

GLENDALOUGH AND WICKLOW MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

Visitor Experience & Management Masterplan
October 2023

Foreword

Glendalough

A Living Landscape

Our landscapes are a layered palimpsest of geological and human activity, displaying the complex processes which have shaped the natural environment and which have influenced human interaction. While dramatic mountainous and valley landscapes can offer a vision of picturesque beauty which can facilitate an instant 'snapshot' moment, there clearly exists a deeper value as to why we feel such a strong a connection with this natural scenery.

In her poetic prose, 'The Living Mountain', Nan Shepherd describes the intricate play of soil, altitude, weather and living organisms within mountainous regions as having a 'mysterious' effect on our senses. It is this 'mysterious' effect which led to the Wicklow Mountains valley being used as a medieval religious retreat, and it is this same quietness and serenity which makes the area popular with outdoor enthusiasts today.

The Wicklow Mountains National Park epitomises a fusion of tangible and intangible values, displaying a natural picturesque beauty overlaid with layers of cultural and built heritage.

It is in these layers of cultural and built heritage, wildlife and habitat, that meaning is found, and while even a superficial exposure brings reward, rich experiences are to be had in a deeper understanding of, and immersion in, all these complex interactions. The value of Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park, then, is not just in its tourism based economic importance to the region, important though that is, but in its much wider contribution to human experience, reinforcing our recognition of the need for protection and enhancement of wild landscapes and habitats, bringing alive the purpose of official designations, proving the need for investment in their long term care and showing how human interaction is compatible with the sustainability of heritage landscapes.



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1.0 Introduction

The Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan (VEMMP) for Wicklow Mountains National Park is a seven to ten year plan. It is designed to provide a phased roadmap to protect and enhance the setting of Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park, and to establish key sustainability objectives against which future projects will be assessed.

The central challenge for the VEMMP is how to balance the ever-increasing desire for people to visit and experience Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park, with the overriding importance of protecting and conserving those values which give the area its significance.

This VEMMP sets out a strategy for achieving the over-arching objective for Wicklow Mountains National Park, which is to create a sustainable balance between enhancing the area as a visitor destination based on outdoor recreation, trail networks, and direct experiences with nature, and conserving its natural, built and cultural heritage. The Plan sets out an iterative process which will continually adapt to the needs of all users of the National Park and will balance the core conservation and heritage values with visitor demand.

The Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan is informed by the previously published Tourism Interpretation Master Plan (TIMP), which identifies the unique character of each of Ireland's National Parks and seeks to guide the phased and coherent development of sustainable tourism within the parks.

This document is also informed by the existing Wicklow County Development Plan 2016-2022, and the supplementary vision for Laragh-Glendalough 2022 which highlights the aspiration for the area to be a prime high quality and long-stay tourist destination renowned for its natural beauty and its unique archaeological and built heritage.

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) has informed each stage of the evolution of this Plan and has resulted in a series of evidence-based measures that will ensure that the implementation of the Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan will cause no harm to the sensitive surrounding environment.

This Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan is firmly based on the belief that it is possible to achieve that balance – all the proposals for development of the physical infrastructure and attractions are carefully considered against their impact on the significance of the place, and a series of enhancements will ensure that significance grows.



1.1 Project Background

The Wicklow Mountains National Park is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Ireland, enjoying a national and international reputation for its spectacular landscape, its unique ancient monastic settlement, and its cultural, architectural, and archaeological heritage.

Glendalough (Gleann Dá Loch) is a well-established tourist hub within the National Park and is recognised as a major cultural attraction due to the volume of visitors it attracts year on year – around one million visitors annually. The area is rightly recognised as a site of national and international significance due to its monastic city and natural heritage and is a potential World Heritage Site, but those very qualities have unfortunately led to visitor management issues in recent years.

Given the exponential growth in outdoor recreational participation in recent years, it has been recognised that a visitor management plan is required to ensure that the impacts are manageable, sustainable, and not detrimental to the continuance of the natural, built and cultural heritage.

In 2020, Fáilte Ireland, in partnership with National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the Office of Public Works (OPW), the National Monuments Service (NMS) and Wicklow County Council commissioned Consarc Design Group with a multidisciplinary team to deliver a Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park and Visitor Orientation Recommendations for Co. Wicklow.

The proposals are intended to balance the core conservation and heritage values of the NPWS, NMS and OPW with increased and sustainable tourism demand and to set out a co-ordinated approach between the different parties leading to a shared vision and plan with the visitor experience at the centre for future developments.

Key issues identified in the brief included:

- Improving the regional and seasonal spread of visitors
- Persuading more tourists to visit outside seasonal peaks
- Encouraging people to visit areas outside of the main attractions

All of these aspirations intended to mitigate against regional and seasonal congestion and deliver a better experience for all.

It is a key aspiration of this plan to ensure that visitors are spread geographically throughout the wider Wicklow region and throughout the year to minimise peaks which can become unmanageable, and can be detrimental to visitor experience as well as ecological and heritage sensitivities.

Wicklow is a renowned destination for outdoor enthusiasts (overseas and domestic) who enjoy being active in nature, through activities such as walking, hiking, rock climbing, cycling and mountain biking. This VEMMP seeks to manage these areas of outdoor activity through better awareness and promotion of the range of options, along with the provision of alternative access points and improved facilities. This 'dispersal' strategy is aimed at spreading the benefits and impacts of tourism more evenly across the county and encouraging people to visit areas of less ecological sensitivity, and where there is sustainable infrastructure.

The VEMMP seeks to provide guidance on future development within the Wicklow Mountains National Park, ensuring sustainable tourism within the Park and wider area is married with the promotion and support of conservation.

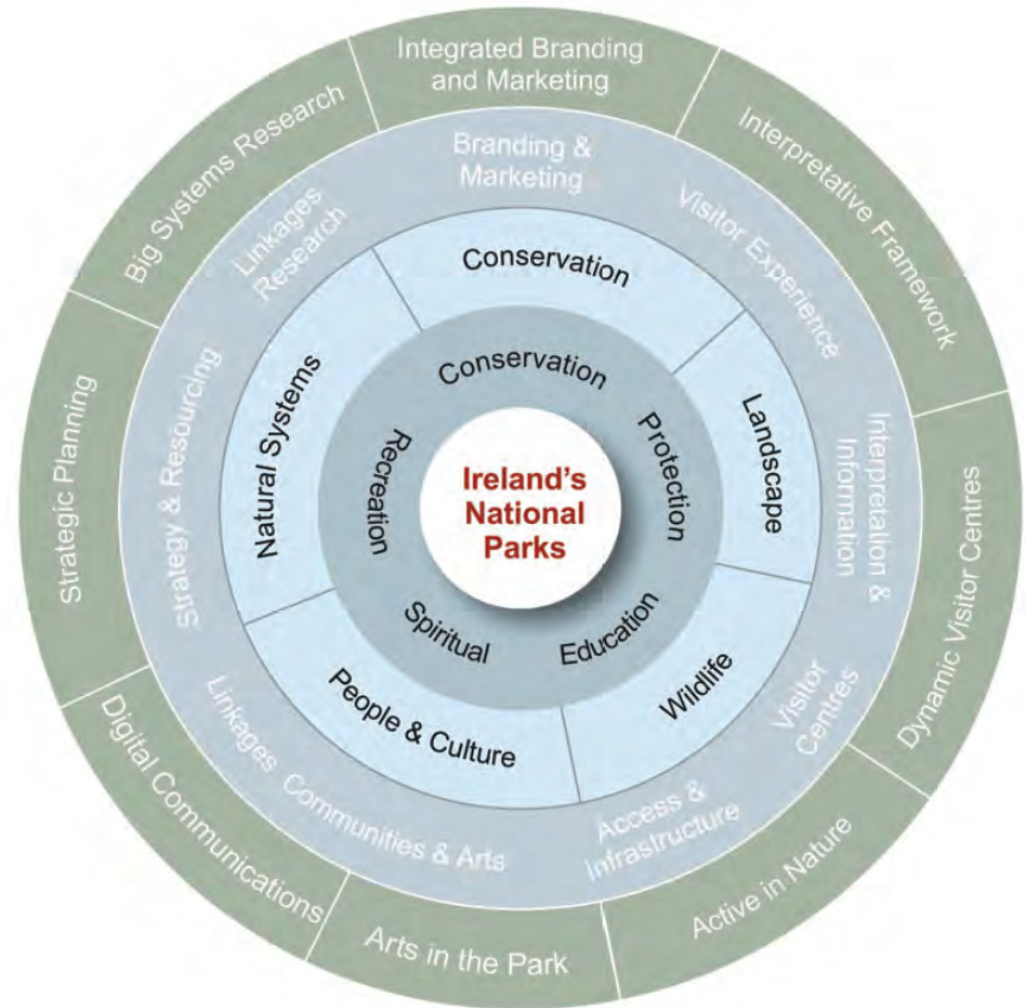


2.0 Summary of Report Contents

The Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan comprises a number of key elements which combine to create an integrated set of Aims, Objectives and Actions. A suite of technical reports detail the appraisal of the existing context relevant to each aspect, and lays out the aims, objectives and actions to be addressed by any new proposals within the area. This Summary sets out the contents of each of those reports and indicates where they fit into the overall Plan.

The contents can be divided into four broad sections

- A UNDERSTANDING**
Fact gathering of existing background information
- B PROPOSALS**
Recommendations to address key emerging issues
- C DELIVERY**
Recommendations for implementing and managing proposals
- D REVIEW**
Strategic Environmental Assessment and Economic Appraisal



The technical documents which combine to form the integrated set of Aims, Objectives and Actions are:

2.0.1 Section A UNDERSTANDING

A1 Visitor Analysis

Author: Outdoor Recreation NI

This is a technical background document which brings together known information about previous and existing visitor patterns, trends and numbers. The work on this identified the difficulties in collating information from different sources, but it sets out how much visitor traffic in Wicklow is generated by day trips from Dublin and how that skews the visitor hospitality infrastructure and incomes in the County.

A2 Gazetteer of Existing Attractions, Trails and Activity sites and Initial Analysis

Author: The Paul Hogarth Company

In the early stages of the project the team visited and collected information on a wide range of attractions and activities. This was supplemented during the extensive public consultation process and we now have a comprehensive record of visitor sites, although this is fluid with new initiatives constantly coming on stream. The conclusion is that in general there is no shortage of visitor activity opportunities in Wicklow but some surprising gaps in provision (such as the amount of off road family cycling currently available) were identified.

A3 Traffic Surveys

Author: Kevin McShane Ltd

The early information gathering process identified that although issues of congestion around Glendalough and some upland care parks were well known, there was little in the way of relevant data in respect to the number of people per car and parking dwell times.

An extensive traffic and car parking survey was undertaken the weekend of 21st - 24th May 2021 in conjunction with Wicklow County Council and the results are presented in a technical report. This weekend is normally one of the busiest of the year and proved to be instructive in the extent of congestion, car queuing, car parking in obtrusive areas and other issues detrimental to a good visitor experience. The data obtained from these surveys also allows collation with the pedestrian visitor data as set out in the Visitor Analysis paper and gives a factual basis for the calculation of car park requirements in and around Laragh, and indicators of upland car parking requirements.

A4 Analysis and Concept Development

Author: The Paul Hogarth Company

Analysis of the initial surveys, consultations and site visits led to the formation of a concept development of the Plan. This has been reviewed and developed through the consultation and detailed design process but is included here to show how the thinking behind the plan emerged.

A5 Feedback on Public Consultation

Author: The Paul Hogarth Company

A detailed report on the public consultation process has been prepared by the Paul Hogarth Company and widely circulated so consultees could see the results of the feedback and the teams interpretation of it. In general there was wide support for the initial aims and objectives of the plan which have followed through into the proposals.

