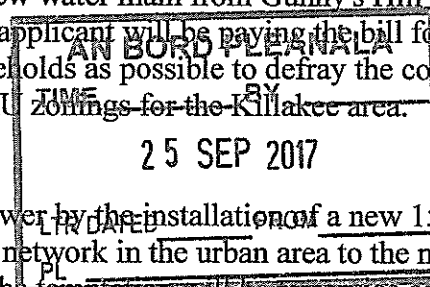
We believe this work would be unnecessary if the “Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre is not permitted to proceed.

When the Bord's inspector is visiting the site he/she should note the resurfacing of the R115 from just above Gunny's Hill which was done in August 2017 despite these works not being included in the South Dublin County Council Road Maintenance Programme for 2017.

14. In Chapter 2, Page 35 of the EIAR :

“A new water main will be required to serve the development. The existing watermain is located at the intersection of the R115(Old Military Road/Killakee Road) and the R113(Gunny's Hill).”

It will require about 1.5km of new piping to bring this new water main from Gunny's Hill to the site of the proposed Visitors Centre on Montpelier Hill. The applicant will be paying the bill for these works so the temptation will be to service as many households as possible to defray the cost of these works which will undermine the existing HA-DM and RU zonings for the Killakee area.



15. In Chapter 2, Page 35 of the EIAR :

“It is proposed that the site be connected to the public sewer by the installation of a new 150mm diameter sewage pipe from the site to the existing sewer network in the urban area to the north.”

The applicant will be paying the bill for these works so the temptation will be to service as many households as possible to defray the cost of these works which will further undermine the existing HA-DM and RU zonings for the Killakee area.

16. In Chapter 2, Pages 36 of the EIAR :

“For one stretch of the road(c.100 metres) it is proposed to widen the road(R115) by up to 1.2 metres in places, encroaching into the Massy's Wood property(Coillte owned) east of the road.”

We do not consider it appropriate that part of the original estate wall should be interfered with as is proposed.

17. In Chapter 4, Page 41 of the EIAR : Consideration of Alternatives :

The applicants attempt to justify their preferred location at Montpelier Hill on the basis that “development would not encroach SIGNIFICANTLY into the Dublin Mountains High Amenity (DM-HA) zoned area.” The fact of the matter is that the proposed development DOES encroach into the DM-HA Zone in the applicants County Development Plan for the Killakee area.

18. In Chapter 4, Page 43 of the EIAR : Rejection of Stewards House as an alternative :

“Stewards House provides no view, which was a key objective (and site selection criterion) for the

Response to South Dublin County Council application for “Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre” : 5.

Visitor Centre facility. Additionally it was considered that this option would not achieve the “wow” factor required for a new tourist destination of national status.”

The applicant appears to have got ahead of themselves again as normally people wait until a project has been completed and operational for several years before proclaiming it is of “national status.”

19. In Chapter 4, Page 43 of the EIAR : Private Sector Development : Section 4.1.4.1

“The proposed development is intended in part to act as a CATALYST for private sector amenity and tourism related development in the Dublin Mountains.”

Here we have South Dublin County Council breaching its own Development Plan to encourage development in the Dublin Mountains but going further by encouraging private sector development to locate there regardless of the constraints that would normally limit such development. It can be seen now that opening up new water and sewage services will lead to further development in an area that the Landscape Character Assessment of South Dublin County by Minogue and Associates (May 2015) in Landscape Character Area 4 : River Dodder and Glenasmole Valley has recommended should NOT BE PERMITTED.

The applicant repeats the comment about “to act as a CATALYST for private sector amenity and tourism related development” on page 52 of the EIAR.

20. In Chapter 10, Landscape and Visual Resources, Page 146 of the EIAR :
“Specific Prospects in the Plan that are of relevance to this development include Montpelier Hill.”
Why is South Dublin County Council making this application when it is bound to uphold the terms of its own Development Plan?

21. In Chapter 10, Landscape and Visual Resources, Page 150 of the EIAR :
Dublin Mountains Partnership Strategic Plan(2007-2017).
Dublin Mountains Partnership priority 1 of Theme 2 is to provide “a flagship welcome and orientation point for the Dublin Mountains(e.g. on Three Rock with viewing platform) and its management programme.”

No explanation is provided as to why this alternative was not considered in the EIAR.

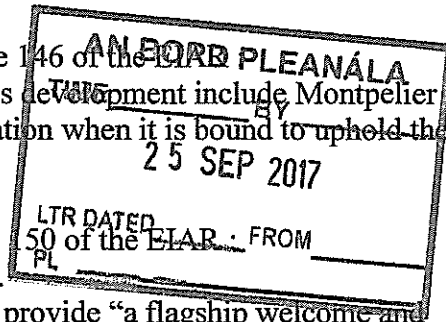
22. In Chapter 13, Material Assets-Forest, Page 297 of the EIAR : Projected Visitor Numbers :
“The Business Plan for the proposed development is estimated to attract approx 300,000 visitors per annum, 10 years after construction, which is an approximate 3 fold increase in the current visitor numbers to the site at the Hell Fire Wood. This would amount to 200,00 new visitors in addition to the existing 100,000 visitors.”

