



**GLENDALOUGH AND WICKLOW MOUNTAINS
NATIONAL PARK**

Draft Visitor Experience & Management Masterplan

Appendix B2

Glendalough Valley Plan

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Consarc Design Group*

Glendalough Valley Plan

Within the context of the analysis of Wicklow County as a whole, it was abundantly clear that the Glendalough Valley required greatest attention.

St. Kevin established a Christian settlement at Glendalough in the 6th Century in a place that was of outstanding beauty. Those qualities and the ability for people to understand the significance of the Valley and have an outstanding quality of experience has been greatly compromised. On busy days parked and moving vehicles dominate the arrival and the landscape itself.

Dwell time in the Valley has reduced in recent years, with many people driving to the OPW Visitor Centre, spending a very short time and then leaving.

Many of the stakeholder conversations highlighted the difficulties associated with the management of the area and of the visitor experience lacking co-ordination between the state bodies of OPW, NPWS, Coillte and Wicklow County Council.

The quality of visitor experience at the OPW Visitor Centre was highlighted as a concern.

Stakeholder engagement highlighted that the significance of the industrial, mining heritage should be highlighted, bringing added depth to the visitor experience.

Whilst Laragh has been previously identified in the Local Development Plan as being the place where visitors to the Valley should be welcomed, with parking/public transport provision, this has not yet materialised.

Extensive use of the Valley by walkers was highlighted. This is exacerbated by prevailing concerns in relation to car crime in other, remote parts of the County.

Tensions between the needs of local residents/businesses and the requirement to deliver high quality visitor experiences were clearly articulated. Vehicular dominance was highlighted as a concern to residents, whilst recognising the desire to have ease of parking.

In responding to the analysis, the following guiding Principles were established.

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.
- Develop an uplands shuttle bus service to connect lowland hubs with trailheads.
- 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 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.

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

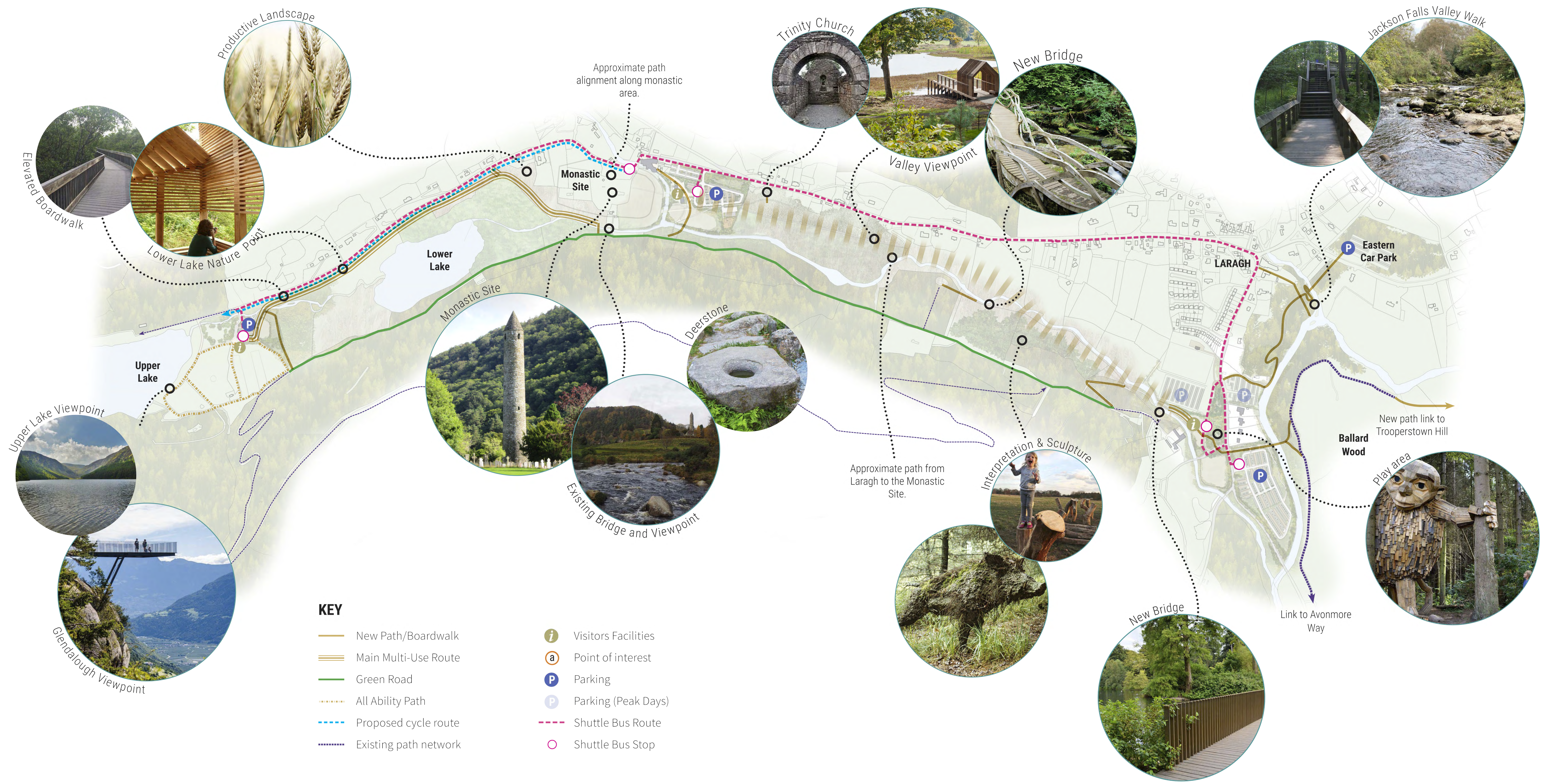
- Parking provision in Laragh increased to full capacity, with new car parks to north east and south of village and linking trails, with the new Visitor Orientation Hub becoming the primary entry point for most visitors.
- Shuttle bus capacity increased to meet demand.

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



KEY

- New Path/Boardwalk
- Main Multi-Use Route
- Green Road
- All Ability Path
- Proposed cycle route
- Existing path network
- i Visitors Facilities
- a Point of interest
- P Parking
- P Parking (Peak Days)
- Shuttle Bus Route
- Shuttle Bus Stop



New path link to Trooperstown Hill

Ballard Wood

Link to Avonmore Way

Approximate path alignment along monastic area.

Approximate path from Laragh to the Monastic Site.

Glendalough to Laragh **Upper Lake Visitors Centre**
DRAFT



- KEY**
- New Path/Boardwalk
 - Main Multi-Use Route
 - Green Road
 - All Ability Path
 - Existing path network
 - Visitors Facilities
 - Parking
 - Shuttle Bus Route
 - Shuttle Bus Stop

Visitors facilities including bike park, cafe and toilets. Positioned within existing hardstanding

Existing car park removed and wild flower meadow introduced with potential space for overflow parking/events



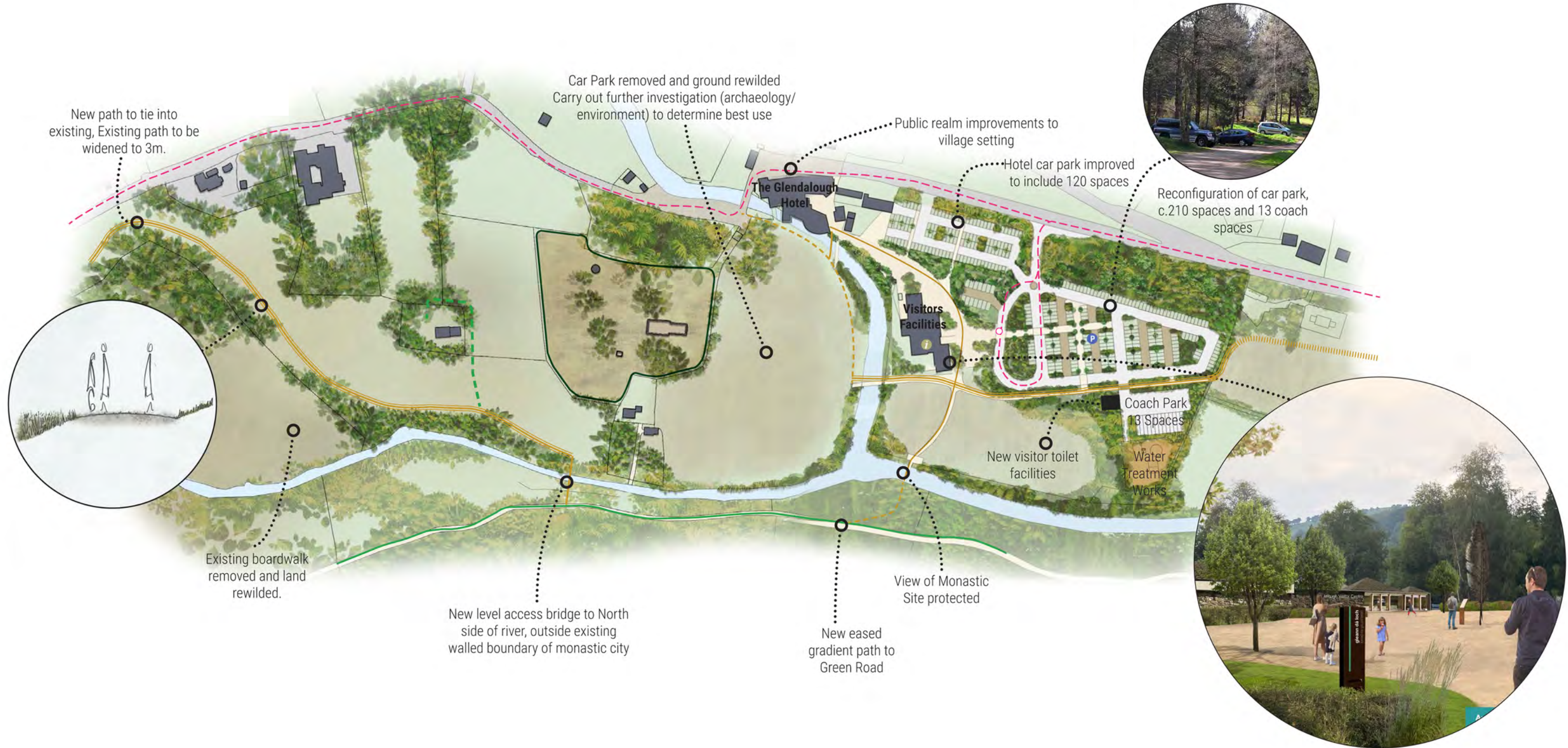
All-ability boardwalk



Upper Lake view point

Glendalough to Laragh **Monastic Site**

DRAFT



Glendalough to Laragh Laragh Visitors Facilities

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New bridge across water course

Pedestrian link to Green Road/
Woollen Mill

New visitor facilities including bike hire,
shuttle bus drop off and disabled parking



Play space within the woodland



New woodland path to connect parking
area to visitor facilities



New footbridge, connecting to wide walking
routes



New woodland car park including coach
overflow area and potential Motor home/
camper van overnight facility

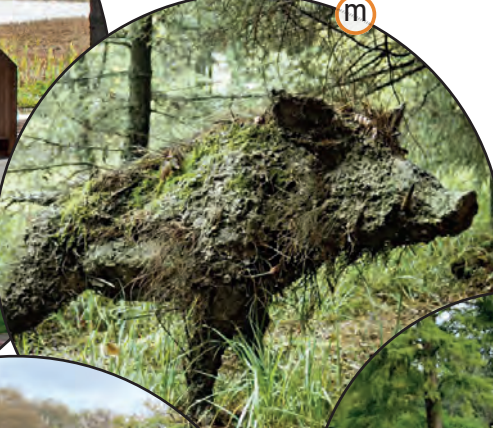
KEY

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Glendalough to Laragh **Points of Interest**

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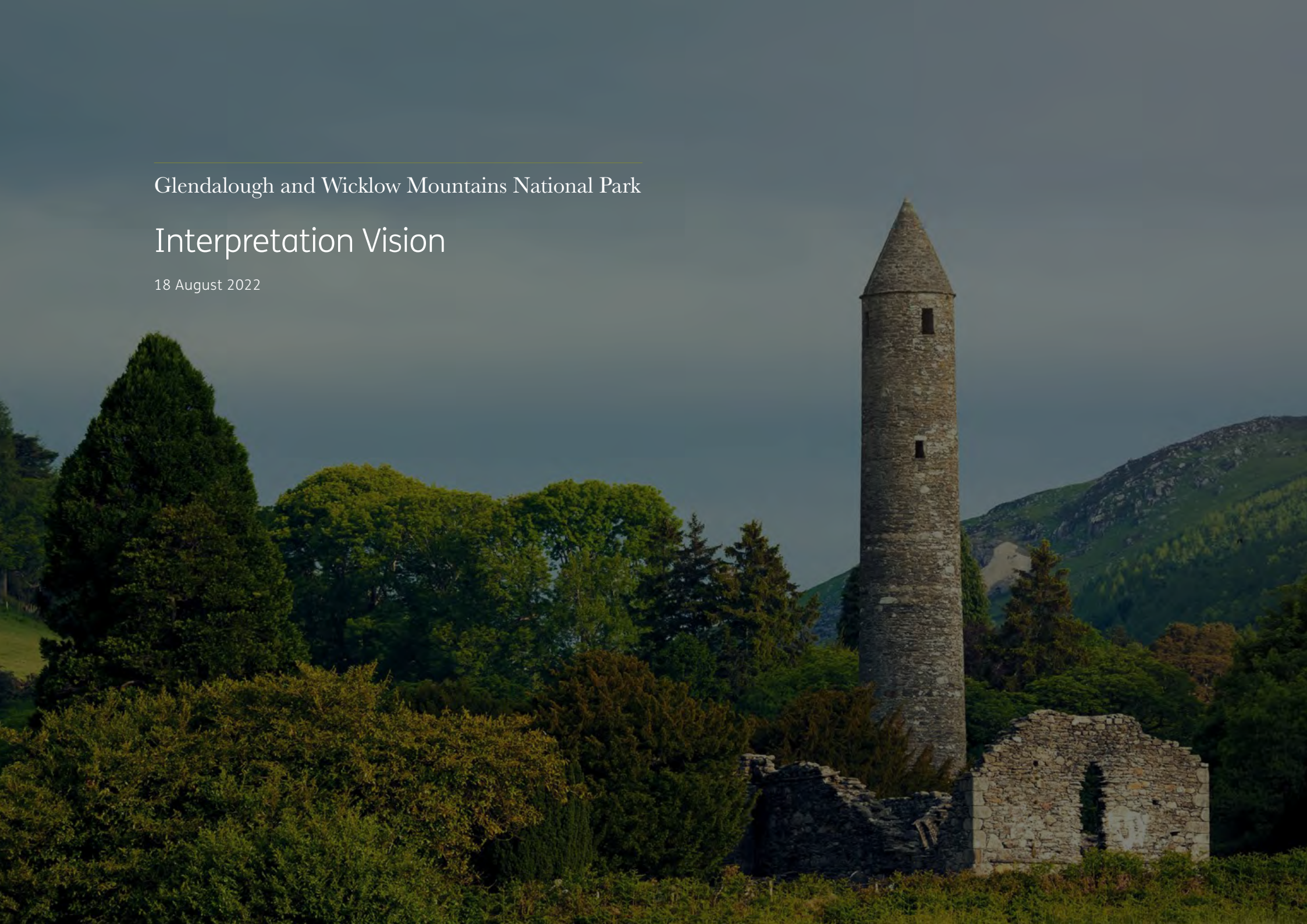
- a** Glendalough Viewpoint
- b** Upper Lake Viewpoint
- c** Lower Lake bird hide/nature point
- d** Productive Landscape
- e** Monastic Site
- f** Deerstone
- g** New bridge
- h** Existing Bridge and Viewpoint
- i** Trinity Church
- j** Valley viewpoint
- k** New Bridge
- l** St. Saviours Priory
- m** Sculpture/Interpretation
- n** New Bridge
- o** Play area
- p** Jackson Falls Valley Walk
- q** Coach-layby Viewpoint
- r** Potential Ranger base
- s** Elevated boardwalk



Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park

Interpretation Vision

18 August 2022



Transformational interpretation

Our vision

To enter the Glendalough valley is to enter a place where nature and spirituality are entwined. Here you can experience a sense of stillness that reaches across centuries, from a time when saints and pilgrims walked through this landscape.

Follow in their footsteps. Leave the hustle and bustle of modern life behind. Let Glendalough's woodlands, wildlife and wilderness set your body and mind on a path of discovery and enlightenment.



Walk with St Kevin

Gaze upon the majesty of Glendalough, breathe its air, clear your mind, and you will come to understand why St Kevin settled here. Embracing his surroundings and befriending all manner of creatures, Kevin lived a frugal life free of luxuries, but everything he needed was here.

Around him, a settlement of devotees grew. Inspired by his teachings the monastery flourished here.

As you explore the valley, you will encounter sensitively developed interpretive interventions – light touches on this beautiful landscape – that reveal what St Kevin saw here and how he and his followers lived.

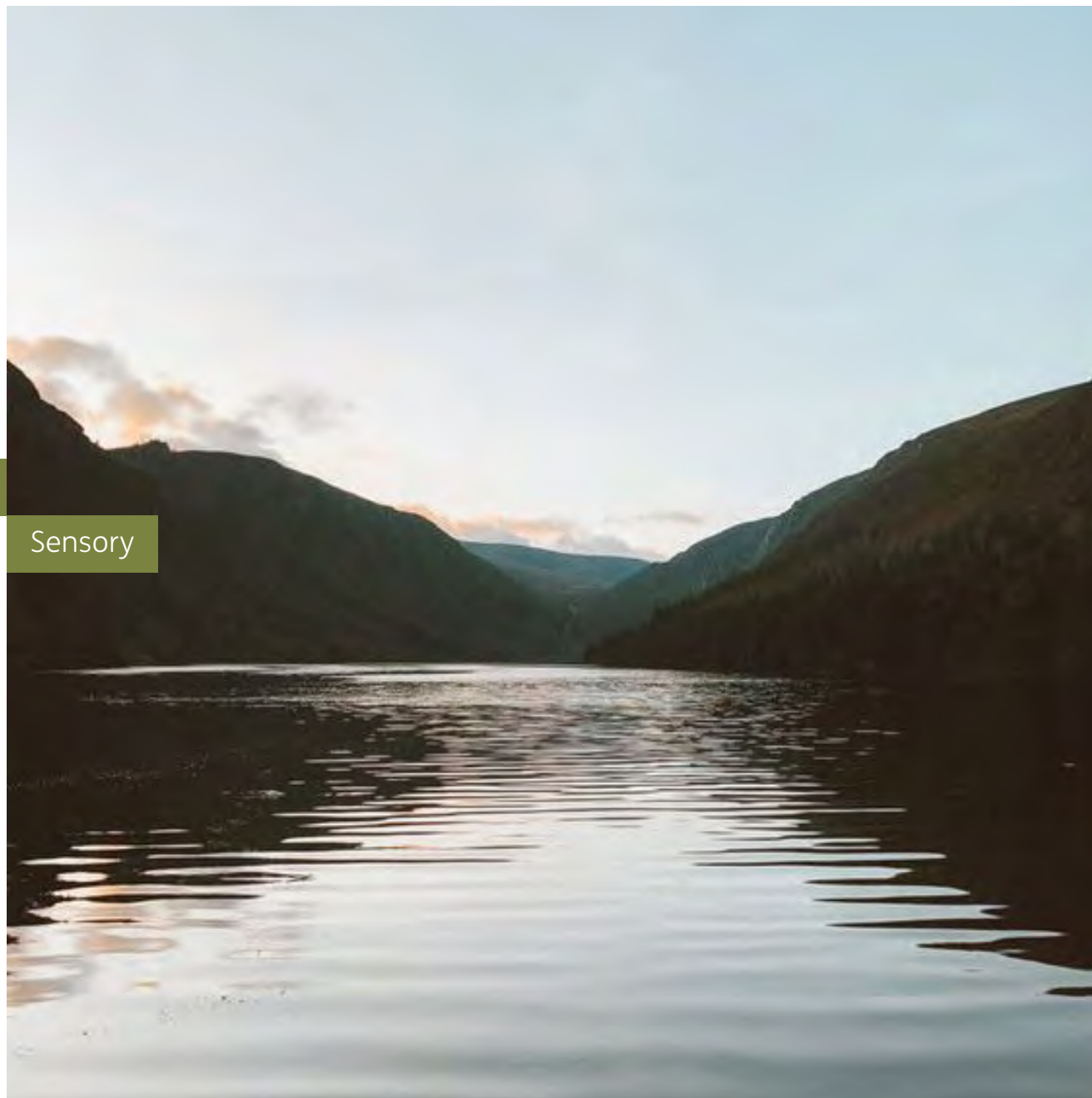


‘The area around the Upper Lake was most likely redesigned as a pilgrimage landscape during the 10th and 11th centuries, and retains many original features.’

NMS Statement of Significance 2020

Tranquil

Sensory



Journeying into the light

It was in the 12th century, under the watchful eyes of St Laurence O'Toole, that Glendalough reached the height of its power and influence, 400 years after the death of St Kevin. Devotees flocked to this valley of learning and prayer.

The monastic settlement grew to incorporate churches, priories, stone crosses and secular areas for living, growing food and learning.

As one of the four most important centres of pilgrimage in Ireland, it is said that seven pilgrimages to Glendalough equalled one to the great holy city of Rome.

Consider your time here as that spent on a journey rather than in a place. You will see how the balance of people and nature has ebbed and flowed through the passage of time; how the landscape has been marked with buildings and pathways, but also how nature has reclaimed these altered spaces as people have moved away from the valley.

A landscape for life

The landscape of the valley was closely intertwined with the lives of those living here. Plants and fungi would have been carefully harvested and animals and birds were hunted. Only what was needed was taken.

Building materials came from the surroundings too with the remains of many structures still evident today, each providing a glimpse into the past; an insights into a way of life long changed. As you explore, look for the evidence of these past lives.

From the 13th century the historical significance of Glendalough fell into decline. In the late 18th and early 19th century lead mining left its mark on the valley.

Although the site has survived as one of the largest and best-preserved medieval ecclesiastical sites in Ireland, commercialisation and overcrowding has taken its toll. The visitor has been disconnected from opportunities for spiritual nourishment.

‘One of the lives of St Kevin compared Glendalough to *A gracious Rome, city of the angels, western Europe’s Rome*’

NMS Statement of Significance 2020

Transforming Glendalough

Restoring and protecting the spiritual significance of Glendalough is at the heart of our vision.