SECTION A UNDERSTANDING

2.0.2 Section B PROPOSALS

B1 Recreational Trail Masterplan - Two parts and Appendices

Author: Outdoor Recreation NI

This is a county wide set of proposals for enhancement of the existing trail network based on achieving the three aims of the Plan – Enhancement, Dispersal and Improvement. Part 1 sets out the overall strategy with a series of objectives and actions including the need for a central, online information hub, a co-ordinated approach to signage, improvements to car parks and facilities, designation of sustainable 'Discovery Walks' capable of absorbing large numbers of people looking for an introduction to the outdoor environment. Other recommendations relate to off road cycling including the lack of family cycling opportunities and the potential for the Outdoor Recreation Hubs as designated by the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Forum. Part 2 of the report sets out detailed proposals for the upgrading of a number of the key sites to make them robust and environmentally sustainable and improve the visitor experience.

The proposals in these plans are integrated into the overall Masterplan and in particular the Glendalough Valley Plan as sustainable walking and cycling infrastructure is a key part of this, as set out below.

B2 Glendalough Valley Plan

Author: The Paul Hogarth Company, Tandem Design, Consarc Design Group, Kevin McShane Ltd

The Masterplan contains a significant series of proposals for the Laragh-Glendalough valley aimed at transforming the visitor experience and minimising the impacts on the local community. The rationale for them is contained in the 'Principles and Phases' paper, illustrated in the Hogarth and Consarc maps and drawings and the Tandem Interpretation Strategy. It is recognised that overnight change will be difficult and so the 'Principles and Phases' paper sets out a proposed phasing strategy by which incremental change builds up to the longer term transformation. The physical proposals go hand in hand with the management and delivery proposals set out separately, but the two issues are integral, as discussed below.

B3 Wicklow Wide Strategies

Author: The Paul Hogarth Company, Tandem Design

An important part of the overall brief was County Wicklow wide 'Visitor Orientation' and the proposals for this are contained in a series of visuals prepared by the Hogarth team and a interpretation strategy developed by Tandem. Both these documents seek to build on the strengths of the many attractions, activities and sites throughout the County and proposes a series of Visitor Hubs, spread through the County, building on the particular strengths, assets and potential of each area.

SECTION B PROPOSALS

2.0.3 Section C DELIVERY

C1 Management and Delivery Structures

Author: Consarc Design Group

It was recognised in the Plan brief that co-ordinated working across a number of state bodies; Wicklow CoCo and the local community, private owners and businesses, was crucial to the delivery of a comprehensive and broadly acceptable Plan. This was reinforced during the public consultation process with strongly worded responses suggesting that support for the Plan was dependant on a credible and resourced delivery structure. It is recognised that this is a complicated area but it is crucial to overall success and so the Management and Delivery Paper sets out a phased approach to the development of integrated management structures. Early collaborative projects between the stakeholders could include a mechanism for the collecting and collating of visitor counter data (traffic and pedestrians), a combined approach to signage and a one stop shop for visitor information – both for the paying attractions and the trail access details.

A separate 'Management Case Studies' document gives examples of three current approaches to management of similar areas and issues – in the Mourne, the River Nore Catchment and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park in Scotland

SECTION C DELIVERY

2.0.4 Section D REVIEW DOCUMENTS

D1 Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment

Author: Doyle Kent, Faith Wilson Ecological Consultant

The proposals have been developed by Faighté Ireland by Planning and Environmental consultants, who have carried out a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment on the Plan.

D2 Ecological Requirements for Successful Funding & Support of Projects Resulting from the Masterplan

Author: Faith Wilson Ecological Consultant

Partners and stakeholders responsible for objectives, actions and projects coming from this Plan will be required to demonstrate compliance with measures relating to sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management. Table 1 within Appendix D2 itemises the requirements to be considered and resolved at Project Level.

SECTION D REVIEW



3.0 SECTION A
UNDERSTANDING
summary

3.1 Assessing the Significance of Wicklow Mountains National Park

The significance of Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park can be summarised as follows:

- The sublime landscape setting; a dramatic glacial landscape interwoven with historic ecclesiastic and productive human activity.
- The connectivity between spirituality and natural serenity which saw Glendalough as a centre of hermitage in Celtic Ireland through St Kevin and subsequent pilgrimage routes.
- The monastic settlement; one of the largest and best-preserved medieval ecclesiastical sites in Ireland of global significance, with evidence of human occupation from Neolithic times.
- The importance and value of the landscape and habitat – designated both as a SAC (Special Area of Conservation), and a SPA (Special Protection Area) as part of the European Natura 2000 Network of protected sites, all founded on the areas of ecological importance to a number of key species and habitats.
- The National Park designation which brings with it a recognition of the need for and potential of management and visitor services including environmental education, landscape and habitat enhancement. The state ownership is a recognition of the national importance of Wicklow Mountains to the people of Ireland.
- Mining Heritage; the Wicklow Mountains are part of a huge granitic mass, which extends from Dun Laoghaire to New Ross forming the largest expanse in northwestern Europe incorporating The Glendalough, Glenmalure and Glendasan valleys
- The Great Military Road: Running from Rathfarnham to Aughavanna, the Great Military Road indicates a fascinating history of the 1798 rebellion in Wicklow. Covering 58 km, it was constructed between 1801 and 1809 and is still a key route through the Wicklow Mountains, although mostly used by cars today. It traverses the inhospitable mountain blanket bog habitats which are a key feature of the Wicklow Uplands.



3.2 Assessment Process

Throughout the duration of this project in 2020 and 2021, the VEMMP consultancy team undertook an assessment and consultation process to discern key issues which effect the Wicklow Mountains National Park experience. Current and historic visitor numbers were reviewed along with traffic numbers to give factual credence to concerns raised at community and stakeholder consultation events. In tandem with this consultation and information gathering, detailed site surveys were conducted to assess the existing ecological and archaeological sensitivities of the area.

A thorough research and cataloguing exercise was undertaken of existing attractions, trails and activity sites within the wider Wicklow area to ascertain the current visitor offer within the region. The output of this consultation is shown in **Appendix A2**.

A survey of the existing signage, wayfinding and interpretation strategy was undertaken to inform key narrative elements to be further explored through interpretation, and how this is currently used to disperse visitors throughout the Wicklow Mountains National Park and wider Wicklow area.

The consultation process was conducted online and in person with statutory bodies, local businesses and staff as well as the local community to understand the current perceptions around issues such as visitor numbers, congestion, and attractions. The feedback received was used to inform further research and further refinement of the VEMMP.



3.3 Identification of Issues

Throughout the consultation process, a number of key issues emerged as common concerns and potential threats to the continued use, enjoyment and sustainability of Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park. It can be said that all of these key points are mutually connected; for example ineffective visitor management can lead to traffic congestion, which in turn can lead to subsequent impact on archaeological and ecological sensitivities due to human activity.

The main issues identified were:

- **Traffic access and car parking**

Causing congestion at peak times. Traffic data and observations on the current existing congestion experienced in the Glendalough valley and upland car parks is documented in **Appendix A3**.

- **Visitor Management:**

It was noted and observed that visitors are not suitably managed, directed or dispersed to avoid congestion on key days throughout the year.

- **Ecology Concerns:**

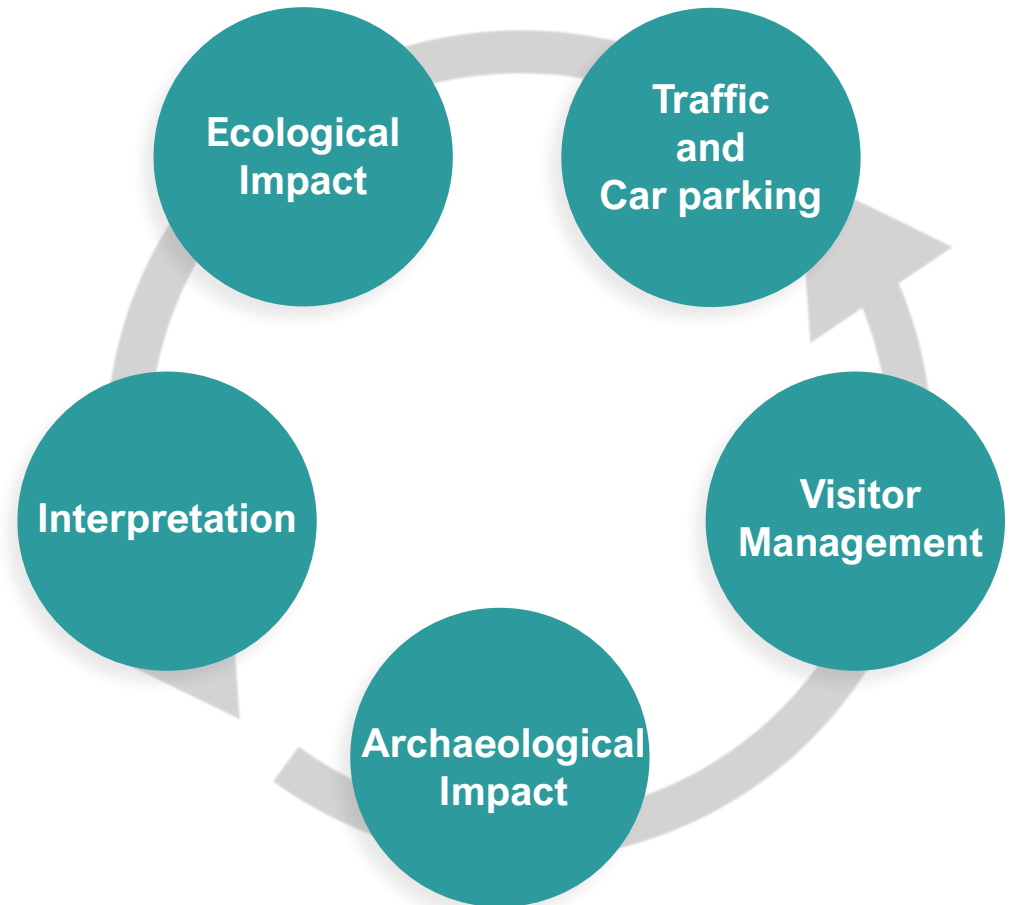
including erosion of existing habitats and impact on the designated area.

- **Archaeology Concerns:**

including disruption and potential damage to heritage assets within the area

- **Interpretation:**

The need for suitable information to foster care, respect and knowledge of the significance of the Wicklow Mountains National Park and Glendalough valley was a key recurring issue within the research and issue identification process.



3.4 Realising the potential

Awareness has grown in recent years of the threats to the environment and landscape character of Wicklow - erosion, congestion, climate change, pollution, littering and waste disposal are all contributing to the loss of habitat and biodiversity, damage to sites and monuments, a diminution of the integrity of the landscape and the loss of natural capital.

Such issues are not confined to Wicklow and are to a greater or lesser extent present throughout rural Ireland. However, the presence on the doorstep of over 2 million people in the greater Dublin area creates a unique situation for Wicklow bringing with it the pressures of car based day trips which generate traffic and congestion without, largely, the consequent financial contribution to the area from accommodation, hospitality and other visitor services. This inevitably creates tensions between host communities and visitors which are in no-one's interests.

The Covid 19 pandemic has not created these tensions but it has exacerbated them, with significant increases in day visitors and consequent congestion, littering, erosion, interruption of farm activities all at a time when hospitality was unable to fully function and there was little financial input into the local economy. All these issues were identified in the research and survey stages of this Plan and endorsed in the comprehensive public consultation process undertaken in the Spring of 2021.

The challenge is obvious – what measures are needed to reverse this friction, to become a virtuous circle of slow, sustainable tourism where investment in the natural and built environment goes hand in hand with improved visitor infrastructure, creating a better visitor experience, where visitors are proactively managed to avoid conflicts with the local communities and inward investment from overnight accommodation, activities, experiences and hospitality brings economic advantage?

There is no shortage of visitor attractions in Wicklow – trails, historic and cultural sites, gardens and estates, managed attractions and around it all, a special natural environment. However, there is a marked shortage in comprehensive, co-ordinated management of that resource. Ownership and responsibility is split amongst a myriad of state bodies, local authorities, private estates, farmers and individuals. All have their own responsibilities and pressures on resources but none have the responsibility or capacity for overall management. Dealing with congestion and other consequences of exceeding the carrying capacity of individual sites is in no single body's remit.

