



1. Vision

To promote environmentally sustainable agricultural activity, a vibrant and healthy forestry sector and to encourage the development of rural-based enterprises established on the principles of sustainable development to contribute positively to a vibrant and dynamic rural economy and society.

2. Context

2.1 – AGRICULTURE

National Spatial Strategy: Agriculture has traditionally been the most important contributor to rural economies. While it is now providing less employment, it remains important as a significant source of income and employment in rural areas. However, it must adapt to the challenges posed by modernisation, restructuring, market development and the increasing importance of environmental issues.

An economically efficient agricultural and food sector, together with forestry, fishing and aquaculture and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, are essential components of the development of the rural economy. No one economic sector offers all the solutions to the challenges in rural areas. Instead, the response lies in different packages of measures to tap the potential that rural areas possess.

In the agricultural and food sectors themselves, issues relevant to spatial policy include:

- Facilitating farm based diversification and alternative enterprises such as organic foods, rural tourism or small and medium enterprises
- Promoting research and development linkages between centres of innovation and food producers
- Recognition of the role of farmers as custodians of the natural resources of the countryside and support for this role

2.2 – FORESTRY

The Council will take cognisance to the following documents:

- Growing for the Future, Department of Agriculture Food and Forestry, 1996
- Draft Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Forestry Development
- National Spatial Strategy
- Forest Guidelines, The Forest Service, 2000 which cover the following
- Forest Harvesting and the Environment Guidelines,
- Forestry and Archaeology Guidelines,
- Forest Biodiversity Guidelines
- Forestry and the Landscape Guidelines,
- Forestry and Water Quality Guidelines,
- Forestry and Aerial Fertilisation Guidelines,

2.3 – RURAL ENTERPRISE

National Spatial Strategy: The National Spatial Strategy states that traditional rural based sectors of employment in agriculture, forestry and fishing will continue to have key roles as a base for strong and diversified rural economies. Efficient agricultural, marine and natural resource sectors, together with significant and developing sectors such as tourism, enterprise, local services and other source of off-farm employment, will be the mainstays of a striking rural economy. However the mix and concentration in any one of these sectors will vary according to the potential of different places. This calls for tailored responses to the particular issues in various types of places. The Strategy outlines that it will be necessary to secure agriculture, where it has the capacity to remain strong and viable, by maintaining the maximum possible number of family farms, while at the same time ensuring that smaller farms have the opportunity to supplement their farm income through off-farm work.

Diversify rural employment options and stabilise population through

- Resource based development in sectors such as forestry, marine and natural resources, enterprise and local services
- Tourism development through quality market responsive products, enhanced access and co-ordinated promotion of a tourism product, which offers a range of complementary visitor experiences
- Protecting landscape, water resources and habitats.

3. Strategy

3.1 – AGRICULTURE

In the past County Wicklow has been economically dependent upon agricultural employment with one third of workers engaged in agriculture, forestry and fishing as late as 1960. The 1991 Census of Population shows that 9.7 % of people at work were employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing. Many of the smaller holdings are incapable of providing a livelihood for a family. As a result, there has been an increase in the practice of part-time farming and the selling of land to non-farmers. The role of alternative farm enterprises is likely to become more significant as a means of maintaining a rural population.

Agricultural employment has declined faster in County Wicklow than in the rest of the country. A higher proportion of holdings are in excess of 56 acres than in the nation as a whole, which demonstrates the relative prosperity of farming in the county. Employment in this sector in the future will depend upon the extent to which those currently involved in agriculture can diversify their economic base and also upon the extent to which value added initiatives might develop throughout the rural area.



Table 12.1: Farm Structure in Co. Wicklow in 1991 and 2000

Year	No. of Farmers	Area Farmed (ha)	Farm Size (ha)
1991	2730	103,929	38.1
2000	2410	101,707	42.2

Source: Census of Agriculture

Like other counties adjacent to Dublin, County Wicklow is experiencing the pressure of urban shadow³⁴. Since 1991, some 2,200 ha of agricultural land have been taken for infrastructure and housing development. The proximity to Dublin has also resulted in increased off farm employment opportunities, which while facilitating the transition to part-time farming are impacting on the development of commercial farms.

