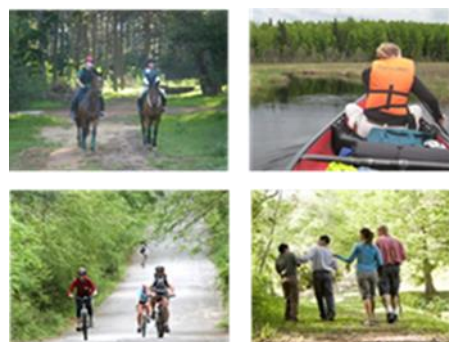


Sheskin South Forest  
Recreation Development  
Report



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## Summary

SSE Renewables & Coillte Renewable Energy are investigating the suitability of forest lands at Sheskin South, County Mayo for the development of wind farm projects. As part of this proposed development, the following document identifies a proposed approach to the development of recreational infrastructure in Sheskin South Forest. This document also identifies the strategic importance of this recreational infrastructure as part of the wider outdoor recreation development of the area.

ILC has engaged with community and agency representatives to identify the recreation potential of this forest and this document provides an overview of the emerging proposals.

## Context

While there is a very low local population density in the area it is apparent that local residents make good use of the forest for recreation and there are a small but consistent number of walkers who traverse the Western Way via this forest. This section of the Western Way connects Ballycastle with Ballycorrick, Oweninny and Wild Nephin area to the south of Sheskin South Forest. Sheskin South Forest is close to the Oweninny Visitor Centre and Ballycroy National Park and this area has significant, and as yet, only partially realised recreation and tourism potential. The upgrading of Sheskin South Forest will increase the visibility of the area and add recreational value and depth to this cluster of outdoor recreation facilities.

The upgrading of the existing Western Way which borders Sheskin South Forest and connects to Ballycastle in the north, allied to the proposed development and upgrading of walking and cycling trails between Bellacorrick and the Wild Nephins, has the potential to provide a network of trails which integrates these local heritage and tourism resources.

## Proposals

The forest is well positioned to enhance the cluster of the recreation and heritage developments at the Ballycroy Wild Nephin area. Specific outdoor recreation infrastructure for development within the forest includes a trailhead with two looped and family friendly recreation walking and cycling trails, 5 km and 9 km long 14 km. These trails can also be combined into a circa 13 km loop. A viewing point, heritage interpretation facilities and a small number of seating benches are proposed along these trails.

A walker/cyclist shelter north of Sheskin South Forest along the Western Way is also suggested. Such a shelter has the potential to provide a focal point for this route as well as provide a comfort point for the long-distance walker.

## Development Approach

A twostep development approach is suggested:

- Step one: develop the Local Recreation Cluster at Sheskin South Forest for recreational walking and family/gravel bike cycling. Including a trailhead to the south of the site, a viewing point and heritage interpretation signage.
- Step two: support the strategic connection of the north coast/Ballycastle area and the Wild Nephin area to the south, subsequent to the windfarm development, through the upgrading of the Western Way surface and signage in the vicinity of Sheskin South forest. Note that the Western Way will be closed for use during windfarm construction at this site.

## Introduction

This Report provides an outline of the proposed recreation development associated with the proposed Sheskin South wind farm in the Coillte owned Sheskin South Forest in North County Mayo.

## Context

SSE Renewables & Coillte Renewable Energy (SSE & Coillte) are investigating the suitability of land at Sheskin South, County Mayo for the development of a wind farm project. This wind farm development provides an opportunity for a review and upgrading of the recreation potential of this site. This recreation potential has been considered with regard to local resident use as well as a means of enhancing the tourism value of the area. These recommendations were informed through local consultation and best practice.

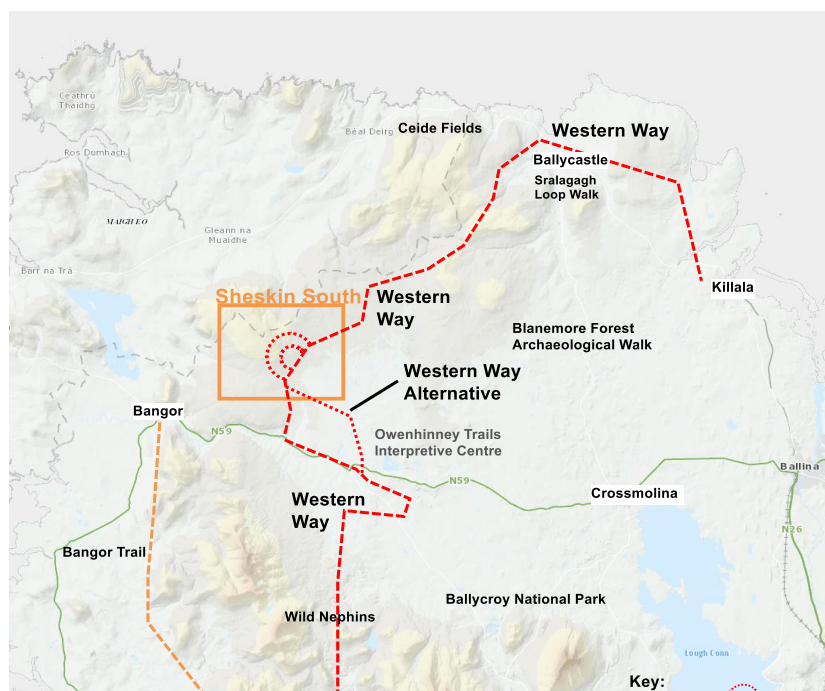


Figure 1: Sheskin South Forest Location Map.

