



Wicklow County Council Library Service

Local Studies Development Plan 2021 – 2026

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1. Introduction

This Local Studies Development Plan 2021 – 2026 has been driven by two significant developments. The appointment of the first dedicated Local Studies Librarian in 2020 and the relocation of the Local Studies Collection to a purpose-built facility in Wicklow Library in August 2021. Together these developments provided the ideal opportunity to assess the current service and identify opportunities for growth in line with the needs and wishes of current and future users in County Wicklow and beyond.

The plan reflects the wider national government objectives and philosophies¹, Wicklow Library Development Plan 2021-2025² together with the County Wicklow Heritage Plan 2017 -2022³ and the Wicklow County Council Corporate Plan 2019 – 2024⁴.

Produced in tandem with the County Librarian and the Wicklow County Council Archivist, this plan provides a roadmap to inform and direct the actions and priorities of the Wicklow Local Study service over the next five years.

It provides a background and context to current approaches, a review of current services and based on a SWOT analysis, the plan identifies four main priorities for future development of the local studies service. These were identified as follows:

- Growth of the Local Studies collection.
- Preservation and conservation of the collection.
- Promotion of the collection.
- Improved access to the Local Studies Collection.

¹ Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*. Stationary Office: Dublin 1998.

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, *Branching Out: Future Directions*. Stationary Office: Dublin 2008.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, *Opportunities for All: The Public Library as a Catalyst for Economic, Social and Cultural Development*. Stationary Office: Dublin 2013.

Department of Rural and Community Development, *Our Public Libraries 2022: Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities*. Stationary Office: Dublin 2013.

² Wicklow County Council. *Library Services Development Plan 2021 – 2025*. Wicklow County Council: 2021.

³ Wicklow County Council. *County Wicklow Heritage Plan 2017 – 2022*. Wicklow County Council 2017.

⁴ <https://www.wicklow.ie/Portals/0/Documents/Governance/Corporate-Plan/Corporate%20Plan%202019-2024.pdf>

These priorities will in turn inform future collection development and budget allocation.

The Local Studies Development Plan 2021 – 2026 is not written in stone. It is an organic document and will be periodically evaluated and revised as necessary to provide guidance for implementing future changes to the service.

2. Background and Context

While local study collections have always been part public library services, the significance of local studies collections was first made explicit in the 1998 seminal public library strategy, *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*. The strategy saw local studies services in libraries playing a key role in recording, preserving and promoting community culture and identity, stating:

‘The library acts as the collective memory of the community and the county/city by comprehensively collecting and making available local studies material of all types and by acting as a centre for local studies’ (p.20)

The strategy was innovative, recognising the historical, literary, and commercial value of collections at local, national and international level. The strategy encouraged all libraries to collect and make available all formats and to use new technologies to both promote and preserve their collection and improve access for all. Emphasis was placed on digitising collections. It laid the foundations for the AskaboutIreland website launched in 2002 which provided a national portal for digitized local studies content. The site continues to provide an important cultural and educational tool for all.

Subsequent strategies have built on these fundamentals. *Opportunities for All (2013)* set out a number of programmes for libraries for economic recovery, social and cultural development. Local Studies Services and collections fell under the remit of the programme for “Culture and Community” which sought to develop libraries as agents of cultural development and a focus for ‘cultural identity in the community,

preserving and embracing diverse cultures and providing opportunities for creative development and collective cultural experience’.

Building on the previous strategy, it reiterated the importance of building up local study collections and improving access through the continued digitisation of local studies material (p. 40).

The more recent strategy *Our Public Libraries 2022 maintained* the focus on collection development – both physical and digital preservation as well as improving and promoting access to collections stating:

‘The public library is a curator of memory and is responsible for creating, storing and sharing local culture and historical records. The library continues to enhance physical and digital collections, promoting access in Ireland and abroad’

3 Mission Statement for Local Studies Service

‘To collect, preserve and make available material relating to all aspects of modern and historical County Wicklow, to support research and stimulate public engagement with the County’s history and culture’.

4. Services and users

The Local Study Service addresses the needs of a variety of sectors of society. The main categories of users are primary, post primary and third level students, local historians and researchers, as well as, teachers, planners and archeologists.

The service is also very popular with family history researchers and genealogists and receives a significant number of genealogy and family history queries by email, phone, and post. The Librarian works together with the Archivist to answer these queries.

