



Ballybrack Woods Trail

2013 Site Assessment Report

National Trails Office Assessment & Inspection System Overview

The National Trails Office supports the sustainable development, management and promotion of recreational trails in Ireland.

Sustainable recreational trails should

- be robust, durable and fit for purpose, may be located in rural or urban environments and are usually waymarked.
- have a positive impact on the environment, heritage and communities, address landowner and user needs and concerns and generally support responsible outdoor recreation.
- be developed to a standard and maintained at this standard on an on-going basis.

Site Assessment:

At the request of the trail developer or funder, the National Trails Office carries out assessments on proposed trails to assess their suitability and potential for sustainability. The assessor will also offer support, guidance and advice, both on the day of inspection and in a subsequent report (this report).

If the assessment establishes that the proposed trail development is appropriate and feasible, the report will recommend that the developer proceeds to the next stage of the Trail Planning and Development Process and produces a Trail Development Plan. This document will help in planning and completing the trail development work.

Note: Recommendations in this report are for guidance only. The National Trails Office/ Irish Sports Council offers advice in line with best practice and Irish trail standards, and does not accept any responsibility for subsequent trail development work or on-going maintenance or upgrade work on trails.

Final Inspection:

The National Trails Office (NTO) undertakes inspections on waymarked recreational trails. A panel of trail inspectors carries out the inspections.

When a new trail is completed, the trail developer can request the NTO to carry out a Final Inspection. When requesting a Final Inspection the trail developer must complete a Final Inspection Checklist and sign it confirming that the trail is completed in accordance with the requirements in the *Management Standards for Recreational Trails*. The NTO inspection then assesses the trail against the *Standards* and if they are met the trail will be accredited and this will be indicated on the National Trails Register and the website www.irishtrails.ie.

Once accredited, on-going inspections (usually annually) are required to monitor the trail and confirm that it is being maintained in accordance with the *Management Standards*.

Inspection and confirmation that a trail is being maintained is a requirement for the public liability insurance on the route to be valid.

Note: Recommendations in Final Inspection reports are for guidance only. The National Trails Office / Irish Sports Council offers advice in line with best practice and Irish trail standards and is not responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of any trail.

Assessment Details:

- The Site Assessment of the Ballybrack Woods Trail was carried out by a National Trails Office Advisor on 16th May 2013.
- The inspector was accompanied by Peter Hertting and Paud McCarthy on behalf of Douglas Tidy Towns. Their time and help are much appreciated.

Report Overview:

This report is presented in 4 sections:

1) Overview of Proposal

Background information on the trail(s): Location, Objectives, Target Usage etc.

