

# Dublin Mountains Partnership

Strategic Plan 2022 – 2026





# FOREWORD

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The role of the Dublin Mountains Partnership (DMP) has been to provide and manage sustainable recreation in the Dublin Mountains. This strategic plan is intended to provide a framework for the Partnership to guide decision-making over the next five years. Building on the outcomes of the previous strategic plan, its preparation followed a purposefully deliberative, highly participative process of facilitated engagement with a broad range of interested individuals and organisations who came together to explore the issues and identify the opportunities associated with facilitating the recreational enjoyment of the Dublin Mountains whilst looking after their special qualities. This new strategic plan also builds on the work delivered in the first 14 years of the DMP and adds a focus on protecting the environment and raising awareness of the multiple benefits that the Dublin Mountains provide.

We thank all those who participated in the process by attending workshops, one-to-one meetings and focus group discussions. Thanks also to the Consultative Forum and the Volunteer Rangers for their considered inputs to the plan.

# 01 Executive Summary

## Our Vision

The Dublin Mountains is an area of outstanding beauty and a place for sustainable outdoor recreation where people can enjoy the hills, learn about and care for their environment and culture whilst respecting resident communities, neighbouring landowners and other recreation users.

## Strategy Themes

To realise the vision, **four strategy themes** and supporting objectives have been developed and are detailed in this document. Building on the outcomes of all the conversations had and the work to date, these interconnected and mutually reinforcing strategy themes and objectives provide a framework for guiding decision making.



They are supported by a series of actions which are intended to focus efforts and resources towards achieving the new vision for the Dublin Mountains. The actions will be underpinned by a detailed operational plan which will be monitored regularly to measure the progress towards our vision.

## 02 Introduction

### 2.1 Why a Strategic Plan?

The plan provides a strategic framework to guide resourcing, inform decision-making and launch initiatives over the next five years that will integrate the delivery of the partners' respective mandates for providing for recreation, protecting the environment and raising awareness of the multiple benefits the Dublin Mountains provide.

### 2.2 Who is it for?

The Dublin Mountains Partnership (DMP) was established in 2008 to improve the recreation potential of the public lands in the Dublin Mountains. The DMP Partners include Coillte, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, South Dublin County Council, Dublin City Council and the Dublin Mountains Initiative (DMI), an umbrella group representing the interests of recreation users of the Dublin Mountains. Since 2018, Fáilte Ireland has also attended DMP Board meetings.



*The Dublin Mountains Initiative (DMI) was set up in 2006 to represent the views of recreational users of the Dublin Mountains and to foster the development of a management plan for the area. While it represents the interests of its affiliated organisations - Mountaineering Ireland, the Irish Mountain Running Association, Cycling Ireland, the Irish Orienteering Association and Scouting Ireland – it also seeks to promote the recreational needs of the more general user such as family groups and casual walkers, who comprise the majority of visitors to the Dublin Mountains.*

The DMP is funded by contributions from partner organisations, as agreed by the Memorandum of Understanding under which the partnership was established. The funding the DMP receives is used to enhance and maintain the recreation facilities in the Dublin Mountains, cover the cost of the

Recreation Manager, operate the Volunteer Ranger Service and promote the Dublin Mountains.

The Board members bring together a range of public sector experience in the fields of planning, recreation development and management, parks, heritage, tourism, community development, forest management, and biodiversity as well as insights, through the DMI, into the experience of recreational users.

The voice of resident communities, farming interests, local businesses and neighbouring interests comes through the DMP Consultative Forum which was initiated in 2011, meets up to three times a year and provides a forum for discussing issues of common interest.

DMP Volunteer Rangers support the work of the DMP and are vital in helping to manage outdoor recreation.

**While the DMP brings the partners together, the outputs from this strategic plan are aimed at the resident communities, at members of the public, at visitors and at all those with an interest in the Dublin Mountains area as a place to live, work, recreate, explore and enjoy.**

### 2.3 Where is it for?

The Dublin Mountains and associated foothills and uplands skirt the southern fringes of Dublin City, occupy much of south eastern end of South Dublin County and extend into the adjoining counties of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and Wicklow. With their diverse topography and landcover, the Dublin Mountains include areas of natural beauty and ecological importance, including several Natura 2000 Sites. The Wicklow Mountains National Park, which includes part of the Dublin Mountains lies on the southern periphery of the study area.

