

derrystone

10 Year Plan, 2024-2034



explore the unexpected

walk
swim
cycle
explore
connect
compete

re-peat
adventure

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The front cover and chapter heading pages have been designed by HallerClarke in response to the element of the project brief which sought guidance on the brand and identity development for Derrycastle Lakes. These pages illustrate one approach to the development of graphic assets and devices that could be deployed in the future marketing and promotion of the destination.

'Derrycastle 10 Year Plan, 2023-2024', published May 2024.



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In collaboration with:



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary Recommendations	iv	Derryounce: built elements	41
1. Introduction	6	Derryounce: bigger & better-connected	42
Stakeholders	7	Derryounce: emergency access	43
Policy & context	8	Derryounce: active & passive	44
2. Context & setting	11	Derryounce: activities	45
Transport routes	12	Derryounce: activity for all	47
Context	13	Derryounce: habitats & activities	48
Regional attractions	14	6. Detailed Design Proposals	49
Local amenities & land-use	16	Derryvilla: enhancements overview	50
Heritage time-line	18	Derryvilla: access & car parking overview	51
3. Consultation	20	Derryvilla: detail of entrance road	52
‘Ideas’ stage consultation responses	21	Derryvilla: visitor facilities	54
Emerging themes	23	Derryvilla: camping aire	56
Consultation with children	24	Cushina: camping aire & coillte entrance	58
10-Year Plan consultation responses & summary of changes	25	Derryounce: forestry design	60
4. Distinctiveness	27	Derryounce: visitor centre & infrastructure	62
Case study: Limburg cycling destination	29	Derryounce: lake expansion	66
Case study: Estonian bogs destination	31	Derryvilla: green gym	68
A Visitor Centre at Derryounce	33	Derryounce: destination play	70
Case study: Swedish naturum	34	7. Governance	73
Derryounce: Midlands cycling destination	35	Funding	75
Derryounce: Midlands trailhead & cycling gateway	36	Derryounce: projected time-line 0-4	77
Derryounce: food and drink destination	37	Derryounce: projected time-line 4-10	78
5. The Place-making Elements	38	8. Recommendations	79
Derryounce: way-finding	40	9. Appendix	81



SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Offaly County Council (OCC) commissioned SLR Consulting to prepare a non-statutory 10-year Development Plan for the Derrycastle Lakes & Trails in June 2023. The study is supported and funded by the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme 2021, under the Department of Rural and Community Development. The following are the main recommendations of the plan:

Governance (Ownership, Management, Partnerships & Funding)

- To deliver on the vision of the 10 Year Development Plan, a new operational model is required for Derrycastle. OCC, Bord na Móna (BnM) and Coillte, as lead project sponsors, should commission a review of the ownership and management model for Derrycastle to put in place a new structure capable of delivering an international visitor destination at the site. (See guidance in section 7 of the report). The existing licensing regime should be reviewed as part of this process to remove restrictions on cycling, camping and swimming activity at the site with the provision of appropriate new management measures. The review should target the implementation of new management arrangements for Q1 2025 to overlap with the expiry of the current PCDA license arrangements.
- Community agreement has been central to the development of Derrycastle and this should remain central to the development of new governance arrangements. The Council should broker a fully inclusive partnership network inclusive of the community sector to help co-produce and deliver the new sports and recreational opportunities within the 10-Year Plan.
- Mindful of the strategic funding opportunity provided by the EU's Just Transition Fund, which opened in August 2023, the lead project sponsors should prepare a strategic funding strategy to fully align the 10-Year Plan with the five prescribed categories of this fund. The strategy should also address funding opportunities from other sources, as highlighted in chapter 7 of the report.
- OCC should incorporate the 10-Year Plan within the next review of the statutory County Development Plan, scheduled for October 2025.

Strategic Infrastructure

Strategic Infrastructure means things like active travel linkages (cycling and walking), green infrastructure and nature, a signal attraction, leisure activities, heritage, way-finding, interpretation and art, overnight accommodation, and water-bodies.

- OCC in partnership with Kildare and Laois County Councils, the Department for Transport, BnM, Fáilte Ireland, and TII (Transport Infrastructure

Ireland) should review the regional plans for greenway/blueway links to connect through Derrycastle as a future network gateway. The key route connections are north to Mount Lucas Wind Farm and then onto the Grand Canal Greenway; and south through Portarlinton to the Barrow Blueway. Eastwards there is potential to link across Derrycastle Bog towards Monasterevin and onto the Umeras peatland bog project near Rathangan.

- Given the geotechnical and environmental sensitivities, BnM and OCC should commission a detailed feasibility study to establish the engineering, hydro-geological and environmental design requirements for an extension of the 'lower lake' at Derrycastle for sports and recreational use. This needs to be completed before new permanent facilities and trails are designed within the immediate lake shore area.
- In association with an appropriate funding strategy linked to the Just Transition Fund programme, OCC and BnM should commission a multi-disciplinary design team to prepare a detailed planning application for a 'signal' attraction and associated visitor centre building at Derrycastle. This destination attraction should be located at 'Nugent's Island', with a visitor centre and associated infrastructure (services building, dark sky and bird-watching observation tower, parking area, all-abilities loop trails) possibly located in the north-eastern quadrant of the existing Coillte forestry plantations.
- Derrycastle should broaden its leisure offer, with provision for all ages and abilities, in all seasons, with a mix of 'active' and 'passive' activities, ranging from angling pegs and dog exercise areas, to bouldering zones and mountain bike trails.
- Derrycastle should develop a coordinated site-wide art strategy to develop a sense of place and points of interest and assist with interpretation of the site's rich history.
- Sensitively-designed visitor accommodation is central to the regenerative tourism objectives of the 10-Year Plan. With appropriate governance arrangements in place, the project sponsors should establish a strategic partnership with a holiday accommodation provider to develop lodge, camping and camper-van aire facilities suitably integrated with the new access points to Derrycastle and linked to the regional active travel network.
- Adjoining landowners who may wish to propose short-stay residential developments or outdoor based self-catered accommodation should consider the information contained in Fáilte Ireland's 'EU JTF Regenerative Tourism

& Placemaking for Ireland's Midlands 2023-2026', and the supporting guidance, application guidelines, and information webinars and presentations available online¹, especially the FI publication 'An Introduction and Approach to Regenerative Tourism'.² Design proposals intended for planning consideration by the local authority should address key priorities and principles of regenerative tourism and placemaking objectives, such as innovative architecture and design; low carbon footprint; improved biodiversity; accessibility and inclusion; wellness; landscape impacts; biodiversity net gain; community inclusion and community gains.

- Derrycastle should develop as a vital Green Infrastructure Core on the planned north-south Wilderness Corridor in Offaly. 'Active' and 'passive' wilding strategies can happen as blocks of coniferous plantation forestry are felled by Coillte, with a sensitive forestry design developed in tandem with Coillte and Coillte Nature. Derrycastle should aim to 'expand' to 500 hectares in area, an ideal size to support wildlife and nature.

Facilities Upgrade (Access, Trail & Rest Facilities)

Several short-term project actions should be implemented under the current management provisions during 2024:

- OCC and the PCDA should immediately progress the delivery of the new entrance and car park provisions on Edenderry Road, including the provision of new toilets, changing and storage facilities. Planning permission should be secured by the end of Q2 2024 and aligned to available funding programmes.
- Accurate digital topographic site and bathymetric surveys of the water-bodies should be commissioned to inform future design projects.

Medium-term projects include the following:

- The design and development of 'forest roads' in co-ordination with Coillte, and the selection of an appropriate site entrance/exit for felling works
- The design and development of dispersed entrances to the site's perimeter; to the south at Old Bog Road/Ballybought; Kilcappagh to the west; to Moanvane Wind Farm's planned 6km of amenity trails to the north-west; to the R400 to the north directly linking Walsh Island to Derrycastle; and along the planned off-road active travel loop to Mount Lucas, 11.23km to the north.
- The design and development of a perimeter loop route of the Derrycastle lands to support walkers

¹ <https://www.failteireland.ie/JustTransition.aspx>

² https://issuu.com/discoverireland/docs/an_introduction_and_approach_to_regenerative_touri

and runners, and also to support emergency access around the site when required.

- Traffic-calming measures along the Edenderry Road, R419.

Forest & Trail Design (Restorative Nature)

- A working partnership with Coillte, OCC, and BnM should prepare a transition plan for the silvicultural management of the forested areas of Derrycastle to provide for the alignment of the ongoing commercial thinning and replanting of the forest with the planning recreational development of the forest and the wider objectives of the 10-Year Plan for restorative nature.
- In order to broaden its leisure offer, with provision for all ages and abilities, in all seasons, a mix of 'active' and 'passive' activities, ranging from angling pegs and dog exercise areas to bouldering zones and mountain bike trails, should be developed and integrated with the evolving forest and bog landscape.
- A coordinated site-wide art strategy should be commissioned to build on the current network of forest art installations and develop a sense of place and points of interest. This will assist with interpretation of the site's rich natural and industrial history and help build a sense of community ownership and identity across the landscape.

Destination Positioning (Events, Programming, Branding & Marketing)

The lead project sponsor should commission an agency to develop the creative output and brand identity for Derrycastle. This should involve consultation on naming and positioning, soft market testing with stakeholders and further design development, narrative, and copy-writing. This will anchor the destination messaging with impact and integrity and establish a baseline for successful audience awareness and visitor growth.

Management of recreational activities & events

As Derrycastle develops there will a requirement to introduce a management plan to coordinate and align the many sporting and recreational interest groups that use the forest and lakes. This management plan will regulate the use of Derrycastle amongst occasionally competing interests, ensuring that the space is shared and cared for in accordance with an agreed code of conduct and in line with the lease provisions as provided by BnM and Coillte. All clubs and activities using Derrycastle should be affiliated to the management plan and should operate in accordance with its provisions by means of health & safety, environmental and amenity impact, and the conduct of members.

eachtra
athuair

introduction



thumadh sa gan choinne

siúl
snámh
rothaíocht
tumadh
aimsigh

tine an mhadra rua

INTRODUCTION

Derrycastle is located in the east of Offaly, just north of Portarlington. It's a former Bord na Móna industrial peat bog that once supplied the adjacent ESB Portarlington Power Station. The bog is now substantially covered with a maturing Coillte forest, at the heart of which are two man-made lakes formed when the bog pumps were turned off in the 1980's.

One of the lakes has a large sandy beach area (excavated from beneath the peat) which has become a popular leisure destination for visitors, bathers and walkers. There are various signed walking trails (14km, 5km and 3km) and community art installations, which in combination with the wetland bog landscape provide an impressive nature offering.

The site is well-used by bathers, tri-athletes and anglers and is a leisure focal point for surrounding communities. For the first-time visitor, Derrycastle is a delightful surprise, a lakeshore oasis in the heart of a forest, reminiscent of the river beaches of the Loire or Dordogne valleys, wrapped in nature, a place apart.

Bord na Móna are the owners of the 280 hectare site, but the lakes at Derrycastle are a community-managed facility, run by Portarlington Community Development Association (PCDA) who operate the area under a sub-lease from Coillte (who manage the wider forest).

The PCDA have been the champion for the development of Derrycastle and their efforts have been instrumental in establishing the venue as a major leisure and recreational asset in the east of Offaly.

This study is charged with defining the next steps for Derrycastle and establishing "a vision for the future direction of the area, emphasising the importance of outdoor recreation, nature conservation, and the social and economic benefits for the area and its surroundings", with a focus on identifying new uses, enhancing existing uses and the provision of necessary infrastructure.

The brief requires it be 'action-orientated and identify specific interventions' to carefully develop Derrycastle as a regional, if not national, visitor attraction. Regenerative tourism for the Irish Midlands region is the recurring theme of the commission.

Specifically the brief requires the provision of four things:

1. A 10-year Development Plan for the Derrycastle Lakes & Trails area, including how the site can

2. synergise with adjacent lands, if feasible;
2. Preliminary concepts for a potential expansion of Derrycastle lake, hard-standing for water sports, water safety and outdoor activities, storage and welfare facilities and accessibility provision around the lake;
3. Concept designs / sketches for key potential aspects of Derrycastle's future development e.g. potential walking & cycling trailhead; potential Hub building; services such as toilets, storage facilities and;
4. Landscape Architect's Design for entrance revisions & car parking of an appropriate scale to reflect the 10-year Development Plan, (a) at entrance on the R419 Edenderry Road and (b) provision at a suitable location(s) for longer term expanded car and bus parking areas.

From these elements the following 'must have' requirements could be drawn:

- Ideas for how the site can spill out to adjacent areas and inspire other things to happen locally
- Locations, details and concepts for access and car parking
- Locations and concepts for structures from storage to changing/toilets to dedicated hub
- Proposals for development of the smaller lake for access, space and surface for learning; water-body expansion
- Concepts for a walking & cycling trailhead and/or hub
- Educational component (post-peat, power, forestry, nature)
- Concepts for a new and refreshed brand identity for Derrycastle for national and international promotion as a new leisure destination for the Midlands region

The project was also set up to be co-produced with the local community and project steering group through a structured engagement and consultation process over the summer and autumn of 2023.

This plan contains diagrams, drawings and illustrations that are conceptual in nature. The drawings are designed to illustrate the project ideas that have been consulted upon as the 10 Year plan has been developed. These illustrations are deliberately presented in a conceptual style as the individual projects they represent are yet to be subject to a detailed design exercise.

The detailed design stage will follow as projects are drawn down for delivery and will require extended consultation with the project partners, prescribed



Derrycastle: national map location

bodies, affected landowners and other community interests on issues such as precise route selection and technical specification.

The authors would like to express their thanks to all the steering group participants from the PCDA

CLG, Offaly County Council Regeneration Team and Edenderry Municipal District Office, Bord na Móna, Coillte, Laois and Kildare County Councils, the ESB, and all the community and user groups representatives that attended the project workshops.

STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders

Various stakeholders play crucial roles in shaping, implementing, and enjoying the benefits of Derryounce. Ireland's Outdoor Recreation Strategy emphasises sustainable land use and outdoor activities, promoting both environmental conservation and recreational opportunities. Key to the strategy is the involvement of diverse stakeholders to ensure a holistic approach catering to both environmental sustainability and community well-being. Inclusive engagement fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders, which will contribute to the long-term success of Derryounce. Key stakeholders involved in the development of Derryounce are:

Government Agencies:

- Local Authorities: Involved in planning, permitting, and overseeing the development of the post-peat extraction park, ensuring alignment with broader regional and national policies.
- Environmental Protection Agencies: Responsible for ensuring that activities adhere to environmental regulations and contribute to habitat restoration.

State Agencies:

Bord na Móna: Historically engaged in peat extraction for energy production, Bord na Móna is a key stakeholder in the transformation of the peatlands of the Midlands. In the context of Derryounce, Bord na Móna may contribute by:

- Transitioning from peat extraction to sustainable land use and rehabilitation.
- Implementing measures for habitat restoration and conservation.
- Collaborating with environmental groups to ensure the responsible and sustainable management of the land.
- Provision of amenities

Coillte: As the largest commercial forestry company in Ireland, Coillte plays a pivotal role in the sustainable management of forests and land. In the context of Derryounce, Coillte may be involved in:

- Transitioning peat extraction sites into recreational spaces.
- Felling plantation forests and developing Forest Design Strategies
- Implementing reforestation and biodiversity enhancement programs.
- Collaborating with environmental organisations to ensure the ecological restoration of the area.
- Providing expertise in sustainable land management practices.

Community Groups:

Organisations representing local interests, such as the PCDA, sports clubs or community associations, can contribute ideas and engage in recreational activities within the park.

Resident Communities: Local residents are important stakeholders who may be directly impacted by the 10 Year Plan for Derryounce. Involving them in the planning process and addressing concerns is crucial for successful implementation.

State Tourism Sector Organisations:

Tourism Boards such as Bord Fáilte and Tourism Ireland can promote Derryounce as a tourist destination, which can help boost local economies. Tourism boards can work with local businesses to create attractive packages for visitors.

Environmental Conservation Organisations:

NGOs and Conservation Groups: These entities, such as National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) or Coillte Nature/The Nature Trust may advocate for and contribute to the restoration and conservation of the natural environment within Derryounce. They may play a role in monitoring and protecting local flora and fauna.

Recreational Users:

Outdoor Enthusiasts: Individuals and groups interested in outdoor activities, including things like hiking, cycling, bird watching, and nature photography, are important stakeholders who can benefit from the recreational opportunities provided by Derryounce.

Educational Institutions & Youth Groups:

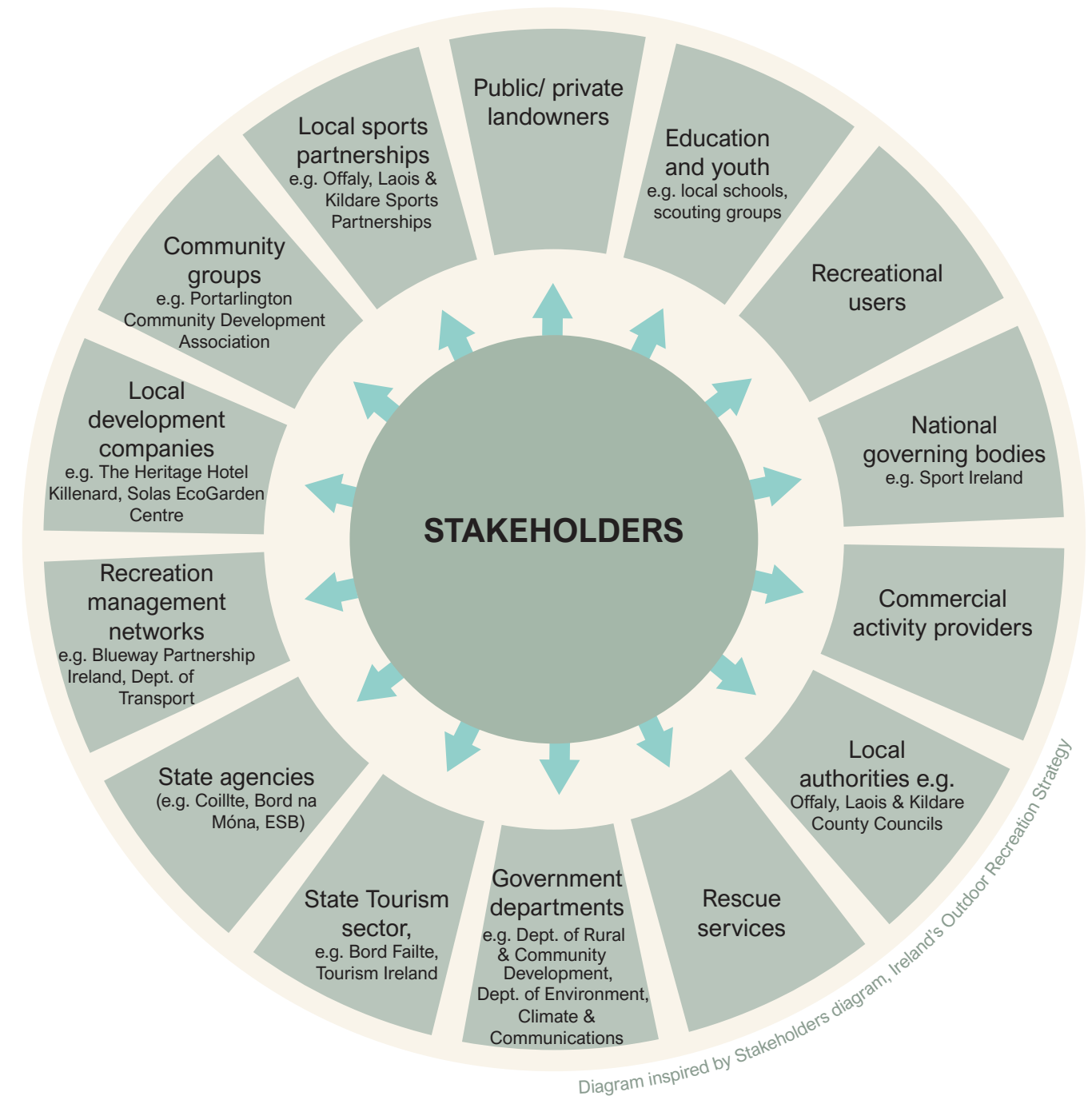
Schools and universities may use Derryounce as an educational resource, providing opportunities for students to learn about environmental science, ecology, landscape architecture, and sustainable land use practices.

Peat Extraction Companies:

Companies formerly engaged in peat extraction may transition into roles involving site rehabilitation and management. Their expertise in the area is valuable for implementing sustainable practices.

Access and Disability Advocacy Groups:

Ensuring that the park is accessible to people with disabilities is a key consideration. Collaboration with advocacy groups can help in designing inclusive information, attractions, facilities and trails.



Derryounce Stakeholder Diagram (inspired by Stakeholder's Diagram, Ireland's Outdoor Recreation Strategy)

Emergency Response Agencies:

Collaborating with local emergency services ensures that Derryounce will be equipped to handle emergencies, guaranteeing the safety of visitors and residents.

these businesses can enhance the overall visitor experience.

Local development companies and businesses:

Restaurants, shops, and other businesses in the vicinity can benefit from increased foot traffic generated by park visitors. Collaboration with

POLICY & CONTEXT

In developing a policy and context framework for such a diverse landscape like Derryounce, it is essential to consider a multi-tiered approach that aligns with international, European Union (EU), national, and local policies.

The 10 Year Plan for Derryounce aims to address various inter-connected issues, including regenerative tourism, climate change mitigation, nature restoration, peat re-wetting, outdoor recreation, biodiversity conservation, industrial heritage preservation, and cultural heritage promotion. Below is an overview of the relevant policy landscape at each level.

International Level:

The project aligns with several UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including:

- SDG 13 (Climate Action): Afforestation and peatland re-wetting contribute to carbon sequestration, mitigating the effects of climate change.
- SDG 15 (Life on Land): Restoration efforts focus on biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use.

European Union (EU) Level:

- EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: The 10-Year Plan for Derryounce aligns with the EU's commitment to restore at least 30% of degraded ecosystems, contributing to the overall goal of halting biodiversity loss.
- EU Climate Action Policies: Afforestation and peatland re-wetting supports EU climate objectives, particularly in the context of carbon sequestration and sustainable land management.
- EU Just Transition Fund: Recognising the Midlands' transition away from peat extraction, the EU's Just Transition Fund supports the area's development, ensuring a fair and sustainable shift for the community and workers.
- Nature Restoration Law: The passing of the EU's Nature Restoration Law should align the 10 Year Plan with a commitment to ecological restoration, and ensuring the sustainability and resilience of Derryounce for generations to come.

National Level (Ireland):

- National Peatlands Strategy: The project supports the national strategy by transitioning former peat extraction sites into areas promoting biodiversity, nature conservation, and carbon sequestration
- National Biodiversity Action Plan: The 10 Year Plan for Derryounce contributes to national

biodiversity goals by creating habitats for flora and fauna, and enhancing ecosystem resilience.

- Climate Action Plan: Peat re-wetting and increased afforestation aligns with Ireland's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and enhancing carbon sinks.
- Outdoor Recreation Strategy: The 10-Year Plan aligns with the ambitions of the national strategy, providing sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities to improve the health and well-being of the population. Ireland's 'National Outdoor Recreation Strategy' defines outdoor recreation as passive and active activities that take place in the natural environment. Such activities are those undertaken by people in leisure time, that require effort or passive enjoyment; access to green-blue spaces; sometimes use purpose-built facilities; and includes play in the natural environment.¹ It excludes motorised activities and recreation on confined courses or pitches from this definition of outdoor recreation.
- Our Rural Future: Our physical and mental health is positively impacted by contact with nature and engaging in even light physical activity makes us feel better. Research shows that those who regularly spend time in green areas are healthier, less depressed, and less dependent on medication. Just a short walk each day improves our health and well-being considerably, reducing illness and improving the quality of our lives; something that also leads to lower health and medical costs for our society. Enabling groups of all ages and abilities to access open space helps them and their families build relationships and neighbourhood networks that can bind communities and promote social inclusion, revitalising rural towns and villages.²
- Town Centre First: Derryounce's proximity to Portarlington town, with its proposed greenways, sustainable travel routes and mosaic wildlife habitats means that it can substantially contribute to the resilience, regeneration, and development of the locality, as well as contributing positively to 'placemaking' of an environment where people want to live, do business, visit and is ultimately successful. This aligns with the visions of the 'Town Centre First' national-level policy.³
- Hidden Heartlands: The proposals envisaged in the 10 Year Plan closely align with Fáilte Ireland's 'Hidden Heartlands' initiative, showcasing the unique and authentic experiences offered by the

¹ 'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors: National Outdoor Recreation Strategy', Department of Rural and Community Development, 2023-2027'

² 'Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025', Department of Rural and Community Development, 2021

³ 'Town Centre First: A Policy Approach for Irish Towns', Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of Rural and Community Development, 2022



Above: site-specific land art installations painted on trees at Derryounce

- Regenerative Tourism in the Midlands: The plans and proposals for the 10-Year Plan have been informed by Fáilte Ireland's publication 'An Introduction and Approach to Regenerative Tourism'.⁴
- Midland Regional Food and Drink Strategy: the 10 Year Plan has considered how development at Derryounce and its hinterland might support the

⁴ 'EU Just Transition Fund Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme for Ireland's Midlands 2023-2026: An Introduction and Approach to Regenerative Tourism', Fáilte Ireland, 2023.

- Local and Economic Community Plan Guidelines: Valuing a community as an expert in the 'built' environment revitalisation process contributes positively to an inclusive revitalisation process. The concept of 'ownership' can be created by encouraging and supporting local residents to have a sense of control and responsibility over their living environment. This is particularly in

⁵ 'Midland Regional Food and Drink Strategy 2021-2024', Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, 2021

relation to the design and maintenance of such public spaces. Consultation and co-design enable projects to hear and incorporate information from the people who live nearby.⁶

Regional Level (Ireland):

- Regional Enterprise Plan (Midlands): The 'Regional Enterprise Plan' for the Midlands envisages opportunities to develop visitor experiences along waterways and cycle tracks to link Derrycastle Lakes & Trails with other significant Blueways and Greenways on the Royal and Grand Canals, the Shannon Pilgrim Way, the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail, and the Shannon Wilderness Park, as long as these developments conserve heritage assets from adverse impacts of visitors and development in general.⁷
- EU Just Transition Fund for the Irish Midlands: Acknowledging the economic transition, the fund supports the community, ensuring a just and equitable shift away from peat extraction.
- 'A Feasibility Study on the Development of a Major Cycling Destination in the Midlands Cycling Destination'⁸
- 'Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2021', Bord na Móna, 2021
- 'Strategic Framework for the Future Use of Peatlands', Bord na Móna, 2011
- 'National Peatlands Strategy', National Parks & Wildlife Services, 2015

Local Level (Joint Offaly-Laois Portarlington Local Area Plan):

The joint Offaly-Laois Portarlington Local Area Plan identifies Derrycastle as an important heritage resource with the potential for environmental and economic benefits, with significant objectives for its conservation and enhancement. The joint LAP notes that the Laois Tourism Strategic Plan 2018-2023 identifies Portarlington itself and its connection to the Derrycastle site as having potential for a strategic aim of economic development and employment generating activities.⁹ This would happen by developing walking, cycling, and angling links

⁶ 'Local and Economic Community Plan Guidelines', Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021, provides a template for community consultation and include values and principles to help guide collaboration with community and voluntary groups.

⁷ 'Regional Enterprise Plan to 2020', Department of Business, Enterprise, and Innovation, 2019

⁸ 'A Feasibility Study on the Development of a Major Cycling Destination in the Midlands of Ireland', Bord na Móna, Coillte and Offaly County Council, 2016

⁹ 'Draft Portarlington Joint Local Area Plan, 2018-2024', Laois County Council & Offaly County Council, 2018

between the town, the nearby Heritage Resort at Killenard, and the Derrycastle site. Both councils have as their objectives to support local LEOs, Portarlington Community Development Association, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the Laois Partnership Company and other agencies and organisations to achieve this.

Policy Objective EEO10 of the Joint LAP is to 'facilitate development of a historical trail through Derrycastle Bog and a Heritage Museum documenting the history of the bog, turf production in the area and the former location of the town's power station'; with EEO11 to 'support the development of a cycleway from Derrycastle Lakes and Trails to Mount Lucas'. Objective EEO13 supports the provision of maps and signage at tourism nodes including Derrycastle Lakes and Trails. Such links will support the ambition of Offaly's 'Connecting People – Connecting Places' vision to connect Portarlington with the Grand Canal via Mount Lucas, and to connect the People's Park along the River Barrow to Derrycastle (TMO12, TMO13) along a mosaic of connected green spaces.¹⁰

The Joint LAP identifies as an objective, to meet the needs of tourists and visitors to the town of Portarlington, to provide a 'trailhead building, heritage museum, food and beverage establishments and increased parking' in the locality. Uses such as tourist accommodation of all types and ancillary services are encouraged within the Derrycastle/Portarlington area in the Joint LAP.

Local Level (Offaly County Development Plan):

Offaly County Council's County Development Plan has an Objective to work with stakeholders including Bord na Móna, Coillte, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Waterways Ireland, and Just Transition groups to examine developing a Wilderness Corridor on rehabilitated peatlands in East Offaly, including Derrycastle Bog.¹¹ The 2015 Offaly CDP identified the landscape character of the subject site as having a 'Moderate Sensitivity' to development and change.

The NTA publication 'CycleConnects - Offaly Cycle Network' outlines OCC CDP's strategic objectives and policies for cycling to be integrated with key themes like sustainable mobility and accessibility, biodiversity and landscape, tourism and recreational development, employment and enterprise, built and natural environment, and infrastructure. As part of Offaly's various de-carbonisation actions and

¹⁰ 'Connecting People - Connecting Places', Offaly County Council, 2015
¹¹ Objective BLO-28, Chapter 4 'Biodiversity and Landscape' of the CDP and Figure 6.13 'Midlands Cycling Destination, Offaly Network Map'



Above: Dark Sky tourism is a key opportunity for a place like Derrycastle

projects¹², a Portarlington to Grand Canal Greenway link is proposed, and Derrycastle itself is identified as an area which can support sustainable mobility, accessibility, and active travel policies by continuing to improve the walkways and facilities. Policy TR-19 of the Offaly CDP identifies potential linkages which could be developed to link the Derrycastle site to the People's Park in Portarlington and to Mount Lucas Wind Farm to the north along a mixture of serviced

¹² Chapter 8 Sustainable Transport Strategy, Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027

walking, cycling, and driving trails through the planned Wilderness Corridors. Active travel is defined by the National Transport Authority as: 'travelling with a purpose, using your own energy via sustainable means. It includes walking, wheeling, and cycling or the use of self-powered, non-motorised scooters as part of a purposeful journey. For example, walking to school and cycling to work are both considered forms of Active Travel.'¹³

¹³ <https://www.nationaltransport.ie/planning-and-investment/transport-investment/active-travel-investment-programme/>



context and setting

doire fhuinsigh

siúl
snámh
rothaíocht
tumadh
aimsigh

eachtra
athuair

THE PLACE

Context & Setting

Derrycastle is located 2.50km north-west of Portarlington town in Offaly, close to the boundaries with the counties of Kildare and Laois, and south of a minor road between Portarlington and Monasterevin. Access to the place is from the east along a lane beside a former Bord na Móna railway line, off the Edenderry road between the towns of Portarlington and Clonbullogue. The cutaway raised bog was in industrial peat production from the 1960's for the local power station, which ceased in the 1990's.

The bog forms part of the Allen-Clonsast Bog Group, with the meaning of the name 'Doire Fhuinsigh' translated from the Gaelic being 'oak-wood of fuinsigh or grove of the ash tree'. Dryland bog islands separate Derrycastle Lake from Derrylea Bog, with a track linking Derrycastle to Lough Lurgan. The Cushina River runs through the landscape, along with the Clonsast Power Station Railway line, 2.32km long linking Clonsast Bog to the north to Derrycastle to the south-west. As happened at the man-made landscape of Lough Boora, another cut-away raised bog, significant sod peat extraction has occurred at Derrycastle which has led to eventual landscape degradation. Offaly's County Development Plan identifies the type of peatland at the site as 'Raised Bog Exploited'.

Derrycastle Lake, like Lough Boora, was artificially flooded in the late 20th century following its peat exhaustion. When all viable layers of peat were extracted, the gravel and sand layers beneath were used to create an informal beach edging the lake.

Coillte coniferous forest plantations surround the site. Ecologist John Feehan, author of 'The Bogs of Ireland' has urged that 'the great bulk of the cutaway should be left to develop spontaneously as a new midland wilderness', predicting that these bogs will regenerate with an 'ecological vitality and diversity as great as any in the past 10,000 years'. His hopes are for our bog landscapes to develop 'a mosaic of woodland and wetland and wild grassland, which . . . can spread and interconnect with other areas of new wilderness to create an ecological network where our grandchildren . . . can wander and explore wild diversity and abundance of a kind we lost in our lifetime.'

The landscape typologies of the site described at the site by ecologists on behalf of Bord na Móna include lake, wetland, poor fen, scrub, and embryonic peat-forming Sphagnum vegetation. The site has been identified as important for the Marsh Fritillary, and

sand-martins have been noted at nearby Derrycastle. Bord na Móna has identified possible rehabilitation solutions at the Derrycastle site as lake creation, amenity development, angling, walkways, and wetland creation. The 16-hectare Derrycastle Lake is stocked periodically with brown and rainbow trout to support its development as an angling attraction. Three looped trails have already been developed at the site, varying in length from 3.00km, 5.50km and 14.00km.

The vision for Derrycastle has been derived from policy and a consultation process, to create a destination focusing on the health and well-being of the local and wider community to deliver environmental, economic, physical, and mental health, and social benefits to the locality. Derrycastle has a special magical wildness to it, which it is important not to lose in the planned intensification of use and the development of tailored design proposals appropriate to the sensitivity of the site.

To cherish, value and protect a landscape, humans must be encouraged to visit, to enjoy their visit, and to repeat their visit as they age and grow. The planned extension of the lake landscape must be carefully designed to accommodate the noise and disturbance caused by human activity to sensitive wildlife, such as nesting birds and rare plants or ecosystems discovered within the site. The desired increase in the size of the water bodies will encourage intensification of wildlife species at the site and will help support nature-based solutions and climate resilience. Protected 'islands' may need to be created within the parkland landscape to support a process of relatively undisturbed 're-wilding' to continue at the site, as it has from its abandonment for industrial peat extraction in the 1990's.

The site may need to be seasonally managed to prevent noisy human and dog activity in certain areas during bird nesting seasons. Sporting activities such as angling and wild swimming may require co-ordination and collaboration between clubs to co-locate in the same water body. The introduction of humans or the intensification of human activity into a sensitive wetland and forest landscape must be delicately balanced with the ecology and biodiversity of the site.

Derrycastle is well-situated, 2.50km north of Portarlington, between the Grand Canal Greenway and the Barrow Blueway, in a part of County Offaly characterised by cut-away raised bogs, coniferous forest plantations, and a landscape undergoing change from peat production to wilderness and sustainable energy production.



Derrycastle: Aerial view looking south between the forestry blocks. Con Murphy, Con Murphy Photography.

