

# GLENDALOUGH AND WICKLOW MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

## VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND MANAGEMENT MASTERPLAN

**DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION**

### BOARD ONE

#### Wider Wicklow Experience Experiences & Attractions

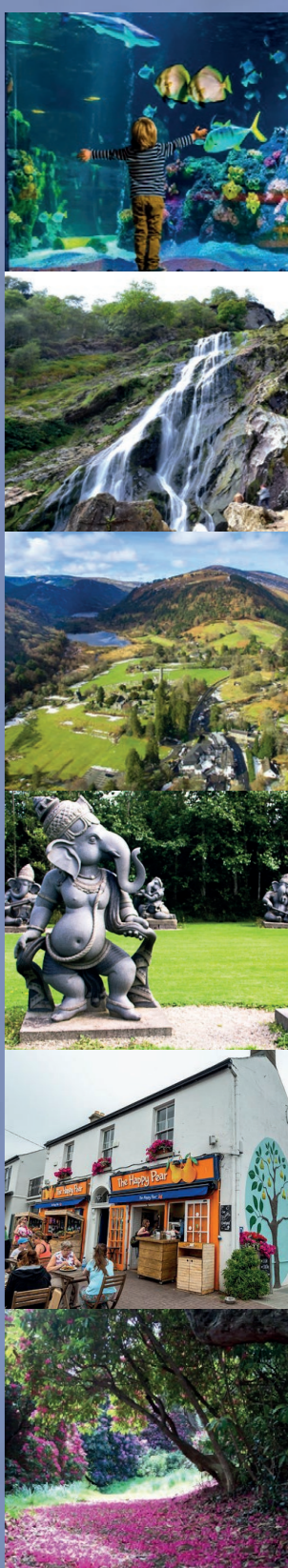
A comprehensive review of the experiences and attractions in the county found numerous offerings, destinations and a rich mix of attractions for visitors.

This ranges, but isn't limited to, the well known locations of Glendalough and Powerscourt House, Gardens and Waterfall, to various experiences along the east coast such as Bray to Greystones Cliff Walk and Wicklow Gaol.

Western attractions of the Blessington lakes and greenway, and southern experiences like Tomnafinnoge Woods and Arklow Maritime Museum all play important roles in the overall Wider Wicklow Experience.

The purpose of the Visitor Experience Masterplan is to set out a strategy for enhancing the visitor experience throughout the county, assist with the development of areas which have un-realised potential and to help busy areas become more sustainable, against a backdrop of protecting and enhancing the important and dramatic natural and built heritage of the County.

The ideas and proposals set out on these Boards are initial thoughts on how to achieve these aims and we welcome all comments and questions, insights and experiences so we can deliver a soundly based strategy with community support.



# GLENDALOUGH AND WICKLOW MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

## VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND MANAGEMENT MASTERPLAN

### DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

## BOARD TWO

### Wider Wicklow Experience Visitor Hubs and Clusters

Given the rich mix of attractions and assets it is proposed to support the development of visitor hubs - geographical clusters – where an emphasis can be placed on their core attractions, destinations and communities. This integrates with the recent Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy which identifies 5 key recreation hubs around the county. Details of that can be found on the Wicklow Partnership website – [www.wicklowpartnership.ie](http://www.wicklowpartnership.ie)

The aim is to strengthen and grow the visitor experience of these areas based on these assets and through that to encourage visitors and residents to explore the entire county. The themes identified for each area are not intended to be restrictive or exclusive but rather where we think there are strengths that can be developed. We would welcome feedback on these themes, including opinions on the strengths and merits of each area.

#### ● Blessington & Hollywood

Relatively low lying areas dominated by the landscapes of the lakes and the mountain backdrop. Visitor experiences tend to be family orientated including existing assets such as Blessington Greenway, Lakes, The Avon Ri, Russborough House and Parkland as well as linking with nearby attractions such as Kippure Estate and Hollywood village. The horticultural delights of Hunting Brook Garden, June Blake's Garden and the walled garden in Russborough form a hub for those interested in garden design at the top of it's game. The focus of these areas could be towards family experiences, for a longer stay and at a slower pace.