### 2.4 A Key Imperative

Key to the realisation of the plan is the need to continue to adopt a *collaborative* approach to planning, developing, managing and promoting the Dublin Mountains for the benefit of those who live in, use, visit or have a role to play in shaping the future of this area.

# 03 Taking Stock

## 3.1 Building on Success

During its fourteen years of operation, the Dublin Mountains Partnership has achieved much of what it set out to do when it formed in 2008 in terms of improving recreational facilities and access to the Dublin Mountains and influencing Coillte's decision to initiate the Dublin Mountains Makeover project. The DMP is proud of what has been achieved to date, the key highlights of which are presented below. The ambition of the Strategic Plan 2022 - 2026 is to build on this success.

*Combining our Resources €3.2 Million over 14 years, to deliver Real Benefits*

	<p><b>Dublin Mountains Makeover</b> influenced the decision to transition from commercial forestry to managing 9 forests in the Dublin Mountains for biodiversity and recreation</p>
	<p><b>Dublin Mountains Way</b> created a 42km National Waymarked Trail plus 46km of waymarked looped trails across 10 recreation sites</p>
	<p><b>Orienteering Courses</b> developed 12 permanent courses across 4 sites: Ticknock, Carrickgolligan, Massy's Estate, Barnaslingan</p>
	<p><b>A Model Partnership</b> 14 years of working together and with others to negotiate change, pursue a shared agenda and deliver public benefit</p>
	<p><b>Managing Impacts</b> promoting the responsible enjoyment of the Dublin Mountains by raising awareness of key issues and working collaboratively to find solutions</p>
	<p><b>Keeping in Touch</b> DMP has a website since 2009; Facebook since 2012 with more than 7,000 followers as of April 2021 Twitter since 2019 with more than 1,300 followers as of April 2021</p>
	<p><b>Volunteer Ranger Service</b> at the heart of the work of the DMP, 21,988 hours of support provided by 50 Volunteers from 2009-2021</p>
	<p><b>Mountain Bike Tracks</b> developed a 13km Red Grade Trail plus a 2km Black Grade Trail at Ticknock</p>
	<p><b>Signage &amp; Orientation</b> provided recreation site trailheads, DMP branded trail signage and wayfinding, map boards &amp; visitor parking</p>
	<p><b>Building Common Ground</b> created a foundation for shared learning, understanding and collaborative action through the Consultative Forum</p>
	<p><b>Raising Awareness</b> ensuring that the natural and cultural heritage assets of the mountains are appreciated and looked after</p>
	<p><b>Promoting Participation</b> facilitated over 600 events from guided walks and mountain runs to tree planting and litter picks; family fun days and treasure hunts to orienteering and map reading</p>



## 3.2 Responding to Change

### A Growing City Region

The population of Dublin in April 2021 was estimated to be 1.43 million persons, equating to 28.5% of the total population of the Republic of Ireland. Forecasts published in 2019 estimate that the number of people living in Dublin could, by 2036, increase by 32% resulting in a population of 1.76 million, at which stage the city region could account for almost one third of the state's total population.

As the population of the Dublin city region continues to grow, its capacity to accommodate and service the needs of existing, emerging and new communities will be challenged. As an essential component of a community's quality of life, the availability of accessible green space will need to evolve in response to growing demands to provide for passive recreation as well as opportunities for all age groups to be active outdoors.

The Dublin Mountains represent a substantial element of a growing network of green spaces within the city region. While they already provide significant recreational and amenity value with popular orienteering courses, climbing areas and walking, running, hiking and mountain bike trails, their extensive and diverse nature in close proximity to urban communities coupled with a growing demand for different types of outdoor recreational activity means that, if sustainably developed and well-managed, they can continue to meet the needs of a growing population and different audiences including visitors new to the city.