The following issues were also considered as part of this recreation planning approach:

- the operational requirements of the proposed wind farm and forest harvesting;
- making best use of the existing forestry & the proposed wind farm forest road infrastructure;
- statutory requirements relating to the site including nearby Special Areas of Conservation and other heritage obligations;
- existing community recreation development initiatives;
- the effective integration of the Western Way and the adjacent Ballycroy, Wild Nephin and Oweninny amenity resource;

## Strategic Context

There are two strategic contexts to the proposed recreation la developments at the Sheskin South forest:

- The Western Way: extending from Oughterard to Ballina connects North Galway with North Mayo and the Sligo border. The Way traverses the Sheskin South forest boundary and hence links the Bellacorrick area, with the village of Ballycastle on the North Mayo coast.
- Oweninny Bord na Mona Windfarm: located close to Sheskin South forest, this embankments from the old Bord na Mona rail system at this site extend close to the Western Way and have potential to be redeveloped as walking and cycling trails. See box area in the south of the following Map. While outside of the remit of this report, such a development will interconnect the existing and planned trails in the area and provide a network of largely off-road linear and looped trails between Ballycastle and Bellacorrick and further south to the Nephin mountains via the Western Way.

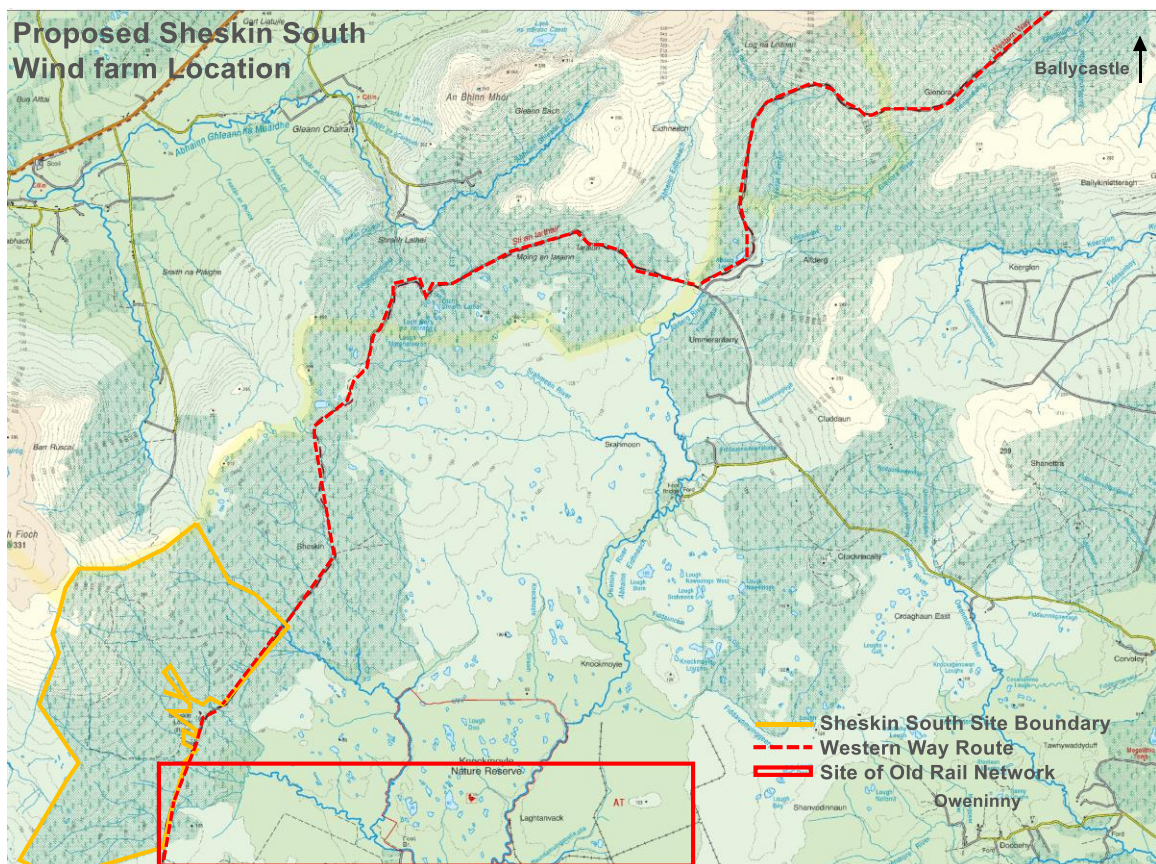


Figure 2: Windfarm and Old Rail Network Locations.