2) Assessment

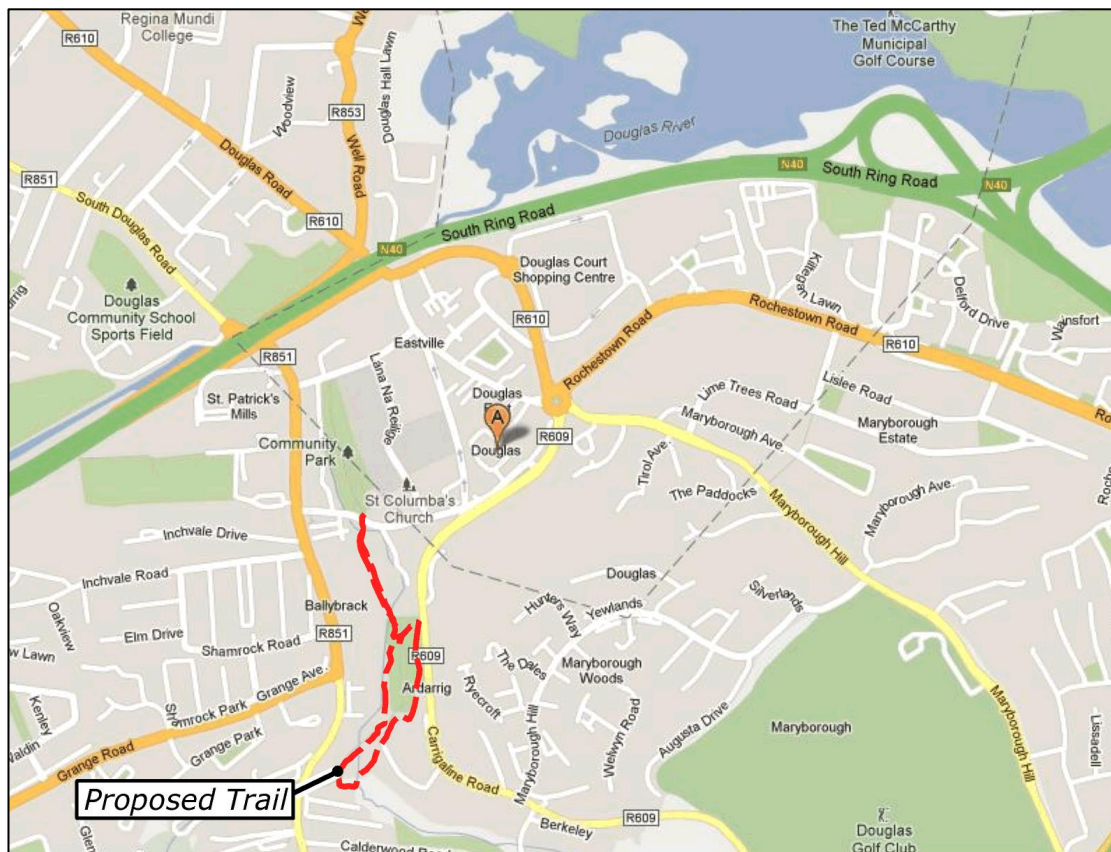
Assessment of the suitability and sustainability potential of the proposal.

3) Specific Recommendations (If proposal deemed suitable for development)

Advice pertaining to specific issues on this trail.

4) General Recommendations (If proposal deemed suitable for development)

Guidelines for trail development relevant to this proposal.



Site Location Overview – Ballybrack Woods Trail

1) Overview of Proposal

Name of Proposed Development:

■ Ballybrack Woods Trail

Trail Type:

■ Walking

Trail Developer:

■ Douglas Tidy Towns

Contact Name/ Details:

■ Peter Hertting

Location:

■ The trail is proposed for Ballybrack Woods (locally known as 'Mangala') which is near Douglas Community Park. Douglas Village is a southern suburb of Cork City, with a large population and full range of services and amenities.

Proposal:

■ The proposal is to develop a short looped trail in a semi-urban environment as a recreational amenity, primarily for local people. To this end, it is proposed to upgrade some existing trails, construct more paths as necessary and install waymarking and signage. The central artery of the woods is being developed by Cork County Council as a dual-use (walking and cycling) trail, to be known as Ballybrack Valley Cycle Track. This trail will use that track for part of the route, but is planned to, as much as possible, use smaller existing paths. This will offer more of a 'wilderness' experience.

Objectives:

■ To make the most of a local scenic area as a recreational and educational amenity. To provide a more rustic alternative through the area to the Ballybrack Valley Cycle Track, which is soon to be developed. To make the woods more accessible and popular, which would hopefully have a knock-on effect of deterring littering and underage drinking.

Intended/ potential users of trail:

■ The trail is primarily aimed as a recreational amenity for local people (walkers, joggers, dog walkers and families). It has potential to be developed as an 'outdoor classroom', with nature trails and biodiversity projects.



Public Notice (left) on development of Ballybrack Valley Cycle Track on main trail (right)

2) Assessment

■ Site Description: Ballybrack Woods is a scenic, semi-urban woodland area with a variety of flora, trees (and presumably fauna) and pretty streams. It is a v-shaped valley, with the eastern and western flanks rising gradually from a flat central artery. There are already some existing tracks, with a main north-south path of concrete (imminent upgrade) and a network of rougher trails to the flanks.

