

# CHIEF EXECUTIVES REPORT FOR DRAFT WICKLOW BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2026-2031



Comhairle Contae Chill Mhantáin  
Wicklow County Council



**Ceangal**

Clár den Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
A Heritage Council programme

# Chief Executive’s Report on the Public Consultation on the Draft Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan 2026–2031

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# Section 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of this Report

This Chief Executive's Report has been prepared for the Members of Wicklow County Council in accordance with best practice for the adoption of strategic local authority plans. It provides a summary and analysis of submissions received during the public consultation on the Draft Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan 2026–2031 and sets out the Chief Executive's response and recommendations arising from this process.

The purpose of this Report is to provide assistance in consideration of the Draft Plan and to inform the decision of Elected Members on the formal approval of the plan. It outlines how the consultation process was undertaken and how submissions were facilitated. The report identifies key themes raised, and details amendments recommended to ensure that the Plan is robust, evidence-based and aligned with national policy.

## 1.2 Background to the Biodiversity Action Plan

The Draft Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan 2026–2031 sets out Wicklow County Council's strategic framework for protecting, restoring, and enhancing biodiversity across the county. While not a statutory plan under the Planning and Development Acts, this BAP fulfils commitments under the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (2023–2030) and responds to the strengthened national biodiversity duty introduced under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023.

The Plan complements the County Development Plan 2022–2028, the Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024–2029, and the County Heritage Plan 2025–2030, and provides a coordinated programme of actions across Council functions and in partnership with communities, landowners, agencies, and stakeholders. Its purpose is to guide coherent and practical delivery of biodiversity protection, restoration and nature-positive management across Wicklow.

## 1.3 Legislative and Policy Context

This Plan has been prepared and approved in line with Ireland's biodiversity and climate policy framework, including statutory obligations arising under national legislation and the National Biodiversity Action Plan.

The Plan operates within a strong national and European policy framework, including:

- ❖ EU Birds & Habitats Directives and Natura 2000 obligations
- ❖ EU Nature Restoration Law (2024) and forthcoming National Restoration Plan
- ❖ Water Framework Directive and River Basin Management Plan (2022–2027)
- ❖ Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (Amendment) 2021
- ❖ National Biodiversity Action Plan (4th NBAP) 2023–2030
- ❖ Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023 and local authority biodiversity duty
- ❖ All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (2021–2025)

The Wicklow BAP serves as the local delivery mechanism for biodiversity and nature-based action within this legislative context and supports cross-government ambitions to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and achieve recovery by 2050.

## 1.4 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA)

In accordance with the SEA Regulations and Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive, the Draft Plan was screened for Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment. The screening assessments concluded that SEA and AA were not required. It is noted that all actions therein will be implemented subject to relevant environmental and planning requirements, including AA screening where applicable.

The SEA and AA Screening reports will be made available on the Council website.

## 1.5 Guidance for Elected Members

While the Biodiversity Action Plan is not a statutory plan under the Planning and Development Acts, its adoption forms a key policy commitment of Wicklow County Council and a core delivery mechanism for national biodiversity objectives. In considering this report and the Draft Plan, Elected Members are advised to:

- Have regard to national policy, including the 4th NBAP
- Consider the Chief Executive's recommendations in full
- Ensure that any amendments remain consistent with national direction, the Council's statutory functions, and the local biodiversity duty
- Support resourcing and cross-departmental collaboration to facilitate implementation

The adoption of the BAP represents an important strategic decision by the Council and will guide biodiversity action, investment, partnership development, and reporting across the period 2026–2031.

## Section 2: Consultation Process

### 2.1 Structure of Public Consultation Process

The preparation of the Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was informed by a two-stage public engagement process, consisting of pre-draft consultation and public consultation on the draft Plan.

Pre-draft engagement took place from 23 September to 4 November 2024, providing communities, stakeholders, and interested parties with an early opportunity to share priorities and local knowledge. An online survey was created on the Wicklow County Council Consultation Hub and drop-in clinics were convened in each of the Municipal Districts. A number of key stakeholder meetings were also held. This stage helped shape the draft Plan and ensured that the emerging policy direction reflected local needs and perspectives.

The public display period for the draft Plan ran from 14 July to 14 August 2025, during which the draft BAP was made available for inspection on the Wicklow County Council Consultation Hub, at County Buildings, and at County Libraries in each in of the Municipal Districts. Written submissions were invited from members of the public, prescribed bodies, and relevant organisations.