## Sheskin South Forest Profile

The following is an outline of the Sheskin South Forest.

### Current Recreation Use

It is apparent from the heat map analysis of the area below<sup>1</sup>, that Sheskin South Forest has a relatively low level of recreation use. The Western Way appears to be the primary activity venue extending from Ballymunnelly to Ballycastle.

It is also apparent that Sheskin South Forest has a lower level of recreational use compared to the nearby Blanemore Forest Walk. This suggests an interest in walking and cycling in the area but a lower level of awareness and accessibility to the Sheskin South forest.

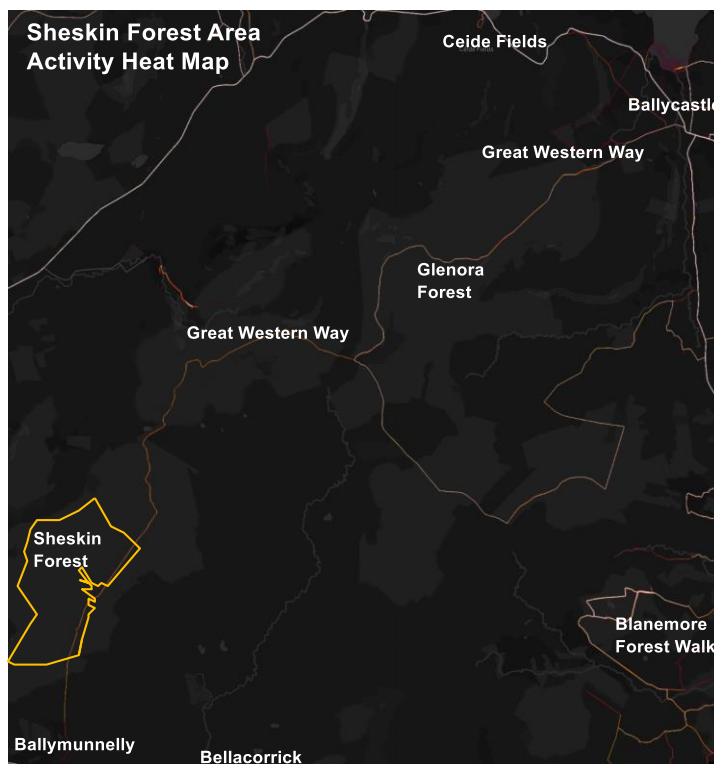


Figure 3: Activity Heatmap.

### Topography

Sheskin South Forest is located east of Sliabh Fíoch and this mountain slopes the forest from the high ground in the east to the lower bogland ground at Oweninny in the west. The Western Way, provides the western boundary of the forest, as illustrated in the overleaf map. This type of landscape is moderately challenging for the walker given the uphill nature of the trails extending towards the west. This western elevation has the potential for views of the eastern landscape, however, the relatively mature trees of the forest obscure this view on most of the trails.

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<sup>1</sup> This heat map amalgamates the data from recreational user GPS devices. Mainly walkers and cyclists, this data is then presented visually along the routes used on the map. The brighter the trail lines are the greater the levels of recreational use.

### Existing Resources in the Sheskin South Forest

Currently there is an extensive forest road system comprised of surfaced and unsurfaced trails as illustrated in the following map. The proposed windfarm is outlined in yellow. These surfaced trails are generally well defined, and they have a consistent and well drained surface. The lack of direction signage is however a challenge and in places the trail system is confusing for the walker navigating without a map.