■ Trail Description: The proposed trail is a 'lasso' shape, with an initial southerly spur followed by a clockwise loop. The total trail length is approximately 1.4km and the grade will be moderate (due to the ascents up the flanks). The spur and part of the loop will use the Ballybrack Valley Cycle Track (class 1), with the remainder on rougher, but solid and well-drained track (class 2-3). The trail features pleasant woodland scenery, with a variety of flora, trees and streams.

■ Matching the Trail to the Environment:

The proposed trail seems ideal for the area. It will use existing paths, for the most part, and offer a semi-wilderness experience in an urban environment. The trail will be a contrast and alternative to the Ballybrack Woods Cycle Track, with both routes complementing each other well. With minimal construction, the loop is likely to enhance the area and hopefully have a positive impact on the environment, with more people exposed to, and valuing, this scenic woodland setting.

■ Matching the Trail to the User:

The trail will be suitable for the target users. It is ideal for walkers (with or without dogs), joggers and families. The steps on the western flank, and the rise on the eastern flank, will make the trail unsuitable for some, particularly those with buggies and wheelchairs. However, parts will be manageable by all and the work required to make it suitable for all would likely take from the wilderness experience. For the level of user targeted (casual and inexperienced walkers), information panels on local history, flora and fauna, and so on, may be a valuable addition.

■ Land Ownership/Access:

The proposed site is state owned, managed by Cork County Council. It is understood that permission has been given by the Council, who have been very understanding, helpful and supportive. Continued consultation and co-operation would be of mutual benefit.

■ Health and Safety:

- On the eastern flank, a fallen tree has damaged the track, making it narrow and potentially dangerous, with further erosion likely. This section needs repair and upgrade.
- It is reported that, due to drinking in the woods, some people feel unsafe in using the paths, particularly in the evening. It is hoped that increased usage will prove a deterrent to anti-social behaviour. Increasing visibility, particularly on the flanks, by thinning trees, may also help.



Features and Scenery along the Ballybrack Woods Trail

■ Current Condition & Trail Surface:

The central 'artery' is currently concrete which is eroding in places. This is to be upgraded soon to a 3m wide dual-use track (class 1). The 'loop' paths are currently unsealed, rough tracks, which are solid and well-drained and have reportedly no issues with mud/erosion in wet weather. These are primarily of class 3, and will not require upgrade for the most part. Footbridges are in place across streams and are suitable for a walking trail. Some are to be upgraded in the construction of the Ballybrack Valley Cycle Track. There is no waymarking or signage in place.

■ Current Usage & Demand:

The area is clearly popular with joggers, casual walkers, families and those with dogs. However, most seem to stay along the main 'artery'. This project would open up and popularise the more rustic woodland sections of the area.

■ Environmental Concerns:

- There was evidence of some littering and dumping in the area, particularly on the western flank and in some streams. Hopefully increased usage of the area would deter some of this, but regular clean-ups should be arranged to preserve the beauty of the site.
- Around the southwestern corner of the loop, a plant growing could be Japanese Knotweed. As Japanese Knotweed is an invasive species, it may need to be completely cleared and controlled. See <http://invasivespeciesireland.com> and consult the National Parks & Wildlife Service for further advice. There may be further instances around the site.
- The existing tracks seem solid and robust, with reportedly no issues of erosion/mud in times of wet weather. However, with increased usage, this may become a problem over time. These sections should be monitored carefully, and upgrades considered as early as possible, if erosion occurs. Surfacing the existing trails with compacted gravel at this stage may prevent future issues, and should be considered.

■ Trailhead:

The proposed trailhead, at the Community Centre, seems ideal. There is ample parking (with more nearby) and services close by. The map board will be visible to users of the community park, which will publicise the trail. At other entrances to the walk, ancillary trailheads are not necessary, as it will be locals, for the most part, joining the trail from them.