Our goal here is not to encourage more visitors but to imbue in those who do come a deeper understanding and greater appreciation of what they encounter here.

We want to reconnect the visitor to what St Kevin saw, all those centuries ago: the true value of this special place – a restorative place where the visitor can find wellbeing for themselves and those with them.

Importantly, we want to show the visitor why they should care about the Glendalough Valley.

*‘Through interpretation, understanding;
through understanding, appreciation;
through appreciation, protection.’*

From *Interpreting Our Heritage*, Freeman Tilden

Transformational interpretation
Themes and Topics

Transformational interpretation Themes and topics

Themes below can inform the interpretive direction of the visitor experience, focusing the narrative and ensuring any media adhere to the themes.

Theme 1

(overall understanding/intangible)

A protected landscape carved over time

Laragh-Glendalough – a protected sacred gateway to Ireland’s largest national park in the stunning Wicklow Mountains. The glacial landscape draws trusted loyal followers to its distinctive u-shaped valleys, a distinctly familiar backdrop to local visitors’ walks and wonderings, talks and trails. New travellers, drawn by tales of its dramatic natural beauty, glimpse the rich, delicate views, bath in the beauty of lakes and forests and immerse themselves in Ireland’s iconic heritage. Earmarked for inclusion into the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative list, this special place still welcomes careful pilgrims hundreds of years later.

Theme 2

(understanding/tangible)

An old spiritual landscape

Hidden by the surrounding natural world ‘where two clear rivers meet’, the monastic settlement devoted to St Kevin is at the heart of the Glendalough valley. The story of his life, followers and pilgrims are retained in the written word, folklore and extant archaeology—churches, an iconic round tower, accommodation, market cross, settlement, graveyards and high crosses preserved on the landscape. Devoted to learning, pilgrimage and spirituality, the story of life in the busy monastic settlement can be discovered through the eyes of the hermit, Kevin, thought to have lived a more solitary spiritual life away from the monastery, deep within the arms of nature.

Theme 3

(behavioural)

Discover new memories and meaning off the beaten track

The well trodden path of modern pilgrims is one of several trails that can be explored. Find your own path, away from the familiar, to discover more, to make new memories and to delve into nature. Whether on a rainy winter hike or a short summer stroll, Glendalough offers a changing landscape of lush ferns, dark lakes and rich smells to awaken the senses all year round. The well trodden path of modern pilgrims is one of several trails that can be explored. Find your own path, away from the familiar, to discover more, to make new memories and to delve into nature. Whether on a rainy winter hike or a short summer stroll, Glendalough offers a changing landscape of lush ferns, dark lakes and rich smells to awaken the senses all year round.

Theme 4

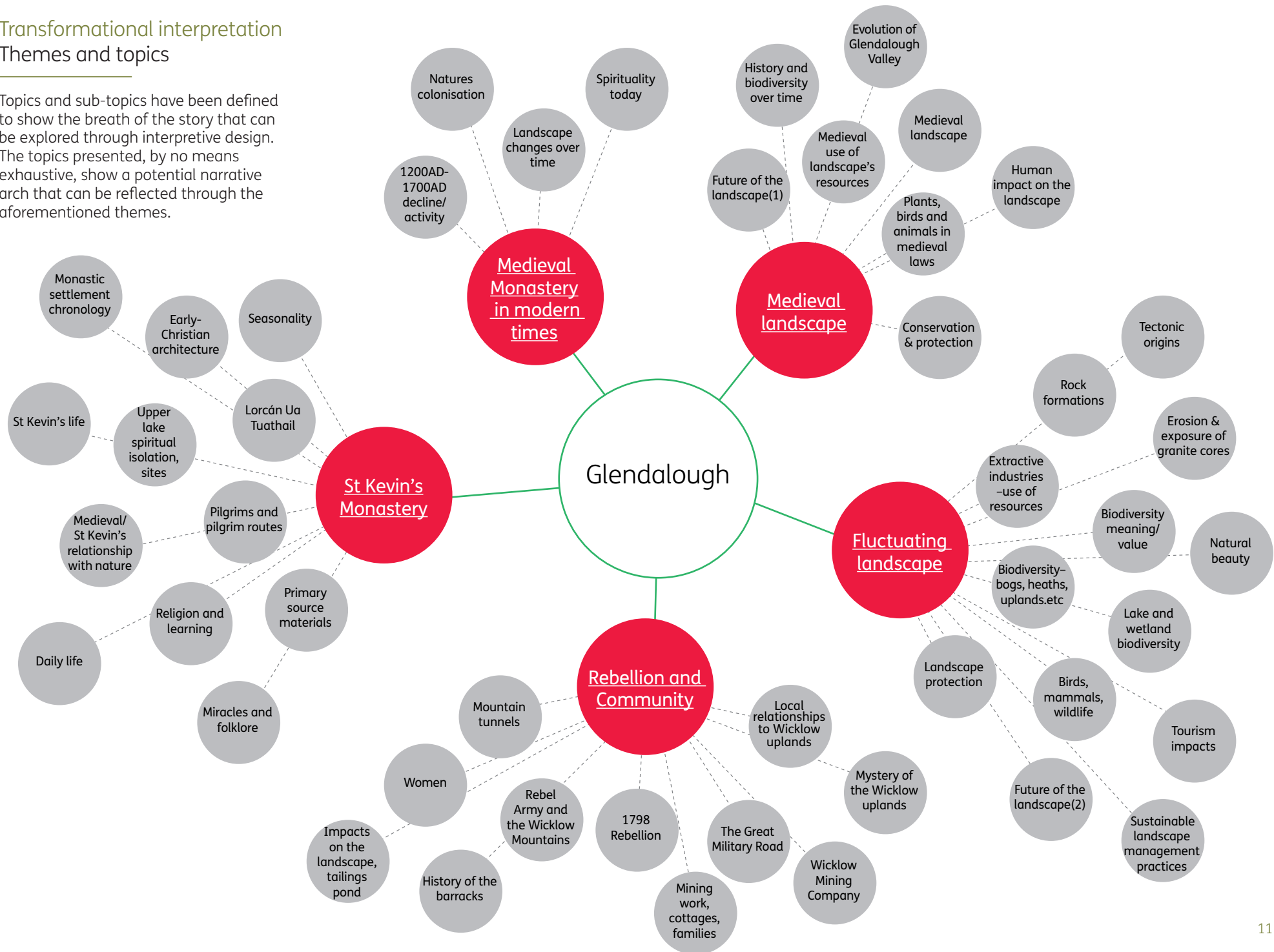
(emotive/wellbeing)

Escape to this special place and recharge in nature

As the sounds of chatter and traffic fall into the distance let nature take over your senses. Throughout the glens, at waters edge and deep within the vastness of the Valley, the serene sound of a peregrine bird, the sight of a squirrel, the smell of growing pine or the damp crunch of sticks underfoot—each visit to Glendalough Valley brings new connections with nature fostering a deep appreciation. For some it offers a spiritual value, to others it is a place of being well. To everyone, it is a special place to rejuvenate, recharge and be within nature.

Transformational interpretation Themes and topics

Topics and sub-topics have been defined to show the breath of the story that can be explored through interpretive design. The topics presented, by no means exhaustive, show a potential narrative arch that can be reflected through the aforementioned themes.



Transformational interpretation

Interpretive concept

Transformational interpretation

Aims of the interpretation

Provide a spiritual experience for visitors, where they can 'escape' the everyday and step into a pre-industrial time

Create an experience which allows time for reflection, exploration and connection with people, place and landscape

Guide people to step into the world of St Kevin and his followers

Foster a deeper understanding of the delicate ecosystems of the National Park

Provide context to deepen and strengthen the sense of awe and wonder at the Wicklow Mountains National Park

Create an emotional experience for visitors as they journey up the valley

Support visitors in their understanding of the richness of the site

Introduce interventions that maintain or enhance the built and natural environments

Develop an integrated approach to interpreting the natural, cultural, spiritual and historical significances

Foster a sense of responsibility and protection in individuals for the National Park

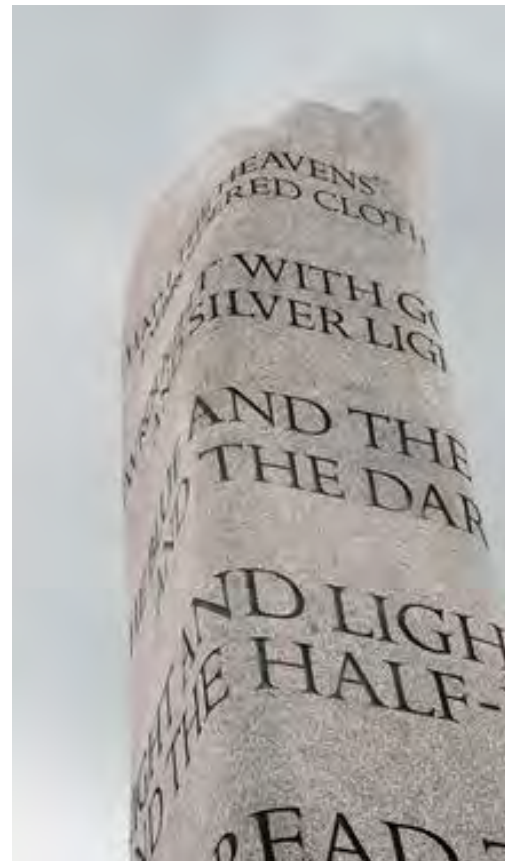
Draw out the stories of the people who lived, prayed and worked in the Glendalough valley and further afield

Layer a variety of media and experiences in ways that will appeal to a broad range of audiences

Deepen engagement with the site beyond its appeal for day trippers and picnics

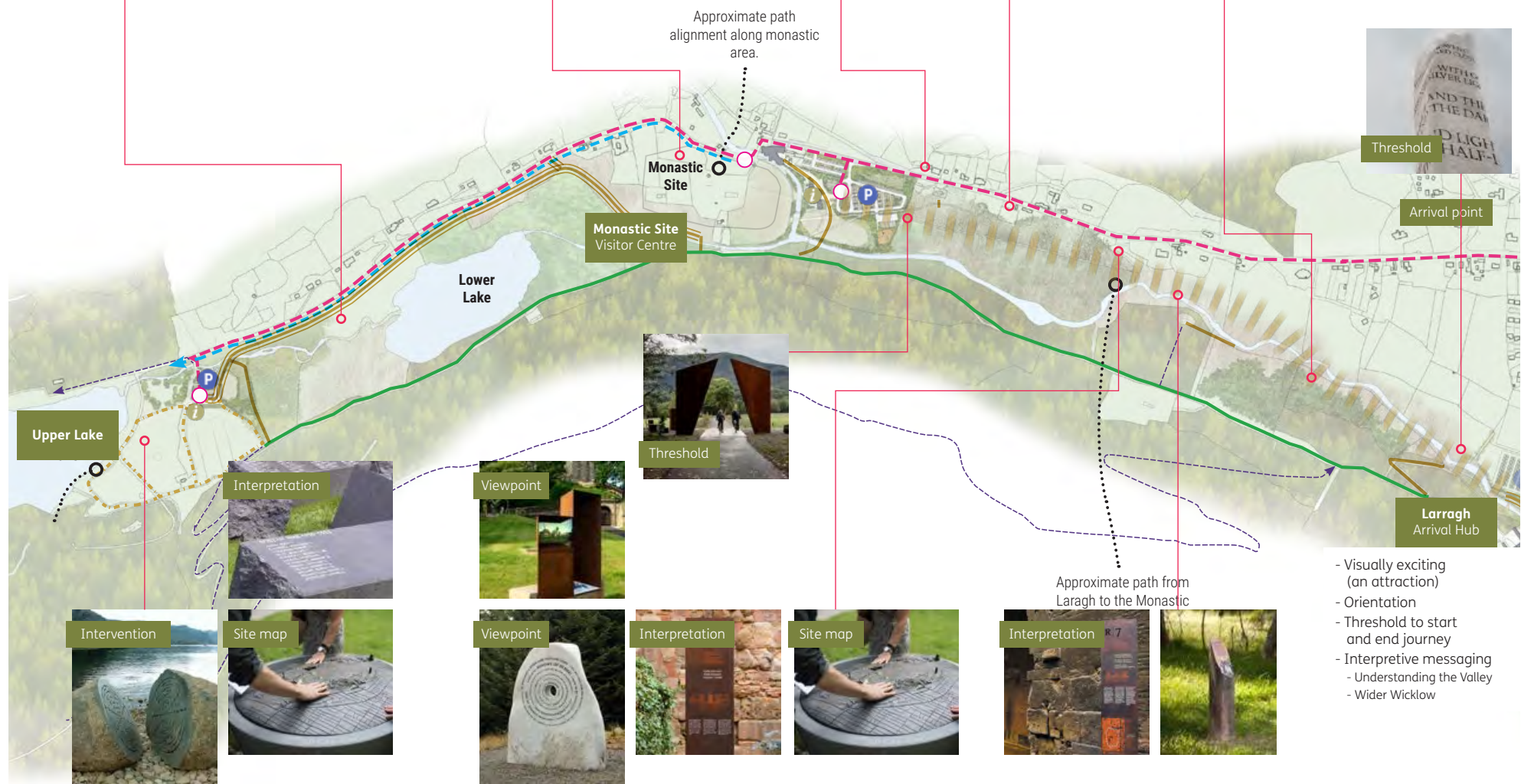
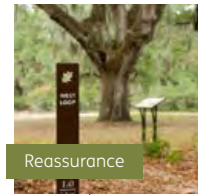
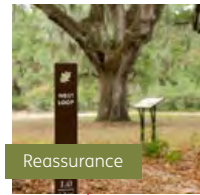
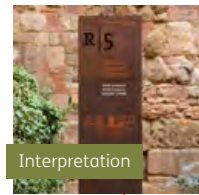
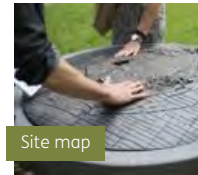
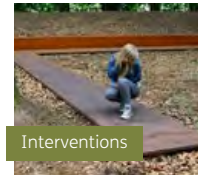
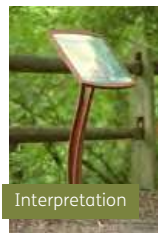
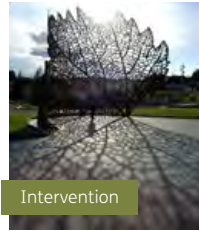
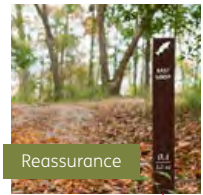
Transformational interpretation Materials and techniques

Interpretation will be connected by themes as well as through materials and techniques that are sympathetic to the environment



Transformational interpretation Materials and techniques

Indicative only



- Visually exciting (an attraction)
- Orientation
- Threshold to start and end journey
- Interpretive messaging
 - Understanding the Valley
 - Wider Wicklow

Larragh

Arrival Hub

Where the journey begins

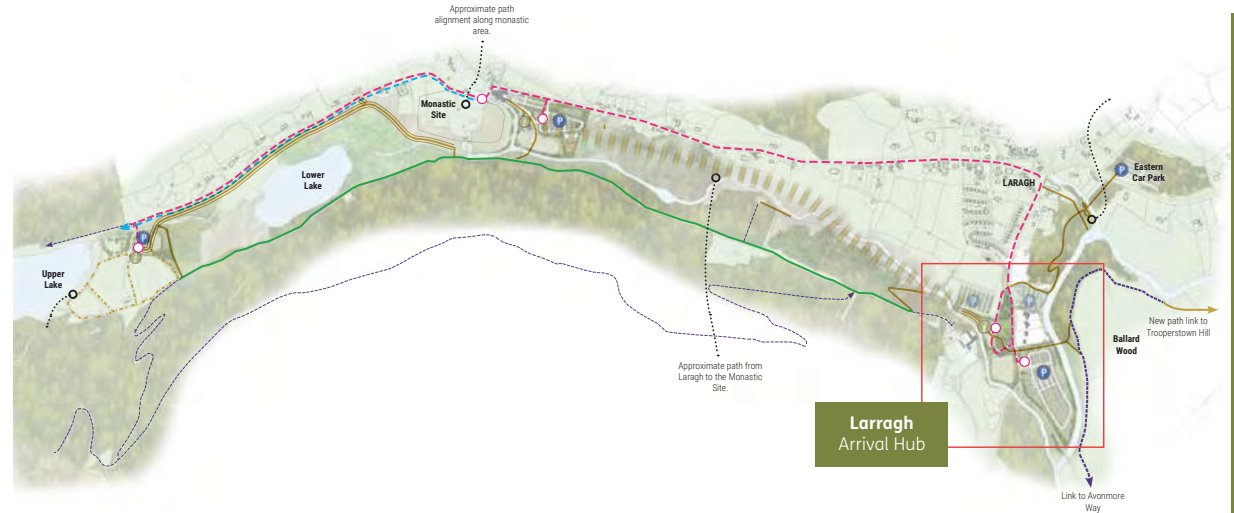
Visitors will be encouraged to begin and end their interpretive journey at a new orientation hub.

On arrival at the Laragh visitor orientation hub (and long term, accessible car park) the visitor will have the opportunity to refresh themselves before and after their journey and take advantage of on site facilities.

Interpretation will begin to set the scene and wayfinding information will orientate them.

Motivational and meaningful interpretive messaging will encourage the visitor to begin their experience via an 'interpretive portal'.

The objective of this 'Hub' is to help the visitor shake off their everyday concerns, to reset their minds and to prepare them for an immersive nature experience in Glendalough Valley.



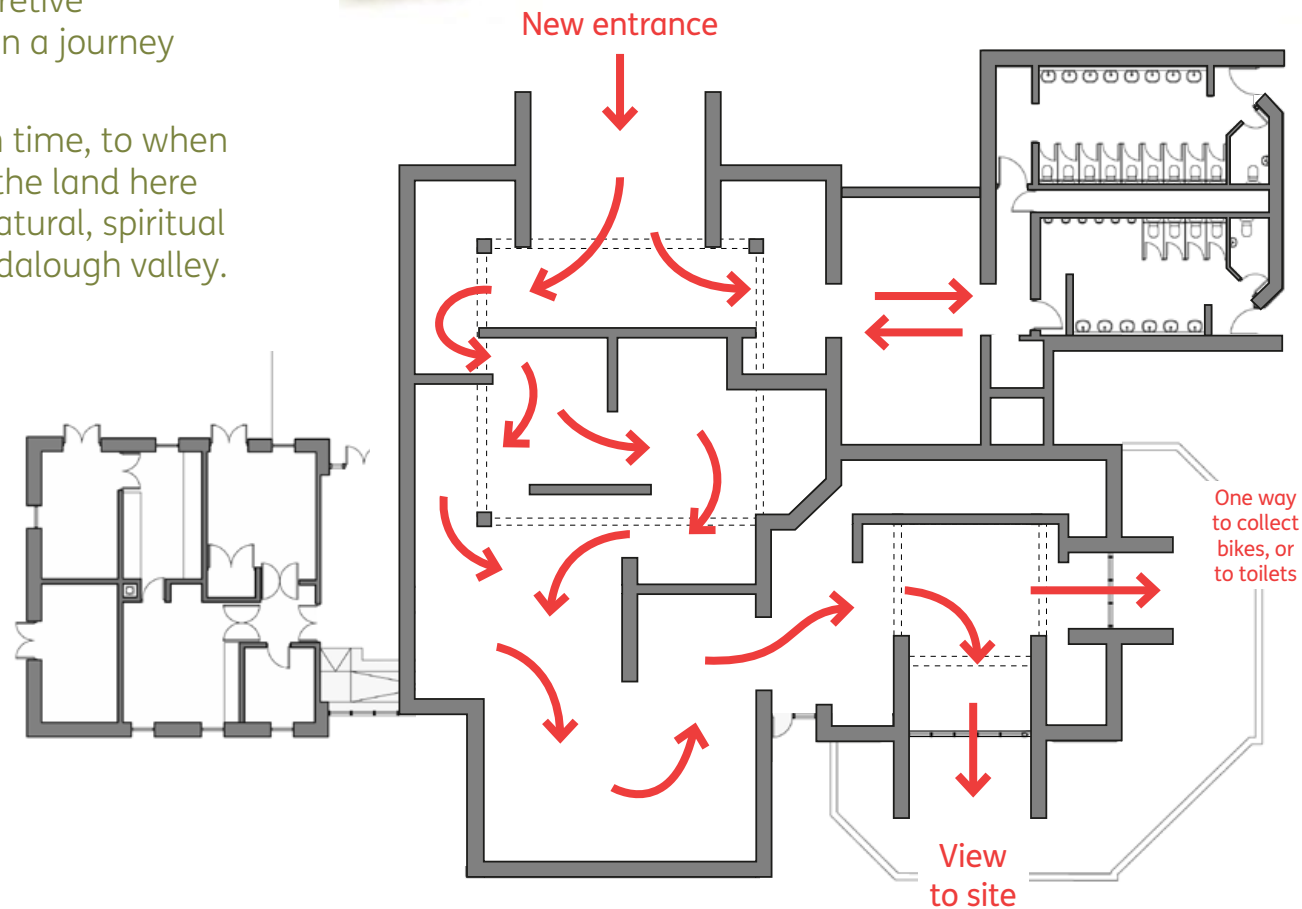
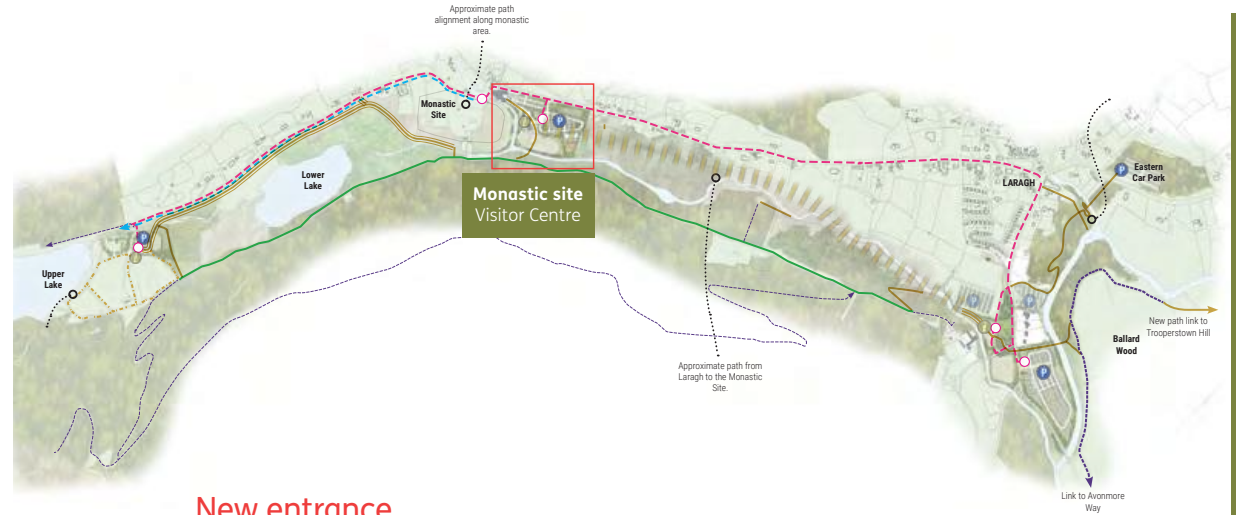
Monastic Site

Visitor Centre
Interpretive Visitor Experience

The new repurposed visitor centre will deliver a transformational interpretive experience.

