



Laragh - Glendalough Settlement and Tourism Plan

Response to Public Consultation from Mountaineering Ireland

August 2011

1. Introduction

Mountaineering Ireland (MI) welcomes the preparation of a Settlement and Tourism Plan to guide the future sustainable development of Laragh and Glendalough.

The Laragh - Glendalough area is Wicklow's premier tourist destination, and a honeypot for participants in outdoor recreation activities, particularly walkers and climbers. As an area with a rich ecclesiastical heritage, set in a magnificent natural environment, it is vital that the future growth of Laragh and Glendalough is managed in a way that respects and protects the environment, and delivers benefits for local residents.

MI represents the largest recreation user group in the Irish uplands – the hillwalking and climbing community. MI is recognised as the National Governing Body for the sport of mountaineering by both the Irish Sports Council and Sport Northern Ireland. The term mountaineering refers to a spectrum of activities that includes hillwalking, rock climbing, rambling, bouldering and alpinism. MI currently has 10,500 members comprising 145 clubs and over 1400 individual members. The Irish Mountaineering Club which owns a hostel (known as the IMC hut) at Glendasan, is an MI member club.

MI is pleased with many aspects of the current draft plan, such as the overarching objective to protect the integrity of the natural, built and archaeological environment of the area, and the commitment to manage future visitor experiences in a different way. The following pages set out some specific comments on the draft plan.

2. Specific comments

2.1 Settlement and Tourism vision

MI is broadly supportive of the vision in the Laragh - Glendalough Settlement and Tourism Strategy, though it is perhaps a little unrealistic to expect that the area will become a 'long-stay' tourist destination by 2022. That said, we agree with the objectives of the plan in terms of trying to encourage visitors to spend more time and money in the area.

While the plan provides a framework for balancing future infrastructural needs, it is not clear how the overall vision in the plan will be achieved. This is our key concern.

MI strongly recommends that the plan includes an objective for Wicklow County Council to work with other statutory bodies, and non-statutory representatives, including the local community, to coordinate the development and ongoing management of Laragh and Glendalough. Statutory stakeholders should include Wicklow Mountains National Park (WMNP), the Office of Public Works (OPW) and Coillte. Non-statutory representation should include local residents, local tourism interests and communities of interest such as mountaineering that have a strong connection with the area.

MI acknowledges that the plan does not seek to increase visitor numbers, however the World Tourism Organisation expects 'experiential' tourism - which encompasses ecotourism, nature, heritage, cultural, and soft adventure tourism, as well as sub-sectors such as rural and community tourism - to grow more quickly than other tourism sectors over the decade ahead. Tourism is also being actively promoted by the Irish government to boost economic recovery. Therefore, plans for the future development of Laragh and Glendalough should be based on the management of increased visitor numbers.

2.2 LG16 - 'Park and Ride' facility

Traffic management is a major issue in the future development of Laragh and Glendalough. Connected with this is the need for parking, therefore the commitment towards the development of a 'park and ride' facility is welcome.

A large car-park will be required and it is difficult to see how this could be accommodated with the Settlement Boundary. The zoning objective for the Tourism Corridor Zone and LG39 indicate that the 'park and ride' facility might be within that zone, however much of

this land is between Laragh and Glendalough. As the majority of visitors approach Laragh and Glendalough from the Annamoe side, it would make sense to locate the 'park and ride' facility on that side of the village, so as to reduce the traffic pressure in Laragh itself.

It is vital that the 'park and ride' facility is complemented by sustainable transport options, that it is well-promoted and that visitors are encouraged to use the facility by setting higher prices for use of the other car-parks. Signage on the approach to Laragh should indicate the cost of the various car-parks. A discreet electronic sign should indicate when the Visitor Centre and Upper Lake car parks are full (or close to full).

2.3 LG15 and LG16 – pedestrian links and Wicklow Way

MI welcomes objective LG15 which includes improving pedestrian links around the village centre and LG16 which includes the development of pedestrian and cycle links on the Green Road, however we would specifically like to see the Council commit to linking Laragh village with the Wicklow Way, as a spur off the main route, or preferably as a re-route via a pedestrian bridge from Laragh village to link with the Green Road. This would increase the local economic benefit from the Wicklow Way and enhance the visitor experience. The Wicklow Way is an important element in local visitor infrastructure and should be referred to in the plan.

2.4 LG22 – Protection of Natura 2000 sites

MI supports the objectives associated with protecting Natura 2000 sites, however any re-direction of recreational use under LG22(v) should include consultation with the representative body for the relevant recreation user group. MI requests that this be added to objective LG22(v).

As all of the zones within the Laragh – Glendalough Development Boundary include some element of a Natura 2000 site, the need to avoid encroachment, the use of buffer zones and consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service should perhaps be referred to throughout the plan.

2.5 LG42 – Tourist information facility

MI welcomes objective LG42 for the development of a tourist information service and the incorporation of this service in an existing centre such as the OPW Visitor Centre. Better availability of tourist information is essential to enabling visitors get more from their time in Laragh and Glendalough and therefore increase their

economic contribution to the area. This objective should be progressed as a priority.

2.6 Appendix A – broadband

Appendix A notes that the Laragh - Glendalough area has restricted broadband internet access. This is frustrating for visitors and local residents and is a constraint to enterprise in the area. It would be good to see the improvement of local telecommunications infrastructure included as an objective in the plan.

3. Conclusions

The current draft plan includes many objectives that could improve visitor experiences and quality of life in Laragh and Glendalough, while protecting the natural and built heritage of the area. However the achievement of these objectives, and the realisation of the vision in the draft plan, depends on the cooperation of many stakeholders. It is also likely to require action that is beyond the development focus of the current plan.

MI urges Wicklow County Council to build on its work in preparing this plan by engaging with other stakeholders, including the local community and recreation user groups, to work towards this vision and enable the Laragh – Glendalough area deliver on its very significant potential.

4. Further information

MI would be happy to elaborate on, or discuss, any of the ideas contained in this submission. Please contact:

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