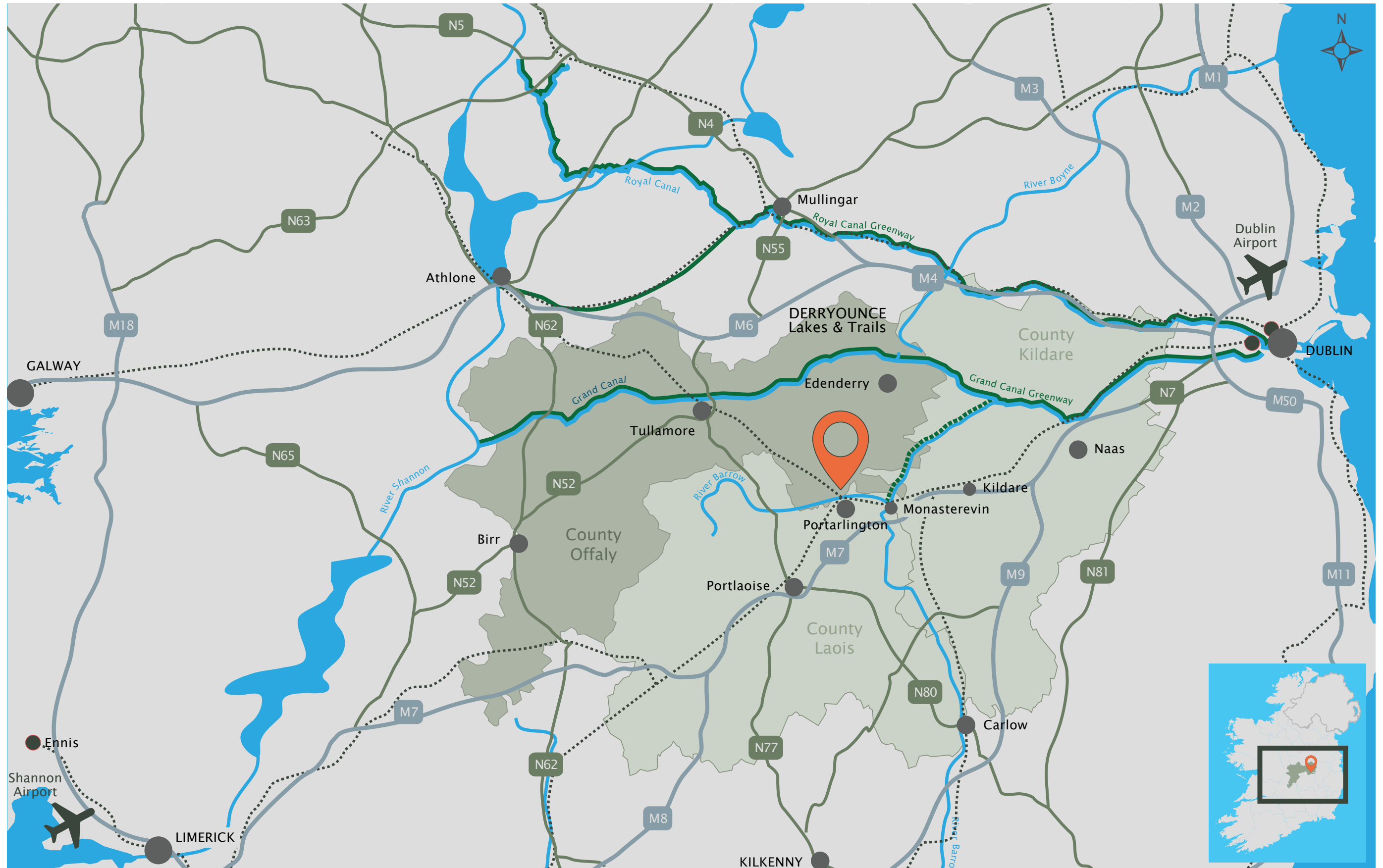
Derrycastle benefits from:

- An already-established strong and special 'sense of place', and a site which is cherished and appreciated by the locals. Most visitors travel over 10km to visit Derrycastle;
- Good site 'scale' at 280 hectares in area, meaning that it can comfortably act as a hub for a number of activities, without compromising its strong sense of place and atmosphere;
- Space for nature in the future forestry design and landscape plan, and space for wilderness as the


landscape evolves function from productive to amenity;

- An excellent location close to the heritage town of Portarlington with its strong public transport connections, meaning that Derrycastle is well-placed to support a 'sleep-over' function, encouraging stay and spend in the locality

DERRYOUNCE: TRANSPORT ROUTES



 Derryounce Lakes & Trails Site location

 National rail line

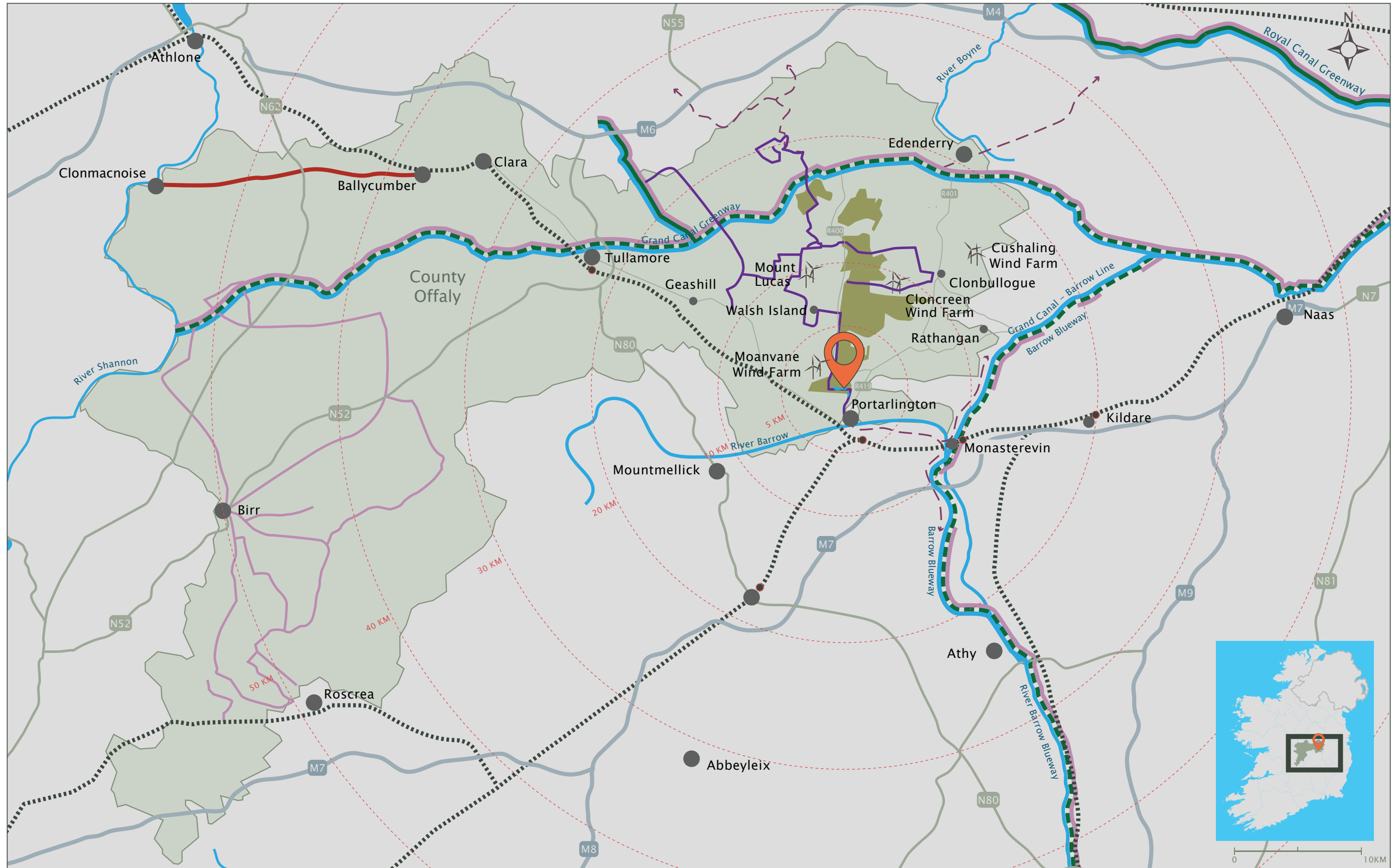
 Waterway

 Greenway, pedestrian & cycleway


DERRYOUNCE Lakes & Trails


TRANSPORT


DERRYOUNCE: CONTEXT



 Derryounce Site location


 County Offaly

 Peatlands


 National rail line


 Bord na Móna railways

 Cycling route

 Links to other amenity routes

 Waterway

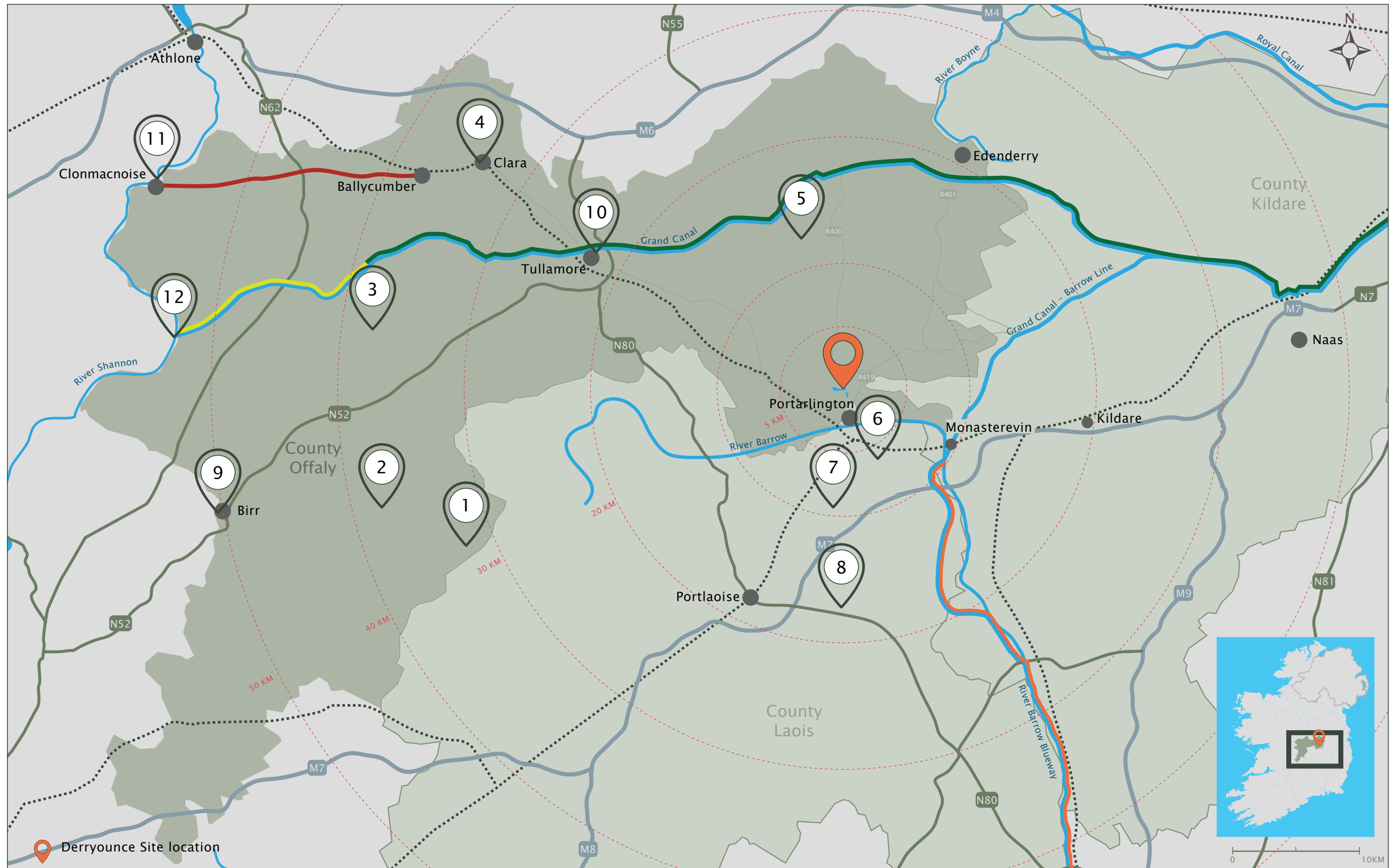
 Active travel route

 Shannon Pilgrim Way

DERRYOUNCE

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT & ACTIVE TRAVEL

DERRYOUNCE: REGIONAL ATTRACTIONS



- | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| ① Slieve Bloom Mountains | ④ Clara Bog Nature Reserve | ⑦ Emo Court | ⑩ Tullamore Dew | Waterway | Barrow Way |
| ② Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trail | ⑤ Mount Lucas | ⑧ Rock of Dunamase | ⑪ Clonmacnoise | Grand Canal Way | Shannon Pilgrim Way |
| ③ Lough Boora Discovery Park | ⑥ The Heritage, Killenard | ⑨ Birr | ⑫ River Shannon | Grand Canal Greenway | National rail line |

Regional Site Location

Derryounce is a wonderful amenity on the doorstep of Portarlington and its hinterlands. It offers the potential for intensification of passive and active recreation without the loss of its strong sense of place.

Its location 2.50km off-road from Portarlington, a transport hub for rail and bus routes, makes Derryounce ideally placed as a trailhead for entry into the Bog of Allen landscape.

The Laois-Offaly Joint LAP for Portarlington identifies as an objective, to meet the needs of tourists and visitors to the town, that a 'trailhead building, heritage museum, food and beverage establishments and increased parking' should be provided in the area. Uses such as tourist accommodation of all types and ancillary services are encouraged within the Derryounce/Portarlington area in the Joint LAP.

Derryounce is well-placed, because of its convenient location, for regular footfall with daily walkers providing regular passive surveillance to help make a commercial element viable.



Above: The worldwide 'Troll' series, created by artist Thomas Dambo, evokes folklore and legends, and are site-specific.

Art & Land Art at Derryounce

Local newspapers and tourism literature extol the Land Art tree mural artworks completed on site by artists Beta Franca and Brian Flynn.¹ Installations such as the 'Gruffalo Grove' walks create excitement and are an attraction for families to the site, who understand that they are welcome and wanted.² Land Art works are made in nature, either by moulding the earth itself, or by forming installations with natural materials. The intention of land art is to provoke sensations in people that make them immerse themselves in nature through the work.³ The VisitEstonia tourism team believe that quality art and design is an attraction in itself to regenerative tourists.

Natural pigmented breathable paints were used in the works 'Entwine', 'Harmony' and 'The Fairy Garden', and the works bring the forest to life through colour and design. Elsewhere, land art has been used selectively to highlight the presence of entrances to Derryounce, particularly successfully at the beginning of the off-road active travel link between the place and Portarlington, called 'Horizon'. These art installations have added to the special and unique sense of place at Derryounce, recalling folkloric tales and forgotten symbols to passers-by. They draw attention to the beauty of the forest and have been carefully and sensitively placed there.

Land art interventions such as Thomas Dambo's Trolls projects can re-interpret the folkloric landscape for the contemporary visitor, telling local landscape stories of Púcas, Will-O-The-Wisps, St. Brigid, and Sheela-na-gigs.

'Place, Space and People', the Arts Council's policy framework for socio-spatial equity in the arts, envisions a people and place-centred approach where people can create, engage with, participate in, and enjoy the arts and culture.⁴ Artistic installations can be implemented as educational, ecosystem sensitive, interpretive and design elements on the following principles:

- Signage and way-finding, distance-markers
- Interpretive, educating people about place, such as leaving a portion of cut-away bog intact
- Circular economy, with installations fashioned from found and local materials re-purposed, including elements of industrial heritage, which can be easily recycled.
- **Low-impact**, with sensitivity to existing habitats

¹ <https://laois-nationalist.ie/2021/07/09/stunning-art-work-in-the-woods-in-portarlington/>

² <https://www.theindietripper.com/post/derryounce-lakes-and-trails>

³ <https://www.landuum.com/en/history-and-culture/land-art-landscape-as-a-canvas/>

⁴ 'Place. Space & People', The Arts Council, 2022



Above: The artworks completed at the site by Beta Franca and Brian Flynn are evocative, mysterious, and sensitive.

- Landscape and ecological restoration, where art installations become 'restoration' projects involving things like the regeneration of old water features, such as a re-discovery of the original Lough Lurgan, an in-filled tarn to the north-west of the current one; or planting new forests
- Water management, such as infilling old peat drains and re-wetting the landscape in certain locations
- Introducing STEAM principles which were used

- at the site (power generation, tree-planting earth-moving, dams, windmills etc.) to a younger generation
- Community engagement, involving the local community in co-creation and implementation. Projects should have social value and be undertaken in respectful partnerships.
- Biodiversity creation, where land art is designed to include elements that attract local wildlife and provide food and shelter

DERRYOUNCE: LOCAL AMENITIES & LAND USE



- | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| (A) Derryounce | (E) Portarlington Bus Station | (I) Gracefield GAA | (M) Garryhinch Woods | Town | Bogland |
| (B) Link trail from Portarlington | (F) People's Park | (J) Leisure centre | National rail line | County boundary | Harvested peat |
| (C) Portarlington town centre | (G) The Heritage Resort, Killenard | (K) Corrick Spire | Bord na Móna railways | Agricultural | Water |
| (D) Portarlington Train Station | (H) Solas Garden Centre | (L) Lea Castle | Derryounce access road | Woodland | |

LOCAL AMENITIES & LAND USE

Land Use

This part of County Offaly benefits from a rich vein of history and heritage. The landscape of the region is characterised by horizon, peat bogs, woodlands, rivers and tarns, and its landscape history of production (agriculture, canals, peat, wood, energy).

At Derryvilla, near the site entrance to Derrycastle off the Edenderry Road, a National Monument has been discovered, with evidence of a Friar's Togher (a medieval walkway across a bog) and an early Christian settlement found on the gravel 'bog island'. A Bronze Age burial mound is thought to be on the summit of Croghan Hill, an extinct volcano 2.5km to the north-east of Derrycastle. The largest settlement of Huguenot refugees in Ireland was established at Portarlinton and the surrounding area.

Portarlinton itself is very well-located within Ireland, roughly equidistant between three county towns (Tullamore, Kildare and Portlaoise). The town benefits from main bus and rail routes and proximity to the M7.



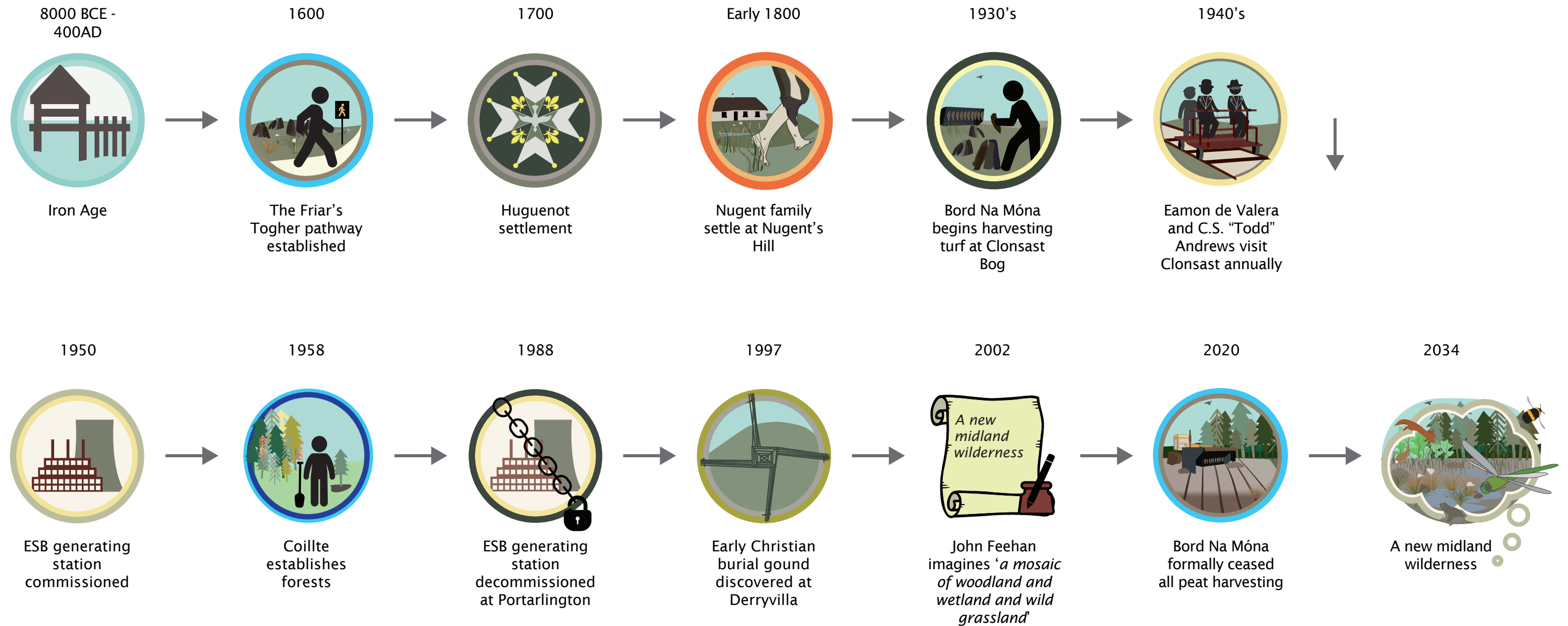
Above: location of former Bord na Móna rail-line through forestry plantation quadrants at Derrycastle

Portarlinton's geographic location on the River Barrow offers it existing off-road active travel blue-way connections to the Grand Canal Greenway, the Shannon Blueway, and the Barrow Blueway. Strong potential for other off-road connections exist on Bord na Móna rail-lines through peatlands and Coillte forestry.



Above: Remnants of industrial heritage like this 'bothy' at Derrycastle should be kept and cherished.

HERITAGE TIMELINE



Graphical timeline tracing heritages at Derrycastle

Derrycastle - A Changing Landscape

'Landscape' as a term has been defined as 'an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.'¹ Storied knowledge of the place was gained from local people during consultation and also from desktop research. This knowledge and understandings have informed the ideas and concepts of the 10-Year Plan during its evolution.

The landscape at Derrycastle has been undergoing change since the arrival of the Huguenot refugees at Portarlinton in the 1700's. The areas surrounding the town began to become more intensively used for

¹ This definition for the word 'landscape' is from the European Landscape Convention, The ELC was issued by the Council of Europe and signed on 20 October 2000 in Florence by member states. The Convention was ratified by Ireland in 2002 and came into force in 2004. The ELC landscape definition and its legal recognition was included in the Irish Planning and Development Act 2010 (amended).

food production and agriculture. In the early 1800's, the family farm sited at today's Nugent's Island in the heart of the Derrycastle woods supplied vegetables to market fairs in Portarlinton.

In the 1930's, Bord na Móna began to harvest peat for national energy production from nearby Clonsast Bog, and Derrycastle Bog was one of the first bogs to be harvested by the Bord. Taoiseach Eamon deValera and C.S. Andrews, then managing director of the Turf Development Board, visited the Derrycastle bog to celebrate Good Friday mass with the Bord na Móna workers there.² They toured the Clonsast Bogs on a small wooden rail car built on rail wheels. Workers cycled to the bog from Portarlinton, or lived in a hostel at Clonsast Bog.

² <https://www.bordnamonalivinghistory.ie/article-detail/clonsast-from-memory-in-the-early-days-of-the-turf-development-board/>

In the 1950's, the ESB opened an electricity generating power station 2.50km to the south of Derrycastle, close to Portarlinton, with a weighing-bridge located along the then rail-line, which marked the transition between BnM and the ESB's lands.

In 1958, Coillte began to plant coniferous forest plantations on the degraded peatland areas at Derrycastle. 1988 saw the decommissioning of the ESB's power station and its iconic cooling tower. Archaeological investigations resulted in the registration of initially Historic Monument (1997) and then National Monument (2000) status for the mound at the Derryvilla bog island (then in use as a sandpit quarry). An early Christian burial ground, enclosure, and a bog togher road was discovered at Derryvilla.³

³ <https://excavations.ie/report/2012/Offaly/0023313/>

Walsh Island-reared ecologist and palaeobotanist Julie Fossitt described the landscapes of the local bogs as her favourite habitat, and the one she returned to regularly to walk.⁴ In the early 2000's, Offaly-resident John Feehan conceived of a 'New Midland Wilderness'.⁵⁶

In 2020, Bord na Móna formally ceased all peat harvesting and adopted a 'Brown to Green Strategy', transforming from a traditional peat business into a climate solutions company, focusing on renewable energy generation, recycling, and the development of other low carbon enterprises.⁷

⁴ <https://www.irishtimes.com/obituaries/2022/09/24/julie-fossitt-obituary-ecologist-and-staunch-defender-of-irelands-natural-heritage/>

⁵ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/plan-for-wetlands-wilderness-park-receives-boost-1.403392>

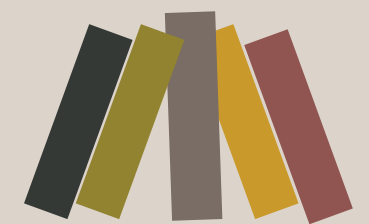
⁶ 'A Long Lived Wilderness – The Future of the North Midlands Peatland Network', John Feehan, 2024

⁷ <https://www.bordnamona.ie/bord-na-mona-announce-formal-end-to-all-peat-harvesting-on-its-lands/>



consultation

3



the bog

a re-imagined place to
restore, explore and play

cycle
swim
walk
immerse

re peat
adventure

CONSULTATION PLAN

In fostering a democratic and inclusive decision-making environment, our public consultation process adheres to the Gunning Principles, ensuring transparency, fairness, and effective communication.

Consultation Guiding Principles:

To facilitate open consultation, essential in guaranteeing that stakeholders are engaged, informed, and have the opportunity to influence decisions that affect them, the Gunning Principles have been applied to structure the consultation process.

The Gunning Principles consist of four principles, which if followed, are designed to make consultation fair and lawful. The four principles are as follows:

- Consultation must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage.
- Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response.
- Adequate time must be given for consideration and response; and
- The product of consultation must be conscientiously considered.

A variety of dialogue methods was created in the consultation process so that people felt that they had been listened to and participated in a meaningful process, to encourage active listening.

Clear Objectives and Scope:

Before launching the consultation process, a comprehensive set of clear objectives and the scope of the project was established. This helped in framing the discussion and provided stakeholders with a solid understanding of the purpose and potential outcomes. Three stages of consultation were planned:

- Ideas: June to July 2023
- Concept Development: August to December 2023
- Final 10-Year Plan: February to March 2024

The consultation process was divided into four methods:

1. Reach: focused on maximising community engagement and awareness, using social media, offline interactions, bilingual communication, a steering group, and stakeholder engagement
2. Engage: actively gathered community input on a wide range of topics. We used methods like surveys, one-on-one discussions, and informative newsletters to encourage meaningful participation.

3. Analyse: undertook a comprehensive examination and interpretation of community insights, aiming to understand their perspectives and needs thoroughly.
4. Collaborate: fostered a collaborative environment throughout the process. Regular updates were shared with the community to maintain transparency and trust, ensuring an inclusive and community-driven decision-making process.

Thorough Preparation of Information:

To facilitate informed participation, two newsletters were distributed at key stages of the process. These newsletters contain detailed information about the project, its goals, potential impacts, and any alternatives under consideration. This ensures that stakeholders are equipped with the necessary knowledge to engage meaningfully.

Regular Stakeholder and Steering Group Meetings:

A series of regular meetings were conducted with both Stakeholder and Steering Groups. These sessions served as platforms for open dialogue, allowing stakeholders to express their concerns, provide insights, and ask questions. The Steering Group played a crucial role in guiding the consultation process and ensuring that it remains aligned with the established principles.

Public Questionnaires:

To gather diverse perspectives, two public questionnaires were issued. These questionnaires were designed to elicit specific feedback on key aspects of the project. The data collected was analysed and used to refine the project proposal, addressing concerns and incorporating valuable insights from the community.

Early engagement when proposals are at a formative stage encourages deliberation and a feeling of genuine involvement by issuing a first newsletter. The first survey kicked in once people had the opportunity to digest and consider the issues online.

During the consultation process we widened the opportunities for consultation, to consult with schoolchildren to hear their thoughts.

Alternatives to a survey, such as tools for ideation and mapping tools, open up conversations about proposals and help people to influence the outcome.



Above: Stakeholder workshop event held at 'Ideas' stage in Portarlington

Public Consultation Events – Stakeholder Workshops:

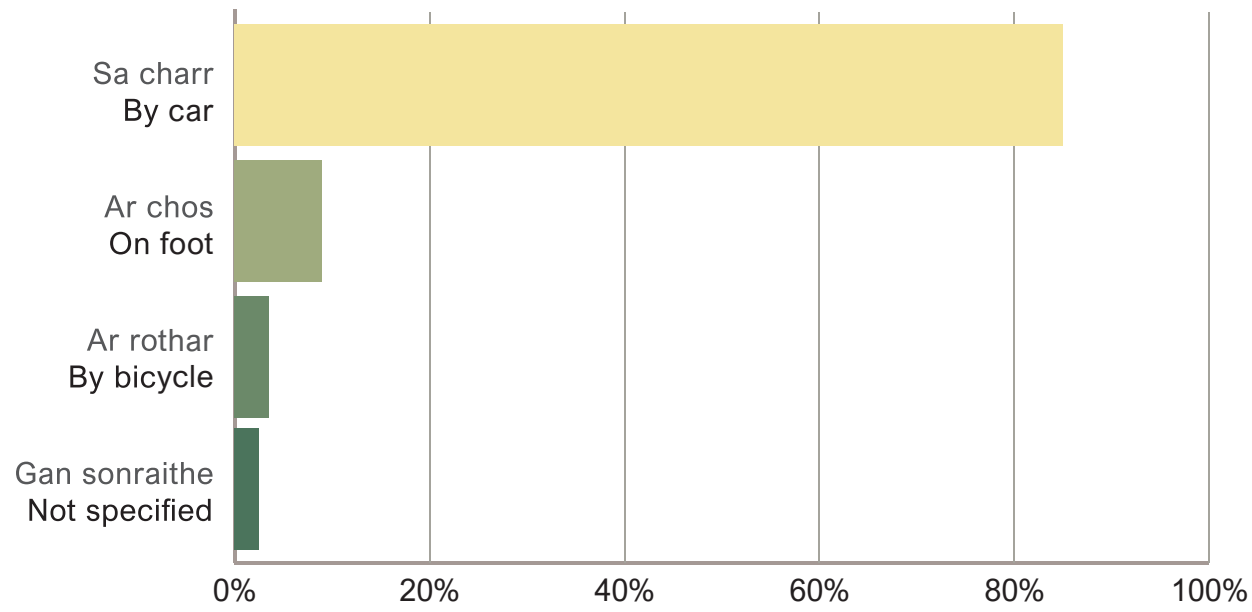
Two public consultation events, in the form of stakeholder workshops, were organised. These workshops provided a collaborative setting for stakeholders to discuss the project in-depth, share ideas, and contribute to the decision-making process. Facilitators guided the discussions to ensure that all voices are heard and that the process remains aligned with the Gunning Principles.

Consultation Feedback Loops and Iterative Adjustments:

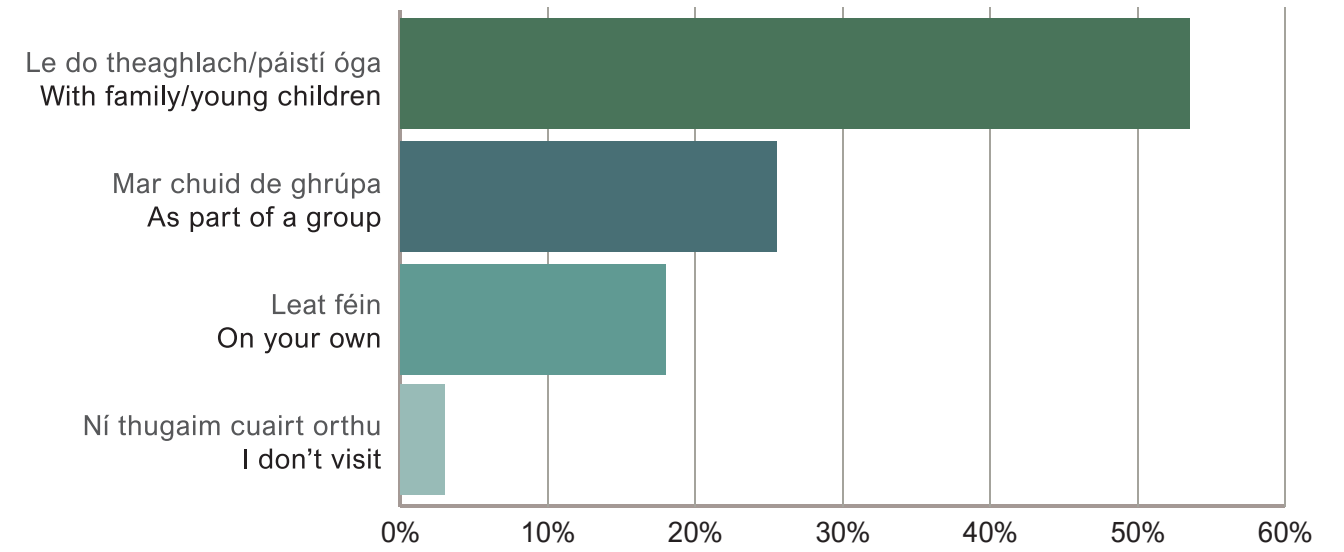
Throughout the process, feedback loops were established to continuously assess and adjust the consultation approach. This iterative method allows for the incorporation of new information, addresses emerging concerns, and ensures the ongoing alignment with the Gunning Principles.

'IDEAS' STAGE CONSULTATION RESPONSES

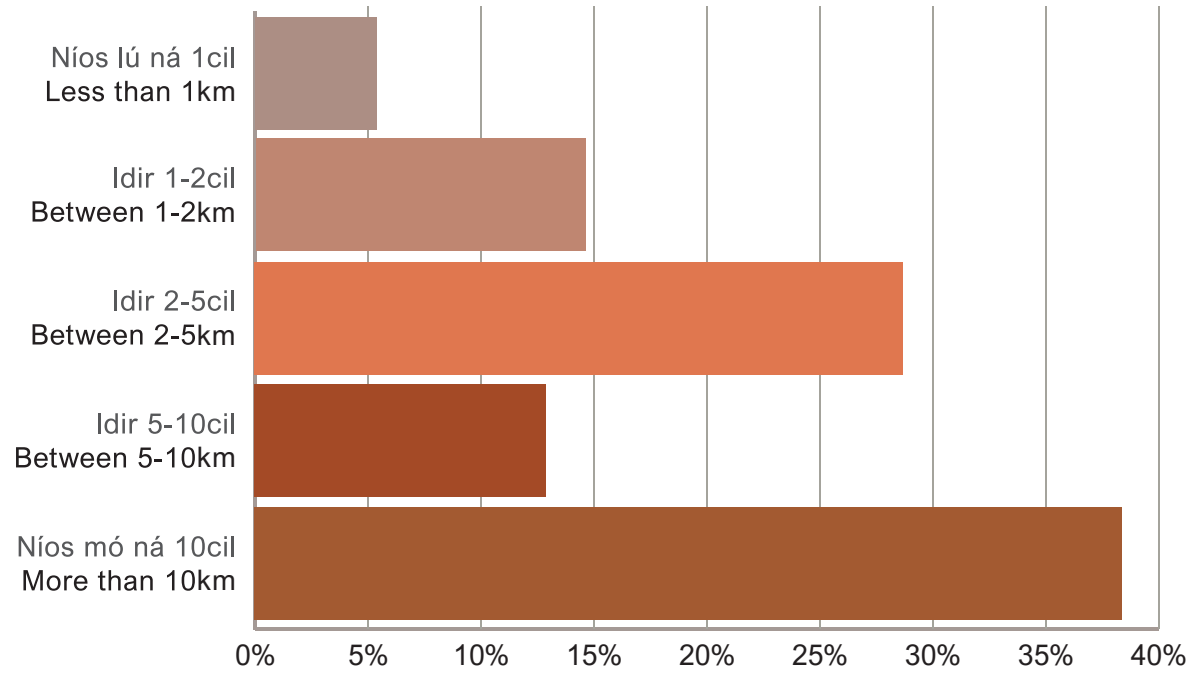
Mode of travel



Visitor profile



Distance travelled to visit



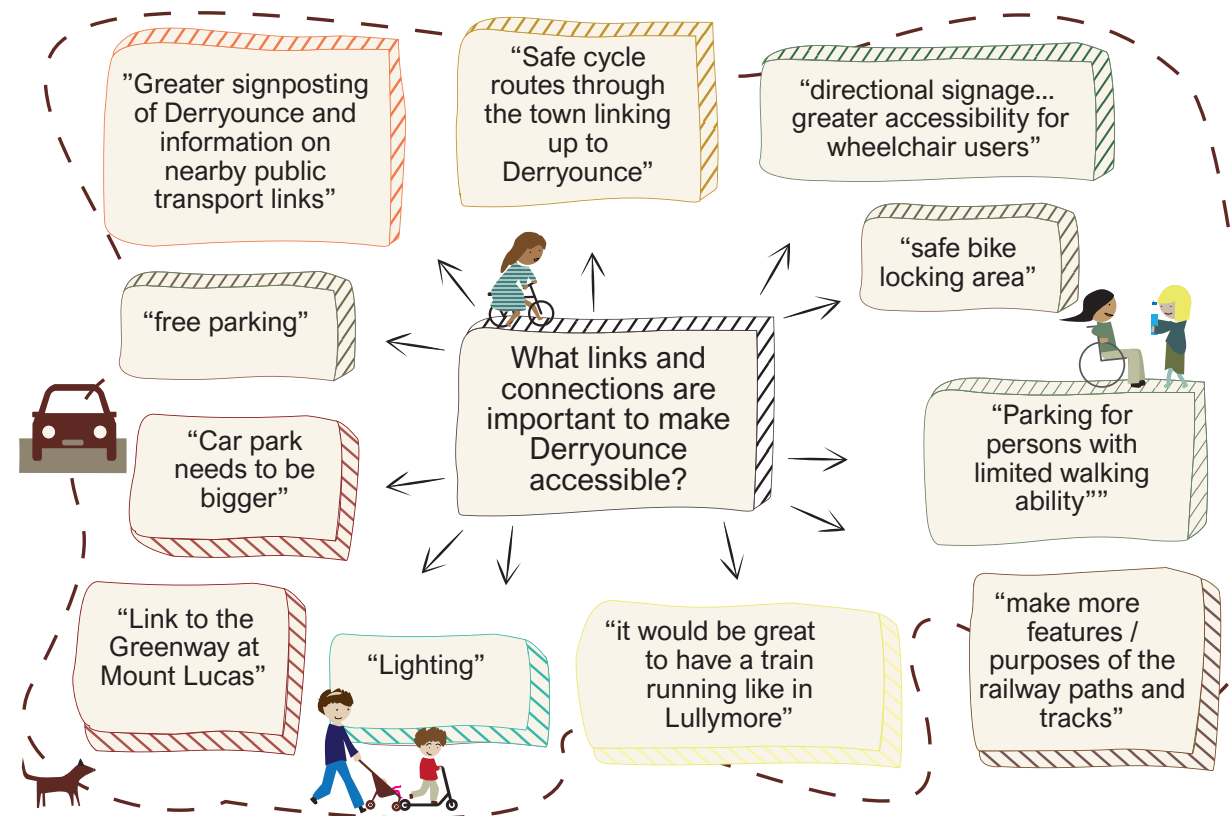
Main reasons for visiting



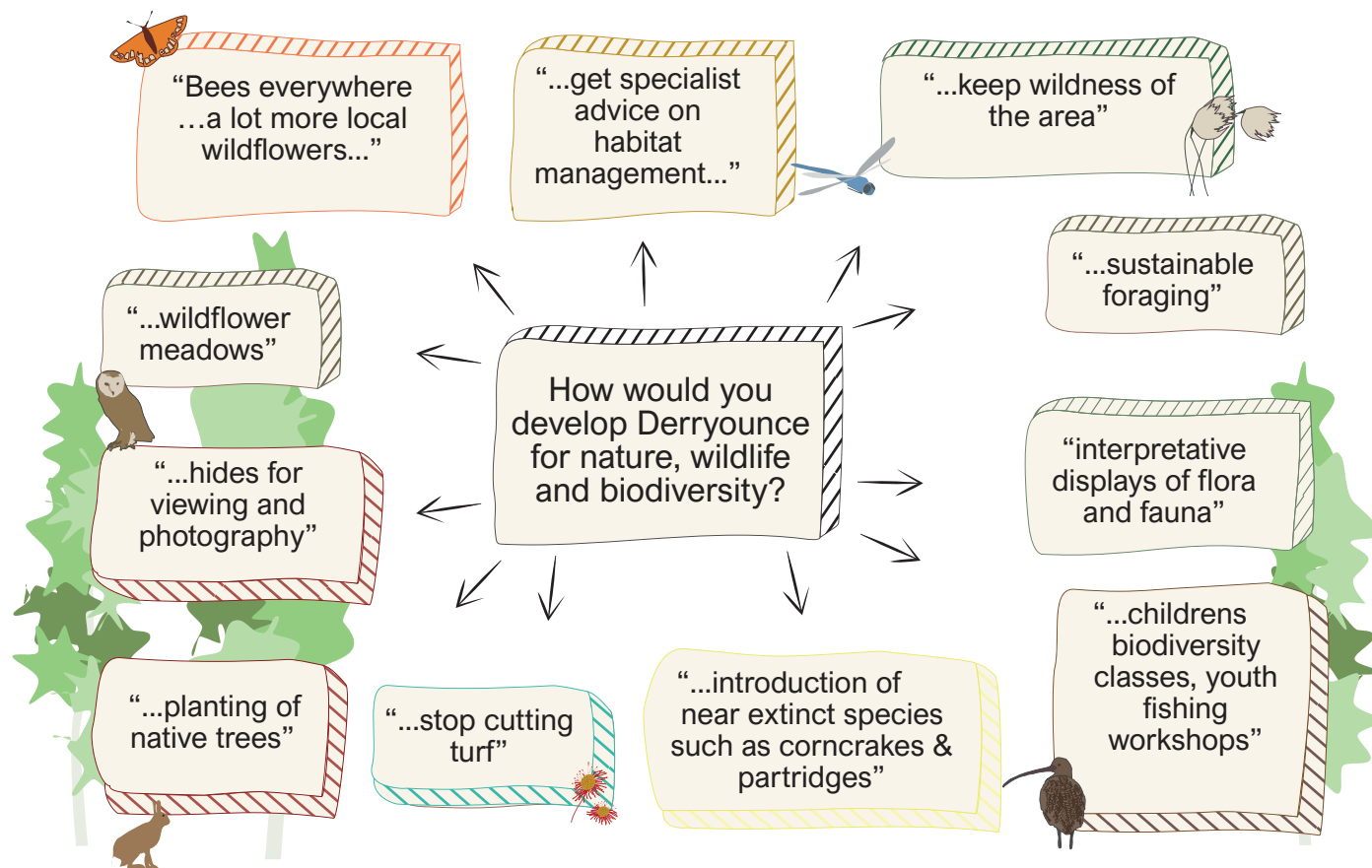
Above: icons illustrating the main reasons people told us they come to Derrynouce



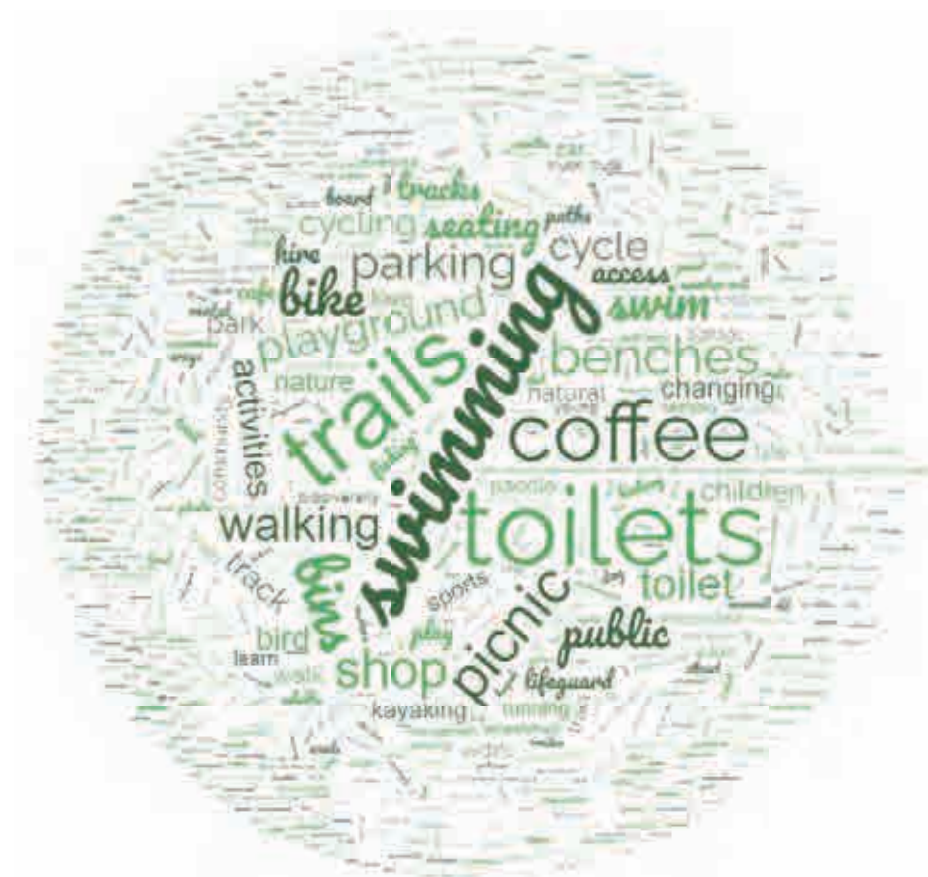
Above: 'Wordle' illustration expressing what people said the history of the area meant to them, formed from responses to the online questionnaire at the 'Ideas' consultation stage



Above: Illustration showing responses by people to the question 'What links and connections are important to make Derryounce accessible?', asked in the online questionnaire at the 'Ideas' consultation stage



Above: Illustration showing responses by people to the question 'How would you develop Derryounce for nature, wildlife and biodiversity?', asked in the online questionnaire at the 'Ideas' consultation stage



Above: 'Wordle' illustration expressing what people wanted to see at Derryounce, formed from responses to the online questionnaire at the 'Ideas' consultation stage

Emerging Themes

During the process of initial consultation about Derrycastle, several 'emerging themes' arose based on the feedback, opinions, and suggestions from the steering group, the stakeholder groups, the public, and from children, who responded or engaged. These themes represent common threads and recurring topics that emerged as people shared their thoughts and perspectives about Derrycastle.