#### ● Baltinglass

Baltinglass and surrounding area has a wealth of heritage assets such as Baltinglass Abbey and Graveyard, Rathcoan Hillfort, Kilranelagh Graveyard, Boleycarrigeen Stone Circle and Rathsalagh Country House, Golf and Country Club and Pathanna Gardens in Kiltegan. The focus of the Baltinglass area could be to encourage the exploration of these heritage features.

#### ● Aughrim, Tinahely & Shillelagh

In the rolling valleys of the southern part of the county are the smaller rural villages of Aughrim, Tinahely and Shillelagh. Rambling walks are accompanied by places to eat and explore.

The villages of Tinahely and Shillelagh themselves have attractions of Tinahely Farm Shop and Activity Centre, Shillelagh Stick Sculpture and its heritage, as well as Tinahely looped walks, Railway Walk and Tomnafinnoge Woods Nature Reserve offering attractive ways to explore outdoors. This is a relatively undeveloped area for visitors and has much to offer in slow, gentle and rich experiences.

Aughrim is an old estate village with beautiful granite buildings, an all ability angling lake and the nearby hub of Macreddin Village with it's organic restaurants, weekend markets and golf course which can be reached by a walking trail from the village.

#### ● Wicklow Coastline

The settlements along the east coast of the county such as Bray, Greystones, Wicklow and Arklow have a wide range of visitor experiences and destinations to discover including beaches at Greystones and Brittas Bay, as well as indoor and outdoor experiences such as the Sea Life Centre, Bray Head, Bray to Greystones Cliff Walk, Wicklow Gaol and the Arklow Maritime Museum. These settlements and destinations should seek to encourage exploration of the entire east coast linking together assets to create longer visitor stays. Arklow has an important role to play as a gateway to Glendalough, Laragh and the Wicklow mountains when travelling from the south of the county.

#### ● Glencree, Ballinastoe & Roundwood

The faster paced outdoor experiences are concentrated to the north of the county with a main attraction at Ballinastoe Forest Mountain Bike Centre complimented by the bike and walking trails at Belmont Demesne. Various other destinations in the adjacent Dublin Mountains such as Ticknock Forest, Zipit Forest Adventures and Glencullen Adventure Park build a critical mass of adventure activity destinations which could be further developed. Roundwood as the Gateway Village to the uplands with the network of walking trails around the Vartry Reservoir has great potential for sustainable development.

#### ✳ Managed Estates & Gardens in the Garden County

There are a number of managed landscapes across County Wicklow, these include grand estate houses, gardens, golf courses and Hotels. To the west are Russborough House, Rathsalagh Country House and Golf Club, June Blake's Garden, Hunting Brook Garden and Patthana Garden. To the south there is Coolattin Estate and Golf Club. Destinations in the east include the National Botanic Gardens at Kilmacurragh, Mount Usher Gardens, Avondale House and Forest Park, Killruddery House and Gardens and the internationally renowned Powerscourt House and Gardens and nearby Waterfall. Enniskerry, Roundwood and Druids Glen all offer hospitality.

