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Wicklow County Development Plan submission from Liz Tiernan

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-How do you think the County Development Plan can address climate change?

While climate change is obviously a huge issue to tackle and obviously requires policy changes at National & EU level plus individual action, Wicklow County Council can & should do everything it can to help.

Having declared a "biodiversity and climate change emergency" earlier this year, Wicklow County Council has an immense opportunity to truly lead the way as the 'Garden of Ireland' on council owned land. We can create what is needed for the biodiversity that is in crisis- all unused council land can and should simply be given back to nature- we have an opportunity to lead the way with this initiative. The 'All Ireland Pollinator Plan' is a great start but in a 'biodiversity emergency' like the one declared by the council we need to go a step further also.

Please consider the non-profit 'We are the Ark' started this year by once a Wicklow resident Mary Reynolds, a Chelsea Garden Gold Medal winner and now a reformed landscape designer who has recognised the need for urgent change. The time has come to move away from garden centre ornamental plants, to stop using herbicides and pesticides and to start to give this land back to nature. The signs you must erect are important, just like in the 'All Ireland Pollinator Plan' any council land given over to this cause will need its sign saying 'This is an Ark' with the website details underneath for people who are curious. The website has an entire section for 'Public Land' with steps and information to implement the mission.

I believe it is something that Wicklow County Council can lead the way with. It is a meaningful, positive and empowering way to take action after the declaration this year. It is easily achievable to stop the purchase and planting of ornamental garden centre plants, most of which are treated with chemicals and are not what the local biodiversity and wildlife need to thrive, they need local native plants. It is easily achievable even for small areas such as all our roundabouts and verges to become wildflower meadows or just clover swards. The Council can lead the way with a ban on glyphosate and other such substances. We need to give as much land as we possibly can back to nature as we have all taken too much and this is an initiative we can get onboard with. Please visit the website 'www.wearetheark.org' for all the info.

-Is there a need for more tourist facilities within the County? If so, what is needed and where should they be located?

I have walked in Glendalough regularly since I was a child and feel compelled to submit regarding the food and snack providers at this outstanding site for our natural and cultural heritage and how shocked I am at what is still provided for visitors there, even in the times we live in now. It is my understanding that 'Irish Popcorn Company' run the upper lake car park and the options for food and snacks for visitors to Glendalough here are completely limited to only heavily fried foods such as chips, burgers, ice cream and other extremely unhealthy options for our tourists and children who visit. With consumer awareness and eating habits shifting and with a lot of health conscious outdoor loving people visiting this wonderful place, surely other options can be provided instead of or alongside the current offerings by this company. I find it so disappointing to watch tourists faces after exploring the upper lake, waterfall, hiking when they see what is on offer- none of which is remotely healthy for their families not to mention for the environment with no plant based options whatsoever for visitors. I feel this is an area the Council needs to step in on now, to look for another provider for this beautiful attraction we have that can offer options in line with the ethos of wonderful wild Glendalough and its multitude of visitors each year.

-What aspects of Wicklows heritage do you consider should be protected?

Having declared a “biodiversity and climate change emergency” earlier this year, Wicklow County Council should be protecting its natural heritage as a priority now. We need to protect our existing natural heritage sites and take measures to extend this protection. Examples include the unnecessary cutting back of hedgerows and the cutting of mature trees which in many cases I have seen throughout the county are not necessary for health and safety and seem more to do with providing work/employment for people to carry out these jobs- this has to stop.

The ‘Tourism & Recreation’ section of the Issues Booklet begins with “Wicklows scenic unspoilt landscape.... and extensive woodlands” This is not how a keen eye views Wicklow. The landscape is dominated by extensive commercial monoculture conifer plantations and ‘sheepwrecked’ uplands and lots of us would like to see this start to change. Our old oak woodland in Glendalough is a gem that could be an inspiration for other parts. We need to take back land in Wicklow for native woodland for a multitude of reasons- to reduce erosion, increase carbon storage, increase biodiversity, for recreation and for our heritage.