Glendalough is the prime example of this as although the issues and pressures occur in many other areas it is in the Laragh/Glendalough area that they are most manifest. The combination of the internationally recognised monastic site within a spectacular valley served by a narrow dead end road close to a small village within an hour's drive of over 2 million people creates a recipe for popularity and crowding. With a tradition of attracting visitors going back centuries, a reputation for safe car parking (unlike other, more remote, upland areas) availability of facilities and the comforting familiarity for repeat visitors, it is easy to understand why Glendalough gets between 750k – 1 million visitors a year – a figure that's puts it in the very top tier of Irish visitor attractions.

And yet, there is no overall mechanism for managing that visitor presence with responsibility split between National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the Office of Public Works (OPW), National Monuments Service (NMS), Coillte and Wicklow County Council for their 'own' areas with significant private sector owners holding key assets and land. On the other two visitor sites in Ireland with such numbers (Giants Causeway WHS and Cliffs of Moher) there are single bodies with the responsibility for overall visitor management. In comparable areas in Britain eg Loch Lomond and the Trossachs or Cairngorms National Parks, there are now established mechanisms for the co-ordination of state bodies and private landowners and management structures that involve the local communities. In the Mourne, which like Wicklow has a significant population within an hour's drive, the Mourne Heritage Trust was established to co-ordinate the work of state bodies and Council and liaise with farmers and landowners, and despite under resourcing and limited funding has made a significant contribution to managing the many challenges.

3.5 Sustainable Tourism

This Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan recognises that it has never been more important that the safeguarding and successful growth of Ireland's tourism sector is based on a sustainable and balanced approach. Environmental protection, economic competitiveness, community & visitor awareness and involvement, all play a part in successfully achieving and benefiting from this approach.

This Plan provides an opportunity to ensure that all existing and future tourism projects and initiatives within Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park area are planned, developed and managed in a sustainable and integrated manner.

The Plan has full consideration for the following:

- The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) goals and specifically the implementation of policies to promote sustainable tourism
- The Sustainable Tourism Working Group – Guiding Principles, and
- The VICE (Visitor, Industry, Community and Environment) Model for Sustainable Tourism

Valuing, promoting protecting and enhancing the environment and heritage as the cornerstone of the Plan area is vital to the success of the Plan itself.



The implementation of the following guiding principles is key to the success of the VEMMP. The findings and outcomes of these assessment processes can be viewed in Section 6.1

Guiding Principles for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism

- Assess the feasibility of developing and implementing visitor management plans where relevant
- Encourage the adoption of a responsible tourism approach with ongoing monitoring of environmental impacts
- Increase awareness and appreciation of the Plan area's unique landscape and environment
- Increase environmental performance among tourism businesses
- Encourage sustainable modes of transport and ensure they are accessible to tourists
- Introduce and implement minimum sustainable standards for tour guides
- Increase and promote environmental protection and enhancement when progressing actions derived from this plan
- Ensure the EPA's Environmental Sensitivity Mapping Webtool is consulted when implementing projects resulting from this plan.
- Ensure the Plan contributes towards delivering on Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2023
- Monitor the quality of visitor experiences and local social/cultural impact at key sites
- Ensure the visitor experiences are accessible to all where possible
- Support voluntary and community-led environmental protection projects, which in turn benefit tourism
- Advocate for the protection of key environmental and tourism assets
- Improve tourist management, particularly in mature and established tourist areas
- Encourage tourism related businesses to engage in the Leave No Trace Programme
- Ensure crucial infrastructure including water and wastewater services are in place and adequate
- Harness the importance of ecosystem services and protected sites to encourage sustainable levels of ecotourism growth and awareness
- Ensure invasive species management is in place through the promotion of effective biosecurity measures



3.6 Environmental Protection

The VEMMP recognises the need to integrate environmental considerations in a way that responds to the sensitivities and requirements of the wider natural environment. Environmental considerations including inland and coastal water quality and amenity, climate change, transportation, biodiversity, built and cultural heritage, landscape, critical infrastructure and communities, all play a vital part in the tourism sector of the Plan area.

The protection, enhancement and promotion of our most important tourism asset – the natural environment has been an integral part of the formation of this plan as is evidenced in the following:

- A firm commitment to ensuring sustainable and responsible tourism principles are practiced,
- Environmental assessments and resulting measuring and monitoring,
- Compliance with statutory decision making and consent granting at Plan implementation stage, and
- Integrating requirements for environmental protection and management

Consideration has been given to the requirement to undertake environmental assessment of this plan in order to ensure full legal compliance and to further integrate protection, enhancement and promotion of the environment in developing and implementing the Plan. The following sets out the two types of environmental assessments that were considered.

1. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

The Plan was examined for the need to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). On initial examination of the plan it was determined that full SEA would be required. The assessment process was completed having full regard to SEA Directive 2001/42/EU and to Statutory Instrument No. 435/2004 as amended. The outcome of this process can be referenced in the relevant environmental documents that accompany this plan.

2. Appropriate Assessment (AA)

The Plan was examined for the need to undertake Appropriate Assessment (AA). On initial examination of the Plan and in completing screening for AA, it was determined that Stage 2 AA would be required. The assessment process was undertaken having full regard to the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC and to Statutory Instrument No. 477/2011. The output and outcome of this process can be referenced in the relevant environmental documents that accompany this plan.





4.0 SECTION B
PROPOSALS
summary

4.1 Aims of the Plan

From all the research, studies and surveys, discussions and consultations and debates, three key Aims for this Visitor Masterplan have emerged.

AIM 1 **ENHANCE** the natural, built and cultural heritage

AIM 2 **DISPERSE** the benefits and impacts of tourism

AIM 3 **IMPROVE** the visitor experience

The proposals set out in this Plan are designed to be interdependent to ensure a careful mutually beneficial balance between physical developments, protection and enhancement of the natural environment, improving the visitor experience and investment in staff and management resources. It is through this balance and careful integration that the long term success of the project will be achieved, as well as the justification for the investment and the certainty of delivery.

The principles of the iterative phasing of this plan are outlined in **appendix B2: Glendalough and Laragh Valley – Principles and Phases**. These Principles are the basis for a phased approach to development based on incremental steps to match demand. They are envisaged as a progression from small scale interventions as soon as possible to relieve existing pressures forward to longer-term, comprehensive and ambitious plans to transform the visitor experience in the valley.

Specific proposals outlined in the Recreational Trail Masterplan and Glendalough Valley Plan focus on high profile visitor destinations which are currently under significant pressure. Proposals are outlined for the short, medium and long term, which address those challenges, providing clear recommendations that will deliver visitor experiences of international quality, whilst safeguarding the highly sensitive built and natural heritage environments.

These proposals sit in the context of a vision for the County as a whole and how it can fulfil its tourism potential. The Wider Wicklow plan recognises the wealth of visitor destinations across the County. It also recognises the current visitor patterns with day visits, mainly from outside the County, to individual locations. The Plan outlines a strategy for clustering, and promotion of an overall cohesion of visitor offer. This will increase the profile and attractiveness of Wicklow County as a place to visit, encouraging exploration of multiple destinations of interest, with associated extended stays. This in turn will be supported by improved accommodation and hospitality provision.

The wider vision for the County will enhance the visitor profile and quality of experience, creating employment and increasing local economic benefits.

Each of the proposals itemised within Section B of this Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan seek to address the 3 key aims of the plan to offer an all encompassing solution to improve the existing Wicklow Mountains National Park. The proposals are noted in the following documents:

B1 Recreational Trail Masterplan - Two parts and Appendices

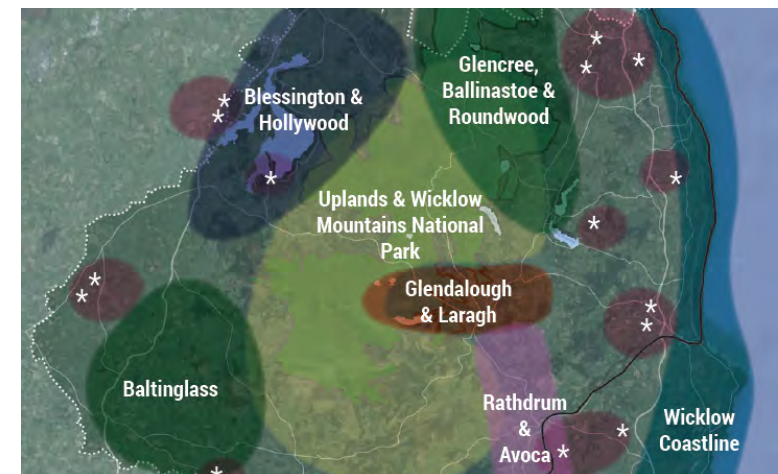
Author: Outdoor Recreation NI

B2 Glendalough Valley Plan

Author: The Paul Hogarth Company, Tandem Design, Consarc Design Group

B3 Wicklow Wide Strategies

Author: The Paul Hogarth Company, Tandem Design



Wider Wicklow areas of interest

WICKLOW MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

4.1.1 Aim 1 - Enhance

It is widely and generally accepted that the quality and integrity of the 'receiving' landscape – natural, built and cultural – is of crucial importance to the sustainability of tourism and the visitor experience – people will not want to visit a degraded and impoverished environment and it was clear from the consultation process that the public are very aware of issues around the quality of the landscape and environment, with comments on such issues as the importance of biodiversity, 'rewilding', replacement of coniferous plantations with native woodlands, control of the deer population etc.

There is recognition that all parts of our landscape are shaped by human activities over the centuries – nothing is completely 'natural' but at the same time there is a growing public sense that a re-balancing of 'development' and 'nature' is required. Through time, scars of previous generation's exploitation such as mining can become valued industrial heritage. That does not convey a rationale for future exploitation but the layers of change in a landscape are crucial to its understanding and through that its protection and enhancement, appreciation and enjoyment.

There are many studies and reports which show that current 'protection' measures are insufficient to halt a general decline in quality, in particular of the natural environment, and that significant intervention and investment is required to restore and enhance. There are many factors here, from the macro scale of climate change to individual actions, erosion by visitors or agricultural practices, insensitive development, loss of habitat and bio-diversity.

Understanding the landscapes and their significance is thus the starting point for putting in place intelligent measures to protect and enhance them and, of course, much is already known through decades of research and study by a wide range of bodies. Collating that knowledge to support a significant package of interventions is crucial at arriving at a series of objectives and actions. There are already some important projects underway to restore the condition of the upland bogs – in the private estate of Luggala and on public lands at Liffey Head Bog (Irish Water and NPWS). The primary motivation in both is carbon capture as a means of combating climate change but as this chimes with the public mood for nature protection and improvements to bio-diversity, it is arguably supportive of enhancing the visitor experience and public engagement with the Wicklow Uplands in a positive manner. This aim is all about investing in the resource – building up the natural capital – and objectives and actions to pursue this aim might include:

Objectives

- Create a central baseline record of research and knowledge on natural and built heritage
- Quantify the impacts of visitors and tourism
- Provide capital support for enhancement
- Set targets for improvement of bio-diversity
- Review the myriad of protection designations and how they are working in practice

Actions

- Commission research to cover gaps in knowledge
- Pursue World Heritage Status for Glendalough
- Erosion Repair project for upland trails
- Support bog rewetting and enhancement projects on public and private land
- Visitor interpretation and education programme

4.1.2 Aim 2 - Disperse

It is well known that tourism can bring both positive and negative impacts and the study has established that both are currently unevenly distributed across the County.

As the recent Wicklow CoCo commissioned Accommodation Study shows, Wicklow is under supplied in visitor accommodation based on visitor numbers largely because most international visitors stay in Dublin and are brought to Wicklow by bus on day trips so their revenue largely stays in Dublin and is not invested in local jobs and services. Likewise, the local visitor market is dominated by day trips from Dublin bringing little into the local economy. The impacts are also unevenly distributed, notable around Glendalough and Laragh, suffering from peak time congestion that mars the visitor experience and negatively impacts on the local community.

