

## **Calls for Expressions of Interest for Café at Ducketts Grove Historic House and Walled Gardens**

Carlow County Council is seeking Expressions of Interest from suitably qualified and experienced catering companies or individuals, for the unique opportunity to operate a new café at Ducketts Grove Historic House and Walled Gardens. This proposed new facility will play a vital role as part of the tourism product offering.

Ducketts Grove is a spectacular ruin in the countryside, situated east of Carlow Town. Once a grand mansion, Duckett's Grove Historic House and Walled Gardens is now one of the key visitor attractions in County Carlow (approx. 52,000 visitors in 2022) and forms part of the Ireland's Ancient East trail. It is situated 10km east of Carlow Town and is within a 10-minute drive of Exit 4 on the M9 Dublin/Waterford route.

Once the centre of a vast Estate that covered some 20,000 acres, Duckett's Grove was home to the Duckett family in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1933, the interior of the mansion was sadly destroyed by a fire. Even in ruin, the surviving towers and turrets of Duckett's Grove form a romantic profile, making it one of the most photogenic historic buildings in the country. This part Cobden designed building is structurally intact and accessible to the public.

Visitor experiences that can be enjoyed at Duckett's Grove Historic House and Walled Gardens include:

- Two walled kitchen gardens and pleasure ground area
- Guided tours of the site, focusing on the history of the Duckett family and the House - audio tours also available in English, German, French, Italian, Spanish and Irish
- Woodland playground
- Craft units in the courtyard area
- Proposed new high quality café

There are two walled kitchen gardens in Duckett's Grove. The Upper Walled Garden, hedged with boxwood, is planted with historical varieties of shrub roses, a great range of hardy and tender perennials and choice flowering shrubs. The Lower Walled Garden, once the site of the old orchard, contains a wide variety of fruits, including figs, a mulberry, red currants, blackcurrants, pears, plums and Irish historical varieties of apples. The borders also contain a variety of shrubs and perennials all echoing the past history of the garden and people associated with Duckett's Grove. The gardens are of interest to:

- gardeners, both beginner and advanced
- gardening and flower clubs throughout Ireland and from overseas - markets including England, USA, Germany, France, Switzerland and Norway
- active retirement and ICA groups throughout Ireland
- local walkers and dog owners

The gardens are maintained by a full-time Horticulturist, along with three part-time gardeners. Guided tours of the site focus on the history of the Duckett family and the house. Guided tours of the site are provided each Friday, Saturday and Sunday from March 24<sup>th</sup> – October 29<sup>th</sup> 2023 at 2pm and 4 pm, with times outside the foregoing also available by appointment. Duckett's Grove also benefits from a series of audio tours covering key aspects of the site's heritage and cultural and social history, which are available on a daily basis. Guided tours and audio tours

are free of charge to the public. Audio tours and interpretative mapboards and signage have been funded by Fáilte Ireland.

### **Woodland Playground**

The woodland play area is universally accessible and finished in wood, featuring slides, poles and an obstacle course. This rustic and aesthetically pleasing playground has been completed, taking its natural surroundings into consideration. The playground is located within the pleasure ground area. Restored paths and the repaired sunken bridge plus plantings of oak, lime, hazel, spindle and laurel also complement this area.

### **Craft Units in the Courtyard Area**

The courtyard area currently features a craft studio occupied by the artisan craft maker Elaine Kelly of NicAngels Candles, who specialises in individual, hand-marbled, fragrance-free Irish made candles. NicAngels Candles are open on selected days during the week. Carlow County Council intends to issue Expressions of Interest for the remaining three craft units for occupation in Summer, 2023, which will add significantly to the offering in the Courtyard area. Significant progress has been made in presenting an attractive site to visitors of Duckett's Grove in recent years with the appointment of a full-time Horticulturist and the provision of audio tours and interpretation mapboards by Fáilte Ireland. Carlow County Council now see the establishment of a high quality café as an integral aspect of the overall visitor offering. The café will be located in the courtyard area, in immediate proximity to the main entrance.

**FACILITIES AT DUCKETT'S GROVE:** Large car and coach park, toilets, wheelchair access.

**TO FIND US:** From Dublin/Waterford take Exit 4 off the M9 motorway. Follow signs for Castledermot, then take the R418 Castledermot – Tullow Road for 6km and turn right at the signed junction. From Carlow Town take the R726 Hacketstown Road for 10km to Killerig Cross. Turn left at this junction onto the R418 for 2.5km, turn left again at the signed junction.

**OPENING TIMES:** Gardens and ruined mansion daily, daylight hours.

**ADMISSION:** Free

### **Catering and Submission Requirements:**

The proposed refurbished building will provide 97.7msq at ground floor and 57.1msq at first floor with space for seating outside in the Courtyard. Expressions of Interest will be assessed on the listed requirements and experience. Submissions should include details of:

#### **Requirements (scored component, provide an answer for each point):**

- The proposal should give detailed information on the type of café offering proposed, to include food, beverages, light snacks/lunches and cakes
- Proposed opening days and hours - at a minimum, the café must operate during peak periods March – October, 7 days a week
- Proposed pricing structure (food, soft drinks and hot beverages)
- Proposed staffing and management structure
- Proposed marketing and publicity strategy
- Provide knowledge of, and commitment to, compliance with all health and safety and legal standards and operational procedures of a catering business
- Proposal for dealing with waste disposal and cleaning requirements of both the café and adjacent toilet facilities.

#### **Experience (scored component, provide an answer for each point):**

The operator must have relevant business experience and must show evidence in their submission of:

- Previous and current operations in the catering business
- Training in catering or hospitality management
- Experience in merchandising and marketing

**Additional Information to be supplied (not scored):**

- Names and contact details for two references, one being a most recent employer or leaseholder.

The successful operator will be responsible for water, electricity, heating, rates, broadband and waste collection charges.

All prospective operators, prior to commencement of operation, must supply;

- Evidence of Employers Liability Insurance €13.5m
- Evidence of Public Liability Insurance €6.5m
- Food Hygiene Certificate
- Health & Safety Policy

**Security**

Security arrangements will be a matter for the successful operator and the operator will be required to ensure that cash and any other items of value are removed from the premises on a daily basis. Carlow County Council will have no liability for any loss or damage to the successful operator's property or for property for which the successful operator is responsible for or for any consequential loss of earnings that may arise due to loss or damage.

**Freedom of Information Requests**

It should be noted by applicants that, under the Freedom of Information Act 2014, persons may apply to Carlow County Council for access to information that is held by the Local Authority and not otherwise publicly available. It is also noted that elements of your application may or may not be considered commercially sensitive, depending on the nature of the information request.

**Confidentiality**

Interested parties are requested to treat all information which may be gained during this process in the utmost confidentiality and not disclose any such information to any person or company not directly involved in this process. In addition, applications will be held in confidence by Carlow County Council and will be dealt with in accordance with Carlow County Council's Data Protection Policy. The privacy notice for Carlow County Council can be found at <https://www.carlowcoco.ie/en/privacy/>

**How to apply:**

Applications should be returned by email to [econnors@carlowcoco.ie](mailto:econnors@carlowcoco.ie) with *Expression of Interest: Ducketts Grove Café* in the subject title, no later than 4pm on Friday, 10th March, 2023.

Late applications will not be considered.