While the specific themes varied depending on the context and the participants involved, some common emerging themes included:

- Ecological Restoration and Conservation
- Recreational Opportunities
- Educational and Interpretive Initiatives
- Cultural and Historical Significance
- Sustainable Tourism and Infrastructure
- Community Engagement and Involvement
- Accessibility and Inclusivity
- Natural Aesthetics and Scenic Beauty
- Wildlife Conservation & Restoration
- Funding and Resource Allocation
- Potential Risks and Mitigation Strategies
- Public Safety and Infrastructure Maintenance

Design Principles

By translating these emerging themes into design principles, the future for Derrycastle can be envisioned and developed in a way that reflects the collective vision, meets the needs of various stakeholders, and aligns with environmental and sustainability goals. This will ensure that Derrycastle becomes a meaningful and purposeful place that fosters appreciation, understanding, and enjoyment of the place.

The data collected during the consultation process was gathered, including surveys, interviews, public meetings, and any written submissions. The feedback was then analysed and sorted into categories based on common themes and topics. The themes which were mentioned most frequently or had the greatest significance to a broad range of participants have shaped the core objectives of the 10-Year Plan and of the supporting design principles to guide the development of the landscape at Derrycastle over the next 10 years.

These design principles address topics such as:

- Access
- Signal
- Activity
- Landscape & Beach
- Hub/Visitor Centre

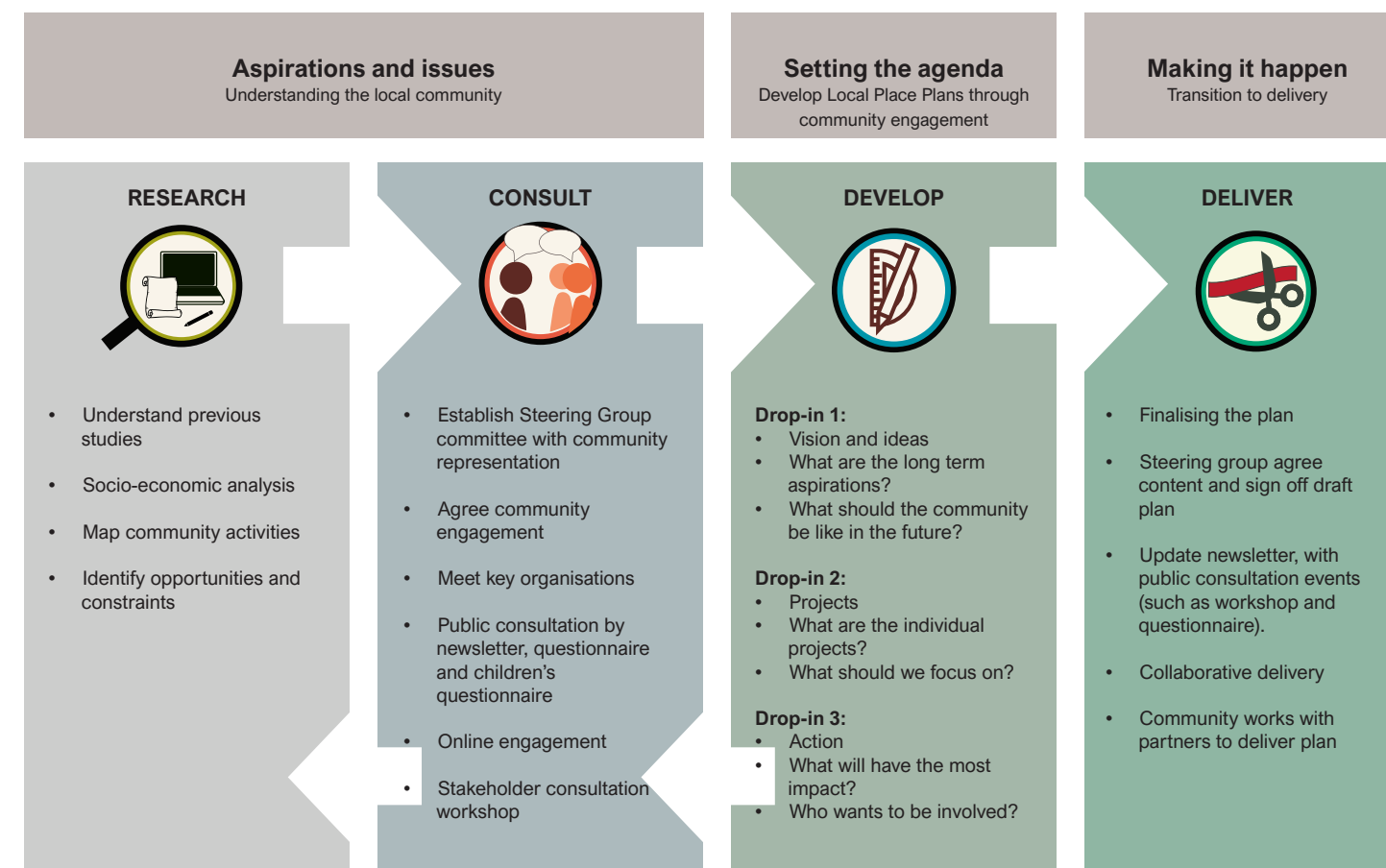
- Sense of Place
- A Midland Wilderness
- Overnight Stay

Key Findings of the 'Ideas' stage

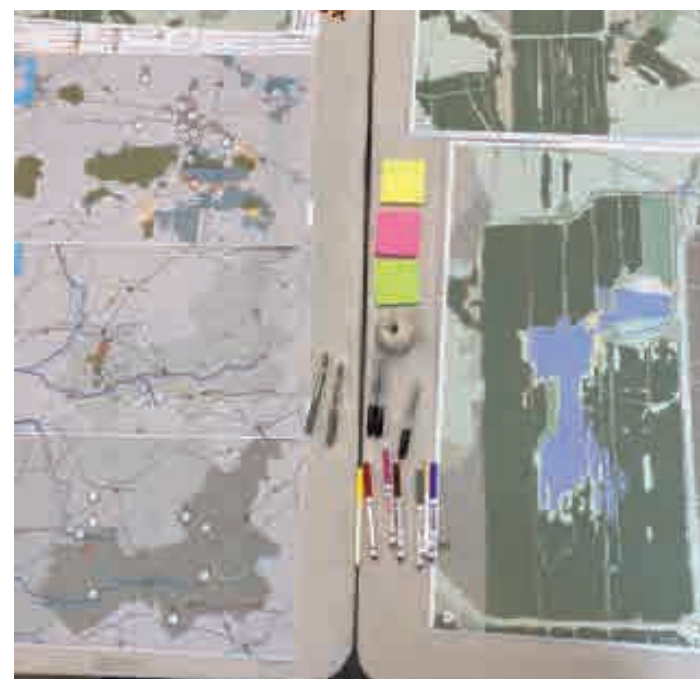
The takeaways from the initial public consultation stage for the drafting of the 10 Year Plan and its supporting design proposals were:

- Active travel and safe routes to play
- More entrances to the park to support mobility and reduce pressure on the Derrycastle entrance
- Connections to amenity areas surrounding Derrycastle
- Benefits for health and well-being of being outdoors and being able to engage in recreational activities there, including natural play
- Ensuring that children are enabled to play to the fullest extent possible - freely and often, inclusively and without discrimination
- Representing the industrial heritage layer of the site in particular
- Creating connections to nature
- Sustaining the existing special sense of place and atmosphere
- Providing balanced active and passive recreation

CONSULTATION PROCESS



Infographic illustrating the stages of the consultation process



Consultation sheets for use at the stakeholder workshop



Table discussions at the 'Ideas' stage stakeholder workshop event



Table discussions at the 'Ideas' stage stakeholder workshop event

CONSULTATION WITH CHILDREN

Children Told Us They Disliked



Children dislike...

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child & Consultation

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognises and emphasises the importance of consulting children in matters that affect them, including the planning of things in their area. This emphasis is based on several principles outlined in the CRC:

- Right to Participation (Article 12): Article 12 of the CRC explicitly states that children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them. This includes the right to be heard in any judicial or administrative proceedings affecting the child. The CRC recognises that children are individuals with their own perspectives, and their views should be given due weight in decisions that impact their lives.
- Respect for the Child's Evolving Capacities (Article 5): Article 5 of the CRC acknowledges that children's capacities to exercise their rights evolve with age and maturity. Consulting children about the planning of things in their area takes into account their evolving ability to express informed opinions and actively participate in decisions that affect their environment.
- Best Interests of the Child (Article 3): The CRC places the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all actions and decisions that affect them. Consulting children in planning processes ensures that their needs, perspectives, and well-being are taken into account, promoting outcomes that are in their best interests
- Empowerment and Education (Article 29): Article 29 of the CRC recognises the right of the child to an education that develops their personality,

Children Told Us They Liked



Children like...

talents, and abilities to the fullest potential. Involving children in planning activities fosters a sense of empowerment, educational development, and civic engagement, helping them understand and participate in their communities.

- Non-Discrimination (Article 2): The CRC emphasises the principle of non-discrimination, ensuring that all children have equal rights and opportunities. Involving children in the planning of things in their area promotes inclusivity and diversity, as it acknowledges the unique perspectives of each child, irrespective of their background.

By consulting children in planning processes, the UNCRC seeks to create a more inclusive and child-friendly society. It recognises that children are active participants in their own lives and communities, and their insights contribute to better decision-making, fostering a sense of belonging, empowerment, and respect for their human rights. This approach aligns with a broader movement toward recognising and respecting the agency and voice of children in various aspects of society.

Returned questionnaires from schoolchildren attending Cloneygowan School told us about what children liked and disliked in relation to visiting Derryounce, where they liked to play, and their ideas and hopes.

Children said that they disliked:

- Traffic in or near play areas, restricting their independent access and threatening their safety
- Rubbish in or near play areas, as they care about

DERRYOUNCE LAKES & TRAILS	
13. Do you ever go to Derryounce Lakes & Trails? Yes!	14. If you said yes, how do you get there? by car
15. And what do you like to do there? make holes	16. If you do not go to Derryounce Lakes & Trails, why not? I go to Derryounce!
Thank you for your answers!	17. Would you like to suggest another name for Derryounce Lakes & Trails? Have you a story about it's folklore or history to tell us?
The Bog Beach	
Extra space here for drawing a picture.	

Childrens' Questionnaire response from Cloneygowan National School.

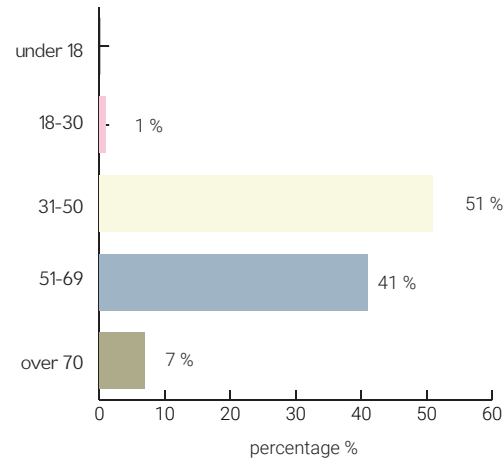
- their environment
- Lack of independent mobility, meaning their ability to get to playable landscapes on their own steam, and not being reliant on cars

Children said that they liked:

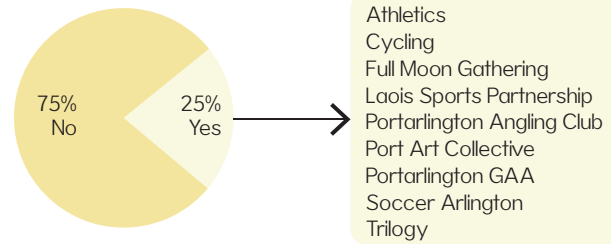
- Natural materials such as wood, metal, stone, rope, sand and water
- 'Risky-funny' play, sensory appeal and stimulation, and play value
- Playing together

10-YEAR PLAN: CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Profile of Online Survey Respondents (62 responses)



Age Bracket



Do you belong to a Sports Club or Community Group who currently use the site?

10-Year Plan Consultation:

Public consultation for the 10-Year Plan encompassed three stages:

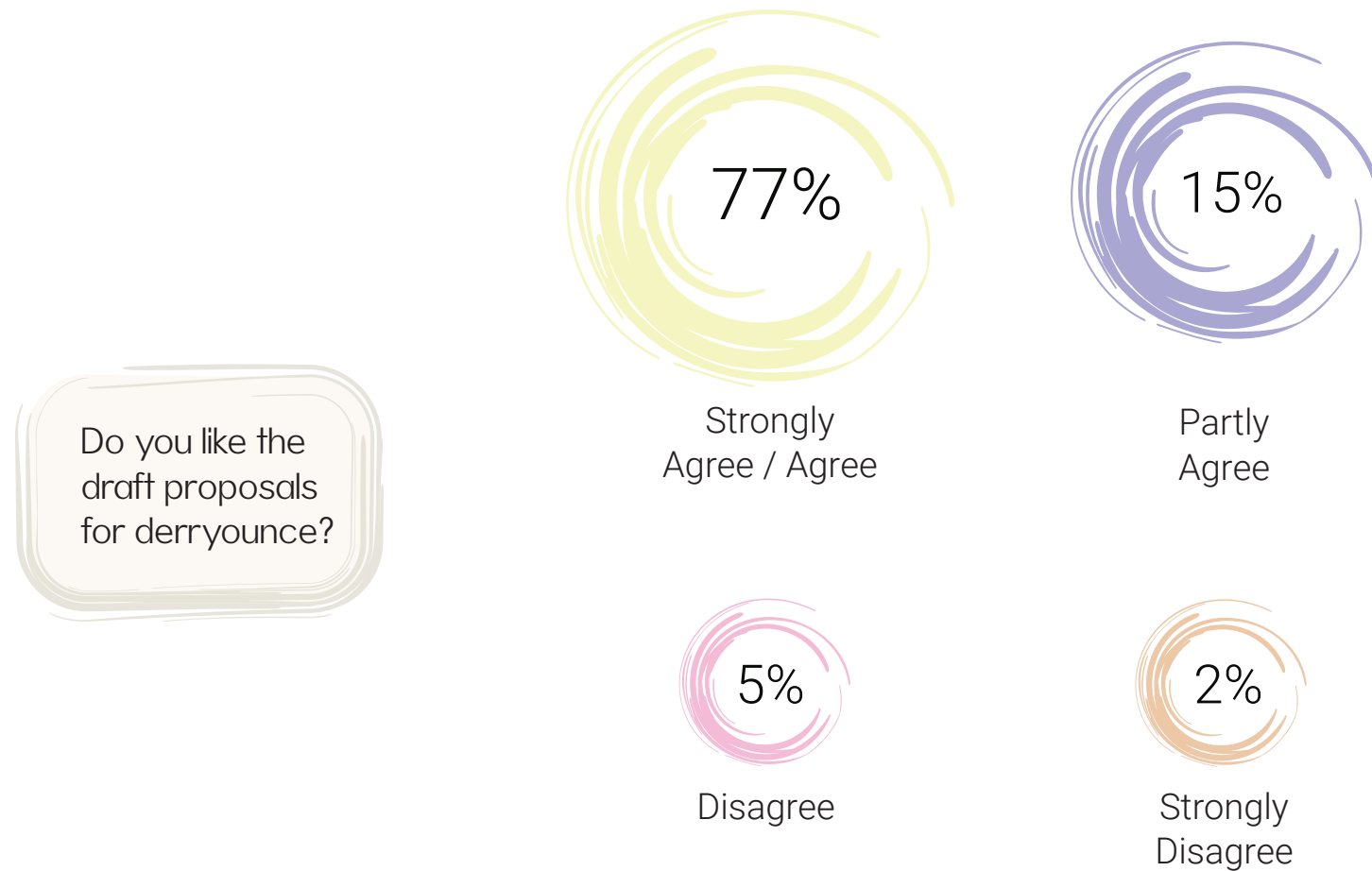
- Ideas: June to July 2023
- Concept Development: August to December 2023
- Final 10-Year Plan: February to March 2024

Online questionnaires offered people the chance to respond with their opinions, informed by newsletters. Two newsletters were issued to the public to illustrate the various stages of the plan at the start of each consultation period, with results of the previous stage of consultation, graphical plans, and descriptive text contained in them.

People were asked to submit their ideas, comments, and opinions on the development of the Plan in the various stages through the media of newsletter responses, online and paper questionnaires, and direct submissions.

During this period, the design team also made a series of online presentations to a steering group, composed of local stakeholders, during the process of developing the Plan. The steering group discussions tabled things like design precedents, concept ideas, whilst addressing any concerns or issues relating to the proposals. Presentations were also made by the design team to Fáilte Ireland and to elected members of Offaly County Council during the Concept Development stage. Local stakeholders were directly engaged and consulted with at two workshops in nearby Portarlinton, during the Ideas stage and the Final 10-Year Plan stage.

After publication of the Draft 10-Year Plan, people were asked in a second online questionnaire whether they thought that there was anything missing in the published proposals, and what they thought could be improved or added to make the proposals better. People were also offered the opportunity to respond directly with their comments using a project



email account. The consultation process supported feedback loops and reflection, and allowed the concept design to be iterative and responsive.

Summary of Changes Made Post-Consultation:

77% of the respondents to the second online survey issued at Final 10-Year Plan stage strongly agreed with the draft concept proposals, saying what they liked and disliked about the concepts and plans contained in the draft.

Concerns raised by the angling club regarding perceived loss of fishing opportunities in Derrycastle Lake were addressed in the developed concept proposals. The concept plans were amended to demonstrate the potential for that water-body to accommodate multiple users. These concerns were also addressed in the developed proposals addressing the vision for the planned expansion of Derrycastle Lake to accommodate events such as triathlons and as part of the place's potential to operate as a Centre of Excellence for water safety training in the future.

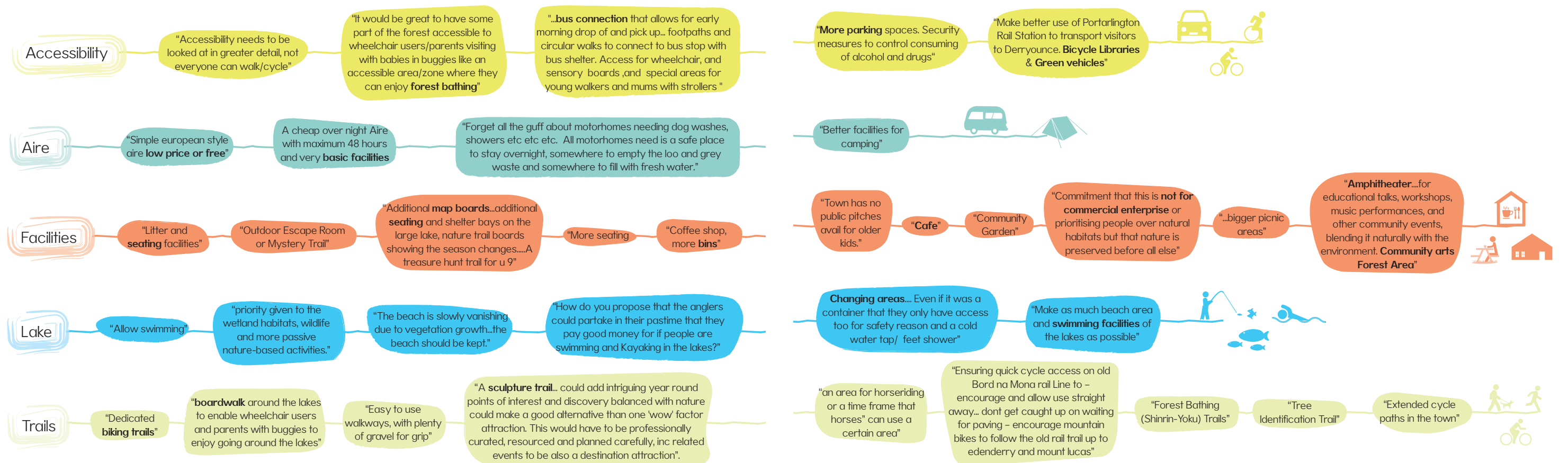
The suggested 'Fire Ring' area at the beach of Derrycastle Lake was omitted from the Plan proposals, because of concerns raised during consultation regarding the potential fire risk in relation to the peatland landscape. The sculptural seat shown at Derrycastle Lake's Bog Beach is retained in the concept plan proposals, to act as an artistic meeting point and focal area at the beach.

Stakeholders raised concerns about potential over-development of the western quadrants of the forestry blocks at Derrycastle as shown in the concept proposals at draft stage. These concerns were addressed in changes to the concept plans to maximise the potential for wildlife and commercial forestry operations. Recreation activities that had been illustrated in this area in the draft plan, such as disc golf, were relocated in the developed proposals to the Derrycastle Woods 'green gym' area, to prioritise the western quadrant area for biodiversity.

People also raised concerns about management of Derrycastle, anti-social activity, how sporting clubs might co-operate, and how wildlife might migrate through the landscape.



What do you think could be improved, or added to make it better?



distinctiveness

4



thewisp

immerse in the unexpected

walk
swim
cycle
immerse
connect

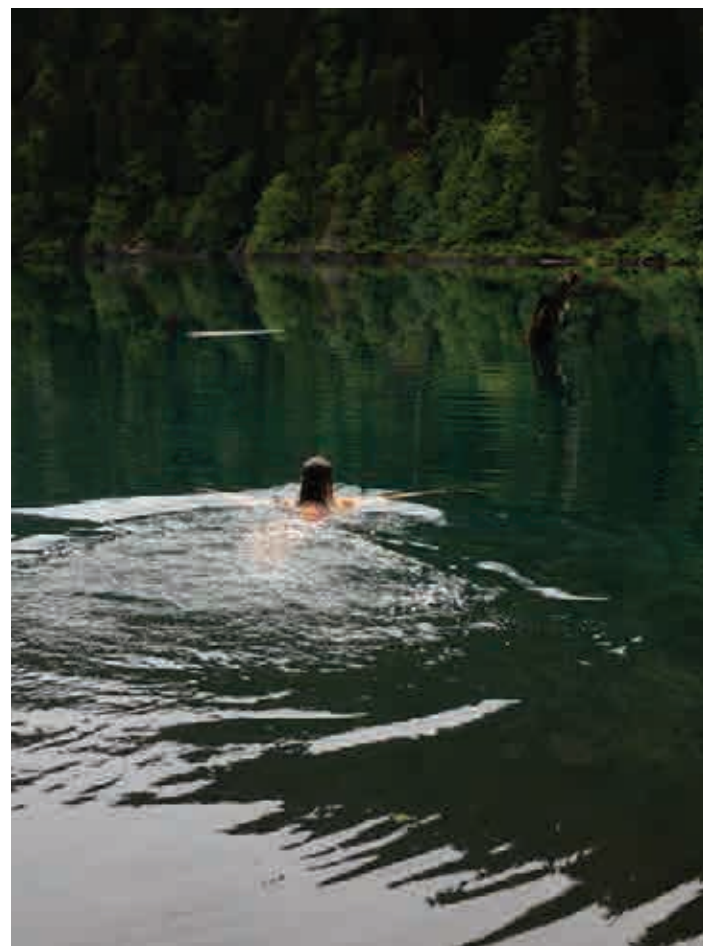
DISTINCTIVENESS

Distinctiveness

One theme that consistently emerged from the consultation process was a sincere 'love of place' that consultees of all ages and abilities expressed for Derryounce, and their recognition of the place as something special. People wanted others to know about just how unique Derryounce is, to enjoy its special and healing atmosphere, but they also expressed fears about loss of wildlife, over-development, and climate change.

Fáilte Ireland's recent publication, 'EU Just Transition Fund Regenerative Tourism and Place-making Scheme for Ireland's Midlands 2023-2026: An Introduction and Approach to Regenerative Tourism', states that:

'Reflecting the rehabilitation and restoration that is happening in our peatlands, there is an opportunity for tourism in the Midlands towards a more regenerative approach, putting nature and communities at the centre of all it does, and creating transformative and unique experiences that benefit visitors, locals and nature.'



Above: Immersion in nature is key to regenerative tourism.

The EU's Just Transition fund is providing financial support to EU regions with carbon-intensive industries to move towards a climate-neutral economy. Fáilte Ireland has been allocated a portion of this fund to deliver a Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme in the Midlands. Offaly is at the heart of the region designated for the Scheme.

The long-term tourism vision for the Midlands has already been set out in the Regional Tourism Development Strategies for Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Ireland's Ancient East, and contained in the Hidden Heartlands is an ambition to be one of the leading regenerative tourism destinations in Europe by 2023. The intention is that the Midlands Trails Network project empowers visitors to discover the region through a connected web of Greenways and Blueways, tracks and rails. It is hoped by delivering this vision in cooperation with locals, that the economy will thrive and that biodiversity will flourish.

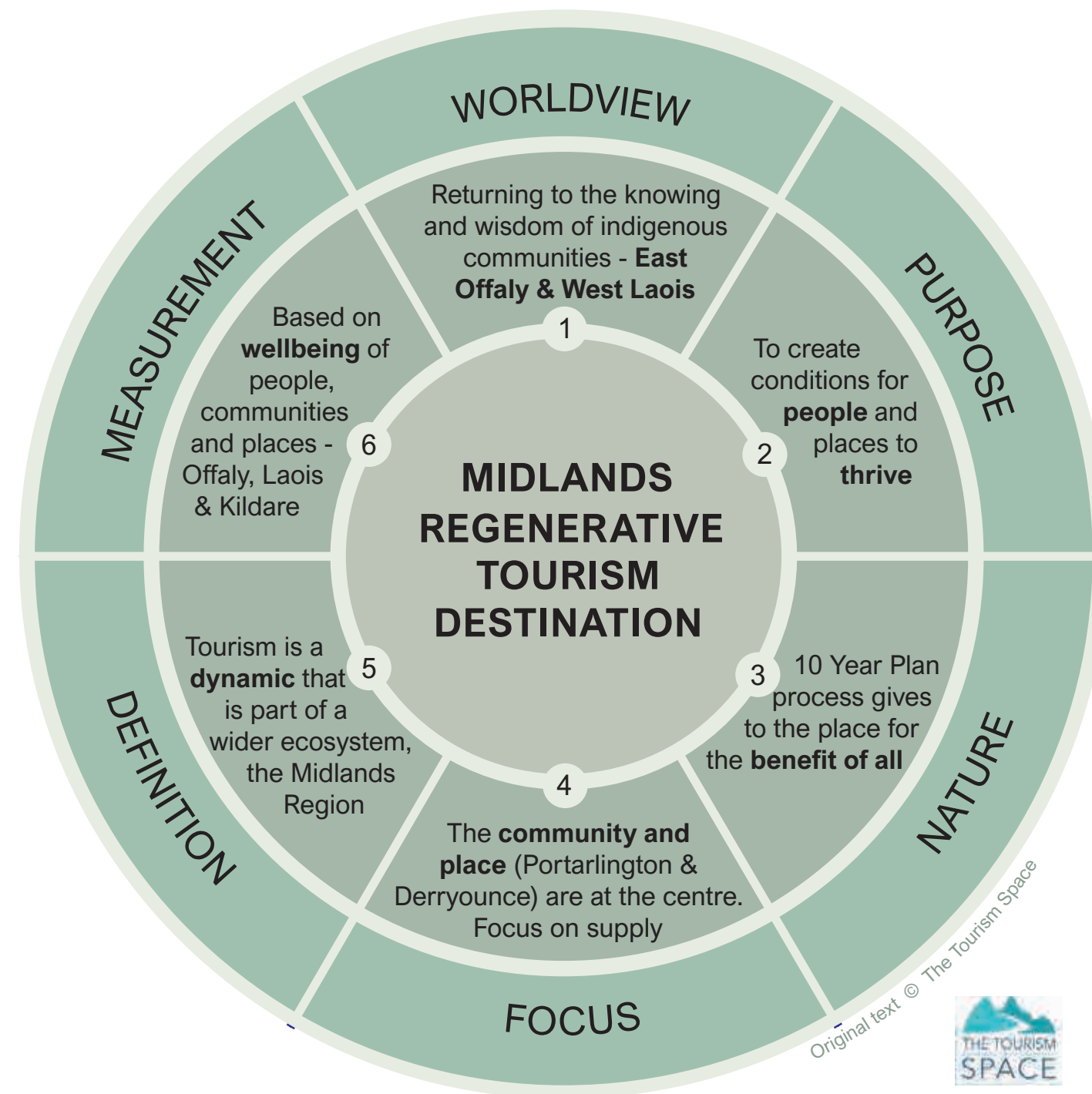
The 10 Year Plan for Derryounce has considered the key regenerative tourism characteristics identified in the Scheme and shaped the design proposals, recommendations, and governance strategies to respond to them:

- Connected trails in a re-wetted and restored peatland landscape linking attractions, activities and experiences
- Accommodation Choice: adventure, stay longer with longer dwell time and spend benefits.
- Biodiverse
- Smart
- Rooted
- Accessible
- Low-Carbon

Regenerative Tourism: The driving theme

Regenerative tourism prioritises the central role of the destination ('the Place') within the tourism model, aiming to generate a net positive impact for all involved stakeholders - including the environment, local communities, the tourism sector, and visitors. This approach advocates for a form of tourism that contributes more to a destination than it extracts.

'Regenerative tourism' differs from the concept of 'sustainable tourism', which is built on the idea of maintaining and preserving the current state of ecosystems, towards including nature as one of the key stakeholders in decision-making about 'place'. It asks how can tourism enhance the value that a destination and community already have, and how can tourism put more back in than it takes out.



Info-graphic expressing key tenets of regenerative tourism. Original words and concept by 'The Tourism Space'.

The concept of regenerative tourism goes beyond mere protection and mitigation of environmental harm, and intentionally works to provide benefits to nature, habitats, communities, and the overall health and well-being of the place. The focus is on ensuring that tourism becomes an agent for positive change, leaving the place in a better state than it was before, and fostering a positive relationship between tourists and the places they visit.¹

¹ Journal of Tourism Futures, Vol. 8 Issue 3. Special Issue: Transformation and the Regenerative Future of Tourism

A regenerative approach to tourism thrives on partnership and collaboration. Success is forged through collective effort, involving everyone from grassroots groups, businesses and individuals, to local authorities and state agencies.

The success of the approach is also intricately linked to alignment with nature and involves a sincere commitment to promoting biodiversity and integrating the natural world into decision-making processes.

CASE STUDY: LIMBURG CYCLING DESTINATION

Cycling Destination & Regenerative Tourism

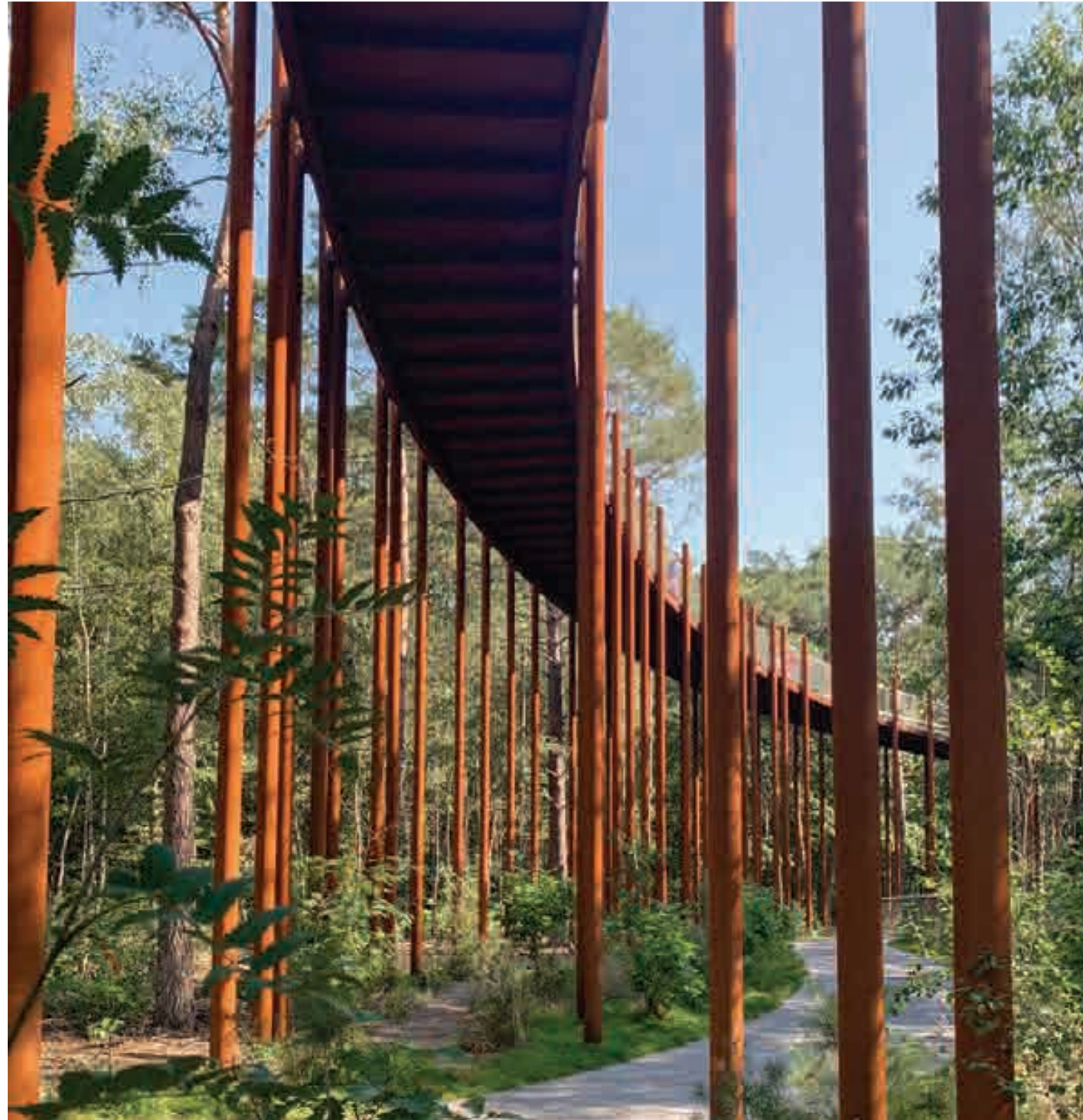
The Cycling Through concept by Tourism Limburg is a response to the transition of the region after the closure of the coal mines in the 1980's and 1990's. To rejuvenate and regenerate the area, a new vision and strategy was conceived to focus on cycling tourism. Tourists are guided through the landscape, highlighting the natural beauty and the cultural and industrial heritages of Limburg.

Limburg is 2,209km² in area; Offaly is 2,001km² in area. Visitlimburg.be is a legible and helpful tourism portal website centred around cycling and experiencing nature, which helps the visitor decide what to do, where to stay and what they need to know about visiting the region. Limburg's transition is an exemplar of how good design and regenerative tourism can positively impact a region's economic landscape and its cultural identity.

Every year Limburg receives an average of two million visitors, and the Limburg cycling network is reported to be one of the main reasons for visiting. Until recently, much of the area could not be entirely explored by bike.



Above: Orchard in Limburg, Belgium

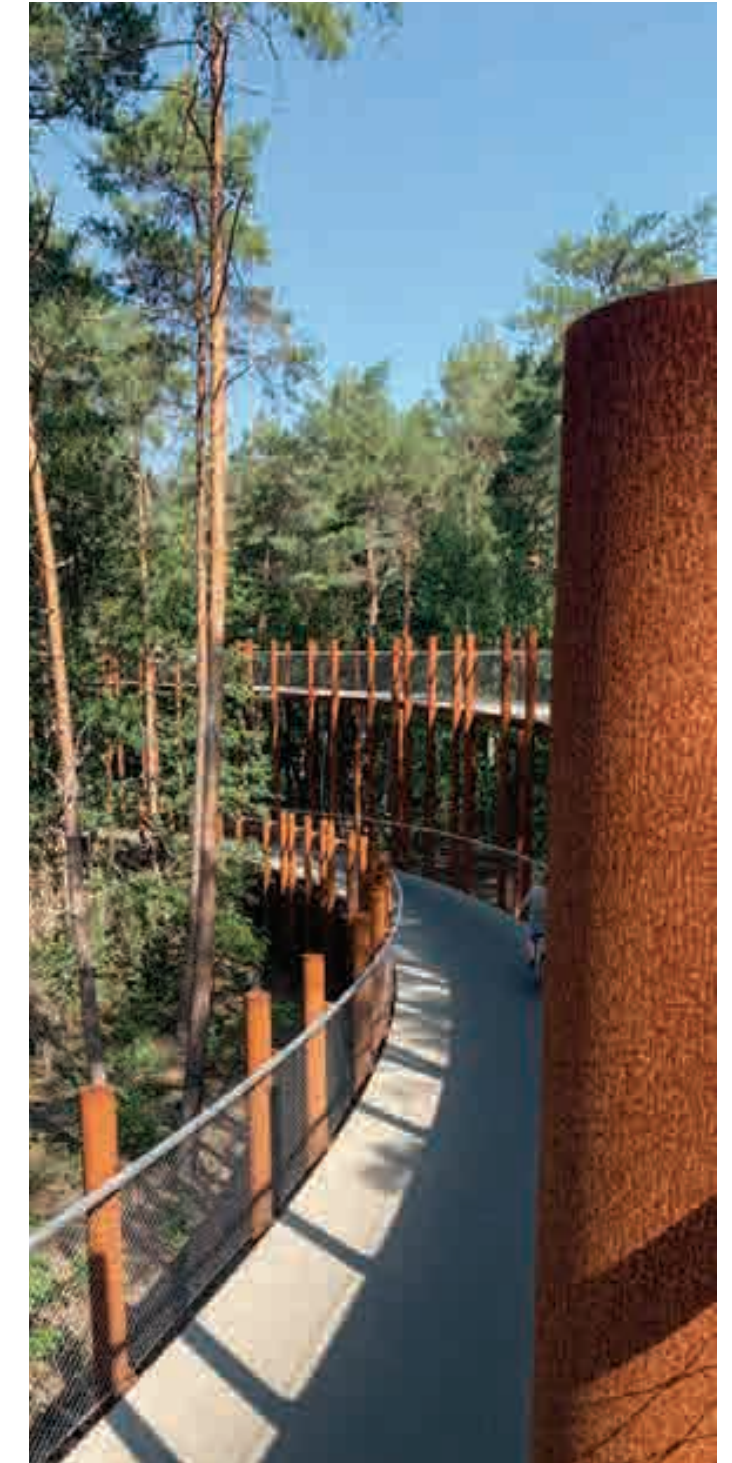


Above: Cycling Through the Trees, Bosland, Flanders, Belgium

'Cycling Through', an ongoing project located in Limburg, a region of Flanders in Belgium, consists of four stages; Cycling Through Heathland, Cycling Through Trees and Cycling Through Water, with the fourth stage 'Cycling Through the Underground', still in progress. Here, a network of different cycling routes through beautiful landscapes and unique heritages are connected to each other via junctions (usually nodes of cycle trails) to create 2000km of cycling trails. Each new stage of the project highlights

Limburg as a cycling paradise, and strengthens its position as a market leader in cycling tourism with a new destination to experience.

Some of these nodes were chosen to host the destination attraction landscape features that characterise the 'Cycling Through' project. The project was inspired by the Norwegian Tourist Routes, and aimed to replicate the success of this route by connecting scenic locations together and



Above: The corten steel supports of the ramp are lightweight, require minimised maintenance, and fit colour-palette wise with red Pine trunks.

implementing thoughtful and considered landscape architectural designs. Also to be found in Limburg as a destination attraction of the cycling routes is the De Wijers nature reserve, a unique wetland landscape undergoing a community re-wilding project.