This Dispersal Strategy is developed on the basis of active management of the visitor experience – with a number of objectives and actions:



Objectives

- Actively disperse visitors more evenly throughout the County
- Pro-active visitor management to avoid congestion and enhance experience
- Increase multi-day stays centred around a variety of experiences within the County

Actions

- 'One stop shop' – website for visitor information – including Publicising/Marketing/Social media messaging.
- Co-ordinated signage
- Transport offers
- Pricing mechanisms in car parks
- Traffic management
- Recreational Masterplan built around dispersal strategy – Discovery walks – new trails spread around the County
- Develop mechanisms to co-ordinate visitor management
- Walker drop-off shuttle bus service

4.1.3 Aim 3 - Improve

Wicklow has an international standard natural and built environment but it is generally recognised that the visitor experience does not match that quality and there is much to be done to improve it, in particular at Glendalough and Laragh as the premier visitor site, but throughout the County.

This aim is focussed on the capital investment in visitor infrastructure as a means to enhance the visitor experience and to support the Dispersal Strategy and the enhancement of the receiving landscape.



Objectives

- Understanding the markets and tailoring facilities accordingly
- Improving the quality of the visitor facilities in the Glendalough valley
- Developing the varied experiences to encourage the multi-day stays
- Active visitor management to enhance the experience
- Improved interpretation and learning about the receiving landscapes

Actions

- Qualitative visitor surveys to inform future visitor services
- New visitor arrival Hub in Laragh with supporting car parks and infrastructure - 'Arrival'
- Improved and re-purposed Visitor Centre incorporating natural and monastic heritage - 'Learning'
- New Visitor services at Upper Lake with re-landscaping the car park- 'Discovery'
- Appropriate development of upland car parks and connecting shuttle buses
- Co-ordinated visitor information signage across Wicklow

4.2 Glendalough Valley Plan

New Visitor Flow

One of the primary observations during the 9 month consultation process has been the convergence of visitors in one concentrated point within the Glendalough valley; at the existing visitor centre and associated upper and lower car parks. The majority of visitors coming from the Eastern, Dublin direction travel via the village of Laragh, arrive in the visitor centre car park, enjoy a walk around a looped trail, return to the car park and venture onwards in their car. On a number of days throughout the year, this creates significant congestion, resulting in excessive traffic, overabundance of overflowing car parking, a detrimental visitor experience, and could lead to a negative impact on the archaeologically and environmentally sensitive landscape.

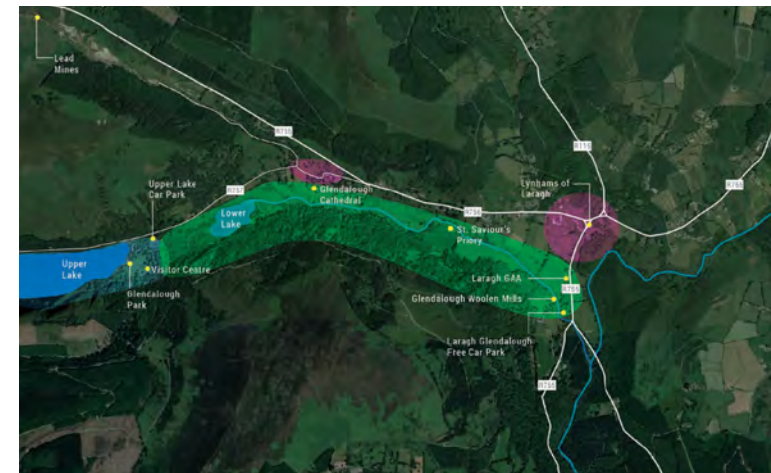
This occurs mostly due to the fact that the infrastructural arrangements of access and car parking in the valley are limited to these two car parks, with additional ad hoc overflow car parks facilitated by local landowners as a pragmatic response to excessive demand. The natural visitor behaviour of parking close to the visitor centre is facilitated by a lack of an alternative option, or lack of designated alternative visitor flow.

In order to break the observed current cycle of concentration of visitors in one place, it is proposed to geographically spread the visitor journey within the Glendalough valley, incorporating the village of Laragh as a gateway to the Glendalough experience. This principle of moving visitor arrival from the main attraction point is a strategy which has been utilised in many sensitive sites, including Brú na Bóinne and Stonehenge. It is proposed that this will reduce the concentration of visitors in one place, and minimises associated negative impacts such as traffic, parking and environmental issues. Providing a prescribed visitor journey starting within the village of Laragh also critically addresses a key concern raised in the Laragh and Glendalough Settlement and Tourism Plan; that the economic benefit that should be resulting from the nearly 1 million visitors that come the area every year to the Glendalough valley area is not being fully realised by local commerce.

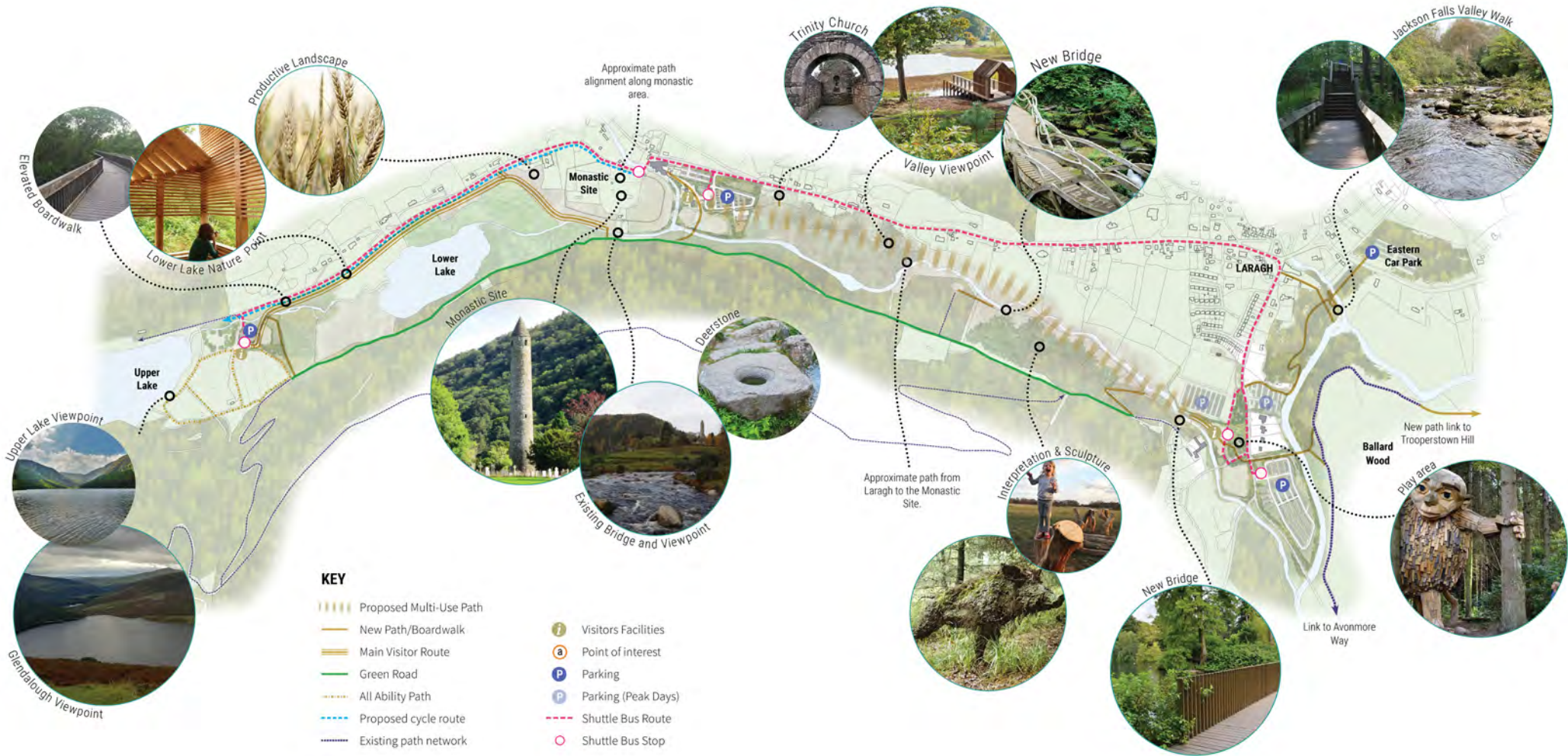
The Wicklow County Development Plan vision for Laragh-Glendalough 2022 is for the area to be a prime high quality and long-stay tourist destination renowned for its natural beauty and the exceptional quality and setting of its unique natural, archaeological and built heritage. The vision seeks to establish a framework for the planned, coordinated and sustainable development of the area that safeguards

the heritage and amenity of Glendalough while facilitating Laragh in developing as the service centre and becoming an accessible 'gateway' to the attractions at Glendalough and the surrounding area.

In assessing a suitable visitor starting journey, it is critical to ensure that any bottleneck is not simply being pushed further down the valley, but that a comprehensive strategy is applied which provides an infrastructure for even visitor dispersal. Within the plan it is intended to introduce a phased strategy which combines new car parking within the village of Laragh, and a new all ability visitor trail up the Glendalough valley which not only alleviates pressures of traffic and footfall, but which also provides for a richer experience within the valley, allowing visitors to experience the full gamut of natural and built heritage within the historic valley. Full details of these proposals is available for reading in **Appendix B**.



Laragh - Glendalough Valley



Arriving at Laragh

It is recognised that there is a spatial disconnect between Laragh and Glendalough, and that the two are considered by many visitors as two distinct entities; separately signposted with different reasons for visiting one and not the other. It is proposed within this plan to bridge that gap, to help ensure the establishment of Laragh-Glendalough as an identifiable and attractive destination, and provide physical connections between them for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport alternatives.

The plan proposes that the gateway for the Glendalough valley should be in Laragh, roughly 2km from the existing visitor centre. This gateway building would signify the beginning of the visitor journey within the Glendalough valley, and provides an intuitive and exciting starting point for further discovery,

Relocating the main orientation and information centre to this location would remove the main point of entrance in the area from the archaeologically sensitive monastic site, removing car parking and peak visitor congestion from this area. The strategy for vehicular traffic parking is noted within **technical appendix A3**. As a general strategy, a number of potential sites on the outskirts of the centre of Laragh village have been identified for use as primary and overflow car parking, with potential for coach parking, camper van parking, and integration of electric powered shuttle bus.

On the worst day recorded, there were over 300 cars queuing for entry into the Glendalough car parks. This, in addition to the existing 248 car parking spaces, as well as 212 additional 'ad-hoc' car parking spaces would necessitate the need for 400 car parking spaces within the village of Laragh to ensure traffic congestion is mitigated.



New All ability trail

The Glendalough to Laragh Masterplan shows the concept design for a new proposed 'all ability' trail connecting Laragh to the Monastic site and beyond to the Upper Lake and the Miner's Road. This trail will offer accessibility within the valley which currently is not possible within the existing Green Road trail.

This route would not only physically connect the main trail network to a new visitor orientation hub, aiding with the dispersal of visitors, but will provide greater access to the natural and built heritage within the valley; creating a compelling visitor experience, with a wide array of varying natural scenery, with archaeological points of interest and viewpoints.

To provide a new pathway within the existing valley corridor will not only require protective measures to ensure there is no harm to the existing eco systems, but could also offer an opportunity for habitat restoration and ecological enhancements within the wider trail corridor.

A key advantage of relocating the Glendalough visitor orientation hub to Laragh is the opportunity it provides to establish the village as the main hub and trailhead for the wider walking and cycling network that radiates from here including the Wicklow Way, St Kevin's Way, Avonmore Way and Miner's Way.