#### ● Glendalough & Laragh

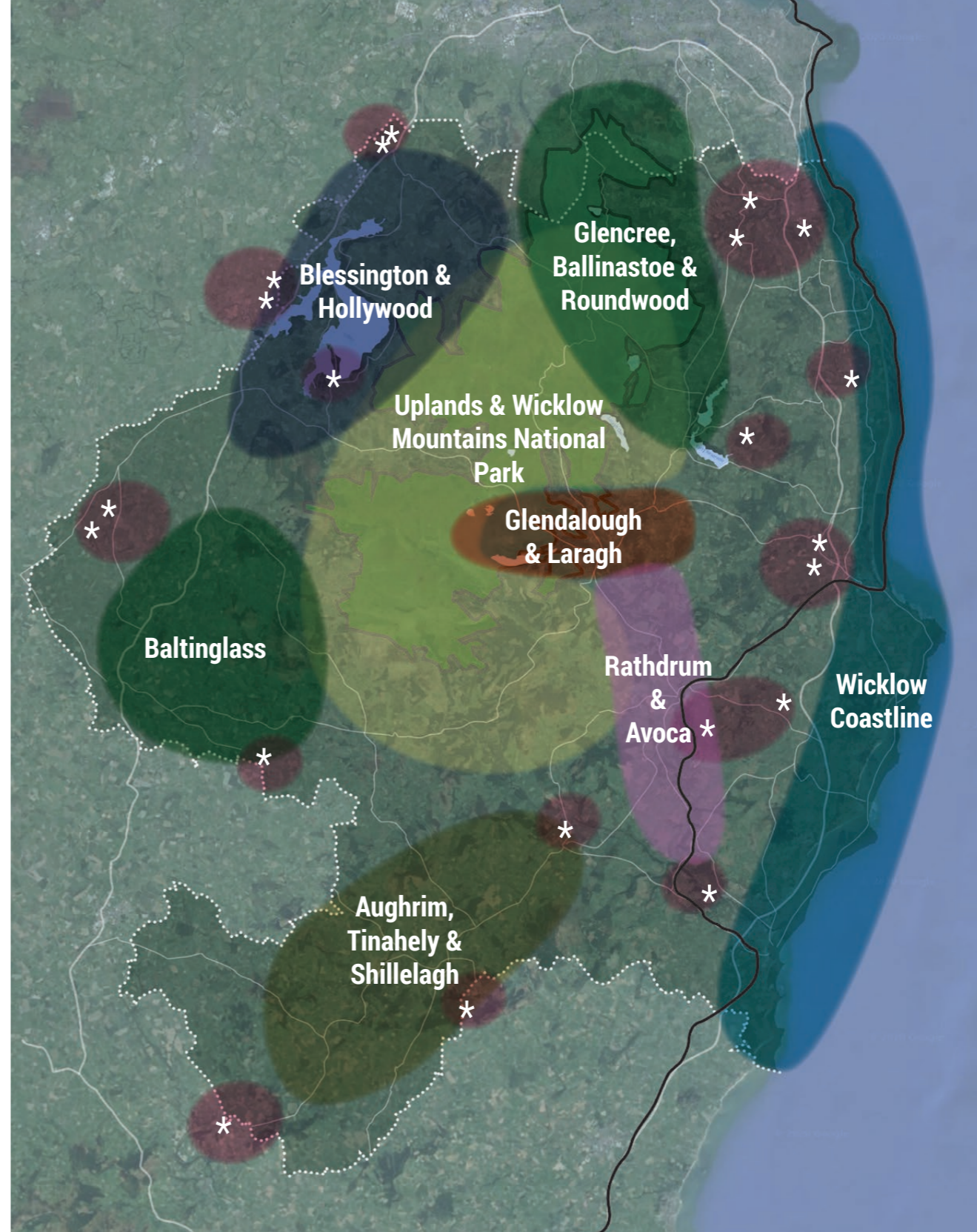
The monastic experience at Glendalough is the most popular visitor destination in County Wicklow and of tentative World Heritage Site status. As such it is subject to a detailed analysis and study set out on the following sections. Gateway towns and villages play an important part in the sense of arrival to Glendalough with Laragh having a crucial role due to its proximity to the monastic site.

#### ● Rathdrum & Avoca

Due to Rathdrum's close proximity to Glendalough and Laragh, there are ambitions to improve Rathdrum's connection north to Laragh village and south to Avondale House and Forest. This can be done through improved foot and cycle connections along the Avonmore Way, as well as through other sustainable means. There is great potential to explore the town's role as a new gateway to the Glendalough Valley and wider Wicklow County while enhancing existing assets such as the towns textile heritage, Hidden Valley and Splash Valley, Avondale House and Forest, Ballygannon Wood and Shekina Sculpture Garden. Avoca, situated on the River Avoca, is a picturesque small town located between Rathdrum and Arklow. Its attractions include Avoca Handweavers, the Meeting of the Waters and the Avoca mines.

#### ● The Uplands & Wicklow National Park

At the core of the County are the uplands, much of which is included within the boundaries of Wicklow Mountains National Park and other state owned lands. These are vital habitats and carry a range of protective designations, they are also a vital outdoor resource for local residents and visitors alike. The challenge is to create sustainable access, protect the environment and offer world class visitor experiences.



