

Wicklow LCDC

Local Development Strategy

For the delivery of 2023 – 2027 LEADER Programme in County Wicklow

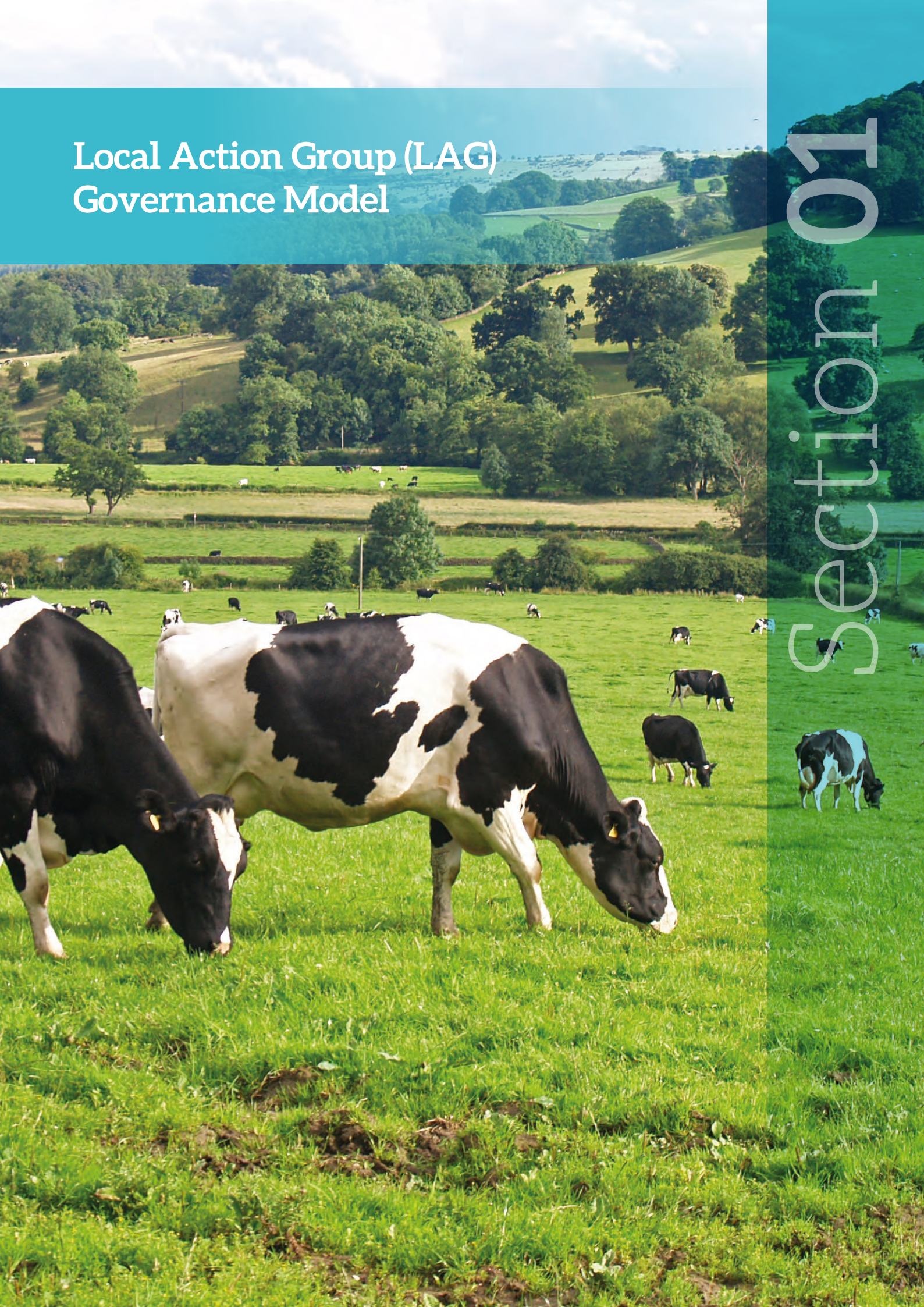


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Local Action Group (LAG) Governance Model

Section 01



LAG Overview

1.1 Organisation Details & Legal Description

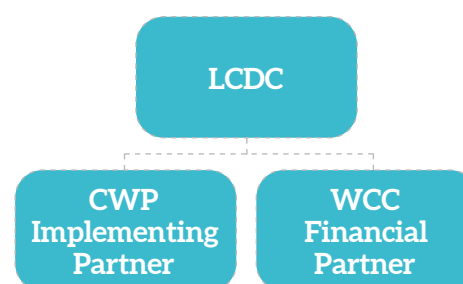
LAG Model	LCDC-Led LAG with partners; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> County Wicklow Partnership (Implementing Partner) Wicklow County Council (Financial Partner)
Legal Name of LAG	Wicklow Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)
Business Name (if applicable)	n/a
Postal Address	Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Whitegates, Wicklow Town, Co. Wicklow. A67 FW96
Telephone No	0404 20100
Email address	lcdc@wicklowcoco.ie
Website	www.wicklow.ie
CRO Number	N/a
Tax Clearance Access Number	WCC – TCAN 188516 CWP – TCAN 129123
Legal structure	Committee Structure

The LEADER programme 2023-2027 for county Wicklow will be administered by an LCDC-led LAG with a proven track record in programme management. Wicklow LCDC will provide management and oversight of the programme at a strategic level but will draw on the skills and experience of County Wicklow Partnership (CWP) as the sole implementation body and Wicklow County Council (WCC) as financial partner.

