

Castlebanny Windfarm, Recreation Development Plan



Humphrey Murphy
ILC
humphrey@ilc.ie
086 2659276
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Summary

Springfield Renewables Ltd (Springfield), supported by Coillte and ART Generation is committed to enhancing the recreation experience currently on offer in Castlebanny Forest as part of the proposed wind farm development.

Castlebanny forest is an accessible and largely level or gently sloping area with existing forest road infrastructure. A commercial forest, it is also used by some nearby residents for walking and to a lesser extent equestrian activities. The forest also hosts the 'Glenpipe to Mullinavat' section of the South Leinster Way, however, aside from this section of trail, there is limited use of the forest for walking by outlying communities possibly due to the complex trail network, the absence of signage and insufficient awareness of the opportunities.

The relative lack of gradient in Castlebanny forest allied to its elevated nature and its location within a 10-kilometre radius of a number of small communities, makes it an appropriate location for walking and gravel trail cycling. There is also an opportunity to link Castlebanny Forest with other outdoor recreation venues in the wider area via the South Leinster Way which ribbon-like connects these venues.

Following an examination of the current use of the forest and the opportunities for enhancement and connection to surrounding walks and greenways in consultation with key stakeholders a recreational plan has been incorporated into the proposed wind farm development.

The main themes of walking, cycling, signage, car parking and associated trail infrastructure identified have been addressed as follows:

- Walking: 2 no. trail loops of different lengths and thus differing degrees of difficulty have been proposed:
 - Mullenakill loop (6km).
 - Castlebanny branch (a 2km extension of the Mullenakill loop)

A portion of a 3rd loop, the Derrylackey loop will also be upgraded completing this 5km loop and providing access to turbine no. 1.

- Cycling: Existing forest trails within the proposed development site including a section of South Leinster Way, will be enhanced to provide a hard-packed gravel and a dust finish that will also be suitable for cycling. New trails will also be finished in this way.
- Outdoor exercise stations: 8 no. outdoor exercise stations are proposed along the Mullenakill loop close to its junction with the South Leinster Way.
- Car parking: A permanent public car park with seating/picnic tables is proposed at the end of the construction phase of the development on the footprint of the southern temporary construction compound. This will provide a trailhead/landing point for visitors to the forest and enable visitors from the surrounding settlements to visit the forest. It is adjacent to the South Leinster Way and the start of the Mullenakill loop and Derrylackey loop.
- General information and wind farm information signs are also proposed proximate to active zone junction to attract visitors to the forest and promote interest in the provision of renewable energy at this location. A general information/welcome sign is also proposed at the main operational wind farm entrance.
- Directional signs along the Castlebanny forest trails are proposed at junctions to direct visitors appropriately.

1.0 Project Concept

The proposed development of a windfarm in Coillte's Castlebanny forest provides an opportunity to further community, recreation and tourism development in the forest for the nearby community and the outlying areas.

Springfield is committed to enhancing the recreation experience currently on offer in Castlebanny Forest as part of a successful wind farm project and will thus will provide resources/funding as part of the proposed development to enhance the recreation potential of the site.

2.0 Castlebanny Forest Profile and Surrounding Area

Castlebanny Forest is a largely mature evergreen forest with two small knolls (both approx. 250 meters high), resulting in a slight gradient on the Western edge of the forest at Castlegannon (10m height loss) and a more pronounced gradient on the Eastside, Kilvinoge (22m height loss). These relatively low gradients of 20 meters height gain/loss overall, makes the site suitable for easy to moderate walking, recreational off-road cycling and related activities.

Castlebanny forest is located close to the following communities and tourism services and sites:

- Mullinavat: located 3.5 km southwest from Castlebanny with an urban population* of 233.
- Ballyhale: located 3 km northwest from Castlebanny with an urban population* of 174.
- Knocktopher; located 4 km northwest from Castlebanny with an urban population* of 166.
- Thomastown: located 6 km north from Castlebanny with an urban population* of 2,445.
- Inistioge: located 6 km northeast from Castlebanny with an urban population* of 285.
- Listerlin: located 2 km northeast from Castlebanny.