### 2.2 Public Communications & Engagement

Wicklow County Council undertook an extensive communications campaign to maximise awareness and participation. This included:

- ❖ Publication of information and consultation materials on the Wicklow County Council Consultation Hub
- ❖ Regular Wicklow County Council social media communications
- ❖ Print media notices in local newspapers
- ❖ A series of local radio announcements
- ❖ Development and circulation of a Biodiversity Discussion Paper
- ❖ An online public discussion event during the statutory consultation period
- ❖ Five in-person drop-in clinics hosted in public libraries during the pre-draft phase:

*Table 1 Drop-in Clinic details*

Clinic Location	Date
Ballywaltrim Library	9 October 2024
Arklow Library	15 October 2024
Wicklow Library	17 October 2024
Blessington Library	22 October 2024
Greystones Library	24 October 2024

In addition, regular updates were provided to Elected Members through the Council's Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) and to relevant staff and departments across the Council organisation.

## 2.3 Submission Channels & Approach

Submissions were accepted:

- ❖ Via the online Consultation Hub (as free text or survey responses)
- ❖ By email
- ❖ In hard copy

## 2.4 Stakeholder Engagement & Consultation Submissions

Submissions were welcomed from individuals, community groups, non-governmental organisations, land managers, and statutory bodies. All submissions received during the consultation period were reviewed and considered in the preparation of this Chief Executive's Report.

In parallel with the public consultation process, key stakeholders were engaged throughout plan development via the Biodiversity Working Group (BWG). Membership of the BWG reflects the wide range of interests and expertise required to support biodiversity delivery across the county, including:

- ❖ Wicklow Public Participation Network (PPN)
- ❖ National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)
- ❖ Coillte
- ❖ BirdWatch Ireland
- ❖ ACRES Leinster / Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine extension service
- ❖ ReWild Wicklow
- ❖ Teagasc
- ❖ Wicklow Heritage Forum
- ❖ Irish Farmers' Association (IFA)
- ❖ Mountaineering Ireland
- ❖ Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO)
- ❖ Wicklow Uplands Council
- ❖ Inland Fisheries Ireland
- ❖ National Deer Management Forum

## 2.5 Consultation with Prescribed Environmental Authorities

In accordance with S.I. No. 435/2004 (as amended) — European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations — the draft Plan was referred to the prescribed environmental authorities, namely:

- ❖ Environmental Protection Agency
- ❖ Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- ❖ Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications
- ❖ Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

A submission was received from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, one from the Environmental Protection Agency, and one on behalf of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage via the National Parks and Wildlife Service. No submission was received from the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communication

## 2.6 Summary of Consultation Process

The consultation process generated a strong and positive response, reflecting growing public engagement with biodiversity issues across County Wicklow.

The collaborative approach detailed above ensured that a broad range of perspectives, including community organisations, landowners, recreational interests, environmental groups and public agencies, and this informed both the development and refinement of the Plan. All submissions received during the public consultation period have been reviewed and are addressed in Section 3 of this report.

## Section 3: Summary of Submissions

### 3.1 Overview

A total of 40 written submissions, and 56 survey responses, were received during the two phases of the public consultation period, many of which contained multiple issues for consideration (over 100 issues were identified). 33 people attended the pre-draft drop-in clinics and 26 attendees participated in the online engagement session. Submissions were received from members of the public, community groups, environmental NGOs, recreational stakeholders, landowner and farming representatives, prescribed bodies, and public agencies.

Feedback demonstrated a high level of public interest and constructive engagement with biodiversity issues. Many submissions expressed strong support for the Draft Plan and its ambition, while offering suggestions to enhance clarity, resourcing, delivery mechanisms and alignment with national policy frameworks.

The submissions were reviewed and analysed, and recurring themes were identified. The following sections summarises the key themes raised and the Chief Executive's response, including references to where updates have been made in the final Plan.

### 3.2 Theme-Based Submissions & Responses

#### 3.2.1 Timelines, Targets and Reporting Cadence

**Summary of theme:** Several submissions requested clearer targets, time-bound milestones, quarterly updates, and an online dashboard to track delivery. Concerns were expressed that "S/M/L" time bands are not specific enough to drive accountability.