As the visitor passes through this innovative space, experiential and interpretive interventions will take them on a journey away from the everyday.

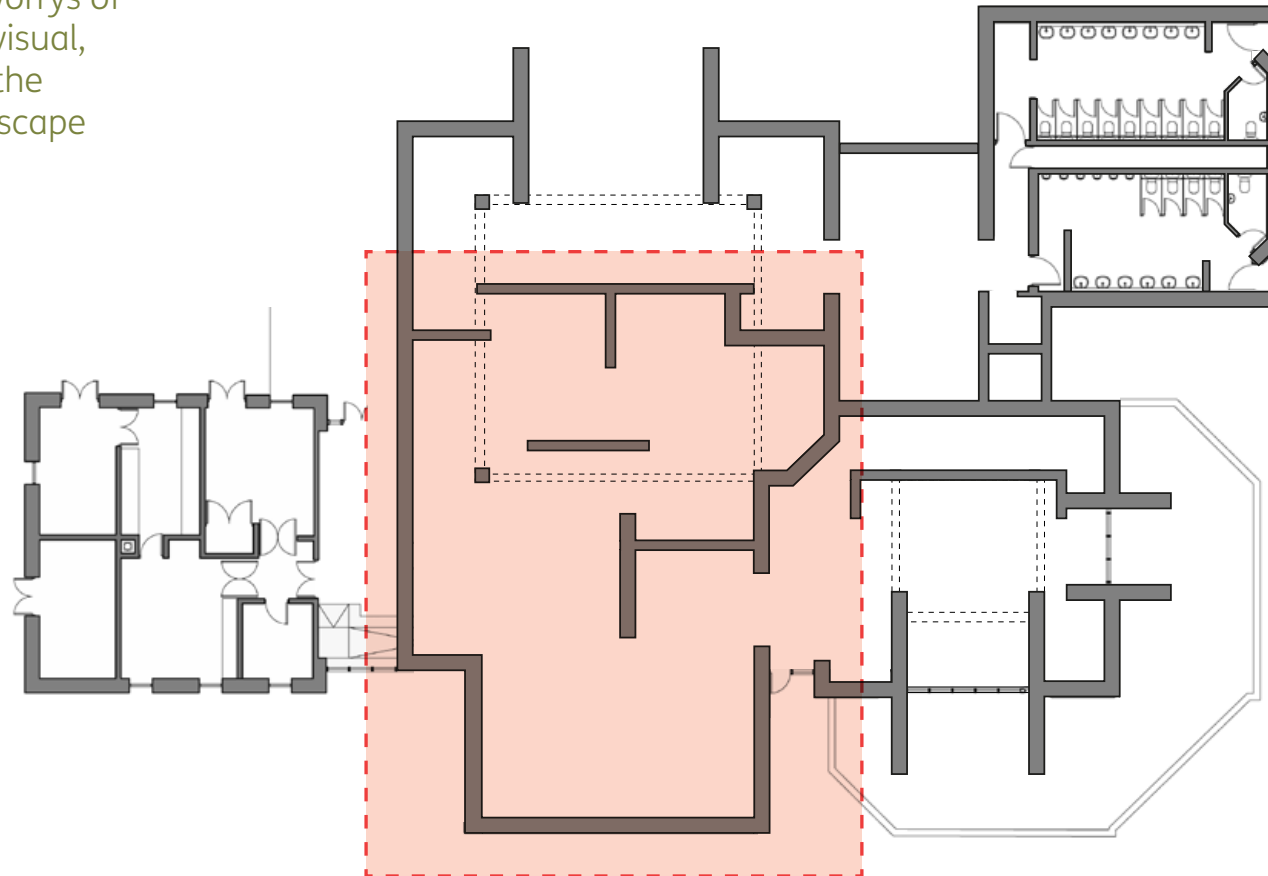
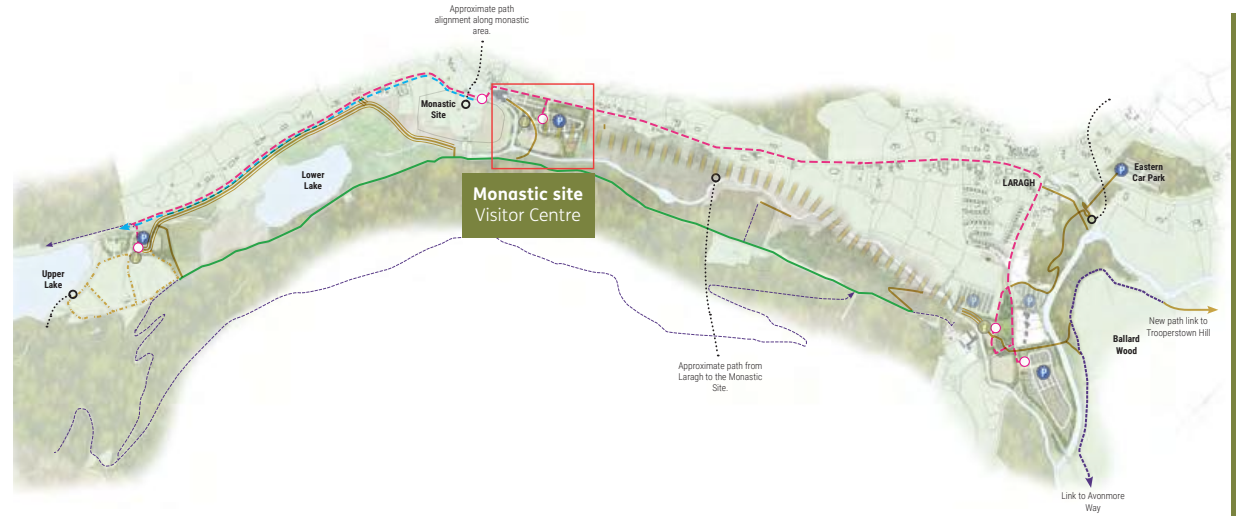
It will transport them through time, to when St Kevin first walked through the land here and connect them with the natural, spiritual and built heritage of the Glendalough valley.



Monastic Site

Visitor Centre
Interpretive Visitor Experience

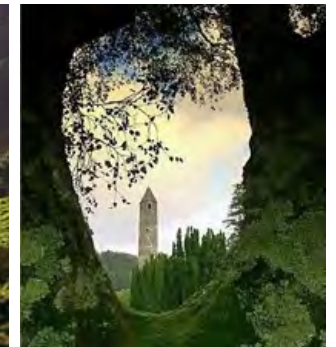
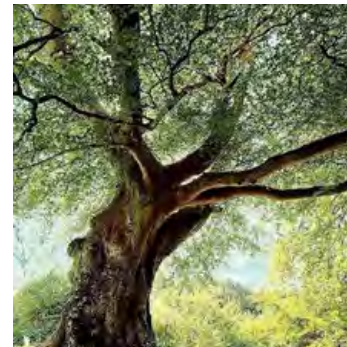
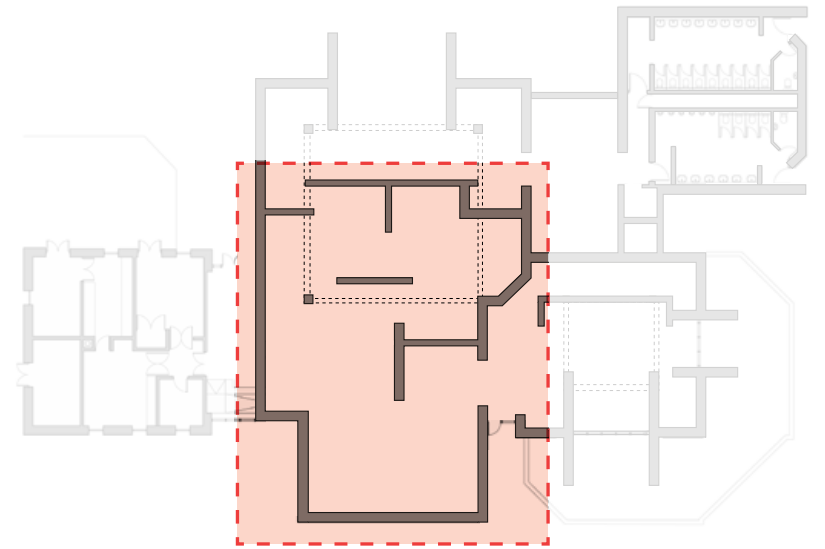
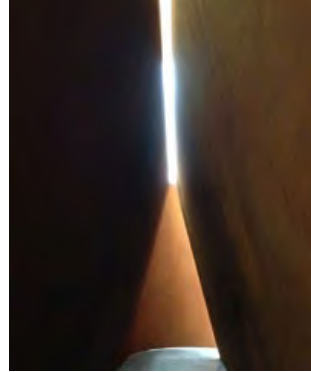
An atmospheric, open and visually compelling space, entry to the Visitor Centre will be a warm, welcoming and unique experience. Visitors will be invited to shed the toils and worries of the day and replace it with a visual, immersive experience where the sights and sounds of the landscape are explored.



Monastic Site

Visitor Centre
Interpretive Visitor Experience

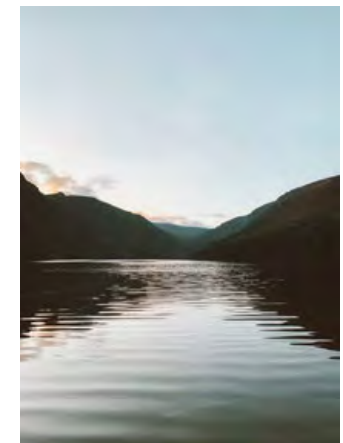
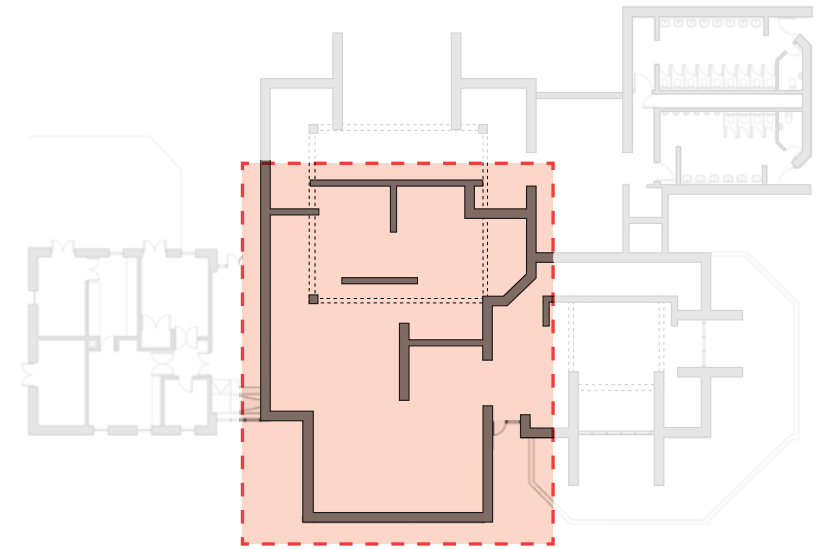
Nature, heritage, light and seasons will heighten the senses. Breathe in, clear your mind, explore the familiar aspects of the natural world like never before. In the distance a monk forages in the hedgerow, a beam of light filters where your foot step lands, the territorial call of a peregrine breaks the sounds of nature, wind rustles through the forest.



Monastic Site

Visitor Centre
Interpretive Visitor Experience

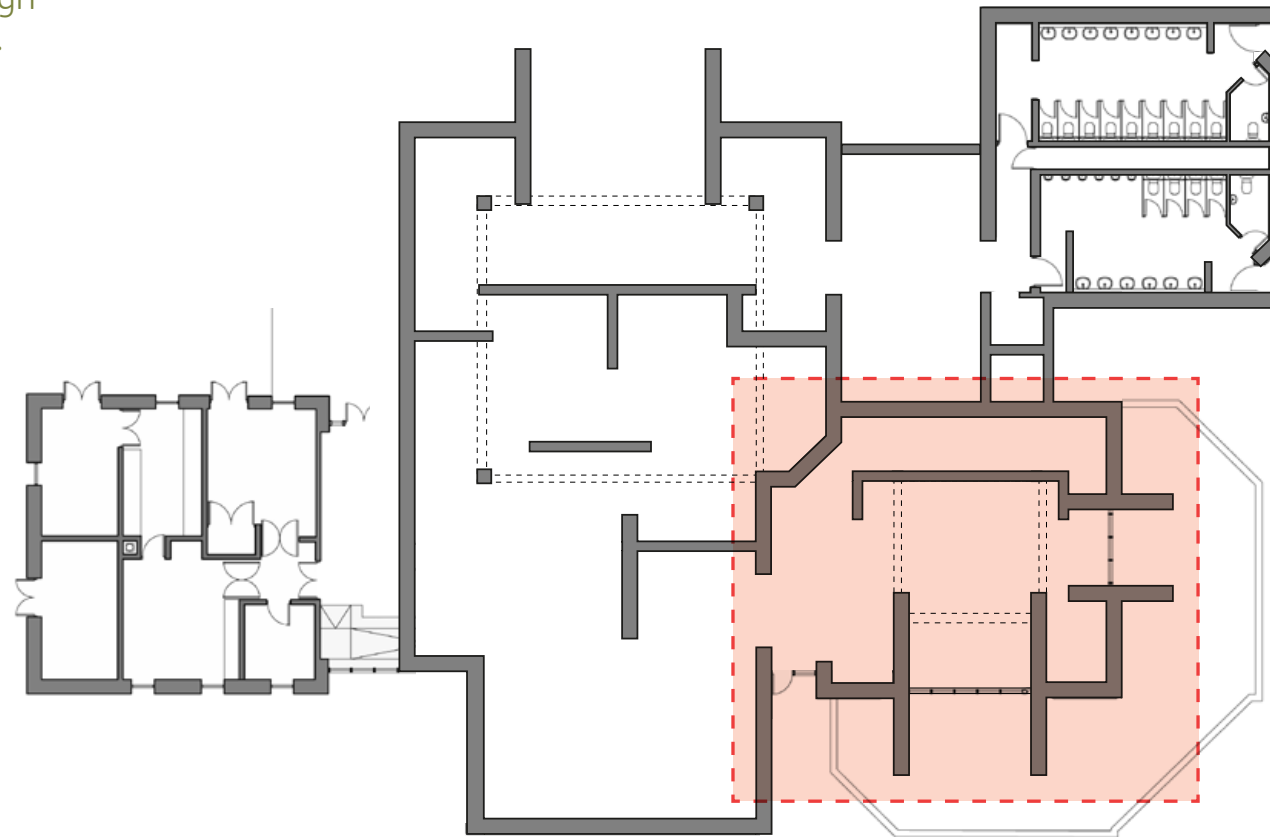
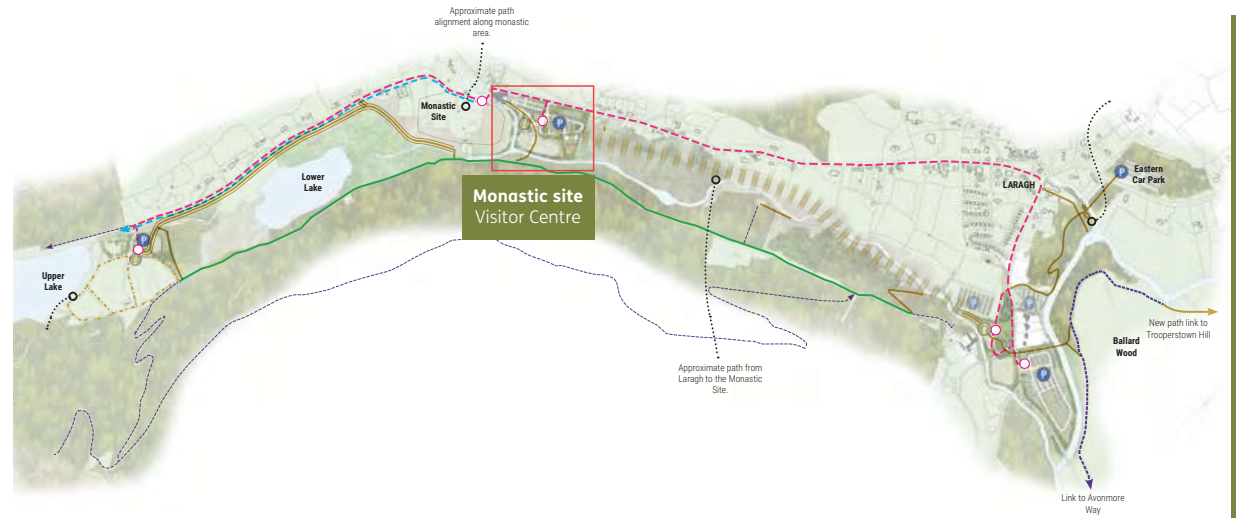
Immersive and interactive, the space intensifies the visitors' experience of nature. Approaching a swaying ancient oak, the leaves will change colour and drop before slowing and carefully replenishing again. On approach to open grassland a young fawn will jump up, leaping into the distance. The sight and sound of a torrential downpour will nourish the flora and fauna growing richer and more colourful as the raindrops recede. Individual elements of the landscape will be brought into a close, and intimate focus.



Monastic Site

Visitor Centre
Interpretive Visitor Experience

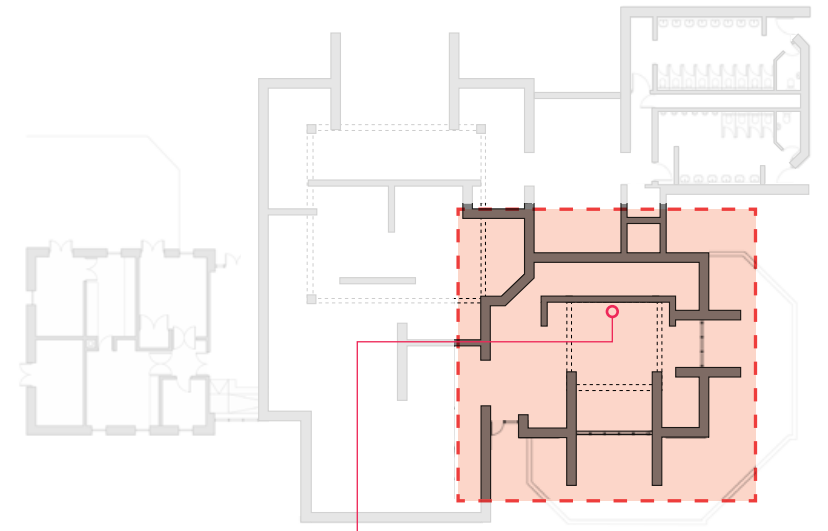
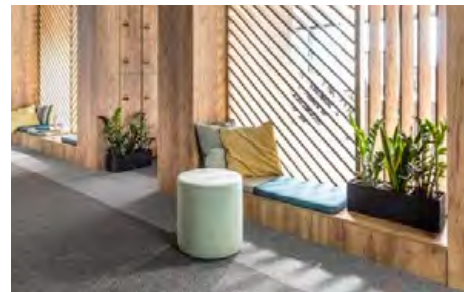
The immersivity of the earlier experience will be enhanced through an open plan room where interpretation will explore how the landscape changed through natural and manmade forces.



Monastic Site

Visitor Centre
Interpretive Visitor Experience

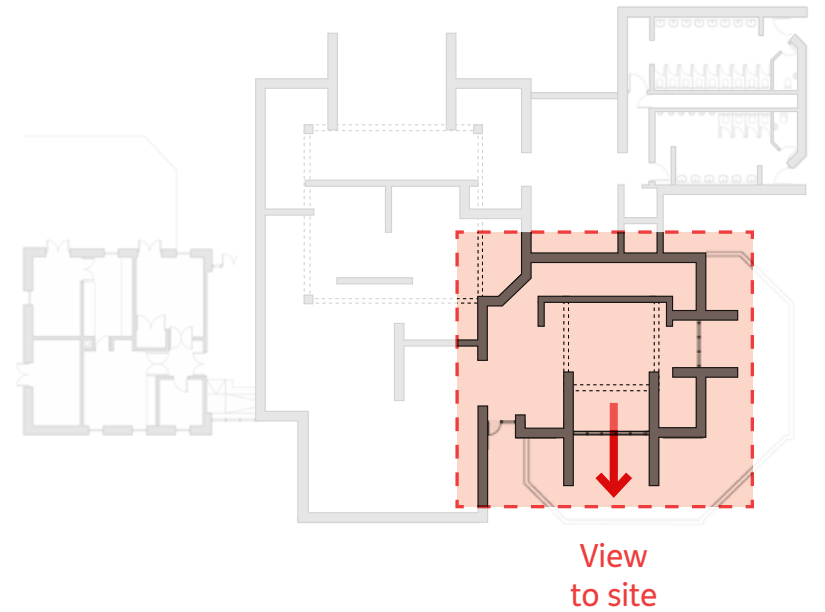
Nature-rich reflective spaces will encourage and allow visitors to reflect on the landscape outside highlighting the diversity of natures through subtle 'must sees'. The impact of people, industry and the future of this rich, sacred landscape will feature in interpretation while spirituality, connection to nature and concepts around the future of the landscape will be explored. As the visitor begins to understand the landscape around them, their appreciation will grow.



Monastic Site

Visitor Centre
Interpretive Visitor Experience

Strategic viewing points will enhance the visitor connection to the outside space, motivating the visitor to explore the surrounding area.



Upper Lake

Focused sensory interpretation

Sensory and artistic interpretation will re-enforce the Upper Lakes key natural assets, way finding and discovery sites.