The DeWijers nature reserve in Bokrijk-Wenk was chosen for the first destination attraction landscape project, 'Cycling Through Water', completed in 2016. An existing cycle path between two ponds was chosen as the site for the first intervention,

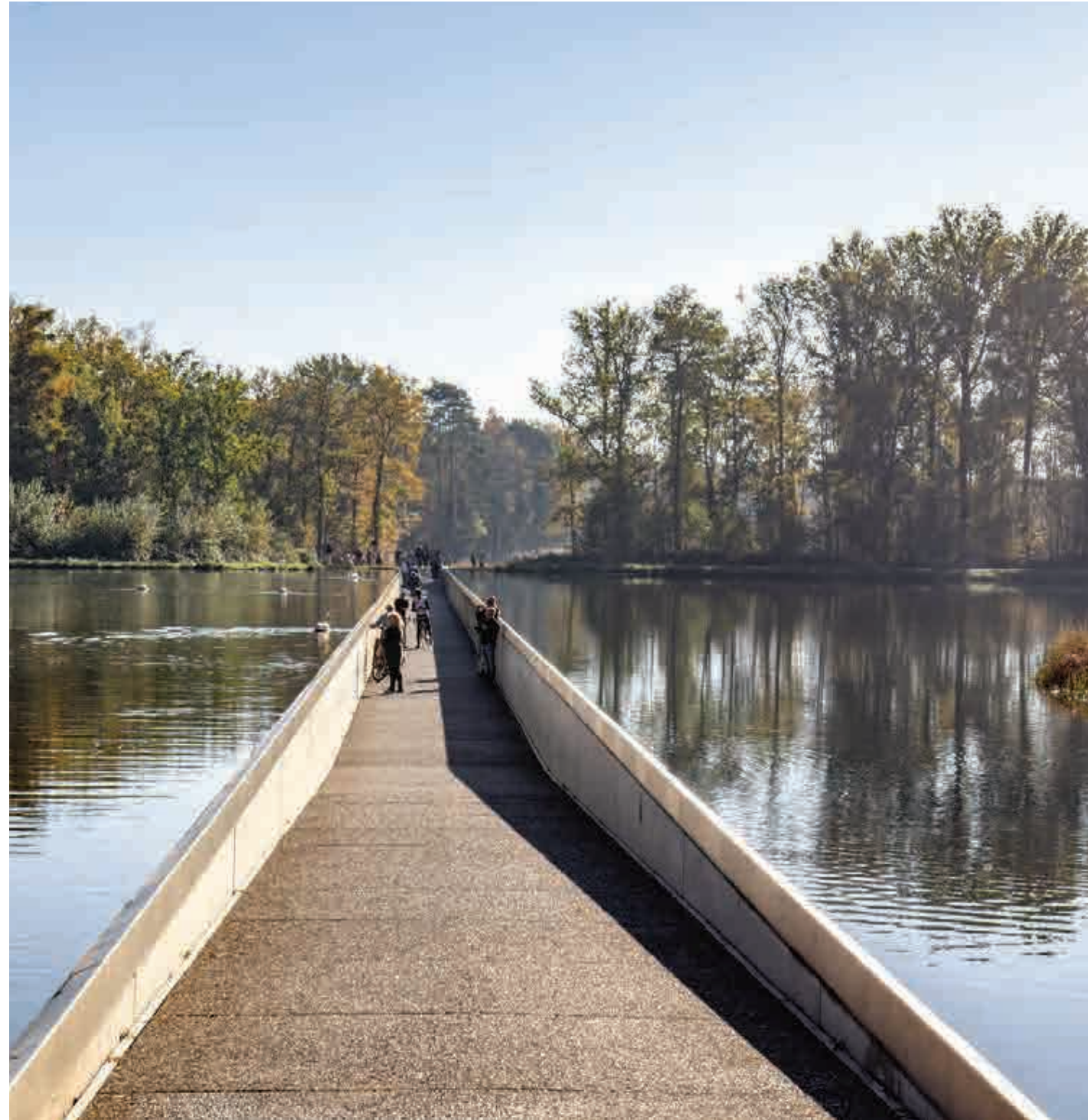
because of the likely minimal impacts on the existing environment. Now, for 200 metres the visitor can cycle or hike along a 3.00m wide concrete path through a pond, all the way from one bank to the other. In the middle, the adventurer experiences the water at eye level. An average of 800 tourists per day explore this part of the cycling network, and it has provided qualitative improvements to the Bokrijk area.

'Cycling Through Trees' opened in 2019 and comprises a 700m length gently-sloped ramp in the Bosland forest, forming a double circle 100m in diameter. The ramp rises gently to a height of 10 metres to allow visitors to experience the tree canopy of the forest. Corten steel was chosen to support the PU-coated steel ramp because of its reduced need for maintenance and its warm colour of rusted steel, recalling the industrial heritage of Limburg. The visitor gets to experience the sounds and scents of the Pine forest, changing through the season. The circular form of the ring is a symbolic reference to the tree age rings in the tree trunks which it celebrates.

'Cycling Through Heathland' opened in 2020, comprising a 4 kilometre cycling route through the heathlands of the only national park in Flanders, the



Above: pastoral landscape n Limburg, Belgium



Above: Cycling Through the Water offers a magical sensory experience at the eye-level of the water's surface at the De Wijers nature reserve in Limburg.

12,000 hectare Hoge Kempen National Park and nature reserve. The cycling route includes a 300m length wooden bridge allowing cyclists and hikers to cross over a busy road through the area, and enjoy panoramic views over the heathland and pine forest landscape.

The De Wijers landscape, 'Land of 1001 Ponds', offers the visitor 1000km of well-maintained paths, with themed walking routes highlighting specific aspects of the area's history or ecology. Bird-

watching, kayaking and canoeing are all popular in the area with rental services available. Adventure sports are provided for with climbing parks, zip lines and rope bridge.

The peaty wetlands of the De Wijers landscape was partly drained with canals as early as the Middle Ages for fuel, agriculture, and fish-farming. Today the landscape is undergoing a series of habitat restoration projects and water management projects to improve the overall ecosystem health of the area.



Above: Cycling Through the Heathland moves the visitor through fields of aromatic heather and pine forests to stimulate all the sense.

CASE STUDY: ESTONIAN BOGS DESTINATION

Estonian Bogs & Regenerative Tourism

22% of Estonia is covered with bogs and wetlands, not too dissimilar to Ireland. 6-7% of that coverage area is reported as 'intact', not 'degraded', meaning that the landscape has not been altered for peat extraction, agriculture or over-grazing. Like in Ireland, there are a lot of cultural folklore associations with their bogs or wetland-related phenomena.

In Estonia, the bogs have served as a source of food, for hunting and foraging; as a refuge in times of invasion on bog islands; and more recently as a resource for peat brick heating, farmland, and 'construction' forestry growth. In the 1970's activists began to raise awareness about the importance of the bogs as a carbon sink, and their unique aesthetic and restorative appeal. Perceptions began to change during the 1970's and 1980's, and large areas of bogs were designated as protected areas.

Since then, the popularity of bogs has dramatically increased and the state forestry agency has made many board-walks and forest trails to enable easy access for visitors to enjoy the silence and minimalistic landscapes.



Above: Food foraging trips for mushrooms and berries is a popular guided activity for visitors in Estonian bogs



Above: Boardwalk over the bog surface, Estonia.

VisitEstonia, the national tourist board, has placed sustainable and regenerative tourism experiences at the heart of their offer, and visits to bogs are one of the primary reasons cited to visit Estonia.¹

VisitEstonia's intent is to create travel experiences that 'provide unique and immersive connections to our people and places', and to attract adventurous visitors who seek immersion, escapism and education

¹ <https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-posts/from-sustainable-tourism-to-regenerative-tourism-key-trends-for-the-future-of-baltic-sea-tourism/>

off-the-beaten path. They predict a rise in post-pandemic visitors seeking wide open spaces, and clean air and water. They predict that these visitors will travel slowly and with purpose, and will want to be guided by locals about music, hidden history, cultural heritage and customs. VisitEstonia notes that travellers often search for buildings, art and design-related activities; and that visitors often share interests related with food and drink; considering foraging for berries and mushrooms to be as life-affirming as a Michelin star meal.

Regenerative Activities in Bogs

Estonian bogs have been described in tourism literature as 'serene wilderness, secretive peat bogs and rejuvenating sauna culture'¹, which is a heritage that Irish people may be surprised to hear we share.²

Many remains of sweat-lodges are visible in historical maps of landscapes that have been used for extraction in Ireland, notably around the mountainous landscape of Arigna and its former extractive industry of iron-mines in Leitrim.

Estonia has developed as a regenerative tourism destination for health and well-being trips, with saunas, sweat-lodges, and wild swimming developing as popular destination activities in the region.³ Bogs have become extremely popular destinations in Estonia for things like night safaris and multi-day adventures, wild swimming, bog-shoe hiking, goose-hunting and cranberry- and mushroom-foragers.⁴

¹ <https://www.countryandtownhouse.com/travel/wet-wild-exploring-estonia/>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2023/nov/18/feel-the-heat-the-northern-irish-beach-thats-embracing-scandinavian-sauna-culture>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2023/nov/18/smoke-sweat-and-tears-my-initiation-into-estonia-sauna-sisterhood>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2021/dec/16/estonia-in-winter-into-the-wilds-by-canoe-and-bog-shoe>



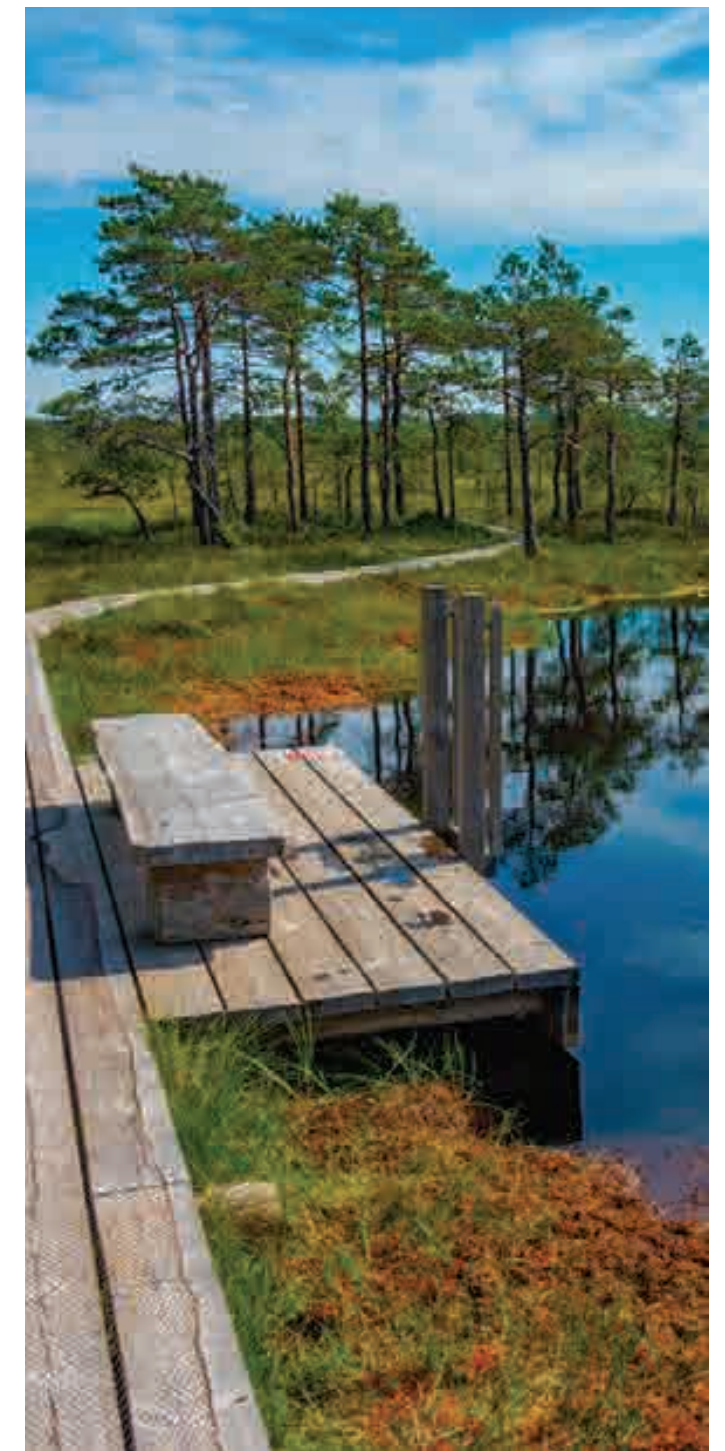
Above: Wetland in Estonia



Above: Canoeing trip in Estonian bogland



Above: Tall viewing tower allowing expansive views over the wetland landscapes



Above: Boardwalks and resting points hover over the sensitive mossy surface.

The identity of wilderness and the idea of exploring into something unknown, the chance of getting lost, is cherished in Estonian tourism literature and articles about tourist trips to the boglands.⁵

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2017/mar/04/estonia-tallinn-wilderness-adventure-walking-canoeing>

CASE STUDY: SWEDISH NATURUM

A Visitor Centre at Derryounce

Derryounce is well-positioned to serve both as a trailhead for the Midlands Cycling Destination, and as a gateway to the planned Wilderness Corridors stretching north on the former Bord na Móna peatlands towards Mount Lucas Wind Farm.

Plans for a visitor centre at Derryounce should be formed to serve several purposes, contributing to the success, safety and sustainability of the landscape.

Visitor centres in national parks and nature can assist to provide services and objectives such as:

- Orientation and Information
- Education and Interpretation
- Community Engagement
- Guided Tours and Programmes
- Amenities and Services
- Safety and Emergency Services
- Stewardship Practices
- Event Permits and Organisation
- Weather and Trail Conditions
- Cultural Heritage and Historical Context
- Universal Design
- Sustainable and Circular Economy Principles
- Regenerative Tourism
- Visual Attraction

Visitor centres can serve as vital hubs for information, education, safety and community engagement. They can positively contribute to the quality of the visitor experience, promote responsible and regenerative tourism practice, and ensure the appreciation of the landscape.

'Places for People'

Ireland's new national policy on architecture, 'Places for People'¹ outlines ways to promote and embed quality in architecture and the built and natural environment. It is integrated into other Irish government policy and plans such as the National Development Plan, Project Ireland 2040, the Climate Action Plan 2021, Housing for All, and Town Centre First. Culturally the policy aligns with Culture 2023 Eire Ildánach, the Creative Ireland programme, Championing Architecture (by the Arts Council), and Heritage Ireland 2030.

Places for People has four key objectives:

- Sustainability: to respect our past and shape our future. Environmentally-sensitive buildings and places should be prioritised to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

¹ 'Places for People - Ireland's National Policy on Architecture', The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2022



Above: Cabin-style naturum visitor centre immersed in nature

- Quality: to design and deliver quality buildings and spaces for all.
- Leadership: to advocate for leadership to prioritise quality architectural outcomes.
- Culture: Architecture is both art and science, and should serve people, place and the planet.

Practical actions that the new policy champions to help create, sustain and regenerate local areas as vibrant, welcoming and sustainable places in which communities can thrive are identified as follows:

- Value and Empower: to value design, empower people, and foster cultural change for sustainability
- Set a Quality Agenda to achieve sustainability
- Generate Knowledge: to enhance evidence-based learnings through research, education, and knowledge.

The planned built interventions (such as paths, bridges, toilets, kiosks, visitor centre, wellness and accommodation) in the environment at Derryounce

should be informed by the ambitions and actions set out in the national policies in relation to heritage, wildlife, architecture, landscape, the built environment, and recreation outdoors.

Naturum Visitor Centres

A 'naturum' is a visitor centre building typically found in Swedish national parks and nature reserves, translating to 'ionad dúlra' as Gaelige and 'nature centre' in English. This word combines the essence of nature with the concept of a museum, suggesting a place where visitors can explore and learn about the natural world and its cultural significance.

These buildings serve as educational hubs and information points for visitors, interpreting the natural and cultural heritage of the surrounding landscape. Their primary purpose is to educate the public, promote regenerative tourism, contribute to people's appreciation of their natural heritage, and to enhance visitor experience in these sensitive landscapes.

Their key features and functions often include:

- Educational exhibits housing interactive displays that provide information about the flora, fauna, geology and cultural history of the park or reserve
- Visitor services such as information desks, maps, brochures and guidance on recreational activities hosted within the park
- Guided tours, workshops and educational programmes to help visitors explore and understand the reserve, led by knowledgeable staff members
- A loo, a brew and a view! Many naturum centres host amenities like cafés and restaurants where visitors can relax and enjoy the surroundings, especially during bad weather. Outdoor support spaces such as viewing platforms, bird-watching towers and board-walked nature trails are often integrated into the design.
- Naturum centres often play a role in promoting sustainable environmental stewardship practices to educate and encourage responsible behaviour amongst visitors.
- Naturum centres often engage closely with local communities, hosting events, workshops and outreach programmes to connect local residents to nature and foster a sense of community stewardship towards the landscape. Many naturum centres provide meeting rooms and workshop spaces.

Naturum centres such as Lake Tåkern Visitor Centre by Wingårdh Arkitekter and Store Mosse National Park by White Arkitekter, use a combination of vernacular building methods and materials like thatch and glue-laminated wood construction.

The 750m² naturum at Lake Tåkern is constructed on piles to minimise the impact on the sensitive



Above: Overhanging roofs cantilever over open spaces to allow visitors to shelter in all weathers at Naturum Lake Tåkern, Sweden.

landscape below. It has been designed with a closed and sheltering form like that of a traditional U-shaped farmhouse and sheds around a courtyard, which results in reduced energy consumption from the chilly winds.

Carefully-placed large windows allow bird-watching in all weathers. The steeply-sloped thatch roofs encourage rainwater to run-off quickly, giving the cladding a lifetime of 50-70 years, according to the architects. Untreated pine clads the entire interior.



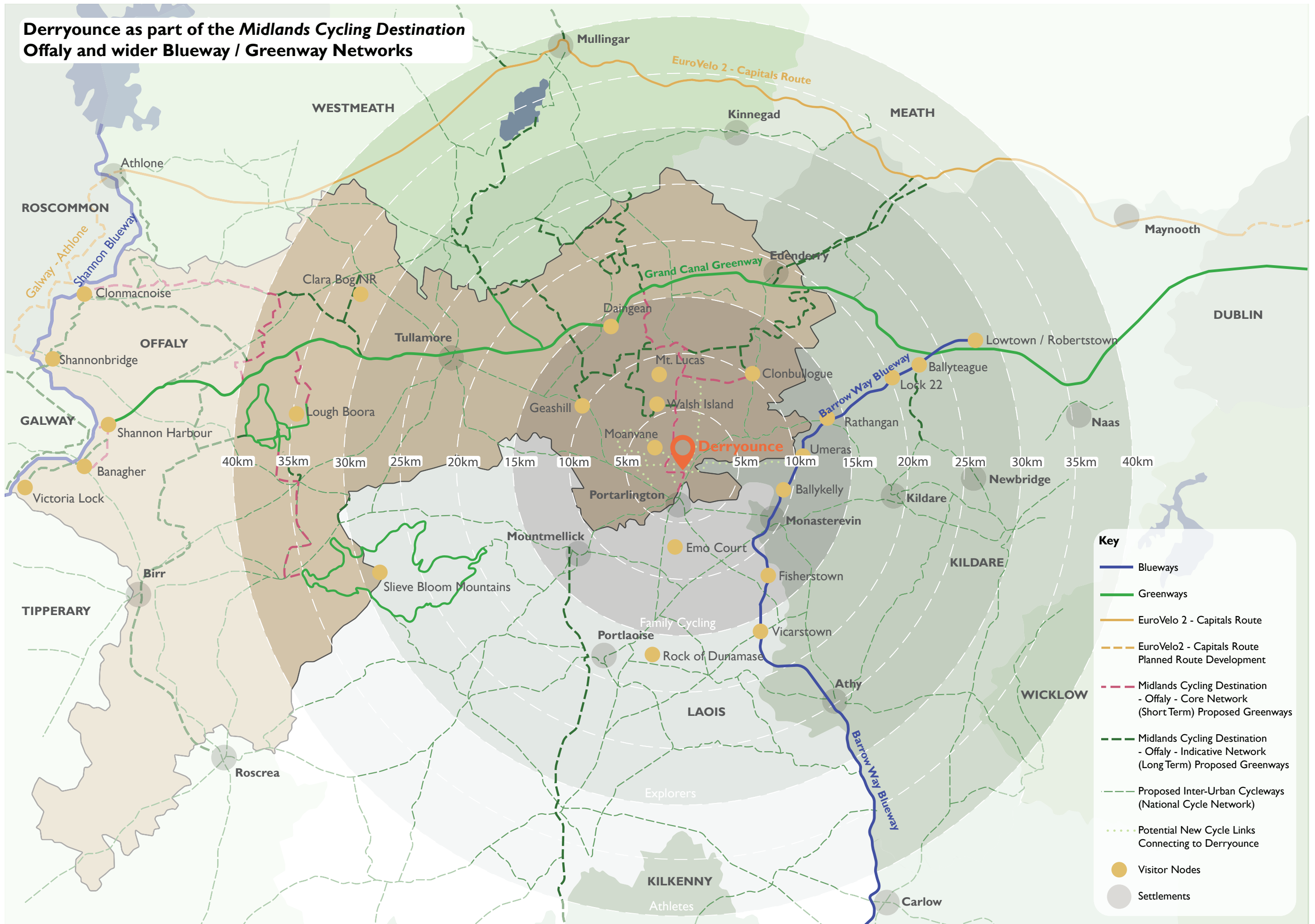
Above: Naturum Lake Tåkern sits on piles at the edge of the lakeshore wetland and the surrounding pine and spruce forest. Reed-thatched roofs slope steeply down to the building's raft floor, with large windows cut into the walls to enjoy specific views over the habitats.

The main path approaching the centre from the car-park passes a series of interpretive landscape exhibits. Board-walks and bridges connect the visitor centre with the car-park, a nearby 5.00m height bird-watching tower nestled in the lakeshore reeds, and a service building huddled at the edge of the nearby forest. All three structures are connected by pathways and ramps which have made the terrain universally accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

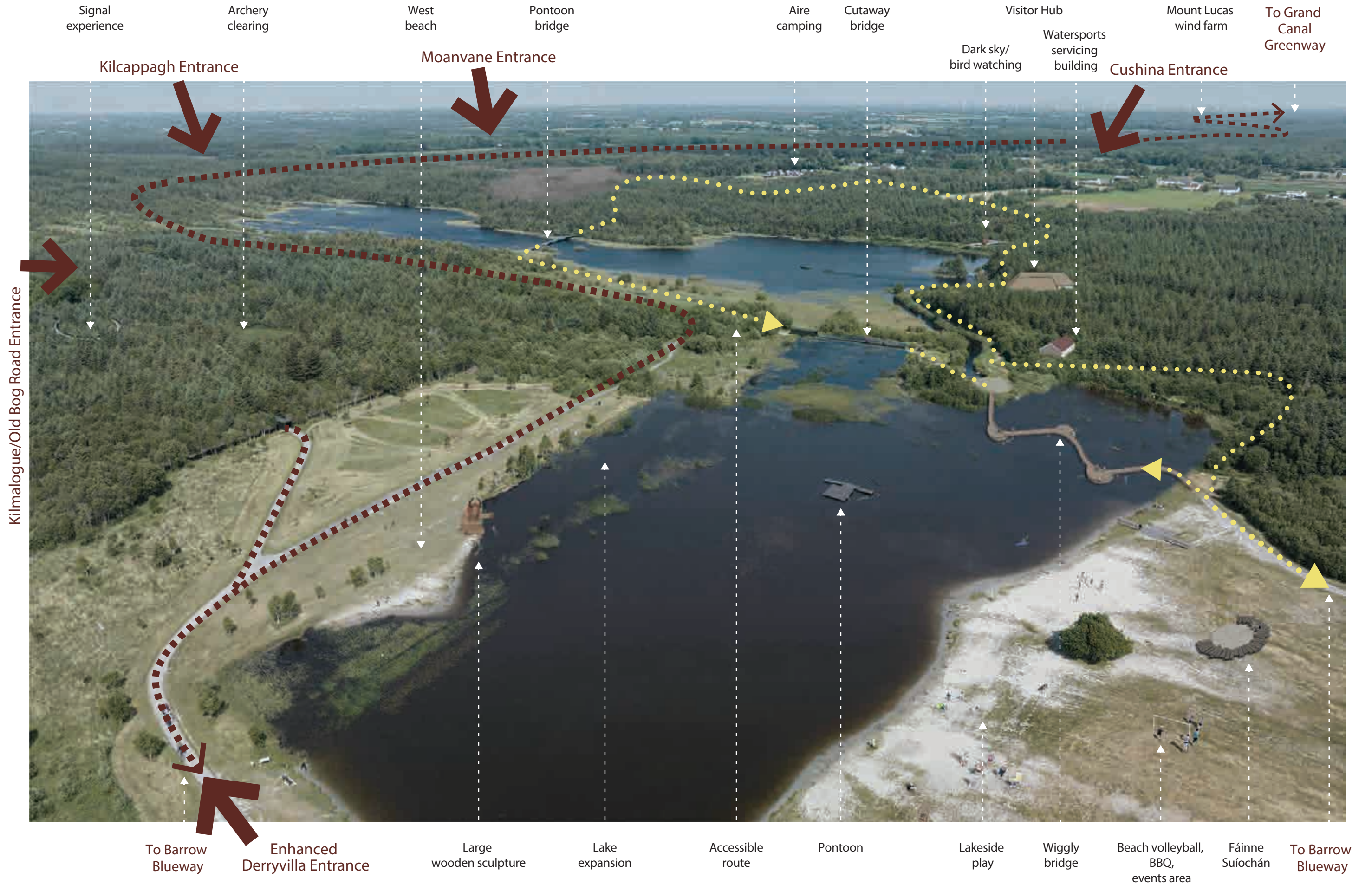
Naturum Store Mosse by White Arkitekter, transports visitors into the heart of the place's folklore and cultural heritage, while interpreting the region's 14,000 year history ranging from the Ice Age to the present day boglands.

A structural timber frame forms the modest spruce barn structure, approached by way of a wooden footbridge. A 300m² cabin-like structure, it floats above the sensitive ground on two long structural beams, resting on four granite supports.

DERRYOUNCE: MIDLANDS CYCLING DESTINATION



DERRYOUNCE: POTENTIAL MIDLANDS TRAILHEAD & CYCLING GATEWAY



Above: Illustration visualising connections into and out of Derryounce to support its development as a Node on the Midlands Cycling Destination

DERRYOUNCE: FOOD AND DRINK DESTINATION

Midlands Regional Food & Drink Strategy

As a response to the evolving Midlands Cycling Destination, the Hidden Heartlands tourism strategy, and the development of the regenerative tourism concept in the Midlands, the vision of the regional Midlands Regional Food and Drink Strategy (counties Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath) for sustainable food, drink and agricultural production has emerged. The objective of the strategy is to create a 'unique food and drink eco-system where local people are proud of their local produce, where companies have the capabilities and supports to create world-class hospitality and product experiences, where scaling and exporting is enabled, whilst respecting nature and our environment.'¹

Derryounce can act as a node in this network, marking a physical trailhead or gateway to the wider planned Wilderness Corridors, and a transition from Portarlinton to the wider hinterland. Opening up entrances, linkages and connections to nearby sites such as Derrylea Bog, Cushina Bog and Moanvane Forest and further afield to Walsh Island, Cloneygowan and Tullamore will help support

¹ 'Midland Regional Food and Drink Strategy 2021-2024', MidlandsIreland.ie



Above: botanicals and juniper berries for distilling.



Above: mural maps of place at Solas Eco-Garden Centre, Portarlinton

a sustainable relationship between landscape, agriculture and the local community.

The Portarlinton region has a proud history of food production in Ireland, with 500 Huguenot refugees living in the town by 1702, the largest settlement in Ireland. Drains were dug into the bog and small farms created. The Regional Strategy notes that in the late 1700's there were over 30 distilleries in Offaly alone, and 123 sites related to grain milling, malting, and distilling. Peat from the bogs fuelled the kilns for drying grains and malts. The Grand Canal reached the Shannon in 1817, supporting exports of grain and flour from Dublin abroad. Post-Famine, cereal-growing in the region declined as the population had decreased. Peat harvesting since the 1930's partly compensated people for lower incomes from farming.

Derryounce, serving as a nodal point for recreational activities with cycling trails meandering through the forest to join up with tracks and routes to the Barrow Blueway and the Grand Canal Greenway, will become a unique and engaging place for cyclists enjoying the Midlands. Part of that is the place itself, with trees, shrubs and wildflowers chosen and planted to enhance biodiversity, support fruit and nut foraging, and create a haven for flora and fauna.

Blueberry farms and mushroom farms already exist in the locality, and the promotion of sustainable foraging should help create a destination attraction. Along the trails, interpretive details can help guide foragers through designated areas, educating them about local flora, and the importance of sustainable and seasonal harvesting practices. The action of foraging recalls childhood memories of black-berry picking, connecting us with nature and helping us understand what nature needs to thrive and produce. Growing



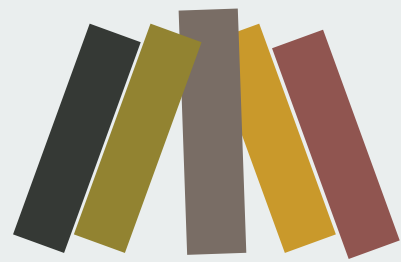
Illustration showing Derryounce at the heart of the Midlands Region

floral botanicals like juniper at the site may help mini-distilleries grow in the hinterland. Derryounce may grow to encourage agro-ecological and regenerative farming practices on its fringes, aligning with the broader goals of the Just Transition strategy for the Midlands as well as the regional Food and Drink Strategy.

Should Derryounce develop a visitor centre, it can serve as an educational hub or living classroom, hosting things like workshops, seminars and events

focused on sustainable living, regenerative agriculture and biodiversity. Food tourism is a key objective of the Strategy, which hopes to develop 'evocative food and drink visitor experiences that will attract tourism'. including restaurants and cafés, farmer's markets and events. The visitor centre can incorporate a café as part of it's brief, but a short-term project which would have the intention of the strategy at its heart is proposals for a coffee and food kiosk at the Derryvilla site entrance, developed in detail in Chapter 6 of this Plan.

the bog



a re-imagined place to
restore, explore and play

cycle
swim
walk
immerse

re-peat
adventure

the place-making elements

5



DERRYOUNCE: THE PLACE-MAKING ELEMENTS

Arrival & Orientation

Consultation revealed concerns among the community about visitor pressure on the Derryvilla entrance to Derryounce, off the R419 Edenderry Road. People were worried about the numbers of cars arriving at this entrance and difficulties created by this congestion for emergency access. Dog-walkers asked for other entrances to be provided, so that they could avoid the parking congestion at Derryvilla on busy summer days.

Derryounce already has a number of 'less-used' or less well-known approaches; the 'Old Bog Road' through Ballybought to the south, a disused Bord na Móna access road to the west in Kilcappagh, and a northern access lane from the R400.

These areas should be developed as proper entrances to open up the site and connect it to the surrounding hinterland villages such as Clonygowan, Geashill and Walsh Island, and further afield to Tullamore itself. These upgraded approaches will support active travel loops.¹ Providing 'pocket parking areas, signage, and orientation at each new

¹ Timmons, S., Y. Andersson, F. McGowan and P. Lunn (2024). Active travel infrastructure design and implementation: Insights from behavioral science, Wires Climate Change, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.878>



Above: Congestion in the existing car-parking area, summer 2023.



- | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------|------------------------|---|
| (A) 'Derryvilla' entrance R419 | (E) 'Kilmalogue Bog Road' entrance | (I) Derryounce Loop Active Travel Route | Town | Bogland | DERRYOUNCE
Lakes & Trails
A1 1:10000
A3 1:5000 |
| (B) 'Cushina' entrance (R400) | (F) Loop Active Travel to Mt. Lucas | National rail line | County boundary | Harvested peat | |
| (C) Link to Moanvane Wind Farm | (G) Active Travel to Barrow Blueway | Bord na Móna railways | Agricultural | Water | SITE ENTRANCES
& LINKS |
| (D) 'Kilcappagh' entrance (R420) | (H) Tinacranagh Bog Walk | | Woodland | Derryounce access road | |

Above: diagram illustrating dispersed entrances and links proposed at Derryounce, to reduce the pressure on the Derryvilla entrance off the Edenderry Road.

entrance will help visitors from the surrounding hinterland find their way around.

An off-road active travel link already exists from Portarlington to Derryounce on the former Bord na Móna rail-line. This active travel link should be developed northwards to connect Mount Lucas wind farm directly to Derryounce along the disused rail-line and loop back to the new trailhead through 'lanes' in the Coillte forests and planned Wilderness Corridor.

Moanvane Wind Farm, set in an existing plantation forest to the north-west of Derryounce, offers the chance to connect directly into its planned 6.00km amenity trails.

Derrylea Bog, located to the east of Derryvilla, provides the opportunity to develop an off-road active travel route across the peatlands towards Monasterevin and Rathangan, and to create a Wilderness Corridor between Derryounce and the Umeras Bog community project. Umeras Bog

is located on the Offaly/Kildare border between Rathangan and Monasterevin. An existing Bord na Móna rail-line connects Derryounce along the Derryvilla entrance to the Derrylea Bog, crossing the R419 with a signalled crossing.

DERRYOUNCE: WAY-FINDING

Dispersed Entrances

There are a number of approaches into Derryounce that have fallen into disuse and disrepair, forcing access to concentrate at the now-congested Derryvilla approach off the Edenderry Road. Refurbishing and enhancing the other peripheral access routes such as Old Bog Road at Ballybought (an alternative approach from Portarlinton and an opportunity for a looped route); the BnM route from Kilcappagh, opening the site up from the direction of Tullamore and Cloneygowan; creating a link between Derryounce and the planned 6km amenity trails in Moanvane Wind Farm to the north-west; and the Cushina entrance to the north. Re-using the old BnM rail-lines through the Cushina forests to the north will create opportunities for active travel loops north towards Croghan Hill and Mount Lucas Wind Farm.

Landscape Character

Derryounce consists of four distinct main landscape characters: Forest, Lakes, and Beach, surrounded by perimeter cut-away Bogs. The four landscape characters together tell the story of Derryounce's different identities, roles and eras. The distinct landscape types help set a clear direction for Derryounce over the next several years.

Currently the Derryounce site covers 280 hectares in size (containing three distinct 'zones'; a coniferous forest in the townland of Moanvane; a coniferous forest, two lakes and a 'Bog Beach' in the townland of Derryounce, and a primarily broad-leaved forested area in the townland of Kilmalogue, located close to Portarlinton along a former Bord na Móna rail-line re-purposed as an 2.5km length off-road active travel route directly linking the town and Derryounce).

Forest

The Forest at Derryounce is a mosaic of plantation forest perimeter scrub, tall shrubs and small trees, and more 'naturalistic' woods, tarns and clearings. It is the combination of the Forest and the Lakes which imbue Derryounce with its particular and special atmosphere and strong sense of place.

In the Forest, it is nature, the wild, which is allowed to rule, the human is the adventurer, and here you are further from the 'tamer' places like the Beach. The Forest is linked landscape character-wise with the forest plantations of Moanvane to the north-west and Cushina to the north. There is room in the Forest for long trips by bike and on foot, as well as space for several activities. In the Forest, softwood plantation

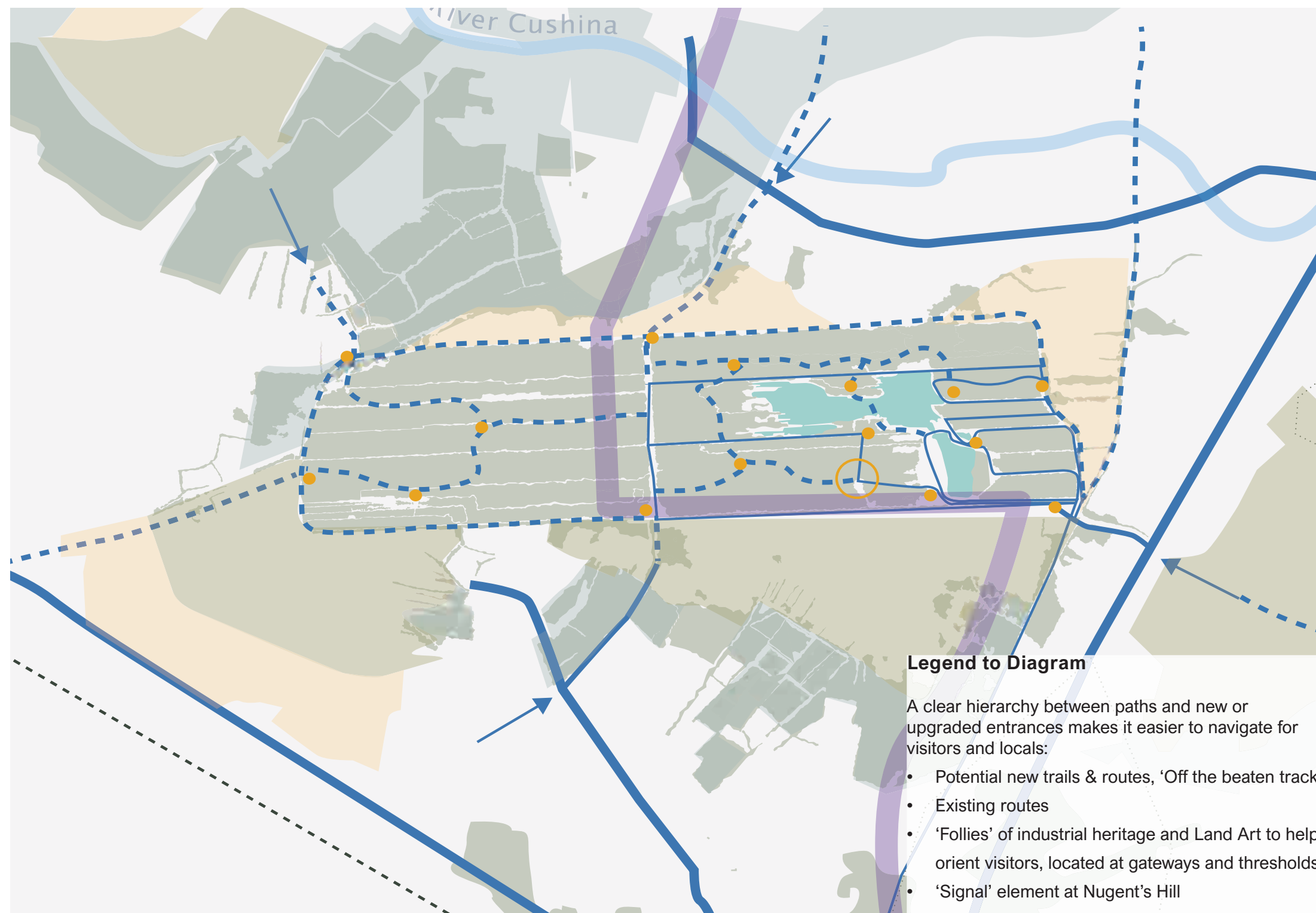


Diagram illustrating a new hierarchy of routes and dispersed new entrances

trees will continue to be felled and planted in large parts of the area.

If these clear-felled areas are partly turned over to recreational purposes and nature, they may be allowed to passively or actively re-wild, either in large areas or in buffer zones. In 'passive re-wilding', there is natural succession, and everything is slowly and constantly allowed to change and develop. In the north-eastern quadrant of the Forest, we suggest the location of a destination attraction visitor and learning

centre, supported by a service block containing toilets, changing facilities and storage. This centre would have its own parking facility, surrounded by Forest areas. A children's playground placed nearby to the Visitor centre would support the development of summer camps and school trips, and encourage children and educators to immerse in nature. A board-walk from the Visitor centre could lead to a bird-watching tower placed on the northern shore of Lough Lurgan, to support Dark Sky watching activities and the observation of avian wildlife.

The existing character of the landscape at Derryounce, described as peaceful and tranquil with 'Scandinavian vistas' is deeply informed by the Coillte coniferous plantation forest nearing maturity. As some of these areas are felled in the future, there is scope to create a sensitive Forest Design when planning re-planting. Areas of the Forest could slowly undergo a change in landscape and soil design, experiments in operations and activities, planting and spirit.

1 <http://portarlinton.ie/derryounce-lakes/>

DERRYOUNCE: BUILT ELEMENTS

The ambition must be to create a mosaic of different woodland and woodland verge habitats with buffer strips, tarns, scrub-land and clearings. Additional paths along 'wiggly ways' will help people and wildlife move through the Forest; and related support points marked by 'follies' of Land Art and industrial heritage remnants will help orient adventurous visitors. Parts of the Forest can be used for MTB races, training courses, orienteering and games, etc. The Forest can contain a destination attraction at a high point such as the bog island of Nugent's Hill, where a treetop route could allow cyclists and walkers to enjoy views through the tree canopy south to the Slieve Bloom Mountains and north to Mount Lucas. The Lakes are discovered in the middle of the Forest. Derrycastle Lake is an artificial lake created by peat extraction works, with the excavation of a sand and gravel layer creating a west-facing Beach. It's perimeter is open and it is the 'main draw' for human activities at the site.

Lakes

Lough Lurgan to the north is more naturalistic in form and origin, with wooded edges buffering its shore. The different sense of place of the two lakes and the character of their shorelines make two distinct 'moods' for recreational activities at the site, 'active' and 'passive'. Loop trails encircle the water bodies.