**Chief Executive Response:** The Plan employs short/medium/long time horizons to provide flexibility given emerging national policy (including the forthcoming National Nature Restoration Plan) and to retain flexibility under uncertain resourcing and future staffing. The Plan now includes strengthened language on monitoring, and the role of the Biodiversity Steering Group (transitioning from the BWG post-adoption) which will oversee implementation. Annual progress reporting to Members will be undertaken, with online highlights considered, if and as capacity permits.

**Plan References:** Section 5; Actions 43–48.

**Modifications:** Clarified monitoring and reporting approach.

#### 3.2.2 Citizen Science and the Evidence Base

**Summary of theme:** Respondents advocated for citizen science to establish baselines, select indicator species, and "bend the curve" tracking. Named proposals included using NBDC schemes, local groups' datasets (e.g., camera traps), and National Datasets (e.g., Blue Skies data) to map hedgerows/trees.

**Chief Executive Response:** The Council recognises the value of citizen science for awareness-raising and broad trend observations, and we will continue to facilitate participation and signpost national schemes. An action dedicated to rolling out a County-wide citizen science programme is included in

the plan (Action 16). Notwithstanding, specialist ecological monitoring remains outside core local authority functions and is led nationally (NPWS, NBDC, IFI). Wicklow County Council's role is to add value to national/partner monitoring (NPWS, NBDC, LAWPRO, IFI, BWI), focus local indicators where data already exist (e.g., habitat restoration outputs, invasive-species work, fish-passage/barrier removal), and improve data management and sharing so information is usable and visible. Where sustainable partnerships and funding exist for specific species orientated projects (e.g., barn owl, swift, nightjar work), collaborations will continue.

**Plan References:** Actions 15-25 (community/citizen science enablement); 43–48 (audit of monitoring, data systems, impact options).

**Modifications:** Highlighted citizen-science role and national alignment.

### 3.2.3 Ecological Networks & Connectivity

**Summary of theme:** Calls to make the county's ecological network explicit (core sites, buffers, river corridors, stepping stones) and to designate a formal "Wicklow Ecological Network", citing Fingal County Council as a model.

**Chief Executive Response:** The Plan commits to mapping ecological networks and integrating ecological connectivity into decision-making and project design. Fundamentally, the identification, protection and enhancement of a County-wide network is an overarching aim of the Plan. Nevertheless, a statutory designation process is a reserved function requiring significant resources and strategic planning work. Fingal's approach is instructive but reflects a different resourcing trajectory. The draft BAP prioritises practical steps that build resilience and connectivity in the near term, including riparian corridors, upland-lowland linkages and strategic green-infrastructure projects.

**Plan References:** Actions 2–4 (mapping/using networks), 26–29, 35–37 (river corridors, buffers, upland–coastal links, site restoration).

**Modifications:** Action 4 added.

### 3.2.4 Trees, TPOs & Hedgerows

**Summary of theme:** Submissions sought a more active TPO regime, faster processing, and stronger hedgerow/tree protection and guidance (including species lists and planting standards).

**Chief Executive Response:** TPOs are a statutory tool with limitations (no appeal route, challenging enforcement) and are not an ideal biodiversity protection mechanism, but, nevertheless, County Wicklow has significantly more TPOs in place than all other counties. The Plan commits to reviewing the Tree Policy, providing practical guidance and training, and aligning with national best practice. The 2024 county Hedgerow Survey will inform campaigns and guidance, with publication of results online. Tree felling on private land is constrained by national legislation; stronger national tools would be required to address pre-emptive clearance.

**Plan References:** Action 5 (Tree Policy review), Actions 11–12 (planning/ecology integration), Action 27 (surveys on Wicklow County Council lands), plus comms Action 20.

### 3.2.5 Enforcement & Inter-Agency Liaison

**Summary of theme:** Submissions expressed frustration at perceived weak enforcement (e.g., out-of-season cutting), requests for stronger Garda/NPWS liaison, and more visible consequences for wildlife offences.

**Chief Executive Response:** The majority of wildlife offences fall under national enforcement (NPWS/An Garda Síochána) and the appropriate agencies provide strong responses locally to reported incidents. Wicklow County Council will strengthen guidance, internal referrals, and liaison within our remit and continue to prioritise prevention (clear design/specs, staff/contractor training, earlier ecological input). Where issues are national, escalation through the appropriate channels will be supported.