In mid-2019, Coillte announced its intention to convert some of the key forest properties in the Dublin Mountains to recreational forests. This will forever change the emphasis of these forests from being a place for commercial timber production, to forests which will be managed for recreation, landscape and biodiversity values for future generations.

This will be achieved through a change in forest management approach with a strong emphasis on the use of continuous cover forestry to maintain a permanent forest cover, while encouraging regeneration and a gradual increase in species

diversity. In other areas of predominantly coniferous woodland these will be gradually felled and converted to native woodland, including species such as Scots Pine, Birch, Rowan, Oak and Holly. The forest conversion process has been named the 'Dublin Mountains Makeover' and will be managed by Coillte Nature, Coillte's not-for-profit division.

Demand for access to recreation in the Dublin Mountains continues to grow. Visitor counter units at each of the forest sites show an increasing number of visitors each year and this mirrors increasing trends nationwide. This increasing demand must be sustainably managed and comes with increasing demands for resources – both human and infrastructural – to maintain and manage it.

## A Changing Climate



The role of green infrastructure in addressing the challenges of the 21st century cannot be underestimated. It is a natural, service-providing infrastructure that is often more cost effective, more resilient and more capable of meeting social, environmental and economic objectives than 'grey' infrastructure'

The multi-functional nature of green space is particularly important when considered within the context of a changing climate. While it is clear that the issue of climate change is currently high on the public agenda and sectoral adaptation plans have been developed, the critical role that green infrastructure can play in mitigating its impacts is increasingly being recognised. For its mitigating impacts to work, an integrated approach to planning the provision of green infrastructure across different spatial scales – from neighbourhood to district to city region to wider catchment – and across different local administrations will be needed.

In providing habitats for wildlife, space for outdoor recreation, landcover for flood risk mitigation and carbon storage, the Dublin Mountains are a strategic component in the network of green infrastructure

within the city region and have been recognised as 'a strategic asset' within the suite of such metropolitan scale assets in the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019 - 2031.

Green infrastructure interventions which can include looking after, creating, enhancing, maintaining, managing and promoting these vital assets are not only a key mechanism in ameliorating the impacts of climate change, but they can also deliver on other agendas as well.

## A Healthier Community

Many studies have demonstrated the positive health effects of exposure to green spaces, citing reduced depression and improved mental health, reduced cardiovascular morbidity and mortality and reduced rates of obesity and diabetes. By enabling people to experience nature up close, the Dublin Mountains play a key role in preventively supporting and maintaining health and improving well-being and quality of life.

The 'Woodlands For Health' initiative, a prescribed GP-led programme, is demonstrating measurable improvements in mental health and well-being for its participants, through their active engagement in nature and the outdoors. It is clear that the Dublin Mountains are a positive force for the city region's well-being.



# 04 Strategic Themes

To realise the vision, the following section sets out **four strategy themes**, each with supporting objectives and specific actions.



## Strategy Theme 1:



# Protect the Resource

Maintain and enhance the ecological integrity of the Dublin Mountains

**Aim:** The recreational use of the Dublin Mountains is compatible with the conservation of the area's rich diversity of natural, built and cultural resources and minimises impact on neighbouring farmers and resident communities.

### Objective 1.1: Support the delivery of the Dublin Mountains Makeover

#### ACTIONS:

- \* Work with Coillte Nature to develop a strong and clear communications programme for visitors and the wider public.
- \* Support Coillte Nature in managing the recreation/conversion operation interface.

### Objective 1.2: Protect the environment of the Dublin Mountains - its natural, built and cultural heritage and assets.

#### ACTIONS:

- \* Develop and implement an integrated ecological management plan for the Dublin Mountains.
- \* Deliver the actions in the Dublin Mountains Archaeological Plan.
- \* Ensure operational compliance with all relevant environmental and built heritage legislation.
- \* Use the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre as a key resource to raise awareness of the environmental protection measures being implemented in the mountains.

### Objective 1.3: Measure, understand and grow the value of the Dublin Mountains in future climate change mitigation and carbon storage.