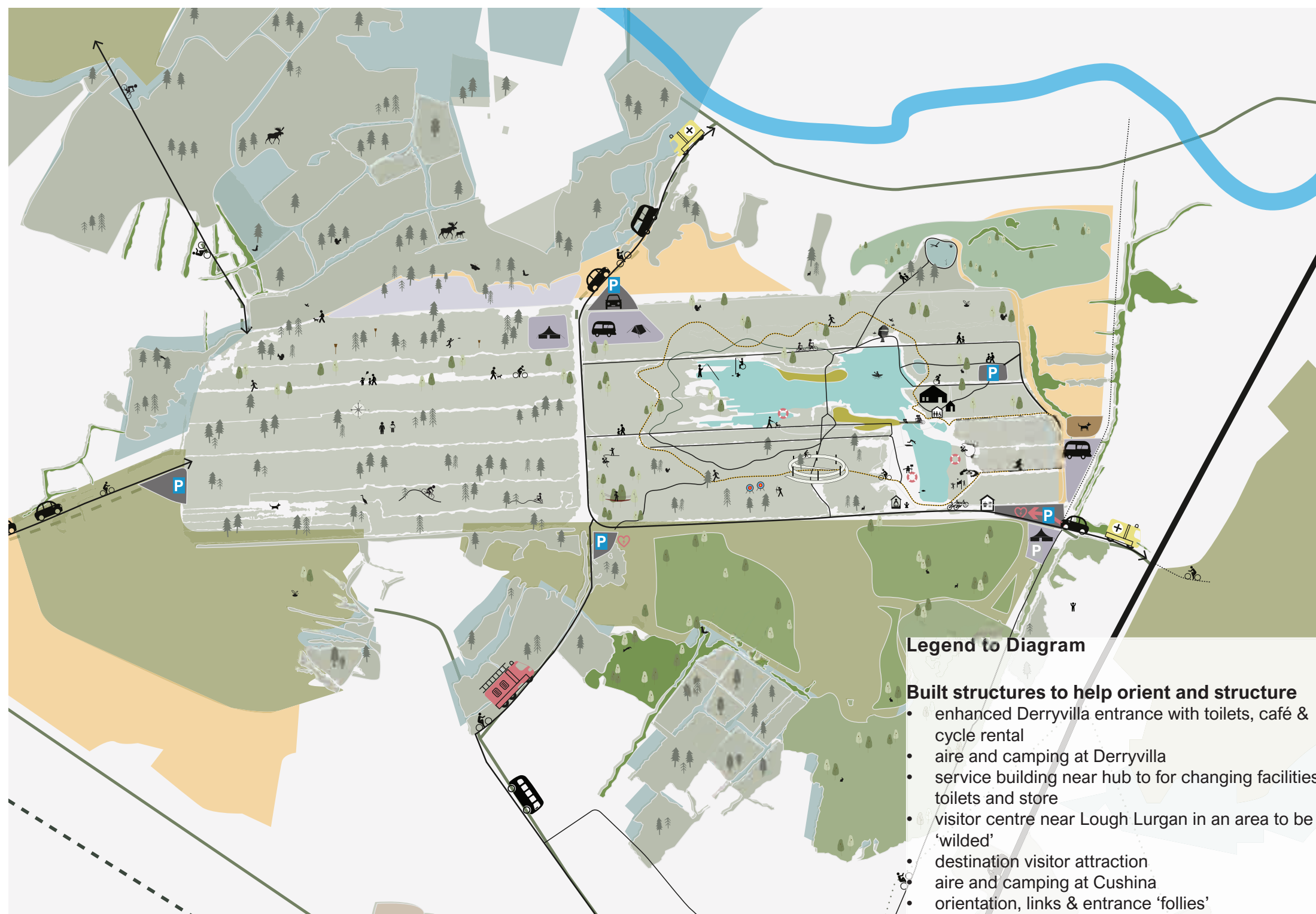
Bog Beach

The Bog Beach is why most people come to Derrycastle; that surprising experience of suddenly emerging from close-canopy forest out onto a wide sunny west-facing sandy beach, with people walking dogs, swimmers splashing, and teenagers playing beach volleyball. The Bog Beach is that special fun ingredient which makes Derrycastle singular and fun.

Cut-away Bogs

The Bogs are a large, varied landscape space with topography, nature, stories and activities that create coherence from north to south and conveys the history of the landscape. 'Bog islands' such as at Nugent's Hill and Derrycastle create raised landmarks and reference points in the horizontal landscape of the raised bogs in the Midlands region.

Paths and footpaths should be designed in the Bogs so that the difference in direction is marked, and used to support the experience of the dramatic heathland landscapes. Activities, support points, and paths can guide users in relation to movement through the landscape and protecting special natural habitats



Concept diagram illustrating suggested locations for built elements and landscape 'features'

there, as well as channelling the pressure of use and wear-and-tear to the right places.

On the Bogs you can sense the very different ways that the place has been used and transformed by man over time. Here there are bog islands, long-range views of church steeples, and the large depressions left in the cut-away bog. When extraction on the last cut-away is finished, a long era of peat production on the bogs will end.

Drains left behind on the bogs may be dammed as part of a peatlands re-wetting process; others may be left open to demonstrate turf-making.

Long-range views and wide open spaces can be experienced in the bogs. Dried-out bogs can develop as steppes, plains and meadows with grazing, so that the vegetation is kept down and open space is maintained. Areas may be allowed develop 'successionally' into heathland, scrub-land and forest.

DERRYOUNCE: BIGGER & BETTER-CONNECTED

Ecologist and Offaly-resident John Feehan, author of 'The Bogs of Ireland', has urged that 'the great bulk of the cutaway should be left to develop spontaneously as a new midland wilderness', predicting that these bogs will regenerate with an 'ecological vitality and diversity as great as any in the past 10,000 years'. Walsh Island-born ecologist Julie Fossitt grew up roaming the Bog of Allen.

Feehan's hopes are for our bog landscapes to develop 'a mosaic of woodland and wetland and wild grassland, which . . . can spread and interconnect with other areas of new wilderness to create an ecological network where our grandchildren . . . can wander and explore wild diversity and abundance of a kind we lost in our lifetime'. 'Re-wilding' theories posit that a site of minimum 500 hectares in area is well-positioned to become a critical 'Core' in Green Infrastructure terms. The subject site at Derrystone currently measures 280 hectares in area.

Derrystone can grow to become bigger and better-connected to adjoining areas, creating connections to adjacent sites such as:

- The surrounding peatland areas to the perimeter of Derrystone, in the townlands of Derrystone, Ballybought, Kilcappagh, Moanvane and Cushina;
- The forested areas of Moanvane Wind Farm to the north-west and its planned 6km amenity trails;
- The riparian habitats and watercourse of the River Cushina immediately to the north;
- The forestry and peatland areas to the north of the site which connect Derrystone directly to Mount Lucas Wind Farm, 11km to the north, and;
- Derrylea bog to the east.

The EU defines Green Infrastructure (GI) as: 'a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services such as water purification, air quality, space for recreation and climate mitigation and adaptation.' GI encompasses a planned network of natural, semi-natural, and human-made habitats, including green spaces and ecological assets, spanning both urban and rural areas. A robust and interconnected green infrastructure network delivers a variety of benefits, including socio-economic and ecological advantages. In the hinterland of Derrystone, such a network would encompass agricultural land, watercourses, eskers, peatlands and forests.

GI strategy is intended to preserve and enhance ecosystems, benefiting both nature and people. GI networks have three key parts:

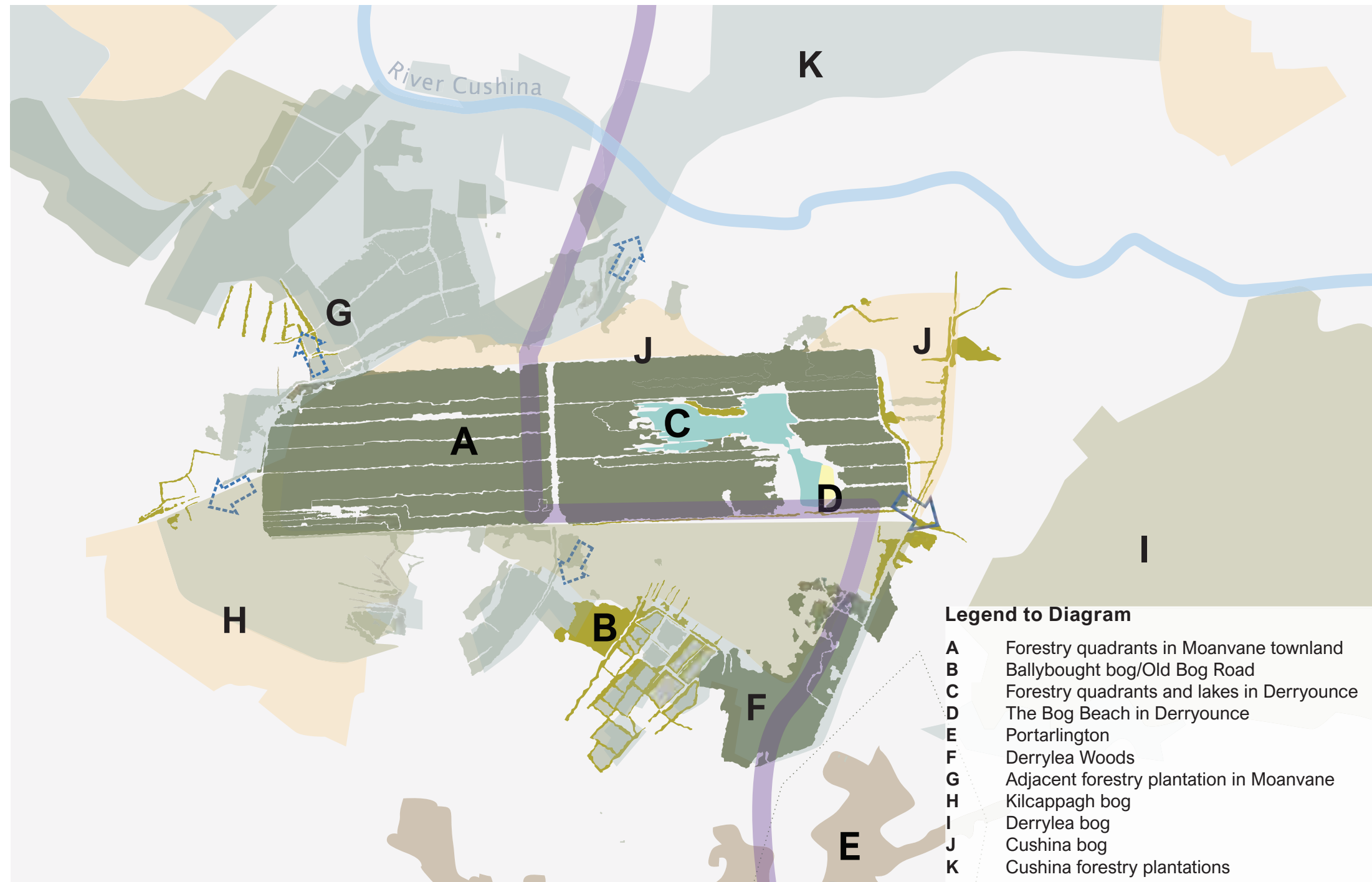


Diagram illustrating Derrystone growing bigger and better

- Core Areas:** the heart of the network, providing essential habitat for sensitive species.
- Hubs:** Large, unbroken areas of forest, wetlands, and native landscapes surrounding core areas.
- Corridors:** Essential for landscape connectivity, facilitating animal movement, seed dispersal, and plant migration.

Derrystone has capacity and location to act as a vital GI Core, set within a larger GI Hub area, situated as it is near GI Corridors of watercourses, eskers, peatlands and plantation forests. These GI Corridors could link the Shannon, the Grand Canal and the Barrow together to create a mosaic of healthy habitats

in the region. This possibility for Derrystone should be developed in a collaborative process that involves ecologists, foresters, conservationists, land planners, and local communities to ensure the preservation of valuable ecosystems and the well-being of both nature and people.

Forest Plantations: GI in forested areas focuses on maintaining and expanding forest cover with native tree species, promoting biodiversity, and ensuring sustainable forestry practices. Forest plantations can serve as hubs within the broader green infrastructure network, supporting wildlife and providing ecosystem services like carbon storage and timber production.

Peatlands: GI for peatlands involves the sustainable management and restoration of peat bogs and wetlands. This helps sequester carbon, maintain water quality, support unique flora and fauna, and reduce the risk of peatland fires.

Watercourses: GI for watercourses involves the conservation and restoration of natural waterways, such as rivers and streams, to ensure proper water flow, filtration, and flood control. It also includes the creation of riparian zones with native vegetation to improve water quality and provide habitat for aquatic species.

DERRYOUNCE: EMERGENCY ACCESS STRATEGY

Ensuring effective emergency access in a diverse landscape such as Derryounce, a 280-hectare area containing coniferous forest plantations and broadleaf wood areas, a lake used for swimming, wetland areas, and perimeter bogs, and acting as a trailhead to the wider landscape, demands a comprehensive strategy.

Mapping and Signage: the adjacent diagram illustrates key access points, emergency assembly areas, and potential hazards. Clear legible signage must be installed at strategic locations, providing directions to emergency exits, assembly points, and critical facilities.

Emergency Response Team Training: a well-trained emergency response team with knowledge of the specific challenges posed by the forest areas, the lakes, and the wetland areas. Regular drills and simulations should be conducted to ensure swift and efficient responses in real emergencies.

Communication Systems: a robust communication system that covers the entire area, including 'dead zones', should be implemented as activities at the site intensify. This may involve a combination of two-way radios, emergency beacons, and other communication tools to maintain contact between response teams and central command.

Infrastructure Development: develop and maintain emergency access routes suitable for various types of vehicles, ensuring they are regularly inspected and well-maintained, as illustrated on the accompanying diagram. Install bridges or alternative means of crossing water bodies where required, and establish emergency landing zones for aerial support if necessary.

Community Engagement: continue to foster a culture of emergency preparedness among the community members and visitors. Conduct awareness programs, distribute informational materials, and collaborate with local authorities to educate the public about the designated emergency access routes and procedures.

Lake Swimming Safety:

- Designated Swimming Areas: Clearly demarcate safe swimming zones within the lake, equipped with visible buoys or markers. Restrict swimming outside these zones.
- Lifeguard Stations: Establish a lifeguard station at the popular swimming spot, adequately trained in water rescue techniques. Ensure that they have proper communication tools to coordinate with the emergency response team.

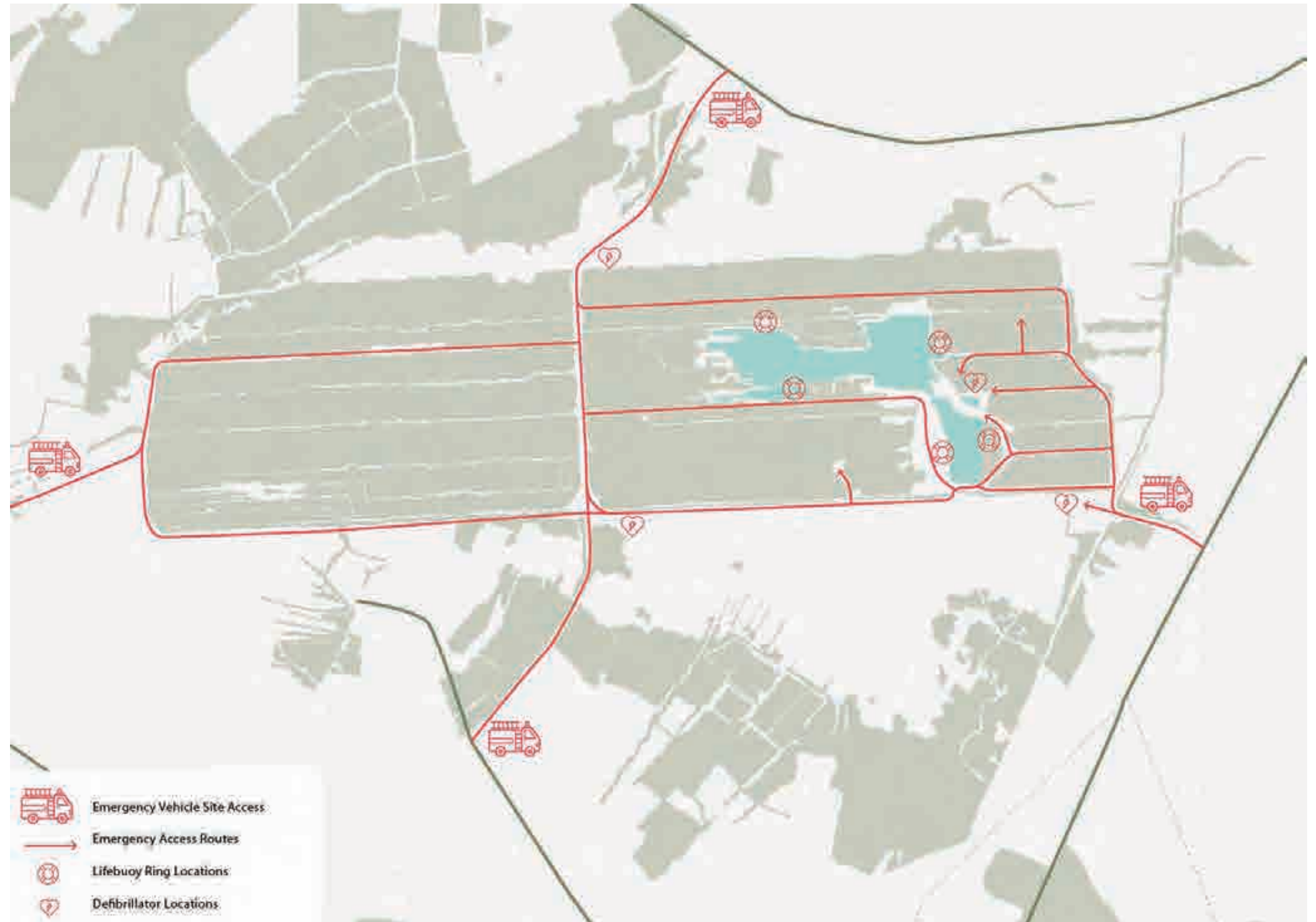


Diagram illustrating emergency access routes and locations for lifebuoy rings and defibrillators

- **Water Safety Education:** Conduct regular water safety education programs for visitors, emphasising the importance of following designated swimming areas and guidelines. Derryounce has potential to act as a Centre of Excellence for water safety training.

Peatland and Forest Fire Preparedness:

- Fire-breaks and Clearings: Develop and maintain fire-breaks around the forest plantation and peatland areas, reducing the risk of fire spread.

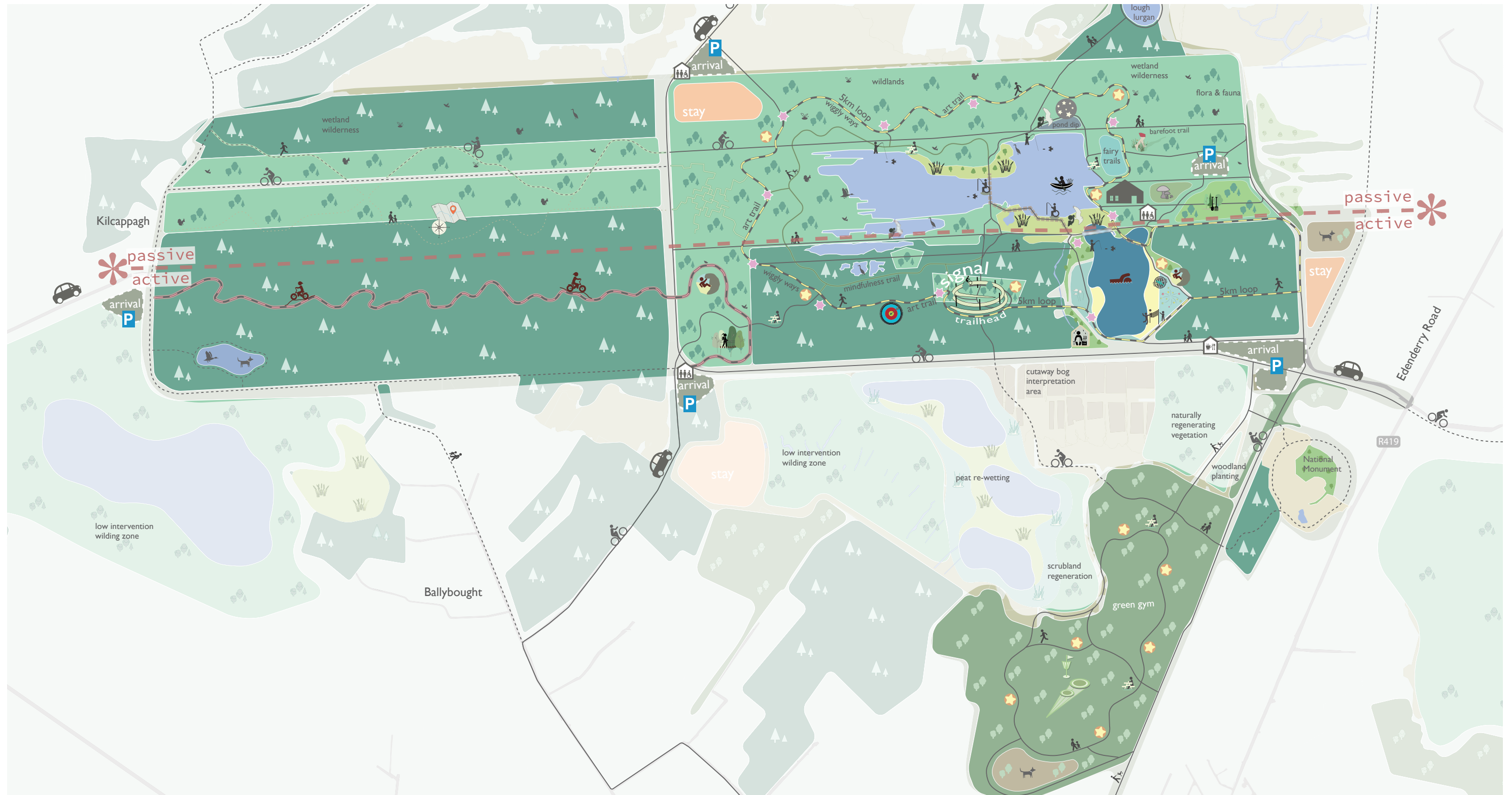
- Create clearings to act as natural barriers, separating combustible materials.
- Fire-fighting Infrastructure: Strategically position fire-fighting equipment, including water tanks, hoses, and fire retardants, at key locations throughout the area. Ensure that response teams are well-trained in forest and peatland fire containment techniques.

- Evacuation Protocols: Develop clear evacuation protocols in case of a fire emergency. Establish assembly points away from the fire risk zones

- and ensure that emergency access routes accommodate rapid evacuation.
- Collaboration with Authorities: Foster collaboration with local fire services and authorities to leverage their expertise in fire-fighting efforts. Establish communication protocols to streamline coordination during fire emergencies.

Regular Review and Update: emergency response plans should be dynamic, subject and responsive to drills and actual incidents.

DERRYOUNCE: ACTIVE & PASSIVE



Detailed concept illustration of dispersed and concentrated activities in Derrylea Woods and the Derryounce and Moanvane forestry quadrants, and the 'Active/Passive' line defining what type of activity happens where

Active & Passive

The existing sense of place and site arrangement suggests a division between 'active' and 'passive' recreation, as defined in Ireland's Outdoor Recreation Strategy, within the quadrants of the four main forestry blocks. The forest area around Derryounce Lake in the south-east of the site is likely to continue to be the busiest and most popular part of the place, and can absorb the most dynamic and active sporting and play opportunities. Derryounce Lake

itself overlooks the Derryville bog and Derrylea woodlands to the south. Derrylea Woods can evolve as 'Portarlington's Back Garden, hosting a trim trail or green gym, disc golf, a play loop, and a dog park, as this area wilds to host more flora and fauna. The townland of Derryville also hosts a National Monument¹ on its bog island, and consideration must be made for appreciation and understanding of this

¹ Concept plan illustration above shows the potential National Monument interpretation area, subject to landowner agreement and National Monuments Service approval.

heritage feature.

Lough Lurgan and its surrounding forest presents a calmer, more restorative experience, and may be more suited to things like forest-bathing, mindfulness and hiking. The plans to fell this part of the Coillte conifer forest may influence the detail design of the re-forestation and the character of this space. This area may be suitable to host a visitor centre building, centred as it is in the larger site context, with scope to grow outwards to encompass the bog and wetlands around the 'original' (currently infilled) Lough Lurgan

tarn² to the north. To the west, the quieter and more remote blocks of forestry are perhaps suited to more destination group activities like orienteering and mountain biking tracks, as Coillte undertake various felling and re-planting activities. Potential for expansion exists to the north-west; linking in with the planned 6.00km of amenity trails in Moanvane Wind Farm, and to the south-west in the Kilcappagh boglands.

² A 'tarn', meaning a pool, or a small lake in bogland, referenced in the Seamus Heaney poem 'Bogland'.

DERRYOUNCE: ACTIVITIES



































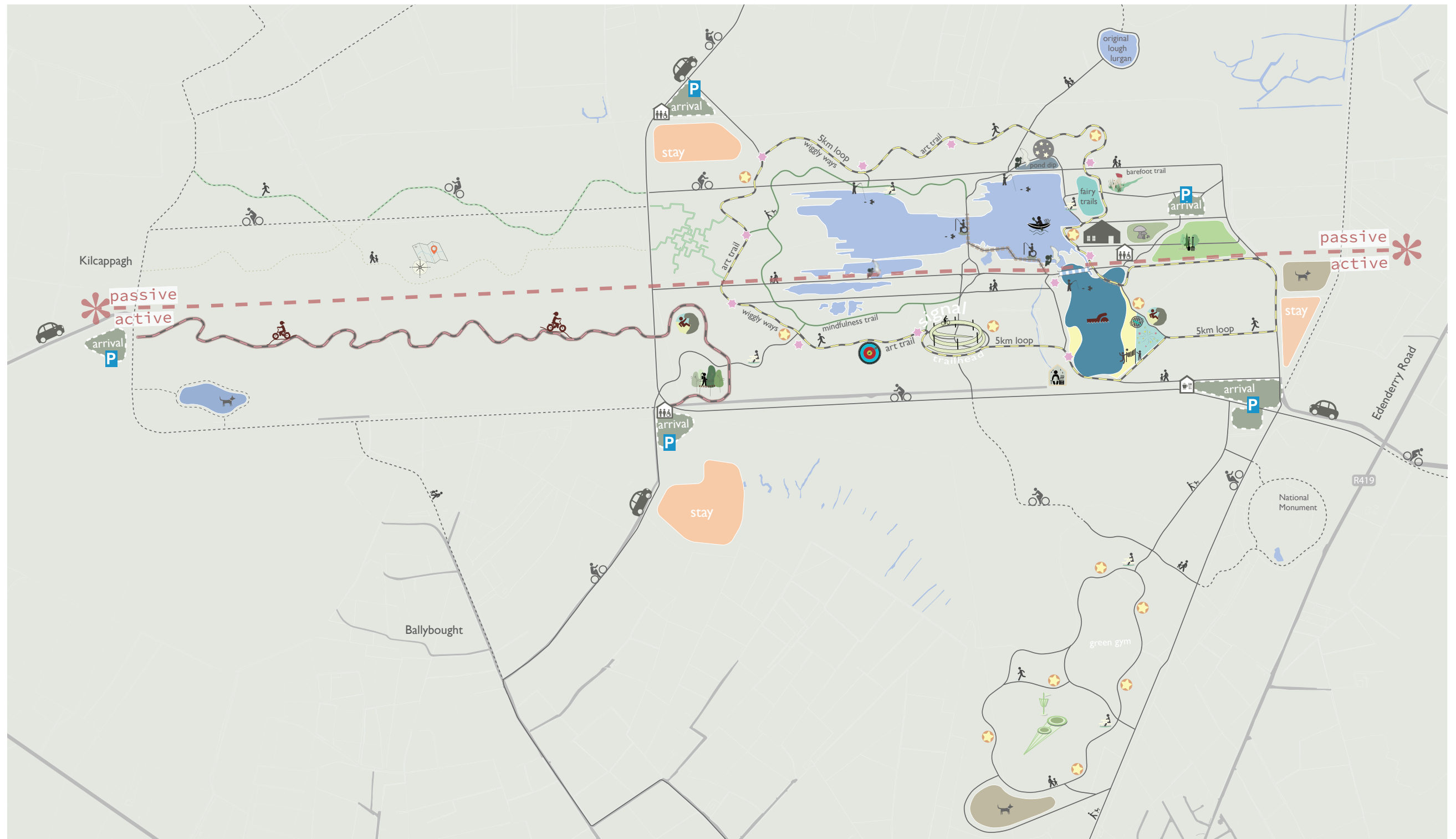
Activities

The ORIS application hoped to accommodate 15 different activities at the site, while not disturbing its very special sense of place. The challenge is for Derryounce to be comfortably able to absorb all of these diverse recreational activities without disturbing it's unique sense of place.

DERRYOUNCE: ACTIVE & PASSIVE







Proposed Activities / Attractions

-  Walking
-  Cycling
-  5km Running / Walking Trail
-  Swimming / Paddle Boarding
-  Canoe / Kayaking
-  Fishing
-  Wildlife Watching
-  Children's Play
-  Archery
-  Bouldering
-  Mountain Biking
-  iOrienteering
-  Labyrinth
-  Disc Golf
-  Yoga Retreat
-  Mindfulness Trail
-  Art Trail
-  Picnic Area
-  Fairy Trail
-  Pond Dipping
-  Foraging Area
-  Community Woodland
-  Beach
-  Events Area
-  Star Gazing
-  Volleyball
-  High Ropes Course
-  BBQ Area
-  Dog Exercise Area
-  Barefoot Trail
-  Cutaway Walk
-  Signal Destination



Detail concept illustration of where activities could happen at Derryounce, and the introduction of a Passive/Active line through the forestry quadrants to 'zone' the place

Site Infrastructure

-  Arrival Areas
-  Overnight Accommodation
-  Visitor Hub Building
-  Servicing Buildings
-  Site Circulation
-  Potential Links

Derryounce's landscape character, atmosphere, physical features, and history provide a strong framework for the zoning of potential leisure activities.

The sense of isolation, enclosure and wildness experienced to the north of Derryounce, around Lough Lurgan, supports more **passive** leisure activities including walking, orienteering, angling, foraging, Dark Sky observation, bird-watching, and mindfulness. The accessibility of the water's edge, the sandy beach, and the general openness

surrounding Derryounce Lake, supports more **active** recreation activities including swimming, paddling, paddle boarding, angling, and beach volleyball. The Bog Beach along the shores of Derryounce Lake also offers the potential to host large events such as triathlons, park runs, art, food and music festivals.

The western forestry quadrants of Derryounce have been zoned for wildlife, forestry, and more adventurous activities such as orienteering, archery, bouldering, and mountain-biking trails.

An iconic 'Signal' feature is planned at 'Nugent's Island', hidden in the forest to the west of Derryounce Lake, to create an unmissable visitor destination attraction for Derryounce, and to integrate pedestrians and cyclists as key visitors into the detail of the attraction.

Knitting the larger Derryounce site together are a series of threads emanating from the signal destination; play, health and well-being, exercise, and art.

DERRYOUNCE: ACTIVITY FOR ALL

Inclusion & Accessibility

People with disabilities do not need to be able to access and use everything and everywhere, but they do need to be able to comfortably access, use and enjoy 'the coolest thing'. At Derryounce, 'the coolest thing' might mean destinations like the beach, loops around the lake-shores, the water, the playspaces, the hub building, and destination attractions like Nugent's Hill or a bird-watching tower. Emerging from consultation was a desire for people with disabilities to have equal access to engage in angling along the lake-shores with universally-designed angling pegs. Regular 'resting places' should be designed into perimeter paths to allow people with disabilities to take a breath. Toilet facilities should include accessible toilet provision, and if a Visitor Centre is established, it should host a Changing Place facility.¹

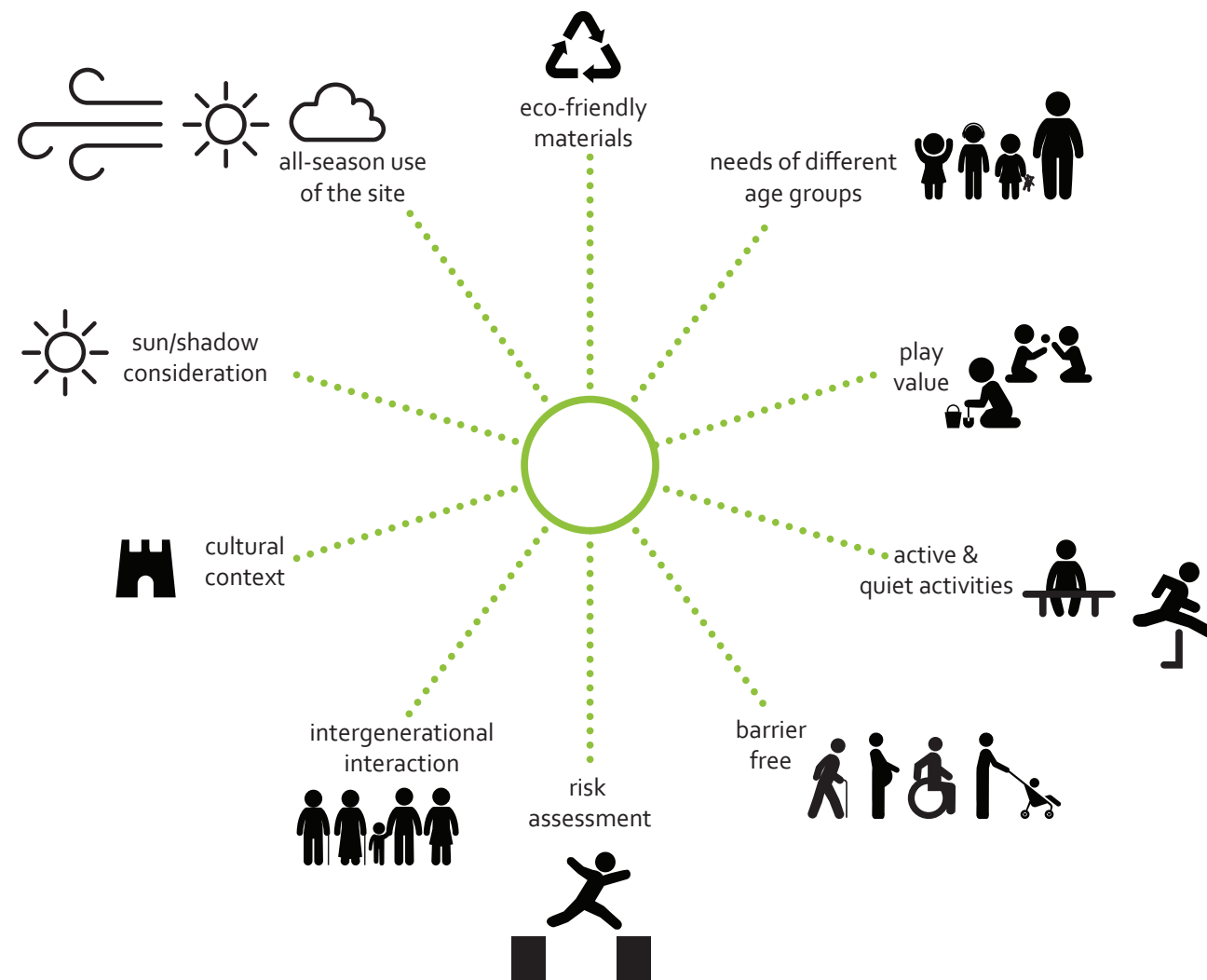
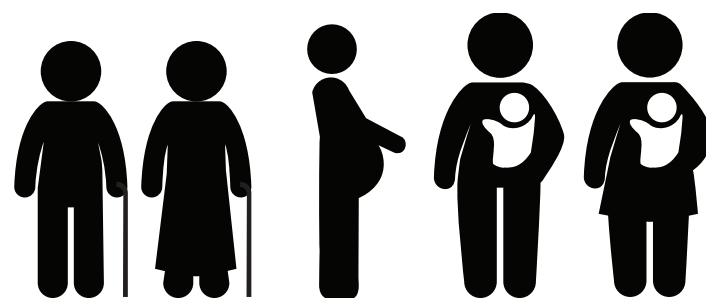
For children with disabilities and their friends and families, consultation reveals a desire to 'play together', meaning to play with friends in a

¹ <https://universaldesign.ie/built-environment/public-consultation-draft-universal-design-guidelines-for-changing-places-toilets/>

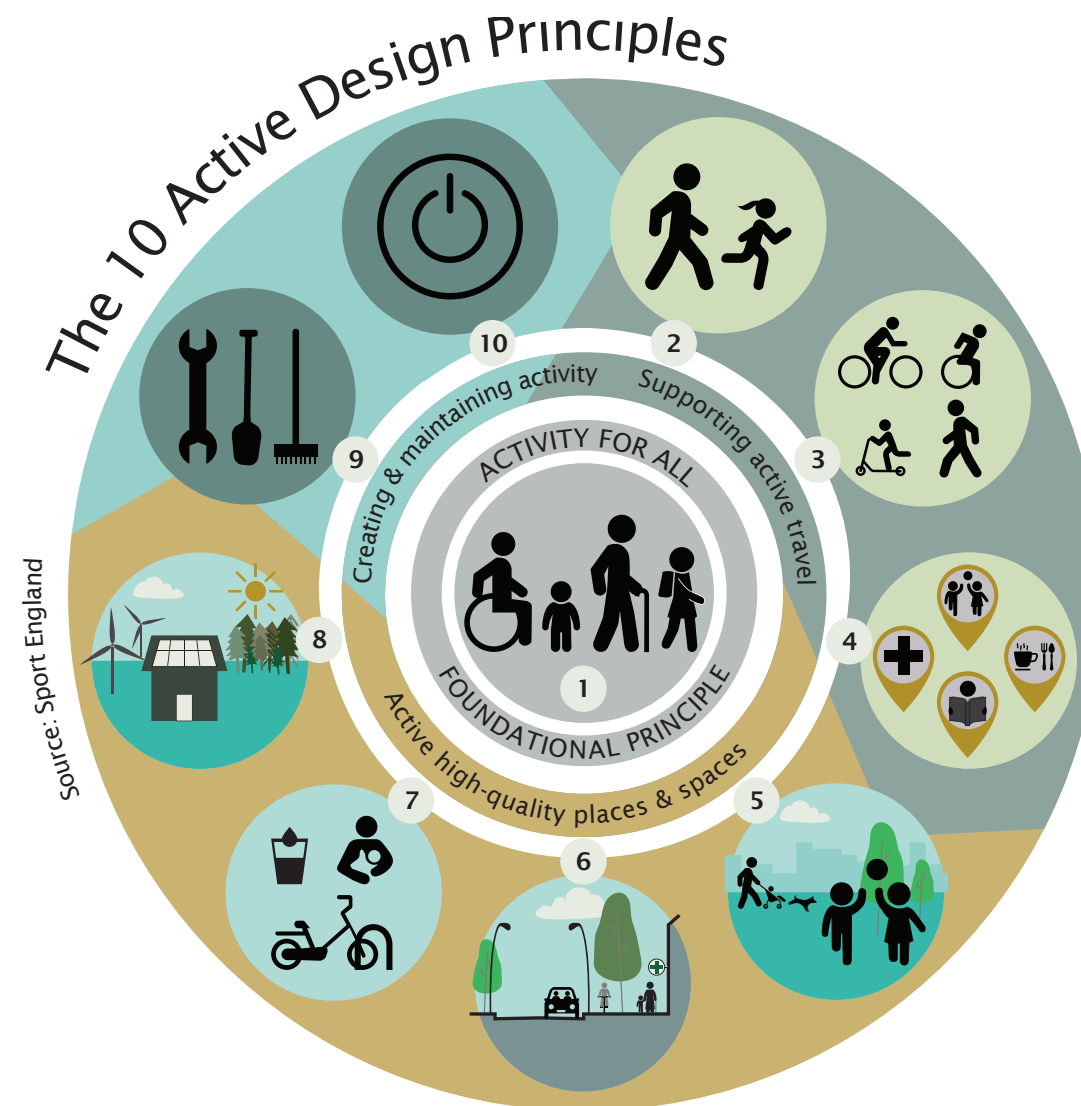
communicative and team-working way, or in the presence of friends, rather than in isolation. Multi-user and team play should be preferred in the detail design of play areas and affordances.

An Access Guide should be prepared for Derryounce, so that people can pre-plan their visit with companions and groups. The Access Guide should be based on the principle of providing an unbroken visitor experience 'Access Chain',² beginning at the decision to visit, through journey and arrival, the on-site experience, and the return home.

² <https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/resources/guidance/access-chain-an-inclusive-design-tool>



Above: Illustration showing design principles that should be considered in the detail design of activities



- 1 Activity for all
- 2 Walkable communities
- 3 Providing connected active travel routes
- 4 Mixing uses and co-locating facilities
- 5 Network of multi-functional open spaces
- 6 High-quality streets and spaces
- 7 Providing activity infrastructure
- 8 Active buildings, inside and out
- 9 Maintaining high-quality flexible spaces
- 10 Activating spaces

Above: infographic for Derryounce based on Sport England's '10 Active Design Principles', to inform 'active' design provision

Active Design Principles

The 'Active Design' guidance by Sports England has been produced to assist communities to create 'active environments' by applying ten principles to built and natural environments, which encourage people of all ages and abilities to be active through their everyday lives.³ The founding principle is 'Activity for All', which is supported by three pillars:

³ 'Active Design; Creating Active Environments Through Planning and Design', Sport England 2023, supported by Active Travel England and the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities

- Supporting active travel
 - Active, high-quality places and spaces
 - Creating and maintaining activity
- Such principles are particularly applicable at a well-situated and connected place like Derryounce, with its existing links to Portarlinton and potential for more connections and linkages to the hinterland and wider region. In the detailed design of various projects and programming of activities, the above principles, re-conceived in a Derryounce-specific illustration above, should be borne in mind.

