

**SEA Environmental Report
Appendix 1
Non-Technical Summary**

***Draft Visitor Experience & Management Masterplan for Glendalough
and Wicklow Mountains National Park, Co. Wicklow***

Prepared on behalf of Fáilte Ireland

November 2022

(Revised 2023)



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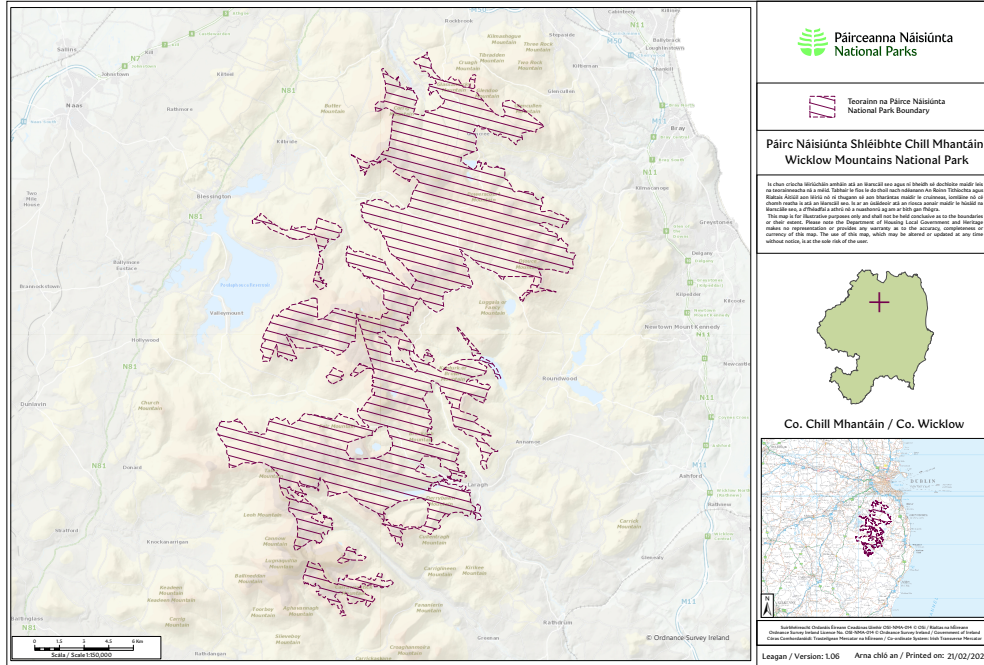
1. Introduction

This report is the Non-Technical Summary of the Environmental Report for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the *Draft Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park (Draft VEMMP)*.

The *Draft VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park* is a multi-layered, medium term strategic draft plan aimed at the sustainable development and management of tourism in the National Park and wider County Wicklow commensurate with the environmental capacity of the area. The *Draft VEMMP* is a non-statutory plan and is informed by the statutory plans for the area, including the *Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028*, and the *Laragh – Glendalough Tourism and Settlement Plan*, incorporated into the *Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028*. In practical terms, it could be considered to sit under the County Development Plan, including the *Laragh – Glendalough Tourism and Settlement Plan*, which has itself been subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment.

The primary purpose of the *Draft VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park* is to balance the ever-increasing desire for people to visit and experience Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park, with the overriding importance of protecting and conserving those values which give the area its significance. The over-arching objective is to create a sustainable balance between enhancing the area as a visitor destination based on outdoor recreation and conserving its natural, built and cultural heritage. Considerations of environmental protection have guided formulation of the *Draft VEMMP* and it is subject to both environmental assessment (SEA) and assessment in relation to protection of European sites (Appropriate Assessment).

The *Draft VEMMP* has been compiled by a multi-disciplinary team, led by Consarc Design Group, on behalf of the commissioning authorities, Fáilte Ireland in partnership with National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the Office of Public Works (OPW), the National Monuments Service (NMS), Wicklow County Council and Coillte. The work included significant levels of consultation with interested persons, organisations and communities. The Environmental Report and Non-Technical Summary have been prepared by Doyle Kent Planning Partnership Ltd on behalf of Fáilte Ireland, The National Tourism Development Authority.



Wicklow Mountains National Park

2. Wicklow Mountains National Park

There are six National Parks in Ireland of which the Wicklow Mountains National Park is the largest at nearly 22,000 hectares. The National Park covers more than one tenth of County Wicklow, from Glenasmole in the Dublin Mountains southwards to the slopes of Lugnaquilla.

Most of the National Park is designated as a special area of conservation (SAC) and special protection area (SPA) and it contains a range of archaeological, architectural, ecclesiastical and mining heritage sites. The Wicklow Mountains National Park is an IUCN Category II National Park. These are areas that are defined as *“large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities”*.¹

The National Park is managed in accordance with international criteria set down by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and is included in the United Nations list of National Parks and Equivalent Reserves.

The popularity of the National Park and, in particular of Glendalough, poses significant challenges in respect of access, parking, congestion, orientation, interpretation and provision of both commercial facilities and amenities. There are currently approximately 1.5 million visitors per annum to the National Park, but almost half of these visits are concentrated on Glendalough, with 735,000 visitors per annum, of which approximately 80,000 attend the Glendalough Visitor Centre (numbers are reducing year by year). As the population of the State continues to grow, it is anticipated that pressures on the National Park are likely to intensify in future years.

¹ IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature

3. Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is the formal, systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing a plan or programme, such as the *Draft VEMMP*, before a decision is made to adopt the plan or programme.

The steps in the SEA process, as described (in general) in the recently published Ministerial guidance: *Draft Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities 2021* are:

Stages in SEA Process	
Screening	Screen plans to decide if SEA is necessary
Scoping	Scope the contents of the Environmental Report
Environmental Report - baseline	Collect baseline environmental data, consider strategic environmental objectives, planning alternatives, assess impacts, propose mitigation measures
Environmental Report	Preparation of Environmental Report
Consultations on the draft Plan and Environmental Report - will also include Natura Impact Statement in the case of Wicklow Mts. Nat. Park VEMMP	Consultations with relevant environmental authorities, the public and (if necessary) adjacent States
Adoption of the Plan SEA Statement	Provision of specified information on the Plan and the SEA process to the public and relevant environmental authorities, including any amendments to the Plan
Monitoring	Monitor the significant environmental effects of implementing the plan

4. Environmental Report

The Environmental Report is a part of the process of Strategic Environmental Assessment and it identifies, describes and evaluates the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the *Draft VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park* and reasonable alternatives, taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the VEMMP. The strategic environmental objectives for the SEA are described. The reasonable alternatives considered are described and the reasons for choosing the proposed VEMMP are set out. The existing environmental baseline is described. Measures to offset any significant adverse effects on the environment, due to implementation of the VEMMP, are included. Monitoring measures are set out.

The information to be contained in an Environmental Report in summary:

Summary of Information to be contained in an Environmental Report	
A	Outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan, and of its relationship with other relevant plans and programmes
B	Description of relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the evolution of that environment without implementation of the plan
C	Description of the environmental characteristics of areas likely to be significantly affected
D	Identification of any existing environmental problems which are relevant to the plan, particularly those relating to European protected sites
E	List environmental protection objectives, established at international, EU or national level, which are relevant to the plan and describe how those objectives and any environmental considerations have been taken into account when preparing the plan
F	Describe the likely significant effects on the environment (biodiversity, human health, fauna, etc.)
G	Describe any measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse environmental effects of implementing the plan
H	Give an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives considered, and a description of how the assessment was undertaken (including any difficulties)
I	A description of proposed monitoring measures
J	A non-technical summary of the above information

Information to be contained in Environmental Report

5. Draft Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan

The *Draft VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park* is a multi-layered, medium term strategic draft plan aimed at the sustainable development and management of tourism in the National Park and wider County Wicklow commensurate with the environmental capacity of the area. The *Draft VEMMP* is a non-statutory plan and is informed by the statutory plans for the area, including the *Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028*, and the *Laragh – Glendalough Tourism and Settlement Plan*, incorporated into the *Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028*. In practical terms, it could be considered to sit under the County Development Plan, including the *Laragh – Glendalough Tourism and Settlement Plan*, which has itself been subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment.

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In respect of the *Draft VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park*, the VEMMP team undertook a consultation process to discern key issues which affect the Wicklow Mountains National Park. The views of the public, stakeholders and certain public authorities were sought. Detailed site surveys were conducted to assess the existing ecological and archaeological sensitivities of the area, as well as to establish baseline visitor and traffic data. An innovative programme of online engagement was carried out.

With respect to sustainability, the draft *VEMMP* sets out a number of guiding principles, *inter alia*, in relation to:

- developing and implementing visitor management plans;
- encouraging responsible tourism including ongoing monitoring of environmental impacts;
- improving tourist management, particularly in mature and established tourist areas;
- increasing environmental performance among tourism businesses;
- encouraging sustainable modes of transport accessible to tourists;
- promoting environmental protection and enhancement when progressing actions derived from the *VEMMP*;
- ensuring the *VEMMP* contributes towards delivering on Ireland’s Climate Action Plan;
- ensuring adequate infrastructure is in place, including water and wastewater services.

5.1. Aims of the Draft VEMMP

The *Draft VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park (VEMMP)* has three main aims:

- Aim 1: *Enhance the natural, built and cultural heritage*
- Aim 2: *Disperse the benefits and impacts of tourism*
- Aim 3: *Improve the visitor experience*

The *Draft VEMMP* comprises a number of key elements which combine to create an integrated set of Aims, Objectives and Actions. A suite of technical reports details the appraisal of the existing context relevant to each aspect, and lays out the aims, objectives and actions to be addressed by any new proposals within the area. The structure of the *Draft VEMMP* can be divided into five broad sections:

- Understanding: Collating background information to achieve an understanding of the National Park and wider environment.
- Identification of issues – the main issues identified include: traffic, access and parking; management of visitors; impacts on ecology and archaeology; facilities to aid interpretation.
- Proposals: Recommendations to address key emerging issues.
- Delivery: Recommendations for implementing and managing proposals.
- Review: Environmental Assessments and an Economic Appraisal carried out of the *Draft VEMMP*. In addition, Appendix D2 to the *Draft VEMMP* sets out *Ecological Requirements for Successful Funding & Support of Projects Resulting from the Masterplan*.

5.2. Understanding

The “understanding” exercise included a number of outputs, which are set out in detail in Appendices A1 – A5 to the draft *VEMMP*.