New Interpretation

Visitors to Wicklow need a clear understanding of the county and its opportunities for experiences and facilities to provide comfort and guidance before and after a visit. This plan proposes that Laragh is the ideal location for a central gateway to these experiences, and the perfect location for visitors to better understand the National Park more widely; becoming aware of the different journeys available throughout Wicklow, and developing a sense of awe and wonder at this remarkable county.

The arrival point at Laragh has the potential to combine powerful storytelling with emotive messaging about the impact humans have had on the landscape and biodiversity of the Wicklow Mountains. This plan proposes Laragh as the gateway into the monastic settlement of Glendalough and into the Glendalough/Glenealo valleys, providing visitors to these sites with key information to provide a frame for their experience, whilst also encouraging them to explore more widely throughout the region.

The arrival hub at Laragh enables visitors to appreciate the complex interaction between nature, geology and human experience as they traverse up the Glendalough Valley. Throughout the visitor journey within the valley, interpretation is proposed to be interspersed for to ensure information is conveyed to visitors in an interesting and educational manner.



Arriving at Glendalough Visitor Centre

Within this plan, it is proposed to refurbish and repurpose the existing visitor centre area within Glendalough to provide an engaging information and visitor orientation point along the wider Glendalough valley trail. Rather than forming the primary entrance point to the monastic city, as is currently the case, the existing visitor centre area is proposed to be a destination node within the overall valley trail where visitors can stop before onward travel. This provides a pitstop to allow visitors to know they are on the right path, and provides an opportunity for interpretive information and refreshment.

The new repurposed visitor centre will deliver a transformational interpretive experience, highlighting the unique landscape beyond. The immersivity of the visitor experience will be enhanced through an open plan room where interpretation will explore how the landscape changed through natural and manmade forces. As the visitor passes through this innovative space, experiential and interpretive interventions will take them on a journey away from the everyday. It will transport them through time, to when St Kevin first walked through the land here and connect them with the natural, spiritual and built heritage of the Glendalough valley.

While the aim of this plan is to disperse visitor numbers throughout the Glendalough valley region, it is recognised that there will still be a requirement for direct access to the green road for shorter trail walks.

Within this plan, it is intended to reduce and rationalise the existing car park in front of the visitor centre. This is intended to provide a more direct and intuitive access from the car park area, through the visitor centre and onwards to the monastic city and trails around the two loughs beyond from which the region derives its name. It is also proposed that this will address a key issue experienced within the existing visitor centre area; that coach parking and visitor drop off will occur further away from the 'front door' of the visitor centre, which regularly obscures the visitor centre entrance and serves to disorientate the desired visitor flow.



Arriving at the Upper Lake

The Upper Lake area car park is currently seen as the 'primary' car park for the Glendalough experience, a perception which results in overcrowding and congestion as visitors attempt to park as close to the Upper and Lower Lakes as possible.

Because of the large footfall and adjacency to the pleasant picnic area to the south, private food vendors currently provide a service of refreshments to visitors before their onward travel up the mountain trails. While this does fulfil the requirement of providing refreshments, the manner in which these temporary food vans are located within the Upper Lake car park is having an adverse effect on the amenity of the area. It is proposed within this plan to reduce and rationalise the Upper Lake car park, to be restricted to essential car parking requirements; i.e. accessibility requirements, and to provide the final drop off location for an electric shuttle bus.

Providing a specifically designed refreshment pavilion will avoid the 'temporary' feel of the current scenario.



4.3 Wider Wicklow

County Wicklow, the 'Garden County', has been visited by people from nearby and across the world for centuries. Across the county, there are many places of outstanding quality and interest to visitors, some already attracting significant numbers of people, and others which have been described as 'hidden gems'.

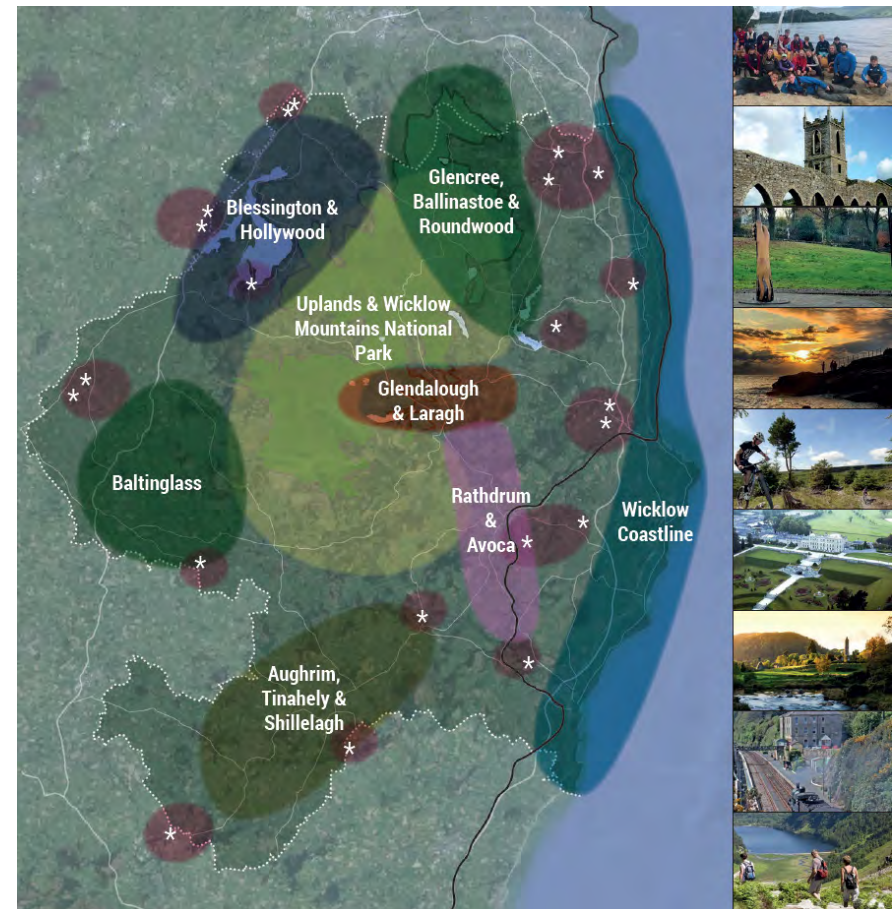
The analysis and consultation undertaken as part of this plan highlighted that there is an existing pattern of day-visits to the county, including from the greater Dublin area and beyond. Overnight and longer stays in the county are limited, with people tending to visit a specific destination. The 'brand' awareness of the county is limited, with 'Wicklow Mountains' having prominence.

It has been observed that there is little coherence to the overall Wicklow visitor proposition, with some places being over-stretched whilst others have significant potential to deliver more and better. The Wider Wicklow plan seeks to address this challenge.

The following have been developed as guiding principles to assist with the overarching aim of 'dispersing' visitor numbers and their effects. It is recognised, and has been highlighted within the Strategic Environmental Assessment process, that these high level principle aims, and any subsequent projects must be rigorously tested to avoid any detriment to existing ecological or environmental conditions upon development.

Spreading Visitor Experience to areas of lesser sensitivity

As discussed within this summary document, there is potential for significant harm if visitors and development are not adequately managed within areas of ecological and heritage sensitivity. A key mitigation for this risk is to limit the concentration of visitor numbers within such sensitive sites. By promoting areas of lesser sensitivity as attractive visitor experiences, the risk of high concentration visitor peaks to sensitive areas such as Glendalough can be reduced. Areas outside of Natura 2000 sites such as Powerscourt House, Russborough House and National Botanic Gardens already enjoy annual visitor numbers, and provide an existing infrastructure for tourist activity. The task for the Wider Wicklow strategy will be to change visitor habits and promote these areas as quality and interesting attractions; to ensure that a visit to Wicklow is not synonymous with just a visit to Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains.



Wider Wicklow areas of interest

Increasing the length of stay

A key objective of the plan is the objective of encouraging people to stay longer, visiting other places in the area and enjoying the local hospitality.

Building on the Wicklow County Council Outdoor Recreation Strategy, the VEMMP proposes a series of clusters. These will strengthen the synergy between places in parts of the county, consolidating their distinctiveness and the associated visitor experiences.

The following outlines the proposed clusters and the synergies to be explored for consolidation:

Glendalough

Since St. Kevin journeyed to Glendalough in the 6th Century, inspired by the beauty of the lakes and valley, the area has been a place of pilgrimage and a place for people to visit from nearby and around the world. The valley is of international significance for its religious heritage. The industrial lead, zinc and silver mining heritage, dating to the 1790s provides another layer of significance, within the outstanding landscape setting. Added to this heritage/cultural focus, the valley has become a magnet for a wide range of outdoor recreational visitors.

The plans for the Glendalough Valley identify how the qualities of the area can be improved, by managing the impact of visitors, enhancing their experience and encouraging people to stay longer to enjoy and explore the area better. As outlined, key to this will be to encourage people to explore and enjoy other parts of the County, dispersing the pressure that is currently focussed on the Valley. It is in that context that the proposed 'clusters' are particularly important, spreading the pressure as well as the benefits of tourism.

Active Outdoors

To the north of the County, there is an existing 'cluster' around Roundwood and Ballinastoe, where the upland landscape is the setting for a wide range of outdoor activities, with a focus on destination mountain bike trails, that attract visitors from across Ireland and beyond.

It is proposed to consolidate the 'Active Outdoors' offer, strengthening the awareness of opportunities in the area, enhancing the quality of experience, including the hospitality/accommodation offer. A key element will be delivery of the Signature Trails identified in the Recreational Trails Masterplan.



Blessington

Blessington is the hub for an area of rolling landscapes and expanses of water. With the mountain backdrop, this area lends itself to a 'gentle' enjoyment of outdoor activities. The Greenway, provides an extensive, safe and easily accessible facility. Likewise, the lakes, as relatively sheltered water bodies provide opportunities for a range of safe, readily accessible watersports.

Opportunities to consolidate this offer should be investigated; improving and enhancing the existing hospitality and accommodation provision.

Baltinglass

Stakeholder engagement highlighted the wealth of points of heritage interest in the area. The complex of hillforts is particularly impressive.

There is an opportunity for awareness of the heritage of the area to be strengthened, encouraging exploration of the towns, villages and surrounding landscape.

Tinahely & Shillelagh

To the south of the county is a landscape of rolling valleys and woodlands, with picturesque villages, steeped in history and culture and with a strong reputation for hospitality. It is proposed within the Wider Wicklow plan that the unique and distinctive character of these villages is promoted for exploration as part of the visitor journey throughout Wicklow.

Uplands

The Mountains dominate the central part of the County. This landscape of peaks rising to over 900m, dramatic valleys, waterfalls and lakes attracts visitors from nearby and from abroad. This is a landscape with extensive and well-used trail networks. For people experiencing it from cars and coaches, the Wicklow Gap, Sally Gap and Military Road, with views over Lough Tay and Lough Dan provide dramatic introductions to the area.

The Recreational Trail Masterplan outlines how access to the uplands can be better managed, encouraging dispersal, which takes pressure off areas where the environment and visitor experience are currently compromised. Improved parking provision is proposed giving confidence in their security and with basic facilities, that encourage use.

Wicklow's Coast

The County's 60km of coastline includes dramatic headlands and sweeping beaches, as well as picturesque traditional seaside towns and attractions such as the Sea Life Centre. This coastline, though dramatic and picturesque has specific ecological sensitivities, and is in certain parts currently subject to coastal erosion studies. It is acknowledged that while there is an appetite for enjoyment of the natural and unique scenery offered by the coast, there is potential for ecological harm if visitors and development are not adequately managed within areas of ecological sensitivity.

There is opportunity for Wicklow's Coast to assist with the overall visitor dispersal strategy as highlighted within this plan, however the feasibility of any infrastructural development will be considered only in tandem with the appropriate ecological consideration and mitigation measures.

The Garden County

Across the County there are many grand properties with beautiful, managed grounds, these include places such as Russborough House, Kilmacurragh Botanic Gardens and Druid's Glen Hotel and Golf Course.