DERRYOUNCE: HABITATS & ACTIVITIES

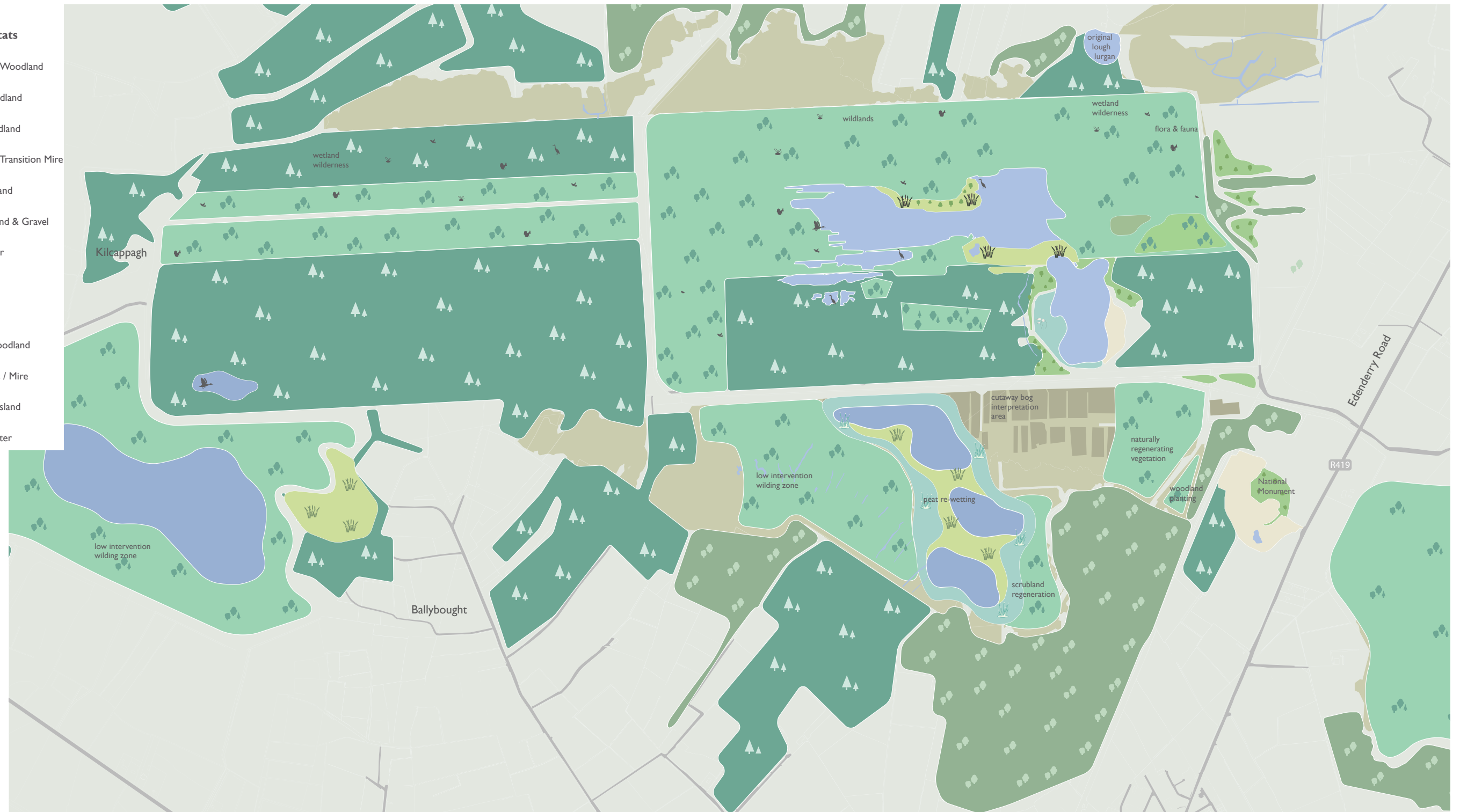
Key

Retained Existing Habitats

-  Existing Coniferous Woodland
-  Existing Mixed Woodland
-  Existing Scrub Woodland
-  Existing Reedbeds / Transition Mire
-  Existing Wet Grassland
-  Existing Exposed Sand & Gravel
-  Existing Open Water
-  Existing Peat Bog

Habitat Creation

-  Proposed Mixed Woodland
-  Proposed Reedbeds / Mire
-  Proposed Wet Grassland
-  Proposed Open Water



Concept illustration for dispersal of activities across the Derryounce and Moanvane forestry quadrants of the subject site, and how they might balance with habitats

Habitats and Activities

Derryounce and its hinterland townlands (Kilcappagh, Moanvane, Cushina, Tinacrannagh, Derryvilla, and Derrylea) contain a range of habitat types including coniferous woodland, mixed woodland, scrub, wet grassland, peat bog, exposed sand and gravel, reeds, mire and open water. At present Derryounce's landscape character is physically dominated by coniferous woodland grown in large, densely planted blocks managed by Coillte for commercial forestry purposes. The landscape surrounding Derryounce is

characterised by extracted peatlands and sporadic woodland and scrub blocks.

Consultation revealed that the interaction between the coniferous plantation forest, the water-bodies, and the areas of naturally regenerated scrubland and broadleaf forest is key to the special sense of place and the oft-celebrated 'Scandinavian' type landscapes¹ and 'otherliness' of Derryounce. Part of the 10-Year Plan's concept is to significantly enhance biodiversity across the site through introduction of a

¹ <https://www.theindietripper.com/post/derryounce-lakes-and-trails>

variety of new woodland planting mixes in conjunction with Coillte's programme for felling and reforesting the site. The concept layout has been conceived to balance the place of nature with human activity to respond to the overall theme of regenerative tourism. 'Ecotones' can be developed to provide a more ecologically diverse and visually interesting transition between various habitat types.

Once commercial peat harvesting has ceased in the lands surrounding Derryounce, it is suggested that areas to the perimeter could be allowed to regenerate

through low intervention 'wetting and wilding' techniques. These techniques include methods like the blocking up of peatland drains allowing new areas of open water to form; allowing vegetation to establish organically through a process of self-seeding from surrounding species; and developing areas of native woodland and scrub planting. A balance of 'passive' and 'active' wilding could be followed in certain areas to maximise biodiversity and enhancement of nature.

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athuair

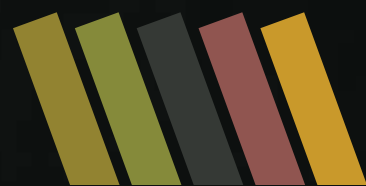
detailed design proposals



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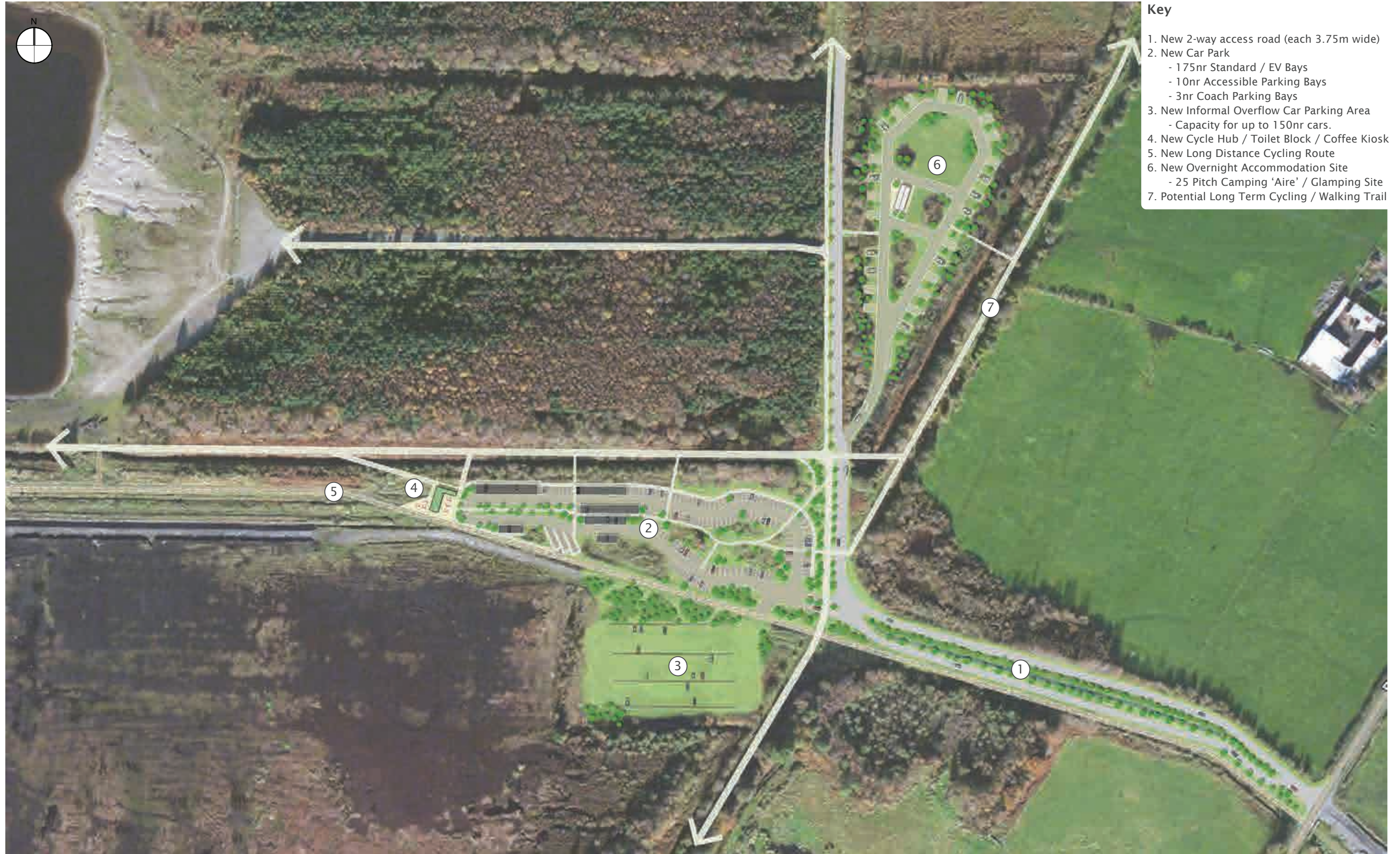
thumadh sa gan choinne

siúl
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aimsigh



tine an mhadra rua

DERRYVILLA: ENHANCEMENTS OVERVIEW



- Key**
1. New 2-way access road (each 3.75m wide)
 2. New Car Park
 - 175nr Standard / EV Bays
 - 10nr Accessible Parking Bays
 - 3nr Coach Parking Bays
 3. New Informal Overflow Car Parking Area
 - Capacity for up to 150nr cars.
 4. New Cycle Hub / Toilet Block / Coffee Kiosk
 5. New Long Distance Cycling Route
 6. New Overnight Accommodation Site
 - 25 Pitch Camping 'Aire' / Glamping Site
 7. Potential Long Term Cycling / Walking Trail

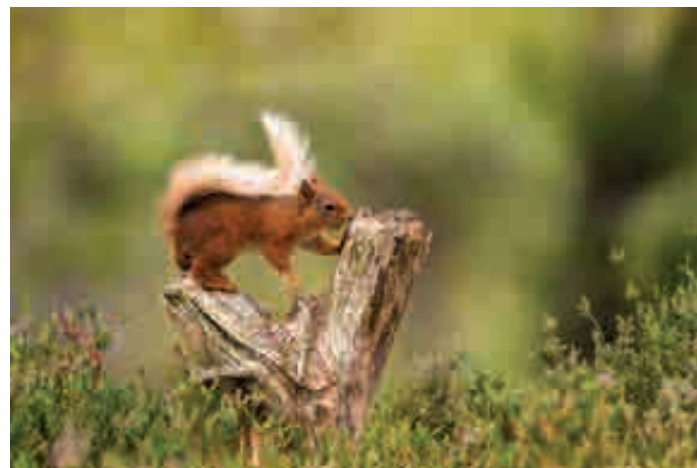
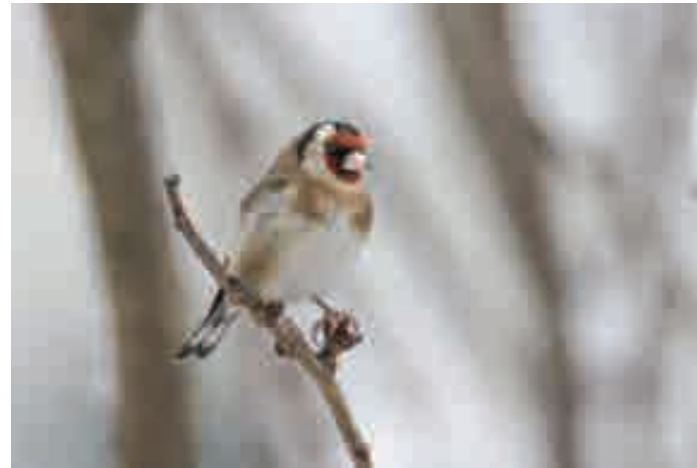
Overview illustration of enhancements proposed at the Derryvilla entrance to Derrycastle

DERRYVILLA: ACCESS & CAR PARKING OVERVIEW

Derryounce is envisaged to develop as a cycling and active travel 'node' in the Midlands Cycling Destination. Active travel (meaning a cyclist, a pedestrian or a person using wheeled assistance) shall take priority over motorised transport in accessing the site, with the existing off-road former Bord na Mona rail-line link from Portarlinton providing the primary connection to the site and linking to a new perimeter cycling and walking trail heading north to Mount Lucas Wind Farm through the planned Wilderness Corridors.

The main entrance at Derryvilla off Edenderry Road will continue to be the most popular entrance due to its proximity to the primary attraction, the 'Bog Beach.' Detailed design proposals have been prepared for this area that can be implemented gradually to enhance site usability, sense of arrival and safety. To improve traffic flow and safety, it is proposed to convert the old Bord na Móna crossing and rail-line leading from Derrylea bog into Derryounce into an access route for pedestrians and cyclists.

Revising the vehicular road arrangement at the entrance and designing it as an in/out route will reduce current motorised traffic and parking conflicts, and make the site more accessible to emergency services. The central green strip between the in/



Above: Key Palette of Design Principles at Derryounce

out roads can be preserved for wildlife and natural SuDS. A new perimeter route for active travel and emergency services access around Derryounce is proposed. It is planned to create a new parking and overflow area at Derryvilla to accommodate coaches, cars, cycles, and motorcycles, using an area currently covered by scrubland. This area, in a nearby field, has the potential to host event vendors and additional vehicles on event days/popular beach days. A camper-van aire is also proposed at Derryvilla, to allow people to stay overnight at Derryounce

and enjoy the landscape's amenities as well as visit Portarlinton.

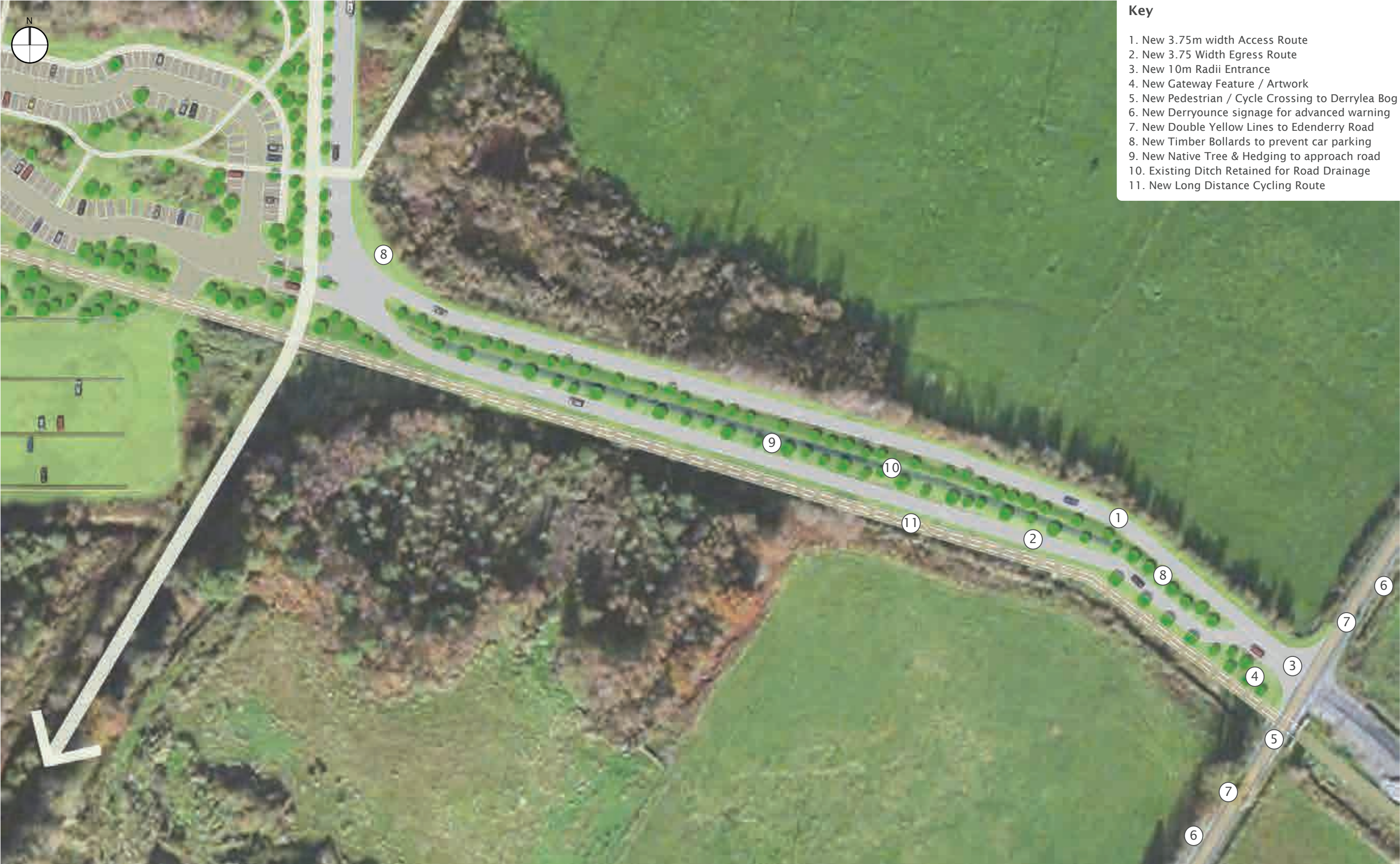
Artificial illumination should be designed to balance the needs of personal safety with the needs of Dark Sky tourism and nocturnal fauna, such as bats, as Derryounce is intended to be a haven for nature and wildlife. Circular economy principles should be a key point of departure for detailed design and waste management, and locally-sourced, recycled or re-purposed materials should be used. Composting

facilities should be provided and the 'Leave No Trace' waste policy should be continued as part of waste management. Wastewater management should consider the sensitive peatland soils context. Paving materials should be permeable where possible, and consider the comfort of people using wheeled assistance¹. Child- and age-friendly design principles and inclusion/accessibility details are key to the success of Derryounce.

¹ Meaning people using bicycles, buggies, mobility scooters and wheelchairs

Above: cycling trails winding through forests at Limburg, Flanders

DERRYVILLA: DETAIL OF ENTRANCE ROAD



Key

- 1. New 3.75m width Access Route
- 2. New 3.75 Width Egress Route
- 3. New 10m Radii Entrance
- 4. New Gateway Feature / Artwork
- 5. New Pedestrian / Cycle Crossing to Derrylea Bog
- 6. New Derrycastle signage for advanced warning
- 7. New Double Yellow Lines to Edenderry Road
- 8. New Timber Bollards to prevent car parking
- 9. New Native Tree & Hedging to approach road
- 10. Existing Ditch Retained for Road Drainage
- 11. New Long Distance Cycling Route

Plan illustration showing improvements made to the site entrance for safety; an in/out road to reduce congestion and over-parking, and integration of a central vegetated swale for natural drainage

DERRYVILLA: DETAIL OF ENTRANCE ROAD

The Derryvilla entrance off the R419 Edenderry Road will remain popular due to its proximity to the main attraction at Derryounce, the 'Bog Beach.'

It is proposed to re-purpose the former Bord na Móna rail-line as an active travel route, promoting non-car access and supporting the development of a loop route from Portarlinton to Mount Lucas Wind Farm and back again through the planned Wilderness Corridor.

To improve safety and reduce traffic conflicts, the upgraded entrance to Derryounce off the R419 will provide a separate in and out access route for motorised traffic. Improved visibility traffic engineering design will be required at the site entrance off the R419.

Traffic calming measures may be required on the busy R419 Edenderry Road to ensure safe entry and exit at Derryounce, and to support safe connections for active travel towards Derrylea Bog and Monasterevin to the east of Derryvilla.

The central green strip between the in/out roads will be preserved for its aesthetic value, wildlife habitat, and natural SuDS purposes.



Above: aerial photograph of the Derryvilla entrance



Above: using permeable paving materials where possible will reduce the surface water run-off from cloud-burst events. Photographs taken at Cabu By the Lakes, Cavan and Lough Boora Discovery Park, Offaly.

DERRYVILLA: VISITOR FACILITIES



Plan illustration for an improved vehicle parking arrangement at Derryvilla, and the provision of visitor amenity facilities including cycle rental, coffee kiosk, a First Aid point, and toilets!

DERRYVILLA: VISITOR FACILITIES

The existing Active Travel route from Portarlington on the former Bord na Móna rail-line should take primacy over the motorised vehicle in the traffic hierarchy to encourage pedestrians, runners and cyclists to gain safe access into Derrycastle, and to continue north to Mount Lucas Wind Farm along the planned Wilderness Corridors.

It is planned to transform an area of existing scrub vegetation into a parking lot suitable for cars, coaches, cycles, and motorcycles. These parking spaces will feature permeable surfacing and include EV-charging points, with some covered by solar PV structures. Parking space for various cycles, including cargo-bikes and e-bikes, has been allocated. For busy summer or event days at the 'Bog Beach,' an overflow parking lot area is designated in a nearby field.

The lot has been arranged to retain as much of the existing scrub vegetation as possible, to minimise disturbance to wildlife. When detail design is undertaken, an ecological survey should be conducted to identify any sensitive areas, wildlife habitats, and vegetation. Permeable paving materials are proposed to reduce run-off and allow water infiltration. Vegetation should be allowed to regenerate naturally around the perimeter and between bays.

Designated disabled parking spaces have been located with convenient access to amenities. Family- and age-friendly parking spaces should be included in the detail design. Pathways should be universally accessible for visitors of all ages and abilities. Coach parking bays have been arranged to minimise impact on existing vegetation. An overflow parking area is suggested on a field to the south of the lot for busy summer days or events. A stabilised surface to this area will allow it to revert to naturalistic conditions when not in use.

Visitor amenities structures comprising food and coffee kiosks, picnic tables, toilets and cycle rental can also be provided at this area, close to the southern shore of popular Derrycastle Lake. Toilets should be family-friendly, and a first aid point should be provided here as part of the visitor amenity response. Recycling and composting stations will encourage waste management. Composting facilities should be provided for food waste from the planned new coffee and food kiosk visitor amenity services at the Derrycastle area and the camping aire. Fresh drinking water for visitors should be available, along with a dog-washing station for people to wash down their pets with hot water after a long walk.



Above: imagery of key design considerations in this part of the site

As this will be the main arrival point for many visitors, informative and way-finding signage should be available here to help visitors orient themselves, to decide what they would like to do, and where they would like to go. This information point is a good place to educate visitors about the importance of the forest, the lakes, the beach, and the perimeter bogs of Derrycastle, as well as interpretation of the site's history and wildlife habitats.



Above: details at Cabu By the Lakes minimise impact of vehicles on the forest environment. Providing differing types of cycles for hire enables people to explore the landscape with minimal impact.

Lighting should be energy-efficient, with dark-sky and bat-friendly features to minimise light pollution and to support Derrycastle to become a wildlife-friendly Dark Sky reserve.¹

An access barrier can restrict vehicular access to the lot during out-of-hours, preserving the tranquillity of the place. Clear signage and designated crossings can ensure safe interaction between pedestrians and

¹ 'Environmentally Friendly Lighting Guide', Dark Source Lighting Design Studio, Dark Sky Ireland, and the Heritage Council, 2024



Above: the car park and pathways at Lough Boora use primarily natural materials and are permeable. Integrating solar PV shelters in some bays will help power the site..

cyclists and road-users.

Key to the success of Derrycastle as a Midlands Cycling Destination node is a cycle rental and repair kiosk. It should offer a mix of cycles for people of all ages and abilities to rent and use. Electric and cargo bicycles will help families access the site. Some cycles for children should be available, so that children can learn to cycle in a 'safe' off-road environment.

DERRYVILLA: CAMPING AIRE



Key

- 1. New 6m Wide Access Track
- 2. New Access Restriction Barriers
- 3. New 5m Width x 8m Length Camping Pitches
- 4. New Toilet / Utility Block
- 5. New Chemical Waste Disposal Layby
- 6. Potential Long Term Cycling / Walking Trail
- 7. Beach Access Track

Plan illustration for a camper van aire at Derryvilla

DERRYVILLA: CAMPING AIRE

It's clear that Offaly suffers from a lack of bed spaces for visitors. As part of the intensification and diversification of uses at Derrycastle, the location of a 25-berth camper-van 'aire' and supporting utility building is proposed as one of the core short-term projects at the Derrycastle entrance.

The ability to stay overnight at a place is key to the concept of Regenerative Tourism; generating economic activity and in the hinterland. The presence of an overnight camper-van/camping 'Aire' will attract tourists to stay longer and travel to the site from further afield, leading to increased footfall for local businesses such as cafés, restaurants, and grocery shops in Portarlinton. Regenerative Tourism trips can help create job opportunities, particularly in the hospitality and service sectors.

Regenerative tourism focuses on minimising environmental impact, and camper vans often have smaller ecological footprints compared to larger accommodation. By supporting overnight visitors to park and stay in a designated area at Derrycastle, the impact on the local environment can be minimised.

The proposed 'aire' is located on a wedge-shaped piece of land between the active travel route around the perimeter of Derrycastle and the proposed active travel route on the disused Bord na Móna rail-line heading northwards to Mount Lucas Wind Farm, 11.50km away. This wedge-shaped area is enclosed by vegetative buffer zones, which will help integrate the aire facility sensitively into the landscape.

The detailed design of the camper-van aire should blend with the character of the surrounding landscape, using natural materials and a colour palette that harmonises with the industrial heritage of the site as well as the forest. Existing vegetation should be retained where possible to create a buffer-zone transition between the berths and the aire boundaries. A vehicular barrier prevents unauthorised access to the camper-van aire site.

In the design proposals, the area has been zoned so that the utility block is positioned centrally within the site, easily accessible to campers. A perimeter access route enables vehicles to park in the individual berths, separated from each other by naturally-regenerated vegetation.

Structures provided such as the utility block or a sauna cabin should be made of sustainable or circular economy-sourced materials. Waste disposal, energy generation, and water management should use renewable energies and 'green' technologies,



Wedge-shaped area proposed as the Derrycastle aire location

incorporating elements of natural SuDS, green-blue roofs, rainwater harvesting, solar PV panels and composting toilets, as appropriate. Toilets must be family-friendly and accessible for visitors with disabilities.

Adding communal spaces such as picnic spots, a central gathering area with a cooking area and safe fireplace, and things like a sauna cabin, can help act as focal point for social interaction between campers. The site should be pet-friendly, with a washing area



(Above) Camper van aire parking berths integrated sensitively in forest landscape settings

with hot water intended for dogs provided as part of the utility block. Washing machines and dryers for clothing can also be provided at the utility block.

The aire site should include a service area for camper-vans and caravans where visitors can fill up their water tank, check tyre pressure, and clean their car in a self-service car wash. A chemical toilet disposal point should also be provided as part of the utility block. Showers in the utility block should be low-flow.



(Above) Camper van tourists often seek to engage in more nature-based activities, such as bird-watching, tree planting, hiking or foraging tours

Composting facilities for organic waste should be provided with recycling bins to encourage responsible waste disposal by tourists staying at the aire. Visitors should be educated about the principles of 'Leave No Trace' to minimise their impact on Derrycastle.

Low impact pathways using permeable and locally-sourced materials will allow rainwater to penetrate into the ground.

CUSHINA: CAMPING AIRE & COILLTE ENTRANCE



Concept plan illustration showing proposals for an additional camper van aire to the north at a new 'Cushina' entrance, and arrangements for a Coillte entrance to the site for felling works

CUSHINA: CAMPING AIRE & COILLTE ENTRANCE

Cushina Entrance: Aire and Coillte

As part of the process of 'opening-up' at Derrycastle, it is proposed to create a new entrance to the north of the site off the R400, to encourage people from the immediate hinterland, particularly Walsh Island 6.00km away, to regularly visit Derrycastle.

Set within a series of off-road active travel loop routes towards Mount Lucas 10.00km to the north on old Bord na Móna rail-lines and forestry roads through the planned Wilderness Corridors, this Cushina entrance will support more local populace to visit and take pressure off the Derrycastle entrance.

In the short-term, this entrance can be used as a forestry entrance for Coillte; and in the medium- to long-term as a place to depart the site to explore the Wilderness Corridors, peatlands and forests to the north. The location of another overnight camping aire is suggested here. Other entrances are suggested around the perimeter of Derrycastle to the south at Ballybought/Old Bog Road, to the west at Kilcappagh on an old Bord na Móna rail-line; and to the north-west to link with the planned amenity trails of Moanvane Wind Farm.

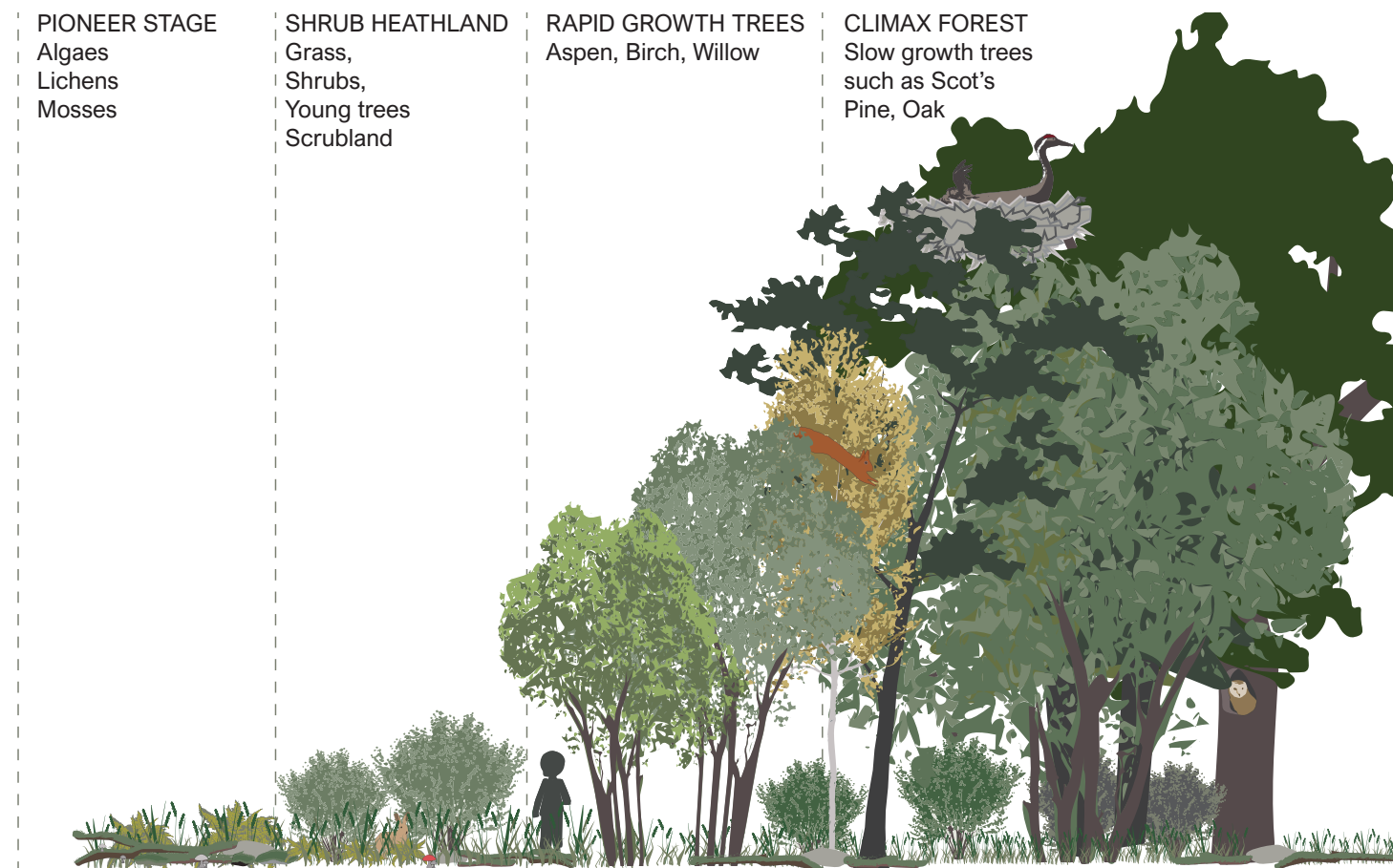
Forestry Felling & Design

Coillte plan to fell some of the existing plantation forest soon. What should it look like in the future? The atmosphere of the existing coniferous forest plantation contributes strongly to the sense of wonder and surprise felt by the first-time visitor at Derrycastle, and is one of the main reasons visitors describe the landscape experience as 'Scandinavian' and restorative.

A Forest Design Strategy for the future of Derrycastle will need to be developed, in partnership with Coillte, to balance future plantation areas, and areas that might be 're-wilded' and re-wetted.

We propose wide 'wiggly ways' for humans and wildlife to move along Corridors through the site, winding through the site and aligned along forest roads in places. As forestry blocks are re-planted, new trails, amenities, art, play, wildlife hot-spots, and reflection areas should be 'baked-in' to the layout and growth of the new forestry layers.

Mono-cultural plantings in forests have been shown to be less resilient than mixed species to



Above: illustration showing indigenous plants and where they fit in terms of scale and size in a vegetated buffer



Forest management



Plan diagram illustrating areas planned for felling by Coillte and the location of forest roads

the effects of storms. Research shows that forests with more diverse tree species are more likely to survive extreme weather events than mono-cultural ones. Forestry management practices that promote diversity and slower-growing tree species should be adopted.

A high proportion of 'broad-leaves' should be incorporated in the Forest Design for Derrycastle to welcome wildlife into the site, along with indigenous conifers or evergreens like Scot's Pine, Arbutus, Holly and Juniper. Derrycastle presents an opportunity to plant areas of the Irish native Trembling Aspen, with its startling golden leaves in autumn.



(Above) Camping berth in a forest landscape setting.

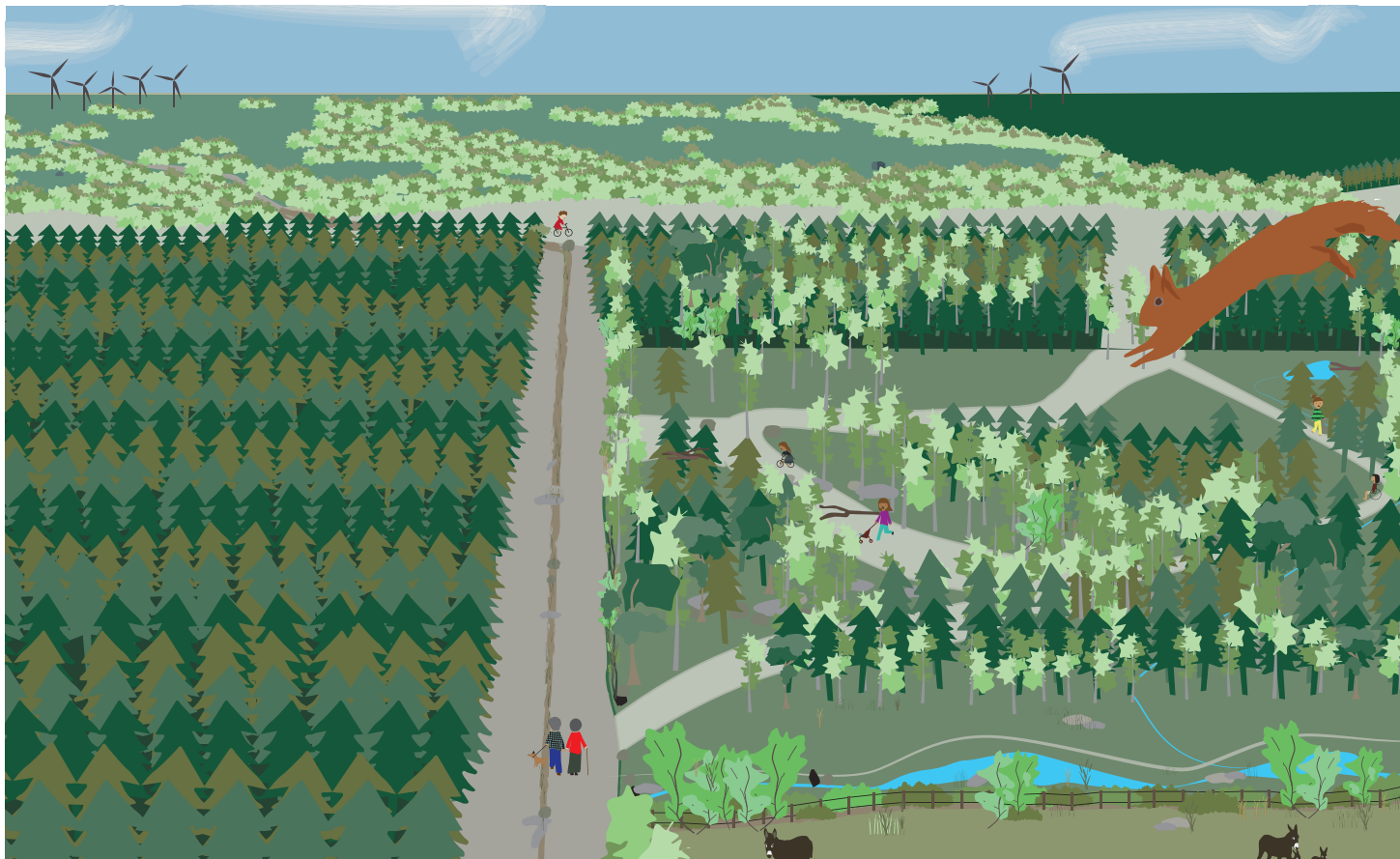
DERRYOUNCE: FORESTRY DESIGN



Year 01 Illustration showing an area of plantation forest 'post-felling'



Year 02 Illustration of forest area a year on, with re-planting began, and areas arranged for new 'scrapes' and 'tarns' along wiggly ways through the forest



Year 20, illustration showing 'plantation forest' and 'wiggly way' planting maturing, and wildlife increasing at the site.



Year 40 Illustration showing mature forest area, with the cycle beginning again at the plantation forest nearby

DERRYOUNCE: FORESTRY DESIGN

Forestry Design

Derryounce should seek to collaboratively undertake transformation of the existing plantation forest in partnership with Coillte. The focus should be on carefully managing the felling of areas designated by Coillte, with a comprehensive plan for re-planting that emphasises the inclusion of indigenous plant species such as Scot's Pine, Birch, Aspen and Oak, as well as appropriate 'exotic' tree species to try and create a climate-resilient planting palette.

The goals of the re-planting strategy to these areas should be to enhance biodiversity, to promote ecological resilience to the effects of climate change, and to preserve the unique atmosphere and features that make Derryounce special.

Sense of Place

The plantation forestry quadrants, and the lake treasures hidden within them, play a pivotal role in creating the special sense of place and unique atmosphere at Derryounce. The serried ranks of spruce and pine tree trunks influence the feeling of a tranquil setting, and create a sheltered microclimate around the lake bodies.

The glimpses of the lakes through the tree trunks contributes strongly to the sensory and aesthetic appeal of Derryounce. It is within the forest areas that the visitor is conscious of the deeper and emotional connection to nature that Derryounce offers, and the restorative effects of being among the trees.

'Gruffalo Tunnels' & Land Art Elements

The 'Gruffalo Tunnels' as they are known are unique features to Derryounce which have gained popularity amongst visitors, especially children. The beautiful artworks throughout the site, painted tree trunks with organic paint by artists Beta Franca and Brian Flynn, have created a distinctive talking-point and become integral parts of the site setting, contributing to the cultural and recreational identity of Derryounce. Thoughtful consideration should be given to the Memory Tree on Nugent's Hill, which serves as a poignant reminder of a young girl. This tree has become a place of reflection, with mementos and tokens left on the tree by community members, creating a link between the forest setting and the personal stories of the locals. Special attention should be given to assessing the chance of preserving these elements, to ensure that the artistic and recreational value that they bring to the forest can be kept.