- *Visitor Analysis* (Appendix A1) : This is a technical background document compiled by Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI), which brings together known information about previous and existing visitor patterns, trends and numbers to inform the *Draft VEMMP*.
- *Gazetteer of Existing Attractions, Trails and Activity Sites* (Appendix A2): The *Gazetteer* was compiled by the Paul Hogarth Company for the *Draft VEMMP*. The team members visited and collected information on a wide range of attractions and activities. This was supplemented during an extensive public consultation process to produce a comprehensive record of visitor sites.
- *Traffic Surveys* (Appendix A3): Control of traffic and parking in the Wicklow Mountains National Park, especially in the Glendalough-Laragh area, has been identified as a significant concern and is a particular focus of the *Draft VEMMP*. An extensive traffic and car parking survey was undertaken by Kevin McShane Ltd, Transport Planning Engineers, the weekend of 21st - 24th May 2021 (Whit weekend), in conjunction with Wicklow County Council.
- *Analysis and Concept Development* (Appendix A4): The initial analysis led to the formation, by The Paul Hogarth Company, of a concept development for the *Draft VEMMP*. This has been reviewed and developed through the consultation and detailed design process.
- *Public Consultation* (Appendix A5): A detailed report on the public consultation process was prepared by the Paul Hogarth Company and widely circulated so consultees could see the results of the feedback and the team’s interpretation of it.

5.3. Proposals of Draft VEMMP

There are three main initiatives proposed in the *Draft VEMMP*. These are outlined in the main *VEMMP* document and are set out in greater detail in Appendices B1-B3 to the *Draft VEMMP*.

- *Wicklow Wide*: High level dispersal strategy including visitor hubs through the County
- *Draft Recreational Trail Masterplan*: focused strategy for dispersal of outdoor recreation with detailed proposals for Discovery Trails
- *Draft Glendalough Valley Plan*: proposals for local Laragh-Glendalough area-wide strategies, informed by an *Interpretation Strategy*.

5.4. Wicklow Wide Strategy

Visitor activity in County Wicklow is primarily based on day trips to the county, overnight and longer stays in the county are limited and some popular locations for visitors are over-stretched, such as Glendalough. To relieve some of the pressure on these locations, the Wider Wicklow strategy aims to encourage visitors to visit other places in the County and to stay longer. The *Wicklow Wide Strategies* builds on the *Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2020-25*, wherein five *Outdoor Recreation Hubs* were identified for future development (Glendalough, Rathdrum, Blessington-Baltinglass, East Coast Maritime and Tinahely-Shillelagh).

The main proposals of the *Draft VEMMP* are set out in (i) the *Wicklow Wide Strategies* (The Paul Hogarth Company with Tandem Design), (ii) the *Wider Wicklow Interpretation Vision* and the (iii) *Wider Wicklow Interpretation Strategy* (Tandem Design). (In addition, there are detailed proposals for county-wide facilities for walking, cycling and car parking set out in the *Recreational Trails Masterplan* - see below).

In the *Draft VEMMP (Wicklow Wide Strategies)*, particular roles are assigned to individual locations, such as Glendalough, Roundwood/Ballinastoe, Blessington, Baltinglass, Tinahely-Shillelagh, the Wicklow Uplands, the Wicklow Coast, the Garden County including great houses.

Emphasis is placed on transportation improvements particularly in rail infrastructure. For sustainable tourism, use the main roads (M11/N11) and rail links as points of connection, from where to explore the county at a slower pace. Walking and cycling connections, including strategic routes from Arklow to Rathdrum and onwards to Laragh, will aid a sustainable modal shift. Signage, online and promotional material will strengthen cohesion.

Wider Wicklow Interpretation Vision – This sets out to identify less visited county- wide attractions and to alleviate pressure points elsewhere, by facilitating greater appreciation of such sites through interpretation.

Wider Wicklow Interpretation Strategy - The *Wider Wicklow Interpretation Strategy* outlines some of the key elements for visitor interpretation in the valleys and uplands near Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park. Selected sites are suggested for *interpretation journeys*. There is a focus on the mining and military heritage in the areas surrounding Glendalough, landscape change in the uplands, the ecclesiastical heritage and ancient monuments/archaeology.

Interpretation Journeys – the *Draft Wider Wicklow Interpretation Strategy* outlines potential for theme related journeys of interpretation in Wicklow (e.g. Industrial and mining histories of Glendalough, bringing in elements of mining, charcoal burning, links to England and Wales and the impact this has had on the landscapes of Wicklow.)

Key Interpretative Locations: In the general environs of Glendalough, proposed Key Interpretative Locations have been proposed:

- i. *Laragh and Glendalough Arrival Point:* a gateway in Laragh leading to the monastic settlement of Glendalough and into the Glendalough and Glenealo valleys (see *Glendalough Valley Plan*).
- ii. *Glens of Lead – Engagement Point:* This is envisaged as a stand-alone engagement point at the Wicklow Gap, providing a focal point to the history of mining around Glendalough.
- iii. *The Military Road:* This road, particularly through the Sally Gap and through the Uplands, is to function as a driving or cycling route, with key information points at sites along the way.

Wider Wicklow Themes and Topics: Glendalough area, the *Draft Wider Wicklow Interpretation Strategy* puts forward an expanded range of eight headings of themes and topics which have potential to direct interpretation and visitor journeys throughout the county. Suggested relevant sites and activities are included under each of eight heading:

- *Natural History & Biodiversity*
- *Ecclesiastical and Spiritual Heritage*
- *Military History*
- *Mining and Extractive Industry*
- *Ancient Monuments and Sites*
- *Big Houses, Castles and Formal Gardens*
- *Viking and Maritime Heritage*
- *Marine and Coastal Biodiversity*

5.5. Recreational Trails Masterplan

The *Recreational Trails Masterplan* is a county wide set of proposals to include:

- designation of sustainable ‘*Discovery Walks*’ (to cater for large numbers of people seeking an introduction to the outdoor environment),
- improvements to car parks and facilities,
- recommendations for off road cycling, including addressing the limited provision of family cycling opportunities,
- recognising the potential for the five *Outdoor Recreation Hubs*, previously designated by the *Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Forum*,
- a co-ordinated approach to signage,
- addressing the need for a central, online information hub.

The *Recreational Trails Masterplan* sets out proposals for six *Discovery Walks*, generally along routes already in use.² The *Recreational Trails Masterplan* also contains proposals for the upgrading of a number of existing popular sites to make them environmentally sustainable with detailed improvement at four of these [Great Sugar Loaf Mountain; Djouce Mountain; Spinc and Glenealo Valley; Lough Brays (Upper & Lower)] and sets out recommendations for improvements to parking facilities at a number of locations.³ Further dispersal will be achieved through the introduction of a shuttle bus service with promoted sustainable return walking routes. Current gaps in provision for off-road leisure cycling will be largely met by delivery of several regionally significant greenway projects across the county over the next 5 years.⁴ The five *Outdoor Recreation Hubs*, identified in the *Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2020-25*, and in the *Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028*, are addressed in terms of walking and cycling (Glendalough/Laragh; Rathdrum; Tinahely-Shillelagh; East Coast Maritime; Blessington-Baltinglass).

² Maulin; Clara Vale Jubilee Route; Table Tract Glenmalure; Little Sugar Loaf; Ballinaclesh Cushbawn Mt.; Ballinafunshoge Loop.

³ Great Sugar Loaf; Djouce; Lough Brays/Glencree; Lough Dan/Old Bridge; Glenmalure; Shay Elliot; Seskin; Glenmacnass Waterfall; Glendasan Lead Mines

⁴ (i) Blessington Lakes; (ii) Arklow to Shillelagh; (iii) Wicklow to Greystones; (iv) Southern cross to Kilmacanogue; (v) Various other greenways at concept level.

5.6. Glendalough Valley Plan

The *Draft VEMMP* contains a significant series of proposals for the Laragh-Glendalough area in the form of the *Draft Glendalough Valley Plan*. The *Glendalough Valley Plan* is to be implemented in phases and is aimed at transforming the visitor experience and minimising any negative impacts on the local community. The principal features include:

- *Creating a New Visitor Flow*: To geographically spread the visitor journey within the Glendalough valley, by developing the village of Laragh as a gateway to Glendalough.
- *Arriving at Laragh*: To provide improved physical connections between the village and Glendalough for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. This will include new car parking within the village of Laragh and a shuttle bus to Glendalough.
- *New All ability trail*: The *Glendalough Valley Plan* proposes a concept design for a new proposed 'all ability' trail connecting Laragh to the Monastic site in Glendalough and beyond to the Upper Lake and the Miner's Road.
- *New Interpretation*: The *Glendalough Valley Plan* proposes that Laragh is the ideal location for visitor facilities before and after a visit and to provide a clear understanding of the county.
- *Glendalough Visitor Centre*: To refurbish the existing Glendalough Visitor Centre as a destination and rationalise the existing car park in front of the visitor centre to provide a more direct access through the visitor centre and onwards to the monastic city.
- *Upper Lake*: To reduce and rationalise the Upper Lake car park, restrict its use to essential car parking requirements, provide the final drop off location for a shuttle bus. Provision of a specifically designed refreshment pavilion is proposed.

5.7. Integrating Environmental Protection and Management

The protection, enhancement and promotion of the natural environment has been an integral part of the formation of the draft *VEMMP* evidenced by:

- A firm commitment to ensuring sustainable and responsible tourism principles are practised
- Environmental assessments and resulting measuring and monitoring
- Integration of requirements for environmental protection and management

Integration of environmental considerations is addressed in the *VEMMP* Summary Document, and a *Masterplan Implementation Group* will be formed as part of the *VEMMP* and all objectives and actions coming from the Masterplan will require to be agreed and governed by this group. Guiding Principles for Environmental Protection and Environmental Management, together with related actions are set out in the Environmental Report and are reflected in the main draft *VEMMP* documents.

The draft *VEMMP* documentation, Environmental Report and Natura Impact Report set out appropriate mitigation measures to ensure accordance with sustainability objectives. Partners and stakeholders responsible for projects coming from the *VEMMP* will be required to demonstrate compliance with measures relating to sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management, in particular as set out in Appendix D2 of the draft

VEMMP. This is likely to include further survey work, production of Visitor Management Plans and detailed Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMP) as appropriate, at project development consent stage.

Fáilte Ireland and other Project Partners, with governance from the *Masterplan Implementation Group*, will provide funding and support for sustainable tourism projects that emerge as part of the VEMMP. To ensure full protection of the Natura 2000 Network and wider natural environment, the *Masterplan Implementation Group* will be tasked with governance in this regard.

A suite of good practice guidelines has been formulated by Fáilte Ireland, which will guide VEMMP related projects. Among these are:

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

Promoters of VEMMP related projects, where funded by Fáilte Ireland, will be required to manage any increase in visitor numbers or change in visitor behaviour to avoid significant adverse environmental effects. Where relevant, this will include a requirement for a *Visitor Management Plan*, incorporating monitoring. Infrastructural capacity at project level, including green infrastructure, will be considered by the *Masterplan Implementation Group* as projects resulting from the VEMMP arise. Developers of such projects will be encouraged to consider environmentally sustainable solutions for any infrastructure requirements, including contributing towards the maintenance of existing green infrastructure. Fáilte Ireland's *Environmental Damage Resolution* procedure provides for a consistent approach in recognising and where required responding to perceived or actual environmental damage. This procedure will be relevant in the implementation of the VEMMP.

