

DRAFT WICKLOW COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027

VOLUME 2, PART 4 LARAGH – GLENDALOUGH SETTLEMENT & TOURISM PLAN

LARAGH – GLENDALOUGH SETTLEMENT & TOURISM PLAN

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LARAGH-GLENDALOUGH SETTLEMENT & TOURISM PLAN

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Purpose & Status of Plan

The purpose of the Laragh-Glendalough Settlement and Tourism Plan is to put in place a structure that will guide the future sustainable development of Laragh and Glendalough. This plan, in conjunction with the strategies, objectives and standards of the County Development Plan will inform and manage future development in the area.

The aim of this plan is to establish a framework for the planned, co-ordinated and sustainable development of Laragh and Glendalough, and to enhance and facilitate the balancing of tourism, economic, social and environmental infrastructure in order to maintain and develop a high quality of life without compromising the protection of the environment and the needs of future generations.

In addition to the objectives set out in the County Development Plan, that are relevant to the development of Laragh-Glendalough, it is an objective of this plan to identify the special characteristics of Laragh-Glendalough and accordingly craft objectives to meet the area's specific needs. As this plan will be part of and form a subset of the County Development Plan, it is not proposed to include a repetition of the objectives or strategies as set out in the County Development Plan. Unless standards or objectives for a particular development are included in this plan, the provisions of the County Development Plan shall apply. The plan will however seek to formulate appropriate Laragh-Glendalough specific development objectives and guidance, compatible with those of the County Development Plan, to assist the Development Management process in managing sustainable progress for the town.

1.1.2 Settlement Profile

Taken together, Laragh and Glendalough form a picturesque rural area located approximately 15km inland from the N11. The settlement comprises two main elements – (i) the village of Laragh, and (ii) Glendalough, which comprises a historic monastic settlement and the wider Glendalough Valley with the Upper and Lower Lakes. The Upper Lake acts as the main gateway to the Wicklow Mountains National Park, which is managed primarily for the conservation of natural habitats and species, but also for the promotion of recreational and educational activities. Glendalough also has a strong historic association with lead mining, the evidence of which remains, most notably at the now deserted 'miner's village' at the top of the Upper Lake.

The area performs two main functions - firstly, Glendalough acts as a prime tourist attraction, attracting both international and local visitors; and secondly, the village of Laragh provides a service function, providing for the day-to-day needs of the local population and some of the service needs of visitors.

The retail and social services that Laragh provides includes a number of convenience shops, a primary school, post office, Brockagh Community Centre, Catholic and Church of Ireland Churches and GAA pitches. Tourist infrastructure in the area includes a variety of service and accommodation options including The Glendalough Hotel and craft shops, Lynham's Hotel, The Wicklow Heather Restaurant and accommodation, Celtic Crafts shop, the Woolen Mills Factory Outlet, and a number of B&Bs, guest houses and youth hostels. While there is no

dedicated tourist office, visitor information is provided about the Monastic City at the Office of Public Works (OPW) run 'Glendalough Visitor Centre', and about the National Park at the Upper Lake Information Office.

Notwithstanding the fact that Glendalough is one of Ireland's prime tourist attractions, it is considered that the economic benefit that should be resulting from the nearly 1 million visitors that come the area every year is not being fully realised. This is considered to be due to a number of factors, including the spatial disconnect between the village of Laragh and the attractions of the Lakes and Monastic City at Glendalough, the short duration of visitors' stay, the lack of co- ordination amongst information providers / stakeholders, signage problems, and problems in tourist infrastructure including a lack of public transport, the physical limitations of the road serving the Upper Lake, and the lack of an adequate traffic management system to deal with periods of peak demand. Dealing with these issues, whilst ensuring that the integrity and value of the area's natural, built and archaeological heritage is maintained, is key to realising the future success and viability of the Laragh and Glendalough tourist product.