The service is gaining increasing popularity with the general public who are interested in finding out about the history of where they live, the house they live in or local events, people or places of interest.

As a result, the Local Study Service is not only a significant information provider, but it also plays a significant role in the wider social and cultural remit of the library service, contributing to the community's cultural identity and 'sense of place' in their community. It facilitates and promotes research, education, and lifelong learning, as well as, providing a valuable leisure dimension for the community.

Working with Heritage Office, Arts Office and Archives, the local study service participates in a number of national projects such as Heritage Week.

The Local Studies Librarian is an editor and regular contributor to the award winning 'Our Wicklow Heritage' online community heritage archive for County Wicklow.

5. The Collection

The main Local Studies collection is a reference collection consisting of a variety of formats covering a diverse range of topics which document the past activities of individuals, organizations and businesses in County Wicklow, as well as, providing material relating to the topography, geography, local flora and fauna of the county.

The collection comprises over 8,000 items, approximately 5,000 of which are housed in the main collection. This includes both physical and digital resources, primary and secondary sources, including newspapers, directories, journals and periodicals, government publications, maps, books, DVDs, CD and more. A number of resources are available on microfilm and microfiche.

The service subscribes to several online databases in a bid to promote access to historical and genealogical resources and, ultimately, facilitate local and family history research.

The main Local Study Service also supports limited collections in 13 branch libraries and in a mobile service. These collections are necessary for answering general local studies queries and can facilitate those who may not be in a position to travel outside their local areas.

The collection continually evolves as technologies change and digital preservation strategies advance.

6. Access

The Local Studies collection is housed in a purpose built facility in Wicklow Library, Wicklow Town. The entrance to the Local Studies Library is located to the rear of the main library on Salthouse Lane.

The main collection is housed in open shelving and browsing is encouraged. Rare and fragile items are stored in secured shelving and are available for consultation by prior appointment only.

Two public access PCs are available for use for research and to facilitate user access to online databases, the online catalogue, and other digital resources. PCs are linked to two microfilm machines.

Principal access to the collection is by the library catalogue at <http://www.wicklow.ie/Living/Services/Libraries>.

Details about the service and the collection can be found under a dedicated Local Studies page at <https://www.wicklow.ie/Living/Services/Libraries/Local-Studies>.

The Local Studies Service is open to the public during the following hours:

Monday/ Tuesday/ Wednesday/Friday:	10 am to 1 pm 2 pm to 5 pm
Thursday:	1 pm to 5 pm 6 pm to 8.30 pm

While all visitors are welcome to browse the collection, it is strongly recommended that prior contact be made if requesting specific material or looking for research advice. Similarly, microfilm machines should be booked in advance to avoid disappointment.

Queries can be sent to wicklowlocalstudies@wicklowcoco.ie or by contacting the Local Study Librarian on 0872683724 or 0404 67025.

7. Priorities

Based on a SWOT analysis (see appendix 2), four priorities were identified as key development areas for the Local Study Service over the next five years:

- 7.1 Growth of the Collection.
- 7.2 Preservation and conservation of the collection.
- 7.3 Promotion of the Local Studies Collection & Service.
- 7.4 Improve access to the Local Studies Collection.

7.1 Growth of the Collection

- Continue to develop the Collection (both physical and digital resources) to ensure it meets the information needs of all user groups.
- Produce and adopt a Collection Development Policy.

7.2 Preservation and conservation of the collection

- Work with the County Archivist to assess the current and future conservation and preservation needs of the collection and initiate an appropriate manner of maintenance where required.
- Continue current annual rolling rebinding program for materials in need of conservation binding.
- Develop a digitization programme of rare, fragile, valuable or cumbersome items in line with best practice.
- Identify vulnerable items in the branches for possible transfer to local studies collection and provide digital and or surrogate copies in return.

7.3 Promotion and increasing the visibility of the Local Studies Collection

- Enhance current social media presence.
- Continue to contribute to the community archive 'Our Wicklow Heritage' and use this platform to showcase the local study collection.

- Develop the webpage for Local Studies on the main library service website to reflect the extensive range of available resources.
- Create digital and physical exhibitions promoting highlights from the collection and commemorating relevant dates and anniversaries.
- Continue to participate in and support national initiatives, including Heritage Week and Bealtaine.
- Liaise with local schools to develop material and learning opportunities for project work.
- Organise events promoting local historical figures, events, and anniversaries.
- Continue to liaise with local history groups and other relevant bodies.
- Identify possible funding streams for the service.