#### ACTIONS:

- \* Work with Coillte Nature to develop metrics to measure climate change mitigation and carbon storage and communicate these values.
- \* Develop a 'green and blue infrastructure for urban resilience' initiative in partnership with the Dublin Bay Biosphere.
- \* Future proof the recreation experience, employing sustainable development and environmental engineering techniques.

### Objective 1.4: Promote sustainable access to the Dublin Mountains.

#### ACTIONS:

- \* Facilitate and promote multi-modal connectivity and sustainable access to the Dublin Mountains.
- \* Develop a number of shared-use routes into and around the mountains and promote these to members of the public.

## Strategy Theme 2:



# Provide for Recreation

Facilitate the active enjoyment of the Dublin Mountains through providing, maintaining and managing infrastructure and services.

**Aim:** A suite of accessible, well-designed recreation facilities on public lands that supports the health and well-being of resident communities and visitors to the Dublin Mountains.

### Objective 2.1: Plan, develop and manage recreation facilities that meet the needs of key audiences.

#### ACTIONS:

- \* Prepare a strategic plan for recreation hubs in the Dublin Mountains, including new hubs for underserved areas.
- \* Incorporate new appropriate activities into the hubs, including natural play and education opportunities.
- \* Develop a rolling, prioritised programme to maintain existing recreation facilities within hub locations.
- \* Support the delivery of the Dublin Mountains Visitor Centre at Montpelier Hill / Hell Fire Club forest lands as a key gateway into the mountains.

### Objective 2.2: Promote and plan for responsible use of the recreation resource in the Dublin Mountains.

#### ACTIONS:

- \* In the strategic plan, adopt an integrated approach to visitor management, minimising user conflicts.
- \* Promote responsible visitor behaviour and personal responsibility by those accessing/participating in outdoor recreation.

### Objective 2.3: Facilitate and manage the expansion, interconnectivity and accessibility of the trails network.

#### ACTIONS:

- \* Develop a comprehensive, accessible and integrated network of off-road trails.
- \* Develop connecting off-road routes from the urban fringe into the mountain trails network.
- \* Integrate existing/potential recreation hubs into the trails network.
- \* Move the Dublin Mountains Way fully off-road wherever possible.

### Strategy Theme 3:



## Partner for Success

Work with relevant stakeholders to align strategy, policy and funding, share expertise and expand resources to achieve the outcomes of the strategic plan.

**Aim:** The Dublin Mountains Partnership will continue to benefit from a broad range of perspectives and is built upon an alignment of strategy and funding, a sharing of advice, knowledge and experience and is sufficiently resourced to deliver on its objectives.

### Objective 3.1: Structure and resource the Dublin Mountains Partnership to ensure that its strategic objectives are delivered.

#### ACTIONS:

- \* Implement the structural changes identified by the Partnership to oversee its work and to ensure it is fit-for-purpose.
- \* Increase the funding provided to the DMP to deliver on the strategic plan objectives.
- \* Refresh the partners' Memorandum of Understanding to underpin the work of the Partnership.
- \* Incorporate Coillte Nature representation into the DMP to support the delivery of the Dublin Mountains Makeover.

### Objective 3.2: Build alliances with key partners, neighbours and communities.

#### ACTIONS:

- \* Evolve the existing Consultative Forum into Consultative Panels.
- \* Build strong public and community-led participation.
- \* Develop the integration of DMP objectives and support for their delivery into the Partners' organisations.
- \* Work with Partner Tourism Strategies and Fáilte Ireland with respect to recreation in and promotion of the Dublin Mountains.
- \* Within the context of its Outdoor Recreation Strategy, work with Wicklow County Council on matters of mutual interest and benefit.
- \* Build a research initiative with third level education partners to inform future direction for the Partnership's aims.

### Objective 3.3: Facilitate opportunities for volunteering and significantly expand its capability.

#### ACTIONS:

- \* Develop a consistent, sustainable and rewarding volunteering programme and grow its capability.
- \* Build public awareness, enthusiasm and commitment for volunteering with the Dublin Mountains Partnership.
- \* Implement best-in-class policies and practices in volunteering.