■ Future plans:

It is proposed to explore the possibility of developing the site as an 'outdoor classroom', with nature trails and biodiversity projects.

Assessment Conclusions:

■ The Ballybrack Woods Trail seems a well-planned trail, which should prove very popular, offering an excellent complement to the Ballybrack Valley Cycle Track. It has the potential to become a valued recreational asset in the community, and may develop over time into an environmental and educational amenity.

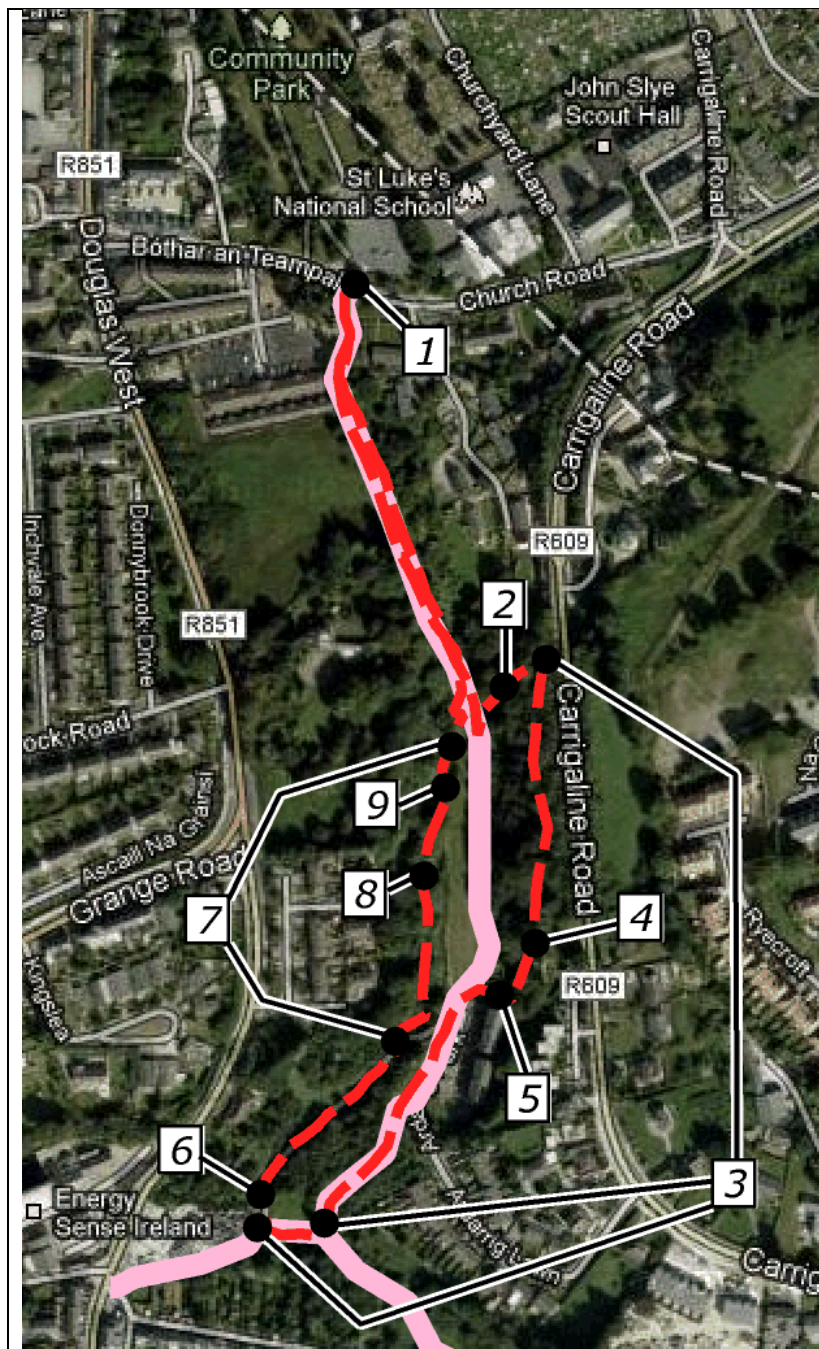
■ The trail seems well suited to the local environment and the target users, offering a semi-wilderness experience in an urban environment.