Appendix D2 to the draft VEMMP is titled *Ecological Requirements for Successful Funding and Support of Projects Resulting from the Masterplan*. The Appendix sets out further, detailed environmental requirements for VEMMP related projects.

In addition to the foregoing and as required by law, projects arising from the VEMMP will be subject to statutory development consent procedures, principally in accordance with *the Planning and Development Acts, 2000-2022* (or any successor legislation). These procedures will include detailed assessment of the environmental effects of such future projects, including, as relevant, under the provisions of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC, the Floods Directive 2007/60/EC and the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2011/92/EU, as amended by 2014/52/EU). Public participation will be provided for in decision making on applications for development consent, as provided for ultimately in the Aarhus Convention [UNECE: *Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters*].

6. Environmental Sensitivities

SEA entails assessment of the likely significant effects on the environment of a plan or programme, including in relation to the environmental topics listed at Schedule 2 of the SEA Regulations (Annex I to the Directive), namely biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between these factors. Scoping was carried out, including consultation with statutory consultees, to identify which aspects of the environment and, particularly, which of the environmental topics require greater focus in the SEA process and reporting. The following table sets out particularly relevant sensitivities:

Environmental Topic	Key Sensitivities
Biodiversity and flora and fauna	Natura 2000 Sites, Natural Heritage Areas, Ramsar Sites, Salmonid Waters, Freshwater Pearl Mussel Catchments and Wildlife Sites (including Nature Reserves, Natural Heritage Areas and proposed Natural Heritage Areas) and all protected habitats and species including those listed on Annex IV of the Habitats Directive and Schedule 5 of the Wildlife Act 1976 as amended. Ecological connectivity and ecological corridors, non-designated biodiversity
Population and human health	Resident population and visitor trends Interactions with other topics
Soil	Hydrogeological and ecological function of the soil resource
Water	Status and quality of rivers, lakes, and ground waters (including interactions with increased demands on water supply and increased loadings to existing waste water treatment facilities)
Air and climatic factors	Climate change, transportation
Material Assets	Archaeological and architectural heritage, resources of economic value and non-renewable resources, water supply resources, waste water services infrastructure
Cultural Heritage	Record of Monuments and Places RMP (based on Sites & Monuments Record – SMR- of the National Monuments Service), potential World Heritage Tentative List site, areas of archaeological potential, record of protected structures, National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
Landscape	Scenic views, mapped areas of landscape sensitivity including as identified in the Wicklow County Development Plan

6.1. Interactions with Other Plans, Programmes and Legislation

The Environmental Report is required to consider the environmental protection objectives established at European, national, regional and county levels which are relevant to the *Draft VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park*, and how they have been taken into account during the preparation of the *Draft VEMMP*. There is a hierarchy of legislation, plans and programmes setting a policy framework for tourism, infrastructure, environmental protection and land use planning. A more detailed consideration of these is set out in the Environmental Report and the most relevant are referred to below.

The *Draft VEMMP* sits within an overall national, regional and local planning framework the relevant elements of which have already been subject to environmental assessment. The National Planning Framework (NPF) of 2018 is the Government's high-level strategic plan for the State up to 2040. The NPF is designed to set in train a process by which more detailed planning documents must follow, including spatial planning, infrastructure planning, social and economic planning. The *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region (RSES)*, 2019, is one of three such regional strategies covering the entire State and sits below the NPF in the hierarchy of plans. The RSES is supportive of tourism development and contains several relevant policies.

The Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028, sits below the RSES in terms of hierarchy and overall strategy, but contains more site specific land use planning policy. The Development Plan contains up to date environmental information relevant to the draft *VEMMP*. Section 2.4 of the Development Plan sets out three strategic themes: (i) Healthy Placemaking, (ii) Economic Opportunity and (iii) Climate Action. Chapter 11 of the Development Plan contains the main provisions in relation to tourism. Volume 2 of the Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028, sets out detailed policy in respect of individual settlements and contains the *Laragh – Glendalough Land Use and Tourism Plan*. This dates originally from 2016 but has been updated and incorporated into the Development Plan.

Policy CPO 11.48 of the Wicklow County Development Plan: *Support the preparation, delivery and implementation of a Visitor Experience Masterplan for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park and Visitor Orientation Plan for County Wicklow in partnership with Fáilte Ireland, NPWS and the OPW.*

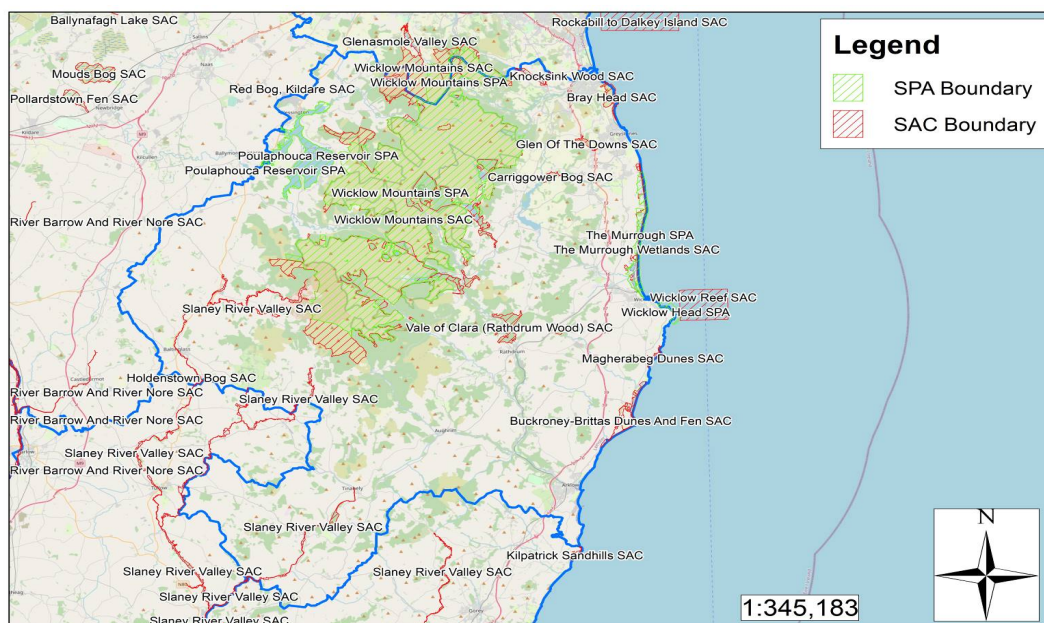
7. Environmental Baseline Data

This section provides a summary of the baseline data sources which are being used to inform the environmental assessment of the draft VEMMP and includes information from relevant sources such as the EPA and the Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028.

7.1. Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna

Biodiversity can be defined as the variability among living organisms, including terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. In Ireland there are a number of categories of protected areas for the conservation and protection of flora and fauna, in the interest of maintaining biodiversity. These include Natura 2000 Sites [i.e. Special Areas of Conservation – SACs - and Special Protection Areas - SPAs], Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs), Nature Reserves, UNESCO World Heritage and UNESCO Biosphere sites and other designations such as Ramsar Sites. The designation of an area as a National Park may also be considered a relevant factor in protection of biodiversity.

In the Wicklow Mountains, there are two very extensive Natura 2000 Sites, the Wicklow Mountains SAC (002122), of 32,931ha, and the Wicklow Mountains SPA (004040) of 30,014ha. These two designations apply to almost the entire National Park (area c.22,000ha) and extend beyond its boundaries at a number of locations. Also of note, some of the sources of the Slaney River rise just outside the south-western edge of the National Park and the Slaney valley is an SAC (000781). The River Liffey rises in the west of the National Park and flows through the Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA (004063), which is a short distance to the west of the National Park.



Natura 2000 sites within the likely zone of impact of the VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park.

Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) are designated by Statutory Instrument under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000, and are legally protected from the date on which they are formally proposed for designation. These are areas considered important for the habitats present or which hold species of plants and animals of which the habitat needs protection. There are several proposed NHAs in the environs of the National Park.

A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has been prepared for the *Draft VEMMP*, which has informed the Environmental Report.

7.2. Population and Human Health

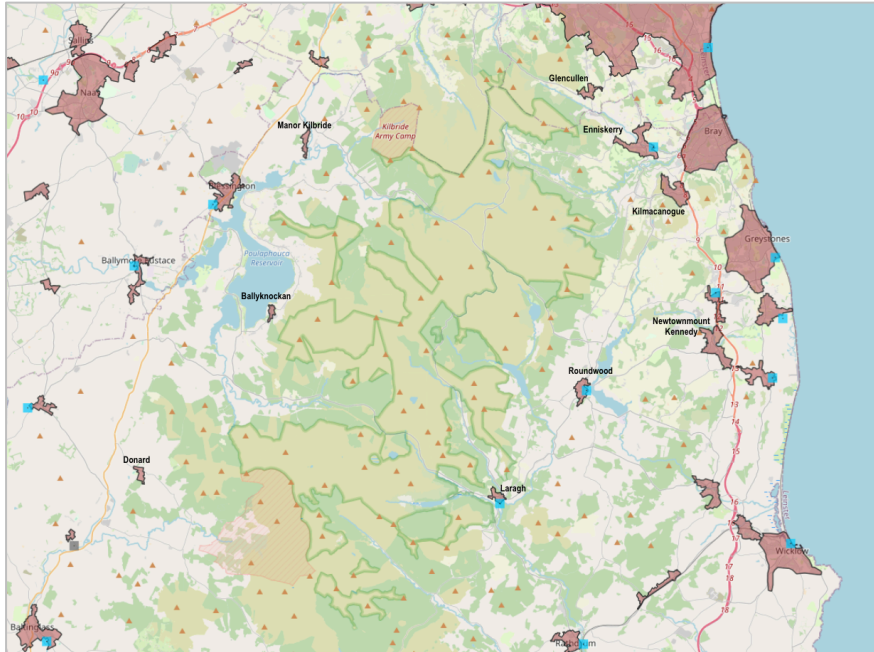
County Wicklow has a land area of approximately 2024 square kilometres and a population of 155,485 (2022), which equates to a density of 77 persons per square kilometre. The population grew by approximately 9.16% since the census of 2016 (142,425 pop) and by 4% in the period 2011-2016. The current population (155,485) already exceeds the lowest level target for the County for 2026 (155,000 - 157,500), as set out at Table 3.1 in the Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028.

The Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028, sets out a settlement hierarchy for County Wicklow as follows:

- Metropolitan Area Key Town (Bray);
- Core Region Key Town (Wicklow-Rathnew);
- Core Region Self-Sustaining Growth Towns (Arklow, Greystones-Delgany and Blessington);
- Core Region Self-sustaining Towns (Baltinglass, Enniskerry, Kilcoole, Newtownmountkennedy and Rathdrum);
- Towns and Villages:
 - Small Towns Type 1 (Ashford, Aughrim, Carnew, Dunlavin and Tinahely);
 - Small Towns Type 2 (Avoca, Donard, Kilmacanogue, Newcastle, Roundwood, Shillelagh);
 - Larger Villages/Type 1 Villages;
 - Smaller Villages/Type 2 Villages;
 - Rural clusters;
 - Open Countryside.