*Based on the 2016 Census

- A Jerpoint Abbey.
- B Goatsbridge Trout Farm.
- C Thomastown.
- D Butterfly Glamping.
- E Woodstock Garden (Inistioge)
- F St Molin's Well.
- G Bishop's Mountain Shooting Ground
- H Tory Hill.
- I Poulnassy Waterfall.
- J Kiltorcan Go-Kart Track.
- K Mountain View Golf Course/Restaurant.

3.0 Castlebanny Forest Current Recreation Status and Opportunities

As described above Castlebanny Forest is a commercial forest traversed by a network of forest roads. While the Forest is used informally by local residents, the lack of coherent trail loops and signage has limited its use to locals with a good knowledge of the forest. The main recreational access to the forest is currently via the South Eastern corner with some further access from the mid-western perimeter. There is limited access from the Knocktopher, Ballyhale and Thomastown (Northern), ends of the forest and this limits its relevance currently to these communities as a recreation resource.

Walking is currently the main recreational activity in the forest, followed by equestrian and cycling activities. Based on site visits and discussions with local residents and agencies (including Kilkenny Leader Project, Kilkenny Recreation Officer) the following recreational priorities were identified:

- Walking: Upgrading existing trails within the proposed development site, including enhancement of the South Leinster Way (SLW) and the provision of additional new trails to form coherent trail loops through the forest.
- Cycling: Dual use of all upgraded and proposed trails to facilitate family-friendly gravel cycling through the forest.
- The provision of outdoor exercise stations, general information signs, wind farm information signs and directional signs along the forest trails.
- Car parking: The provision of a permanent public car park with seating/picnic tables which will provide a trailhead/landing point for visitors to the forest.

It was further recognised that given the number of trails in the region the addition of the proposed infrastructure at Castlebanny Forest has the potential to enhance this cross-county trail network (see Figure 1 below).