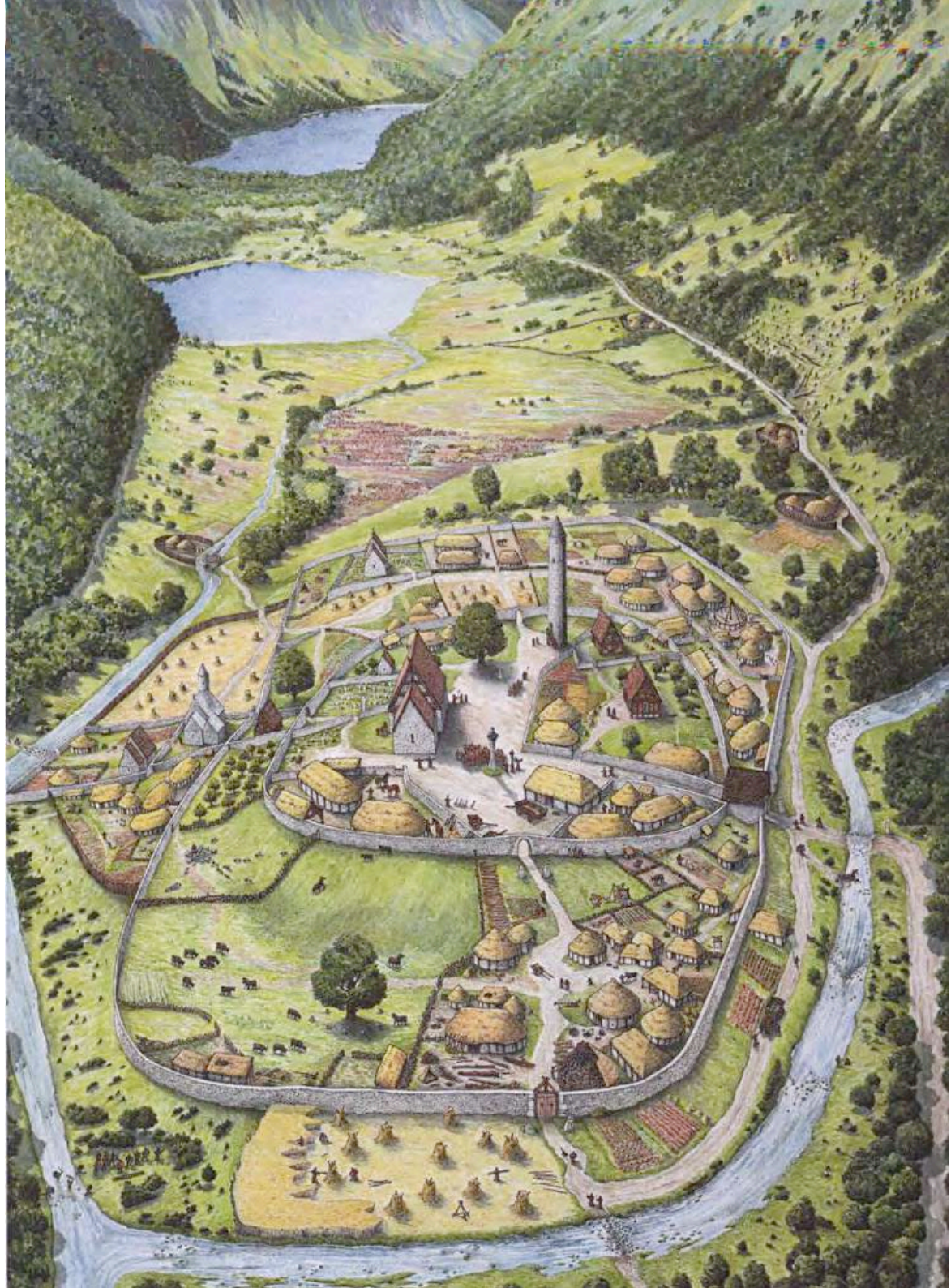


Interpretive Visitor Experience
Orientation and interpretation hub

Transformational visitor experience

‘As the visitor emerges into the light, they will become aware of the widening vista with a spectacular view across the valley.

Multiple senses will be stimulated. Modern life has been left behind and the visitor is now in a place beyond time.’



A scenic view of a river flowing through a lush green landscape. In the background, a stone tower with a pointed roof stands on a hillside. The river is surrounded by dense vegetation and large rocks.

Glendalough Visitor Experience Masterplan

Interpretation Strategy

Issue: 02
05/08/2020

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Introduction

This document outlines the background, comparative case studies and an overview of the natural heritage and historical significance for the Glendalough Valley. This forms the context for the refreshment of the interpretative experience at the Glendalough and Laragh valley and monastic settlement, incorporating a section of the Wicklow Mountains National Park. This strategy is aligned with the overall masterplan which incorporates the wider Wicklow visitor experience, and is developed in conjunction with Consarc, Paul Hogarth Company, Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland, Faith Wilson and Doyle Kent.

Our overall proposal encompasses a reimagined visitor experience model in the valley, which is necessary in order to mitigate the current confused and disparate experiences available for visitors in this incredibly significant area. We envisage the significant stories and histories of the valley being incorporated more widely across the sites, including the Upper and Lower Lakes, through newly developed pathways and cycle routes as well as on current routes, and further into the valley and on the Military Road.

The project presents a unique opportunity to consider what stories are told to visitors at Glendalough and Wicklow, and how to tell them. It provides a concept of a visitor journey that will deeply connect visitors

to the special landscapes and habitats of the Glendalough valley, while relating the significance and spirituality of the monastic centre in an engaging and relatable way.

The proposals outlined have been informed by a detailed site appraisal and consultation with NPWS and OPW management and staff, and by Fáilte Ireland's market insights.

The proposals have been benchmarked against international models and standards for best practice, with the aim of deepening the engagement of visitors to the monastic settlement and the Glendalough Valley through developing an authentic, meaningful and deeply emotional experience. Ensuring this important destination for locals and international visitors alike is maintained and respected is key to our proposals, which align with other parts of the masterplan aiming to disperse visitation throughout the amazing range of experiences available in Wicklow.

Providing a range of access options to the valley, as outlined in the Tourism Interpretative Masterplan for Ireland's National Parks, has also been outlined, to ensure the congestion and access issues experienced in recent years are relieved.¹

¹ Experiencing the Wild Heart Of Ireland: A Tourism Interpretative Master Plan for Ireland's National Parks and Coole - Garryland Nature Reserve. June 2018
200805 Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park Masterplan

Who are we?

Tandem Design are a specialist design agency, based in Holywood, Northern Ireland. Our team of expert graphic designers, interpretation planners and education consultants have experience in developing awe-inspiring visitor experiences from national parks to museums, from art installations to archaeological sites. We use smart, beautiful design with diligent research, writing and planning to tell stories that inspire and entertain. It's unusually rich and exciting work that makes a real difference.

We believe in the power of interpretation to help individuals and communities find long-lasting value and meaning in heritage and culture. That's why we place learning at the heart of our design process and understand its role in providing fun, thought-provoking and fulfilling experiences that will be remembered.

What is interpretation?

The provision of relevant and effective interpretation is critical to the creation of a successful model for visitor experience and management at Glendalough.

It is an essential tool which contributes to NPWS satisfying its responsibilities with regard to education and public engagement. National Parks organisations and other conservation organisations around the world use interpretation successfully in this way, and excellent interpretation can make the difference between a good experience and a truly amazing one.

Potentially the most effective and enjoyable form of interpretation is interaction with a human being. Everyone who works at Glendalough can use interactions with visitors to help foster understanding and appreciation of what makes the place so special.

The Association for Heritage Interpretation defines interpretation as:

“Interpretation is primarily a communication process that helps people make sense of, and understand more about, your site, collection or event.”

It can:

- Bring meaning to your cultural or environmental resource, enhancing visitor appreciation and promoting better understanding. As a result your visitors are more likely to care for what they identify as a precious resource.
- Enhance the visitor experience, resulting in longer stays and repeat visits. This will lead to increased income and create employment opportunities.
- Enable communities to better understand their heritage, and to express their own ideas and feelings about their home area. As a result individuals may identify with lost values inherent in their culture.

Freeman Tilden, one of the founders of modern interpretation, defined it:

‘An educational activity which aims to reveal meaning and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information’.

After 50 years, this is still one of the clearest insights into the role of the interpreter.

Interpretation also happens via other media, such as written, illustrative and digital content around the site, in the visitor centres or on outdoor panels, on the website, and during special events.

Any means of communication with the public has the potential to feature elements of interpretation, as it offers a chance to overtly or subtly impart the area's values and significances, and to influence visitor behaviour and attitudes.

It can be as discreet as a thoughtful colour choice for trail wayfinding arrows, as creative as an interactive indoor exhibition, as entertaining as a themed guided tour, or as direct as listing the Leave No Trace principles on trailhead signs.

Successful Interpretation

The success of interpretation is dependent on its ability to connect and resonate with visitors, and so the development of interpretation is necessarily visitor-centric. The process of developing interpretation should have an emphasis on defining the needs of the various target audiences in the context of their visit. Engagement with relevant stakeholders is also a key part of the development process.

The National Parks and Wildlife service have a number of responsibilities and objectives in terms of learning, emotional and behavioural outcomes. This includes the Wicklow Mountains National Park's primary objectives under the IUCN Category II National Park Status "to protect natural biodiversity and promote education and sustainable recreation. Recreation and Tourism must be environmentally compatible with this objective." National parks under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature guidelines also have the opportunity to provide "respectful visitor access for inspirational, educational, cultural and recreational purposes".²

The site-specific interpretation at the Glendalough monastic settlement also needs to highlight the exceptional historical significance of the site, as befitting the bid for World Heritage Site status through UNESCO.

Interpretation enables informal education to take place by all visitors, as well as working in harmony with the formal education programmes offered within the Wicklow Mountains National Park, by providing opportunities for school pupils and third level students to engage more generally or specifically with media that is relevant or linked to their learning journey.

In doing all these things, we can make sure to capitalise upon these opportunities to help visitors not only enjoy themselves but also to understand what makes Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park so special.

² Experiencing the Wild Heart Of Ireland: A Tourism Interpretative Master Plan for Ireland's National Parks and Coole - Garryland Nature Reserve. June 2018
200805 Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park Masterplan

What do we mean by ‘visitor experience?’

Further in this plan we have undertaken a detailed audit of the current visitor experience at the Glendalough Visitor Centre and at the National Parks and Wildlife Service visitor centre. Please see this section for further analysis. Fáilte Ireland defines a visitor experience as different to a tourism product. There is currently an emphasis on creating experiences that visitors take part in, rather than consume, which provide opportunities for imaginative learning and where encountering the unexpected elements is the norm. All elements of the visitor journey combine to create an experience worth more than the sum of its parts.

Fáilte Ireland has developed an Experience Development Framework to support the development of world class tourism experiences in Ireland, which identifies the components that combine to deliver a memorable experience (see table below³).

As visitors move around the valley — from arrival at the arrival point in Laragh and begin their journey via the entrance hall, make their way to the Upper Lake monastic via the Green Road, cycling or shuttle, visit the monastic settlement, explore the trails and viewpoints, and perhaps venture further into the National Park itself, we can ensure that they have the best possible experience by thinking carefully about what messages they are receiving in each context.

Not only does this include when we are actually speaking to visitors, but also includes other cues that visitors pick up on, including signage, labels and exhibits, marketing material, website and social media content, and special events provision.

³ *Experiences Explained: a guide to understanding and developing memorable tourism experiences* Fáilte Ireland: National Experience Development Framework Ref: FI-23051-14

Component	At Glendalough/WMNP	How?	Visitor outcome
Product	Attractions, activities, trails, facilities	The experience is truly immersive	Feels energised and instilled with a deep connection to the place.
Service	Looking after the customers' needs	Meeting passionate and hospitable people, who present a unified approach to welcoming visitors	Feels valued by the quality of service on offer and the personal service experienced.
Story	The story of the Glendalough valley, its monastic heritage and significance, its natural history and the wider stories of the national park	Meaningful and emotive stories of place, history and culture	Feels enlightened by stories that resonate and last a lifetime
Narration	How we tell the story - before, during and after the visit	Communication that informs, motivates and inspires	Feels enriched by being immersed in the local culture and becoming a part of the story

Visitor Profiles to Glendalough Valley

Visitors to the Glendalough Valley come from all walks of life, with a range of different ages, needs and expectations prior to their visit. Understanding what these visitors need and want from their

experience helps us to shape an interpretative journey that engages and excites as many visitors as possible.

Below we have mapped out how different visitor segment groupings, sourced from Fáilte Ireland, are likely to engage with Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park. These are indicative groupings and will not cover all visitors to Glendalough and the wider national park, but give an indication of how we can shape interpretation to delight, engage and inspire different segments of visitors.

	Connected Families (ROI/NI)	Culturally Curious (international)	Great Escapers (international)
Why does Glendalough/ WMNP appeal to the key market segments?	It is a beautiful day out, with the chance to create family memories in a special place.	A chance to explore a beautiful, unique place on their own terms, and immerse themselves in nature and history.	Somewhere spectacular to connect with landscape and nature, and disconnect from their normal daily lives.
What do they want to do during their visit?	Primary motivation is to spend quality time as a family and connect in a meaningful way. For parents, they are particularly concerned with their children having a good day out and experiencing the outdoors, away from screens and indoor activities. They wish to create special memories together that can be treasured. Learning something new is of interest, but is not the priority. Instead fun experiences as a family are key.	These visitors wish to connect with nature, get off the beaten track and have an authentic and meaningful experience. They wish to explore at their own pace, and immerse themselves in the stories of the location. They will appreciate understanding why a place like Glendalough is so important, and feeling a connection to the landscape and the history that it holds as a unique memory of their time in Ireland.	Seeking down time somewhere beautiful where they can be off the beaten track exploring somewhere new. They enjoy strenuous activity, but need the wow factor without too much effort to get there or make decisions. They're interested in seeing landmarks and important sights, and understanding their own place in history.

<p>What experiences will enrich/improve their visit?</p>	<p>Good access for buggies and small legs</p> <p>Easily accessible hidden gems to discover, with well-marked trails and way finding.</p> <p>Traffic-free areas for safe play and exploration</p> <p>Child-centered activities and stories that are engaging for the whole family.</p> <p>Photo opportunities</p>	<p>This visitor segment are interested in new and unique experiences which give them a sense of authenticity and understanding of the place and its people. They enjoy walking to explore amazing scenery so well-marked trails with plenty of information about what they can see en route will help them to plan their tour. Guides or other staff on site to direct and engage with them will be appealing.</p>	<p>Information to facilitate active exploration around the site, to discover remote and exciting places either by bicycle or on foot. However they don't want it to be too difficult to get to these places, with good access to trailheads and directions making it straightforward for orientation. Something out of the ordinary but with limited hassle or challenge – a truly relaxing experience.</p> <p>Photo opportunities at amazing views</p>
<p>What interpretative facilities will promote/support these experiences?</p>	<p>Activity trails that are child fun</p> <p>Clear, colourful information about birds, plants and animals to search for</p> <p>Buggy-friendly walks with clear time and distance markers</p> <p>Great photo opportunities</p> <p>Traffic-free areas to walk and cycle</p>	<p>Engaging visitor centre which provides an overview of the unique elements of the story</p> <p>Well-marked trails with key information along the route</p> <p>Guides on site to provide personal experience</p> <p>Facilities to enable a longer stay – toilets, food and drink, shelter for a picnic</p>	<p>Information about walks that highlights amazing views and landscapes, while including length of walk</p> <p>Information about cycle friendly tracks</p> <p>Something that will take the hassle away – planned out itineraries, easy decision making, proactive guides</p>

<p>What topics could hold particular appeal?</p>	<p>Key animal and plant species in the Wicklow Mountains National Park, and guides to identification</p> <p>From an ocean to mountains: ancient formation of the valleys</p> <p>Myths and legends of St Kevin – the deer stone, the blackbird</p> <p>Everyday life in medieval Glendalough – what did monks eat/wear? Where did they sleep?</p>	<p>The history and significance of the Monastic Settlement</p> <p>Some of the hidden sites in Glendalough Valley – St Mary’s Church and Reefert Church</p> <p>Myths and Legends of St Kevin and how his followers lives on the land.</p> <p>Mining history and lives of those in the valley</p> <p>Key species and habitats to look out for during a visit</p>	<p>The history and significance of the Monastic Settlement</p> <p>From an ocean to mountains: ancient formation of the valleys (and great viewpoints)</p> <p>Key species to look out for during a visit</p> <p>Pilgrim paths and a spiritual connection to the natural world.</p>
<p>How will new interpretative experiences and stories impact the visitor/park (what is the outcome)?</p>	<p>Families experience a rich and rewarding day out</p> <p>Encouraged to return again as there is so much to see</p> <p>An appreciation beyond the obvious natural beauty</p>	<p>Develop a connection with Ireland’s landscape and history</p> <p>Surprised and delighted by the layers of heritage in the valley</p> <p>Inspired to tell their family and friends</p>	<p>Recharged and relaxed by an easy yet rich experience</p> <p>Soothed by the natural beauty and peace</p> <p>Inspired by stories of pilgrimage and connection with nature.</p>

Target Audience Experiences

In order to better explore how different visitor profiles can be applied to the Glendalough experience, we have developed a series of fictionalised case studies to explore how a visit to Glendalough can be rewarding in different ways for different groups.

Example 1: Síobhan, 40 (Connected Families)

Lives in Ballyboden, Dublin 16

Has three children: Shane (12), Ella (9), Amy (7)

Siobhan lives in suburban Dublin with her husband and three children. Her husband works full time in insurance, while she works part time as a medical receptionist when the kids are at school. Their schedules are busy, with sport and other after school activities taking up both weeknights and some weekends. The three children are very active and on the rare weekend days the whole family is together, Siobhan likes to organise activities that they can do together that the kids will enjoy. Glendalough has appeal as a day trip destination because of its reputation as a beautiful view with plenty of space for the kids to run around in. Ella loves riding her scooter while the older children like their bicycles, so Siobhan is always interested in spaces where they can safely engage in these activities.

How can we appeal to Siobhan?

- Create opportunities for intergenerational engagement with interpretive content.
- Encourage a sense of exploration of the hidden stories of the local area, creating unexpected moments of discovery.

- Provide learning opportunities as entertainment, which link with the school curriculum.
- Identify areas for safe biking and other activities away from cars and high footfall
- Showcase special activities or events that appeal to kids and families
- Highlight the great value of a day out in Glendalough, especially with regards to free parking and a well marked, well surfaced path to the Green Road for walking, or on the associated cycling paths and scootering.
- Social media advertising (Facebook) and recommendations from word of mouth.

What might a visit to Glendalough look like for Siobhan?

Mid-morning arrival but in their own car. Taking the train or the bus is too hard with three kids and bikes/scooters, but they are willing to use the free car park and cycle on the designation cycle paths, provided it is well sign posted and not too far. Once they arrive, the kids spend a bit of time on their bikes, while Siobhan and her husband look at some of the information about activities on site and trails they can take. They decide to explore the Poulanass Waterfall and take some photographs of the family there, and are drawn to explore the Reefert Church nearby, taken by its secretive nature and beautiful setting. They sit near the Upper Lake to enjoy a picnic lunch and make use of the facilities, before going for a bit more of a cycle down the Miner's Road. They're thrilled to see a red deer on the hillside, and return to the upper lake find out a bit more about them on the information panels. By 2pm everyone is getting pretty tired, so they slowly cycle back to the car park, stopping for a photograph or two overlooking the monastic settlement.

Example 2: Hans, 56 (Culturally Curious)

Lives in Munich, Germany

Travelling with his wife, Sarah

Hans loves the great outdoors, and is interested in travelling to Ireland for its reputation as a naturally beautiful country and a chance to understand a different culture. He carefully plans his trips overseas, and both he and Sarah are particularly interested in walking trails which are combined with a chance to explore history and culture. World heritage sites are of great interest to them, but they also like to get off the beaten track to experience an authentic location at their own pace. When planning their trip to Ireland, Hans has read about the significance of Glendalough and is intrigued by the opportunity to explore the Monastic City and its history as well as take in the scenery on a hike. He is a little concerned reading reports of traffic congestion, as he doesn't want to waste his precious leisure time stuck in traffic.

How can we appeal to Hans?

- Provide plentiful trip planning information online so he can plan his trip to Glendalough in advance
- Highlight medium and longer hikes with added information about sights along the way, so Hans can feel prepared to get off the beaten track
- Encourage a sense of exploration of the hidden stories of the local area, creating unexpected moments of discovery.
- Provide information about options further afield, such as the Military Road and St. Kevin's Way, to reduce impact of congestion and give the sense of exploring hidden gems.

- Proactive guides providing information and options tailored to Hans and Sarah's needs.
- An accessible visitor centre which gives them context for their visit, and with key information at sites around the valley

What might a visit to Glendalough look like for Hans?

Hans and Sarah take the Dart from their city centre accommodation to Greystones, where they take a shuttle connection to the Visitor Centre. They arrive at opening time, to make the most of their day out. After exploring the visitor centre and getting a sense of the scale and history of Glendalough, they're feeling inspired to explore the site. They have a chat to one of the guides on site, who recommend that they consider exploring the Monastic centre, before taking one of the trails up either Derrybawn or the Spinc to take in the views of the valley and to understand the natural heritage of the valley. After a detailed exploration of the monastic site, they stop for some lunch at the Upper Lake, before following the markers to the Derrybawn Loop. They appreciate the peace and quiet of the trail and take plenty of photos looking out through the valley. They return via the Green Road, where they make a detour to visit St. Saviour's Priory and Trinity Church, feeling like they've discovered some hidden gems. Finally, they return to Laragh, to enjoy a well-deserved pint of Guinness before heading back to Dublin.

Example 3: Emma, 36 (Great Escapers)

Lives in Boston, USA

Travelling with her wife Theresa

Emma is looking for a relaxing adventure, away from the everyday stress of her busy life as a GP. She and her wife run marathons in their spare time, and enjoy escaping the city for hiking and rock climbing. They have a rare opportunity to travel overseas together, and are interested in exploring Ireland's great outdoors, dipping into the history and culture as well. They're interested in taking in some day walks to take some beautiful photos (ideally to feature on Instagram) but aren't interested in taking completely untravelled paths. They're not sure what to expect from Ireland's natural landscapes, and assume it might be hard to get away from built up areas.

How can we appeal to Emma?

- Showcase the range of short and long distance walks and cycle paths throughout the Glendalough valley, and further afield – dispel any thoughts of Ireland being small and crowded with people
- Plenty of images to help Emma find the spots she most wants to see
- Highlight the stories connecting the monastic heritage of the valley with an appreciation of nature and solitude – meeting Emma's desire to escape from her busy urban life.