It was previously identified that there was a need for the establishment of a single co-ordinating forum for stakeholders that are involved in the management, development and promotion of the area and in this regard, Failte Ireland, in cooperation with the Wicklow County Council, and strategic partners the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the National Monuments Service and the Office of Public Works (OPW) commenced in late 2020 the preparation of, and published a draft for public consultation in 2021, a 'Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan' for Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park, which aims to address and propose options around enhancing the key visitor attractions and visitor experience, visitor facilities including tourism information and access / car parking. Emerging options clearly identify Laragh village as the main focus for the development of new facilities, particularly to ease pressure on the vulnerable Monastic City area. A fundamental aim of this plan is therefore support the outcome of this project, and in particular to promote Laragh as a tourist hub, where visitors gather to stay the night, to dine, shop, and to organise visits to the main attractions of Glendalough and to take part in the other tourist activities that the area has to offer. Of equal importance is the promotion of a number of sustainable transportation options so that visitors can travel to the key attractions that Glendalough offers, in an enjoyable manner, whilst also ensuring that the quality of attractions is improved.

Thus the Tourism Strategy of this plan will aim to manage the experience of existing visitor numbers in a different way so that the quality of the area's heritage assets is protected, the quality of the visitor experience is enhanced and the economic benefits to the local population are maximised.

The Settlement Strategy element will aim to ensure that Laragh village has the capacity to provide for the future housing, employment and social needs that result from projected levels of growth.

The successful protection and enhancement of the Laragh-Glendalough area will ensure the development of sustainable tourism options associated with a range of themes, including for example outdoor recreational activities, exploration of monastic, archaeological and historical heritage and traditional skills and crafts. Importantly, the theme of 'spiritual heritage' is making a growing economic and social contribution, as growing numbers of visitors are attracted by the peace and tranquillity of the area, for prayer, retreat and religious activities. In order to ensure the successful development of these unique tourist products and themes, it is essential that the distinct heritage on which they depend, is strictly safeguarded for the enjoyment of existing and future generations.

1.1.3 Population / Housing Growth Parameters

Under the Wicklow County Settlement Hierarchy, Laragh is designated a Level 7 'Type 1 Village' which are villages with moderate capacity for growth and development, and in this regard the population / housing growth rate is targeted at c. 10% or c. 15-20 housing units.

1.1.4 Waste Water Treatment

Laragh is served by the Laragh Wastewater Treatment Plant, which is located at Brockagh. The plant provides preliminary, primary and secondary treatment. Treated effluent is of good quality and discharges to the Avonmore River. The plant is currently the subject of a Waste Water Discharge Licence that was granted in December 2009. The plant has a design capacity of 1,000pe and has a current loading of 715pe¹. This plant is therefore likely to have capacity to meet the housing growth target, but may come under pressure in the event of any significant new tourism or other commercial development occurring. No new development shall be permitted unless there is adequate capacity in the wastewater collection and treatment system.

Developments in the vicinity of Glendalough are mainly served by private waste water treatment plants, including small scale treatment plants at the car park, OPW interpretive centre and Glendalough Hotel and a number of private waste water treatment plants.

1.1.5 Water Supply

Water supply to the Laragh Water Supply Scheme is sourced from a surface water source at Glenmacnass which is fed to the Laragh Reservoir by gravity from the Glenmacnass Treatment Works. The Laragh distribution system extends to Glendalough in the west. At present, water supply is able to meet demand but in times of dry weather and high demand, such as the tourist season, supply can be limited. No new development shall be permitted unless there is adequate capacity in the water supply system.

1.1.6 Roads & Transportation

Laragh-Glendalough is located near to the centre of the County and is an accessible location, with transportation links from all points of the county crossing through the settlement. The settlement is connected by a number of key transportation routes including the R756 from Hollywood in the west and the R755 that has links to Ashford, Roundwood and Rathdrum to the east and south. In addition, Laragh acts as the gateway to the attractions at Glendalough, which is located at the end of the R757 and also has access to the scenic R115 Military Road across the Sally Gap.