## Strategy Theme 4:



# Promote the Benefits

Promote the Dublin Mountains as a wonderful destination for recreation and learning about the outdoors, for both outdoor enthusiasts and the wider public.

**Aim:** Visitors and residents will have a deeper appreciation of the special qualities of the Dublin Mountains, know where best to experience and enjoy healthy responsible exercise and outdoor activity and understand their role in ensuring that the Dublin Mountains can continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

## Objective 4.1: Develop an external communications plan to profile the importance of the Dublin Mountains as a destination for enjoyable, healthy and sustainable recreation activities and events.

### ACTIONS:

- \* Develop and enhance the digital experience and develop a new website showcasing the recreation offer and events.
- \* Develop a media campaign to encourage the wider public to become more conversant and familiar with what the mountains have to offer.
- \* Promote responsible use of the Dublin Mountains through Leave No Trace Ireland principles.
- \* Develop an events programme to animate the mountains as a destination for a broad range of educational conservation, fun and enjoyable activities.

## Objective 4.2: Profile the Dublin Mountains as a destination for outdoor learning.

### ACTIONS:

- \* Develop an educational programme to enable volunteers, visitors, land managers and others to actively engage with the ecology and heritage of the Dublin Mountains.
- \* Work with youth groups/educational organisations to facilitate group learning for diverse/hard to reach communities.
- \* Identify/evaluate potential educational or learning facilities such as an outdoor field studies centre.
- \* Develop a suite of guided and self-guided educational programmes to increase visitors' knowledge and enhance their experience of the Dublin Mountains.

## Objective 4.3: Promote the visibility, interconnectivity and accessibility of recreation opportunities in the Dublin Mountains.

### ACTIONS:

- \* Promote the multiple benefits of the mountains, forests and parks through communication, advocacy, campaigns, outreach and education.
- \* Create a memorable sense of arrival and orientation at all entry points and promote the connectedness of the Dublin Mountains.

# 05 Gearing Up

The strategic themes, objectives and actions set out in this plan are considerably more wide-ranging than previous iterations of strategic plans developed by the DMP since its inception. But they reflect a considerably higher level of ambition by all the Partner organisations to see the DMP do more and deliver more for resident populations in the surrounding area and the wider city as well as for visitors to the region.

## 5.1 Going Forward - Governance Structure

The role of the DMP as a coordinator, facilitator, unifying force and trusted intermediary that is able to fold different initiatives into a collective strategy, increase cooperation between partners, launch initiatives to address pressing issues and attract funding needs to be amplified and properly resourced.

The Partnership will continue to be ‘governed’ under a Memorandum of Understanding. The current MoU will be enhanced and updated to reflect the ambition set out by the DMP Board in this strategy document. The Board oversees all activities of the DMP and is responsible for delivery of the Strategy.

The Board has a Chair and Vice-Chair who will give direction to the expanded management/ executive team. Through the work of Committees, comprising individual Board members, and with inputs from the Consultative Panels, key work streams emerging from the strategy will be prioritised and progressed.

## 5.2. Going Forward - Enhanced Management/Executive Structure

The work of the DMP already spans a broad array of initiatives and while its work is highly regarded, it is clear that its capacity is significantly under-resourced. Resources that are commensurate with the need to deliver on the ambition of the strategic plan need to be secured.

The revised management structure of the DMP would see an Executive Team – the budget holders and representatives of the core funders – having oversight of additional resources in the areas of:

- Volunteer Management
- Community Liaison
- Educational Programme Development
- Communications/Promotions/ Events