While there is a trend towards part-time farming, the number of farms of over 20 hectares has remained stable – 1630 in 1991 versus 1616 in 2000. The number of farms with over 30 ha has increased from 1145 in 1991 to 1251 in 2000. There is also a significantly greater incidence of 50 ha plus farms in Wicklow than nationally.

Table 12.2: % of farms in various size categories

Farm Size: ha.	<10	10<20	20<30	30<50	50 Plus
Wicklow (no.)	403	391	365	534	717
Wicklow %	17	16	15	22	30
Ireland %	20	24	18	21	17

Across all enterprises considerable consolidation is taking place. In general, individual enterprises are becoming larger and more specialised while overall numbers are falling or increasingly becoming part-time. In 1991, 75.3% of holders listed farming as their sole occupation. In 2000, just 57.5% of holders in Co. Wicklow did so. The numbers who listed farming as a major or subsidiary occupation increased substantially.³⁵

3.2 – FORESTRY

During the last 100 years or so, Wicklow has built up a stronger forestry tradition than most counties in Ireland. One of the first modern forestry centres was established at Avondale at the start of the 20th century. Prior to this, woodlands such as those at Avoca and Glendalough, supported thriving industries based on coppicing, mostly supplying fuel to the nearby mine works, while oak from all over Wicklow was used for ship building and other construction work.

A sizeable proportion of the forestry estate in Co. Wicklow consists of the remains of old demesne planting. In addition to being a forestry resource these are also of significant amenity value. Such plantations are located for the most part in the north east of the county.

The role that forestry plays in the economic development of the county, however will have to be balanced against its impacts on landscape and the environment. The Wicklow Indicative Forestry Strategy has been produced following consultation with the Forest Service and outlines changes that have taken place in the forest industry, focuses on the legislative background that relates to forest issues and sets forestry in the context of the overall sustainable development of County Wicklow.

Over the years, forestry has undergone many changes and has become one of the major land uses in the County, with both positive and negative consequences. Wicklow County Council recognises that, if properly planned and managed, forestry has the potential to provide a significant contribution to the social environment, and economic enhancement of the county.

3.3 – RURAL ENTERPRISE

The model of rural land use, dominated by traditional agriculture, is changing to include more varied patterns of rural land use such as alternative crops and animals, farm forestry, recreation, tourist accommodation and activities. Rural Wicklow is now under even greater pressure for one off sporadic housing generated by increasingly easier road access to the county from Dublin, greater prosperity and the continued urbanisation of the county.

The National Spatial Strategy outlines five broad rural area types and suggests a range of policy responses. Wicklow is identified as an area that is strong. The Rural Area Policy Responses for these types of areas are:

- Support agriculture by maintaining the integrity of viable farming areas
- Strengthen rural villages and small towns by making them attractive to residential and employment related development
- Reduce urban sprawl through a renewed emphasis on appropriate in-fill development.

4. Policy

4.1 – AGRICULTURE

4.1.1 – AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY

Although the economic character of rural areas is no longer synonymous with agriculture, the sector remains the single most important contributor to the economic and social viability of rural areas. Agriculture employs a significant proportion of the rural population and while employment is declining in relative terms, the sector continues to play a defining role in the rural landscape and is the conduit for major public support for rural communities. Agriculture is, and will remain in future, critical to the well being of the rural economy and, in many areas, represents the main option for economic activity.³⁶

³⁴ Development Pressure from the Metropolitan Area as outlined in the Strategic Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area.

³⁵ John Keating, CAO, Teagasc, 2003

³⁶ Dept of Agriculture and Food

"A Strategy for Rural development in Ireland" 1999



Policy AG1: The Council will support the development of agriculture that is compatible with the sustainable development of the county and commensurate with maintaining the farming community.