The Wicklow Mountains National Park has an extremely low density of human population and there are no settlements of any significant scale within the boundaries of the National Park. Of particular relevance in relation to Glendalough is the settlement of Laragh, as defined by the CSO, which had a population of 342 in 2016. The CSO Statistical Small Area 257018002, *Wicklow*, which encompasses Glendalough and Glendassan, as well as the uplands adjoining, but excludes the settlement of Laragh, had a population of 291 persons in 2016.

The impact of tourism on the local population may be positive, in terms of generating business and employment opportunities. But in the case of Glendalough-Laragh, infrastructure capacity constraints are giving rise to significant negative impacts particularly in terms of traffic congestion and uncontrolled parking.



Settlement pattern in vicinity of Wicklow Mountains National Park (EPA maps)

Human health may be affected by interaction with air, water, or soil through which harmful contaminants or pollutants can be transported so that they come into contact with human beings. Hazards to human health can arise as a result, for example, of exposure to contaminants arising from insufficient treatment of fresh water supplies or inadequate waste water treatment capacity or from incompatible adjacent land uses. Variable loading on such systems may be particularly marked in areas with high volumes of seasonal tourists, such as Glendalough.

7.3. Soil

Soil is the top layer of the earth's surface and is used to grow crops for food, shelter and clothing. Soil is biologically active, being formed by mineral particles, organic matter, water, air and living organisms. Soils are classified into categories based on distinguishing qualities that have developed during soil formation. Agricultural land makes up about two thirds of the national land cover in Ireland, most of which is in grassland. Peatlands (raised bogs, blanket bogs and fens) and wetlands constitute slightly less than one fifth of the national land cover and forests cover about a tenth.

In Wicklow, blanket peat and peaty soils (mainly in the central and north-western upland parts of the County) and brown earths (occupying most of the southern, eastern and western parts of the County) are the two most dominant soil types in the County. The National Park is characterised by a concentration of upland peat bog and shallow lithosols. There are also areas of substantial rock outcrops. Glendalough has a relatively complex soil composition, with areas of alluvium directly along the river valleys, adjoined by some areas of loamy soils, as well as lithosols, peats and rock outcrop.

Most of County Wicklow has relatively low levels of landslide susceptibility, but the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) has identified that there are areas of moderate and high susceptibility in upland areas of the National Park, with the potential to adversely affect water courses, habitats and species. The uplands around Glendalough constitute one such area, with an established record of landslide events.

Ireland has a complex geology, laid down over hundreds of millions of years. In broad terms, the island is a saucer shape, with a low lying central plain, bordered by coastal uplands, including the Wicklow Mountains. The uplands are composed of a range of rock types, which predominantly include granites in Wicklow. To the east and west of the granite are generally areas of metamorphic rock. The lands of Glendalough from the Upper Lake eastwards, are generally underlain by such metamorphic rocks classed by the Geological Service of Ireland (GSI) as the *Maulin Formation*, which is composed of dark blue-grey slate, phyllite and schist.

7.4. Water

Under the Water Framework Directive classification, surface water status is categorised in a range descending in quality from *high*, *good*, *moderate*, *poor*, *bad*. In the National Park and environs the majority of river water bodies in the Ovoca-Vartry catchments are *good*. In Glendalough, the Glenealo / Glendasan River is classed as *moderate*. Water courses to the west, in the Liffey catchment, tend to be *moderate* for the most part and in the Glen of Imaal to the south-west, just outside the boundary of the National Park, in the upper reaches of the Slaney the majority are of *high* quality. The status of lake waterbodies varies so that of the larger lakes in the eastern Ovoca-Vartry catchment the Lower Lough Bray is *good*, Lough Tay is *moderate*, Lough Dan is *moderate* and Upper Glendalough is *high*. In the Liffey catchment, to the west of the National Park, the reservoir at Poulaphouca is classed as *good*.

Groundwater status throughout the National Park and environs is *good* with the exception of the old mining areas to the west of Glendalough and in Glenmalure, which areas have *poor* status.

Parts of County Wicklow are vulnerable to flooding from a variety of sources. The *Dispersal Sites* in the *Draft Recreational Trails Masterplan*, are for the most part in relatively elevated locations, where the probability of flooding is low, with a few exceptions. A significant width of the Glendalough valley, along the Glenealo / Glendasan River from the Upper Lake down to Laragh, is susceptible to flood risk. A preliminary *Flood Risk Assessment* has indicated that the site of the proposed visitor centre in Laragh is not subject to historic flooding or present day fluvial or sea flooding. Risk to the existing Glendalough visitor centre building and the proposed car parking can be mitigated by provision of some additional underground surface water attenuation and retention of the existing ground level. Outdoor recreation is considered acceptable in areas susceptible to flooding and the risk to life due to flooding is low.

7.5. Air and Climate

The EPA report of 2021 regarding air quality in Ireland (*EPA: Air Quality in Ireland 2021*) states that ambient air in Ireland in 2021 met all the legal requirements under the CAFE Directive (Clean Air for Europe) by being within legal limit values. Current air quality in County Wicklow is rated as *good*.

Ireland's statutory national climate objective and 2030 targets are aligned with the State's obligations under the Paris Agreement and with the European Union's objective to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels and to achieve climate neutrality in the European Union by 2050. The Climate Action Plan 2023 is the first to be made under the *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021*, and following the introduction, in 2022, of economy-wide carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings. The Climate Action Plan 2023 implements the carbon budgets and sectoral emissions ceilings and sets a roadmap to halve emissions by 2030 and reach net zero no later than 2050.

The emission ceilings will particularly affect electricity generation, agriculture, transportation and land use. One of the key issues involving the assessment of the effects of implementing the

VEMMP on climatic factors relates to greenhouse gas emissions arising from transport. By providing more sustainable modes and levels of mobility, noise and other emissions to air and energy use can be minimised.

7.6. Material Assets

Assets of significance for the environmental assessment of the VEMMP include tourism infrastructure, transport infrastructure, agricultural and forestry land and water and drainage infrastructure including waste water treatment. In respect of Glendalough, water supply and waste water infrastructure are also of particular relevance. Other material assets include communication infrastructure, electric grid infrastructure, commercial and residential property. A particular form of material asset of relevance in relation to the VEMMP is the heritage of archaeological and architectural monuments, especially those in Glendalough.

7.7. Transportation

The two principal roads traversing County Wicklow from north to south are the N11/M11, located between the mountains and the Irish Sea, and the N81 National Secondary Road located on the western side of the mountains. The village of Laragh is located at a key intersection on the regional road network. Public transport services in the Laragh-Glendalough area are limited. Laragh village and the Glendalough area suffer from traffic congestion during periods of peak demand, which has the effect of reducing the amenity and safety of the area. The results of the *Glendalough Transportation Surveys*, including parking survey, carried out in 2021 as part of the Draft VEMMP work, confirmed there are serious capacity issues in terms of traffic and parking, particularly in Glendalough, where it was calculated that in the region of 6,375 persons were parked in Glendalough on 6th June 2021. A traffic management plan for Laragh, prepared a number of years ago, is undergoing phased implementation. A shuttle bus service has been in operation between Laragh and Glendalough over the summer months of 2022.

7.8. Water and Waste

Laragh is served by the Laragh Wastewater Treatment Plant, which is located at Brockagh, which provides preliminary, primary and secondary treatment. As set out in the *Laragh – Glendalough Land Use and Tourism Plan*, treated effluent is of good quality and discharges to the Avonmore River. The plant has sufficient capacity to serve the proposed tourist arrival facility in the village. The existing OPW waste water treatment works in Glendalough will require upgrading in next few years.

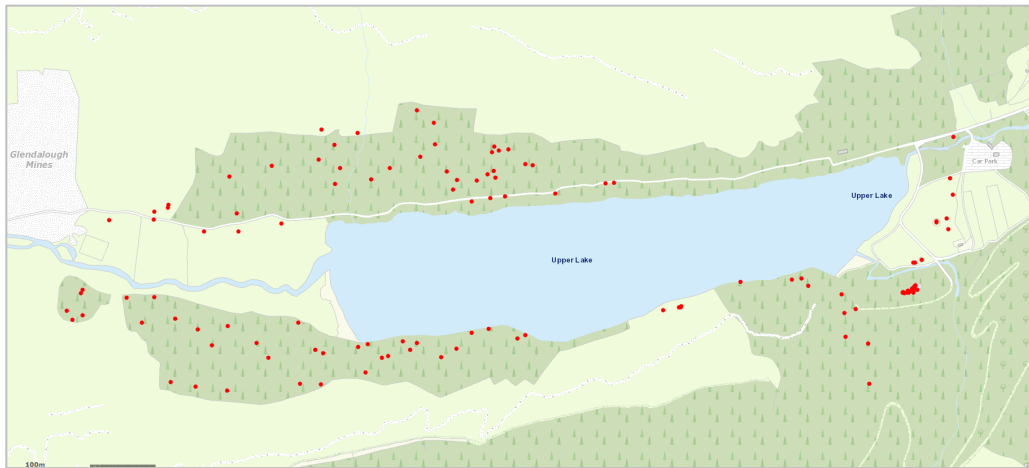
Irish Water plans to extend the catchment area of the *Vартry Water Supply Scheme* to serve areas of mid-Wicklow including Laragh (also Rathdrum, Aughrim, Annacurra, Avoca, Ballinaclesh, Roundwood, Annamoe, Redcross, Conary and Glenealy). These areas are currently served by vulnerable water sources.

7.9. Tourism

In a national context, Wicklow accounts for 3% of both domestic trips and 3% of overseas visitors. Domestic and local casual day visitors make up a significant proportion of visitors in the county including Glendalough. It has been estimated that in 2017 there were 275,000 overseas tourists visiting County Wicklow and 319,000 domestic tourism trips. Increased participation in hiking and walking has revealed a capacity issue in the county, with environmental degradation of popular locations and excessive congestion at car parks. There are approximately 1.5 million visitors per annum to the National Park. But half of these visits are concentrated on Glendalough, with c.730,000 visitors per annum of which up to 80,000 attend the Glendalough Visitor Centre. Pedestrian numbers in the valley have been trending upwards over the past few years. There is a high concentration of visitors recorded at the monastic site and the Green Road in Glendalough.

