

Leitrim County Council



PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACT, 2000 (As Amended)

PART 8

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS 2001 (As Amended)

PART 8

BRIEFING REPORT

MULLAGHGARVE MASS ROCK TRAIL AND CARPARK.

Introduction and Background to Project

Leitrim County Council proposes to construct a car park and upgrade the existing walking trail up to Mass Rock at Mullaghgarve. Mass Rock has been a tourist attraction for many years near Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim. In recent years, visitor numbers have been increasing even during COVID-19. Tourists and locals use the walking trail for exercise and to view the Mass Rock as the site and proposed car park are near the top of Sliabh an Iarainn. There are spectacular views from this area of the Co. Leitrim countryside. The Mass Rock is promoted on various tourism websites and social media. Cars currently park along the nearby local road. Cars also park along a private access road, often blocking access for the landowner to their property. There is currently a walking trail to the Mass Rock from the nearby local road.

Leitrim County Council is proposing the development of a public carpark and the upgrade of the existing walking trail to Mass Rock.

These works include:

- 1. Construction of a public car park consisting of 13 no. spaces to facilitate visitors to Mass Rock**
- 2. Upgrade of 975m of existing trail with CL804 stone**
- 3. Construction of 150m of sheep's wool pathway**
- 4. Installation of 20m timber boardwalk.**
- 5. All necessary ancillary works.**

Scheme Overview

The scheme is located at Mullaghgarve outside Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim. The scheme will start from the public road L1601. There is an existing walking trail from the local road to the summit which will be upgraded. There will be 975m of an existing trail upgraded with CL804 stone. This will be followed by 150m of a proposed sheep's wool walking trail. There will also be a 20m timber boardwalk installed at a section to preserve the natural drainage through the bog. The proposed carpark will be located opposite the beginning of the trail.

On completion of the works, it is envisaged that the project will give visitors a safe place to park their car. It will enhance the experience for the visitor to the site as there are spectacular views from the car park location and make the local road safer for passing traffic. It will provide a safe parking space for persons with a disability and eliminate cars from parking on nearby private roadway.

The location and details of the project accompany the Part 8 application drawings.

Landownership

Land has been purchased for the location of the proposed carpark. Relevant land consents have been granted for the proposed works involving the trail.

Planning Policy Context

National Policy

Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future, (2009) is the transport policy for Ireland for the period 2009-2020. It recognises the vital importance of continued investment in transport to ensure an efficient economy and continued social development, but also promotes more sustainable transport modes such as walking, cycling and public transport.

Leitrim County Development Plan 2015 – 2021

Leitrim County Council has a number of policies and objectives set out in our County Development Plan which supports the proposed development. Policy No 1 states that it is the policy of the Council to deliver a *County Tourism Strategy* which will, inter alia, forge strategic and operational partnerships in tourism planning, marketing, and promotion with surrounding Counties in the Northwest and Northern Ireland.

Section 4.6.1 of the County Development Plan deals with Sustainable Transportation. The policies and objectives contained therein are guided by the national policy document "*Smarter Travel: A Sustainable Transport Future*, (2009)" which is referred to above. The promotion of initiatives that can reduce congestion, improve local environments, and encourage healthier and safer lifestyles are key features of sustainable transportation. Leitrim County Council seeks to influence people's travel behaviour towards more sustainable options and seeks to do so by working closely with relevant organisations in improving public transport facilities and promoting opportunities for alternative transportation such as walking and cycling.

Leitrim County Council also recognises the importance of walking and cycling to the wellbeing and quality of life of residents. It will support and encourage the continued development of walking as a sustainable form of transportation and will work with organisations and groups in the promotion of safe walking throughout the county, including heritage walks and the protection of public rights of way, which are an important amenity and tourism resource.

In accordance with the principles of sustainable development, the basis of the Council's transportation policies includes the encouragement of walking and cycling as a recreational activity and a healthy exercise.

Relevant policies and objectives in this regard include:

Policy 46 It is the policy of the Council to encourage safe walking and cycling by providing linear parks, footpaths, cycle paths and public lighting in towns and villages.

Policy 47 It is the policy of the Council to seek to improve the facilities for pedestrians and access facilities for people with special mobility needs in line with the aims of the European Charter of Pedestrian Rights.

Objective 29(a) It is an objective of the Council to seek opportunities for the development of suitable walking routes, cycle tracks and bridle paths along redundant railway lines and other suitable locations such as; along waterways and historical access routes.

In relation to Natura 2000 sites which refer to Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas, the County Development Plan states that the Council shall take appropriate steps to avoid, in these areas, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance

of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of the *EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC Directive)*.

With regard to Natura 2000 sites, the County Development Plan includes the following policies:

Policy 76 It is the policy of the Council to protect and conserve Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas including 'Candidate' and 'Proposed' areas.

Policy 77 It is the Policy of the Council to ensure that all Plans and Projects that have the potential to negatively impact on the integrity of the Natura 2000 network, will be subject to a Habitats Directive Assessment (HDA), in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive and in accordance with best practice and guidance.

Appropriate Assessment

An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has been prepared to assist the Planning Authority in their determination. The Appropriate Assessment Screening Report concludes that the project will have no significant effect on any Natura 2000 sites and that the project does not require to be progressed through to Stage II Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive.

Archaeological Assessment

There is no element identified through the National Monuments listed as an artifact of Archaeological importance within the area of the proposed works.

Environmental Impact Assessment

Within the associated EIA screening report, the review of plans and projects that is described as part of the works did not reveal any additional potential pathways for effect on European Sites or biodiversity that may have arisen as a result of those plans or projects. No pathway or mechanism for the development works to result in any significant effect on any European Site, was identified when considered on its own during the assessment process and therefore, there is no potential for it to contribute to any such effects when considered in-combination with any other development.

Appendix I Photographs of Proposed footpath route



Fig 1: Proposed site for public carpark



Fig 2: Mid-sections of walking trail



Fig 3: Sections of trail toward summit of Mass Rock



Fig 4: Mass Rock



Fig 5: View from Mass Rock