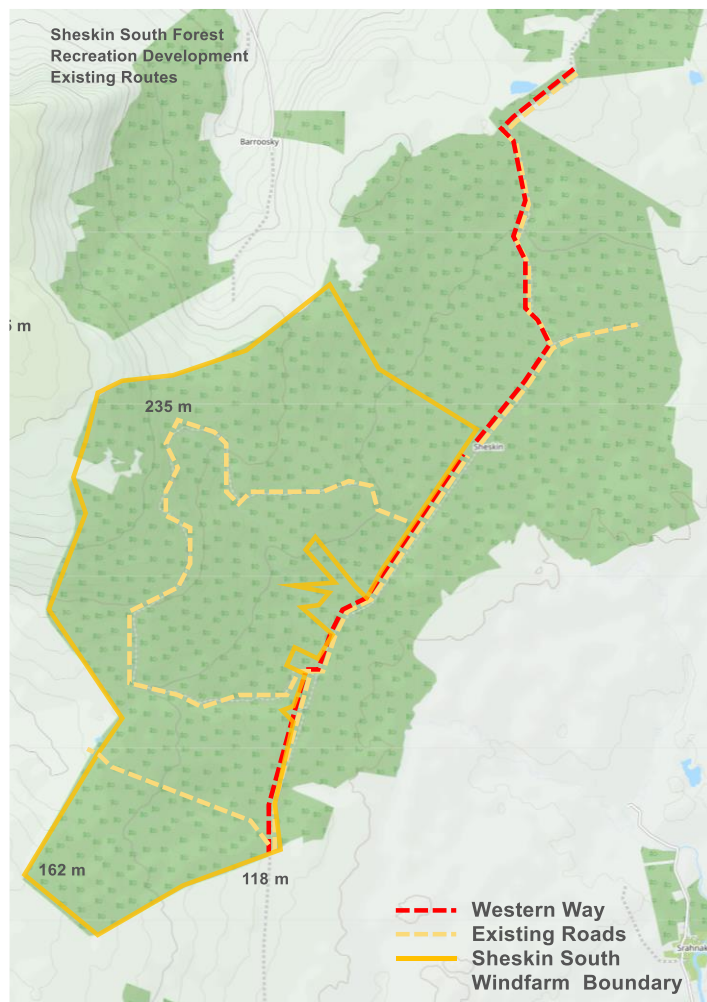


Figure 4: Existing Trail Infrastructure.

### Heritage and Conservation

The forest is bounded by Special Areas of Conservation (the Glenamoy Bog Complex, the Carrowmore Lake Complex and the Bellacorick Bog Complex SACs). While the forest itself is outside of these SACs, it is located within the 15 kilometre buffer zone of the SAC.

There are no discernible negative SAC impacts because of the proposed recreational trails as the trails remain within the forest footprint. The Western Way also appears to be located outside of the SAC however it acts as an SAC boundary in places.

### Archaeology

An archeologically sensitive sites has been identified to north of the forest at A2 but this site is outside of the proposed recreation area. The excavations at E1 have not revealed anything of archaeological significance.

A1: Craanog.

A2: Megalithic tomb - court tomb.

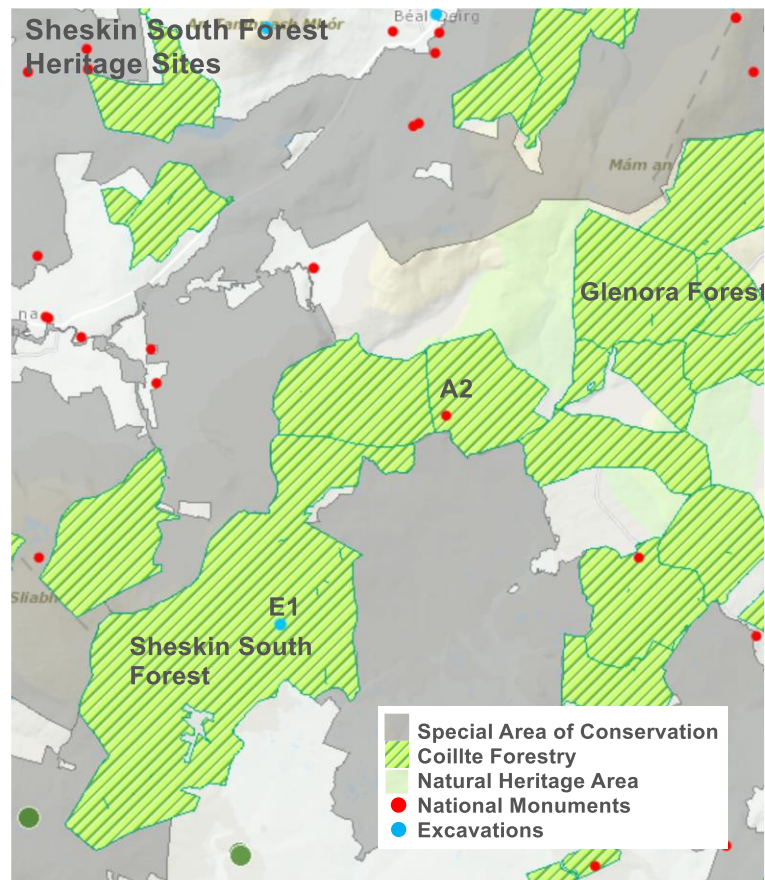


Figure 5: Heritage Sites.

### Existing Trail Structures Sheskin South Forest

Currently there is an extensive forest road system comprised of surfaced and unsurfaced trails as illustrated overleaf. The proposed windfarm is outlined in yellow.

#### Sheskin South Control Points

There are two positive control points within the proposed windfarm site, illustrated on the previous map, which should be linked in with any recreation structures:

- 118 m: Forest entry and potential trailhead.
- 235 m: Elevated view to the West.

The adjacent proposed turbine locations are identified to clarify the location and as possible routes towards some of the control points.



### **Sheskin South Development Options**

Recreation demand for the Sheskin South Forest is primarily for the activities of walking and cycling. The development of cycling trails will target family type recreational cycling and potentially journeying as part of a gravel bike type experience. Mountain biking is not appropriate for this site due to the low levels of local demand and the proximity of the mountain bike trail system in Coolaney County Sligo (77km). There is no apparent demand for equestrian activities at this location.

Viewing points and possibly a signature arts or cultural installation is suggested. There is limited merit apparent for an outdoor gym type facility at this location given its relative remoteness. Links with the nearby bog (natural and commercial), and Nephin fields and the built heritage of the area are likely to provide a key theme for the trails. These links to be realised via information panel type interpretation resources.

