

## MATERIAL ALTERATIONS TO THE DRAFT MAYO COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Forward Planning  
Mayo County Council  
Aras an Chontae, The Mall,  
Castlebar  
Co. Mayo, F23 WF90

Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2022  
[Via: <http://consult.mayo.ie>]

Dear Sir/Madam,

**RE: SUBMISSION TO MATERIAL ALTERATIONS TO DRAFT MAYO COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN BY WESTPORT ESTATE**

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY

The Planning Partnership, McHale Retail Park, Castlebar, Co. Mayo, have been retained by Inishoo Management Ltd., The Demesne, Westport, Co. Mayo (the owners of Westport Estate) to prepare a submission in relation to the Material Alterations to the Draft Mayo County Development Plan 2022-2028.

As is acknowledged in the existing Mayo County Development Plan Westport Estate is a 'world renowned attraction'<sup>1</sup> which is set to further materialise during the lifetime of the emerging County Development Plan.

Following the purchase of the Estate in 2017, the owners have implemented a significant programme of investment and restoration which is ongoing in terms of bringing key element of the Estate back to former glory and securing the long term of structures therein.

In addition, the owners have partnered with Failte Ireland through the 'Platforms for Growth' grant for Heritage and Cultural Attractions which will provide funding of c. €20 million as part of an overall investment across the Estate as a whole in the order of €75 million.

Delivery of the Failte Ireland project, and other projects within the Estate, will take place during the lifetime of the forthcoming Development Plan.

Whilst the local planning and development policies and objectives for Westport and Westport Estate will be set out in a separate Local Area Plan, we consider that it is also prudent that the County Plan address and acknowledge strategic issues, given the significance of the Estate to the economy of the County as a whole.

Specifically this submission relates to proposed **Amendment CH 5.1** where, in addition to the reference to Regional Tourism Plans, this section of the Development Plan should explicitly reference and support the *Clew Bay Destination and Experience Development Plan* (November 2021) (DEDP) which constitutes Fáilte Ireland's strategy for a substantial portion of the County, and is of particular relevance to Westport Estate.

The following sets out the rationale for changes to the Material Alterations to the Plan in greater detail.

<sup>1</sup> Table 2 – Strengths and Economic Opportunities for Co. Mayo

## 2.0 MATERIAL ALTERATIONS

### 2.1 Amendment CH 5.1

We note the amendment proposes to introduce the following text:

*5.4.2 Regional Tourism Plans (RTPs)*

*Fáilte Ireland are in the process of preparing Regional Tourism Plans for each of the four Regional Experience Brands (Dublin, Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands). The purpose of the Regional Tourism Plans is to identify the sustainable tourism development priorities that will help to unlock the commercial potential of the region bringing benefits to all stakeholders and industry. Each plan will be prepared based on the VICE model which is a methodology for working towards sustainable tourism that seeks to strike an appropriate balance between the needs of the Visitor, the Industry and Community and the Environment. The plans will be for the period to 2025 and will be grounded in the Fáilte Ireland's new Corporate Strategy. There will be a strong spatial element to the plans which will seek to identify where development should take place in order to unlock the tourism potential of the region.*

The above inclusion should however be amended to reflect emerging policy at national level by Fáilte Ireland, specifically the DEDP which post dates the drafting of the emerging Development Plan.

The Draft Plan as published refers to future publications of visitor experience development plans (VEDPs) which the DEDP now supersedes.

The DEDP sets out in comprehensive detail the strategy for Clew Bay, the detail of which should be incorporated into the Development Plan. For instance, 'Westport Estate' is one of four 'Hero Experience Themes', which the DEDP elaborates on in considerable detail, which in turn aligns the 'Platforms for Growth' project at Westport Estate currently being progressed.

Our client requests that the principal detail of the Westport Estate Hero Experience be incorporated into Section 5.4.2 of the Development Plan, as would be entirely in keeping with the spirit of the Development Plan as drafted and as is proposed to be amended above.

Appendix A includes extracts from the DEDP which can be summarised into three main categories / elements, as follows:

1. Restoration and reinterpretation of Westport House and formal gardens;
2. Deliver the Wild Realms Garden Project; and,
3. Deliver the Immersive Grace O'Malley experience.

In our opinion it is important for the Development Plan to provide appropriate specificity to such a strategic project (along with all other Hero Experiences) and the proposed additions herein are relevant to and interlinked with the above **Amendment CH 5.1**.

Specifically, whilst the quoted text in the proposed amendment relates to the opening paragraph of Section 5.4.2 of the Draft Development Plan, the above advertised change affects the entirety of Section 5.4.2 and the overall commentary therein. As noted by Fáilte Ireland in their submission to the Draft Plan: "*The Regional Tourism Plans will also provide a strategic framework for a suite of Destination Experience Development Plans (DEDPs) which will sit underneath them.*"

By changing Section 5.4.2 to refer to the *Regional Tourism Plans*, the final Development Plan should ensure that the overall text therein ties in with the next level of the *Regional Tourism Plan* hierarchy, i.e. the DEDP as published.

### 3.0 CONCLUSION

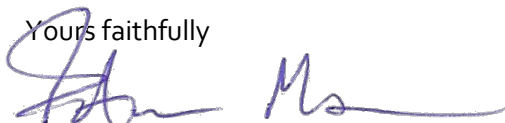
We trust the above is of interest and will be considered by the Planning Authority and look forward to the publication of the *Mayo County Development Plan 2022-2028* in due course.

In our opinion, the proposed modifications to the Material Alterations are in line with the core principles of both local and national policies, and primarily seeks to make explicit the existing implicit support for development at Westport Estate.