4.1.2 – ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURAL ENTERPRISES

The Council recognises the fact that the most effective means of ensuring the protection of the rural landscape is to encourage the continued use of agricultural farm holdings. However, the Council also acknowledges that the diversification of uses on rural landholdings may be necessary in order to ensure the continued viability of agricultural ways of life. Farming has been diversifying into other areas such as energy production, increased forestry, agri/green tourism, farm holidays, farm foods and craftwork. The Council will support small-scale development in rural areas for alternative agricultural enterprises in accordance with the objectives and standards of the Plan in order to assist in the sustainable development of rural communities.

Policy AG2: The Council will encourage the development of sustainable alternative agricultural enterprises and non agricultural enterprises as a means of supporting a viable rural community subject to the retention of the holding for primarily agricultural use and the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

4.1.3 – AGRICULTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Modern agriculture places pressure on the environment. These environmental impacts have been most evident in the increasing incidence of water pollution and the effects of overgrazing on soil and biodiversity. Apart from the immediate impact on the local environment and its resources, the long-term damage and destruction involved could also have serious implications for the wider economy and society.

The Council recognises that there are environmental problems associated with farming activities in the countryside. The Council will encourage the support of farming practices and production methods which reflect concerns for conservation, landscape protection, the protection of wildlife habitats, the protection of endangered species of flora and fauna and wider environmental problems.

Policy AG3: The Council will encourage the development of environmentally sustainable agricultural activities.

4.2 – FORESTRY

4.2.1 – INDICATIVE FORESTRY STRATEGY

The Wicklow Indicative Forestry Strategy was produced by the Council in 2002. One of the main functions of an Indicative Forestry Strategy is to help identify those areas that are preferred for afforestation as well as those areas that are sensitive to afforestation. This Forestry Strategy is intended to assist planners in assessing forestry applications by illustrating areas of the county that are favoured for afforestation and those areas where afforestation would be inappropriate by virtue of landscape, soil type, settlement or environmental grounds and to provide guidance with respect to their input into the planting application process.

Policy F1 : The Council recognises the importance of the forest industry, both state and private, to the economy of the county, and as such the Council will encourage state and private afforestation that is compatible with the sustainable development of the county in accordance with the provisions of the Wicklow County Council Indicative Forestry Strategy, 2002.

Policy F2 : The provision of amenity and urban and recreational woodlands contribute to the amenity of the county. The Council recognises the importance of afforestation to the local economy of Wicklow, to on-farm diversification, and particularly as an alternative income source for farmers.

Wicklow County Council will promote the use of native hardwood species using seed of native provenance where possible.

4.2.2 – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF FORESTRY

One of the main aims of the forestry strategy is to safeguard the scenic qualities of the county, while at the same time having regard to the economic role that forestry plays. Prior to the emergence of both the Forest Service Forestry and Landscape Guidelines and the 1998 Indicative Forestry Strategy, much of the planting which occurred in the county was poorly landscaped, both in terms of location and plantation structure.

Policy F3: The Council shall encourage forestry in a manner that is sustainable and in harmony with the surrounding landscape, ensuring that no pollution or injury is caused to natural waters, wildlife habitats or conservation areas.

Policy F4: Forestry will be appropriate in terms of nature and scale to the surrounding area.

Policy F5: The Council aims to encourage forestry development in appropriate locations, in co-operation with Coillte and the Forest Service and in line with national policy.

4.3 – RURAL ENTERPRISE

The key objective as outlined in the National Spatial Strategy is to maintain rural populations. Rural enterprise can contribute to overall sustainability by aiding the development of a diversified local economy, involving locally-based employment, both farming and non-farming, and reducing commuting outside rural areas to work. A key objective must be to ensure that the nature of rural enterprises must be appropriate to those areas in economic, social and environmental terms.

4.3.1 – ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY RURAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Policy RE1: The Council will support environmentally friendly rural economic activities including natural products, organic farming enterprises, biomass, plant nurseries and the recycling and/or treatment of domestic and farm waste.