Laragh village and the Glendalough area suffer from traffic congestion during periods of peak demand, which has the effect of reducing the amenity and safety of the area.

The vision of the current plan is centred on a strategy to develop Laragh as a gateway and hub, from which visitors travel to the attractions at Glendalough by means such as walking, cycling or organised transport. An important component of realising this strategy is the implementation of traffic management measures for the

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¹ As of 2019

overall area. While a traffic management plan was prepared a number of years ago, it is still of relevance and is undergoing phased implementation (WCC, NTA, Brady Shipman Martin, 2012), the suite of necessary intervention required will be reviewed and updated as part of the current strategy development for the area.

1.2 Laragh-Glendalough Settlement & Tourism Strategy

1.2.1 Settlement & Tourism Vision

It is the vision that the area of Laragh and Glendalough will be a prime high quality and long-stay tourist destination. The area will be renowned for the natural beauty of the area and the exceptional quality and setting of its unique natural, archaeological and built heritage. Laragh will be a strong, vibrant and attractive rural village, that provides a good range of the essential day to day service and community needs of the local village population and its hinterland, and also provides a full range of infrastructure and services for the needs of visitors. While the heritage and amenity of Glendalough will be safeguarded through the management of future development at Glendalough, Laragh will be developed as the service centre for the area and will become an accessible 'gateway' to the attractions at Glendalough and the surrounding area. The village will have a good range of housing options, and the area as a whole will provide employment opportunities for the local labour force, in a range of employment options, with a strong focus on the provision of employment in the tourist industry.

1.2.2 Settlement & Tourism Objectives

Unless standards or objectives for a particular development are included in this plan, the provisions of the County Development Plan shall apply. All development proposals shall comply with the qualitative and quantitative development standards set out in the county development plan.

The objectives included herein shall apply to <u>all lands</u> that are located within the 'Plan Boundary', as shown on the map, unless otherwise stated. The 'Settlement Boundary' is the boundary of Laragh village, as shown on the map. The following objectives should be considered in conjunction with the objectives set out in the zoning tables.

It is an objective of the Council to:

Housing

LG1 Support the development of new housing at appropriate location within the Laragh settlement boundary, in accordance with the provisions of the Core Strategy.

Tourism

LG2 Promote the development of the Glendalough tourist experience in a more sustainable manner that involves managing the movement and experience of visitors in a way so that the integrity of the rich natural and archaeological heritage of Glendalough is protected to the highest degree, while opportunities for yielding economic benefit from the attractions are maximized.

- **LG3** Increase the length and quality of the stay of visitors to the area through promoting the development of new and improved tourist infrastructure (including for example tourist information, tourist accommodation, tourist shops ('tourist retail'), cafes, restaurants, public houses, tourist attractions and public infrastructure), facilities and attractions.
- **LG4** Promote Laragh village as a tourism hub that is the first stop for visitors to Glendalough and the wider area, and that is the point from which visits to Glendalough and other attractions in the vicinity are organized. In order to ensure that Laragh village becomes the focus for the provision of the service needs of visitors, the planning authority will allow for the development of tourist-related developments on appropriate lands and which are of a high quality and an appropriate scale and design, in accordance with the following (save as otherwise indicated):
 - (i) Within the Settlement Boundary, tourist-related developments will generally be permitted.
 - (ii) Within the Tourism Corridor Area, the planning authority will generally limit the amount and type of tourist related developments in this area to a total amount, scale and design that is commensurate with the overarching objective to protect the integrity of the natural, built and archaeological environment of the area and the protection of listed prospect no.23.
 - (iii) Within the Tourist Attractions Area, the planning authority will generally not permit the development of new tourist related developments, except in the following cases: (i) where a development involves the redevelopment or reuse of an existing building, (ii) where a development involves an extension to an existing tourist related development, or (iii) where a development is a strictly necessary addition that improves the visitor experience or that contributes to the better management of traffic and infrastructure in this area. The development of new tourist related developments will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that the integrity of the heritage sites and prospects are not diminished.
- **LG5** Particularly promote tourist developments that are associated with the following tourism products or themes: (i) monastic, archaeological and historical heritage, (ii) outdoor recreational activities, (iii) retreats and spirituality, (iv) mining heritage, (v) the Military Road, (vi) traditional skills and crafts, and (vii) natural heritage and education.
- **LG6** Facilitate the appropriate development of the following sites for mixed use tourist developments, whilst ensuring the protection of the character and setting of natural and built heritage, as relevant to the site:
 - The Old Mill Building for a mixed use tourist development. Any proposed development shall be of an exceptionally high quality design and shall include uses that reflect its landmark location within the settlement.
 - Woolen Mills at Derrybawn (including the provision of parking facilities and the promotion of the use of the Green Road as a pedestrian and cycle link to Glendalough),
 - Laragh Castle / former Military Barracks.
- **LG7** Allow for the development of a campsite at a suitable location.