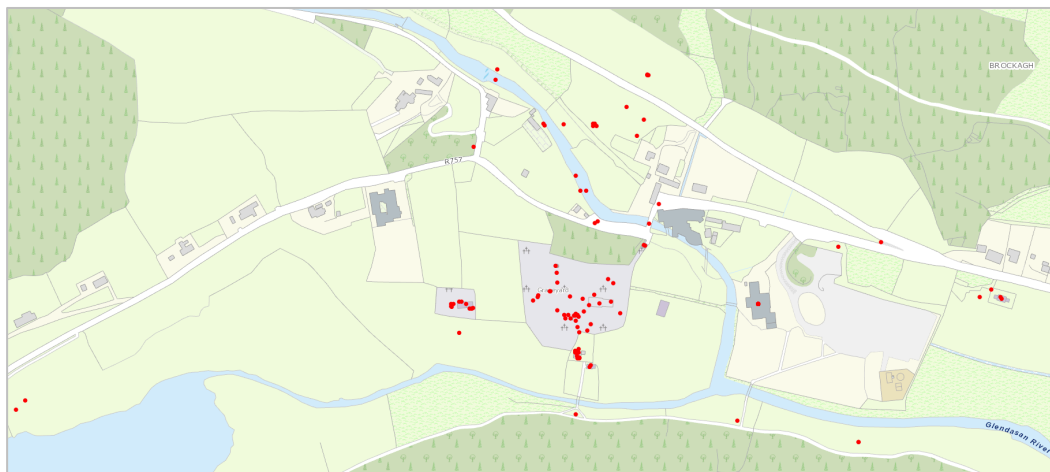
7.10. Cultural Heritage

The *Heritage Impact Assessment on Glendalough* (Consarc) forms part of the background documentation to the SEA Environmental Report. The report points out that the *draft VEMMP* does not contain proposals directly affecting any of the many monuments at Glendalough. But the various proposals to rationalise access, parking and circulation will have a very positive effect. There is a great concentration of archaeological monuments at Glendalough, spread over a large area throughout the valley. They are grouped into three main complexes, namely the Upper Lake, the Monastery and the satellite churches. The main features near the Upper Lake include St Kevin's Cave, Templenaskellig, Reefert Church, a stone fort and a series of stone crosses.



Archaeological Heritage Sites at Upper Lake – Red Dots (Historic Environment Viewer)

The main Monastery at Glendalough, to the east of the Lower Lake, contains a dense concentration of National Monuments and archaeological features, including a gatehouse, the Cathedral, the round tower, St Kevin's Cross and a small building known as the Priest's House. During the 11th century the Monastery expanded to the south, with the construction of St Kevin's Church and St Ciaran's Church. The 12th century gatehouse, to the northern side, continues to be the main point of access for many visitors and is the only example of a monastic gatehouse known in Ireland.



Archaeological Heritage Sites at Monastery - Red Dots (Historic Environment Viewer)

Wicklow has a considerable architectural heritage, from classical country residences, such as Powerscourt, Russborough and Killruddery, to modest vernacular houses which evolved in the landscape over centuries and reflect locally available materials and skills. There is also a strong industrial heritage, which is reflected in surviving buildings and structures associated with mining, as well as shipbuilding, milling, weaving and railway transportation. Mining for lead, zinc and silver was carried on in the environs of Glendalough at various times from the end of the 18th century until 1947. The remains of some of the old mining sites can still be seen today up by the Miners Road and in the Glendassan Valley. Another unique part of the heritage is the early 19th century Military Road, running southwards from Rathfarnham to Aughavannagh, with its associated purpose built barracks.

To date, there is no World Heritage Site in County Wicklow. However, there is an intention to advance Glendalough, at some point in the future, as a candidate for the tentative list for World Heritage status to be submitted to UNESCO.

7.11. Landscape

The *European Landscape Convention*, drawn up under the auspices of the Council of Europe in 2000, came into effect in 2004 and has been ratified by Ireland. Ireland has a rich and diverse landscape which is vital to sectors such as tourism.

The CORINE Land Cover (CLC) is a mapping of the European environmental landscape based on interpretation of satellite images. Most of the upland areas of County Wicklow are wetland/peat bog/moor or have been afforested, primarily with conifer trees, as shown on the *Corine* land coverage map. Such areas are classed as forest and semi-natural areas. There are also areas of deciduous forest and small areas of agricultural land in the National Park, including along the river valleys in and around Glendalough.

Landscape assessment has been incorporated into the Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028. The Wicklow Mountains National Park comes within one of 13 Landscape Categories – *Mountain Uplands*. This upland area is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Scenic views throughout the county have been identified for protection. Environmental sensitivity mapping has been used by the County Council to determine levels of sensitivity.

7.12. Cumulative Impacts

The draft *VEMMP* sits within a suite of other relevant plans and programmes including statutory plans, such as the National Planning Framework, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the Wicklow County Development Plan. Other plans and programmes with potential for cumulative effects with the *VEMMP* include those with significant overall environmental impacts, such as the *Climate Action Plan, 2023*, those with a strong biodiversity component, such as the *National Peatlands Strategy, 2015-2025*, the *National Biodiversity Action Plan, 2017-2021*, those with a heritage theme, such as the *County Wicklow Heritage Plan, 2017-2022*, those with a tourism theme, such as *Ireland's Ancient East* or those related to infrastructure development, such as *Eastern-Midlands Region Waste Management Plan, 2015 – 2021* or *The Water Services Strategic Plan (2015)* of Irish Water. Also of relevance is the *Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2020-25*, which is a high level, non-statutory statement of ambition. Where relevant, these statutory plans have been subject of Strategic Environmental Assessment, Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive and other required assessments such as in relation to flood risk, thereby ensuring proper consideration of environmental impacts and protections, including cumulatively. Cumulative impacts in relation to these and similar plans and programmes have been taken into account in development of the draft *VEMMP*.

There is very close alignment between the *draft VEMMP* and the policies of the Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028, including the detailed provisions of the *Laragh-Glendalough Land Use and Tourism Plan*. Of particular relevance to the *Draft VEMMP* is Development Plan Policy CPO 11.48:

Support the preparation, delivery and implementation of a Visitor Experience Masterplan for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park and Visitor Orientation Plan for County Wicklow in partnership with Fáilte Ireland, NPWS and the OPW.

The provisions of the County Development Plan are, for the most part, complementary to the *draft VEMMP* proposals. The full realisation of these proposals would likely increase the cumulative level of human outdoor activity in Wicklow. However, the nature of many of these projects is not such as to generate significant additional emissions of greenhouse gases. Many of the locations are not especially sensitive in environmental terms, although others may present challenges in terms of biodiversity e.g. disturbance to species and habitats. The County Development Plan contains several policy objectives to mitigate any adverse environmental effects (CPO11.131⁵, CPO 11.432⁶, CPO 11.477⁷, CPO 11.488⁸ and CPO 11.499⁹) as well as very detailed measures for both monitoring and mitigation of environmental effects in the SEA Environmental Report. Subject to implementation of the mitigation measures, the cumulative impacts of implementation of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028, with the *draft VEMMP* are not likely to be significant, including in terms of biodiversity.

The *draft VEMMP* sets out a number of proposals which are complementary to the *County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy* and thence to the County Development Plan. Having regard to location of the main proposals of the *County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy*, cumulative effects with the *draft VEMMP* are not likely to be significant. These will include increased carbon emissions from transportation and the impacts arising from increased dwell time in County Wicklow. The latter is likely to mean increased visitor overnight stays in the urban areas highlighted in the policy, with limited effects on the natural heritage.

In conclusion, implementation of the specific projects in the *draft VEMMP* will be subject to the legal regulatory and consent mechanisms, which include further more detailed project level assessments of effects, including those arising during any construction works. These processes ensure proper cognisance of cumulative impacts and their mitigation.

⁵ To promote, encourage and facilitate the development of the tourism and recreation sectors in a sustainable manner.

⁶ To only permit the development of a tourism or recreational facility in a rural area in cases where the product or activity is dependent on its location in a rural situation and where it can be demonstrated that the proposed development does not adversely affect the character, environmental quality and amenity of the rural area or the vitality of any settlement and the provision of infrastructure therein. The natural resource / tourist product / tourist attraction that is essential to the activity shall be located at the site or in close proximity to the site, of the proposed development. The need to locate in a particular area must be balanced against the environmental impact of the development and benefits to the local community.

⁷ Where relevant, the Council and those receiving permission for development under the plan, shall seek to manage any increase in visitor numbers and/or any change in visitor behaviour in order to avoid significant environmental effects, including loss of habitat and disturbance. Management measures may include ensuring that new projects and activities are a suitable distance from ecological sensitivities; visitor/habitat management plans will be required for proposed projects as relevant and appropriate.

⁸ Ensure the potential environmental effects of a likely increase in tourists/tourism-related traffic volumes in particular locations/along particular routes shall be considered and mitigated as appropriate. Such a consideration should include potential impacts on existing infrastructure (including drinking water, wastewater, waste and transport) resulting from tourism proposals.

⁹ Where projects for new tourism projects identified in this chapter are not already provided for by existing plans / programmes or are not already permitted, then the feasibility of progressing these projects shall be examined, taking into account planning need, environmental sensitivities as identified in the SEA Environmental Report and the objectives of the plan relating to sustainable development.

8. Alternatives

The primary objective of the *Draft VEMMP*, as set out in the brief, is to improve the visitor experience and disperse the benefits and impacts of tourism. The brief requires a *Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan* for Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park and *Visitor Orientation* recommendations for County Wicklow. In order to mitigate regional and seasonal congestion, the brief sets an ambition to persuade more tourists to visit areas outside of the main attractions and outside seasonal peaks. Within the overall brief, there is a requirement to balance increased tourism demand with core conservation and heritage values. Accordingly, environmental protection and improvement has been incorporated into the *Draft VEMMP* as reflected in the first of its three main aims:

- Aim 1: *Enhance the natural, built and cultural heritage*
- Aim 2: *Disperse the benefits and impacts of tourism*
- Aim 3: *Improve the visitor experience*

It is a requirement of the SEA Directive that reasonable alternatives to the chosen plan (the *Draft VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park* in this instance) are identified, described and evaluated in the Environmental Report, taking into account the objectives and the geographical scope of the plan or programme.

A reasonable alternative to the formulation of the *VEMMP* would be to decide not to undertake a new plan for tourism but to continue a “*business as usual*” scenario, that is the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without implementation of the plan.

A further reasonable possibility would be to undertake a plan for tourism, responding to the requirements of the brief, but without any particular environmental elements or controls. Such approach could correspond to a plan based on the second and third of the three *Draft VEMMP* aims above. Reliance would be placed entirely on the environmental controls of the existing regulatory system of development consent and licensing, which would apply to any projects arising from the *VEMMP*.

The likely environmental effects of the *draft VEMMP* as also those of the alternative scenarios, are outlined below.

9. Potential Environmental Effects of the draft VEMMP

Having regard to the nature and geographical extent of the area affected by the *draft VEMMP*, to the scale and location of the actions and projects arising from the *draft VEMMP* and to the environmental factors set out in the baseline analysis, the potential significant environmental effects, before mitigation, of implementation of the *VEMMP* are outlined below. Potential significant issues in relation to biodiversity are also considered in detail in the Natura Impact Statement.