# GLENDALOUGH AND WICKLOW MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

## VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND MANAGEMENT MASTERPLAN

### DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

# BOARD THREE

## Glendalough & Laragh Attractions, Challenges & Emerging Development Principles

### ATTRACTIONS

- A sublime co-incidence of nature, heritage and culture in one spectacular valley
- Significant Monastic heritage identified as a tentative World Heritage site
- Layers of human history and stories written into the landscape
- One of the important Gateways to the Wicklow Mountains National Park
- Proximity of Laragh village to monastic site
- Good public accessibility to natural landscape and visitor facilities

### CHALLENGES

- Impact on the quality of the visitor experience through congestion, short stay visits, and uneven hospitality offerings
- Quality of visitor facilities, interpretation and orientation not meeting the quality of the built and natural assets
- Negative impacts on habitat and bio-diversity
- Challenges of managing large numbers of visitors especially at peak times

### EMERGING DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

- Safeguard, restore and enhance the setting of the heritage and natural environment of Glendalough using sustainable principles, as a place for local people to be proud of and as a place of world-wide significance to be visited by people from across Ireland and internationally.

Facilitate visitors in their enjoyment and understanding of Glendalough, as a monastic site of outstanding significance combined with a natural landscape of ecological and recreational importance through a combined visitor experience.

- Dispersal of visitors for whom the monastic experience is not the primary reason for their visit, to reduce the pressure on Glendalough. This will focus on encouraging walkers/cyclists/leisure users to use other areas, especially at peak times as part of the County wide strategy.

- Develop a sustainable trail network that encourages the exploration and enjoyment of the Glendalough Valley, its outstanding and unique heritage, culture and landscape, with routes that are accessible to all, on foot, bike and wheelchair.

- Restore the quality of the monastic landscape and its wider valley setting, from the Upper Lake to Laragh, befitting the potential World Heritage Site (WHS) designation.

- Integrate engaging interpretation that enriches the visitor experience as part of the trail network and through improvement of the existing facilities at Glendalough.

- Provide good quality accessible parking in Laragh associated with a new visitor orientation hub that becomes in time the main point of welcome for Glendalough with an effective shuttle bus that connects the parking in Laragh with Glendalough and the Upper Lake.

- Encourage sustainable transport connections from Rathdrum, connecting with the railway station, including walking, cycling and bus routes.

- Incrementally reduce car/coach parking at the Upper Lake and adjacent to the existing Visitor Centre in Glendalough reducing the impact of parked and moving vehicles on the most sensitive areas, making them increasingly attractive for local people and visitors.

- Promote, strengthen and enhance the quality of existing commercial offerings at Glendalough and Laragh – hospitality, accommodation and visitor services and support new, diversified opportunities.

- Facilitate a critical mass of high-quality activities and attractions that encourages multi-day visitor experiences – ‘slow and sustainable’ tourism.