There are two likely development directions for the site:

- **Local Tourism Recreation Cluster:** As part of a local cluster of recreation facilities including Ballycroy National Park, the Oweninny area and the Wild Nephins, the development of the proposed recreational trails in the forest will add value to recreational tourism of the area.
- **Recreational Journey Node:** Sheskin South Forest is linked by the Western Way to Ballycastle, the Owenwinney Visitor Centre and the Wild Nephin/Ballycroy National Park. The upgrading of the Western Way trail surface, directional signage and information signage is central to maximising the potential of this route. The provision of a simple walker and cyclist's shelter at the midpoint between Bellacorick and Ballycastle will strengthen the attractiveness and the practical use of the Western Way as a thru-route.

### **Proposed Sheskin South Walking and Cycling Trail**

A walker at an average speed of 5 km h will complete a 4km trail in circa 40 minutes, ideally as a loop or partial loop. The proposed recreation trail development is illustrated on the following map. The proposed walks and cycle trails include a 9 km and a 5 km walk that can be combined to provide a circa 13 km loop all of which commence and end at the P trailhead. The walking trails extending from this location will use the existing and proposed forest/wind farm roads which will be upgraded and signed to a standard suitable for recreational use.

This trail will bring the walker to an elevated section of the forest and a viewing point at T8 (235 m), as well as close to the valley floor via the Sliabh Fyagh Loop and the Western Way.

There is also potential that the upgrading of this trail and the Western Way to Sheskin South Forest in the south, will increase recreational cycling along this section of the Western Way.

Further details on these routes and their supporting infrastructure are available in the following Appendix 1.

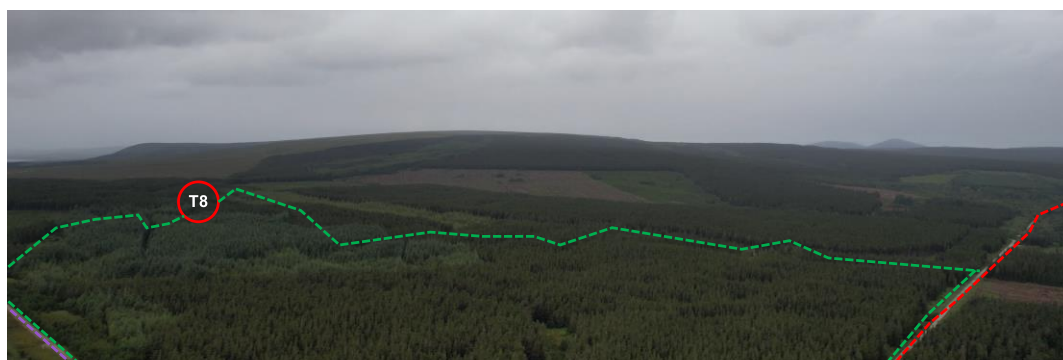


Figure 6: Aerial Perspective of Proposed Viewing Area.