Environmental Topic	Positive effect	Negative effect (before mitigation)
Biodiversity and flora and fauna	Restoration of damaged pathways and habitats along existing trails within uplands of Co. Wicklow Reduction in pressure on Glendalough and environs and other prime attractors	Potential injury to biodiversity, including habitats and species disturbance, arising from development of new/enhanced trails, new pedestrian route from Laragh to Glendalough and new car parks
Population and human health	Development of new infrastructure including additional parking in Laragh and in association with Discovery Walks Reduction in pressure on Glendalough and environs and other prime attractors	Potential for excessive loading on critical infrastructure with insufficient capacity (drinking water, waste water)
Soil	Restoration of damaged pathways along trails in upland Co. Wicklow	Trampling leading to new 'braiding' or erosion of pathways at existing and proposed outdoor recreation locations
Water	Proposed habitat restoration in Glendalough will aid flood risk resilience	Deterioration of water quality due to run-off from construction works associated with VEMMP projects Flood risk to critical infrastructure in Glendalough
Air and climatic factors	Proposed habitat restoration in Glendalough will aid climate resilience Shuttle bus service will help reduce noise and greenhouse gases emissions from motor traffic	Increased tourism related transportation causing increased emissions to air including noise and greenhouse gases
Material Assets	Positive impacts from revised access and parking in Glendalough/Laragh and proposed Discovery Walks and associated car parking improvements	Need for improved waste water treatment in Glendalough and at selected upland car parks. Additional waste generation at Discovery Walk locations
Cultural Heritage	Improved setting of Monastic site Glendalough and its possible World Heritage designation Improved interpretation and education	Potential adverse effect on archaeological deposits at Glendalough and along route to Laragh
Landscape	Proposed habitat restoration in Glendalough Improved setting of Monastic site	Potential adverse impacts of additional parking facilities in Laragh and Discovery Walk locations.
Interrelationships	See diagram over showing interrelationships	

Potential significant effects before mitigation of draft VEMMP

9.1. Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs)

Strategic Environmental Objectives (SEOs) are goals to be met by the *draft VEMMP* in relation to the environmental topics cited in the SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) and the Irish Regulations (S.I. No. 435/2004 - *European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004* (as amended)). The SEOs are formulated with regard both to the aims of the *draft VEMMP* and to relevant Directives and Regulations and are focused on the potentially significant effects set out in Table below. The SEOs are set out under the environmental topics and are used as measures against which the provisions of the *draft VEMMP* and alternatives are evaluated.

Topic	No.	Strategic Environmental Objective	Target
Biodiversity, Flora & Fauna	B1	Contribute toward compliance with EU Habitats and Birds Directives	Implementation of the <i>VEMMP</i> not to adversely affect the integrity of any Natura 2000 Sites
	B2	Contribute toward environmental reinstatement and protection of Nature Conservation Sites ¹⁰	Maintenance or restoration of favourable conservation status of habitats and species
	B3	Contribute toward conservation and enhancement of biodiversity	Protection of flora and fauna from disturbance and restoration of selected habitats
Population and Human Health	P1	Contribute toward minimisation of adverse impacts on local communities arising from excessive concentration of tourism related activity	Reduction of congestion and wider distribution of tourism in the Wicklow area
	P2	Contribute toward provision of a positive experience for visitors	Provision of improved information, interpretation and infrastructure
Soils	S1	Contribute toward maintenance of the integrity and functioning of soils	Minimisation of soil sealing Protection of soil stability
Water	W1	Contribute toward maintenance and improvement of water quality	Maintenance or achievement of good status for surface waters and ground waters in terms of Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) Incorporation of nature based water management measures
	W2	Contribute toward maintenance of bathing water quality	Compliance with the provisions of the Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC)
	W3	Contribute toward minimisation of flood risk	Compliance with Flood Risk Management Guidelines
Air & Climate	C1	Contribute toward mitigation of climate change	Incorporation of climate mitigation measures in <i>VEMMP</i>
Material Assets	M1	Contribute toward provision of appropriately located and designed tourism infrastructure	Provision of improved and additional tourism related infrastructure at key locations
	M2	Support adequate provision for and control of tourism related traffic	Provision of transportation related infrastructure at key locations
Cultural Heritage	H1	Contribute toward protection of archaeology and conservation of built heritage assets	No adverse effects on archaeological or architectural heritage arising from implementation of <i>VEMMP</i>
	H2	Support the potential of Glendalough for inscription as a World Heritage Property	Protection and enhancement of cultural heritage of Glendalough and its setting
	H3	Support awareness of cultural heritage of Wicklow, including Glendalough	Provision of improved information and interpretation for the public
Landscape	L1	Avoid conflicts with protection of landscapes designated for protection in the Development Plan	Avoidance or mitigation of impacts on designated landscapes

Strategic Environmental Objectives

¹⁰ A Nature Conservation Site, as defined at sec.212 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) to include a European Site, a proposed Natural Heritage Area, a designated Natural Heritage Area, an established or a recognised Nature Reserve under the Wildlife Act, 1976 (as amended), a refuge for fauna or flora designated under the Wildlife Act, 1976, as amended.

10. Potential Environmental Effects of the *draft VEMMP* compared with Alternatives

The likely environmental effects of the *draft VEMMP* as also those of the alternative scenarios, are considered below, having regard to the SEOs and to the environmental baseline described above.

10.1.1. Business as Usual Alternative

The existing state of the environment is described in foregoing sections of this report. In the absence of the *Draft VEMMP* there will be a continuation of current trends of over concentration of tourism/visitor activity on Glendalough. The principal likely environmental effects would be:

- *Biodiversity*: Current trends point to an intensification of adverse effects on the natural environment including habitats and species.
- *Population*: Continuing environmental nuisance to local community from traffic/parking by visitors, especially in Glendalough, continuing over-concentration of economic benefits of tourism and a poor quality experience for visitors.
- *Soils*: Existing problems of erosion in certain upland locations likely to continue.
- *Water*: Potential adverse effects on water quality due to overload of existing infrastructure in Glendalough.
- *Air and Climate*: No interventions to reduce reliance on car usage and related emissions.
- *Material Assets*: Potential overload of critical infrastructure, including roads, parking and waste water treatment serving the existing visitor centre at Glendalough.
- *Cultural Heritage*: Continuing unsatisfactory situation at Glendalough with respect to protecting the integrity of the monastic site.
- *Landscape*: Landscape impacts would be relatively limited and subject to mitigation at project design stage.

10.1.2. VEMMP as Proposed

Successful implementation of the *Draft VEMMP* would relieve the overconcentration of tourism/visitor activity on Glendalough and disperse visitors more widely. Adverse effects from unmanaged access to certain upland areas of County Wicklow, such as habitat degradation and erosion of soils, would be mitigated. The principal likely environmental effects would be:

- *Biodiversity*: likely increase in the number of visitors to additional parts of County Wicklow with potential for increased adverse effects on the natural environment. But, these impacts would be mitigated by improved management of visitors, by repair works to damaged footpaths and by improved facilities at public car parks. Reinstatement of certain areas of natural habitat in Glendalough would have a further positive effect on biodiversity.
- *Population*: Nuisance to the local community in Glendalough, from traffic/parking by visitors, would be relieved and improved visitor management would be positive.
- *Soils*: Problems of erosion in certain upland trails would be addressed. Some existing areas of managed grassland in Laragh would be given over to provide parking.
- *Water*: Potential adverse effects on water quality due to overload of existing infrastructure in Glendalough would be addressed.
- *Air and Climate*: Dispersal of tourism likely to increase reliance on car usage and related emissions, but countervailing measures in *VEMMP* including shuttle bus services would reduce adverse effects.
- *Material Assets*: Existing overload of critical infrastructure would be addressed. New facilities in Laragh would potentially contribute toward the economy of the village.
- *Cultural Heritage*: The protection of the integrity and setting of the monastic site at Glendalough, with a possible future World Heritage application, would be enhanced. Educational and interpretative facilities for the public would be improved.

- *Landscape*: Landscape impacts would be relatively limited and subject to mitigation at project design stage.

10.1.3. A Plan for Tourism without additional Environmental Elements

A plan for tourism, responding to the brief, but without particular environmental elements or controls within the plan, would rely on the existing regulatory framework of planning and other environmental laws and licensing for mitigation or prevention of adverse effects on the environment. The plan would respond to two of the aims set out in the Draft VEMMP, namely dispersal of the benefits and impacts of tourism and improvement of the visitor experience, but not the first aim of the *Draft VEMMP*, concerning enhancement of the environment. In this scenario, funding from Fáilte Ireland for related projects would not be made contingent on compliance with environmental provisions of the plan.

The principal likely environmental effects would be:

- *Biodiversity*: Implementation of the plan would likely result in increasing the number of visitors to additional parts of County Wicklow. This would increase adverse effects on the natural environment including habitats and species. Any mitigation would be dependent on the existing regulatory regime.
- *Population*: Nuisance to the local community in Glendalough, from traffic/parking by visitors, would possibly be reduced, but in a less structured fashion.
- *Soils*: Problems of erosion in certain upland locations would not be addressed as part of the plan.
- *Water*: Potential adverse effects on water quality due to overload of existing infrastructure in Glendalough would not be subject to any provisions of the plan, although subject to other environmental controls.
- *Air and Climate*: Dispersal of tourism likely to increase reliance on car usage and related emissions.
- *Material Assets*: Existing overload of critical infrastructure, including roads and parking serving Glendalough visitor centre would be ameliorated by provisions of the plan relating to dispersal of tourism.
- *Cultural Heritage*: The protection of the monastic site at Glendalough, with a possible future World Heritage application, would not be subject to provisions of the plan. Educational and interpretative facilities for the public might be improved.
- *Landscape*: Landscape impacts would likely be relatively limited and subject to mitigation at project design stage.

10.1.4. Summary Comparison of Draft VEMMP and Alternatives

The results of the comparisons are summarised in tabular form at Table 9.1 below and show that the *draft VEMMP* performs best of the alternatives examined. Overall, it has notably more positive effects and fewer negative than the comparators, although different elements within the *draft VEMMP* will have differing potential for environmental effects.