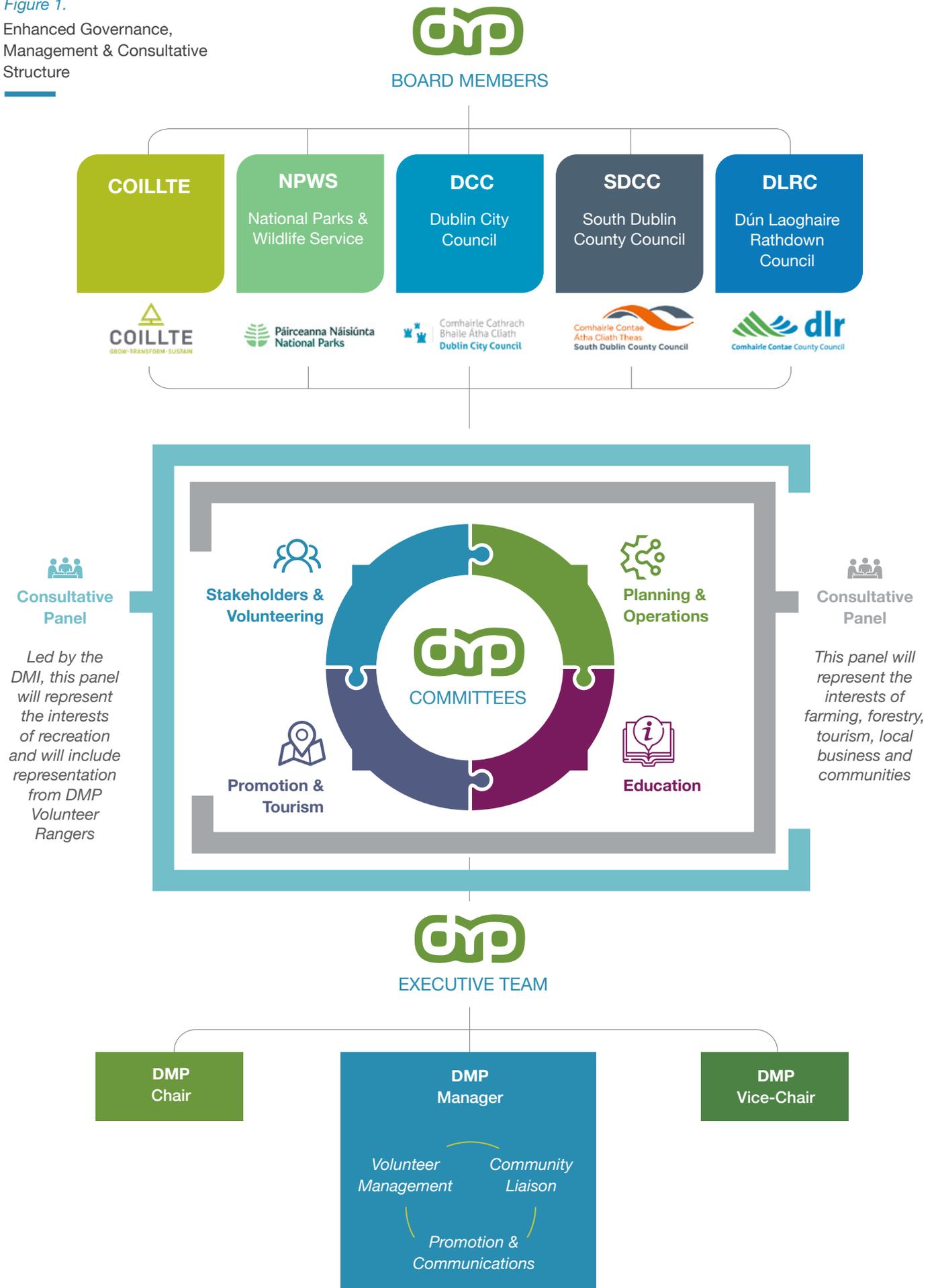
A priority will be resourcing the management of an expanded Volunteer Corps to add enhanced capability and capacity.

Two new Consultative Panels will provide an opportunity to engage user groups and knowledgeable stakeholders with an interest in recreation, farming, forestry, tourism, conservation, volunteering and community development on future strategy, both in terms of defining future objectives and building a path to achieve its ambition. The Consultative Panels will have representation on the Stakeholders & Volunteering Committee and both Panels will be consulted on key proposals of the DMP linked to the Strategic Plan.

The new structure required to deliver the strategic plan is represented graphically in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Enhanced Governance,  
Management & Consultative  
Structure





# **DUBLIN MOUNTAINS** PARTNERSHIP

Strategic Plan 2022 - 2026