# Development Proposal

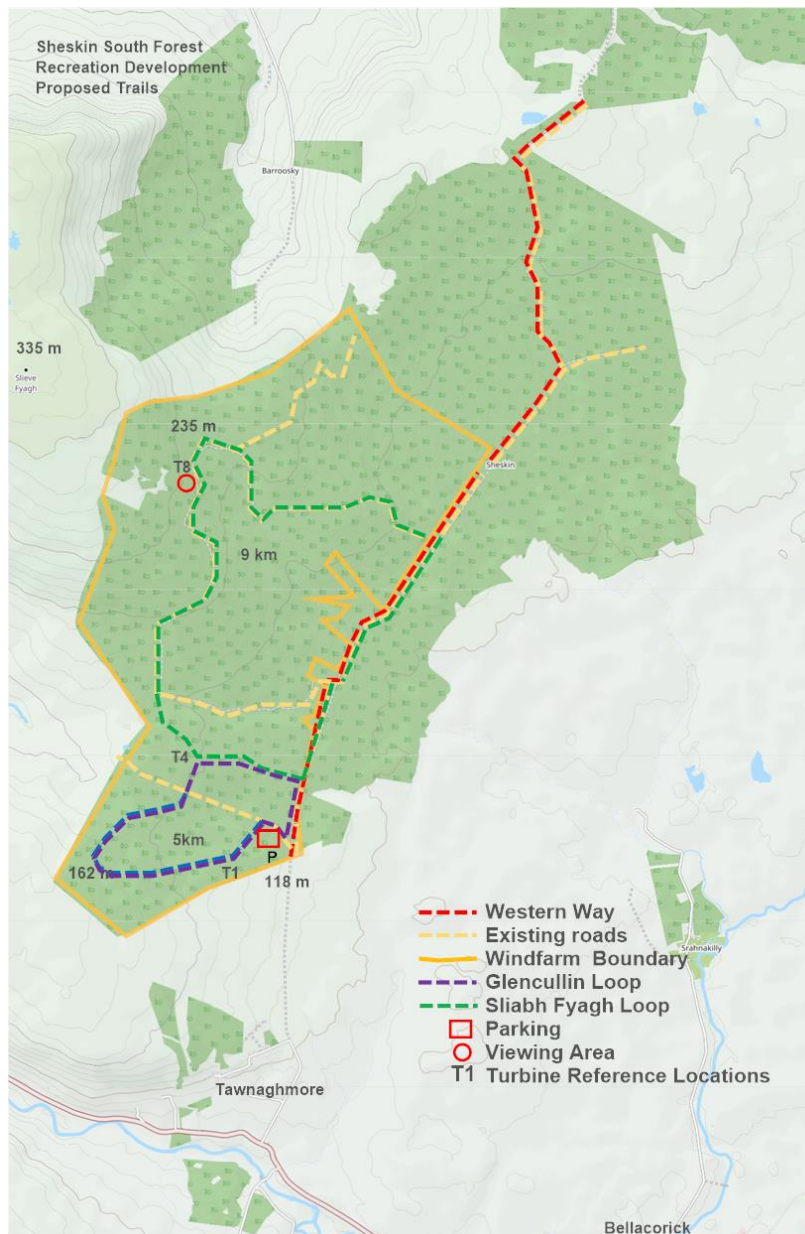


Figure 7: Proposed Trails.

Trail Name	Glencullin Loop	Sliabh Fyagh Loop
<b>Start Point</b>	Car park	Car park
<b>Length (km)</b>	5 km	9 km
<b>Time</b>	1 hour.	2 hours
<b>Degree of Difficulty</b>	Easy	Easy - Moderate
<b>Meters Climb</b>	75	30
<b>Loop</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Trail Finish</b>	Car Park 1	Car park 1

### Signage and Interpretation

Directional signage, maps and route information as well as information on Leave no Trace and on walker and cyclist respect for each other and the forest environment will be provided for the participant<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, the story of Sheskin South Forest, the wind farm and the role of wind power will be illustrated along the trails. Where possible signage will be wood based and include Sheskin South Forest branding like the Galway Wind Park example below.

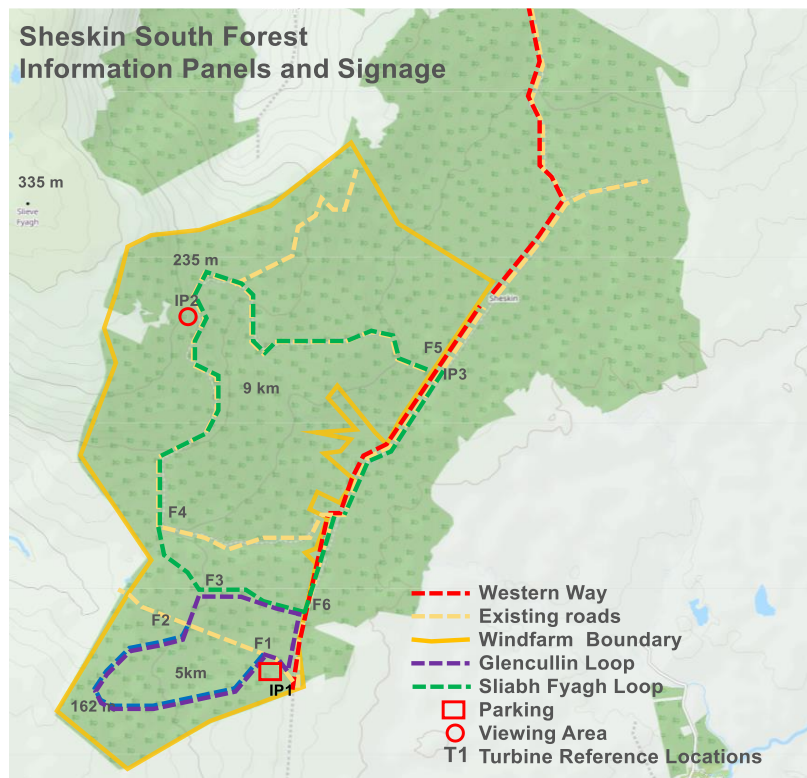
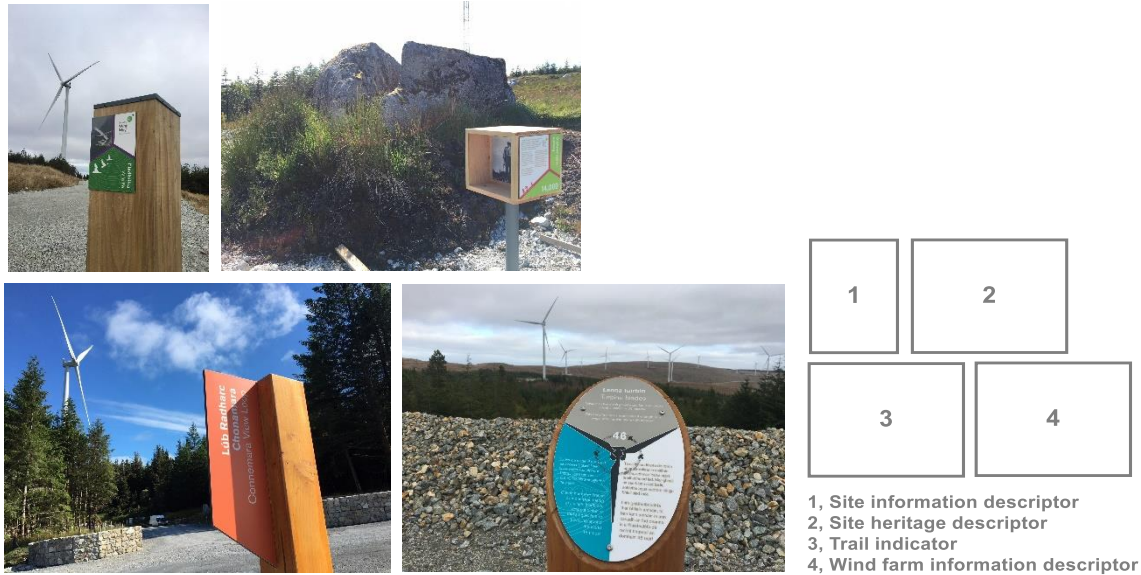