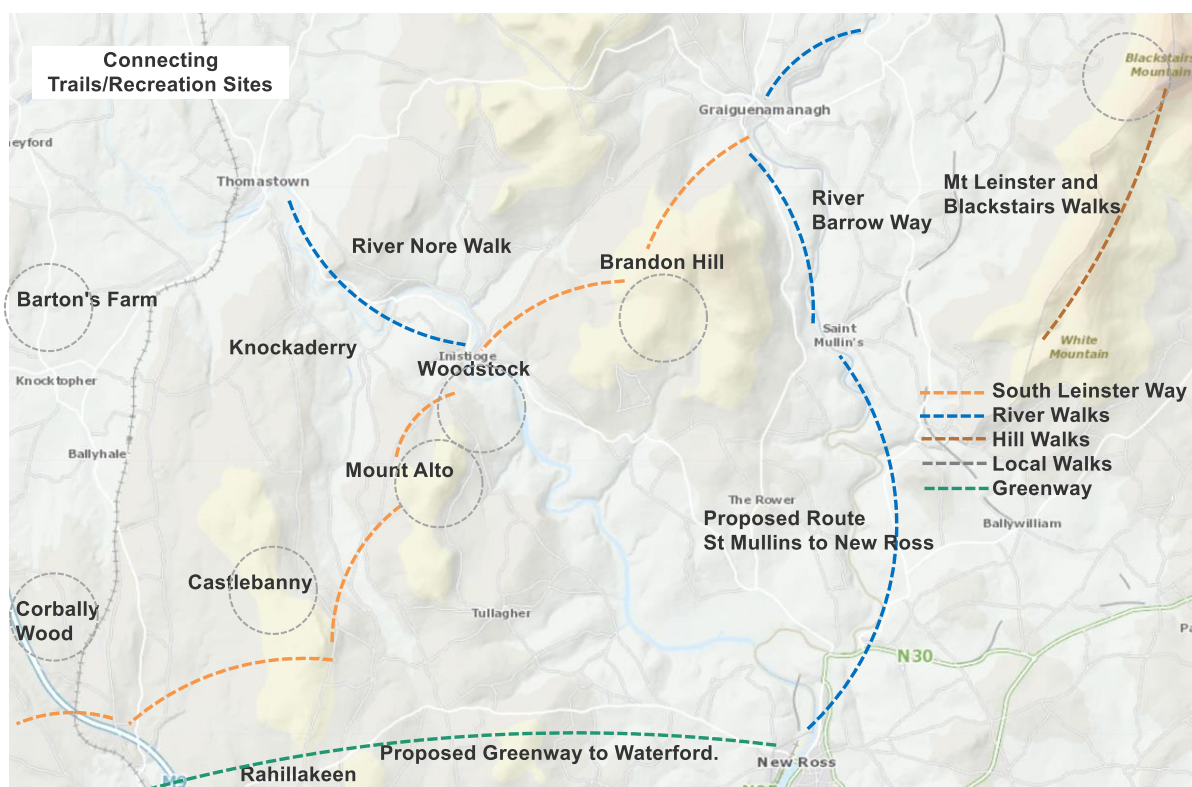


Figure 1: Walks and Trails in the Surrounding Area

4.0 Recreation Development Plan

Following an examination of the current use of the forest and the opportunities for enhancement and connection to surrounding walks and greenways a recreational plan has been incorporated into the proposed wind farm development as shown in Appendix 1 (also Dwg. Ref. 10730-2055 accompanying this application).

The main themes of walking, cycling, signage, car parking and associated trail infrastructure identified in consultation with key stakeholders have been addressed as follows:

- Walking: 2 no. trail loops of different lengths and thus differing degrees of difficulty have been proposed:
 - Mullenakill loop (6km).
 - Castlebanny branch (a 2km extension of the Mullenakill loop)

The Mullenakill Loop will form the central spine of the new trails at Castlebanny forest and will link into the South Leinster Way and provide a new point of interest along this established route including showcasing a number of the proposed wind turbines.

A portion of a 3rd loop, the Derrylackey loop will also be upgraded completing this 5km loop and providing access to turbine no. 1.

- Cycling: Existing forest trails within the proposed development site including a section of South Leinster Way, will be enhanced to provide a hard-packed gravel and a dust finish that will also be suitable for cycling. New trails will also be finished in this way.
- Outdoor exercise stations: 8 no. outdoor exercise stations are proposed along the Mullenakill loop close to its junction with the South Leinster Way. This will provide an active zone for visitors to the Castlebanny forest or hikers traversing on the South Leinster Way thus promoting entry into the Castlebanny forest trails.
- General information and wind farm information signs are also proposed proximate to active zone junction to attract visitors to the forest and promote interest in the provision of renewable energy at this location. A general information/welcome sign is also proposed at the main operational wind farm entrance.
- Directional signs along the Castlebanny forest trails are proposed at junctions to direct visitors appropriately.
- Car parking: A permanent public car park with seating/picnic tables is proposed at the end of the construction phase of the development on the footprint of the southern temporary construction compound. This will provide a trailhead/landing point for visitors to the forest and enable visitors from the surrounding settlements to visit the forest. It is adjacent to the South Leinster Way and the start of the Mullenakill loop and Derrylackey loop.

The proposed trails will be for the general public, visitors to the area for recreation and, under licence from Coillte, for events and competitions. Dogs on a leash will be permitted on the trails. These trails are not for any mechanised forms of transport other than for the management of the forest and windfarm.

Castlebanny forest will be available to host appropriate events and competitions such as orienteering, athletics, equestrian and cycling. An online Coillte permit scheme is in place to support this. The use of the forest for informal and organised recreational activities and events will form part of the future management of the forest.