5. Development Control Objectives

5.1 – AGRICULTURE

5.1.1 – AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS AND ACTIVITIES

The Council will exercise its powers under the Planning Acts and Water Pollution Act to ensure that agricultural activity does not cause pollution to watercourses.

The Council accepts that normal impacts from agricultural developments are part of the rural environment but will endeavour to ensure that agricultural practices, particularly industrial type agriculture does not cause undue harm to amenities including the residential amenities or permitted houses in rural areas. The Council will discourage the development of intensive live stock poultry and pig units in the vicinity of settlements.

5.1.2 – DESIGN OF AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS

The sympathetic design and layout of agricultural buildings determine how the development is assimilated into the landscape over time. In assessing applications for planning permission for agricultural buildings the Council will have regard to:

- Recommendations contained in An Foras Taluntais handbook “Farm Buildings and the Environment”.
- The grouping of farm buildings in so far as is practical and a unifying design of individual buildings to help absorb them more easily into the landscape.
- Screening and shelterbelt planting composed principally of native species.
- Where cladding is used on the exterior of farm buildings dark colours (preferably dark green, red or grey) with matt finishes will normally be required. Roof areas should be same or in darker shade of the colour used on the side panels.

5.2 – FORESTRY

5.2.1 – AFFORESTATION

In assessing applications for forestry applications, the Council will have due regard to the Forestry and Landscape Guidelines published by the Forest Service in July 2000 and the Indicative Forest Strategy 2000. Adopted by Wicklow County Council.

5.2.2 – AREAS SENSITIVE FOR AFFORESTATION

The Council regards the areas listed in Table 12.3 as sensitive for afforestation and wishes to be consulted on all forestry grant applications in these areas.

5.3 – RURAL ENTERPRISE

5.3.1 – DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

The Council will require that all buildings be designed, located and constructed in a manner, which will minimise their environmental impact so that rural amenity is protected. The Council will encourage traditional building styles and avoid substandard or unsuitable building designs.

5.3.2 – RURAL ENTERPRISE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The Council will control developments, which would be liable to cause pollution of ground waters or degradation of air quality. The Council will maintain, where possible hedgerow and traditional field boundary characteristics.

5.3.3 – EXISTING ENTERPRISES

The Council will allow existing established rural commercial enterprises to expand their business subject to proper planning and sustainable development.



Table 12.3 Areas Sensitive for Afforestation

Character or Type	Area	Description
Outstanding Natural Beauty	Mountain Uplands	Central mountain area including Wicklow Mountains National Park (existing area and proposed target area)
Outstanding Natural Beauty	Northern Hills	Great and Little Sugarloafs and Bray Head
Outstanding Natural Beauty	Glencree Glencullen river valleys	Glencree and Glencullen
Outstanding Natural Beauty	Coastal Area	Coastal area between coast road and sea
Outstanding Natural Beauty	Poulaphuca Reservoir	Poulaphuca reservoir and surrounding hillsides
Area of Special Amenity	North Mountain Lowlands	North-eastern foothills of Wicklow Mountains from Downs Hill at Calary to Trooperstown
Area of Special Amenity	South Mountain Lowlands	South-eastern foothills of Wicklow Mountains from Rathdrum to Aghrim and Woodenbridge
Area of Special Amenity	Baltinglass Hills	Hills surrounding Baltinglass and Stratford of scenic importance and with a megalithic hillfort complex of international archaeological interest.
Vulnerable Acquifers	Acquifers	Vulnerable sand and gravel acquifers
Heritage Areas	Natural Heritage Areas	Proposed NHAs for flora and fauna conservation identified by the Wildlife Service.
Archaeolog-ical Sites	Archaeological Buffer Areas, Areas of Archaeological Potential or Significance	Archaeological sites identified as Recorded Monuments and archaeological Areas of Interest
Urban Areas	Expanding Urban Areas	The environs of expanding towns and villages.