**Plan References:** Actions 11–12 (guidance/capacity); 39, 41 (recreation/invasives liaison and preventive measures).

### 3.2.6 Water Quality & Catchment Coordination

**Summary of theme:** Requests were submitted for a dedicated water-quality section, clarity on roles (Wicklow County Council Water Pollution Control, LAWPRO, IFI, Uisce Éireann), and support for citizen monitoring and reporting.

**Chief Executive Response:** Wicklow County Council operates a statutory Water Pollution Control function that investigates pollution reports and enforces relevant legislation. The BAP's role is to complement this statutory function by supporting catchment restoration, barrier removal, riparian buffers, and nature-based measures with partners. For enforcement-grade water-quality evidence, statutory monitoring applies; citizen science is welcomed for participation and awareness but is not a substitute for official monitoring. We will consider updating online guidance to roles and reporting as capacity allows.

**Plan References:** Actions 30, 35–36 (RBMP linkage, barrier removal, riparian corridors/buffers); Section 5 (coordination).

### 3.2.7 Deer Management & Woodland Recovery

**Summary of theme:** It was noted that deer impacts are a major barrier to native woodland regeneration; calls for measurable progress.

**Chief Executive Response:** Deer management sits primarily with the National Deer Management Strategy and local DMUs (outside the direct remit of Wicklow County Council). The BAP will support awareness raising on the issue generally (e.g., with WUC/DMUs), and specifically through its promotion of wild venison as a sustainable food option (Action 38). It will also emphasise deer impacts when developing woodland and upland restoration projects with partners.

**Plan References:** Actions 36–37 (landscape/upland actions), 38 (deer information/engagement).

### 3.2.8 Invasive Alien Species (IAS) - Policy & Logistics

**Summary of theme:** Calls were made for scaled invasive control across taxa (plants, aquatic species, vertebrates), with better logistics for volunteers and consistent messaging.

**Chief Executive Response:** IAS control at scale requires dedicated budgets, multi-agency partnerships, and long-term coordination. The BAP prioritises awareness, mapping where feasible, and targeted treatment projects on Wicklow County Council lands, while seeking regional/national partnerships (including with other LAs) for larger programmes. We will review options for practical volunteer support and capacity building in relation to invasive species management. Planting and procurement guidance on public works will specify native species where possible, and will not include potentially invasive species.

**Plan References:** Action 41 (IAS coordination/awareness), Actions 5, 11, 28 (policies/specs/planting guidance), regional collaboration references.

### 3.2.9 Lighting, Riparian Setbacks & Vegetation Clearance

**Summary of theme:** Requests were submitted for wildlife-friendly lighting standards, stronger riparian buffers, and clearer guidance on vegetation clearance and pre-emptive site works.

**Chief Executive Response:** Wildlife-friendly lighting will be embedded in Council standards/specs when feasible, and planning guidance will align with Dark Skies principles where appropriate. Riparian setbacks are primarily set via the CDP/Development Management Standards (reserved function), but we will apply best practice on Wicklow County Council projects and support partner delivery along river corridors. Pre-emptive clearance on private land is difficult to prevent under current legislation; we will continue to discourage the practice through guidance and pre-application advice.

**Plan References:** Actions 28 (lighting), 11 (planning/guidance), 30, 35–36 (corridors/buffers).

### 3.2.10 Community Capacity, Funding and Practical Supports

**Summary of theme:** Proposals were made for micro-grants, biodiversity hubs, equipment loans (e.g., meadow machinery), community nurseries, and a local “innovation grant”.

**Chief Executive Response:** The Plan prioritises community-led action and commits to facilitating further training, signposting of funding, promotion of peer learning, and showcasing of demonstration sites. New grant schemes or loan programmes will be considered pending sufficient administration capacity and funding availability. Community nursery and seed-collection concepts have a dedicated action within the Plan (Action 18).

**Plan References:** Actions 17–25 (capacity/training/supports), 32 (NBS portfolio).

### 3.2.11 Peatlands, Forestry & Land

**Summary of theme:** Support was called for for peatland restoration, CCF/close-to-nature forestry, addressing sitka spread, and (where appropriate) acquisition of strategic land for nature.