# GLENDALOUGH AND WICKLOW MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

## VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND MANAGEMENT MASTERPLAN

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

# BOARD FOUR

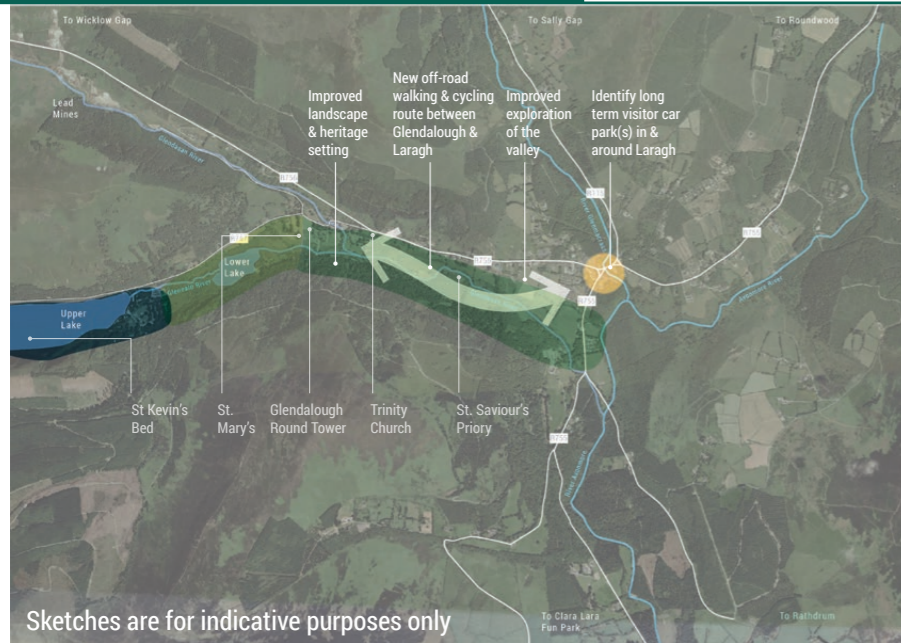
## Glendalough & Laragh Draft Proposals

These Principles are the basis for a phased approach to development based on incremental steps to match demand. They are envisaged as a progression from small scale interventions as soon as possible to relieve existing pressures, moving towards longer-term, comprehensive and ambitious plans to transform the visitor experience in the valley.

Implementation will require co-operation and co-ordination between the various state bodies, Wicklow County Council, the local community and a number of private owners and operators.

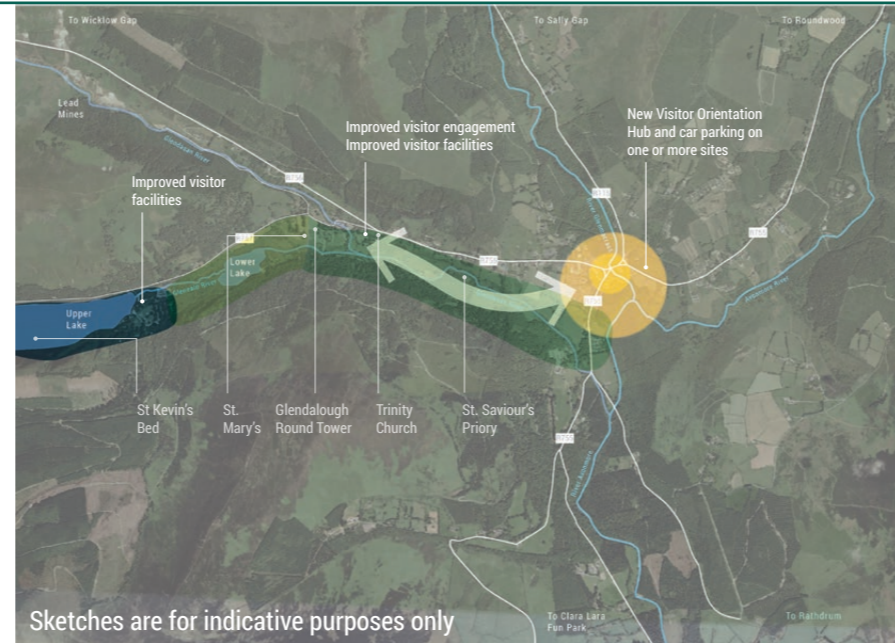
We believe all parties have much to gain from this approach as it will balance the various needs, desires, responsibilities and ambitions.

The draft proposals are set out in 3 broad phases, broadly in the order we see implementation as desirable. There is a potential stopping point or pausing point after each phase which could be used to review and measure effectiveness and inform the detail of the following phases.