These are jewels in the county's visitor offer. It is proposed to better promote these destinations, encouraging people who visit one to explore others.

Connectivity

The M11 and N81 make Wicklow County an easy place to access, with proximity to Dublin making it a popular place for day-trips.

Key to sustainable development of tourism in the county will be using the main roads and rail links as points of connection. This accessibility will be important to permit longer and more leisurely stays within the county.

Investment in the rail infrastructure is a priority, providing a regular service to Rathdrum, restoring the town's importance as a base for exploring the county. This will provide a viable alternative to access to Glendalough by car and coach, as well as strengthening connections along the coast.

Walking and cycling connections, including strategic routes from Arklow to Rathdrum and onwards to Lara will support initiatives to deliver sustainable modal shift as well as being visitor attractors in their own right.

Hubs

It is important that there should be a clear vision for each town and village to thrive, strengthening their distinctive identity and complementing each other.

The role of Laragh as a vibrant village that is synonymous with the Glendalough experience is outlined in the Glendalough Valley Plan.

Rathdrum will have a key role to play, providing access by rail and integrating existing attractions such as Clara Lara Fun Park and the major investment at Avondale. Elsewhere, Arklow should be developed strongly, with its maritime heritage.

The hubs should become the focus for a diversity of types of accommodation, with assured quality standards and associated hospitality and cultural provision that will be central to the visitor experience.

Establishing a Strong Cohesive Identity

It is proposed to establish a strong 'brand' identity within which the various visitor destinations gain collective strength. This would apply principles similar to places such as the Lake District or Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park.

It is proposed to establish a 'Wicklow Mountains' brand for the uplands and their fringes. The possibility of providing a brand to the east of the M/N11 as 'Wicklow's Coast' could be considered, dependent on the outworkings of ecological assessments to ascertain a sustainable carrying capacity.

Signage, online and promotional material will use this to strengthen cohesion, encouraging people to see these as areas to explore, rather than being individual locations to visit. The online presence will be particularly important facilitating visitors in understanding the breadth of offer and how to plan extended stays.



4.4 Principles and Phasing of Development

The following are the key guiding principles for any development within the Glendalough-Laragh valley as detailed within this Plan.

- Safeguard, restore and enhance the setting of the heritage and natural environment of Glendalough using sustainable principles, as a place for local people to be proud of and as a place of world-wide significance to be visited by people from across Ireland and internationally.
- Facilitate visitors in their enjoyment and understanding of Glendalough, as a monastic site of outstanding significance in a beautiful setting.
- Dispersal of visitors for whom the monastic experience is not the primary reason for their visit, to reduce the pressure on Glendalough. This will focus on encouraging walkers/cyclists/leisure users to use other areas, especially at peak times as part of the County wide strategy
- Develop a sustainable trail network that encourages the exploration and enjoyment of the Glendalough Valley, its outstanding and unique heritage, culture and landscape, with routes that are accessible to all, on foot, bike and wheelchair.
- Restore the quality of the monastic landscape and its wider valley setting, from the Upper Lake to Laragh, befitting the potential World Heritage Site (WHS) designation.
- Integrate engaging interpretation that enriches the visitor experience as part of the trail network and through improvement of the existing facilities at Glendalough.
- Provide good quality accessible parking in Laragh associated with a new visitor arrival building that becomes in time the main point of welcome for Glendalough and the wider Wicklow Mountains.
- Provide an attractive and efficient shuttle bus service that connects the parking in Laragh with Glendalough and the Upper Lake.
- Encourage sustainable transport connections across Wicklow including from Blessington, Kilmanogue and Rathdrum, connecting with the railway station, including walking, cycling and bus routes.
- Incrementally reduce car parking at the Upper Lake and adjacent to the existing Visitor Centre in Glendalough reducing the impact of parked and moving vehicles on the most sensitive areas, making them increasingly attractive for local people and visitors.
- Promote, strengthen and enhance the quality of existing commercial offerings at Glendalough and Laragh – hospitality, accommodation and visitor services and support new, diversified opportunities.
- Facilitate a critical mass of high-quality activities and attractions that encourages multi-day visitor experiences – ‘slow and sustainable’ tourism

These **Principles** are the basis for a **Phased** approach to development based on incremental steps to match demand. They are envisaged as a progression from small scale interventions as soon as possible to relieve existing pressures forward to longer-term, comprehensive and ambitious plans to transform the visitor experience in the valley.

Implementation will require co-operation and co-ordination between the various state bodies, Wicklow County Council, the local community and a number of private owners and operators. We believe all parties have much to gain from this approach as it will balance the various needs, desires, responsibilities and ambitions.

The proposals are set out in 3 broad phases, approximately in the order we see implementation as desirable. There is a potential stopping point or pausing point after each phase which could be used to review and measure effectiveness and inform the detail of the following phases. For the purposes of the economic appraisal, the completion of each phase is considered as an option which will allow their relative costs and benefits to be assessed.

Phase 1 1-2 years

Laragh

- Introduction of Variable Messaging Signage (VMS) to approach roads to direct visitors to the Laragh car parks when capacity at Upper Lake and Visitor Centre becomes limited. The detail of this is set out in a Technical Note.
- Secure long-term car park locations in Laragh and develop the initial phases.
- Wicklow County Council have extended their lease on the current temporary car park and are in discussion with owners of land for a longer term car park on the Rathdrum road (CP1). In Phase 1 we propose that the first northern section be developed to replace the existing temporary car park.
- Wicklow County Council start acquisition process with land on NE side of Laragh on the Roundwood Road (CP2).
- Wicklow County Council enter into an agreement with Laragh GAA club for partial use of their grounds as part of an enhancement plan for facilities. The first phase could be pitch enhancements to the No1 pitch and building of new clubrooms on the northern end of the site, to facilitate the southern half of the site becoming part of the visitor service proposals.
- First phase of Visitor Hub building to orientate visitors using the Laragh car park and shuttle bus service, including introduction of VMS signage.

Laragh to Glendalough

- Develop all-ability pedestrian and cycle link between Laragh and the Upper Lake. Preferred route has been identified, starting in Laragh GAA grounds and discussion with landowners started. Associated environmental enhancement of the river corridor. Alternative routes also identified if preferred route not feasible.
- Establish a high quality, effective, seasonable shuttle bus service. Industry advice is that a minimum of 4 buses required. Ideally one bus is always one at each stop to give confidence that system is operating. But real time information could help with this. Hydrogen or electric powered.
- VMS (Variable Messaging Signs) installation on the 4 main approach roads linked to car park counters to facilitate management of the parking provision – see below for operational details.
- Improvements of the heritage and landscape setting throughout the valley including a co-ordinated signage and branding strategy.
- Co-ordinated approach to visitor information collection through counter data, traffic surveys etc.

Glendalough Visitor Centre, Village and Hotel area

- Visitor Centre remodelled and extended to provide an all encompassing introductory visitor experience covering natural, built and cultural heritage. Additional interpretative and orientation installations in the grounds, with a clear visitor pathway identified to maximise the visitor experience.
- Car Park remodelled with new entrance to create a pedestrianised visitor gathering space in front of the visitor centre, with connectivity to new all ability trail to and from Laragh.
- Car Park will remain open all year round to pre-booked coaches (13 spaces) in new coach park area. It is anticipated these will be largely half day visits so total of 26 coach slots per day. Coaches not pre-booked will be directed to Laragh car parks with shuttle bus service (potentially drop off and pick up allowed at shuttle bus drop off)
- Car Park will remain open to private cars but controlled by VMS system from March to October, so when nearing capacity, cars will be directed to Laragh car parks. Potential facility for pre-booked mobility parking permit holders all year round. Barrier installed after hotel car park entrance to control traffic to Upper Lake.
- Revised path network in and around visitor centre to direct and manage visitors, with landscaping/replanting of more natural landscapes around.
- Develop a detailed Conservation Plan for the built heritage of the valley and in particular, set out a vision for enhancing the character and significance of the monastic heritage.
- Develop Glendalough Visitor Website to inform and co-ordinate visitor stays in the Glendalough area.

Upper Lake/Lower Lake connections

- Options study on creating accessible trail from Visitor Centre to the Monastic city and beyond to the Upper Lake. 3 Options identified and detailed benefit/impact study required.
- Enhanced landscape, including 're-wilding', with investment in a sustainable all ability trail network and habitat protection.
- New signage and interpretation, founded on overall branding strategy

Upper Lake Car Park

- New Visitor services building – toilets, coffee shop and information
- (Removal of existing toilets and trading vans and reduction in hard landscape once new building completed)
- Shuttle bus drop off and pick up area created with car park re-modelling.
- Car Park will remain open to private cars in the off season (eg end October to start of March).
- From March to September VMS signage would be in operation and when car park nears capacity, cars would be stopped at Visitor Centre and road closed to private vehicles (except residents). Shuttle bus would be in operation. Potential facility for pre-booked 'blue badge' holders all year round.
- Enhancement of landscape setting with new native planting and control of deer
- External interpretation, signage and branding to guide visitors to maximise their experience.
- Existing NPWS cottage used as ranger base with environmental interpretation material in grounds.
- Existing Education centre remains as current use.

Phase 2 3-5 years

Laragh

- New Visitor Orientation Hub developed as an inspirational entry point fusing buildings and landscape to make the journey rewarding and special, commensurate with a World Heritage Site designation. Located in GAA grounds in area of former GAA clubrooms.
- Car Park on former GAA second pitch developed (CP3) – possibly reserved for mobility parking permit holders or priority bookings
- Rathdrum Road Car Park (CP1) expanded as demand required – middle section. Potential overflow coach park and potential overnight campervan site.
- Eastern Car Park (CP2) developed, along with trail network to Laragh and through woods to Visitor Hub. Shuttle Bus point developed
- Wicklow County Council acquire land to east of GAA grounds (CP4) as long term overflow car park and trail access point.
- VMS system from Phase 1 adapted as required to facilitate the increased use of the parking in Laragh and control of upper valley access.

Visitor Centre, Village and Hotel

- Trading stands relocated from current monastic site entrance gate, with area landscaped and softened, to area between hotel and visitor centre car park within new designed structures, or potentially around 'Glendalough Market Square' – area to north side of hotel, landscaped and largely pedestrianised, with creation of traditional market square character.
- Hotel car park extended into current OPW lands with balancing removal of hotel car park south of river to create a pedestrianised zone for hotel and

- other visitor services and potential interpretative experience on the historic monastic city and surrounding domestic and agricultural life. Net gain of formal car parking to hotel and creating space for hotel development and expansion without impact on visitor experience of the monastic site. Hotel car park and resident's access will be all year round.
- Lands between Visitor Centre and Monastic site and back to Trinity Church re-landscaped as the second phase of restoring the wider monastic landscape, combined with expanded monastic site interpretation, including potential for interpretation of the historic agricultural and domestic supporting setting of the monastic 'city'.
- Installation of accessible trail from Visitor Centre to monastic site and on to Upper Lake – creation of preferred route following outcome of Options study in Phase 1.

Upper Lake car park

- Closed from 1st March to 31st October at weekends and from 1st May to 30th September all week.
- Trader vans removed from the car park with a coffee dock in new Visitor service building.
- Potential facility for pre-booked blue badge holders all year round.
- Ongoing investment in sustainable trail network and habitat enhancement.

Phase 3 **6-7 years**

Laragh

- Parking provision in Laragh increased to full capacity, with new car parks to north east and south of village and linking trails, with the new Visitor Orientation Hub becoming the primary entry point for most visitors.
- Shuttle bus capacity increased to meet demand.

Visitor Centre, Village and Hotel

- Further expansion of coach parking at Visitor Centre if demand remains, with reduction in private car parking. Bookable blue badge car parking remains.
- Potential high quality accommodation pods for visitors on sites between Visitor Centre car park and road if integrated well into landscape.
- Scope for further commercial development in and around Glendalough Market Square on the northern side of a re-landscaped square.