Employment

- Increase the quality and range of employment opportunities by facilitating developments that involve local investment in a variety of forms, including 'people' and 'product' intensive industries. The Council will allow for the development of 'people' intensive employment generating developments that provide for the needs of visitors and the retail and social service needs of the local population. The Council will allow for the development of a limited amount of small scale 'product' intensive industries, and will particularly support developments based on the use of a rural resource and which involve the production of a tourist product. The planning authority will particularly promote the development of 'people' intensive industries in the Primary Development Area and will particularly promote the development of 'product' intensive industries in the Secondary Development Area (save as otherwise indicated within the plan).
- **LG9** To support the efforts and proposed initiatives of the Laragh and Glendalough SEC (Sustainable Energy Community and their Energy Masterplan.

Retail

- **LG10** Within the Primary Development Area within the settlement of Laragh, provide for an appropriate expansion in the variety of retail facilities so that the village includes a range of retail outlets that provide for the day to day convenience needs of the local and visitor populations.
- **LG11** Notwithstanding any other objectives in the plan, 'tourist retail' uses will only be permitted at the following locations:
 - (i) 'Tourist retail' uses will be permitted within the Primary Development Area or on suitable lands within the Secondary Development Area.
 - (ii) 'Tourist retail' uses will generally not be permitted at all other locations, however consideration will be given to the improvement/expansion of existing retail facilities or small scale retail facilities ancillary to tourist related developments.

Community & Recreation

LG12 Within the settlement boundary of Laragh, facilitate the development of a range of high quality community and recreational facilities that meet the needs of the local population, including facilities for health, welfare, community, education, civic and institutional uses including schools, childcare, nursing homes, community buildings, churches etc. in close proximity to existing and planned residential communities as well as other ancillary services such as public services and recycling facilities. It is a particular objective of the planning authority to allow for the development of child care services and youth-related developments and to allow for the appropriate extension or redevelopment of the Brockagh Centre and St.Kevin's National School.

Transportation & Infrastructure

LG13 Promote the development of safe and accessible pedestrian and traffic routes, with particular emphasis on improving pedestrian links around the primary development area and between this area and adjoining residential areas, through the development of additional footpaths and crossing points, as appropriate and in consultation with the Roads Section.