■ Continued co-operation with the County Council seems key to successful development and the future success of this trail. A clear management and maintenance plan should be put in place prior to development, considering all aspects and potential issues in future (funding, dumping, possible upgrades etc).

■ The National Trails Office considers the Ballybrack Woods Trail suitable for development.

3) Specific Recommendations

Below are some specific recommendations for areas of the trail, but these are not exhaustive. The principles described in section 4, and detailed in National Trails Office literature, should be applied throughout.



Red: Proposed Walking Trail
Pink: Ballybrack Valley Cycle Track

1. Crossing road from trailhead at Community Centre, walkers should be directed to use the existing pedestrian crossing nearby.
2. After crossing first bridge and turning left uphill, handrail beginning to rot in places. Consider repairing worst parts.
3. At alternative entrances to the trail, recommend highlighting the walk, with signage such as "Welcome to the Ballybrack Trail", and waymarking to direct along the trail. Full map boards not needed at these points.
4. Approaching descent parallel to Carrigaline Road, drain blocked, causing erosion and muddy ground. Repair drainage system and build up ground.
5. On descent to meet main track, steps need repair/upgrade, with further steps installed (create zigzags) to reduce the steepness near the bottom. From bottom of descent to meeting main 'artery track', path needs to be constructed.
6. Crossing stream at southwestern corner of loop, plant growing could be Japanese Knotweed. As Japanese Knotweed is an invasive species, it may need to be completely cleared and controlled. See <http://invasivespeciesireland.com> and consult the National Parks & Wildlife Service for further advice.



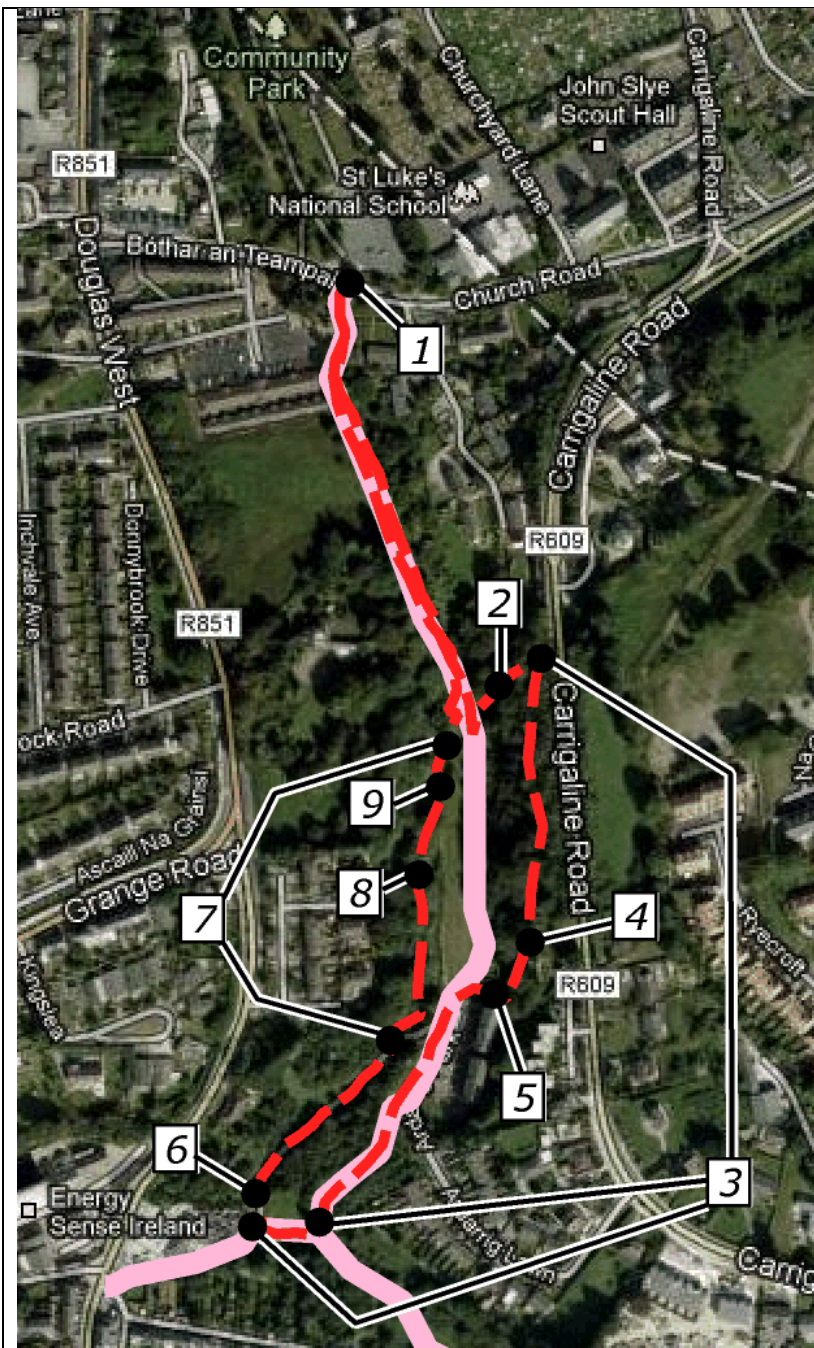
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Red: Proposed Walking Trail
Pink: Ballybrack Valley Cycle Track