Upper Lake car park

- Closed from 1st March to 31st October at weekends and from 1st May to 30th September all week as set out in Phase 2
- Full restoration of the monastic landscape in line with the Conservation Plan
- Re-naturing of the valley ongoing with continued investment in a sustainable trail network and habitat protection



5.0 SECTION C *summary*
DELIVERY

5.1 Recommendations for implementing and managing proposals

Practical and achievable mechanisms for the delivery of the Masterplan are crucial. A key issue emerging from the public consultation process was that the means for delivery of the Plan proposals, and confidence in that, was a factor in how well supported the Plan would be – in other words, respondents needed to be convinced that there were going to be mechanisms for delivery in order for them to support the proposals.

The background to this is a long history of reports, strategies and studies which have not been implemented and a feeling that there are lots of bodies 'doing their own thing' rather than in a co-ordinated fashion, some areas over-developed and congested whilst others have been neglected. There was criticism of the state bodies for not co-operating with each other or with the wider community and a reported lack of trust between all the stakeholders.

It is also clear from our research and analysis that there are a large number of dedicated staff of the state bodies and Wicklow County Council working in a wide variety of ways; many community groups developing exciting projects for their local areas and a wide range of entrepreneurial people developing hospitality and activity ventures, people committed to development of recreation, caring for the environment and active in many and various ways.

There have also been many initiatives to bring people and groups together including The Wicklow Uplands Council, established in 1997, which includes over 50 groups from the farming, environmental, recreation, community sectors, aiming to build consensus and develop policies, strategies and initiatives. It is an important and valued forum for discussion but it has limited resources and no powers. There are also many other collaborative groups such as Visit Wicklow, Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee, Wicklow Heritage Forum etc, with specific roles and purposes.

What is clear from all of this is that there is a complex entanglement of many bodies, individuals and organisations, all of whom have a legitimate stake in what happens, and are affected, by better or worse, by changing patterns of use, and yet there is no one body whose responsibility is to provide the overview – to co-ordinate, to develop and to promote and to protect all that makes the Wicklow environment such a special and invaluable asset, and to carry out the increasingly important role of visitor management.

The obvious conclusion is that if the desired outcomes of the Plan are to be realised it will need new management, implementation and delivery structures with the appropriate resources. There are many models for such structures, but the circumstances in Wicklow, with the proximity of Dublin, the particular patterns of landownership, the close connectivity between rural communities and the visitor attractions and the vulnerability of the built, natural and cultural heritage, mean that a bespoke model is required, though drawing on successful initiatives elsewhere, taking the experiences from such bodies as the River Nore Vision project, The Mournes Heritage Trust and the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, amongst others. Details of each of these are included in the separate 'Management Case Studies' paper (Appendix C1)

At the heart of this challenge is finding a structure which can achieve a fair balance between the needs and aspirations of the local community, the expectations of visitors and, above all, the protection and enhancement of the environment – the Wicklow Mountains – the county's greatest and enduring asset. All of the stakeholders have their part to play in that, but the consultation showed that there is a strong desire to create a collective sense of purpose to implementation change for the better of all, and it is this which will shape our recommendations for a new management and delivery structures for the Wicklow Mountains.

There are three broad groupings of stakeholders, all of equal importance.

- Central Government or State bodies
- Local Government, Councillors, officials and connected bodies
- The public - Community, Farmers and Landowners, Hospitality and leisure businesses, NGO's etc.

Discussions between the key statutory agencies and Wicklow CoCo on the Draft Plan have led to an agreement on the establishment of a Glendalough Valley Steering Group for the implementation of the Plan proposals based on a MoU between the bodies. It has also been agreed to establish the recommended Community Advisory Group under the auspices of the Council to ensure ongoing involvement of the local community in the implementation and review processes.

Wicklow County Council has an important role to play in supporting and representing the views of the host communities, local businesses and other bodies. In addition to the existing Outdoor Recreation Forum, Visit Wicklow, Wicklow Partnership, Wicklow Heritage Forum and other bodies, it is recommended that the embryo 'Community Advisory Group', brought together to represent the views in particular of the Glendalough and Laragh community, be more formally established. Some specific duties of the Council – eg traffic, parking and roads management - are crucial, in particular in the Laragh and Glendalough area. The valuable role of the Wicklow Uplands Council is also an important part of the management structure with the voice of the disparate communities feeding into the delivery of the Plan.

In summary, the future management and delivery model must respond to the three key deficits in the current arrangements

- There is no co-ordinated visitor management across Wicklow and this is leading to congestion, unbalanced impacts and benefits and harm to the visitor experience.
- There is a lack of co-ordination and co-operation between the various state and local authority bodies which results in duplication, gaps in services and a loss of opportunities for resource sharing
- There is little or no active involvement of the local communities in visitor management. Experience across Europe would suggest this is crucial in achieving a balance between the needs and desires of the visitors and host communities

In the short term there is merit in setting up a number of collaborative projects which will better inform future visitor management decisions and help address some of the congestion at busy times.

Collaborative projects

Visitor Information Gathering

At the moment OPW, NPWS and Coillte all have people counters in various locations, Fáilte Ireland do some visitor surveys and Wicklow County Council have a programme of traffic surveys, although this has been mostly for road maintenance reasons. The project has highlighted the un-coordinated nature of this information gathering so there are gaps and overlaps and recommends a comprehensive and co-ordinated system of visitor data collection so to inform and justify future visitor management measures. This would be an ideal project for collaboration between all the bodies.

'Wicklow Wide' Website and Information Hub

The Dispersal strategy needs an integrated 'one stop shop' for reliable information for visitors, interactive and up to date.

All the state bodies need to feed into this (eg trail information) and the private sector attractions, services and facilities could be managed through Fáilte Ireland or Wicklow County Council building on the current Visit Wicklow website. Although it carries information on many of the attractions it is missing the trail infrastructure detail that many visitors are basing their visits on and in particular 'live' information about trail closures, forestry operations etc. The potential of this Wicklow Wide website, though, is to use it as a visitor management tool – part of the Dispersal mechanism, to encourage people to go to the less visited sites and take pressure off busy areas at peak times.

There is no, one, satisfactory, website which provides visitor info about the Glendalough experience. 'Glendalough.ie' is run by the Brockagh Centre and OPW don't have a dedicated site. This is serious gap and the coordination involved in updating visitor facing information would be excellent pilot collaborative project that would allow for trialling of co-ordination mechanisms between the various bodies on a more manageable scale.

Wayfinding – Laragh and Glendalough

It is generally recognised that there is no co-ordinated visitor information and signage through the Glendalough valley and this is the first step to overall visitor management. This needs to cover parking mechanisms including the VMS signage and clear orientation and information way finding throughout the valley. This would be part of wider discussions on co-ordinated visitor management, eg between OPW, NMS and NPWS over the enhancement of the Visitor Centre as the central orientation point for all aspects of the valley, linked to site wide interpretation and information.

Wicklow Signage Strategy and Branding

A key part of the overall strategy is to create a collective character and feel for the whole area, so that visitors are aware they are entering a special landscape. Signage and branding have a significant part to play in this so developing a single brand, supported by the individual identities of the state bodies and Council would be an important collaborative move.



6.0 SECTION D *summary*
REVIEW

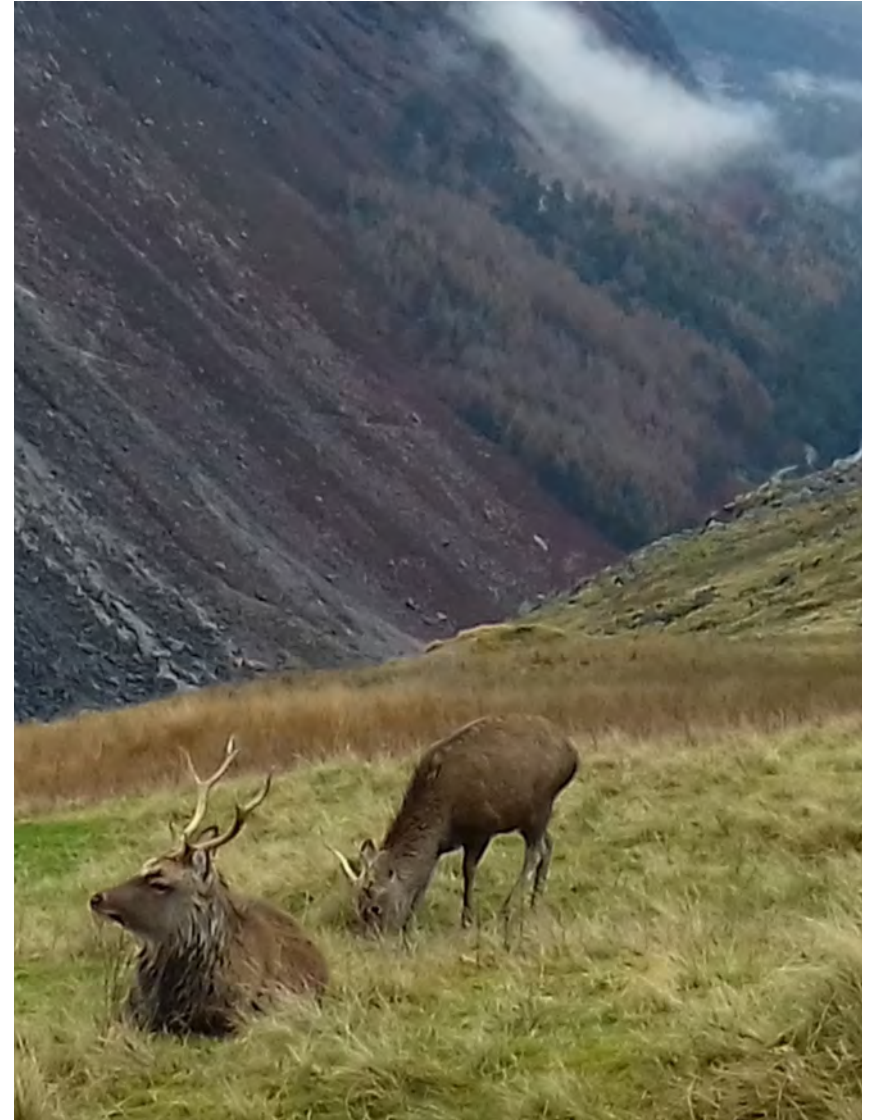
6.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA)

A Strategic Environment Assessment has been undertaken in tandem with this Plan. The Strategic Environmental Assessment seeks to underline the ambition to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to promote sustainable development within the National Park

The SEA process is designed to identify the risks to the environment that may arise as a result of the plan, and any proposed developments that will flow from the plan. The key nature conservation issues associated with the various developments contained in the plan include:

- biodiversity loss
- disturbance of species
- direct (footprint) and indirect (water pollution) impacts to protected habitats
- changes to ecological landscape etc.

Screening for Appropriate Assessment of the plan has taken place as the Plan as developed with a number of initial ideas for developments within the plan being dropped as the Screening process identified potential risks to the protected habitats. A report for Screening and Appropriate Assessment and a Natura Impact Statement was prepared for the Plan. A number of initial ideas for developments within the Plan were subsequently omitted or modified as this process identified potential risk to protected habitats and species.