Year 40: Wiggly ways through a forest plantation area, with clearings for play, activity and nature. Tarns and scrapes allow water to thread through the forest.

Sustainable Harvesting & Re-planting

A sustainable harvesting plan including practices such as minimising soil disturbance, employing selective logging techniques, and mitigating the impact on local fauna, should be employed.

The re-planting strategy should acknowledge that coniferous forestry plantations are an appropriate land-use at Derryounce, but should diversify the forest composition by including a minimum of 30%

indigenous coniferous and broadleaf species. It is hoped that perimeter areas could transition to plant nurseries for the new forest and scrubland areas.

Community Engagement

During the planning of the Forestry Design and the planting of young trees and shrubs, community engagement will be key. Regular consultation and feedback sessions with relevant stakeholders such as the management organisation, community groups,

schools, and environmental organisations will ensure that the detailed forestry design addresses their concerns and includes their ideas, such as food-foraging. A collaborative approach will foster a sense of ownership and a shared vision for the future of Derryounce.

DERRYOUNCE: VISITOR CENTRE & INFRASTRUCTURE



Concept plan illustration for the location of a Visitor Centre building and supporting infrastructure, including a looped pontoon and boardwalk route across Lough Lurgan, a service building and a bird-watching or Dark Sky observation tower

DERRYOUNCE: VISITOR CENTRE & INFRASTRUCTURE

Visitor Centre Building at Derryounce

The Joint LAP identifies as an objective, to meet the needs of tourists and visitors to the town of Portarlinton, that a 'trailhead building, heritage museum, food and beverage establishments and increased parking' should be provided in the Portarlinton area. In the Joint LAP, land uses such as tourist accommodation of all types and ancillary services are encouraged within the Derryounce/Portarlinton area.

This building should be an exemplar facility, that offers facilities for visitors and provides a base for outdoor activities and events within the parkland. This building should be an integral part of the overall concept masterplan and regeneration strategy for the area, providing focus to a complex site. It should provide food, drink, shelter, toilets, function spaces, changing rooms and more, and act as the focal point in the park. A Changing Places facility should be provided within the visitor centre structure to ensure access and use for all abilities at Derryounce, and to integrate universal design as a key element of its offer.

The visitor centre building could be conceptualised to marry the brief and vision requirements with the stunning context and the opportunities for views towards the lake and overlooking the bog, forest, and wetland landscapes of Derryounce. It would be a good place to house a permanent exhibition on the history of the bogs and the industrial heritages of the site, as hoped-for in local policy. If co-located with a primarily recreational function like that of the *naturum* buildings of Swedish national parks, repeat visits to the facility would be able to happen, resulting in a more sustainable use.

In the heart of the peatlands and forested landscape managed by Coillte, a unique opportunity presents itself to create a building that harmonises with its surroundings, emphasises sustainability, and showcases the inherent beauty and sensory appeal of wood. Timber should be used in the construction methods of the building, not only for aesthetic reasons but primarily for its role in promoting green construction and low-carbon methods. Coillte's responsible forest management practices ensure a continuous supply of timber, making it an ideal choice for construction that aligns with sustainable and circular economy principles. Using wood from certified sustainable sources demonstrates a commitment to responsible resource management and will contribute to the reduction of buildings' and structures' carbon footprints.



Above: aerial view of Lough Lurgan and surrounding forested areas.

Embracing a wood-centric construction approach facilitates the incorporation of biophilic design principles and reflects Coillte's history at the place. The natural patterns and textures of timber evoke a sense of connection with the outdoors, fostering a harmonious relationship between the built environment and nature. Large windows and open spaces will blur the boundaries between the interior and exterior, allowing occupants to feel immersed in the beauty of the surrounding forest and peatlands.



Above: precedent imagery of the Naturum visitor centre at Lake Takern, Sweden

Education Group Visits & Supports

Providing a visitor centre and related infrastructure such as a service building and toilets will help support visits of school and university groups to Derryounce. Children and young people should gain an awareness and understanding of STEM, environmental issues, conservation efforts, and regenerative processes during their visit.¹ They should be able to engage in informative sessions and guided tours to learn about

¹ <http://www.ipcc.ie/discover-and-learn/resources/>

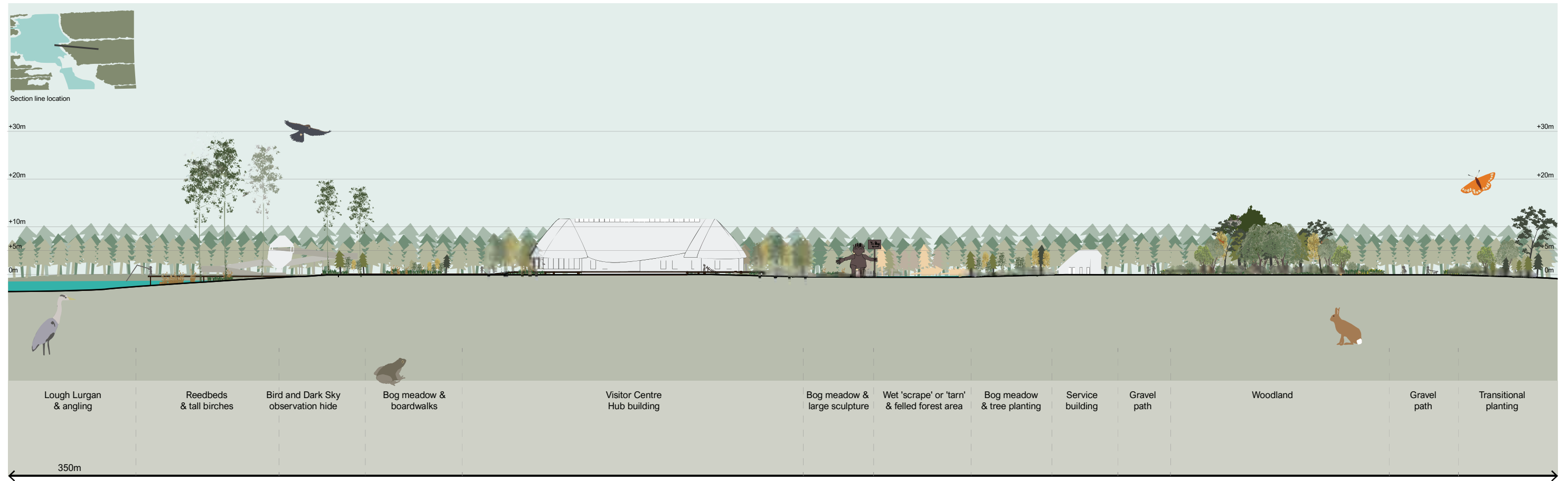


Above: precedent imagery of the popular visitor centre at Brockholes, a National Trust Park in the UK.

the peatland landscapes, as well as recreational activities. Students should have the chance to develop a deeper connection with nature and a sense of stewardship for the peatlands, and learn about things like ecosystems, peatland carbon sinks, peat extraction, wildlife conservation, renewable energies, and landscape change and quality.² Visits should support opportunities for active travel, a sense of well-being, and a healthy lifestyle.

² 'Peatlands: A Guide to Educational Activities for Schools', Scotlands National Nature Reserves/Scottish Natural Heritage, 2014

DERRYOUNCE: VISITOR CENTRE & INFRASTRUCTURE



Illustrative section imagining the future of the north-eastern forestry quadrant at Derrycastle



Above: precedent image of one of the rest facilities provided for tourists along the Norwegian scenic route



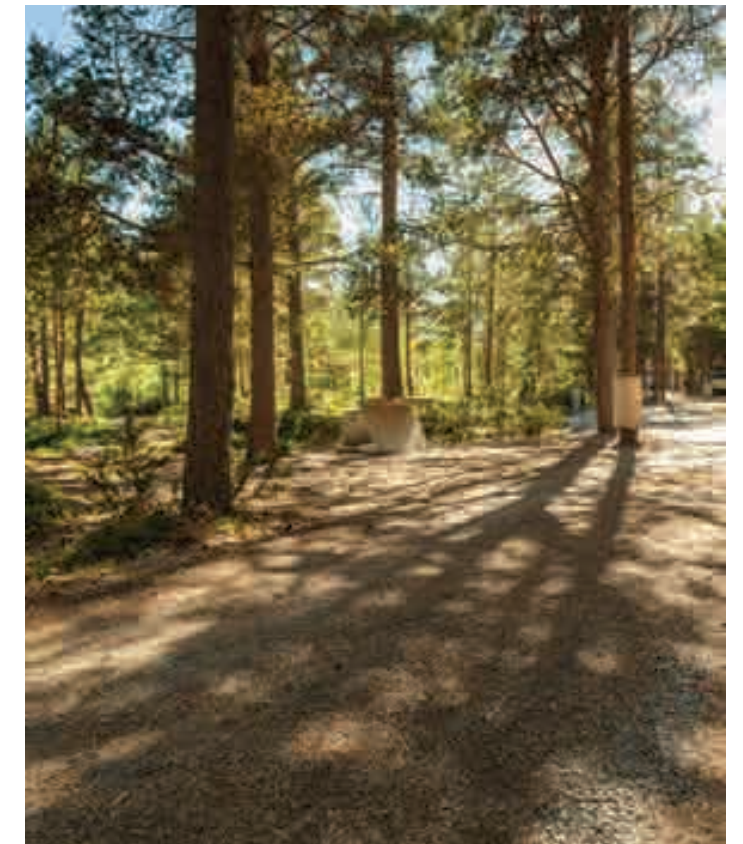
Above: precedent image of a look-out tower for bird-watching, views over a wetland landscape and dark sky observation in the Estonian bogs.

'Neighbour' structures

'Neighbour' structures to a visitor centre hub could include things like lakeshore perimeter boardwalks; a bird-watching and Dark Sky observation tower and hides; a lake bridge crossing; a services building hosting toilets, showers and sports club storage; and all-abilities angling pegs and resting places. The design and construction of such structures should align with the architectural design language and materials of the visitor centre building. Inspiration for such structures should derive from the place, and from the sensitive interventions taken at the Norwegian Tourist Route, and in the Limburg cycling attractions.

Vehicle Parking Area

For the car-parking area and approach road and paths to service the visitor centre, reference should be made to the sensitive landscape interventions made in the successful Norwegian Tourist Route, particularly the serviced parking area located in a pine forest at Liasanden, or the naturalistic setting of the car park and paths leading to the naturum building at Lake Takern in Sweden, shown earlier in the precedent case studies.



Above: precedent image of the serviced vehicle parking and picnic areas at the Liasanden rest stop on the Norwegian scenic route.

DERRYOUNCE: LAKE EXPANSION



Concept plan illustration for expansion of Derryounce Lake

DERRYOUNCE: LAKE EXPANSION

Derryounce Lake Expansion Proposal

The proposed expansion of Derryounce Lake is a thoughtful and comprehensive approach to enhance the existing site, taking into consideration the sensitivity of the peatland environment and the unique geological features, such as the 'running sand' layer. The primary focus of this expansion is to accommodate a 750m swim for planned triathlon events as well as possibly long-distance swim events; whilst enhancing the recreational opportunities of the place, diversifying the habitats, and situating event facilities near to the enlarged water body.

Understanding the delicate nature of the peatland environment, extensive hydro-geological studies will be conducted before initiating any construction works. This is crucial to mitigate potential environmental impacts and ensure the long-term sustainability of the expanded lake area.

The proposed expansion will feature a designated events area on the Bog Beach for events days. The Bog Beach will remain the primary attraction of Derryounce, with its sunny west-facing aspect and ample size. It will continue to be a central hub for recreational activities, with a particular focus on engaging youth through activities such as beach volleyball, a sand-moving STEM junior playspace, and a bouldering clearing. This not only adds to the fun quotient of the site but promotes a sense of community and inclusivity.

The raised beach area nestled in the arms of the surrounding forest can serve as the starting or marshalling point for triathlon events, providing easy access to the swimming, cycling, and running routes. The triathlon cycle and running routes can extend out from the main events area, offering diverse and scenic landscapes for participants as the Midlands Cycling Destination trails develop.

To ensure the safety of swimmers and support the evolution of the lake into a water safety training area, the proposal includes the installation of a lifeguard station. This facility will play a vital role during events and regular days, enhancing the overall safety of water-based activities.

To cater to the needs of event days, a servicing building should be constructed. This building can house additional toilets, showers, and maintenance storage, ensuring the comfort and convenience of event participants and visitors. The design of this building should chime with the ambition of the new Irish architectural policy, 'People and Places', and be



Above: Aerial view of Derryounce Lake

informed by vernacular building styles and materials, principles of circular economy, and prioritise the use of green energy and infrastructure.

Incorporating destination features into the landscape will enhance the overall aesthetic and sensory appeal of Derryounce Lake. A cutaway bridge set below water level at the north of the lake could provide unique viewing opportunities for the audience during events, allowing them to experience the water at 'duck-level'. Additionally, a wiggly bridge



Above: Swimming and 'beach life' are popular and family-friendly activities happening at Derryounce Lake. Providing diving platforms, pontoons and accessible fishing pegs and resting platforms will enhance it's use and enjoyment for everyone, as well as supporting water safety and education.

will offer a playful and interactive element, allowing visitors to look down over their friends and family completing a circuit. Including things like pontoons and diving platforms at the lake will encourage youth participation and activity.

The proposed expansion of Derryounce Lake is a balanced approach that considers environmental sensitivity, community engagement, and the specific needs of planned triathlon events. With careful planning, hydro-geological studies, and the



integration of key features as outlined, Derryounce Lake has the potential to become a premier destination for both recreational activities and sporting events, contributing to the overall well-being and enjoyment of the local community and economy.

DERRYVILLA: GREEN GYM



Plan illustration of the detailed design proposals for the forested area at Derryvilla

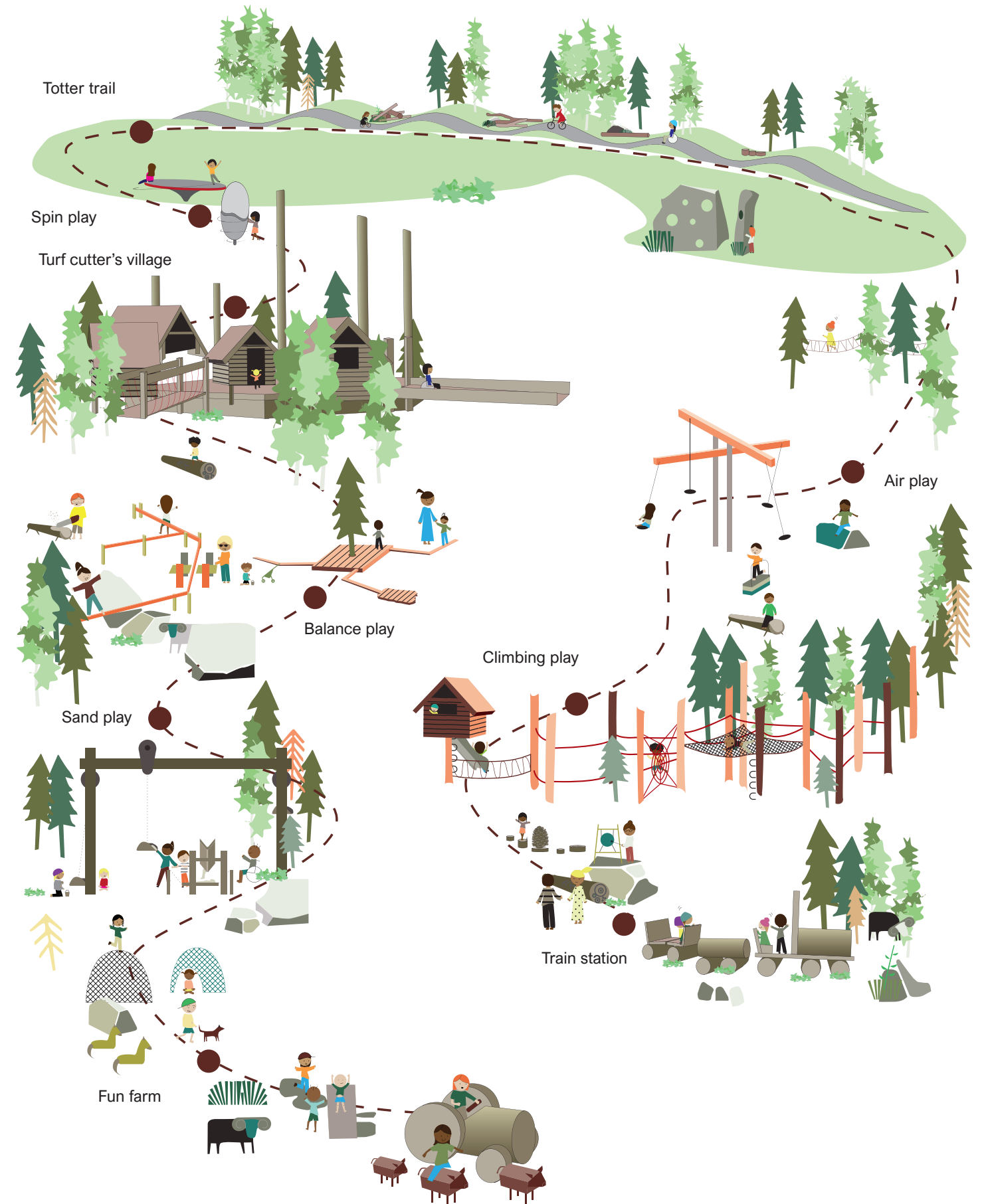


Illustration of playful route loop through the broadleaf forest area at Derryvilla, close to Portarlinton

DERRYVILLA: GREEN GYM

Portarlington's 'Back Garden'

In the wooded area to the west of the 2.50km active travel route linking Portarlington to Derrycastle, a Green Gym is proposed for town residents to come and walk their dogs, run looped trails, and for children from 2-92 to come and play. Public consultation told stories of the weighing bridge that used to be along the route, and the special memories it held for workers on the bog as it marked the junction between Bord na Móna lands and the ESB lands. People commented that this area was as far as toddlers could be convinced to walk by their parents or guardians, and submissions were made during the consultation period asking for a dog park. Derrycastle also hosted the ESB power station and its iconic cooling tower, and the townland contains the Derrycastle National Monument site at which was found the Friar's Togher, a hoard, remnants of an early-Christian monastic settlement, and a burial ground. This mound is one of the 'bog islands' that characterise the landscape, similar to Nugent's Island at Derrycastle, to the north-east.

Green Gym

Looped trails in this area will support the development of group activities like Green Gym programmes, or easily accessible outdoor trails close to the town for evening or afternoon exercise. Integrating challenging balance trails or work-out stations along loop routes through the forest can encourage people to come regularly, or happen upon a fitness activity along the route. People participating in Green Gyms, delivered in communities and designed to encourage physical activity and social interaction whilst in nature, report increased well-being following engagement.¹

Dog Park

A 2-3 hectare area in this zone of Derrycastle has been designated in the plans for development as a Dog Park. Provision of this area will support local residents who want to exercise their dogs close to their homes without having to travel by car. The benefits of owning a dog are many, encompassing increased physical activity, improved social interactions, and enhanced mental well-being. Research shows positive impacts, such as reduced cardiovascular risk, overall mortality rates, and better mental and physical health outcomes (particularly during and since the COVID-19 pandemic).²

¹ Smyth, N.; Thorn, L.; Wood, C.; Hall, D.; Lister, C. Increased Wellbeing following Engagement in a Group Nature-Based Programme: The Green Gym Programme Delivered by the Conservation Volunteers. *Healthcare* 2022, 10, 978. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare10060978>
² Chen S, Wu Z, Sleipness OR, Wang H. Benefits and Conflicts: A



Precedent imagery for 'naturalistic' playful stopping points and an active travel route/trail in Limburg

Dog parks are valuable attractions for local residents

A 'back garden' for Portarlington where local residents can come and exercise and enjoy the outdoors without having to travel too far

Numerous studies underline the advantages of dog ownership across diverse demographics, including children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. However, the presence of domestic dogs in amenity open spaces can lead to environmental and social challenges. Issues like dog-fouling, disturbing nesting birds, and conflicts between dog owners and non-dog owners in public spaces necessitate careful consideration and management. Features of a dog

Systematic Review of Dog Park Design and Management Strategies. *Animals (Basel)*. 2022 Aug 31;12(17):2251. doi: 10.3390/ani12172251. PMID: 36077971; PMCID: PMC9455081.

park might include:

- Segregation for dogs under 15kg and over 15kg
- Fully fenced and with a double-gated entrance to the dog park. If possible, there should be separate entrance and exit gates to fenced areas to avoid conflicts, with no 90-degree angles in fencing.
- An off-leash area (as well as on-leash areas)
- An open field and a swimming are
- A 'dog-friendly walking trail', with walking loops that are accessible for people of all ages and abilities, with regular resting and passing places

- Agility obstacles for dogs such as ramps and platforms of various heights
- A water fountain for drinking water, and a hose for washing down dogs.
- Dark-sky sensitive night lighting
- A balance of sunny and shade areas.
- Provision of bins for dog waste, or a Leave No Trace strategy
- A bulletin board to create a sense of community and connection

DERRYOUNCE: DESTINATION PLAY

Barefoot Trail

Parallel to the accessible footpath route through the woods, which should be suitable for wheelchairs and buggies, a 2.50-3.00km length barefoot walking trail can be provided for visitors here. Such a barefoot trail could help people imagine themselves in the footsteps of the early Christian Derryvilla monks on their way home along a togher road winding through the bogs.

Trails like this support people to enjoy the sensory experience of walking barefoot through different terrains such as moss and mud, sand and bark, larch needles and fir cones, mulch and straw, pebbles and gravel, tree stumps and water. Different types of playful and challenging bridges and balance beams can be integrated in the trail to help stimulate different sensations, and create multiple and graduated levels of challenge.

Beginning the trail at a distinctive land art threshold entrance, perhaps inspired by the existing works at Derryounce by Beta Franca and Brian Flynn, will help ground it in the locality. The trail should finish near a watery area or washing point so that walkers can clean their feet before putting their shoes back on. Providing a vernacular kind of washing trough with a



Above: Children enjoying a barefoot trail experience in Europe.

beam pump will help stimulate children's interest.¹ After completing the trail, people can return to the Derryvilla car park area for a coffee and snack at the kiosk, to freshen up at the toilet facilities there, or to enjoy a picnic near the children's play loop in the woods.

¹ http://www.barfusspark.info/loesungskatalog_en.htm

Play for Ages 2-92 and All Abilities

One of the key aspects of Offaly County Council's CDP and of the Joint Laois-Offaly LAP for the town of Portarlinton and the hinterland of Derryounce is an ambition to achieve economic regeneration and a Just Transition, is to attract visitors to the area and to stimulate the local economy.

Ensuring sufficient opportunities for play can enhance the appeal of a place, attracting residents and supporting local communities. Families often consider not just good schools but also access to nearby outdoor spaces for their well-being. Playful landscapes not only draw in tourists but also can help contribute to ecological plans. In light of the decline in children's outdoor play and increasing urbanisation, efforts have been made by municipalities and practitioners to provide more nature-based play options. Incorporating child- and age-friendly design principles in the development of Derryounce can make it a compelling attraction, and help address the decline in outdoor play and urban challenges.

Establishing an engaging playable resource near Portarlinton can aid in the Midlands region's regeneration. This resource can act as a unique attraction, stimulating the local economy, retaining residents, and maximising community benefits. Activity, art and play installations should be integrated throughout the landscape, enhancing and using the natural environment and the water's edge.

Planners, designers, and developers should create inclusive landscapes that cater to various ages and abilities. Recognising the demand for destination attractions in the Midlands region, a well-designed and challenging playful landscape at Derryounce can extend visitors' stays and encourage repeat visits. To a playful landscape where children are welcomed and entertained will attract school and scouting groups to the place.

In response to the decline in children's outdoor play in recent decades and the increase in urban populations, municipalities, communities, and practitioners have tried to deliver better nature-based play opportunities for people and families. Putting inclusive child- and age-friendly design and planning



Illustration showing destination playspaces set within a naturalistic environment such as a forest clearing themed 'Heritage' with a bog island crannóg, a totter trail with a barrel evoking the old Portarlinton-Monasterevin canal line, and a train to recall the Bord na Móna rail-lines through the landscape



Illustration showing destination playspaces set within a naturalistic environment such as a forest clearing themed 'Forest' with gleaming spires of pyramid towers signalling an attraction, a climbing forest to remind people of the Coillte forest, and a bouldering opportunity

DERRYOUNCE: DESTINATION PLAY

principles at the heart of the place, its development, and its continued operation, will help make Derryounce an unmissable attraction.

Planners, designers, and developers must provide inclusive landscapes full of adventure and challenge for people of all ages and abilities. There is a proven demand for destination attractions in the Midlands region, which can generate increased visitor numbers from the considerable catchment area of the island. Happy children occupied by a challenging playful landscape will increase people's length of stay at Derryounce, and encourage 're_peat adventure' visits to it.

As felling works begin across Derryounce, new 'clearings' can be established in a re-planted forest, linked with a play-route with multiple ranges of challenge to encourage repeat visits by families. Looped play routes through the forested areas could begin with a junior play area over-looked by the Visitor Centre café, and lead into the wider forest spaces and peripheral bogs.

The play offer should be heavily influenced by the STEM (science, technology, engineering, maths) heritage of the Derryounce landscape as well as it's rich folklore. Tree stumps can be re-shaped into balance trails or carved into sculptural artworks.

Things that should be considered in the detail design of playspaces at Derryounce are:

- Children's preferences expressed in consultation for adventurous playspaces made of natural materials
- Supporting a principle of 'playing together' for children of all ages and abilities and prioritising inclusive designs and details
- Access for children with disabilities to 'the coolest thing'
- STEM learning water playspace for children near the Beach (Archimedes screws, mill wheels, water channels & rills, dam-making, pumps)
- STEM learning generally, so that the industrial heritages of the place can be told through play, supporting inter-generational interaction
- A junior children's playspace near the Visitor Centre, passively surveilled by a café
- Adventurous and dynamic playspaces in forest clearings, along 'wiggly way' routes through the woods
- Compliance with EU standards in relation to play equipment and safety surfacing
- Prioritise sustainable materials sourcing and recycling at end-of-life
- 'Risky-funny' play
- Graduated and multiple challenge
- Management, after-care, inspection and maintenance plans



Illustration showing destination playspaces set within a naturalistic environment such as a forest clearing themed 'Industrial Heritage' with opportunities to move earth, water, gravel and mulch in a STEM-centred playspace. Huts evoke the Bord na Móna bothies still to be seen in the landscape, with a crane to recall the large crane seen in historical photographs at the ESB power station, and mill wheels to remember agricultural activity.



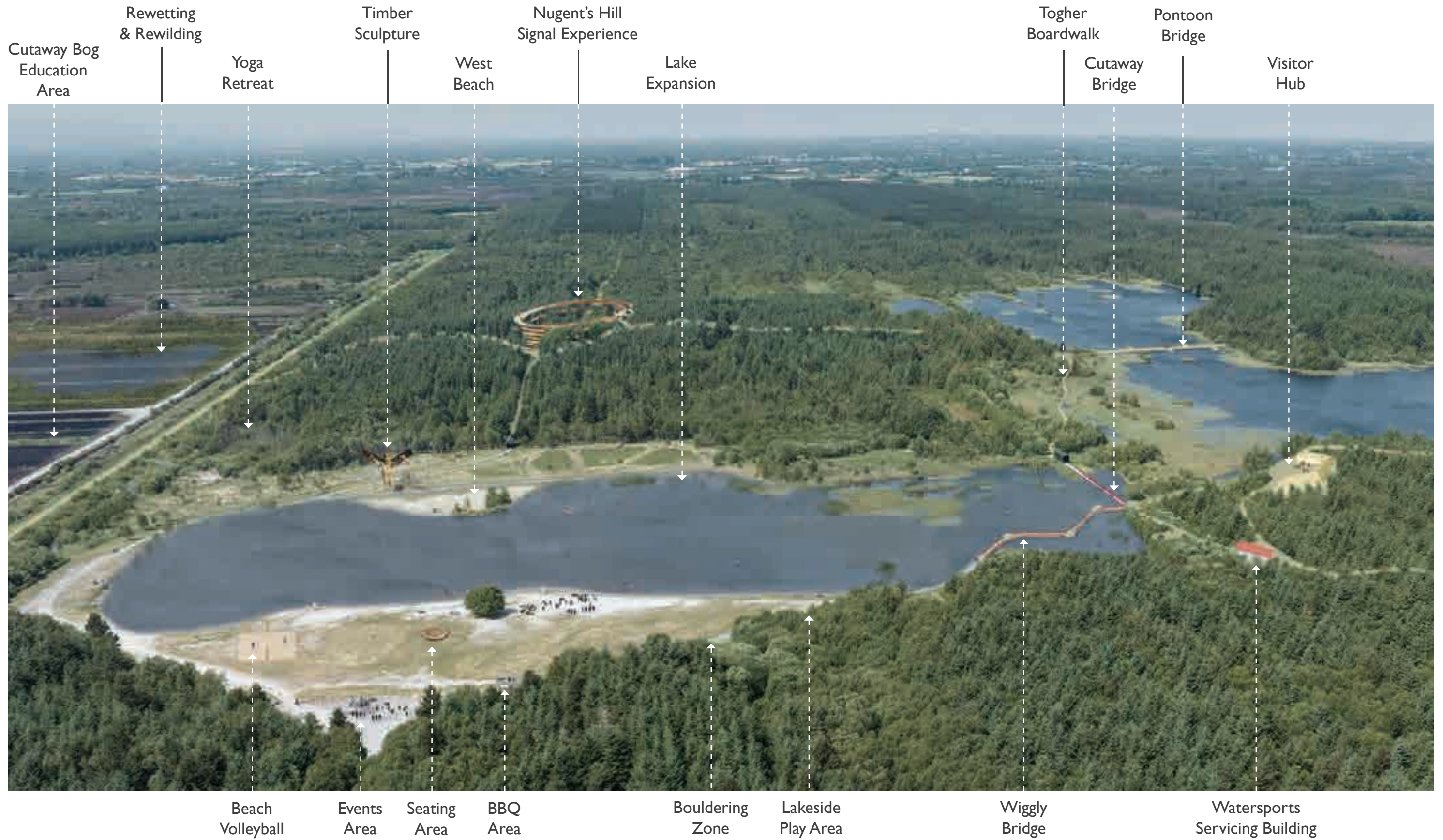
Above: Adventurous and explorative play in a sensitive landscape of a forest clearing setting.



Above: Play features at the 'Timber' festival by Wild Rumpus, held in the National Forest of Feanedock Woods, UK.



Illustration showing destination playspaces set within a naturalistic environment such as a forest clearing themed 'Exploration', with lots of dynamic play including swings, climbing structures and nets, bouldering activity and carousels.



Concept illustration of the key proposals for Derryounce

The above illustration identifies locations for key development projects suggested in the 10 Year Plan for Derryounce, and conceptually visualises them to help establish impacts of such interventions on the existing landscape, and how they can be absorbed. Locations for a cutaway bog education area and landscape rehabilitation projects are identified in

perimeter peatlands; a place for a key destination attraction is shown on the bog island of Nugent's Hill; and a site for a visitor centre is indicated in the forest near Lough Lurgan. Smaller projects such as land art, sporting facilities and pontoons and bridges have also been indicated in this conceptual illustration.



governance

derryounce



explore the unexpected

walk
swim
cycle
explore
connect

re-peat
adventure

GOVERNANCE

Governance (Ownership, Management, Partnerships & Funding)

To deliver on the vision of the 10 Year Development Plan, a new operational model is required for Derrycastle.

Offaly County Council, Bord na Móna and Coillte, as lead project sponsors, should commission a review of the ownership and management model for Derrycastle to put in place a new structure capable of delivering an international visitor destination at the site.

The existing licensing regime should be reviewed as part of this process to remove restrictions on cycling, camping, and swimming activity at the site with the provision of appropriate new management measures.

The review should target the implementation of new management arrangements for Q1 2025 to overlap with the expiry of the current PCDA license arrangements.

Community agreement has been central to the development of Derrycastle and this should remain central to the development of new governance arrangements. The Council should broker a fully inclusive partnership network inclusive of the community sector to help co-produce and deliver the new sports and recreation opportunities within the 10-Year Plan.

Mindful of the strategic funding opportunity provided by the EU's Just Transition Fund, which opened in August 2023, the lead project sponsors should prepare a strategic funding strategy to fully align the 10-year Development Plan with the five prescribed categories of this fund. The strategy should also address funding opportunities from other sources.

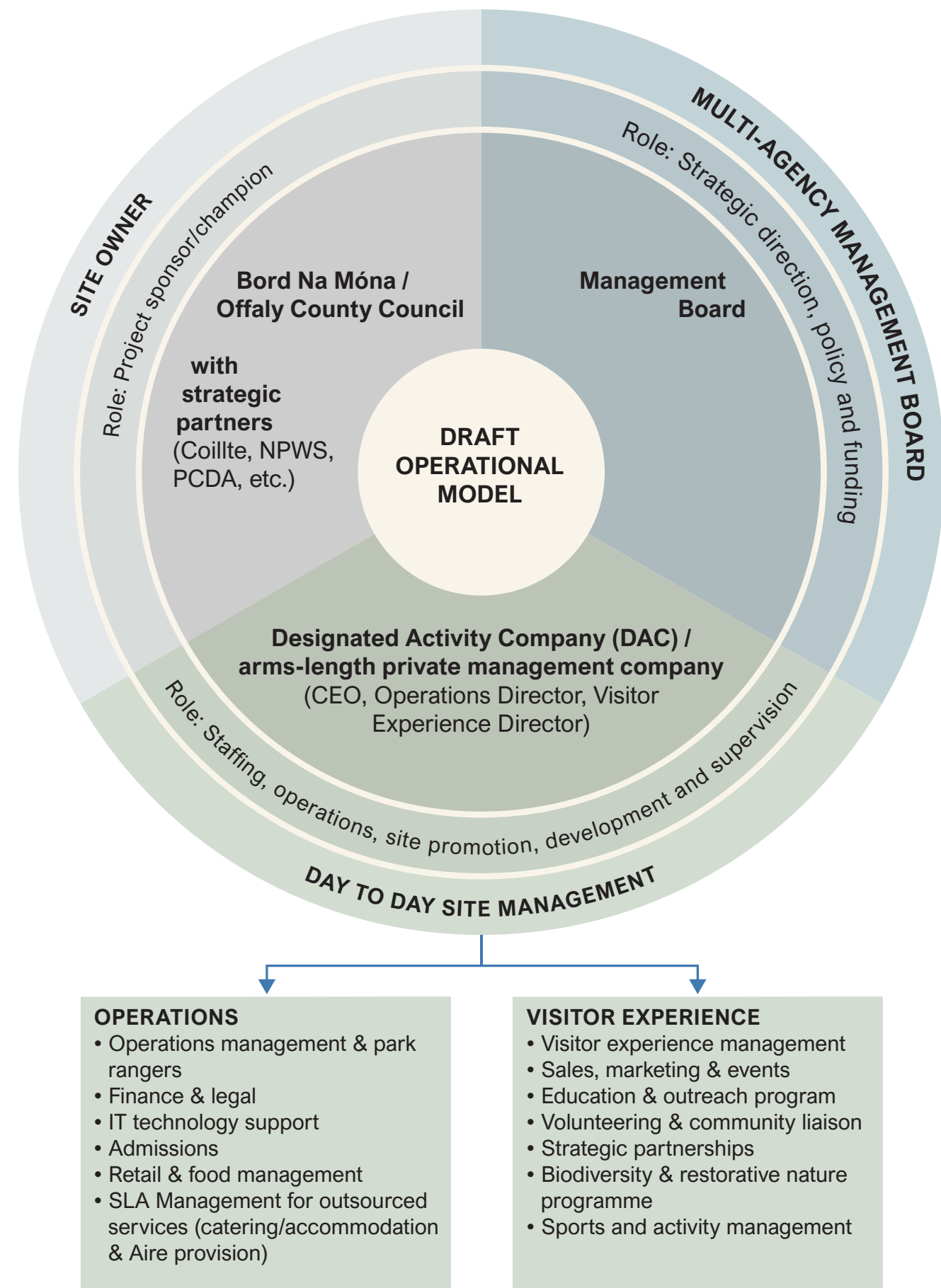
Operational Model

Offaly County Council should incorporate the 10-Year Plan within the next review of the statutory County Development Plan scheduled for October 2025. The draft operational model info-graphic (see right) provides a notional structure for a potential new management structure for Derrycastle. It assumes that Bord na Móna and Offaly County Council will reach agreement on who is the lead project sponsor and project champion.

As a regenerative tourism project, it is also assumed that there will be strategic partners included in the project's management and delivery and that these are likely to include Coillte, the Portarlington Community Development Association, and possibly the likes of the NPWS.

A management board would be formed under the chair of the lead project sponsor and be multi-agency in nature. The management board's primary role is to set the strategic direction and policy for Derrycastle and to oversee the performance of the operating company who will run the park on their behalf. It will also coordinate a strategic funding strategy and oversee the budgetary management of the operating company, on a year-to-year basis.

The day-to-day management of the site will be vested in an arms-length management company, potentially set up as a Designated Activity Company (DAC), owned by the lead project sponsor, with clearly set charitable objectives. It could also be a private company operating under a performance contract to the main project sponsor and their partners.



Above: infographic illustrating a Draft Operational Model for Derrycastle

FUNDING

Funding Streams

The EU's Just Transition Fund, co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the EU, opened on 29th August 2023 and runs until 2026. The Fund supports regions that are experiencing the negative impacts from the transition away from fossil fuel-intensive or greenhouse gas-intensive industries, such as the use of peat for energy generation.

As Ireland progresses toward a more environmentally friendly economy, Fáilte Ireland is set to implement the Regenerative Tourism and Place-making Scheme for Ireland's Midlands from 2023 to 2026, using the EU's Just Transition Fund. This initiative involves investing in the sustainable growth of tourism in the Midlands, aiming to broaden the regional economy by generating employment, promoting biodiversity and habitat preservation, and fostering community sustainability. The execution of the Regenerative Tourism & Place-making Scheme will involve various funding programs.

Part of this JTF funding is the Investment Grant-Aid Scheme for Private & Community SMEs, where there are five project categories that will be considered for funding:

- Category 1: Development or Enhancement of Sustainable Visitor Experiences
- Category 2: Development of Sustainable/Low Carbon Tourist Accommodation
- Category 3: Capital Project Planning & Design
- Category 4: Digital Transformation
- Category 5: Accessibility enhancements to provide a more inclusive visitor experience

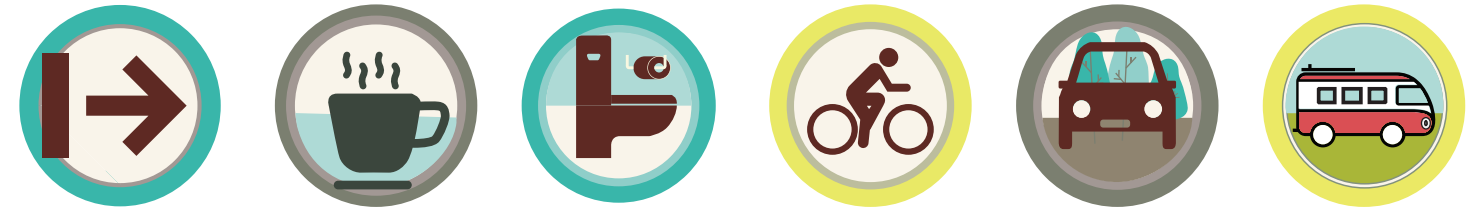
This scheme aims to offer financial assistance to small businesses, including private and community-based micro enterprises and SMEs. The goal is to enhance the overall visitor experience, with the aim of attracting more visitors, extending their time spent in the area, and encouraging overnight stays. Additionally, the initiative will provide support for businesses to enhance their digital capabilities, allowing them to take full advantage of digital opportunities and promoting greater inclusivity.

The 10 Year Development Plan for Derryounce is strongly aligned with the Just Transition funding and the Regenerative Tourism and Place-making Scheme, and it represents the primary opportunity for the project partners to draw down significant investment funding for the project.