Figure 8: Proposed Trail Signage.

<sup>2</sup> Additional information will be provided on dog walking including the requirement that all dogs remain on a lead and that dog owners must remove dog waste from the trail surface. Dog waste and litter bins will not be provided on the site.

## Development Proposal

There is an opportunity to illustrate the natural, social and built heritage of Sheskin South Forest as well as its contemporary role in wood and energy production. Interpretive resources and directional signage can be located around the site at the following locations.

- IP1 Introduction to Sheskin South.
- IP2 Sheskin South Heritage and Panorama
- IP3 The Western Way
- T1, T7, T9, T12: The story of wind power.

Directional fingerpost signage is required at F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6: for, both trail directions. Approximately 15 way-markers will also be required along the walking trail to give directional comfort to participants. A seating benches is to be located at the viewing area and the mid-point of the Glencullen Loop

Appendix 1 includes examples of these various signage elements.

### Trailhead

The Sheskin South Forest trailhead provides the start and endpoint for walkers and cyclists.

The trailhead at P1 will provide the following facilities:

- Parking for circa 10 cars.
- Picnic bench.
- Interpretation Panel.

The trailhead surface will be crushed stone to dust and it may be necessary to fence the perimeter of the trailhead to contain children or prevent vehicle access to the trails. It is suggested that this car park accommodate campervans and hence a low height barrier is not to be included at the entrance.

The route between the parking area and the trails will include a road barrier with a pedestrian and cycle entrance located to one side.



Figure 9: Proposed Carpark Elements.

## Viewing Point

The area to the side of Turbine 8 is proposed as a viewing point of the surrounding forest, landscape and windfarm. This viewing area will include:

- Panorama Labelled Photograph of the Area.
- Seating Area.
- Interpretive Panels on the Heritage of the Area and the role of wind power.

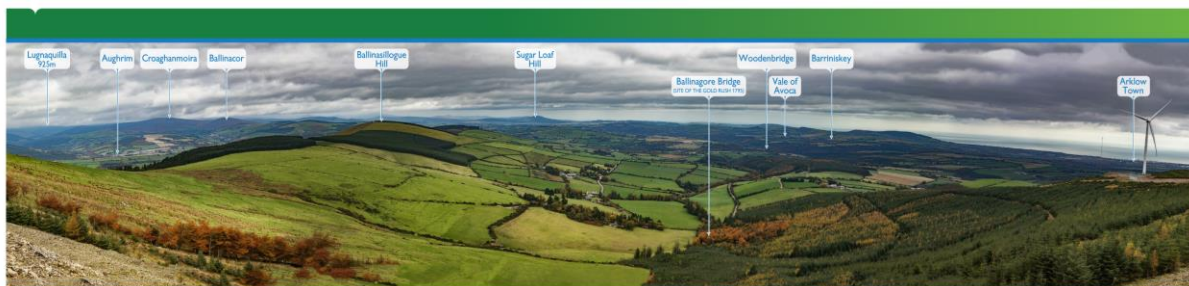


Figure 10: Example of Panorama Photograph.

## Appendix 1: Recreation Infrastructure Samples

The following are reference samples of similar infrastructure recommended for the windfarm at Glenora.

Trail Surface  
Circa 2 meter width, 804  
to dust finish.



Path and Sleeper Steps.



Recreation Site Entrance  
Panel



Recreation Area  
Information Panel

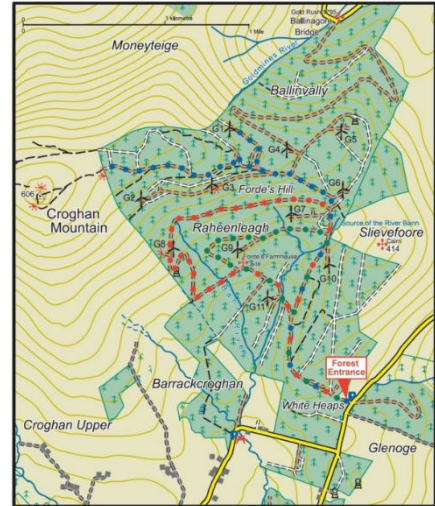


Waymarker, Wood and recycled Plastic. Both with direction roundels and trail branding/colour coding.