Alternatives considered	Strongly Positive for SEOs	Somewhat positive for SEOs	Somewhat Negative for SEOs	Strongly Negative for SEOs
<i>Business as Usual</i>			P1, P2, H1, H2, H3, W1, W2, W3, L1	B1, B2, B3, S1, C1, M1, M2
<i>Draft VEMMP as proposed</i>	P1, P2, M1, M2, H2, H3	B2, B3, S1, W1, W3	B1, B3, H1, C1, S1, W2, L1	
<i>A plan for tourism without specific environmental measures</i>		P1, P2, M1, M2, H3	B1, B2, B3, H1, H2, W1, W2, W3, L1	S1, C1

Comparative Performance of Alternatives against SEOs

10.1.5. Alternatives Considered within the VEMMP

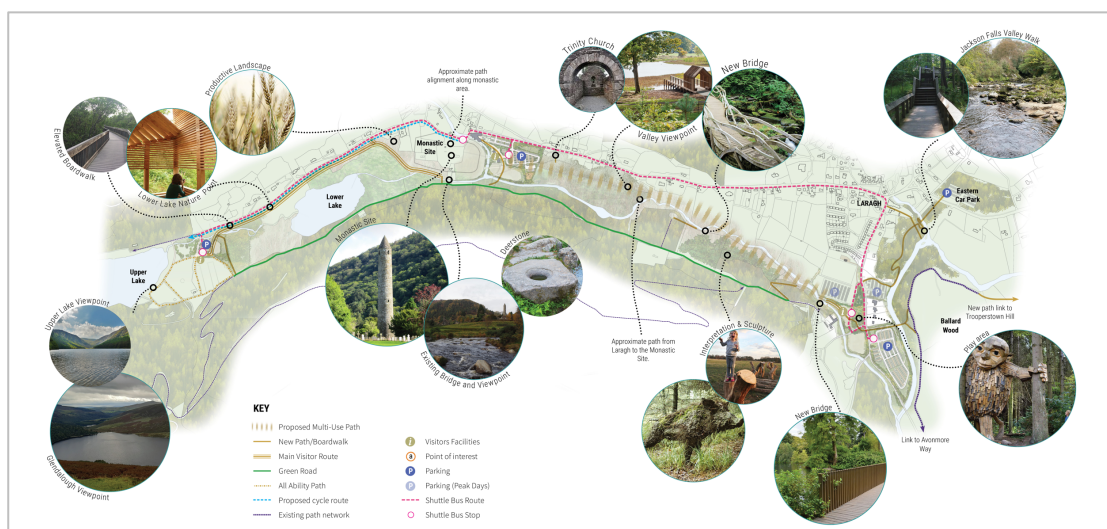
Certain reasonable alternatives within the framework of the chosen plan (*Draft VEMMP*) were also considered, including in respect of transportation/access, walking routes and future developments in the Glendalough/Laragh valley.

Transportation: In respect of access, consideration will need to be given to longer term, more sustainable ways of transport to the area, in order to reduce dependence on private car transport. It was concluded that, in the short term, the proposals set out in the *Draft VEMMP* for car park development and management are the optimum way to manage the pressures. This would contribute positively toward SEO M1.

Discovery Walks: The brief requires dispersal of visitor activity in order to reduce pressure on established locations e.g. the Great Sugarloaf, etc. Following assessment of 18 potential routes, seven *Discovery Walks* were selected as part of the *Draft VEMMP*. The most common reason for rejection related to sustainability of the pathways, which would be strongly negative in relation to SEO B3 and S1.

Glendalough - Laragh Valley: Access from Laragh to Glendalough via the public road network is unsatisfactory, especially for cyclists, but also for pedestrians and for motorists, with significant traffic congestion at peak periods. Improvements to the existing public road connection were considered. However, it was determined that this would not achieve an acceptable standard without significant environmental effects on amenity and landscape which would be negative in relation to SEOs P1 and M1. The chosen solution is to develop a new all ability route to Glendalough from Laragh through the valley from a new arrival centre and car park, near the Laragh GAA club, supplemented by a shuttle bus service, generally as set out in the *Laragh – Glendalough Land Use and Tourism Plan*.

Local Access to and within Glendalough Monastic Site: To improve pedestrian access to and beyond the Monastic Site from the direction of the existing Glendalough Visitor Centre, a number of possible solutions were considered. Following consultation with the relevant State authorities (NPWS, OPW, National Monuments Service), some of these were rejected on environmental grounds because of adverse impacts on cultural heritage or on biodiversity, negative in relation to SEOs B1, B2 and H1.



Access to/within Monastic Site - Preferred Solution

10.2. Assessment draft VEMMP Individual Elements against SEOs

The draft VEMMP is composed of three main elements:

- *Wicklow Wide*: High level dispersal strategy including visitor hubs through the County
- *Draft Recreational Trail Masterplan*: focused strategy for dispersal of outdoor recreation with detailed proposals for Discovery Trails
- *Draft Glendalough Valley Plan*: proposals for local Laragh-Glendalough area-wide strategies, informed by an *Interpretation Strategy*.

The above component elements of the draft VEMMP were individually assessed against the SEOs, to inform the overall assessment.

10.2.1. Assessment of Wicklow Wide Proposals

The *Wicklow Wide* proposals are primarily a dispersal strategy and accord generally with the provisions of the Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028, including the identification of certain visitor hubs. The proposals of the *Draft Wicklow Wide* component of the VEMMP are high level and essentially aim at dispersal of tourism activity. Assessment of the proposals against the SEOs is necessarily at this high level. The main identifiable negative impact is in relation to air and climate, where the *Wicklow Wide* proposals for dispersal will encourage wider car-borne tourism, with consequent emissions to the atmosphere.

Wicklow Wide Proposals	Positive for SEOs	Negative for SEOs but can be mitigated	Negative for SEOs and not readily mitigated	SEOs not affected
	P1, P2, M1, M2, H3	B1, B2, B3, S1, W1, H1, L1	C1	W2, W3, H2

Performance of Wicklow Wide proposals in relation to SEOs

10.2.2. Assessment of Recreational Trails Masterplan

Based on achieving the three aims of the *Draft VEMMP* – Enhancement, Dispersal and Improvement - the *Draft Recreational Trails Masterplan* sets out an overall strategy, including a series of objectives and actions. There is close alignment with the *Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028*, which itself was subject of strategic environmental assessment. The provisions of the *Draft Recreational Trails Masterplan* have been assessed against the SEOs. In summary, the assessment points to a positive balance, with some requirements for mitigation at project development stage. The main identifiable negative impact is in relation to air and climate, where the *Draft Recreational Trails Masterplan* proposals for dispersal will likely encourage some additional journeys by car, with consequent emissions to the atmosphere.

Recreational Trails Masterplan	Positive for SEOs	Negative for SEOs but can be mitigated	Negative for SEOs and not readily mitigated	SEOs not affected
	B2, B3, P1, P2, S1, W1, M1, M2, H3	B1, B2, B3, W1, W3, C1, H1, L1		W2, H2

Performance of Recreational Trails Masterplan in relation to SEOs

10.2.3. Assessment of the Draft Glendalough Valley Plan

The *Draft Glendalough Valley Plan*, is influenced by the primary objective for the Wicklow Mountains National Park “to protect natural biodiversity and promote education and sustainable recreation. The exceptional historical significance of Glendalough is emphasised, with the potential to bid for World Heritage Site status. The provisions of the *Draft Glendalough Valley Plan* have been assessed against the SEOs. The assessment points to a positive balance, with some requirements for mitigation at project development stage.

Glendalough Valley Plan	Positive for SEOs	Negative for SEOs but can be mitigated	Negative for SEOs and not readily mitigated	SEOs not affected
	B2, B3, P1, P2, W1, C1, M1, M2, H2, H3	B1, B3, S1, W1, W3, H1, L1		W2

Performance of Glendalough Valley Plan in relation to SEOs

11. Overall performance of draft VEMMP

The draft VEMMP would generally accord positively in terms of likely environmental effects, subject to mitigation. The main potentials for conflict with the SEOs are identified in summary below, together with the need for mitigation.

NO.	Strategic Environmental Objective	Likely to accord with SEO	Potential conflict with SEO
B1	Contribute toward compliance with EU Habitats and Birds Directives		Requires mitigation per NIS
B2	Contribute toward environmental reinstatement and protection of Nature Conservation Sites ¹¹	Habitat restoration at Glendalough	Requires monitoring at key locations
B3	Contribute toward conservation and enhancement of biodiversity	Includes habitat restoration at Glendalough and at Recreational Trail sites	Requires mitigation and monitoring
P1	Contribute toward minimisation of adverse impacts on local communities arising from excessive concentration of tourism related activity	Yes	
P2	Contribute toward provision of a positive experience for visitors	Yes	
S1	Contribute toward maintenance of the integrity and functioning of soils	VEMMP supports reinstatement works at certain key Recreational Trail sites	Requires monitoring
W1	Contribute toward maintenance and improvement of water quality	Habitat reinstatement in Glendalough and SuDs measures for new works will contribute to this	Likely to require mitigation in respect of Glendalough Upper Lake WWTS
W2	Contribute toward maintenance of bathing water quality		Requires monitoring
W3	Contribute toward minimisation of flood risk	Habitat reinstatement in Glendalough	Potential for flood risk car park and pedestrian route Laragh - Glendalough
C1	Contribute toward mitigation of climate change	VEMMP will support shuttle bus and cycle infrastructure	May generate increased emissions due to dispersal plan
M1	Contribute toward provision of appropriately located and designed tourism infrastructure	Yes	
M2	Support adequate provision for and control of tourism related traffic	Yes	Will require investment in new / improved Recreational Trails
H1	Contribute toward protection of archaeology and conservation of built heritage assets	Yes	Potential to affect archaeological deposits without mitigation
H2	Support the potential of Glendalough for inscription as a World Heritage Property	Yes	
H3	Support awareness of cultural heritage of Wicklow, including Glendalough	Yes	
L1	Avoid conflicts with protection of landscapes designated for protection in the Development Plan		May require mitigation in relation to certain installations

Overall Performance of VEMMP with SEOs

¹¹ A Nature Conservation Site, as defined at sec.212 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) to include a European Site, a proposed Natural Heritage Area, a designated Natural Heritage Area, an established or a recognised Nature Reserve under the Wildlife Act, 1976 (as amended), a refuge for fauna or flora designated under the Wildlife Act, 1976, as amended.

11.1. Reasons for Choosing Proposed VEMMP

The *draft VEMMP* meets the detailed requirements set out in the brief for the plan. Assessment of the environmental effects of the *draft VEMMP*, including in respect of the Habitats Directive, indicates that with appropriate mitigation, there will be no significant effects on the environment arising from the chosen plan.

The *draft VEMMP* is in general accordance with the policies of the National Planning Framework and the RSES for the Eastern and Midlands Region. There is very close alignment between the *draft VEMMP* and the provisions of the Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028, including the detailed provisions of the *Laragh-Glendalough Land Use and Tourism Plan*. These statutory plans are all subject of Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Comparison of the *draft VEMMP* with the described alternatives above clearly shows that the chosen plan outperforms the alternatives when assessed against the SEOs. Implementation of the *draft VEMMP* is likely to bring about positive environmental effects by addressing the excessive concentration of visitors in certain locations, notably Glendalough and at the main attractors for walkers within the National Park. Its implementation is also likely to bring material benefit to parts of Wicklow other than Glendalough by dispersing tourism more widely.