- Highlight the heritage of pilgrimage in the valley and connect with Emma's desire to escape and get back to nature.
- Outlined itineraries that give her options for her whole day, from walks to accommodation, making it simple for her to decide how to spend her time in the valley.

What might a day at Glendalough look like for Emma?

Emma and Theresa arrived in Dublin two days ago, and while they've enjoyed exploring the city they're interested in getting out into the countryside. They've read that Glendalough is a must-see location, and have planned out an overnight visit to really relax into the landscape. They've hired a car so drive down to the valley, where they take a quick look at the Visitor Centre to get more of an idea of the history of the valley. They're inspired by the stories of St. Kevin's monastic life, and are intrigued to see his 'bed' on their walk. After discussing their itinerary with guides, they feel confident that a walk along the Miner's Road to see St. Kevin's Bed and then over the Spinc will meet their aim of a leisurely day of escape. After a quick coffee stop, they enjoy the tranquility of the upper valley, amazed at the life St. Kevin and his followers lived in the valley. They have their lunch (bought on the way) at the end of the valley, with only deer in the distance and larks for company. After a meander back, they enjoy a slow wander along the Upper Lake shore and to the Reefert Church, before heading back to their accommodation for a well-deserved rest.

Experiences in Wicklow

Wicklow County is bursting with incredible visitor experiences, from exploring the natural beauty of the valleys, mountains and rivers; to experiencing an adrenaline rush at the Ballinastoe Mountain Bike park; to experiencing the best of history and nature at Sealife Aquarium in Bray or at Powerscourt Estate. Although this strategy primarily focuses on the Glendalough Valley with some investigation into the Military Road and neighbouring valleys, it is important to note that visitors have a plethora of experiences available throughout the county of varying price and quality. These are available to browse at visitwicklow.ie⁴ which outlines a huge number of these opportunities.

An overview of experiences available to visitors and locals in County Wicklow is developed in more detail in sections developed by Paul Hogarth Company and Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland.

⁴ <https://visitwicklow.ie/>

Site Significance

Natural Heritage

Glendalough valley is part of the Wicklow Mountains National Park and has a number of significant natural heritage features. The upland areas of the park are a mosaic of heath, blanket bog and upland grassland, with small pockets of woodland along rivers and small lakes and corries. Rare plants are scattered throughout the park, with records of Bog orchids, Marsh Clubmoss and Parsley Fern, amongst others, and some rare arctic-alpine plants such as Alpine Saw-wort and Alpine Lady's-mantle being noted.

Hares, badgers, red grouse, otters and the commonly seen red deer-Sika deer hybrids are all present on the upland areas including on the slopes in the Glendalough valley. Pine Martens and red squirrels are occasionally seen, and wood warblers, redstarts and ring ouzels are present. Recently, the distinctive Goosander has established a breeding population and these can occasionally be seen on the Upper Lake in Glendalough. One of the most distinctive species seen in the park are peregrine falcons. These incredible birds of prey have an important breeding location in the National Park, and can be spotted soaring high above the lakes, occasionally at their top speeds of up to 300km an hour! Other birds of prey such as merlins and sparrow hawks can also be spotted, and the mountains provide a breeding refuge for these magnificent birds.

The Wicklow Mountains National Park are an important and complex upland site, with large areas of grassland. Although some areas are relatively undisturbed, the very popular locations around Glendalough especially trails such as the Spinc see high footfall. This has caused peat erosion and other damage. However, the site does provide an incredible amenity for people in Dublin and Wicklow, with easy access to outdoor activities and experiences. For many urban dwellers in

Dublin and Wicklow, access to this area of relative wilderness is an escape to a completely different landscape, and it is an incredible resource for people to explore the natural heritage of Ireland so close to major urban settlements.

“The Ireland of the man who goes with reverent feet through the hills and valleys accompanied by neither noise nor dust to scare away wild creatures; stopping often, watching closely listening carefully. Only thus can he, if he is fortunate, make friends by degrees with the birds and flowers and rocks, learn all the signs and sounds of the country-side, and at length feel at one with what is, after all, his natural environment.”

Robert Lloyd Praeger

The Monastic Settlement

The Glendalough Valley is renowned for its extensive monastic settlement, spread through the Glendalough Valley from St. Saviour's Priory to Tempall na Skellig. The original wattle and daub buildings throughout the upper and lower lake sites were systematically replaced through the 10th - 12th centuries by buildings of stone, and many of these ruins remain extant. Founded by St. Kevin (also known by his Irish name, St C emgen) in the 6th century, Glendalough became a centre of early Celtic Christianity, learning and pilgrimage. After St. Kevin's death in circa 620, Glendalough's importance as a pilgrimage site increased further as Glendalough was described in one of the Lives of St. Kevin as "A gracious Rome, city of the angels, western Europe's Rome". A period a pilgrimage to Glendalough was regarded as equivalent to a pilgrimage to Rome. The medieval lives of St. Kevin tells the story that he brought back soil from Rome and sprinkled it in the church and cemetery in Glendalough. This reportedly made Glendalough one of the four chief places of pilgrimage in Ireland, although its initial power as a pilgrimage site was changed to seven pilgrimages to Glendalough being considered to be of equal value to one pilgrimage to Rome.

Building works carried out by order of the King of Munster, Muirchertach Ua Briain, saw Glendalough compete with Dublin for the most important ecclesiastical centre in Ireland during the 12th century. St. Laurence O'Toole was abbot of Glendalough during the period of Glendalough's eminence, and he was renowned for his charitable works, using his inherited wealth to build churches and feed the poor. O'Toole eventually became Archbishop of Dublin.

The O'Tooles were of high importance in medieval Ireland, with Laurence being held as a hostage by the King of Leinster as a ten year old.⁵ The Reefert Church at Glendalough is known as the burial site for many of the O'Toole family, with the name Reefert being drawn from the Irish *Righ Fearta*, the burial place of the kings.

Regular raids from Norse invaders and Irish tribes led to original wattle and daub buildings being burnt, and rebuilt, eventually in stone. Over time Glendalough's importance waned, with Dublin re-emerging as the key ecclesiastical centre. Glendalough was subsumed into the Dublin diocese, and from the 13th century the significance of Glendalough fell into rapid decline. By the 17th century, the churches had fallen into ruins, although St. Kevin's pattern day was still celebrated and pilgrimages to the site continued.

Today the site is one of the largest and best-preserved medieval ecclesiastical sites in Ireland and is globally significant, with evidence of human occupation from Neolithic times. The main monastery at the lower lake was redesigned to form an ecclesiastical city in the 12th century, and the medieval gate leading into the complex is the only one of its type remaining in Ireland.

The round tower is one of the best preserved examples in Ireland, and there is still evidence of the raised site for the main ecclesiastical sites. At the peak of Glendalough's importance, more than 1,000 laypeople along with the clergy would have worked and lived in the valley, producing food, crops, manuscripts and more.

More prosaic buildings would have ringed the central, sacred section of the site near the Lower Lake which can still be seen today, with bakeries, food storage, gardens and accommodation all featuring.

At the Upper Lake, the ruins of the 10th-century Reefert Church are hidden amongst the trees near the Poulanass waterfall. A church was likely here at the time of St. Kevin also. St. Kevin's Bed, a small man-made cave dug out of the cliffs rising from the lake shore, was used as a retreat for both St. Kevin and later St. Laurence O'Toole, but archaeological evidence suggests it was dug out much earlier and may date from the Neolithic period.

The large green space by the lake was likely used as a pilgrimage settlement, where pilgrims visiting St. Kevin's Bed and the relics housed at Priest's House could stay and receive hospitality from the monastery. Little remains of these sites other than the Caher, a stone

⁵ Grattan-Flood, William. "St. Lawrence O'Toole." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 9. New York: Robert Appleton Company,

circle which may have originally been a ring fort, and was reused as an enclosure for animals, and a number of stone crosses throughout the area and in the valley more widely. These may have been used as pilgrimage stations or to mark the borders of the sacred areas, providing sanctuary to those entering.

Pilgrimage to Glendalough continued after its annexation to the Diocese of Dublin in 1215, but its importance waned over the following centuries. During the 18th and 19th century the natural beauty of the valley combined with the evocative medieval ruins made it a popular day trip from Dublin and further afield. Restoration works were carried out, including reconstructing the roof of the Round Tower in 1876 and the Priest's House, which was reconstructed from fallen stones in 1779. Today the valley receives upwards of one million visitors a year, and is one of Ireland's most popular tourist attractions.

Mining Heritage

The Glendalough, Glenmalure and Glendasan valleys have a rich 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. As the granite cooled, minerals in the liquid were deposited as veins in granite cracks, with lead and zinc along with very small amounts of silver.

The earliest documented mine was worked from 1726 in Glenmalure. Other sites were developed from the turn of the 19th century, and mining continued until the 1950s. Remains of villages developed alongside mining sites can still be seen at the top of the Glendalough

valley, and industrial heritage sites such as the Crusher House in Baravore remain in the landscape. The Miner's Way trail provides a guided overview of these key sites over a 19 km way marked trail.⁶

The Military Road

Running from Rathfarnham in South Dublin to Aughavanna in Wicklow (with a side arm from Enniskerry to Glencree) the Great Military Road indicates an amazing 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.

The inaccessibility of the Wicklow Mountains was well-utilised by rebels based in Wicklow during the 1798 rebellion. As there were no roads from north to south in the county for it was very challenging to find the guerrilla forces, who knew the landscape well and could seemingly disappear into the mountainous wilderness. From August 1800 the road north to south was built, with the added impetus that the feared possibility of a French invasion, meaning troops would need to quickly move down the east coast. The road was built by soldiers in four teams, who camped alongside the site in tents or sod houses. Four permanent barracks were also built, although these only had a very limited use at the time.⁷

The 1798 Rebellion was long over by the time the road was completed, but it has been well used since its opening. Today the Glencree barracks are still in use as a Peace and Reconciliation centre. Preban Graveyard has a number of graves associated with the 1798

⁶ *Miner's Way: Explore the Rich Mining Heritage of the Glendasan, Glendalough and Glenmalure Valleys in County Wicklow.* Miner's Way Committee. nd.

⁷ <https://www.wicklowmountainsnationalpark.ie/history/military-roads/>

rebellion, as well as Neolithic rock art and gravestones carved by notable stonemasons.⁸

⁸ https://heritage.wicklowheritage.org/category/places/preban_graveyard

Audit of Interpretation Provision

Arrival and Visitor Centre

The visitor centre facilities at Glendalough are currently under-utilised by general visitors, instead being primarily marketed towards booked tour groups and international tourists on guided experiences.

The visitor centre's location adjacent to the main car park seems to assume a model of learning and engagement that requires visitors to 'load up' on information regarding all aspects of the Park's heritage and significance at the visitor centre, which they must retain in order to apply during their self-guided exploration of the wider valley.

Although elements such as the model of the settlement and of the round tower are appealing and engaging, the high word counts and disjointed layout have the unfortunate effect of lowering engagement overall.

There is very limited provision of information or interpretation outside of the visitor centre that references the history, significance or stories associated with the site.

Visitor Centre

The visitor centre was opened in 1988. It has not had any substantial additions or changes since this time.

Primarily the centre operates as a tour point for coach tours and booked groups, and there is very limited information pre-visit

(particularly on the website or on social media channels) or on the outside of the building to inform visitors they are welcome to enter.

If independent visitors wish to partake in viewing the exhibition and taking a tour operated by OPW, they are sometimes facilitated but this is dependent on booked tours and guide capacity.

Visitor numbers supplied by OPW, who operate the centre, report an average of 75,000 visitors per year between 2016 and 2019. This compares to over one million visitors estimated to have visited the Glendalough Valley more widely in 2019, highlighting there is immense potential for audience development.⁹

Atrium

The arrival into the visitor centre is easily congested, with a large desk blocking a fairly narrow entrance to the exhibition space. This is to funnel visitors via staff, to ensure numbers and bookings are taken. This layout offers very little to entice visitors towards the exhibition and if visitors are not prebooked onto a tour, there is no information other than what may be provided by staff to let them know that an exhibition is even available. The welcome desk also provides maps, souvenirs and guidebooks for purchase, although at the time of site visit only cash was accepted.

Toilets can be accessed from either the atrium or outside the visitor centre, where many visitors using the OPW-provided car park will use the facilities. Currently due to COVID-19 provisions there can be queues for the toilets due to deep cleaning requirements, but there are a decent number available. However it is likely that large queues could form if large groups arrive on a busy, sunny day where general visitation is also high.

⁹ Data provided by OPW on 26 November 2020.

Holding area

On proceeding into the main space of the building, visitors reach a large and mostly empty space, with large picture windows facing out onto an expanse of lawn running up to a small hill. Trees unfortunately block the view of the monastic settlement, which would provide a lovely visual link to the content of the exhibition. The view looks out over an expanse of lawn which belongs to the Glendalough Hotel, and on busy days at the hotel this lawn is used for overflow parking which greatly detracts from the view. Basic interpretation provision is displayed on the walls of this space, including etchings from different time periods, and a large map of trails and other experiences available in the wider Wicklow Mountains National Park. There is also a visitor services desk where visitors can ask for advice and purchase maps, guidebooks, postcards and other souvenirs.

Exhibition

The exhibition interprets a wide range of topics, including:

- An introduction to monasticism (via audiovisual experience)
- Round towers in Ireland and their uses
- The history of St. Kevin and his association with Glendalough
- The history of St. Laurence O'Toole and his association with Glendalough
- Daily life in a Monastic settlement, including clothing, food, pigment creation, reading and writing.
- Folklore associated with St. Kevin
- A model of the monastic settlement as it may have looked during the 10th–12th centuries
- An outline of each of the sites extant at Glendalough

- High crosses and carved stone slabs

The exhibition is primarily located in one room, with additional material along the walls of the associated corridor. There is a circular flow within the exhibition with an introductory panel, but it isn't particularly clear as to which direction the visitor should go. Although most of the content can be explored in any direction, it is slightly confusing to begin with and there is not clear direction for the visitor.

On first entry to the exhibition the visitor is drawn to the large model of the monastic settlement, which gives a lovely overview of the extent of the site at the peak of its activity. Its location in the centre of the exhibition draws visitors towards it. Its simple mechanism and overview means it is a useful tool for exploring themes of everyday life at Glendalough. The model relating to the Round Tower is also appealing as it lays out the potential uses for their uniquely Irish structures as well as providing a slightly different learning experience through audiovisual materials.

The exhibition is primarily displayed on light boxes along the walls, which are darkened until visitors approach. This can be confusing on entry as there is little around the walls to engage the visitor at first glance. Small audiovisual elements add interest such as the round tower explanation, but elements are not working and these are quite small. An area set apart from the main bulk of the displays offers audio folk tales relating to St. Kevin, but these are displayed using incongruous cartoons and are hard to engage with. A slightly more immersive experience is provided behind a walled off section of panelling which through visuals and small snippets of text conveys with some success the sense of isolation St. Kevin and early monks would have experience at the site.

Overall the exhibition is underwhelming and passive, and is not particularly appealing to the target audiences. There are a number of barriers to engagement at the visitor centre:

- The arrival at the visitor centre is very confusing and dated, with limited information provided for visitors as to what they can expect and whether they are even welcome to the visitor centre. This is

reflected in visitor statistics – although over 750,000 people visited Glendalough in 2018, only 76,562 visited the visitor centre¹⁰.

- The interpretation is split across a number of different spaces, with limited direction provided to visitors. Some important artefacts are located at the end of a corridor and poorly interpreted.
- The use of light boxes for displaying the information makes it hard to engage deeply with interpretation, as the text is small and it takes movement by the visitor to light up the panels. With no instructions provided, it is possible for visitors to not realise there is information provided if the movement sensors aren't activated.
- Some artefacts and interpretive panels are split and important monuments (such as the Market Cross) are less likely to be viewed as significant by visitors, as interpretation has to be sought out to understand the context and importance of the Cross.
- The hierarchy of text and visuals is not clear, and visitors are less empowered to understand the key elements of the narrative. As there is not clear flow around the exhibition it is very possible that visitors will leave without a clear picture of life at Glendalough and the site's significance.
- The tone of voice is dry, and does not necessarily prompt reflection or discussion amongst groups. It is also a text heavy space which prioritises adult audiences with a strong grasp of English. Given a high proportion of visitors to the monastic settlement are international audiences, this has the potential to exclude a number of visitors.
- All interpretation is provided at the exhibition and visitors are expected to retain extensive knowledge of each element of the site and its significance before entering the landscape.
- The interpretation is completely divorced from the landscape, and acts as an entirely separate experience.

¹⁰ Data provided by OPW on 26 November 2020.

Auditorium

On arrival at the visitor centre, visitors can choose to engage in the film experience. For tours operated by OPW, this is the first part of the visitor journey.

The sparsely decorated room has a formal academic feel and is very much divorced from the outdoor setting, which is not in keeping with the aspirations of the target audiences for their experience at Glendalough and the wider National Park.

There is only one video on offer for visitors, and at a running time of approximately 15 minutes is much longer than many audiovisual experiences in a museum setting would be in current practice. The content of the exhibition is extremely specific, focusing on the history of monasticism in Ireland and its impact worldwide. Although this is an essential part of the story of Glendalough, such a narrow focus detracts from the wider stories of the valley that visitors would be more readily able to engage with.

The length of the video is also problematic for visitors who are more accustomed to short, punchy videos delivering strong messages on social media, and its outdated quality is counter to current standards in video streaming. There is certainly potential for an introductory experience via an audiovisual experience, but this would need to be significantly shorter and more impactful to reach a wider audience.

Summary

The current exhibition and audiovisual experience at the visitor centre are not delivering a modern and engaging experience for visitors. The lack of information provided on entry means the majority of visits to Glendalough do not include any engagement with the visitor centre or OPW staff at all. There is immense scope to develop interpretative experiences which better highlight the significance and history of the site, which would greatly deepen visitor engagement.

Monastic Settlement - Lower Lake

Arrival and Orientation

Currently the majority of visitors to Glendalough arrive via private vehicle, although a significant minority will visit as part of a coach tour and day tour (Covid-19 restrictions notwithstanding). The first available car park visitors can use is operated by OPW with a charge of €4 per day and which is located near to the visitor centre.

If visitors park in this car park, they have multiple options for entering into the monastic settlement, none of which are clearly signposted. Low-level, degraded wooden arrows point to the monastic settlement, but these are often obscured by hedging or in hard to see locations. There is one large map on arrival outside the visitor centre which details the entire offering throughout the valley, but this can be crowded with visitors and many will walk past. A large lawn adds to the sense of sprawl and uncertainty, with small paths crisscrossing the area but limited guidance.

To get to the monastic settlement, visitors can either walk through the hotel complex, funnelled through the hotel's signage and then entering the monastic settlement through the medieval gate. The potential gravity of the entrance loses its magic through the encroaching commercial aspects of the hotel, its parking, a lack of directional signage and commercial elements at the medieval entrance. The result is a confusing approach, a sense of disappointment before arrival, and no sense of the sacred nature and importance of the monastic sites.

Alternatively, visitors can cross the lawn at the visitor centre, take a small bridge over the river and join the Green Road. They can then follow the Green Road pathway to another small bridge which leads into the monastic settlement, by St. Kevin's Church. Although this is a much more scenic approach, it is not particularly clear that this is an option from the car park and it does not incorporate the significant medieval gate entrance to the site. It does however provide a very

scenic outlook over the site which also showcases the raised location that the monastic centre is situated on.

This mixed approach to the site, with no clear routes and a lack of anticipation and sense of importance greatly decreases the impact of the site once visitors arrive. If the first experience of Glendalough is confusing and underwhelming, this will shape their experience of the whole site. Ensuring visitors are provided with a clear direction and an understanding of the site's opportunities for engagement will better prepare visitors to understand and appreciate the experiences available.

Some visitors may arrive at the monastic settlement via the Green Road from Laragh, where a temporary free car park has been developed. Signage on this pathway is very limited and there appears to be an expectation that visitors travelling this route will be using the car park as an access point to walking trails, rather than the monastic settlement, and have pre-existing knowledge of the site. As above, visitors using this route are greeted with remarkable views of the monastic site, particularly the round tower, along the route and are also able to deviate from the path to visit St. Saviour's Priory. However there is no interpretation along the route, particularly at the Laragh end of the path, and with only a temporary map provided at the car park and occasional directional signage along the route.

Finally, visitors may park at the Upper Lake car park, situated at the end of R757. Like the Visitor Centre car park, this has a €4 charge and is manned year round. The arrival here is also underwhelming, with a confusion array of paths to choose from. One end of the car park is dominated by food caravans and dated toilet facilities, while the path leading to the lake has large health and safety signage and limited directional information. There are two routes from this car park to the monastic settlement at the Lower Lake – the boardwalk and the Green Road. In order to access the boardwalk, visitors either need to navigate to the rear of the food caravans and facilities to enter the boardwalk directly, which is not signposted, or else double back on themselves from the Green Road. There are limited directions along the boardwalk although the view is very pleasant, and visitors need to follow their nose to make it back.

Monastic Settlement - Lower Lake interpretation

Despite being significant enough to warrant consideration for World Heritage Site status via UNESCO, the interpretation at the monastic settlement at the lower lake is extremely limited.

Unless a visitor has looked up material online or purchased a map in the visitor centre, the information provided is primarily made up of very small, dated panels installed on some (not all) of the remaining buildings. These interpretative panels are very dry and offer a very basic introduction to each building, and not all of the remains have a sign attached.

There is no contextual information provided within the settlement about the lives of those who resided there, as well as any information about how deeply spiritual and significant this site is for early Irish Christianity. The site works on the expectation that visitors will have experienced the visitor centre and retained the appreciable and quite complex information there. In practice, only a small proportion of overall visitors will attend the visitor centre and even fewer will be able to retain much of the information, meaning that there is limited interpretation provision at this incredibly significant site. In particular, understanding the breadth of the site, its inner and outer sanctums and some of its more remote ‘satellite’ churches, and the daily lives of those resident there are not available to many visitors.

Guided Tours

Guided tours are provided by OPW (outside of Covid-19 restrictions) via the Visitor Centre, and theoretically these are available both to booked tour groups and general visitors. In practice however general independent visitors are unlikely to realise this option is available, particularly as booking is not available online and is instead only available as a walk in, ad hoc booking, which cannot always be accommodated.

Prior to Covid-19 restrictions tours were often quite large and were tailored by OPW guides to groups, particularly around place of origin

and interest areas. Guides have reported that previously if they were conducting a tour, independent visitors would frequently either join or ask questions of the guides on site, indicating a desire for more information from visitors.