7.4 Improve access to the Local Studies Collection:

- Ensure all local study items are catalogued and are visible on the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC).
- Enhance online digital resources, including the provision of free access to pay-wall sites e.g. findmypast.ie.
- Establish a programme of digitisation to maximise public access to the collection including prints, photographs, postcards, books, maps, local study files, ephemera and other relevant material.
- Produce bibliographic tools and search aids to highlight particular areas within the Local Studies Collection.
- Produce a series of thematic bibliographies to guide users to relevant resources.
- Continue re-cataloguing and re-classifying material already in the collection as necessary, in particular to include appropriate subject headings as added entries, and additional information concerning relevance to the local area, including web-links.

Appendix 1: References

Local Plans and Policies:

County Wicklow Heritage Plan 2017 – 2022

Wicklow County Council Corporate Plan, 2019 – 2024

Wicklow County Development Plan 2016 – 2022.

Wicklow County Council Library Service Development Plan 2021 – 2025.

Wicklow Local Economic & Community Plan 2016-2022.

Library Development Plans:

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (1998) *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*. Stationery Office: Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2008) *Branching Out: Future Directions*. Stationery Office: Dublin.

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (2013) *Opportunities for All: The Public Library as a Catalyst for Economic, Social and Cultural Development*. Stationery Office: Dublin.

Department of Rural and Community Development (2018) *Our Public Libraries 2022: Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities*. Stationery Office: Dublin.

Others:

Census 2016 www.cso.ie

DLR Libraries Local History Strategic Plan 2009-2012

DLR Libraries Local Studies Guidelines 2015-2019

DLR Libraries Local Studies Guidelines 2015-2019

Appendix 2: SWOT

Strengths:

- Extensive collection including a strong selection of rare and unique materials about the local area.
- New purpose built facility with the ability to provide a centralised repository for all local study items and ensure suitable storage.
- Onsite County Archive and County Archivist can ensure suitable/required program of preservation and conservation.
- Good relationship and strong links with Local History societies in the area.
- Good partnerships with Heritage and Archives Service.
- Robust microfilm collection and microfilm machines – significant investment.
- Provision of free public access to Findmypast and the British Newspaper Archive.
- Purchase of new scanner will enable us to digitize material inhouse. This will enable us to build up digital library, preserve rare material and improve access to resources.
- Opening hours – Strong – open five days a week.
- Online community heritage archive for Wicklow ‘Our Wicklow Heritage’ provides a perfect platform for the storing and sharing of Local Studies collection to a global audience.
- New facility has lots of space. Meeting room and exhibition area provide space for visits from school and other interested groups. Also room to host events and exhibitions.

Weaknesses:

- Further input necessary to develop online presence and promotion of Wicklow Library Service Local Studies Collection.
- No digital library. Inability to respond to any further/similar pandemics in the future. The absence of a digital library negates the equality of access to the collection – a key value of the public library.
- Local Study Section on library website requires extensive updating.
- Post vacant for the past number of years. This has led to expired subscriptions, the build up of uncatalogued material and no focused acquisition of material.
- Much of material not catalogued. This has consequences regarding visibility, access, and collection development.

- Rare and fragile material being stored in branches often not catalogued and not stored in line with preservation and conservation standards.
As a result, there is no traceability and no visibility of these items and no strategy in place to ensure their safekeeping and preservation.

Opportunities:

- Local and Family history is undergoing a significant upsurge in popularity amongst the public.
- New premises provides ample opportunities to expand and grow the Local Studies collection and service.
- Teachers, primary, post primary and third level students have actively used the collection in the past. High number of schools in catchment area around Wicklow Town. Many new schools opened in the immediate vicinity in last few years. County Wicklow is also in close proximity to third level institutions and lots of third level students are living in the county. This provides significant potential for new users.
- Funding for digitisation projects via new funding streams eg. Creative Ireland & Resilience and Recovery 2020-2021: Plan for Living with COVID-19.
- Significant population growth predicted for Wicklow Town and surrounding area. Potential for new users.
- Wicklow County Council Library Service has invested a lot of money in audio visual equipment. This equipment can be used to build up oral and visual/video archive.

Threats:

- Current pandemic could result in further closures and reduced funding for the service.
- Budget constraints.
- Competing with online subscription databases.
- Much Local Studies material now available online in digital formats.