First Phase Capital Projects

Projects that should be undertaken within the short-term include the following:

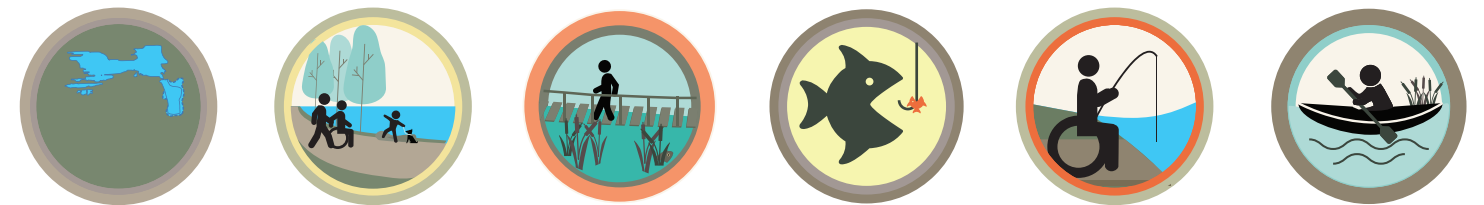
- Derryvilla entrance enhancements
- Sculpture installations and interpretive signage at Lough Lurgan
- Accessible fishing, fish-stocking, accessible trail at Lough Lurgan
- Enhancements at the 'Bog Beach' and at Derryounce Lake
- Activity-for-all provision, including junior play in a natural setting
- Forest Design strategy in partnership with Coillte



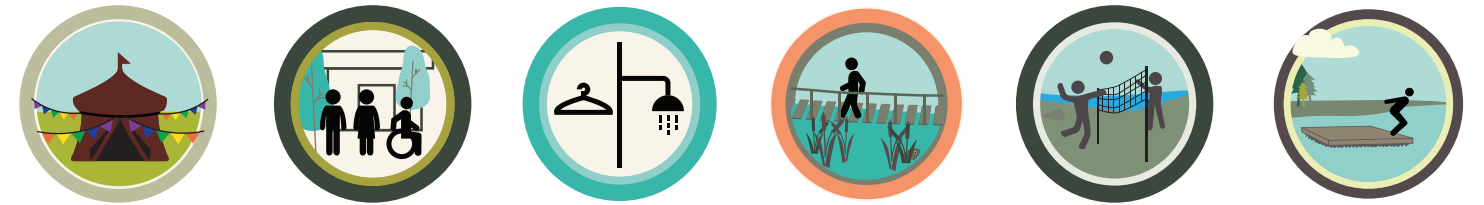
Above: icons illustrating the themes of projects contained in the Derryvilla enhancements



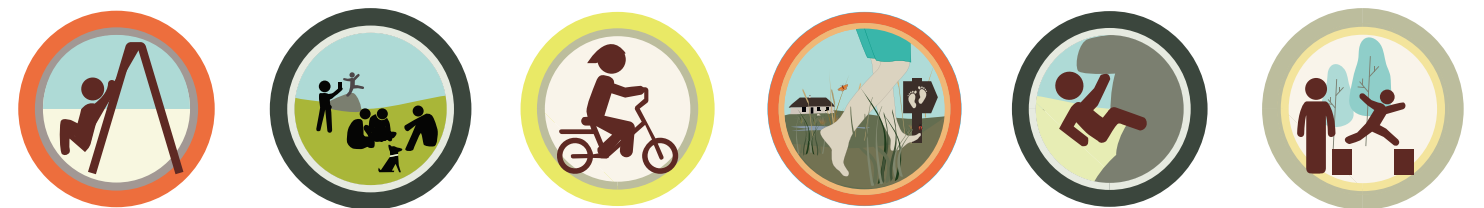
Above: icons illustrating the themes of projects contained in the branding, website, interpretive signage and land art enhancements



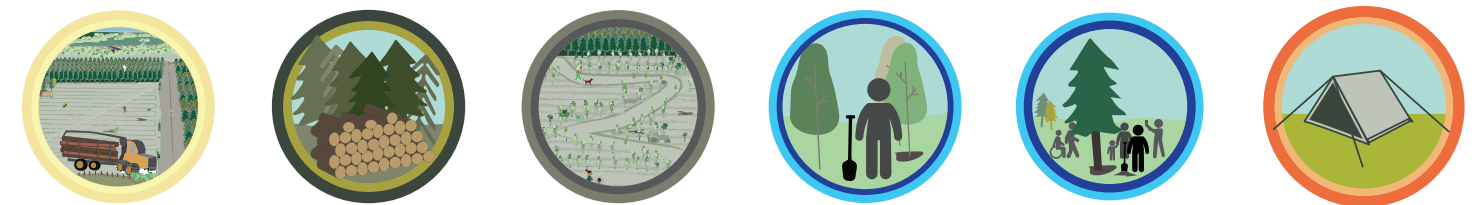
Above: icons illustrating the themes of projects contained in the Lough Lurgan enhancements



Above: icons illustrating the themes of projects contained in the Derryounce Lake & Bog Beach enhancements



Above: icons illustrating the themes of projects contained in 'Active Design for all' enhancements



Above: icons illustrating the themes of projects contained in Forestry Design enhancements

FUNDING

Funding Streams

The other funding initiatives captured here are also well-aligned to the project's objectives and should be assembled into an integrated and comprehensive funding strategy (refer to 'Recommendations').

European Just Transition Fund

The Just Transition Fund is the key tool to support the territories most affected by social and economic impacts of the transition towards climate neutrality.

Applications - CircularInvest

CircularInvest intends to support circular economy projects by providing a range of free project development assistance services, such as circularity optimisation, fundraising, and business development planning. Circular economy projects are selected th...

European Just Transition Fund

The Just Transition Fund is the key tool to support the territories most affected by social and economic impacts of the transition towards climate neutrality.

EU JUST TRANSITION FUND AND REGENERATIVE TOURISM AND PLACEMAKING SCHEME

An Introduction and Approach to Regenerative Tourism Issue

Call out for community climate action projects to join forces with Trinity researchers

Interested in taking action on the climate crisis but don't know how to make it happen? Researchers from Trinity College Dublin are looking to collaborate with communities on a locally-led 18-month project focusing on climate action.

Midlands Native Woodland - Coillte

The raised bogs of the Midlands are some of Ireland's most important habitats. Formed over millennia by plants decomposing without oxygen, healthy raised bogs provide a home for unique plants and wildlife.

Funding and Regulations - BNM Peatlands Climate Action Scheme

Funding and Regulations Home > The Department of Environment, Climate and Communications has approved ongoing grant funding up to €108 million to Bord na Mona in relation to the enhanced rehabilitation of its peatlands under the Peatlands Climate Action...

Community

We're helping to improve quality of life for people across the country, through community funds, charitable contributions and local amenities.

WaterLANDS: Water-based solutions for carbon storage, people and wilderness.

WaterLANDS is an EU-funded project that will restore wetland sites across Europe and upscale wetland restoration for sustainable ecosystems, communities and economies.

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme

The scheme supports outdoor recreation activities such as walking, trekking, cycling, kayaking and hiking. It helps to make use of the resources of the countryside that contribute to healthy active lifestyles. It supports the economic and tourism potent...

Fáilte Ireland | National Tourism Development Authority

Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, provides a range of practical support and advice to Irish tourism businesses.

Green Party creates €3bn Climate & Nature Fund

The creation of a €3bn State fund to invest in vital climate and nature projects has been hailed by Green Party ministers and TDs as one of the most important and far-sighted decisions of any Irish Government ever.

EU JTF Community Facilities EV Charging Scheme - Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly

The first of the funding schemes under the EU Just Transition Fund has been launched! A new scheme through Zero Emission Vehicle Ireland (ZEV) is available in Ireland's EU JTF territory to install Electric Vehicle chargers in community facilities.

EU JTF Investment Grant-Aid Scheme for Private & Community SMEs - Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly

Fáilte Ireland launched on 29th August 2023 an open call for Expressions of Interest for the Investment Grant-Aid Scheme for Private & Community SMEs as part of the EU Just Transition Fund Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking Scheme for Ireland's Midlands...

EU JTF Bioeconomy Demonstration Initiative Scheme - Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly

A funding call for proposals has just been launched to advance a competitive bioeconomy for a sustainable future in the EU Just Transition territory in Ireland. The Bioeconomy Demonstration Initiative scheme, part of the EU Just Transition Fund, will su...

Supporting Communities

ESB has a presence in every community in Ireland and we believe we have a vital part to play in supporting these communities to build a Brighter Future and help them reach their full potential. ESB is committed to supporting communities through programm...

Community Benefits Fund | Moanvane Wind Farm

The Community Benefit Fund for Moanvane is a significant fund, which will bring in the region of €300,000 per year to the local community, which adds up to €4,500,000 over the lifetime of the project.

Rural Regeneration and Development fund

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund is a commitment of €1 billion by government to be invested in rural Ireland over the period 2019 to 2027.

Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme Funding 2023

A fund of up to €500,000 is being made available to support community-led projects as part of the Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme 2023. Following a successful call in 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 the Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme, is no...

RURACTIVE - Empowering rural communities to act for change | RURACTIVE

Empowering rural communities to act for change

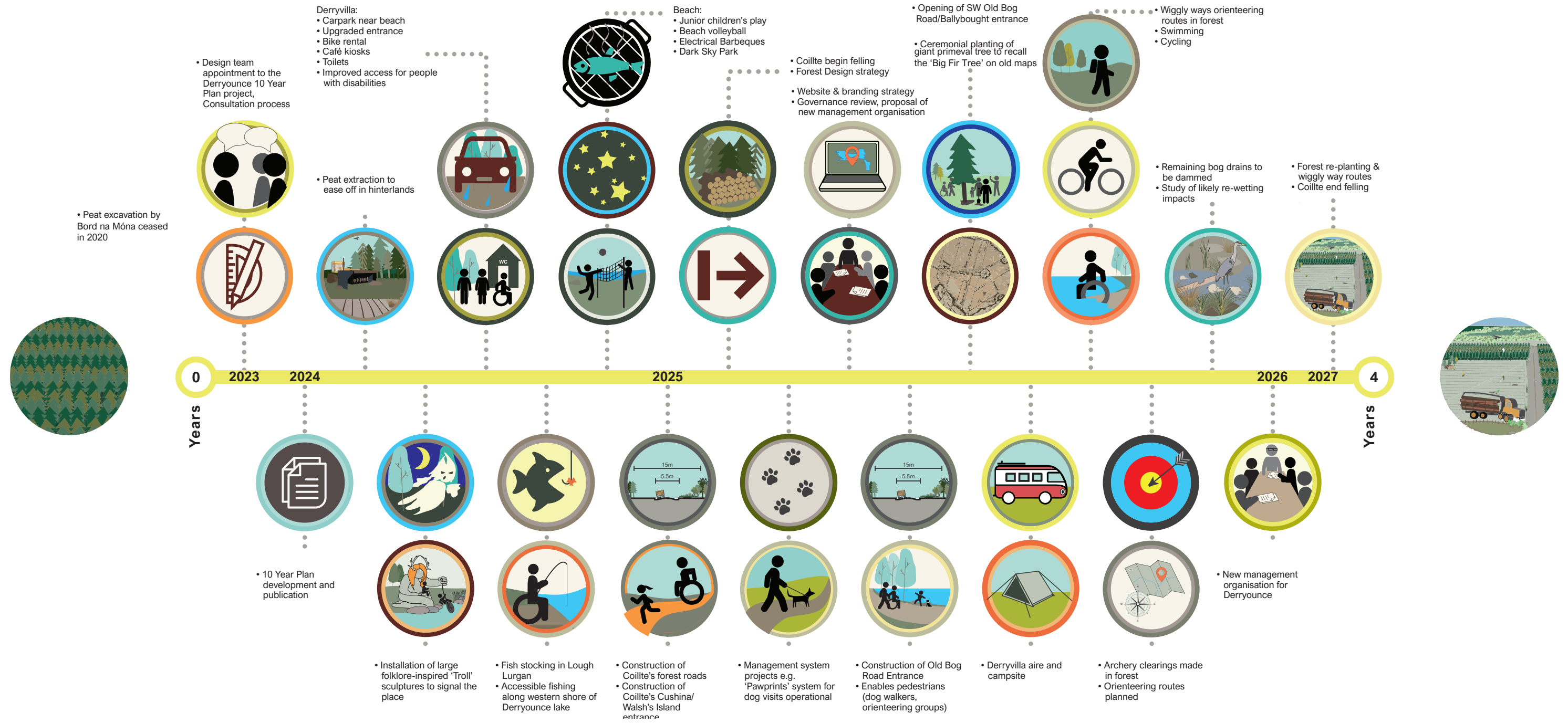
Community Benefits - Coillte

We have developed a bespoke wind farm Community Benefit Scheme for communities close to our wind farms. It includes...

Above: A sample of funding sources strategically aligned to the delivery of the 10 Year Plan

DERRYOUNCE: PROJECTED TIMELINE 0-4

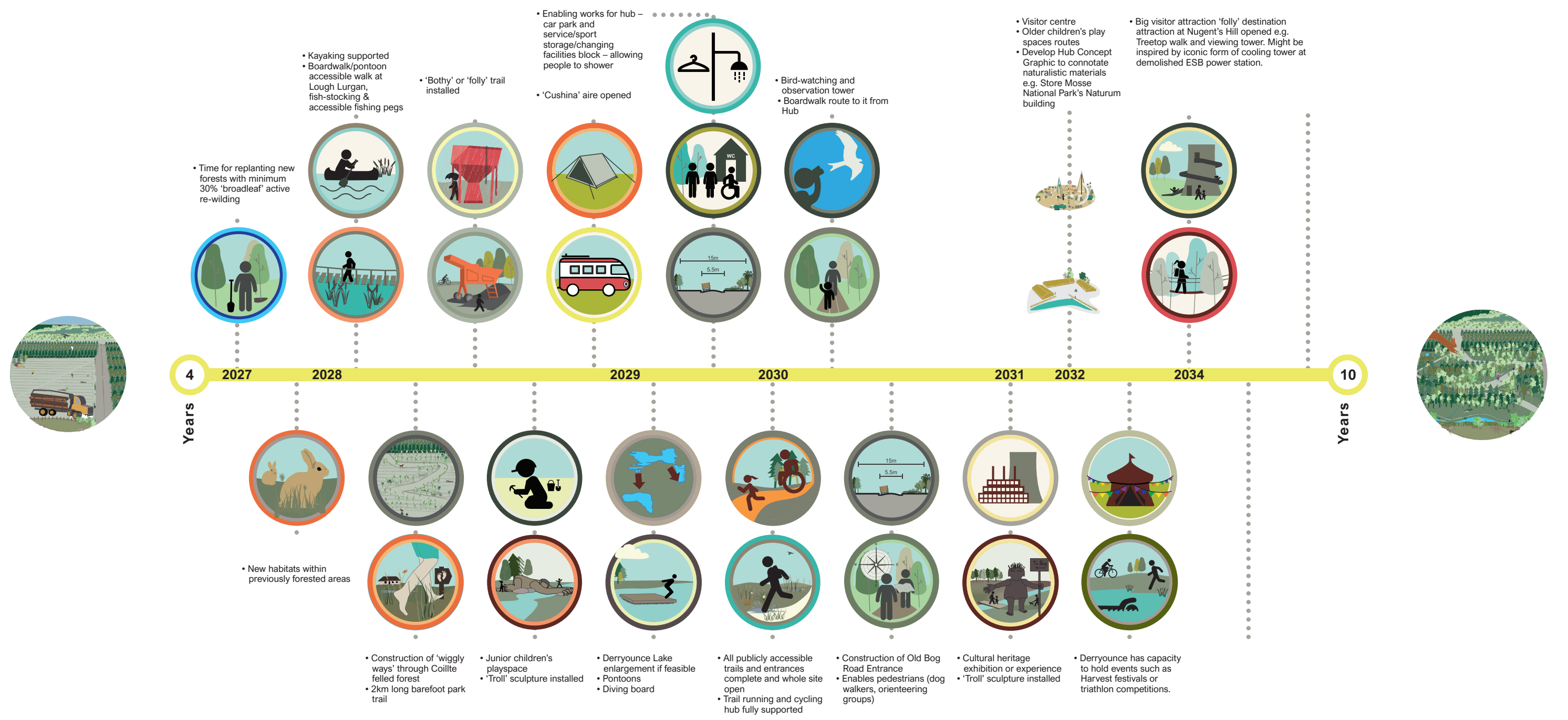
WHERE THE WILD THINGS GO Year 0 - 4



DERRYOUNCE: PROJECTED TIMELINE 4-10

WHERE THE WILD THINGS GROW Year 4 - 7

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE Year 7 - 10



eachtra
athuair

recommendations



thumadh sa gan choinne

siúl
snámh
rothaíocht
tumadh
aimsigh

tine an mhadra rua

RECOMMENDATIONS

Governance (Ownership, Management, Partnerships & Funding)

- To deliver on the vision of the 10 Year Development Plan, a new operational model is required for Derrycastle. Offaly County Council (OCC), Bord na Móna (BnM) and Coillte, as lead project sponsors, should commission a review of the ownership and management model for Derrycastle to put in place a new structure capable of delivering an international visitor destination at the site. (See guidance in section 7 of the report). The existing licensing regime should be reviewed as part of this process to remove restrictions on cycling, camping and swimming activity at the site with the provision of appropriate new management measures. The review should target the implementation of new management arrangements for Q1 2025 to overlap with the expiry of the current PCDA license arrangements.
- Community agreement has been central to the development of Derrycastle and this should remain central to the development of new governance arrangements. The Council should broker a fully inclusive partnership network inclusive of the community sector to help co-produce and deliver the new sports and recreational opportunities within the 10-Year Plan.
- Mindful of the strategic funding opportunity provided by the EU's Just Transition Fund, which opened in August 2023, the lead project sponsors should prepare a strategic funding strategy to fully align the 10-Year Plan with the five prescribed categories of this fund. The strategy should also address funding opportunities from other sources, as highlighted in chapter 7 of the report.
- OCC should incorporate the 10-Year Plan within the next review of the statutory County Development Plan, scheduled for October 2025.

Strategic Infrastructure

Strategic Infrastructure means things like active travel linkages (cycling and walking), green infrastructure and nature, a signal attraction, leisure activities, heritage, way-finding, interpretation and art, overnight accommodation, and water-bodies.

- OCC in partnership with Kildare and Laois County Councils, the Department for Transport, BnM, Fáilte Ireland, and TII (Transport Infrastructure Ireland) should review the regional plans for greenway/blueway links to connect through Derrycastle as a future network gateway. The key route connections are north to Mount Lucas Wind Farm and then onto the Grand Canal Greenway; and south through Portarlinton to the Barrow Blueway. Eastwards there is potential to

link across Derrycastle Bog towards Monasterevin and onto the Umeras peatland bog project near Rathangan.

- Given the geotechnical and environmental sensitivities, BnM and OCC should commission a detailed feasibility study to establish the engineering, hydro-geological and environmental design requirements for an extension of the 'lower lake' at Derrycastle for sports and recreational use. This needs to be completed before new permanent facilities and trails are designed within the immediate lake shore area.
- In association with an appropriate funding strategy linked to the Just Transition Fund programme, OCC and BnM should commission a multi-disciplinary design team to prepare a detailed planning application for a 'signal' attraction and associated visitor centre building at Derrycastle. This destination attraction should be located at 'Nugent's Island', with a visitor centre and associated infrastructure (services building, dark sky and bird-watching observation tower, parking area, all-abilities loop trails) possibly located in the north-eastern quadrant of the existing Coillte forestry plantations.
- Derrycastle should broaden its leisure offer, with provision for all ages and abilities, in all seasons, with a mix of 'active' and 'passive' activities, ranging from angling pegs and dog exercise areas, to bouldering zones and mountain bike trails.
- Derrycastle should develop a coordinated site-wide art strategy to develop a sense of place and points of interest and assist with interpretation of the site's rich history.
- Sensitively-designed visitor accommodation is central to the regenerative tourism objectives of the 10-Year Plan. With appropriate governance arrangements in place, the project sponsors should establish a strategic partnership with a holiday accommodation provider to develop lodge, camping and camper-van aire facilities suitably integrated with the new access points to Derrycastle and linked to the regional active travel network.
- Adjoining landowners who may wish to propose short-stay residential developments or outdoor based self-catered accommodation should consider the information contained in Fáilte Ireland's 'EU JTF Regenerative Tourism & Placemaking for Ireland's Midlands 2023-2026', and the supporting guidance, application guidelines, and information webinars and presentations available online¹, especially the FI publication 'An Introduction and Approach

to Regenerative Tourism'.² Design proposals intended for planning consideration by the local authority should address key priorities and principles of regenerative tourism and placemaking objectives, such as innovative architecture and design; low carbon footprint; improved biodiversity; accessibility and inclusion; wellness; landscape impacts; biodiversity net gain; community inclusion and community gains.

- Derrycastle should develop as a vital Green Infrastructure Core on the planned north-south Wilderness Corridor in Offaly. 'Active' and 'passive' wilding strategies can happen as blocks of coniferous plantation forestry are felled by Coillte, with a sensitive forestry design developed in tandem with Coillte and Coillte Nature. Derrycastle should aim to 'expand' to 500 hectares in area, an ideal size to support wildlife and nature.

Facilities Upgrade (Access, Trail & Rest Facilities)

Several short-term project actions should be implemented under the current management provisions during 2024:

- OCC and the PCDA should immediately progress the delivery of the new entrance and car park provisions on Edenderry Road, including the provision of new toilets, changing and storage facilities. Planning permission should be secured by the end of Q2 2024 and aligned to available funding programmes.
- Accurate digital topographic site and bathymetric surveys of the water-bodies should be commissioned to inform future design projects.

Medium-term projects include the following:

- The design and development of 'forest roads' in co-ordination with Coillte, and the selection of an appropriate site entrance/exit for felling works
- The design and development of dispersed entrances to the site's perimeter; to the south at Old Bog Road/Ballybought; Kilcappagh to the west; to Moanvane Wind Farm's planned 6km of amenity trails to the north-west; to the R400 to the north directly linking Walsh Island to Derrycastle; and along the planned off-road active travel loop to Mount Lucas, 11.23km to the north.
- The design and development of a perimeter loop route of the Derrycastle lands to support walkers and runners, and also to support emergency access around the site when required.
- Traffic-calming measures along the Edenderry Road, R419.

Forest & Trail Design (Restorative Nature)

- A working partnership with Coillte, OCC, and BnM should prepare a transition plan for the silvicultural management of the forested areas of Derrycastle to provide for the alignment of the ongoing commercial thinning and replanting of the forest with the planning recreational development of the forest and the wider objectives of the 10-Year Plan for restorative nature.
- In order to broaden its leisure offer, with provision for all ages and abilities, in all seasons, a mix of 'active' and 'passive' activities, ranging from angling pegs and dog exercise areas to bouldering zones and mountain bike trails, should be developed and integrated with the evolving forest and bog landscape.
- A coordinated site-wide art strategy should be commissioned to build on the current network of forest art installations and develop a sense of place and points of interest. This will assist with interpretation of the site's rich natural and industrial history and help build a sense of community ownership and identity across the landscape.

Destination Positioning (Events, Programming, Branding & Marketing)

The lead project sponsor should commission an agency to develop the creative output and brand identity for Derrycastle. This should involve consultation on naming and positioning, soft market testing with stakeholders and further design development, narrative, and copy-writing. This will anchor the destination messaging with impact and integrity and establish a baseline for successful audience awareness and visitor growth.

Management of recreational activities & events

As Derrycastle develops there will a requirement to introduce a management plan to coordinate and align the many sporting and recreational interest groups that use the forest and lakes. This management plan will regulate the use of Derrycastle amongst occasionally competing interests, ensuring that the space is shared and cared for in accordance with an agreed code of conduct and in line with the lease provisions as provided by BnM and Coillte. All clubs and activities using Derrycastle should be affiliated to the management plan and should operate in accordance with its provisions by means of health & safety, environmental and amenity impact, and the conduct of members.

¹ <https://www.failteireland.ie/JustTransition.aspx>

² https://issuu.com/discoverireland/docs/an_introduction_and_approach_to_regenerative_touri



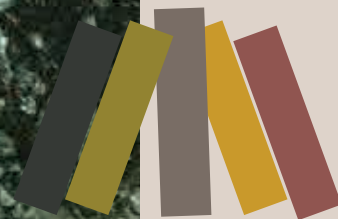
appendix

9

áit athshamlaithe le hathchóiriú, iniúchadh agus súgradh

siúl
snámh
rothaíocht
tumadh
aimsigh

eachtra
athuair



DERRYOUNCE: BASELINE STUDY

Existing Routes & Landscape Types

The following three pages of Baseline Maps provided the project team with a starting point for public consultation and concept generation, offering a representation of the baseline site conditions found at Derryounce.

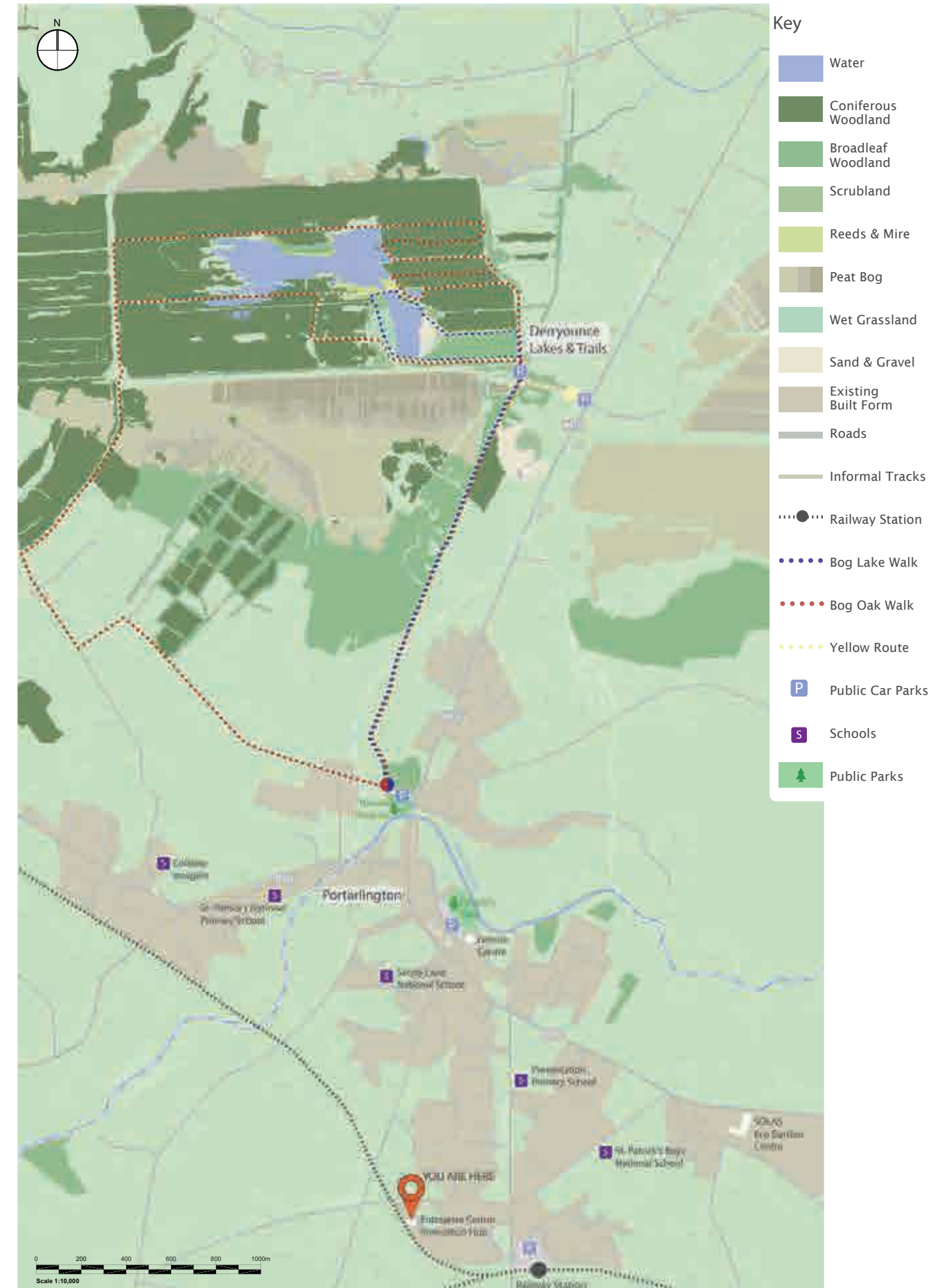
They illustrate the physical characteristics and landscape types which exist within the site and its wider hinterlands and provide context with regards to surrounding transport links and existing recreational routes



Above: Existing trail along the watercourse linking Lough Lurgan and Derryounce Lake



Above: Existing lakeshore at Lough Lurgan



Above: Baseline Plan showing existing landscape types (peatlands, woodlands, urban and peri-urban areas) around Derryounce



Above: Baseline Plan showing existing routes and landscape types (peatlands, woodlands, urban and peri-urban areas) around Derryounce



Above: Baseline Plan showing existing routes and landscape types (peatlands, woodlands, urban and peri-urban areas) around Derrycastle

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS



- Central regional location
- Strong public transport links (train, bus)
- Portarlinton's proximity to Derryounce on an existing off-road active travel link
- Natural beauty
- Sensitive development & art trails
- Recreational activities
- Strong community group (PCDA)
- Major linkages via peat lands to other natural areas and tourism amenities throughout Offaly & beyond.
- Existing goodwill & levels of use of the emerging parklands

WEAKNESSES



- Limited car parking & amenity facilities
- Pressures on Edenderry Road entrance
- Issues for people with disabilities
- Infrastructure
- Maintenance and conservation
- Signposting, way-finding, legibility
- Lack of places to stay over-night in local area
- Dominance of coniferous forest
- Potential conflicts in ownership, leasing and licence-holding situations
- Identity

OPPORTUNITIES



- Counterweight to existing attractions in western Offaly
- Opportunities for sporting & training centres of excellence, training and events with their potential revenue streams.
- Nature-based and regenerative tourism
- Potential for expansion to adjacent lands
- Ecological restoration & climate change adaptation
- Peat re-wetting & landscape re-wilding
- Heritage & education, circular economy
- Links to other green-blue 'mosaic' sites
- Cycling trailhead linking the Barrow Blueway and the Grand Canal Greenway

THREATS



- Climate change and resilience
- Land use conflicts (ecological, sporting, wildlife, adjacent sites)
- Land ownership, leasing and licence holding arrangements & areas
- Funding constraints
- Changing visitor preferences
- Invasive plant and animal species

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

Public Transport Links: Portarlinton is 66.00km and a 1hr24min distance from Dublin by train and is served by an hourly train from Heuston Station to Portarlinton Train Station. Bus Eireann and JJ Kavanagh provide regular bus connections from the capital city, arriving in the Market Square of Portarlinton. Derrycastle is directly accessible on a 2.50km length off-road active travel route from the town.

Adjacent Lands: A map should be prepared illustrating lands in separate ownership to which direct connections can be made from Derrycastle, and related uses supported, such as at the Derrycastle/Tinnacranagh Bog to the east and Derrycastle Bog to the south. To the north and west lie the Moanvane Coillte forestry plantations, planned wind farms and peripheral peatlands.

Natural Beauty: Derrycastle's lakes and trails offer breath-taking natural scenery, attracting visitors who appreciate the beauty of a magical wild landscape, wildlife, and recreation. Offaly County Council's County Development Plan has one of its objectives to work with stakeholders including Bord na Móna, Coillte, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Waterways Ireland, and Just Transition groups to examine developing a Wilderness Corridor on rehabilitated peatlands in East Offaly, including Derrycastle Bog.¹

Ecological Restoration: The 'post-peat' era can provide an opportunity for ecological restoration, creating a more diverse ecosystem and silviculture, and promoting biodiversity within Derrycastle.

Focal Point & Other Gains: The Joint Laois/Offaly LAP states that one of the benefits of recreational amenities is to 'provide a focal point', as well as the following other expected gains:

- The creation of a community spirit and sense of place.
- Encouraging physical activity, health, and fitness
- Access to nature and the environment.
- The creation of a pleasant environment to attract business and inward investment.
- Climate change adaptation.²

Recreational Activities: The presence of trails and lakes at Derrycastle opens opportunities for various recreational activities, such as play, water-based

sports, hiking, jogging, cycling, boating, fishing, and wildlife observation; forest-bathing and therapeutic restoration through sensory experience of the landscape. Derrycastle is well-positioned to serve as a 'node' between trails and tracks planned for the Midlands Cycling Destination strategy, especially if an overnight stay forms part of its offer to visitors.

Unique Selling Point: Derrycastle's history as a peat extraction site can be leveraged as a unique selling point, as a distinctive counterweight to the offer presented at Lough Boora Discovery Park, offering visitors a chance to learn about the land's transformation and the importance of sustainable resource management.

Educational Opportunities: Derrycastle can serve as an educational hub, providing informative displays, guided tours, and workshops on environmental conservation, ecosystem restoration, and the significance of peatland conservation.

Heritage Opportunities: Derrycastle presents a suitable location to host an interpretive exhibition and history of the bogs and peat extraction and related energy and horticultural industries, particularly at a future Visitor Centre building.

Weaknesses

Accessibility: The rural location of Derrycastle limits its accessibility, especially for visitors without private transportation. Local schools report a wish to gain access to the site regularly by means of cycling without resorting to a bus. A facility to rent bicycles (including electrically charged cargo bicycles) in Portarlinton to arrive at the site using the 2.50km route would help mitigate this, as might reducing road speeds along the busy Edenderry Road. Pedestrians should be given priority at the crossing point to the car-park over vehicles. Strengthening such transport links will support the ambition of the 'Connecting People – Connecting Places' vision to connect Portarlinton with the Grand Canal via Mount Lucas Wind Farm and connecting the People's Park along the River Barrow to Derrycastle (TMO12, TMO13) along a mosaic of connected green spaces.

Facilities: Limited size of the existing car-park to accommodate overflow car parking, and confusing presence of wider entrance area at site entrance which is being used for drop-off. An in-out system should be established, with clear vehicular sight-lines for people and vehicles exiting the site. Retention of existing vegetation and drain should be key in this, along with permeability and natural SuDS drainage.



Above: Derrycastle Lake

Smaller secondary car-parking areas might be considered at other entrances to the site..

Portarlinton: Market Square, which has elegant proportions and beautiful heritage buildings, now presents a confusing 'welcome mat' for visitors arriving in Portarlinton by public transport, being dominated by roads and car-parking. Cycle rental options should be provided here at Portarlinton, and eventually at Derrycastle itself, to support independent active travel for people of all ages and

abilities to the place.

Infrastructure Development: Development at Derrycastle will require significant infrastructure development, including visitor facilities, trails, signage, and viewpoints, which could be costly and time-consuming. The Joint LAP policy EEO13 supports the provision of maps and signage at tourism nodes, including Derrycastle Lakes and Trails.

¹ Objective BLO-28, Chapter 4 Biodiversity and Landscape and Figure 6.13 'Midlands Cycling Destination, Offaly Network Map'

² 'Draft Portarlinton Joint Local Area Plan, 2018-2024', Laois County Council & Offaly County Council, 2018

SWOT ANALYSIS

Lack of Amenities: Depending on the level of development, Derrycastle currently lacks amenities such as rest-rooms and food stalls, making it less appealing for some visitors. A Changing Place should be provided at the future visitor centre building to support visits and stays for people with disabilities.

Initial Negative Perceptions: The history of peat extraction might create a negative perception among some visitors who associate the area with environmental degradation. Effective marketing and communication can help overcome this perception. This might also create negative and hostile attitudes and perceptions among people who continue to extract peat commercially for burning in residential homes and for export as a horticultural product, and those who have not transitioned to considering a 'next-use' for their lands.

Aftercare, maintenance and conservation: Maintaining the ecological balance of the restored ecosystem requires careful monitoring and management. Lack of funding and resources could pose challenges in preserving Derrycastle's biodiversity and mitigating potential ecological threats.

Opportunities

Nature-Based & Regenerative Tourism: Derrycastle can tap into the growing trend of nature-based tourism, attracting eco-conscious travellers who seek immersive experiences in natural environments

Residential Stay Opportunities: Providing appropriate space for camper-vans to park, and designating areas for 'glamping' and cabins may present a revenue stream opportunity and encourage people to stay longer in the region, and support the objectives of regenerative tourism and place-making.

Community Engagement: Collaborating with local communities and stakeholders can foster a sense of ownership and involvement, ensuring the long-term sustainability and success of the place

Active Travel: Part of Offaly's de-carbonisation actions and projects³⁴, Derrycastle has been identified as an area which can support Sustainability Mobility policies by continuing to improve the walkways and facilities. Policy TR-19 of Offaly's CDP identifies potential active travel linkages which could be developed to connect Derrycastle to the People's Park in Portarlington and to Mount Lucas Windfarm

³ '(Draft) Climate Action Plan 2024-2029', Offaly County Council, 2023.
⁴ 'Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024', Offaly County Council, 2019.

(11.23km to the north) on a mixture of serviced walking, cycling, and driving trails, connecting the Barrow Blueway with the Grand Canal Greenway/the Shannon Blueway.⁵

Peatland Restoration: Derrycastle, positioned in the heart of the Midlands Region, with good public transport connections nearby at Portarlington, may contribute strongly to promoting ecological balance, biodiversity and carbon sequestration and the study of same. If the project is developed with established raised bog restoration,^{6 7 8} peatland rehabilitation, and nature conservation⁹ principles, it will strongly align with EU, national and regional biodiversity, climate action, and ecosystem accounting policies and strategies.

'Restoration' means the process of assisting through human interventions aimed at the recovery of the natural functions and values of degraded peatlands, specifically those that have been drained. The primary techniques employed for restoration include re-wetting and the restoration of vegetation in the degraded peatlands. 'Rehabilitation' refers to areas that were used for peat production, and employs similar methods to restoration. However, the peatlands where rehabilitation techniques are used have often degraded so much that the functional peatland cannot be restored, and alternative habitat types are developed instead.¹⁰

Partnerships: Forming partnerships with environmental organisations, universities, and research institutions can facilitate scientific research, conservation efforts, and knowledge-sharing, further enhancing Derrycastle's reputation and attractiveness as a destination attraction.

Cultural, Industrial, Energy and Historical Interpretation: Incorporating cultural and historical elements into Derrycastle's design, way-finding, signage, and interpretation can provide visitors with a deeper understanding of the region's heritage and its relationship with bogs, peat extraction, agriculture, power production and forestry.

Sustainable Practices: Implementing sustainable practices such as renewable energies, circular

⁵ <https://www.nationaltransport.ie/planning-and-investment/transport-investment/active-travel-investment-programme/>
⁶ https://ireland.representation.ec.europa.eu/projects/eu-funded-project-helps-restore-irelands-raised-bogs_en;
⁷ <http://www.ipcc.ie/>
⁸ 'Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland, Irish Wildlife Manuals No. 99', National Parks and Wildlife Services
⁹ <https://www.coillte.ie/our-business/our-projects/nature-conservation/>
¹⁰ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/FP/FP-eap/ecosystemaccounts-peatlandsandheathlands2018/restorationandrehabilitationofpeatlands/>



Above: woodland walk at Derrycastle, with remnant of industrial heritage at the place

economy principles, waste management, non-herbicidal and fungicidal weed and pest control, and responsible regenerative tourism initiatives can position Derrycastle as a model for environmentally conscious initiatives.

Halt Biodiversity Loss: Providing a more complex and climate-resilient planting palette when re-planting felled areas of commercial plantation forestry will help support pollinators and wildlife at the site. Re-wetting and re-wilding perimeter bog areas or re-discovering

in-filled water bodies such as the original Lough Lurgan tarn to the north of the site may also help this.

Carbon Sink: Derrycastle, primarily forested, is surrounded by perimeter degraded peatlands. Continued tree planting and associated peatland restoration and rehabilitation projects may lead to reduced peat decomposition, associated biodiversity benefits, and peatland re-wetting. These measures all contribute to mitigating climate change by reducing the release of stored carbon into the atmosphere.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Managed properly, landscape restoration and rehabilitation projects may inspire similar efforts in the surrounding degraded peatlands, leading to an expansion of the 'carbon sink' effect.

Threats

Climate Change: Derrycastle's ecosystems and landscapes might be vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and increased risk of natural disasters, which could affect the place's viability and resilience.

Climate Resilience: A proposed planting palette will have to take cognisance of the expected temperature increases over the next 50 years, as well as potential increases in plant diseases such as Ash Die-back. A resilient planting palette, including native and non-native plants and trees, should be formed in consultation with ecologists, foresters and arborists.

Land Use Conflicts: Issues over land use, such as competing interests for commercial development or agricultural expansion, could threaten the integrity of Derrycastle, and its ability to function as a protected natural area.

Changing Visitor Preferences: Shifts in visitor preferences and demand for different recreational activities or experiences may require continuous adaptation and diversification of offerings to maintain Derrycastle's appeal.

Governance Model: As activities and footfall increase at Derrycastle, a new governance model may have to evolve to care for the place.

Funding Constraints: Securing sustainable funding for Derrycastle's operations, maintenance, and future development could be a challenge, particularly if government support or alternative revenue streams are limited.

Managing Conflicts: Derrycastle may need to be seasonally managed for example, to prevent noisy human and dog activity in certain areas during bird-nesting seasons. Sporting activities, such as wind-surfing, angling, and wild swimming, could be difficult to co-locate in the same water body without club consultation. The introduction of humans or the intensification of human activity into a sensitive wetland and forest landscape must be balanced with the ecology and biodiversity of the site.



Above: Peaceful atmosphere at Lough Lurgan.