Monastic Settlement - Lower Lake satellite sites interpretation

The lower lake area of the monastic settlement includes three satellite sites: Trinity Church, St. Saviour’s Priory and St. Mary’s Church. As visitors travel into Glendalough on R756 a very small sign points towards Trinity Church. Although a very beautiful site with a lovely vista across the valley, there is no further interpretation at the site, and it is not well connected to the rest of the monastic settlement.

St. Saviour’s Priory is nestled within a conifer plantation, close to the Green Road path but hidden from view. There is a small wooden sign on the Green Road pointing visitors to the priory, but again no information at the site and limited connections to the rest of the monastic settlement. The bullaun stone (locally known as the Deerstone) is located across the bridge from the monastic site, at the mid-point of the Green Road path. There is no interpretation of this site despite its interesting folklore.

Finally, St. Mary’s Church is located to the west of the main monastic settlement, across a field which is currently partly excavated by UCD’s School of Archaeology. There is no wayfinding provision to St. Mary’s Church, and visitors are required to go through a gate outside of the main settlement, through a field and then through another gate and over a wall to get to the site. Although the site is very beautiful and has an incredible view of the valley, there is no information or storytelling at all at the site.

Summary

Interpretation provision for the incredibly significant Lower Lake ecclesiastical sites is sorely lacking at present. Visitors are required to

either do their own research prior to arrival or visit the information centre and retain the majority of the information provided to understand the site. Connections between areas, particularly satellite sites, is currently missing, meaning the expansive nature of the monastic settlement, as well as some truly remarkable views and sites, is lost to many visitors.

Monastic Settlement - Upper Lake interpretation

Arrival and Orientation

As mentioned in the Lower Lake section, many visitors will park at the Visitor Centre car park and navigate their way to the Upper Lake. Signage on arrival is present, but only one map means that visitors may walk past on a busy day or if the weather is poor as there is no shelter. Visitors are guided by small, low-positioned and faded wooden signs to the Green Road, but unless they have engaged with the single map, it is unclear how long the walk to the Upper Lake is.

Alternatively, visitors can park at the Upper Lake car park, which has an entry fee of €4. On weekends and holidays anecdotal evidence from OPW guides suggests this car park is full by 10am, particularly with hillwalkers wishing to take some of the longer routes through the valley. On very busy days parking extends along the very narrow road to the upper lake, making walking and cycling this route hazardous and creating extensive tailbacks, an unpleasant arrival to such a beautiful site.

The car park appearance is particularly underwhelming with one end dominated by aged facilities and a number of food vans. Multiple paths snake out from the car park with limited information other than dominant health and safety notices relating to the lake. While

important, it is challenging to visitors to understand what options are available to them to experience. They are required to travel along the lake to the far end of the expanse of lawn to find any further information, which is primarily explaining trail options around the wider valley. There is no information at this end of the valley regarding the monastic settlement or any narrative about the site.

Monastic Settlement - Upper Lake interpretation

The Upper Lake at Glendalough is sorely lacking in interpretation exploring the monastic, natural and geological heritage of this important location. Currently, much of the landscape appears more like a municipal park, particularly to the east of the lake where large grassed expanses are a popular spot for picnicking. While these activities are not inherently problematic, most visitors would have no chance to discover that this area was in fact part of the overall monastic settlement of Glendalough, and the wilderness areas around the shores of the Upper Lake housed St. Kevin during his periods of ascetic retreat from the world.

A staggering number of stone crosses and remnants of built heritage dot this landscape but there is no interpretation provided at all to explore the stories here. Archeological studies have suggested that this site may have been used as an area for pilgrims to stay, with stone crosses marking boundaries of sacred areas and acting as stations for pilgrimage activities. This history is not referenced at all at the Upper Lake.

The sites at this location are more spread out than at the Lower Lake, and there is directional signage to the Reefert Church, although limited narrative relating the site to the wider ecclesiastical complex. Sites further around the lake from the Reefert Church are inaccessible for visitation, but basic signage points from the Miners Road across the lake to St. Kevin's Bed. Again, unless visitors already have prior knowledge of the site there is no explanation of what visitors are looking at or any narrative around its significance. Further along the lakeshore are the remains of Temple na Skelling, a church which is not visible to visitors and is also not interpreted.

Finally, the end of the Miners Road track contains remains of industrial sites and housing associated with lead mining in the Glendalough and Glendasan valleys. These panels do provide an overview of the industrial heritage of the site and its importance, although this does detract somewhat from the spiritual history of the valley and could perhaps be better interpreted in other locations.

Although the Upper Lake includes a number of trailheads for short, medium and longer distance walks and hikes, there is limited information available outside of the visitor centre (see below) about landscapes, ecological habitats, species or the national park more widely on trails or at trailheads.

Visitor Centre

As visitors move through the grassed lawn area, they eventually reach a very small visitor centre operated by NPWS. At the time of visiting the centre was closed to the public but a NPWS guide was available for questions and guidance. In more normal operating times, the centre offers a limited range of dated information about the natural history of the park more widely.

As the sole information provided about the breadth of the WMNP, the current visitor centre offering does not provide much in the way of excitement, anticipation, or learning opportunities for visitors. Although the presence of knowledgeable guides on site does help to develop the understanding of the stories and key elements of the park for visitors to understand, the approach to the centre is not welcoming and it is not clear from the outside what visitors will gain from visiting. A multitude of maps and plans are available to take away, including more specialise information about mining heritage but the primary focus is on walking trails. These are not particularly appealing to visitors as many are black and white or quite dated, and as such do not always receive much attention from visitors.

Trails and walks

There is good provision of information about walking trails at the trailhead behind the visitor centre, outlining the options available, level of difficulty, key viewpoints and experiences on the route and an estimated completion time. This gives visitors who are seeking a walk a good overview of their options, although ideally there would be further examples of this map at other sites around the upper lake, particularly closer to the car park. Although experienced hikers would be less likely to need such information for day trippers or those new to the area, interpretation like this can extend a visit and develop more engagement with the wider site.

Along walks there are good way finding symbols, provided visitors have engaged with either brochures, online or at the map provided as mentioned above.

Other activities and events

Website

The online presence for Glendalough and the wider Wicklow Mountains National Park is disparate and spread across multiple websites. The WMNP website has extensive information available to visitors, and includes a reasonably detailed series of pages about the monastic heritage, natural heritage and industrial heritage of the park. It also includes very extensive information about available activities and experiences at the park including walking trail maps, guidance for hunting and fishing, cycling and other activities.

Although the content of the website is detailed, its design is quite basic and not particularly easy to navigate.

There are multiple websites detailing information about the Glendalough monastic site specifically, including glendalough.ie and heritageireland.ie. The glendalough.ie website does contain a useful array of information but it is challenging to navigate (particularly on mobile devices). The Heritage Ireland website provides basic visitor

information and opening hours with a short statement of significance. The Glendalough heritage forum website offers extensive information for researchers and divers into the stories of the valley, but does not provide information regarding basic visitor information and facilities.

The outcome of this disparate series of websites is that it can be challenging for visitors to wade through to find the information they are seeking.

Wicklow Tourism operates the visitwicklow.ie website which gives a comprehensive overview of opportunities to visitors within the Wicklow county borders. Although the different elements of the Glendalough Valley are split between different pages on the website, they are linked together and provide a thorough overview. However the separate nature of the pages means it is hard to get a complete picture of what is available at Glendalough for visitors, and can be quite confusing to navigate without prior knowledge of the terrain or names of sites.

Summary

Although interpretation provision for trails and hiking is reasonably well provided for, there is a serious lack of provision throughout the Upper Lake area relating to the significant lack of ecclesiastical heritage of the area, and limited linkages to the main monastic settlement at the Lower Lake. Currently the expanse of lawn and its associated archaeological sites are completely dislocated from their narrative for the vast majority of visitors, and an understanding of the connections between areas, the stories and legends and associated characters is impossible for visitors to clearly ascertain. While some heritage elements are introduced, particularly at the miner’s road trail, overall visitors are left to wander without a clear understanding of the heritage of the valley.

Key Statistics¹¹

Total Glendalough Visitor Centre

Year	Number of Visitors
2016	78,589
2017	74,289
2018	76,562
2019	71,335

Footfall Counters

Year	Glendalough	Bridge	Arch
2016	397,661		
2017	357,058		
2018		448,510	263,295
2019		467,162	265,200
2020(Jan_to end of Oct)		180,131	76,558

¹¹ Statistics provided by Patricia McGuire, OPW, 26 November 2020.
200805 Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park Masterplan

Benchmark Case Studies

St. Alban's Abbey and Cathedral

The Abbey and Cathedral of St. Alban began in the memory of St. Alban, who was beheaded for refusing to renounce his Christian faith in Roman Britain. He was honoured as Britain's first saint. Early churches and sites of worship were constructed over Alban's grave, and the Shrine of St. Alban led to the construction of a monastery in 793.

A rebuilding of the abbey with an associated tower was completed in 1115 and the Norman church still stands today, built from bricks and tiles saved from Roman Verulamium. The medieval abbey was a key site for scholarship but closed in 1539. Although the church remained in use by the people of St Alban, it was in a poor state by the 1800s. It was refurbished and became a cathedral in 1877, a position it retains.

In 2019, a £7 million redevelopment project refreshed the visitor experience at St. Alban's Abbey and Cathedral, highlighting the stories of the site and the saint.¹² The visitor centre sits on the site where St. Alban was executed and buried, and includes objects excavated from archaeological digs prior to the building being developed. Sensory panels invite visitors to touch, see, hear and even smell the abbey and its history, encouraging visitors to step back in time to imagine daily life in medieval Britain.¹³ Interpretation of key sites is continued outside the cathedral and grounds. Every year 2.2 million visitors (domestic and international) visit Hertfordshire, and visitor

¹² <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-48621049>

¹³ <https://advisor.museumsandheritage.com/supplier-news/mather-co-unveils-new-visitor-experience-st-albans-cathedral/>

¹⁴ <https://www.stalbanscathedral.org/>

numbers to St. Albans had been on an upward trend – increasing 36% between 2013 and 2018. Although the impact of coronavirus has hit visitor numbers, the site still saw 36,000 visitors by the end of August 2020, compared to 40,000 in the previous year.¹⁴

Nendrum Monastic Settlement

Like Glendalough, Nendrum is an early Celtic Christian monastery, thought to have been formed some time in the 5th century. However unlike Glendalough, its Mahee Island location in Strangford Lough has meant it is a far less developed site and retains its sense of isolation and spirituality.

Although exact dates of the monastery's formation are unknown, it is associated with St. Mochaio. A tidal mill excavated on the island is the oldest known in the world, dating from 619. Like Glendalough, the site was largely self-sufficient and included orchards, cereal drying kilns, gardens, pastures, guest houses and scriptoria. The remains of a medieval sundial, from approximately 900, is one of only very few medieval sundials still in existence.

Although not in regular use the monastic site still has annual services on particular days, creating a spiritual connection to the worshippers of the past. The island was used as a parish church until the 15th century.

The sense of peace and tranquility that accompanies a visit to Nendrum is quite different to arrival at Glendalough. As the ruins are

situated on an island (linked by a causeway) there is still a sense of journey on approach. Being surrounded by the waters on the Lough also provides a timelessness to the experience, as well as a dislocation from modern concerns.

“One of my favourite places since childhood, no matter where in the world, I look forward to getting back here. Not much to do, certainly not a ‘walk’ but a perfect secret, scared spot.” TripAdvisor review, August 2019

“Incredible to think of this deep history in such an amazing quiet place with a serene feel to it given its location on the Lough. The sense of the place and on the information boards makes you realise how significant this place was and is. Just standing looking over the Lough thinking of how it was all that time ago”. TripAdvisor review, June 2019

“Just walking around the site will give you a powerful feeling of peace and tranquility (and this is coming from a sixty year old non believer). Beautiful place.” TripAdvisor review, May 2019

“This is an amazing place. The world’s oldest tide mill from 600AD. The sense of history is moving. The views to the Lough on all sides are breathtaking.” TripAdvisor review, May 2017

“I am not into archaeology but when I visit this ancient site founded in the 5th century I am struck by the amount of time a church has been on the site, It is really over powering.” TripAdvisor review, November 2016

“Such a tranquil spot set high on a drumlin transporting you back to the time of the earliest monks in Ireland. Amazing that the monks had already discovered tidal power!” TripAdvisor review, September 2016

Skellig Michael

One of the most dramatic examples of Celtic monasticism, Skellig Michael has seen an explosion of tourist interest after being featured as a set location for the Star Wars films. In 1996, the island was added to UNESCO’s World Heritage List in recognition of its outstanding historical and cultural value.

A monastery may have been formed on the island from the 6th century, but the first definite record of a monastery on the site was in the 8th century. It is dedicated to the Archangel Michael, and reflected the ascetic desire to remove themselves from civilisation. A series of small beehive cells and a larger monastery were constructed, with the massive stone walls of the monastery also providing a microclimate for gardening and farming to support the monastic life. As there is no fresh water on the island, the monks created an ingenious water collection method through cisterns.¹⁵

There is no visitor centre on site, and all access is via a boat to the original monastic landing site, and written information links modern arrival to how monks would have arrived to this isolated site. OPW guides are on site to provide interpretation and information to visitors, and also monitor visitor behaviour onsite. Outside of specific opening times, the site is not accessible and the public are unable to visit on their own boats. Access to the island is free of charge but visitors must take a private boat transfer for extra costs.

A visitor centre is on Valentia Island, Kerry, the departure point for all tours to the island. It is open between April and October each year and details the lives of the monks, history of the built heritage on the island and the natural history of the area, particularly regarding seabird breeding. This site is not operated by OPW/Heritage Ireland and was originally developed by Peter and Mary Doyle Architects and opened in 1992.¹⁶ Facilities are now out of date and cannot handle

¹⁵ <https://heritageireland.ie/visit/places-to-visit/skellig-michael/>

¹⁶ <https://www.skelligexperience.com/>

the massive increase in visitor numbers. The boom in interest in the site following filming of Star Wars has meant many more people are unable to visit the site directly due to restricted visitor numbers allowed on the island. In order to protect the delicate structures, Fáilte Ireland has engaged Henchion-Reuter Architects to provide a design study to improve the visitor experience at this site. This was completed in 2019 and a Visitor Experience Management Plan for the Skellig Coast was completed by Fáilte Ireland in 2017 but as yet redevelopment has not been confirmed.¹⁷

“The views are to die for. The special peace that ascends on one as you walk through this ancient place. One of the guides gave a fascinating insight into the history of the monastery and its inhabitants. Well worth it to wait for the talk.” TripAdvisor review, July 2018

“Skellig Michael was one of the few things I have seen that truly deserve to be called awesome. It is an awe inspiring and spiritual place.” TripAdvisor review, June 2017

“The numbers from all boats are limited to 180 per day. I found even this volume a bit much. Slightly too many tourists larking about on what is a spiritual centre for my taste, but that is the compromise that I had to accept as a tourist myself.” TripAdvisor review, November 2017

Tupapa: Our Stand Our Stories

Turanganui-a-Kiwa (Gisborne) was the location of Captain James Cook’s discovery of Aotearoa New Zealand, although the area had been settled by Pasifika voyagers 500 years earlier. The arrival of

Captain Cook in 1769 changed New Zealand dramatically, eventually ushering in a period of European settlement and control.

The Tupapa project aims to connect the stories of Māori pre-European settlement in the area and the use and meaning of the land and ocean, to the contact between Cook and the eventual European settlers that reached Turanganui-a-Kiwa. Using a website, app and a physical trail in partnership, the Tupapa experience encourages people to engage with the landscape of the bay, its key sites and the stories that reside in the landscape. Many sites, such as the Manu tukutuku (kite) flying sites, have no remaining physical evidence, but are richly furnished with stories and the wairua (spirit) of ancestors. People are encouraged to visit the site with the added layer of the trail and app to discover more of these stories and connect with the importance of the location, and understand how the present day landscape connects with the stories of ancestors deeply embedded in the culture of the local iwi.

In particular, the app and trail brings together elements of both physical and intangible heritage, imbuing the modern landscape with the significance of historical events and values passed down through generations. It also highlights the contested histories in these stories, and discusses the miscommunication between cultures that resulted in bloodshed.

The Tupapa project is a useful example in that it effectively layers information about both tangible and intangible heritage features, including elements of spirituality, values, connection to landscape and physical remains of this time.¹⁸

¹⁷ <http://www.henchion-reuter.com/projects/skelligs-experience-visitor-centre-extension>

¹⁸ <https://tupapa.nz/>

Tongariro National Park

One of only 24 sites worldwide with World Heritage designations for both natural and cultural heritage, Tongariro National Park holds deep spiritual and cultural significance for New Zealanders, both Māori and Pākehā (European). Māori of the xx iwi (tribes) view Tongariro, Ngauruhoe and Ruapehu as their sacred ancestors, and as physical reminders of them as they too once lived beneath their summits. “We look upon [the mountains] with deep respect and reverence and a tinge of many other complimentary emotions, pride certainly being one of them. Proud that they are ours - Te ha o taku maunga ko taku manawa - The breath of my mountain is my heart”. This deep regard for the mountains leads to their designation of sacred, and as such a number of behaviours such as standing at the summits is prohibited under tikanga, or rules over behaviour. European settlers in the 1840s onwards did not appreciate these unwritten behavioural codes and caused great distress to tangata whenua by climbing these peaks, as this was viewed by Māori as standing on the heads of their ancestors.

However the designation of the site as a National Park in 1894 and designation on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1993, and an ongoing process of education and interpretation have led to the park and its summits being deeply beloved by Māori and Pākehā alike. As tourism has exploded in New Zealand in recent decades significant work has been undertaken in partnership with councils and iwi to provide international visitors and domestic visitors alike with an understanding of not only the natural significance of the area but also the intangible heritage values associated with the area.

“The mountains of the south wind have spoken to us for centuries. Now we wish them to speak to all who come in peace and in respect of their tapu. This land of Tongariro National Park is our mutual heritage.”¹⁹

¹⁹ Tongariro National Park Management Plan Te Kaupapa Whakahaere mo Te Papa Rēhia o Tongariro 2006 – 2016. October 2006.

²⁰ <https://www.archdaily.com/461242/stonehenge-visitor-centre-denton-corker-marshall>

Stonehenge

As one of the world’s most recognisable ancient sites, the visitor centre at Stonehenge has an important role to play in exploring the lives of the people who built the monument, and connecting today’s visitors with the beliefs and lives of the past. However the stones themselves are the reason for the visitor centre and therefore the design of the structure has been carefully planned to provide a complementary experience that does not detract from the majesty and mystery of the stones themselves.

The architecture firm tasked with the building design in 2013 noted “The design of the centre is based on the idea that it is a prelude to the Stones, and its architectural form and character should in no way diminish their visual impact, sense of timeless strength and powerful sculptural composition.”²⁰ Unlike the stones which are deeply rooted in the land, the building design aims to float lightly in the landscape, with almost ethereal materials which are sourced locally and tie in elements of the landscape and geology.

The visitor centre provides a background for the visitor to the importance and history of the landscape and stones, not assuming a visitor’s prior knowledge. A combination of museum exhibition, reconstructed Neolithic housing and audiovisual experiences provide a rich overview to the site. Visitors are then invited to either shuttle or walk to the stones themselves, with the view of the stones slowly appearing to the east. This gives a sense of drama and mystery.

The Stonehenge visitor experience shows how the experience of an historic landscape can be carefully interpreted to not lose the sense of magic and mystery.

Key Challenges

In summary, through analysis and conservation, the following issues and opportunities have been identified in the current interpretation at Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park:

- Dilution of the heritage significance of the site due to traffic congestion, infrastructure that is not sympathetic to the landscape and built heritage, and separation of the heritage sites by roadways or fencing, reducing flow and connection.
- Significance of place and importance of this site to the spiritual and cultural history of Ireland is greatly reduced due to lack of connection between sites, encroachment of car traffic and commercial activity, and limited interpretation for visitors to explore and understand the importance of the space.
- A sense of identity and place is missing at the monastic sites, particularly at the upper lake.
- Limited possibilities to reflect and absorb the beauty and isolation of the area as St. Kevin and his followers would have experienced due to encroaching traffic and commercial activity, particularly at the upper lake where sites of pilgrimage and spiritual reflection are missed in favour of picnics and hikes.
- Natural heritage significance has been reduced by crowding in particularly popular areas, such as the Upper Lake, along the Spinc walk and at sites highlighted by social media such as Lough Ouler and Lough Dan.
- Visitors are disconnected from an ability to mindfully engage with the landscape and ecosystems, as the presence of so many people in the Glendalough Valley detracts from the sense of peace and solitude that being in nature can provide.
- Dated interpretative facilities at the Glendalough Visitor Centre, which have limited appeal for the target audiences
- Limited access to the visitor centre, with primary users being booked groups, limited information outside of the centre to entice visitors in, and lack of awareness of the visitor centre’s offerings amongst visitors.
- Passive interpretation methods and media
- Lack of outdoor interpretative experiences, requiring visitors to either supply their own interpretation or recall material from visitor centre
- Limited information available about the range of sites in the valley, so more isolated areas such as St.Saviour’s, St. Mary’s and mining sites are less appreciated than they could be.
- Limited interpretation provision relating to the national park, although some trail signs do indicate some of the key habitats and species to be observed. Providing light touch interpretation to give an extra layer outside the aesthetic experiences for visitors can deepen connection with the national park and foster a sense of care and responsibility.

“Through interpretation, understanding; through understanding, appreciation; through appreciation, protection.”

Freeman Tilden.

- Default option for visitors from Dublin and further afield to come to Glendalough for a day out - potential to spread the load for people to undertake a driving or cycling tour of the Military Road; provide an industrial heritage experience in the Glenmalure valley; and provide a connected network of interpretative signage to encourage deeper engagement around the county. Currently there is limited exploration of the wider sites in the county and disconnected information available, making the honeypot of Glendalough the perceived straightforward option. Table from Hogarth’s - all that can be experienced in Wicklow.