## Recreation Area Trail Map

## An Ráithín Liath - Raheenleagh

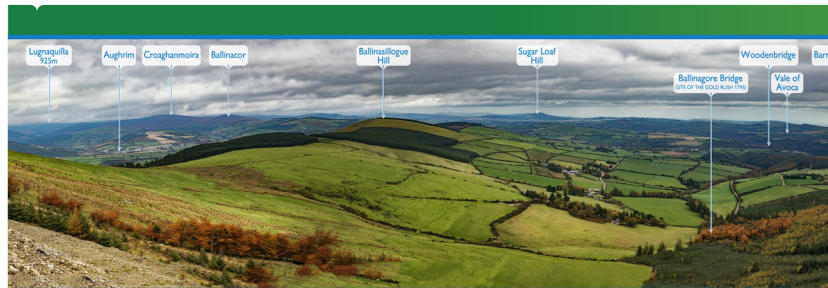


- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Píonmhóthar / Main Road                           | Camshíos / Car Park                 |
| Mionbhóthar / Minor Road                          | Ball páircála / Parking Spot        |
| Bóthar Foraise / Forest Road                      | Lúthair Oidhreachta / Heritage Site |
| Raon / Forest Track                               | Lúthair Píonice / Picnic Area       |
| Cosán / Path                                      | Múleann Gaoithe / Wind Turbine      |
| Ionad Amhairc / Viewpoint                         |                                     |
| Róadmhaoin Colliette / Colliette Properties       |                                     |
| Forais Crann Baisicínigh / Conifer Forest         | Croghan Trail                       |
| Forais Crann leathandúilleacha / Broadleaf Forest | Ford's Farmhouse Trail              |
|   | Bann River Trail                    |

Níor chóir go léimhneadh an léiriúchán ar an léarscáil de na bóithre, raonta agus cosáin taobh amuigh de réadmhaoin Colliette mar go bhfuil ceist áil tuighthe. The representation on the map of roads, tracks and paths outside Colliette property should not be interpreted as conferring a right of way.

## Panorama View Panel

RAHEENLEAGH WIND FARM | FERM GHAOITHÉ AN RAITHÍN LEITH | ANIARCHOINTE Ó THUADH NORTHERLY VIEWPOINT



## Post and Rail Fencing





Viewing Platform



Viewing Point with Information Panel



Post and Rail Access chicane, Information Panel and trail direction roundels.



## Shelters

Two Adirondack type shelters are suggested for the route of the Western Way in the proximity of the windfarm. These shelters are positioned with their back to the prevailing weather and they can be used as a simple bivouacking base as well as a lunch spot. The photograph is of a shelter located in County Wicklow



## Potential community Events



## Nature and Wildlife information board



## **Appendix 1: Trail Classification**

### ***Class One Walking Trails:***

Class One trails are multi-access trails which can accommodate users with reduced mobility, wheelchair users, people with a vision impairment, using crutches, with a buggy, with small children, older people and so on. These trails:

- Will be serviced by a vehicle parking area.
- Can readily facilitate frequent two-way traffic.
- Will have minimal cross slopes and gradient
- Will have a firm surface.
- No steps, waterbars, stiles, barriers or trip hazards of any kind.
- Should have resting places with seating approximately every 100m.

Trail Surface: Sealed non-slip surfaces, non-slip timber boardwalk, tarmac or compacted surface with no loose stone or gravel greater than 5mm.

Trail Width Range: 1800mm to 3000mm

Trail Gradient Range: Flat to 5% (Up to 8% allowed for ramps where required)

### ***Class Two Walking Trails***

These trails are for casual use, by people of all ages which are:

- Serviced by a vehicle parking area if appropriate.
- Reasonably flat and wide enough to accommodate two-way traffic.
- Will have a relatively smooth surface with minimal loose material.
- No waterbars or climb over stiles should be used. Steps should be minimal and if used should be limited.
- May use bridges and boardwalks.
- Should have resting places with seating approximately every 500m.
- May have lighting where provided in an urban area

Trail Surface: Consistent sealed surfaces, non-slip timber boardwalk or compacted aggregate - 20mm to dust stone.

Trail Width Range: 1200mm to 3000mm

Trail Gradient Range: Flat to 8%, desirable: 5% average

### ***Class Three Walking Trails***

- Typically relatively narrow undulating trails with moderate gradients.
- The surface may be variable including loose material and can be uneven in places.
- May include steps, protruding roots and rocks, water bars, stiles and gates.
- May include bridges, bog bridges and boardwalks.

Trail Surface: variable surfaces including some loose material not greater than 50mm in size

Trail Width Range: 600mm to 1200mm

Trail Gradient Range: Flat to 12%, desirable: 5% average.