They also seek to adapt the Development Plan to acknowledge the 'world renowned attraction' that Westport Estate is, and to signal the forthcoming significant investment in the future of the Estate.

Should you have any queries or require any further information in relation to the above please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



**Fintan Morrin**

**Associate**

**The Planning Partnership**

Encl.

Appendix A

*Extracts of Clew Bay Destination and Experience Development Plan*

# THE HERO EXPERIENCE THEMES **Téamaí Eispéiris ar leith**

## WESTPORT ESTATE

The story of Westport House is a microcosm for the wider and, at times, turbulent history of Ireland. Built in the 18th century by the Browne family, each generation had to contend with and adapt to the prevailing social, political and religious changes encountered up until it was eventually sold to the Hughes family in 2017. Visitors to Westport Estate today can stroll the grounds or take a guided tour of the house itself to learn about the Browne family and the house's connection to Grace O'Malley.

## Hero Experience Priorities

In 2021, Fáilte Ireland announced its largest investment ever in a singular tourism product totalling €20.2m to assist with the development of Westport Estate as a national attraction of significance. Among the key areas of work that will be supported by the Fáilte Ireland grant and in partnership with acclaimed designer Mary Reynolds, Westport Estate will be creating a very different and uniquely Irish re-wilded landscape experience connecting the earth with Irish heritage. The restoration of Westport House and the reimagining of its 300-year history will be a strong feature. In addition, a brand-new immersive visitor experience will be created that tells the legendary story of Grace O'Malley, the Pirate Queen.



Westport Estate

# ACTION PLAN Plean Gníomhaíochta – BUILDING EXPERIENCES Eispéiris á Fhorbairt

## Introduction to the Action Plan

The Action Plan lists all the actions that are required to address the development of the potential HERO Experience themes and the associated priorities. The Plan is organised by HERO Experience theme and outlines a range of initiatives that are designed to bring each theme to the fore. In addition, the Action Plan identifies ‘enablers of

success’ – a broad spectrum of destination development factors relating to such areas as governance, access, supporting infrastructure, capacity building, storytelling and sense of place.

### WESTPORT ESTATE

The actions that relate to this HERO Experience theme are designed to create and improve experiences that bring the significant strengths of land, sea and sky to the fore. They aim at helping the visitor to experience deep connections with our history, our people and our landscape and to grow in their appreciation for the unique qualities of this distinctive area of Co. Mayo.

Today the land, sea and sky attract visitors with a diverse range of interests, with many seeking a sense of personal fulfilment, discovery, and an

opportunity to become immersed and to experience their own personal *Clew Bay moment*.

Visitors to Westport Estate today can stroll the grounds or take a guided tour of the house itself to learn about the Browne family and the house’s connection to Grace O’Malley. The estate is positioned to become a major tourist attraction on the Wild Atlantic Way following a significant investment from Fáilte Ireland, detailed below.

| WESTPORT ESTATE |   | Timeframe   | Lead                             | Partner   |
|-----------------|---|-------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 1.1             | <p><b>Restoration and reinterpretation of Westport house and formal gardens.</b></p> <p>Home to the Browne family for nearly 300 years, they poured their hearts and souls into maintaining the estate and house for future generations to enjoy. Wild and wonderful tales await, as visitors will be immersed in grand tours, daring deeds, dungeons and even the abolishment of slavery. Descend into the basement, the engine room of the house and experience servant life – a new story to be told at Westport House. Visitors will emerge into the beauty of the formal Victorian house gardens restored to their former glory overlooking the lake and woodland.</p> | Medium Term | Fáilte Ireland / Westport Estate | <i>A range of partners will be engaged across this project as it progresses</i> |

# ACTION PLAN Plean Gníomhaíochta – BUILDING EXPERIENCES Eispéiris á Fhorbairt

| WESTPORT ESTATE  | Timeframe          | Lead                                    | Partner  |
|--|--------------------|---|--|
| <p>1.1 cont. <b>Deliver the Wild Realms Garden Project.</b></p> <p>Mary Reynolds, reformed landscape designer, is creating 3 brand new contemporary garden spaces that will pair beautifully with Westport Estate’s traditional heritage and will resonate with visitors from around the world. The Wild Realms, a wildly different and uniquely Irish landscape experience, tells the story of the Tree of Life in three distinct wild lands. Here, visitors are reminded that humans are merely guardians of this earth. There has never been anything like this in Ireland.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The tree’s roots lie in Ladies Walk,</li> <li>▶ The trunk in the Walled Garden,</li> <li>▶ The crown on Garvillaun Island.</li> </ul> <p>In each space, we gain a new understanding of the intelligence of nature and how she decides what grows by drawing on the old ways. It includes a miniature pilgrimage, a wind harp and Ireland’s longest tree-top walk. Daytime and night-time story telling sessions will be held around a firepit. Other niche events will include evening performances by travelling theatre groups.</p> <p><b>Deliver the Immersive Grace O’Malley experience.</b></p> <p>The newly imagined Westport Estate experience will begin at the new Coach House Visitor Centre with the story of the original Wild Atlantic woman, Grace O’Malley, the legendary Mayo Pirate Queen. Back in the 16th century, Grace challenged all who stood in her way, at a time when women were treated very differently. The new experience will be the first to explore her truth in such a high impact, experiential, immersive and innovative way – and in the home of her descendants, the Browne family. This exciting new experiential offering will form an integral part of the wider Grace O’Malley Trail proposal which is explored separately in this plan.</p> | <p>Medium Term</p> | <p>Fáilte Ireland / Westport Estate</p> | <p><i>A range of partners will be engaged across this project as it progresses</i></p> |