“We arrived mid-morning and even then the car park and adjoining roads were all full of cars and coaches. It took us half an hour to eventually get a space, not my idea of fun. The whole place was thronged with people, worse than the most crowded shopping mall you can imagine. That was early Tuesday morning, I dread to think what it would be like at weekends. There are plenty of beautiful places to see in Ireland, and at many of these you'll be the only ones there. If you enjoy shuffling along on crowded paths like sheep visit Glendalough, if not, avoid.” TripAdvisor review, June 2017

“I was thinking we would visit these ruins and learn something about them. The visitor center gives you (you have to pay .50 euro) a brochure which explains a SMALL amount. There was a film about Monastic settlements but they told us there were 30 French students who had just gone in and highly discouraged us from joining them (this was fine with me:). We walked around the ruins but not much signage on them. There were a lot of people out with their children, hiking, strollers etc. It seemed like more of a place to hike and enjoy a Sunday afternoon than a Monastic settlement. I think they could make it much more informative to the public.” TripAdvisor review, April 2017

“We were there in October when every other attraction in all of Ireland was relatively empty so we were surprised at the crowd. Must have been some special local event going on. It may have been interesting IF we hadn't arrived on a Sunday when EVERYBODY for miles around was partying there. Amazed we found a parking spot. Cars lined the road into the area. Mostly young people tramping over the graves disrespectfully. It is more of a hiking and picnic area and that is fine that the old places are still used today. But the vendors hawking t shirts etc really detracted from what I expected - an ancient historic site. Would have skipped it if I had known.” TripAdvisor review, October 2014

“This used to be a quiet reflective place, now I found it noisy and crowded, certainly seemed to me to have lost its "monastic" air. The site away from the settlement is lovely for a walk in majestic surroundings perhaps the whole area could be advertised in a different way.” TripAdvisor review, May 2014

“If you choose the latter point of entry be aware that you will have an experience akin to what medieval pilgrims once faced here. Not only will you find the racket of Babel as twenty different tour guides from twenty different countries direct the masses through the settlement, but you will also be faced with the hawkers selling various plastic trinkets from a factory in China. I rarely ever enter by this route: although in winter this area is deserted.” <http://irelandsholywells.blogspot.com/2011/09/>

Aims for Interpretation

- To provide a spiritual experience for visitors, where they can 'escape' their everyday lives and step back into a different way of life.
- To create an experience which leaves the everyday world behind, ushering in a time for reflection, exploration and connection with people, place and landscape.
- To assist people to step into the world of St. Kevin and his followers, understanding the sense of isolation, connection with nature and spiritual connection experienced by these early Christians.
- To foster a deeper understanding of the delicate ecosystems and rare species making their home in the National Park.
- To provide context to deepen and strengthen the sense of awe and wonder that experiencing the Wicklow Mountains National Park can already provide.
- To create an emotional experience for visitors, creating a sense of awe, reflection and peace as they journey up the valley and encounter the history and spirituality of the early Irish church.
- To support visitors in their understanding of the richness of the site, in terms of heritage importance, spiritual significance and natural history.
- To develop interventions that maintain or enhance the built and natural environments in Glendalough and the wider valley, so as not to detract from the special qualities and atmosphere of the landscape but to add to its unique sense of place
- To develop an integrated approach to interpreting the natural, cultural, spiritual and historical significances of the monastic site

and the wider valley that allows visitors to generate their own meanings for the place as a whole or in part

- To foster a sense of responsibility and protection in individuals for the National Park and its landscapes, flora and fauna - seeing the site as more than for human leisure pursuits.
- To draw out the stories of the people who lived, prayed and worked in the Glendalough Valley and further afield, creating connections with our modern lives and highlighting the differences between then and now.
- To layer a variety of media and experiences in ways that will appeal to a broad range of audiences
- To deepen engagement with the site beyond its appeal for day trippers and picnics, instead engaging visitors with the depth of the valley's history and encouraging a longer, more reflective visit, supported by varied interpretation methods.

Experiencing the sacred

Sam Ham discusses the idea of a 'numinous experience', a sort of experience that takes the visitor out of their everyday self to a place of intense engagement and almost religious rapture. This transcendence of self and deep focus on the landscapes creates a connection to a place, and allow an individual to feel a part of a larger system. Interpretation at a site like Glendalough, which is rippled with both natural beauty and deep spiritual significance, can do more than simply provide interpretation. Instead, it can be "a mechanism for producing meanings that bond people to the places they visit and that create in us a sense of place and an empathy for the people who lived in times past. In empathy, not in the facts alone, lie the great lessons

that history purports to teach us”.²¹ At Glendalough, we can do more than inform people. Instead, the lessons of nature and spirituality that imbue Glendalough with its significance can be beautifully interpreted, so visitors can experience a powerfully numinous experience that is deeply meaningful to them.

Related to this is the concept of ‘thin’ places. Based in Celtic Christian tradition, thin places are where the boundaries between the physical world and the eternal or spiritual world are far closer. Although often associated with organised religion, thin places do also associate with a dislocation from the everyday secular world into a slower, more connected way of experiencing a place. As Eric Weimar describes, “Thin places relax us, yes, but they also transform us — or, more accurately, unmask us. In thin places, we become our more essential selves.”²² In a place like Glendalough, the combination of human history and spirituality with the natural world has the potential to lead to this numinous quality, a sense that there is something bigger than our human concerns. It has the potential to offer visitors a chance to reflect and immerse themselves somewhere other, and bask in the spirituality of the space. Time, too, can change in such as place. As Eric Weiner notes, “It’s not that we lose all sense of time but, rather, that our relationship with time is altered, softened. In thin places, time is not something we feel compelled to parse or hoard. There’s plenty of it to go around.”²³

Wāhi Tapu and Identity Making

Heritage sites are not only places where physical remnants of past lives can be viewed. Instead, they can be places where different realms of experience entwine to create a holistic, indeed even spiritual journey, engaging not only the learning brain but also emotions, senses and a meditative effect. Levi and Kocher note that sacredness can be developed at a site in many ways: “as an inherent characteristic of the place because of the presence of spiritual forces; religions can consecrate places to make them sacred, and historic events and artifacts may cause a place to become viewed as sacred.”²⁴ In Aotearoa New Zealand the concept of wāhi tapu is becoming more embedded within heritage management practice across the country, rather than solely for more specifically ‘Māori’ sites. Wāhi tapu refers to sacred spaces, and reflects the relationship people have with place, landscapes and the sacred. Intangible values have equal weighting as tangible values (such as built heritage or landscapes). As Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga states:

“The histories and events which occurred at places of heritage significance are, in a sense, embedded in those places and in relationships with them. Heritage places are sources of identity and cultural values. Māori heritage

²¹ Sam Ham, Keynote presentation to Scotland's First National Conference on Interpretation Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, April 4, 2002

²² Weiner, Eric. 2012. ‘Where Heaven and Earth Come Closer.’ *New York Times*.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Levi, D., & Kocher, S. (2012). Perception of Sacredness at Heritage Religious Sites. *Environment and Behavior*, 45(7), 912–930.

relates not only to the physical places but also the knowledge and stories of those places.”²⁵

Māori communities regard their heritage places as spiritual links and pathways, arawairua, to ancestors and to the past. These are seen as ‘markers of mana’ in which the spirit (wairua) of the people and Māoritanga reside.

A location like Glendalough, with its tangible values of monastic ruins and sites as well as natural landscapes with evidence of ancient human activity, can have its significance and value further deepened by engaging with the site’s intangible heritage as a wāhi tapu, a sacred space. The current approach at Glendalough to combine a highly spiritual site, along with outdoor activities, car parking and a wide variety of commercial activities has resulted in overcrowding, potentially inappropriate behaviour, and a lack of understanding from many visitors about the deep significance of the site, making it a hybrid and more social space. As Levi and Kocher note, “Respect relates to how the place is interpreted—whether it is presented as a tourist attraction, a historic site, or a religious place—and informing tourists about culturally appropriate behaviors”.²⁶

The wairua (spirit) of Glendalough is entwined with its sacred history. Respectful and inspiring interpretation can help this wāhi tapu (sacred place) become a site of meaning, identity and deep engagement for a new generation of visitors.

²⁵ TAPUWAE Te Kōrero a te Kaunihera Māori o te Pouhere Taonga: A Vision for Places of Māori Heritage. 2017

²⁶ Levi, D., & Kocher, S. ‘Perception of Sacredness at Heritage Religious Sites’. *Environment and Behavior*, 2012, 45(7), 912–930.

²⁷ Ahrens, A., and Lyons, S., ‘Changes in Land Cover and Urban Sprawl in Ireland From a Comparative Perspective Over 1990–2012’. *Land* 2019, 8, 16

²⁸ <https://council.ie/benefits-of-visiting-green-space-esri-report/>

²⁹ <http://bioweb.ie/lost-connection/>

Oneness with Nature and Ecological Restoration

In a rapidly urbanising world, connection with the environments of our ancestors is becoming increasingly challenging. Urbanisation in Ireland has occurred faster than anywhere else in Europe and although some trends may shift in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Dublin remains the largest urban centre in the country.²⁷ For urban residents in particular, connection with open spaces and nature is extremely beneficial to overall health and wellbeing, reducing stress and anxiety in particular.²⁸ Finding the right balance in the Wicklow Mountains National Park to encourage visitors to understand the fine balance of ecological landscapes, as well as developing respect and care, is how we see our interpretation making a difference.

*“Only when the general public feels a connection and a desire to spend time in nature will there be the drive to protect it”.*²⁹

Associated with this is the burgeoning field of ‘rewilding’, allowing natural processes to overtake previously highly managed or altered

lands. Although often associated with previously intensively farmed land, the approach to allowing nature to recolonise cleared areas can also work in national parks. Although markedly different from a more rigorously planned and maintained conservation approach, rewilding has the potential to be self-sustaining and far cheaper. Such an approach has merit at Glendalough and is in many places already occurring albeit with assistance - for example, the pockets of regenerated woodlands which then encourage species such as many fungi and insects to return.

“Rewilding - giving nature the space and opportunity to express itself - is largely a leap of faith. It involves surrendering all preconceptions, and simply sitting back and observing what happens”.³⁰

³⁰ Tree, I. *Rewilding: The Return of Nature to a British Farm*. Picador, 2018, p. 9.

Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park

Indicative Signage Requirement

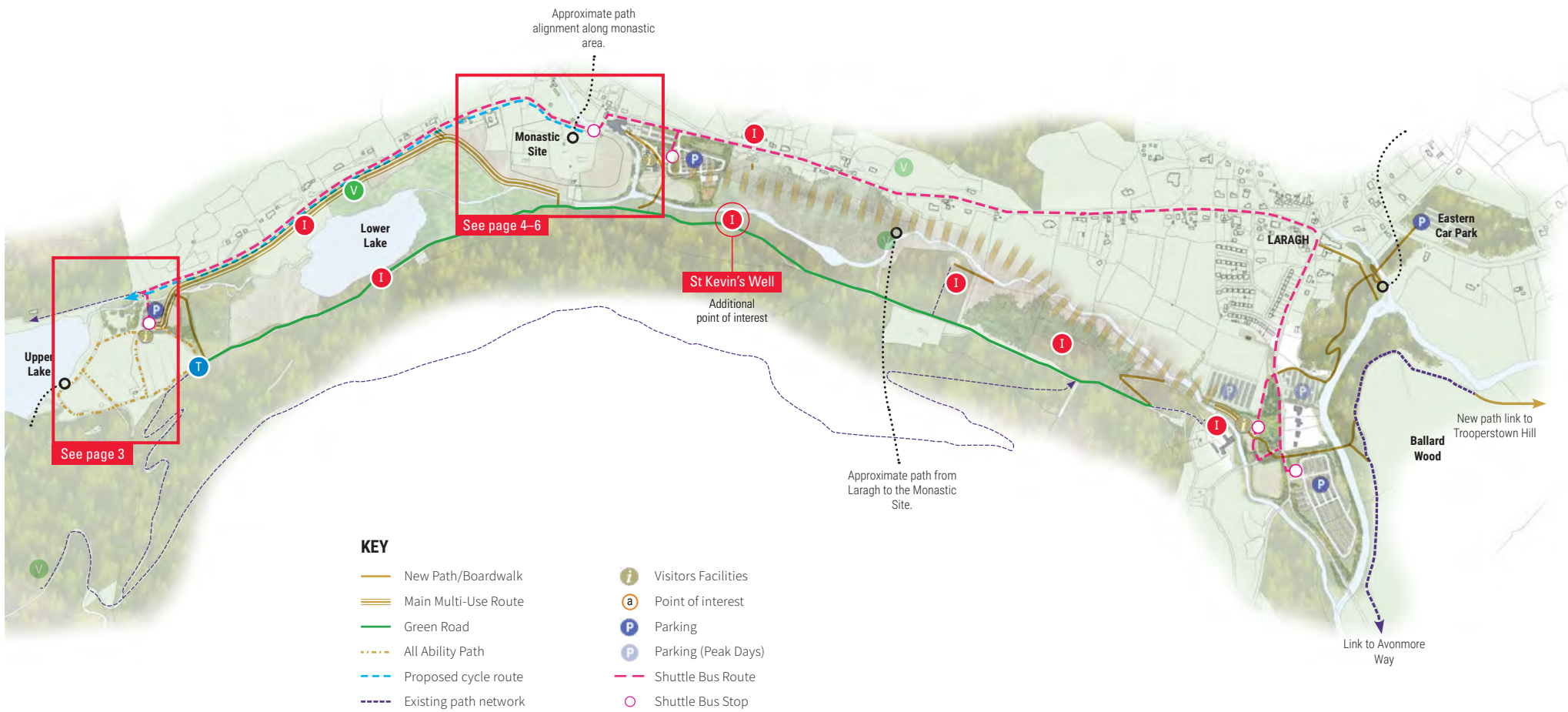
18 August 2022

the paul hogarth company

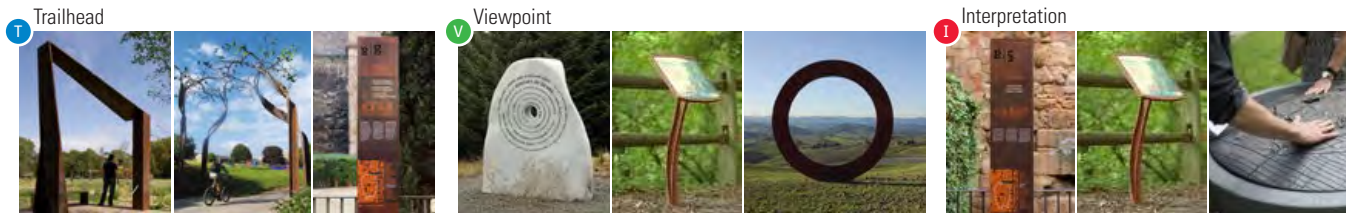
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Glendalough to Laragh Masterplan

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Glendalough to Laragh **Upper Lake Visitors Centre**
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- Key**
- New Path/ Boardwalk
 - Main Multi-Use Route
 - Green Road
 - Existing Path Network
 - Shuttle Bus Route
 - Visitor Facilities
 - Parking
 - Parking (Peak Days)
 - Shuttle Bus Stop

Glendalough to Laragh **Monastic Site**
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T Trailhead



V Viewpoint



I Interpretation



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Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park
Architectural Proposals

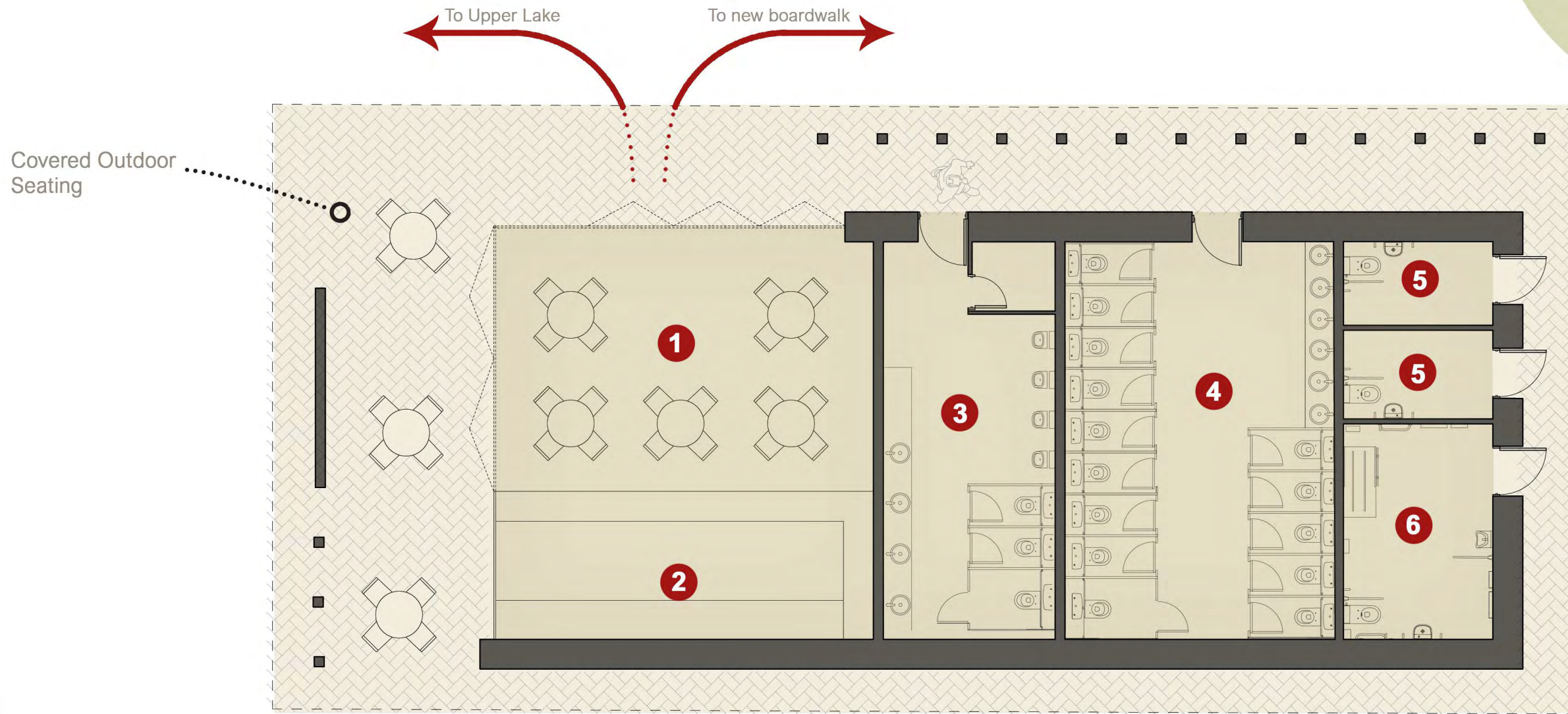
August 2021

CONSARC

Visitor Experience Management Plan **Upper Lake Visitor Pavilion**
 Wicklow Mountains National Park
DRAFT



Site Plan



Covered Outdoor Seating



Visitor Information / Cafe / WCs
 Floor Plan 1:100

KEY

- 1** Cafe Seating
- 2** Cafe Servery
- 3** Male WCs
- 4** Female WCs
- 5** Accessible WC
- 6** Changing Places Facility

Visitor Experience Management Plan **Upper Lake Visitor Pavilion**
Wicklow Mountains National Park
DRAFT



Architectural language and materials consistent with existing visitor centre



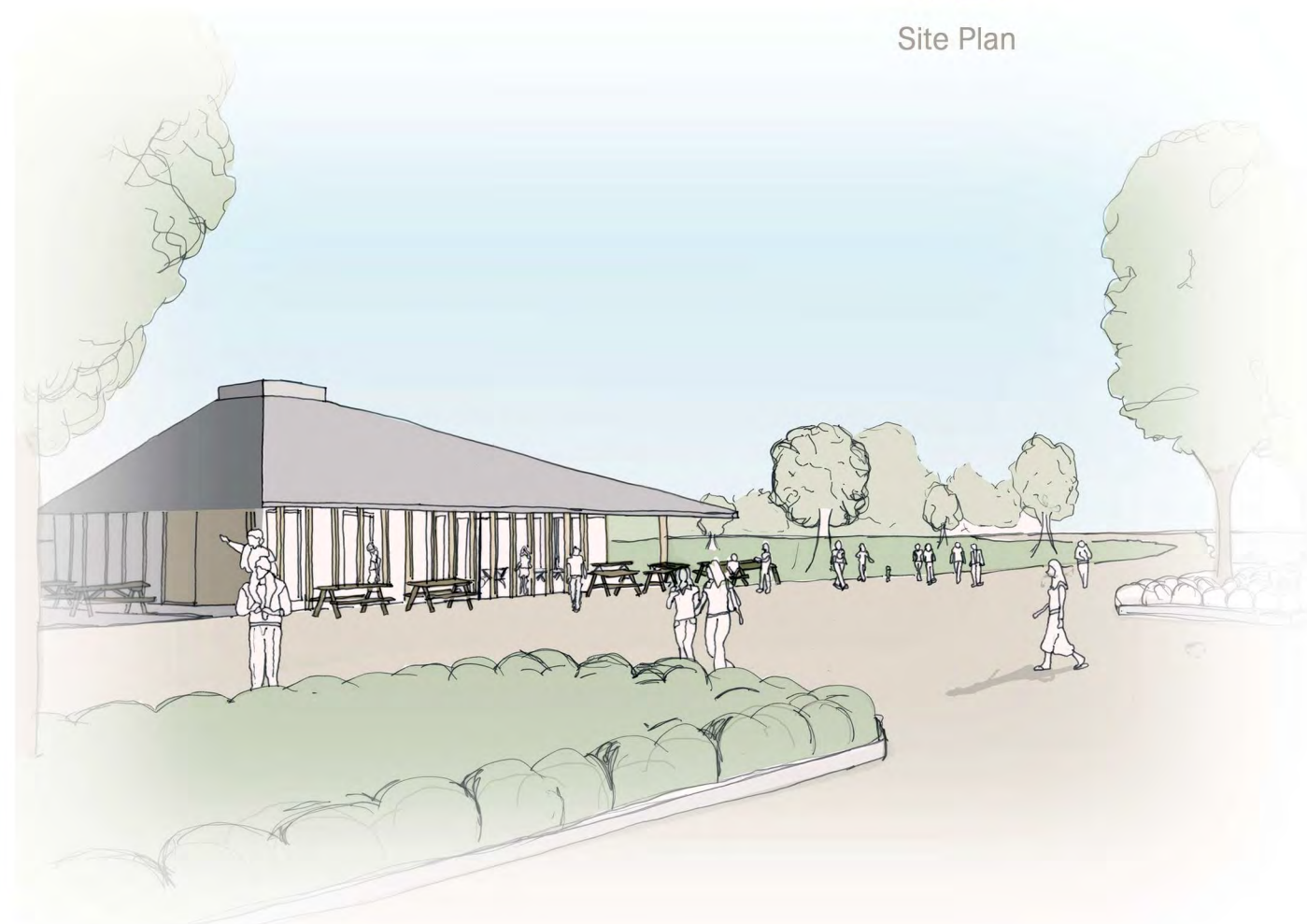
Flexibility with indoor, covered, and outdoor seating