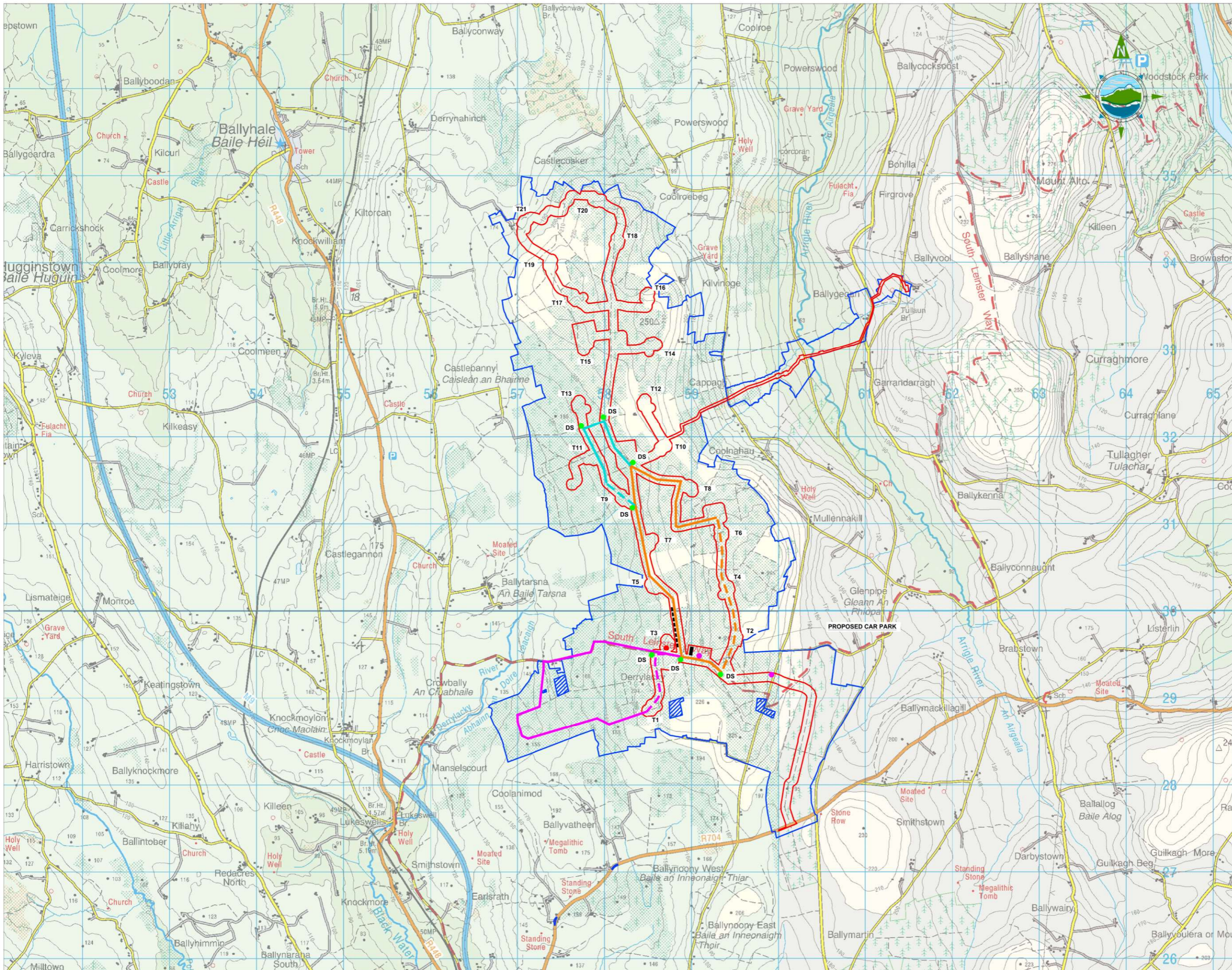
Castlebanny forest will also be available for commercial recreational activities under licence. Commercial activities which are consistent with Coillte recreation policy and which are hosted at other

Coillte sites, include commercial trekking, high and low-rope activities and mountain-biking tours or hire. A commercial licencing system is in place to support this. Where appropriate, local enterprises seeking to access or connect with Castlebanny forest for recreational activities will be supported via the Coillte permit or licencing process.

Coillte have an open forest policy and welcome all visitors to its forests according to the principles of 'Leave No Trace'. User awareness and a friendly user policy will be promoted to support the considerate use of the proposed trails. Information on the recreation opportunities in the forest and orienteering maps will also be available in the future online via <https://www.coillte.ie/our-forests/explore/> or via Coillte's dedicated recreation resource website for the project.