7. Along the western flank
- Vegetation and trees encroaching in places. Cut back and tend regularly.
 - 3 sets of steps becoming slippery. Clear mud and add non-slip surface (such as staples, as discussed).
 - Some rubbish dumped in places (drink cans etc). Arrange for removal.

8. Approximately half-way along the upper western flank, 2 metre wide muddy patch, with water coming down from above. Install suitable drainage.*

9. Approaching descent towards footbridge, fallen tree has damaged path. This section is quite narrow and will subside further. Needs to be built up and repaired.*

* For further details on standards requirement, see *Management Standards for Recreational Trails*, Sec 3.4 available at [http://www.irishtrails.ie/National Trails_Office/Publications/Trail_Development](http://www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/Publications/Trail_Development). For further advice, see The Mountain Meitheal Handbook available from www.pathsavers.org or contact the National Trails Office.



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4) General Recommendations

■ **Management & Maintenance:** A clear management and maintenance plan should be put in place prior to development. It is understood that a local FÁS Scheme/Probation Service may assist with construction and maintenance. However, the proposing body will be ultimately responsible.

■ **Waymarking:** The trail will be waymarked in a clockwise direction only. Waymarking has not yet been designed for this walk. Circular arrow discs are often better than square ones, as they can be rotated to any angle. In many places, arrow discs can be attached to walls, fence posts, gates or service poles (all with permission), reducing the number of marker posts required. Note also that yellow arrows and the 'walking man' symbol are reserved for long distance waymarked trails, so should be avoided here.

■ **Map & Information Boards:** Before ordering map boards, please ensure that all information required (as per the *Management Standards for Recreational Trails*) is included. It is recommended to design the map board such that an information sheet can be removed and replaced easily, if changes were to occur to the walk. Replacing an entire map board can be costly. Information panels on local history, flora and fauna etc. would add to the interest along the trail. However, the potential for vandalism should be considered, and it may prove wise to wait until the trails are in regular use before installing information boards.

■ **Further Information:** The comments and recommendations in this report are not exhaustive. Prior to any further development work, the proposer should read the following documents, available at: http://www.irishtrails.ie/National_Trails_Office/Publications/Trail_Development/

- A Guide to Planning and Developing Recreational Trails in Ireland
- Management Standards for Recreational Trails
- Classification and Grading for Recreational Trails