Site Plan



Indicative Elevations of Visitor Pavilion



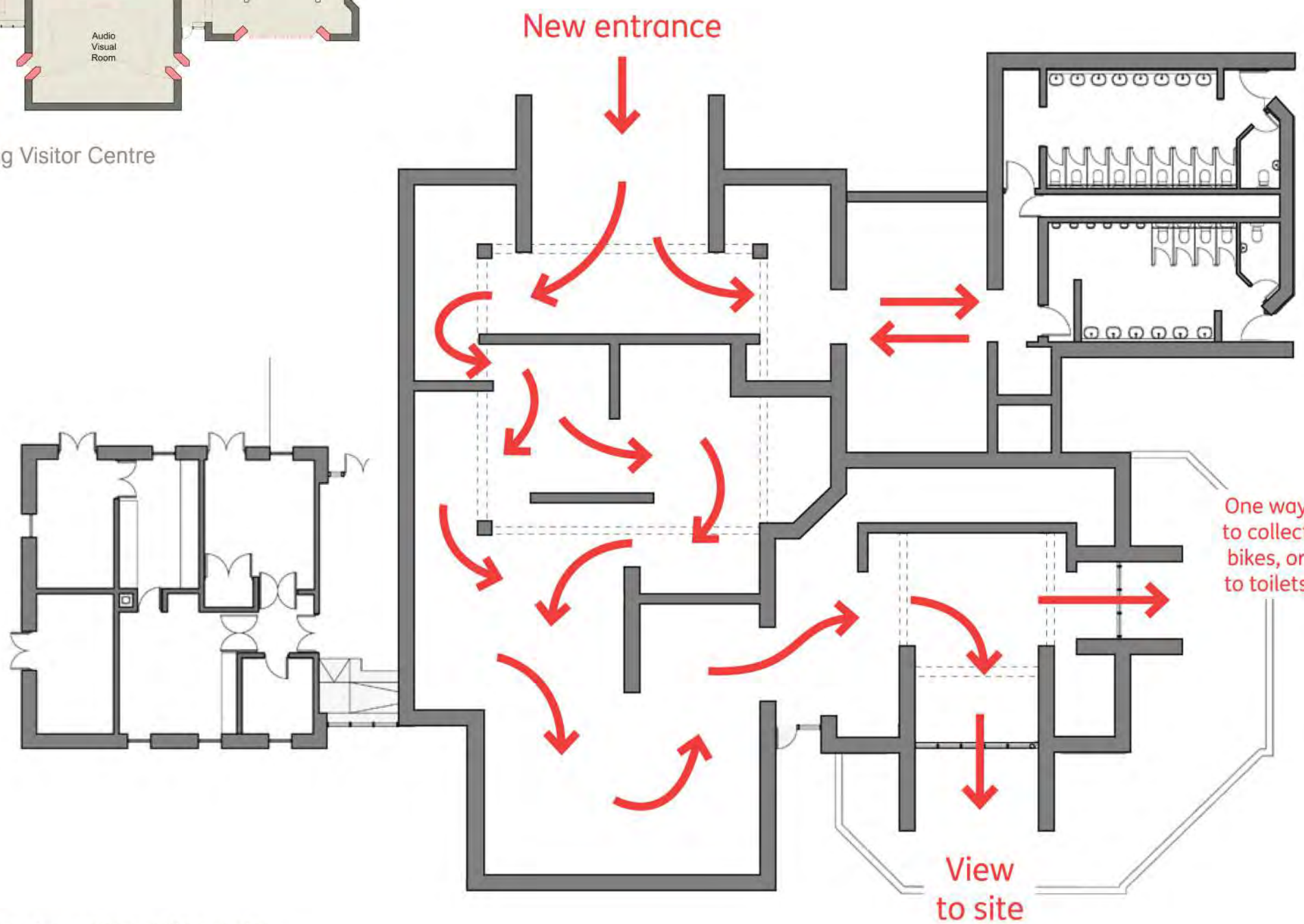
Approach to pavilion plaza from car park area



Alterations to existing Visitor Centre

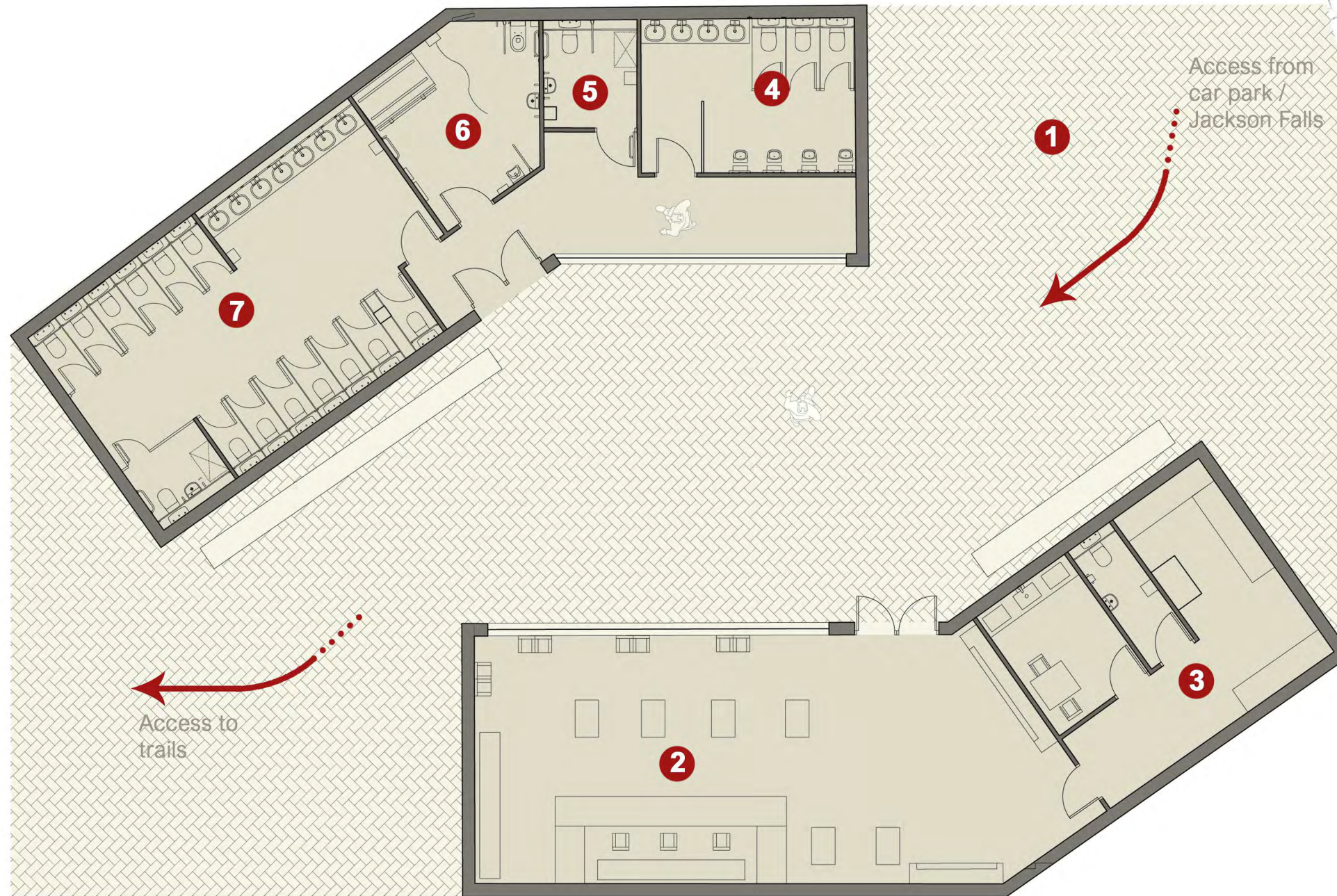


Site Plan



Proposed interventions to existing visitor centre
New visitor flow

Visitor Experience Management Plan **Laragh Visitor Pavilion**
 Wicklow Mountains National Park
DRAFT



Visitor Information / WCs
 Floor Plan 1:100

KEY

- 1 Entrance plaza
- 2 Information centre
- 3 Storage
- 4 Male WCs
- 5 Female WCs
- 6 Changing Places Facility
- 7 Accessible WCs

Visitor Experience Management Plan **Laragh Visitor Pavilion**
Wicklow Mountains National Park
DRAFT



Sculptural pavilions representing geology and topography of valley

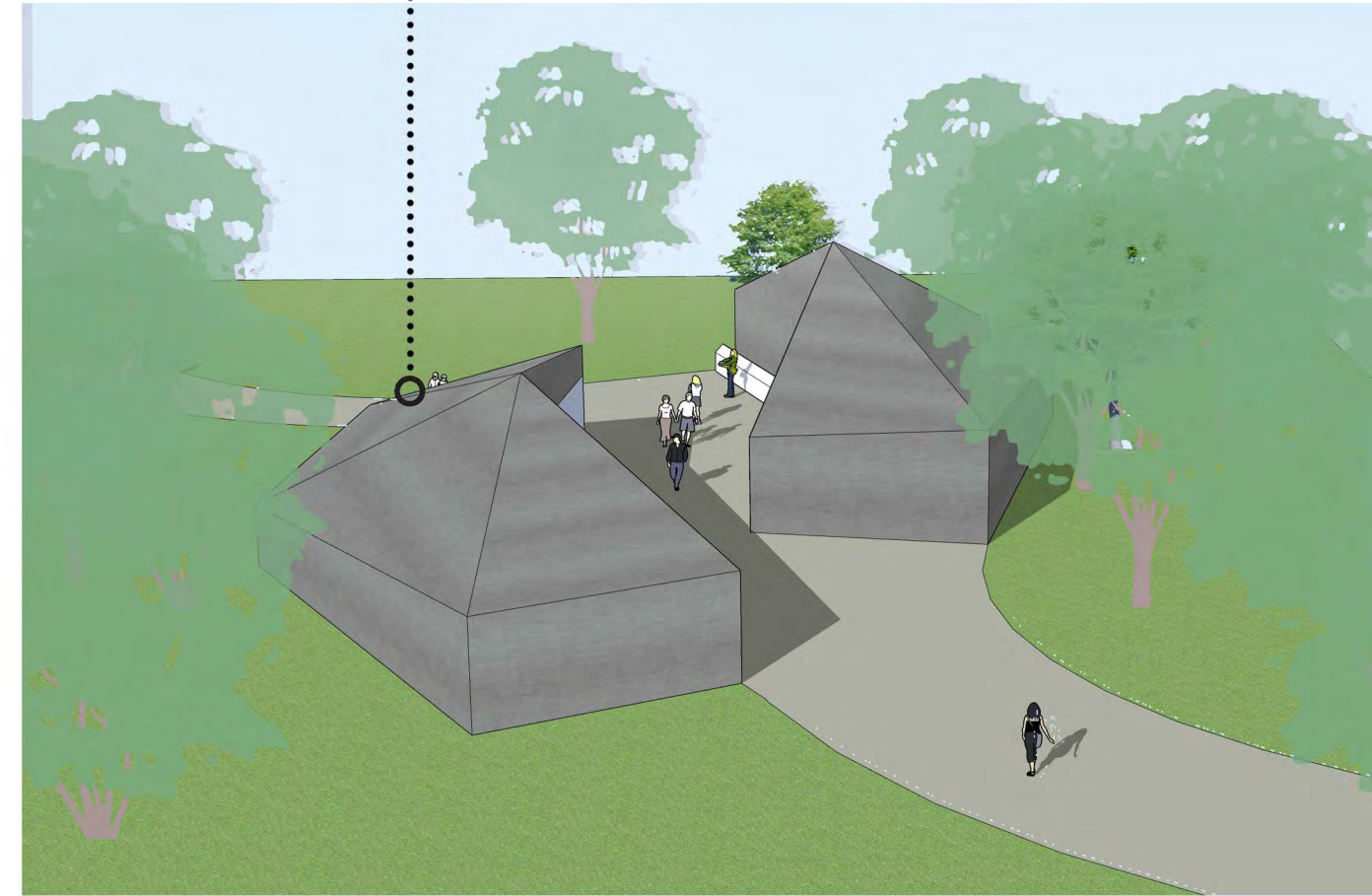
Threshold; tunnel effect demarking beginning of journey up the valley



Site Plan



Approach to pavilion plaza from car park area



Overhead view of pavilions

Glendalough- Additional Information

Controlling of the car parking is essential at Glendalough so that it is managed in such a way to deter users from parking for free in the prime visitor spots. With some management it can deter the use of prime spaces by all day parkers or walkers and leave these free for use by those casual visitors that need to have access to mobility managed space or for those that have a short visit time and are content to pay for a prime space. For such a strategy to work it is essential that there are free or low costs spaces available for long stay users who do not wish to pay a premium. The management of the spaces can be controlled with appropriate charging policies for the different parking areas.

The management of the parking of the spaces is currently very labour intensive at peak times with high levels of staff deployed to each parking location to control parking and to collect parking charges. At peak times the parking attendants are already supplemented by Gardai staff directing traffic away from the prime parking locations when they are full. However, drivers still try to reach the prime car parks as there is no information to tell them that the spaces are already fully occupied.

The study considers a less labour-intensive way of dealing with the management of the car parks and the directing of traffic by Gardai.

Variable Message Signage (VMS)

Implementation of Variable Messaging Signage (VMS) is critical in the management of visitors arriving by private car to remove unnecessary journeys from the road network and to decrease the likelihood of congestion throughout Laragh. The removal of such trips will assist in controlling queuing at car parking facilities, which is currently evident during peak times at Glendalough and Laragh.

The use of the VMS can provide advance warning information of the availability of parking spaces in each location and more importantly can be pre-programmed with variable messages to direct drivers to the most appropriate location for available parking. Such facilities will reduce the nugatory trips and remove the need for onsite traffic direction.

To provide this information it is necessary to have counting mechanisms at each parking location to allow cars to be counted both in and out of the car park so that it can be determined when the capacity of the car park has exceeded the 90% of capacity. At this stage the VMS system can trigger a message to direct car divers to the alternative pre-arranged parking locations. Some drivers will already have passed the signage and so some capacity must be allowed to accommodate those vehicles.

At this stage we recommend that real time car parking information can be displayed on Variable Message Signage on the major approach routes to Laragh. The VMS can be erected temporarily or permanently and should be located in a visible location outside of the town on the major approach routes, such as the R115, R756, and the R755 (north and south). It is recommended that permanent VMS signage are implemented, wired with permanent power and telecoms. This would provide the most beneficial system as they can be switched on at any time when there is increased parking requirements in the area. The use of the permanent VMS would be beneficial for this site as peak visitor times vary throughout the year and are dependent on holiday seasons and weather. Therefore, during any abnormal peak times the VMS will be already installed and will activate when the car park is at close to full capacity.

Temporary signs are used at the likes of the Balmoral Show. These are located on trailers on the main approach routes, powered by batteries and solar cells and make use of mobile phone technology to provide the communications. Such temporary systems are sufficient for this four-day event. However,

at Laragh there are over 30 busy days a year spread over many weekends and public holidays. For this reason, the installation of permanent signs would be more reliable and more advantageous.

When the main car parks at the Upper and Lower Lake are near capacity, these signs can then display appropriate signage to direct cars to alternative parking locations and direct vehicles along the appropriate route, preferably avoiding the congested areas.

Car Park Control

The counting mechanism of the system will require a detailed way of recoding the number of vehicles arriving and exiting each area of the site. This control mechanism must be implemented as a normal barrier which lifts to let vehicles in and out of the car park which in turn drives a mechanism for counting vehicles in and out of the parking areas. This can be done with a car park barrier on a separate entrance and exit lane or via automatic induction loops at the access and egress points. It is recommended that when the car park is filled to c90% this would then trigger the VMS to activate, deterring additional vehicles arriving at the car park which is close to capacity.

The use of barriers can be linked to a pay on foot system where drivers take a ticket at the same time as the barrier is being lifted. That ticket must then be prepaid before the driver returns to the vehicle and is inserted to open the barrier. If an induction loop is used in the ground a separate payment method has to be used otherwise drivers will just drive out of the site.

If a barrier is damaged, they tend to be low-cost items that simply bolt back into place.

Control system

With modern technology an intercom can be accommodated within the barrier system that provide a contact mechanism if there is a problem or if the barrier fails to open. This intercom can be cabled through the normal telecoms or internet network back to the controller.

This controller will require to be located within a central control room. This will allow the controller to override the system should there be an issue, but it will also allow for a central location to control all the signs and barriers in the area. When all the equipment is cabled back through the telecoms network, this control can be remote from the actual site. However, it is advantageous to locate the control room near the main parking areas or visitor centre so that any problems can be easily rectified. At the Balmoral Show the Gold control room can be in the local Police Station or the Urban Traffic Control Centre some 7 miles away.

The space is not a large requirement, but the VMS system will require a control room/ person to activate the signage and required the space of several computers. The system can be set up to automatically highlight the pre-programmed messages and direct traffic depending on the different scenarios, with appropriate logic statements. For example, if Car Park A and B is full do C. This will then trigger the appropriate direction signage such as "car parking" and an "arrow" to direct the flow to C. These can all be pre-programmed.

The signs displayed will be programmed into the software, and a specific message will be chosen to be displayed. The wording of the signage is critical to the operation of the VMS and it must be simple, easy to read, understand and follow.

As the VMS works on a predetermined number being reached it needs to be managed in case the count goes astray. The system must have an option to override the count sequence to set the car park as full or empty at any time so that the messages can be displayed properly. For example, if the barrier

is broken or someone has parked on one of the counting loops it may give a false reading which will need to be updated. This may also be used to reset the counter at any time throughout the day.

It is recommended that the control room is located within the visitor centre and to assist in the operation, CCTV cameras and intercom should be linked to the control room so that an operator can trigger the VMS use when required.

Indicative costs for Implementing VMS:

- Permanent VMS: c£40,000-£50,000 for each sign plus service diversions and foundations.
- Cameras: circa £20,000 each + costs of services connections
- Software Control system with computer and monitors: £16,000
- Barrier installations: £10,000

Installation of a Barrier on approach to Upper Lake

The installation of a barrier will be required along the R757, before approaching the existing Upper or Lower Lake car parks so that when the car parks are nearly full traffic is deterred from driving up this road. The VMS sign will already have highlighted the fact that the car parks are full and should be directing drivers to other locations.

Rise and fall bollards can be problematic with maintenance and hydraulic fluid, whereas a simple barrier that lifts and can be closed when full is commonplace. An appropriate barrier installed in this location, coupled with the proposed VMS signage, will prevent the existing congestion issues that currently occur along the R757 when vehicles waiting to park in the existing car parks during peak times.

The barrier should be in a location associated with a turning area to allow cars that have ignored the VMS signs to safely manoeuvre by turning and driving back towards Laragh, to park elsewhere. It is recommended to install a barrier at the front of the existing hotel. This will allow hotel guests to have access to the hotel car park without having to enter the Glendalough Lower/Upper Lake Car Parking area and will also facilitate a turning head to allow vehicles to turn and return to Laragh to park elsewhere.

This barrier can be used seasonally or be time sensitive. For example, it could stay open between 9pm and 6am to facilitate local hikers that wish to walk before work. It can be pre-programmed with the car park system so that it remains open until the pre-determined time is reached and then dropped. Alternatively, the first staff members to the site can manually close the barrier on arrival.

There are a small number of residents in the area that may need to access the road. They can be provided with an electronic fob system which can be implemented to open the barrier and to let them pass. It may be necessary to provide the barriers on each of two sides of the road and to only open one half at any one time. An induction loop will be required to ensure that a vehicle has cleared the barrier before it automatically closes again. An intercom should also be used on the arrival gate so that someone can call the control room to gain access should they be visiting one of the residents or making a delivery. The buses can also be provided with a fob to activate the barrier on approach.

Barriers should also be erected at the entrance to all proposed car parks and a counting mechanism integrated. This will allow the total accumulation of vehicles in the car parks to be counted to activate the VMS. It will also allow for ticket allocation for payment and can be used for pre booking systems (similar to city centre multi-storey car parks or car parks at airports).

Prebooking a space

Technology exists with number plate recognition or with scan codes to activate barrier systems. For example, at airports a system can be installed that allows drivers to prebook a space for a specific time and then this space is allocated to them. A number of spaces can be reserved for use with ticket sales to the visitor centre. In this way someone who has prebooked a visitor ticket can also prebook a car park space. This does require an additional control module, computer system and scanners on the barrier to either read a prebooked ticket, enter a code or read a number plate. It will so require software to be incorporated into the booking system.

CCTV cameras

Although fobs can be provided and mechanisms can be put in place to drive signs it is recommended that the controller has visibility of the essential parking areas, the barriers and main approach routes. To do this a system of CCTV cameras can be installed and cabled back to the visitor centre. The controller can then have access to override any barrier or VMS signs should the cameras identify a problem.

The cameras should be installed at the same time as the VMS signs and car park barriers to minimise the power and telecoms equipment required. The control room should have monitors dedicated to viewing the camera and be capable of calling up any of the cameras at any time.

Charges

It is imperative that the car parking charges, and shuttle bus charges are set at a level to meet the overall operating and maintenance costs. In this way the system can be franchised out so that it can be tendered and operated independently.

An overall Car Parking Strategy must be implemented with managed car park charges. Various car parks are proposed at the development and a shuttle bus service is planned to run during peak times to facilitate movement from the car parks at Laragh with drop off at Glendalough. The various payment methods can be considered:

- Free shuttle bus and pay for car parking; or
- Car parking free and pay for shuttle bus.

The optimum system is that the shuttle bus service be free and that visitors then pay for car parking. The reasoning for this is that during peak demand the weather is often pleasant which may deter the use of the shuttle bus service as people are more likely to walk. Therefore, the money made from paying for a shuttle bus service may be less than what is achievable. Also, a cost of a shuttle bus may act as a deterrent, especially for large groups or families.

A car parking costing system which is staggered from the most expensive price for parking at the Upper/Lower Lake and decreasing in price as you move further away may should be considered. This will deter cars parking in the car parks closest to Glendalough and this then may reduce the traffic flow through Laragh.

Seasonal car parking rates should also be considered with cheaper rates available at off peak times.

It needs to be agreed who controls the car parks and hence the car park charging.

Disabled Spaces

We recommend that 4% of all spaces provided in the car parks are allocated for disabled/accessible use. These spaces should be located in areas close to amenities (visitor centre/ shuttle bus).

In addition to this it, may be beneficial to provide the majority of spaces in the Upper Car Park for disabled/accessible use, and reservation could be made online to use these spaces.

Car parking spaces for the disabled in the proposed car parks in Laragh must be located close to the shuttle bus service. This shuttle bus service should be equipped to accommodate disabled usage.