Coillte has extensive experience of providing recreational facilities on its forests throughout the country and is proud to have been involved in the provision of recreation facilities at Sliabh Bawn wind farm Co. Roscommon (comprising trim trail, walking trails, viewing platform and picnic area). This is a benchmark for the type of provision proposed at Castlebanny Forest (see further details of Slieve Bawn in Appendix 2).

Appendix 1: Castlebanny Wind Farm Recreational Plan Layout Map

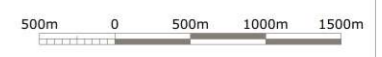


GENERAL LEGEND

PLANNING APPLICATION BOUNDARY	LAND WHERE APPLICANT HAS OWNERSHIP OR BENEFICIAL INTEREST
MULLENAKILL (Existing Upgraded)	MULLENAKILL (New Road Section)
DERRYLACKEY (Existing Upgraded)	DERRYLACKEY (New Road Section)
CASTLEBANNY (Existing Upgraded)	CASTLEBANNY (New Road Section)
TURBINE / ENERGY INFORMATION BOARD	OUTDOOR EXERCISE STATIONS (8)
PICNIC AREA / BENCHES (4)	GENERAL INFORMATION BOARD
DIRECTIONAL SIGNAGE	DS

- NOTES:**
1. DRAWINGS FOR PLANNING PURPOSES ONLY. FIGURED DIMENSIONS ONLY TO BE TAKEN FROM THIS DRAWING.
 2. GRID REFERENCES TO IRISH NATIONAL GRID.
 3. ALL LEVELS SHOWN RELATE TO ORDNANCE SURVEY DATUM AT MALIN HEAD

Co. Kilkenny
 OSI 1:50,000 Discovery Series Sheet No's: 2412, 2414, 2612 & 2614.
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Rev	Date	Description	By	Chkd.
A	18.12.20	PLANNING ISSUE	MN	JS

Client:
SPRINGFIELD RENEWABLES LTD.

Project:
CASTLEBANNY WIND FARM

Title:
SITE AMENITY / RECREATION PLAN

Scale @ A1: **1:20,000**
 Prepared by: M. Nolan
 Checked: J. Staunton
 Date: December 2020
 Project Director: D. Grehan
 Drawing Status: Planning

TOBIN
 CONSULTING ENGINEERS
 Block 10-4, Blanchardstown Corporate Park,
 Dublin 15, Ireland.
 tel: +353-(0)1-8030406
 fax: +353-(0)1-8030409
 e-mail: dublin@tobin.ie
 www.tobin.ie

Drawing No.: **10730-2055**
 Revision: **A**

Appendix 2: Sliabh Bawn Case Study

The windfarm and recreation park development at Slieve Bawn in County Roscommon is a reference site for the proposed developments at Castlebanny Forest.

Sliabh Bawn recreation facilities are located on Slieve Bawn mountain (Slíabh Bágghna na Tuatha – the mountain district of Bágghna) in Doughill Forest. This is also the home of the Sliabh Bawn Wind Farm which comprises 20 turbines and a substation. Throughout the forest are looped walks, a trim trail for fitness, an equestrian trail, a raised viewing platform and a new picnic area.



The walking trails range in distance from 2.7km to 6.5km and are graded as either easy or moderate difficulty making them suitable for family groups to enjoy. Site maps are located throughout the forest.

- Heritage Trail (white trail): 1 hour 15-minute trail with an insight into the history of the mountain.
- Monastery Tail (blue trail): An hour-long trail is part of an existing monastic trail.
- Trim Trail (green trail): 45 minutes, 12 outdoor fitness stations along the route.
- Yellow Loop Walk: 1 hour 50-minute trail passes close by 3 turbines.
- Orange Loop Walk: 1 hour 10-minute walk commences at the main car park. The walk is mainly on forest roads, with sections of a new trail shared with the equestrian route.
- Equestrian Trail: This trail is constructed using a bark mulch finish and includes two off-road cantering loops.



These amenities represent a €500K investment by Sliabh Bawn Power, a joint venture between Coillte and Bord na Mona.