11.2. Appropriate Assessment

A Natura Impact Report has been prepared in respect of the *draft VEMMP*. This has concluded that, having incorporated mitigation measures, the *Draft VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park* is not foreseen to give rise to any adverse effects on the integrity of Natura 2000 Sites, alone or in combination with other plans or projects. This evaluation is made in view of the conservation objectives of the habitats or species, for which these sites have been designated. The AA process is ongoing and will inform and be concluded at the adoption of the Plan.

The Natura Impact Report findings have also informed this Environmental Report in respect of the SEA.

12. Mitigation

The *Draft VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park* is a multi-layered, medium term strategic plan aimed at the sustainable development and management of tourism in the National Park and wider County Wicklow commensurate with the environmental capacity of the area. The *Draft VEMMP* is a non-statutory plan and is informed by the statutory plans for the area, with which it is closely aligned. Its implementation will be phased and will entail development of a number of projects over several years.

Implementation of the *Draft VEMMP* will lead to the development of related individual projects, which will be subject to the development consent procedures set down in law, principally the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended). These procedures, where relevant, will include detailed assessment of the environmental effects of such future projects, including under the provisions of the various relevant European Directives [e.g. Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, the Birds Directive 2009/147/EC, the Floods Directive 2007/60/EC and the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2011/92/EU as amended by 2014/52/EU)].

Guiding principles in relation to environmental protection and management are set out in the Environmental Report, as are proposed mitigation measures. The Environmental Report contains measures to mitigate any negative effects resulting from the draft *VEMMP*. Appendix D2 of the draft *VEMMP* sets out detailed requirements for tourism related projects to avoid or mitigate environmental impacts. The overriding principle in respect of such projects is that they be sustainable in environmental terms. This will include, *inter alia*, requiring demonstration of full compliance of future projects with consent processes, paying due regard to relevant guidance documents and procedures and adherence to guiding principles for environmental protection and environmental management.

Demonstration that mitigation measures have been considered and incorporated at project level will be required before funding of any *VEMMP* related project is approved. In order to achieve funding (including promotion) for land use or infrastructural development or land use activities from the *VEMMP* partners, stakeholders shall be required to demonstrate compliance with measures, including as set out at the said Appendix D2, relating to sustainable development, environmental protection and environmental management, including the production of visitor management strategies (where required) or a construction environmental management Plan (CEMP) and further relevant guidance documents as listed below.

In relation to outcomes under the *VEMMP*, partners and stakeholders will be required to manage any increase in visitor numbers and/or any change in visitor behaviour in order to avoid significant effects, including loss of habitat and disturbance, ensuring that new projects are a suitable distance from ecological sensitivities. Visitor management strategies will be required for proposed *VEMMP* related programmes and projects that are to receive funding as relevant and appropriate.

In bringing forward projects related to the draft *VEMMP*, public participation will be required in decision making, as provided for ultimately in the Aarhus Convention [UNECE: *Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters*].

13. Monitoring

Successful implementation of the *VEMMP* is predicated on mitigating any significant negative environmental effects likely to arise from the plan or the projects in the *VEMMP*. In order to ensure such outcome, monitoring will be needed. This can take the form of both on site inspection and review of relevant indicators compiled by others e.g. EPA or Wicklow County Council. Notably, the Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028, contains extensive provision for environmental monitoring as set out in the Environmental Report for the Development Plan SEA.

In relation to tourism, a co-ordinated effort to record and monitor visitor traffic across selected attractions and outdoor recreation areas will be required. Monitoring will include both pedestrians and vehicles at key tourism/visitor locations, including Glendalough, and record any adverse effects, such as trail erosion or littering. The results will help build a detailed understanding of visitor behaviour and ongoing trends and ensure that unintended adverse effects can be identified and avoided.

With respect to monitoring the effects on biodiversity and cultural heritage, monitoring will likely be concentrated on environmentally sensitive locations. This will establish a detailed baseline of the existing situation and thereby identify any increased or changed effects arising during implementation of the *VEMMP*. Monitoring can determine categories of damage, erosion, vegetation trampling, vegetation loss, soil erosion and identify likely causes of such damage. Of particular importance will be monitoring of local wildlife to be incorporated into project level design. The classification employed in the monitoring of the *Wild Atlantic Way* provides a useful example.¹²

Where it is established, by monitoring, that the carrying capacity of the receiving environment in certain sites is being exceeded in terms of visitor numbers, especially in respect of European Sites, measures may be implemented to address this matter, including temporary removal from the list of advertised attractions to allow for recovery.

Monitoring will be on a structured basis and will require establishment of a Monitoring Committee or similar, which will include the parties to the *VEMMP* and other stakeholders.

The table below sets out an initial framework for monitoring but will be subject to further refinement or modification over time.

¹² Low Impact - No impact or a discernible impact i.e. no significant, lasting damage is identified.
Medium Impact - short term, reversible effect that is intermittent but will have no significant, long term impact.
High/Severe Impact - Severe effect that has potential to have a significant, long-term, irreversible or permanent impact.

Environmental Topic	Strategic Environmental Objective	Target	Monitoring Source
Biodiversity, Flora & Fauna	B1: Contribute toward compliance with EU Habitats and Birds Directives	Implementation of the VEMMP not to adversely affect the integrity of any Natura 2000 Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEA monitoring reports (frequency to be determined) Evidence submitted with Fáilte Ireland funding applications Evidence from partner organisations including NPWS and others e.g. Wicklow Uplands Council. Lower tier assessments associated with regulatory system including planning application decisions Article 17 (Habitats Directive) reports at national level by NPWS – 6 year intervals Article 12 (Birds Directive) monitoring reports at national level by NPWS – 6 year intervals
	B2: Contribute toward environmental reinstatement and protection of Nature Conservation Sites (as defined in the Planning and Development Act)	Maintenance or restoration of favourable conservation status of habitats and species	
	B3: Contribute toward conservation and enhancement of biodiversity	Protection of flora and fauna from disturbance and restoration of selected habitats	
Population and Human Health	P1: Contribute toward minimisation of adverse impacts on local communities arising from excessive concentration of tourism related activity	Reduction of congestion and wider distribution of tourism in the Wicklow area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEA monitoring reports (frequency to be determined) Evidence from partner organisations including Wicklow County Council
	P2: Contribute toward provision of a positive experience for visitors	Provision of improved information, interpretation and infrastructure	
Soils	S1: Contribute toward maintenance of the integrity and functioning of soils	Minimisation of soil sealing Protection of soil stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEA monitoring reports (frequency to be determined) Article 17 (Habitats Directive) reports by NPWS – 6 year intervals Lower tier assessments associated with regulatory system including planning application decisions Evidence from partner organisations including Wicklow County Council
Water	W1: Contribute toward maintenance and improvement of water quality	Maintenance or achievement of good status for surface waters and ground waters in terms of Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) Incorporation of nature based water management measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPA Catchments, ie Water Framework Programme Monitoring reports Other EPA reports including Quality of Bathing Waters Evidence from partner organisations
	W2: Contribute toward maintenance of bathing	Compliance with the provisions of the Bathing	

	water quality	Water Directive (2006/7/EC)		including Wicklow County Council
	W3: Contribute toward minimisation of flood risk	Compliance with Flood Risk Management Guidelines		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower tier assessments associated with regulatory system including planning application decisions OPW reports on flooding
Air and Climate	S1: Contribute toward mitigation of climate change	Incorporation of climate mitigation measures in VEMMP		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPA emissions data EPA air quality monitoring reports Lower tier assessments associated with regulatory system including planning application decisions
Material Assets	M1: Contribute toward provision of appropriately located and designed tourism infrastructure	Provision of improved and additional tourism related infrastructure at key locations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEA monitoring reports (frequency to be determined) Evidence from partner organisations including Wicklow County Council
	M2: Support adequate provision for and control of tourism related traffic	Provision of transportation related infrastructure at key locations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower tier assessments associated with regulatory system including planning application decisions
Cultural Heritage	H1: Contribute toward protection of archaeology and conservation of built heritage assets	No adverse effects on archaeological or architectural heritage arising from implementation of VEMMP		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEA monitoring reports (frequency to be determined) Evidence from partner organisations including National Monuments, OPW and Wicklow County Council
	H2: Support the potential of Glendalough for inscription as a World Heritage Property	Protection and enhancement of cultural heritage of Glendalough and its setting		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower tier assessments associated with regulatory system including planning application decisions
	H3: Support awareness of cultural heritage of Wicklow, including Glendalough	Provision of improved information and interpretation for the public		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEA monitoring reports (frequency to be determined) Evidence from partner organisations including National Monuments, OPW and Wicklow County Council Lower tier assessments associated with planning application decisions
Landscape	L1: Avoid conflicts with protection of landscapes designated for protection in the Development Plan	Avoidance or mitigation of impacts on designated landscapes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEA monitoring reports (frequency to be determined) Evidence from partner organisations including National Monuments, OPW and Wicklow County Council Lower tier assessments associated with planning application decisions

Monitoring Measures

14. Conclusion

The coincidence of the Covid emergency with the formulation of the *Draft VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park* has been a challenge both with respect to efficiency but also data collection, including in respect of determining visitor activity and associated traffic patterns. The analysis has been limited to available datasets, and findings must be treated with a certain amount of caution as research was carried out during 2020 and 2021, when tourism and travel had been severely restricted. The presence of uncertainties is reflected in the overall Masterplan, which is not a prescriptive document, but rather gives a series of options that are to be refined as further information becomes available through a co-ordinated programme of ongoing research and monitoring.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the *draft VEMMP* is in general accordance with the policies of the National Planning Framework and the RSES for the Eastern and Midlands Region. There is very close alignment between the *draft VEMMP* and the provisions of the Wicklow County Development Plan, 2022-2028, including the detailed provisions of the *Laragh-Glendalough Land Use and Tourism Plan*.

The *draft VEMMP* has potential to also cause negative environmental effects, but with appropriate mitigation, any negative impacts will not be significant. Implementation of the *draft VEMMP* will bring about positive environmental effects by addressing the excessive concentration of visitors in certain locations, notably Glendalough and at the main attractors for walkers within the National Park. It will also bring material benefit to parts of Wicklow other than Glendalough.

Submissions are sought in relation to the findings of the Environmental Report, the Natura Impact Statement and the *Draft VEMMP*. These submissions will be considered and taken into account by Fáilte Ireland in completion of the Strategic Environmental Assessment, the Appropriate Assessment (AA) and the finalisation of the *VEMMP*.

Following the above, and subject to the Appropriate Assessment (AA) under the Habitats Directive, it is intended that notice of the completion of the Strategic Environmental Assessment and of adoption of the *VEMMP for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park* will be given. An SEA Statement will also be made available, setting out how environmental considerations have been integrated into the *VEMMP*, how the Environmental Report and the submissions made in relation thereto have been taken into account, the reasons for choosing the *VEMMP*, as adopted, in the light of the reasonable alternatives considered and monitoring measures.