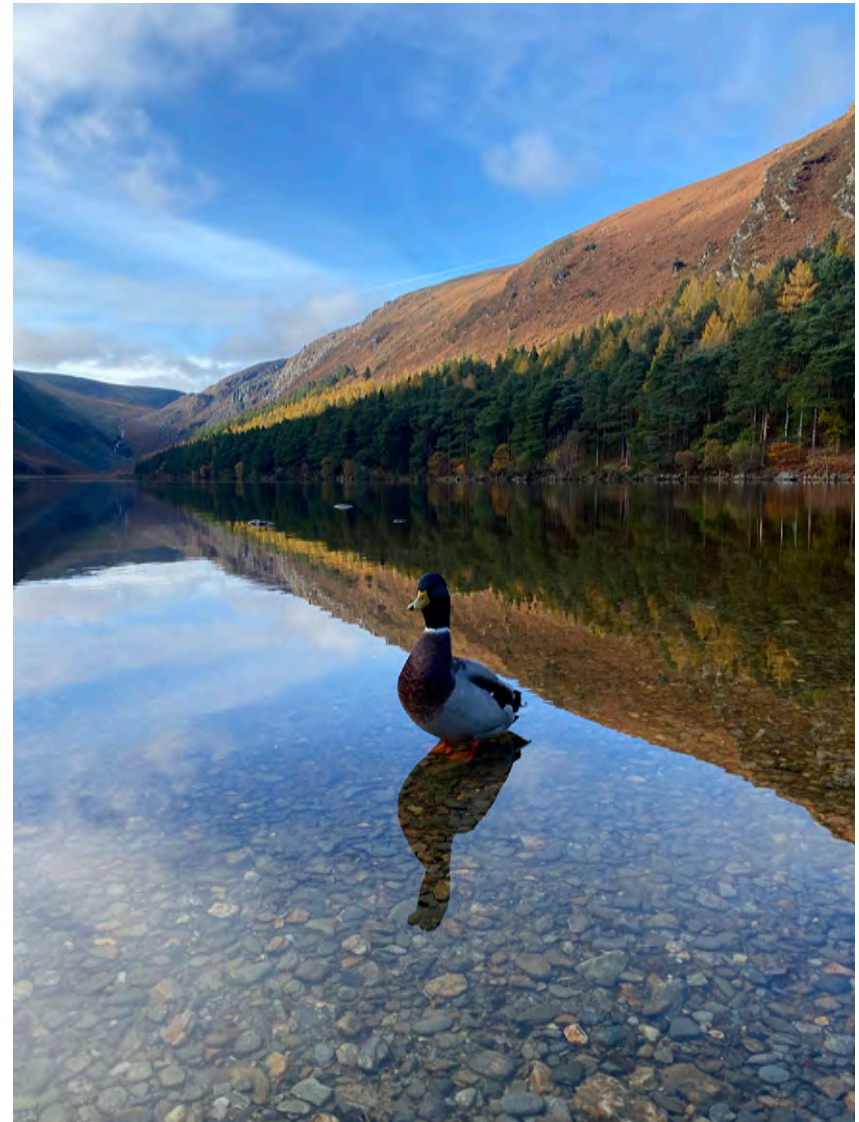
Key Findings of the SEA and AA Process for the Plan

Having completed full SEA and AA on the Plan it is evident that these processes have had a positive influence on the evolution of the Plan itself and will also continue to have a positive environmental influence as the Plan enters its implementation phase. The outcome of completing the above environmental assessments has resulted in the following;

- » Identifying and mitigating where relevant potential environmental impacts resulting from the Plan.
- » Identifying relevant positive environmental impacts arising from the Plan and ensuring the implementation of actions that result in environmental protection, enhancement and promotion e.g., visitor management actions, responsible promotion and dispersal.
- » Developing a suite of mitigatory actions to ensure that any negative environmental impacts are reduced or eliminated at Plan implementation stage. This suite of mitigatory actions includes:
 - The requirement to establish the status of the Plan and its interrelationship with statutory decision making and consent-granting frameworks;
 - Integrating the requirements for Environmental Compliance into the Plan.

Particular emphasis is placed on the following:

- Requirements for lower-tier environmental assessment,
 - The Wicklow County Development Plan,
 - The Climate Action Plan 2023,
 - Visitor management,
 - Consideration for infrastructural capacity, green infrastructure, ecosystem services, responsible promotion etc. and
 - Table 1 within Appendix D2
- » Development and execution of an Environmental Monitoring Programme for the Plan during implementation and operation.



Integrating Requirements for Environmental Protection and Management into the Plan

The SEA and AA team worked with the plan-preparation team in order to integrate requirements for environmental protection and management into the plan.

An Implementation Group will be formed as part of this Plan and all objectives and actions coming from this Plan will need to be agreed/governed/managed by this group. This will include funding and promotion where relevant. Partners and stakeholders responsible for objectives, actions and projects coming from this Plan will be required to demonstrate compliance with measures relating to sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management contained in Table 1 within Appendix D2.

In order to be realised, projects included in the Plan (in a similar way to other projects from any other sector) will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, plans and programmes (including requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licensing requirements as appropriate) that form the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework.

In addition to the details of Table 1 within Appendix D2, the following will also need to be considered as appropriate:

a) Compliance

In order to be realised, projects included in this Masterplan (in a similar way to other projects from any other sector) will have to comply, as relevant, with various legislation, policies, strategy's and programmes. These will typically include the following:

- Lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment and other licensing requirements as appropriate,
- Statutory land use plans that form part of the statutory decision-making and consent-granting framework e.g. Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 – 2028,
- The Climate Action Plan 2023, the Wicklow County Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024, and the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (2018, and all subsequent versions).

In order to ensure full compliance and protection of the Natura 2000 Network and wider natural environment the Masterplan Implementation Group will be tasked with ensuring relevant and stringent compliance is adhered to in this regard. This measure will be monitored for its success through relevant consent process and will be reported in the SEA monitoring process.

b) Funding & Support

Fáilte Ireland and other Project Partners, with governance from the Plan Implementation Group, will provide funding and support for sustainable tourism projects that emerge as part of this Masterplan. Such funding and support mechanisms are not yet detailed, agreed or in place. However they will include for projects relating to land use, infrastructural development and land use activities and attractions in some instances as alluded to in the Masterplan.

Reference made to such projects included in the Plan does not guarantee funding or support. While such support will be provided to certain projects, in some instance Plan Partners will not be the project owner, land owner or developer.

In order to achieve funding (including promotion) for projects coming from this Plan stakeholders shall be required to demonstrate compliance (which may be supported by monitoring undertaken by the beneficiary and will be considered by the Plan Implementation Group) with measures relating to sustainable development, ecological protection and environmental management. This is likely to include further survey work, production of Visitor Management Plans and detailed Construction and Environment Management Plans as appropriate at project consent stage.

Listed here are some Fáilte Ireland Guidance documents which will be considered where relevant:

- Site Maintenance Guidelines
- Visitor Management Guidelines
- Environmental Management for Local Authorities and Others
- Environmental Damage Resolution
- Greenway Visitor Experience & Interpretation Toolkit
- Environmentally Responsible Tourism Promotion & Campaign Statement
- Blueway Management & Development Guide).

c) Visitor & Site Management

Those developing projects as a result of this Plan shall seek to manage any increase in visitor numbers and/or any change in visitor behaviour in order to avoid significant effects including loss of habitat and disturbance, including ensuring that new projects are a suitable distance from ecological sensitivities. This will include the preparation of Visitor Management Plans, where relevant.

Extensive research by Fáilte Ireland has shown improved environmental outcomes (including improved attainment of conservation objectives) in areas with visitor management strategies. Visitor management strategies will be required for plans, programmes and projects that are generated as a direct result of this Masterplan as relevant and appropriate.

Extensive monitoring of the effects of tourism to date has shown predictors of impact occurrence to include: site type; group type; the number of activities; activity intensity; and the interaction between activity intensity and abundance. Site management must consider these factors in seeking to reduce the potential for impacts to occur in the first instance.

Where available, this research will continue to be used as part of a feedback loop to inform ongoing review of Fáilte Ireland and other Plan Partners activities, including the Plan Implementation Group.

d) Infrastructure Capacity

With respect to infrastructural capacity (including drinking water, wastewater, waste and transport) the potential impact on existing infrastructure as well as the potential environmental effects of a likely increase in tourism-related traffic volumes along any routes resulting from the relevant initiative shall be considered and mitigated as appropriate, where relevant. The promotion of developing visitor friendly infrastructure where it is required will also be encouraged.

Any proposed site management and maintenance guidelines produced by Fáilte Ireland and other Plan Partners will encourage site owners and operators to consider environmentally sustainable solutions and compliance with the Water Framework Directive and the Habitats Directive.

Infrastructural capacity at project level will also be considered by the Masterplan Implementation Group as projects resulting from the Plan arise.

e) Green Infrastructure and Ecosystem Services

Those receiving funding and support under this Masterplan shall contribute towards the maintenance of existing green infrastructure and its ecosystem services, taking into account the output of the Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystem Services project being undertaken by the NPWS. Proposals for the development of any green infrastructure should demonstrate the synergies that can be achieved with regard to the: protection and management of biodiversity; provision of open space amenities; sustainable management of water; protection of cultural heritage; and protection of protected landscape sensitivities. Green infrastructure and its ecosystem services at project level will also be considered by the Masterplan Implementation Group as projects resulting from the Plan arise.

f) Environmentally Responsible Tourism Promotion & Campaigning

Environmental considerations need to be integrated into promotional processes and environmentally responsible tourism campaigns associated with this Plan. Fáilte Ireland is in the process of developing an approach to awareness, guidance and support in integrating such considerations. The intention will be that such an approach can be considered and applied by all relevant tourism promotion bodies. This will be applicable to the outputs of this Masterplan and the various projects that come from it.

g) Environmental Damage Resolution

Pre-emptive and action-based responses are essential at site-specific level in response to instances of perceived or actual environmental damage. This is not only important in reaction to an existing issue but should also be considered and applied to situations in order that the risk for potential future damage is recognised and avoided. Fáilte Ireland's Environmental Damage Resolution procedure provides for a consistent approach in recognising and where required responding to such warning signs. This procedure should be considered, as relevant, in the implementation of this Plan.

Implementation of this procedure at similar habitats, sites and situations should be applied where relevant to projects coming from this Masterplan to pre-empt and avoid similar impact.

6.2 Economic Appraisal

An economic appraisal has been carried out of this masterplan to evaluate the cost benefit of any new interventions. Outline costs of proposals have been considered on the basis of the outline designs noted in Section B of the technical documents.

The economic appraisal assesses not only costs of capital projects and financial benefits of tourism, but considers a wide range of societal benefits which can be derived through the development of national parks and the promotion of tourism and outdoor recreation therein. These include:

Recreation and leisure benefits;

- Health and well-being;
- Learning and education;
- Social capital and cohesion, tackling poverty and enhancing social inclusion;
- Improved image of a region and quality of place;
- Climate change mitigation, sustainability, and increased biodiversity;
- Culture, heritage, and landscape;
- Increased land and property values

It has been demonstrated within the Economic Appraisal that the proposed VEMMP Project has the potential to help the National Park meet the governmental objectives of National Parks management as defined by International Union for the Conservation of Nature(IUCN), including:


- Managing the area to perpetuate, in as natural a state as possible, representative examples of physiographic regions, biotic communities, genetic resources and unimpaired natural processes;
- Maintaining viable and ecologically functional populations and assemblages of native species at densities sufficient to conserve ecosystem integrity and resilience in the long term;
- Contributing in particular to the conservation of wide-ranging species, regional ecological processes and migration routes;
- Managing visitor use for inspirational, educational, cultural and recreational purposes at a level which will not cause significant biological or ecological degradation to the natural resources;

- Taking into account the needs of indigenous people and local communities, including subsistence resource use, in so far as these will not adversely affect the primary management objective; and
- Contributing to local economies through tourism.

The Economic Appraisal also indicates that the proposed VEMMP project at Glendalough/WMNP has the potential to contribute to a number of the National Strategic Outcomes featured in the National Planning Framework, including the following:

- Strengthening Rural Economies and Communities by facilitating regional growth through tourism and entrepreneurship in a rural area of Ireland.
- Enhancing Glendalough's amenity and heritage as well as enhancing levels of physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The Economic Appraisal concluded that in both monetary and non-monetary benefits there was a strong business case for public investment in the proposals. As some of the proposals involve purchase of private land and incentives for private development the financial details are commercially sensitive at this stage and not for public disclosure.



This report was produced for the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Fáilte Ireland by Consarc Design Group, in association with:

The Paul Hogarth Company - Landscape Design
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Doyle Kent - Planning
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