**Chief Executive Response:** The Plan places a strong emphasis on partner-led restoration in peatlands/uplands, promote close-to-nature forestry principles through training/guidance. Provision is included for planning for the National Restoration Plan. There is a focus on improved management of land already under Wicklow County Council stewardship. Acquisition and zoning of land are reserved-function matters for Members and depend on budget and statutory plan processes.

**Plan References:** Action 8, Actions 26-34 (landscape restoration/NbS with partners)

### 3.2.12 Policy, Governance & Inclusion

**Summary of theme:** A request was made for stronger alignment with GBF/EU/NBAP/NPF, clarity on BWG/Steering oversight, social inclusion, and references to youth engagement (Children & Young People’s Assembly on Biodiversity Loss).

**Chief Executive Response:** The Plan is aligned with the GBF, EU 2030 Strategy, the Nature Restoration Law’s preparation timeline, and the NBAP’s “whole-of-government/society” approach. Post-adoption, a Biodiversity Steering Group will oversee delivery and advise on prioritisation. There is a continued emphasis on inclusive engagement (schools, PPN, community groups) within available capacity.

**Plan References:** Aim & Objectives; Section 5 (governance/oversight); Actions 15–24 (engagement/comms/schools).

## 3.3 Submissions from Prescribed Environmental Authorities

In accordance with Article 7 of S.I. 435/2004 (as amended), the Draft Plan was referred to the prescribed environmental authorities. Submissions were received from the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Parks & Wildlife Service, and the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine. No submission was received from the Department of Environment, Climate & Communications.

The table below summarises the issues raised and the Chief Executive’s response.

*Note: The Heritage Council, while not a prescribed authority for the purposes of this process, made a submission and is included as a key partner.*

**Table 2 Submissions from Prescribed Bodies and Responses**

Prescribed Body / Key Partner	Summary of Issues Raised	Chief Executive Response
<p><b>Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Formally determine SEA significance using S.I. criteria.</li> <li>2. Ensure Habitats Directive compliance; integrate AA findings into the plan.</li> <li>3. Align with NPF, RSES, and Flood Risk Guidelines.</li> <li>4. Align with national commitments on climate change mitigation/adaptation.</li> <li>5. Screen future amendments/modifications for potential significant effects.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This process was carried out as part of the Plan Development</li> <li>2. This process was carried out as part of the Plan Development. In addition, Action 12 ensures independent review of statutory assessments, including AA</li> <li>3. The policy context of the Plan (section 2) confirms alignment, and Objective 1 embeds planning alignment.</li> <li>4. The Plan is in alignment with the Climate Action Plan and embeds climate resilience in objectives.</li> <li>5. The will be carried out.</li> </ol>
<p><b>National Parks &amp; Wildlife Service (NPWS)</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recommend expand the BAP text on Wicklow’s unique biodiversity and habitat status.</li> <li>2. Recommend actions be more specific and quantifiable.</li> <li>3. Quantify practical management measures (e.g., map pollinator friendly actions, track invasive control implementation).</li> <li>4. Introduce objectives/actions targeting external sectors (agriculture, development, tourism, forestry).</li> <li>5. Consider a 'no net loss' requirement and facilitate transition to 'Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)'.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Updated section 3 now added.</li> <li>2. Actions are SMART to the extent that an unknown level of resources and staffing will be available to implement them. Annual workplans will have more measurable targets.</li> <li>3. This will be done under Actions 3, 6, and 9.</li> <li>4. This is addressed under Actions 10, 24, and 39 which focus explicitly on monitoring or engaging external sectors like agriculture, forestry, and recreation impacts.</li> <li>5. The BAP context states WCC will work toward a no-net-loss approach and build capacity for BNG.</li> </ol>