The Business Plan produced by the applicant is optimistic but it assumes South Dublin County Council will not require a return of the capital spent on this project. On page 35 of the Business Plan the situation is summarised as follows :

“The projected financial performance presented in Section 4, suggests that the DMVC could operate on a self financing basis, albeit it is expected to return a negative financial performance in the first three years of operation(start-up stage).” This means it has to be subsidised by the applicant for at least the first three years, in a situation where the applicant is not guaranteed an allocation of funding by the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

The Business Plan also states on Page 35 that :

“The two key variables determining the success of the DMVC will be its capacity to secure patronage from at least 40,000 of the estimated 100,000 existing visitors to the area and to secure a new and additional 25,000 visitors each year, over the first five years of its operation.” This is a very ambitious target especially securing at least 40% of the existing 100,00 visitors each year into the future. This target is questionable given that most of the visitors at Killakee appear to be casual



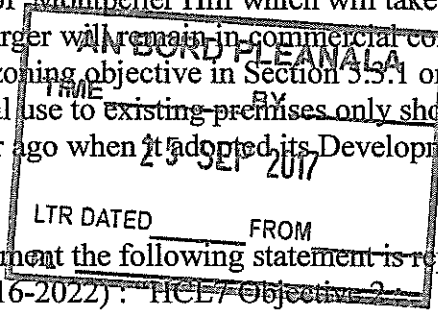
Response to South Dublin County Council application for "Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre": 6.

visitors who would be unlikely to want to use the proposed Restaurant in the proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre on an annual basis.

23. It would be premature for the Bord to grant permission for the proposed development without the Final Archaeological Report from the Hellfire Club Archaeological Project being made available to all parties so that they can make their comments on it. It is due to be published in October 2017.

24. The financial aspects of this application need to be examined further. The capital cost of this project is estimated by the applicant to cost 15million Euros but Bord Failte will only grant aid this project to a maximum of 7 million Euros so where is the balance of 8 million Euros coming from ? The applicant is a public authority with a lot of demands on it to meet necessary projects like Housing and to improve facilities for its staff, many of whom work out of portacabins. Then there is the likelihood that it will need to be subsidised for at least the first 3 years assuming it receives permission. There are many unanswered questions about how a local authority like the applicant can afford to finance this venture when it keeps informing its elected members that there is no available finance for any project.

25. The applicant has provided a Planning Statement "in support of an Application by South Dublin County Council to An Bord Pleanala ...for Approval of Development of the : Proposed Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre." A flavour of its failure to address the real planning issues is provided in the Views and Prospects section on Page 35 where it fails to mention that Montpelier Hill is a View and Prospect recorded in the South Dublin County Council Development Plan 2016-2022. Instead it leads with the following statement : "The proposed development includes proposals for the conversion of the conifer plantations on the east face of Montpelier Hill to permanent mixed deciduous woodland." This is only 26 hectares of Montpelier Hill which will take 10 years to achieve. The remainder which is substantially larger will remain in commercial coniferous forestry. An unusual approach is taken in relation to the zoning objective in Section 3.5.1 on Page 27 where : "The restriction of restaurant/cafe and shop-local use to existing premises only should not apply." This was the applicant's position less than a year ago when it adopted its Development Plan for South Dublin County.



26. On Page 36 of the applicant's Planning Statement the following statement is reproduced from the South Dublin County Development Plan(2016-2022) : "HCL7 Objective 2 : To ensure that development is assessed against Landscape Character, Landscape Values and Landscape Sensitivity as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment for South Dublin County(2015) in accordance with Government guidance on Landscape Character Assessment and the National Landscape Strategy."

The Planning Report concludes by stating that "The proposed development will protect and improve the landscape character of the Dublin Mountains through the interventions described above and the active management of the site as a Green Infrastructure asset."

The Planning Report made no mention of the advice provided in Landscape Character Area 4 : River Dodder and Glenasmole Valley in the report produced by Minogue and Associates for South Dublin County Council in 2015 entitled Landscape Character Assessment where they stated on Page 93 that the Landscape Capacity of this area at Killakee is :

"Negligible. Key Characteristics of the landscape are highly vulnerable to development. Development would result in a significant change in Landscape character and should be avoided if possible."

27. For all of the above reasons the Bord is urged to refuse permission for the proposed development of the "Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre." by South Dublin County Council.