- **LG14** Promote the better management of tourist movements in the area so that visitors are encouraged to stop in Laragh village and travel to the attractions at Glendalough in a range of sustainable transportation options. The planning authority will facilitate developments that reduce the amount of car dependent travel movements to the Tourist Attractions Area. The planning authority will particularly promote the following:
 - The development of a 'park and ride' facility for tourists that is located at an appropriate location within the settlement boundary of Laragh village or on lands in close proximity to the settlement boundary. The 'park and ride' facility should have links to the Green Road, and any proposal should incorporate screening proposals, to consist of species of native provenance, to minimize visual impact and enhance local biodiversity.
 - The development of sustainable and high quality transportation links which improve connectivity throughout the area, and in particular, between Laragh village, Glendalough, and the area in the general vicinity of Derrybawn, including new walkways, cycleways, and other appropriate transportation options.
 - The development of pedestrian and cycle links on the Green Road.
 - Provide equal access for all, including people with disabilities, to the Glendalough site, Green road and general attractions in Glendalough.
- **LG15** Ensure that a reliable and effective water services, drainage, energy, waste management and communications infrastructure is put in place to service the existing and future development needs of the settlement, in a manner that protects the quality of the environment, and to allow for the improvement of public services and public utility installations.
- **LG16** Appropriately control advertising and signage in the interests of protecting the visual amenity of the area and ensuring the safety of the public. It is an objective of the Council to gradually remove unnecessary signage in the area and to only allow signage that is absolutely necessary for the enhancement of the tourist experience or for the safety of the public. Where appropriate, any application for new signage should provide for the removal of existing redundant or unsightly signage.
- **LG17** Promote the development of pedestrian links between Laragh village, Glendalough and all recreational facilities, where possible, including the Wicklow Way and St. Kevin's Way, and to support the development of longer range pedestrian and cycling routes in the area particular between Laragh and Rathdrum and Laragh and Roundwood.

Natural, Archaeological & Architectural Heritage

- **LG18** Facilitate developments that contribute to the achievement of a UNESCO World Heritage site status for Glendalough, which forms part of the Early Medieval Monastic Sites series, in consultation with the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.
- **LG19** To have regard to the 'Management Plan for Wicklow Mountains National Park' regarding any developments likely to impact upon the conservation objectives of the park, or on issues regarding visitor access.
- **LG20** No development will be permitted that adversely affects the integrity of a European Sites. All development proposals shall comply with the following objectives:

- (i) On lands designated a 'European Site' it is an objective of the Council to preserve and improve the integrity of the European Site and to prohibit development that adversely affects the integrity of the European Site, in light of the site's conservation objectives. Land designated a 'European Site' comprises Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).
- (ii) Any proposed development with potential to impact upon a European Site shall be subject to an Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive 1992 and 'Appropriate Assessment of plans and projects in Ireland-Guidance for Planning Authorities' (DoEHLG, 2009).
- (iii) Avoid encroachment on a European Site and implement an appropriate buffer zone on adjacent sites, as required, where feasible or as determined following consultation with NPWS or other relevant body.
- (iv) Ensure that recreational use is directed away from sensitive areas within the European Site, in accordance with the Wicklow Mountains National Park Management Plan and in consultation with National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

In order to ensure the protection of the integrity of European Sites, the planning authority is not limited to the implementation of the above objectives, and shall implement all other relevant objectives of the CDP as it sees fit.

LG21 Any development that may, due to its size, location or nature, have implications for the 'Glendalough-Monastic Settlement' area of archaeological potential and significance and the 'Glendalough' major site of archaeological importance shall be subject to an archaeological assessment. No development in the vicinity of a feature included in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) will be permitted where it seriously detracts from the setting of the feature or which is seriously injurious to its cultural or educational value.

1.2.3 Land Use Objectives

The following tables indicate the objectives for each of the different areas, as identified on the maps.

Primary Development Area – Village Centre

Objective: To create a consolidated and vibrant mixed use settlement centre that is the focal point for the delivery of the retail, commercial, social service and activity needs of the local population and its hinterland; and to promote this settlement centre as a tourism hub which is the prime gathering place for visitors to stay the night, to dine, shop and to organise visits to Glendalough and the other attractions of the area. These lands should have some residential use and should have an animated and high quality streetscape, whilst ensuring the protection of the special character and heritage of this area.