<p><b>Department of Agriculture, Food &amp; the Marine (DAFM)</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recommended changes to the policy section, in particular Table 1, to reflect the multiple pieces of legislation and the ongoing development with the Nature Restoration Regulation and the Nature Restoration Plan.</li> <li>2. Suggested there may be more up to date figures in the threat examples (i.e. conservation status of bees)</li> <li>3. Suggested additional partners in actions.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Table 1 updated as recommended.</li> <li>2. Checked for updates to threat statistics.</li> <li>3. Additional partners added.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Department of Environment, Climate &amp; Communications (DECC)</b></p>	<p>No submission received.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>
<p><b>Heritage Council (Key Partner)</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Include a new action for hedgerow and tree maintenance regimes with Roads Dept, integrated into tendering.</li> <li>2. Include a specific section detailing monitoring, action prioritization, and an annual progress report.</li> <li>3. Add action to explicitly support and implement Ireland's National Nature Restoration Plan (NNRP).</li> <li>4. Update Table 1 concerning the EU Nature Restoration Law targets to reflect agreement since 2024.</li> <li>5. Add action to ensure relevant BAP actions receive commensurate policy provision in the County Development Plan (CDP).</li> <li>6. Explain the concept of County Biodiversity Areas (CBAs) and align Action 2 with HC advice.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This will be addressed when Tree Policy is reviewed (Action 5) and through Actions 6,7, and 13. No action added.</li> <li>2. The "Delivering the Plan" section commits to annual monitoring and reporting to the full Council.</li> <li>3. Addressed through Action 8 which explicitly commits WCC to "ensuring readiness for the implementation of National Nature Restoration Plan (NNRP).</li> <li>4. Table 1 now updated.</li> <li>5. Addressed through Action 4 which specifically ensures that relevant BAP actions "receive commensurate policy provision in future iterations of the County Development Plan"</li> <li>6. Addressed through Action 2 which commits to mapping County Biodiversity Areas (CBAs) and includes the necessary policy alignment.</li> </ol>

## 4. Chief Executive’s Recommendations

### 4.1 Overview

In accordance with Section 20 of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended), the Chief Executive has considered all submissions received, together with internal review and consultation with the Biodiversity Working Group, relevant Council Directorates, and prescribed environmental authorities.

The draft Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan has been refined to strengthen clarity, alignment with national and EU policy frameworks, and practical implementation arrangements.

These updates do not materially alter the strategic direction or intent of the Plan but enhance delivery pathways and governance arrangements.

### 4.2 Summary of Updates to the Plan

*Table 3 Updates to the Plan*

Category	Summary of Change	Rationale
<b>Addition of Aim</b>	Inclusion of a clear aim aligned with EU and national biodiversity policy, including the target to halt biodiversity decline by 2030	Responds to stakeholder feedback and provides clarity of purpose and alignment with national and EU commitments
<b>Refinement of Objectives</b>	Minor revisions to wording to emphasise collaboration, resilience, and evidence-based implementation	Responds to stakeholder feedback and enhances clarity
<b>Revision to Threats Section</b>	Updated descriptions based on Working Group input; consolidation of overlapping themes; strengthened reference to invasive species, deer impacts, development pressures and climate change	Ensures accuracy, local relevance and balanced tone following consultation
<b>Biodiversity in Wicklow Section</b>	Updated following specialist review; includes improved ecological description and clarity on habitat value across the county	Responds to expert input and improves baseline narrative
<b>Policy Alignment Section</b>	Updated to reflect Nature Restoration Law timeline, national NNR preparation, and emerging Biodiversity Net Gain direction	Ensures up-to-date policy context and prepares for future obligations
<b>Action Table Adjustments</b>	New Action 4 inserted (Heritage Council recommendation)	Ensures actions in the Plan are given strong policy backing

## 5. Conclusion

The preparation of the Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan reflects a collaborative effort across Council directorates, statutory agencies, community organisations, land managers, and the wider public. The submissions received through the consultation process have been carefully considered and have informed a strengthened and more deliverable final Plan.

The Plan establishes a coordinated framework to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity in County Wicklow through practical, evidence-based action, partnership-working, and community participation. It is aligned with national and EU biodiversity policies, including the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the emerging requirements of the EU Nature Restoration Regulation.

While the Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan is not a statutory plan, it represents an important policy commitment by the Council and will contribute to fulfilling the wider “whole-of-government and whole-of-society” approach set out in national policy. Implementation will require sustained collaboration, capacity building and access to external funding mechanisms, particularly in the early phases of delivery.

Subject to noting and endorsement by the Elected Members, the Plan will become the guiding framework for biodiversity action within the Council and across the county. The Council will progress implementation through the annual work programme, supported by cross-departmental collaboration and an external multi-stakeholder Biodiversity Steering Group.

An annual report on progress will be brought to the relevant Strategic Policy Committee and to the Elected Members, ensuring transparency, accountability and adaptive learning throughout the life of the Plan.

The Chief Executive therefore recommends that the Elected Members note and endorse the Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan (2026–2031) and approve the implementation and monitoring arrangements outlined in this report.