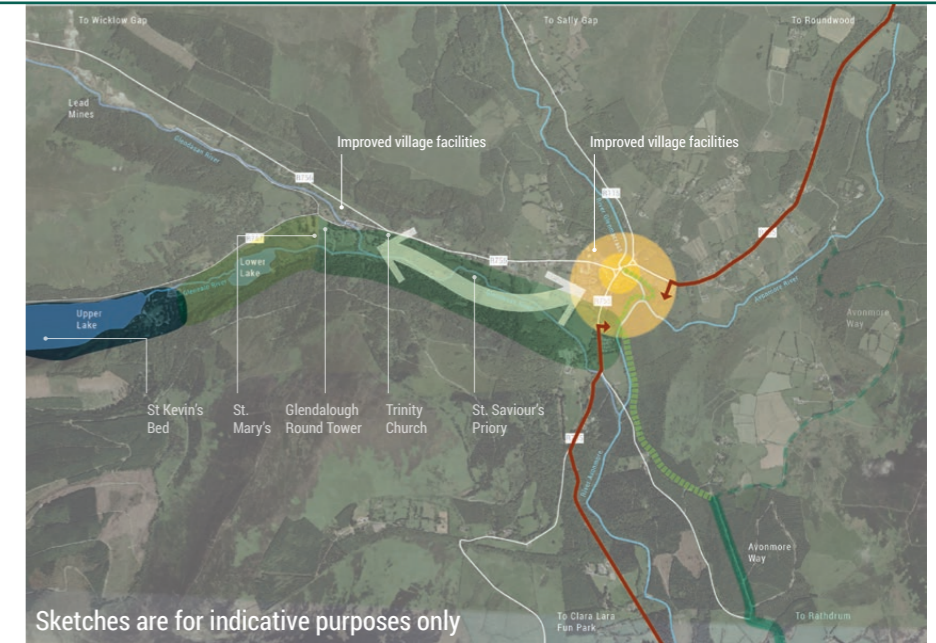
### DRAFT PROPOSALS PHASE ONE : 1 - 3 YEARS

- Commission detailed visitor surveys and vehicle movement counters to provide accurate information on which to base future decisions.
- Secure long-term car park locations in Laragh and replace current temporary overflow car park.
- Develop all-ability pedestrian and cycle links between Laragh and the Upper Lake.
- Establish a high quality, effective seasonable shuttle bus service.
- VMS (Variable Messaging Signs) installed on the 4 main approach roads linked to car park counters to facilitate management of the parking provision.
- Improvements to the heritage and landscape setting from the Visitor centre to the Upper Lake, through the restoration of natural habitats and landscape settings with resultant increases in biodiversity.
- Re-purpose the existing Visitor Centre to include natural heritage as well as the built and cultural heritage interpretation in a more accessible way for more visitors, and integration of interpretation across the trails in the Valley.
- Develop detailed Conservation Plans for the built and natural heritage of the valley and in particular develop a vision for enhancing the character and significance of the monastic heritage.
- Investment in sustainable trail network and habitat protection.
- Review of effectiveness, needs and demands to inform detail of Phase 2.



### DRAFT PROPOSALS PHASE TWO : 3 - 5 YEARS

- New Visitor Orientation Hub developed in Laragh, as an inspirational entry point fusing buildings and landscape to make the journey rewarding and special, commensurate with a destination of international quality. Provide visitors with the information they require to plan their visit, refresh after a journey and understand the context of the areas they are about to visit.
- Further develop the existing Visitor Centre as an Interpretation and Education resources for the whole valley.
- Introduce seasonal restrictions on the Upper Lake car park to reduce congestion, **with local access maintained.**
- Enhanced visitor facilities at the Upper lake including toilets, a coffee dock and information hub.
- VMS system from Phase 1 adapted as required to facilitate the increased use of the parking in Laragh.
- Trader units from bridge area re-located to Visitor Centre car park within new designed structures to allow public realm improvements to Glendalough village and bridge area.
- Lands between Visitor Centre and monastic site and back to Trinity Church re-landscaped using native species as the second phase of restoring the wider monastic landscape.
- Scale of Laragh car parks increased as demand requires.
- Investment in sustainable trail network and habitat protection.
- Review of effectiveness, needs and demands to inform detail of Phase 3.



### DRAFT PROPOSALS PHASE THREE : 5 - 7 + YEARS

- Parking provision in Laragh increased to full capacity so that the starting point of the Glendalough Valley experience for most visitors is in Laragh with it being understood as a full day or multi-day experience.  
**Local access maintained.**
- Sustainable transport links from surrounding Gateways ( Rathdrum, Hollywood, Arklow, Roundwood etc) put into place.
- OPW Car Park in Glendalough subject to seasonal restrictions to create a better visitor experience in the vicinity of the monastic site at busy times.
- Full restoration of the monastic landscape in line with Conservation Plan.
- Restoration and management of habitats in the valley ongoing with continued investment in a sustainable trail network and habitat protection.