Objectives:

LG22 To support existing uses and facilitate the development of new uses that add to the vitality and vibrancy of this area.

- **LG23** These lands shall be promoted for the development of a range of small scale retail outlets that provide for the needs of the local population and visitors.
- **LG24** To allow residential development at a suitable density, and to assess proposals on the basis of qualitative standards such as layout, design, amenity and impacts on adjacent properties, transportation infrastructure and environmental quality.
- **LG25** Mixed use applications which comprise a housing element will be accepted, although loss of active commercial or retail floorspace to residential use will be not be permitted.
- **LG26** To promote the use of upper floors for 'Living over the Shop' and office accommodation.
- **LG27** All shopfronts should complement the traditional character of the village in terms of design, scale and materials used. There shall be strict adherence to the use of traditional materials only.

Secondary Development Area – Mixed Use Area

Objective: To provide for the sustainable development of a mix of uses including residential, employment, community and recreational uses that provide for the needs of the existing settlement and that allows for the future growth of the settlement, and to promote this area as a location for the gathering of visitors to the area.

Objectives:

- LG28 Allow for the limited extension or 'spill-over' of the use types allowed in the Primary Development Area onto the Secondary Development Area lands which immediately adjoin the boundary of the Primary Development Area. New development of this type should be compatible with or reinforce the function of the Primary Development Area and shall be visually and physically linked with the Primary Development Area. No development will be permitted that prejudices the viability and function of the Primary Development Area.
- **LG29** Preserve the use of Laragh GAA grounds for recreational and open space use (save that which may facilitate LG13).

Laragh Glendalough Tourism Corridor Area

Objective: To provide facilities and infrastructure that contribute to the improvement of the visitor experience to Glendalough and to promote the movement of visitors from the area in the vicinity of Laragh towards the attractions at Glendalough through a range of sustainable transportation options so that visitors can travel to the key attractions of the Lakes and Monastic city, in an enjoyable manner.

Objectives:

LG30 All lands located within this area are considered to be within the 'rural area', and all planning applications shall be assessed on the basis of the objectives of the CDP that pertain to the 'rural area'.

LG31 Development will be controlled to ensure that the overall landscape character of this area, and the ability to enjoy and experience same particularly on the route from Laragh to Glendalough is not diminished, and in particular vistas of Glendalough and the surrounding mountains and valley from the road shall be maintained and protected.

The Tourist Attractions Area - 'Glendalough'

Objective: To enhance the visitor experience at Monastic City and Wicklow Mountains National Park, whilst also ensuring that the integrity of the heritage of the area is maintained and improved.

Objectives:

- **LG32** All lands located within this area are considered to be within the 'rural area', and all planning applications shall be assessed on the basis of the objectives of the CDP that pertain to the 'rural area'.
- **LG33** To generally improve the visual amenity of the area through the following: (i) to promote the gradual decluttering of this area, (ii) promote the screening of visually unattractive developments, (iii) introduction of landscaping at certain locations using appropriate species of native provenance, for example in car park areas.

Land uses not referred to above will be considered on the merits of the individual planning application, the general objectives and policies for the area and considerations relating to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. All areas should be considered as mixed development areas with primary uses, but not necessarily excluding all other types of development. Development proposals should be compatible with a zoning objective, however consideration may be given to proposals that, in the opinion of the Council are in the interests of achieving the overall vision for the area and which area necessary for the vitality and proper development of the settlement, which benefit the local community and which are in the interest of the proper planning and development of the area.

Notwithstanding the fact that all areas are designated for mixed use development, at locations where different types of land uses adjoin, the Council shall ensure that the amenity and visual integrity of these areas are protected. At these locations, developments shall be designed in order to avoid abrupt transitions in scale and use, through incorporating design solutions including landscaping, screening and appropriate layout of site, that provide buffer areas between different land uses. This is particularly important where there are adjoining residential and employment uses.