This is a continuation of the operational model which successfully implemented the programme over the 2014 – 2022 period securing over €7.3 million for projects in the county through the RDP 2014 – 2022, Transitional & EURI programmes, LEADER Food Initiative and LEADER Co-operation budget. This model will ensure that Wicklow LCDC has the required management, financial, and organisational capacity to effectively manage and implement the LDS ensuring good governance, transparency, sound financial management, informed decision making and accountability to stakeholders.

The application of a strong CLLD approach will underpin the Wicklow LDS and ensure that the LEADER Programme is proactive, flexible and responsive to local needs and opportunities.

The focus of the LAG is on balanced sustainable social and economic development across the county, and there is a commitment to delivering the LEADER Programme through strong partnership approaches built on effective collaborations that maximise outputs and benefits for the entire sub-regional area. Respecting the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the general principles of Union Law is fundamental to the work of the Wicklow LAG.



1.2 LAG Composition and Decision Making

1.2.1 Wicklow LCDC

Wicklow LCDC, established on 30 November 2015 under the Local Government Reform Act (2014), comprises 19 representatives from the Local Authority, other state agencies, community and voluntary sector, and social partners. The LCDC discharges its functions independently of the Local Authority. Standing Orders for the LCDC are included in the Appendices.

The aim of the LCDC is to “develop, co-ordinate and implement a coherent and integrated approach to local and community development” including the preparation of the community elements of the six-year Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), which will provide clear strategic direction and identify priorities for the county. Wicklow LCDC is currently finalising the draft LECP taking into consideration the economic elements of the plan, existing local and community development programme strategies, as well as the wider policy context. Draft LECP goals have been referenced in Section 5 of this LDS to ensure complementarity.

The LCDC also has primary responsibility for co-ordinating, planning and overseeing local and community development funding in County Wicklow and will provide oversight for a range of programmes including the Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and the LEADER/Rural Development Programme 2023-2027. Any additional Community Led Local Development (CLLD) funding is also intended to be delivered through the LCDC structure.

Current membership and key strengths of individual members are as follows:

Public Representatives (9)	
Cllr. Melanie Corrigan	WCC Collaboration across business & community sector
Eileen Cullen	KWETB Pathways to Skills and Training Opportunities
Vibeke Delahunt	LEO Micro-enterprise Sector and female entrepreneurship
Stephen Fitzgerald	DSP Supports & interventions for Youth and Marginalised Groups
Aisling Heffernan	HSE Health & Wellbeing collaborations and partnerships
Cllr. Pat Kennedy (Chair)	WCC Rural development & bottom-up approaches/experience
Cllr. Peir Leonard	WCC Linkages within creative community & youth projects
Cllr. Dermot O'Brien	WCC Experience within Youth & Community
Emer O'Gorman	WCC (CEO) Governance, in depth knowledge of diverse needs
Private Representatives (10)	
Peter Brennan (LDC)	Bray Area Partnership – Area Based Approach/Marginalised Groups
Brian Carty (LDC)	County Wicklow Partnership - CLLD approach- C&V and enterprise
Lorraine Hennessy	Business Pillar – Pathways to the labour market for unemployed
Carina Holmes (PPN)	C&V - Economic expertise & sustainability
Patrick Mboci (PPN)	Social Inclusion -Integration and economic welfare for all
Amanda Mooney	Farming Pillar – Local, regional, and national experience within sector
Jason Mullhall (PPN)	Environmental – Communities role in environmental protection
Pat O'Suilleabháin	Business Pillar – Representation and Policy Development
Frank Quaid (PPN)	Social Inclusion - Growing needs among rural/new communities
Jim Ruttle (PPN)	C&V Community focus and experience

1.2.2 Selection Process for New Members & Rotation

The membership of Wicklow LCDC is designed to facilitate the ‘bottom-up’ approach and provide a broad representation of local interests and is proactively managed by the Chief Officer who ensures that the appropriate balance and mix of members is managed and maintained.

The selection process for new LAG decision making members and the rotation of members adheres to revised Department guidance on The Operation of Local Community Development Committees (2016). Any new members are appointed and approved by WCC (p.15).

The Chief Officer, in consultation with the Corporate Policy Group and the LAG Chairperson, reviews the membership of the LCDC at least once every three years to ensure the membership is relevant and representative of the work of the LCDC, its aims and objectives (Regulation 29). The Chief Officer ensures that appropriate arrangements are in place for the rotation, every three-years, of representatives of;

- geographical areas
- community and voluntary interests
- social inclusion interests
- environmental interests
- other local community and social partner interests

The nomination and selection of new members allows the LCDC to evolve and adopt new perspectives and viewpoints on a regular basis. In any event, no member nominated to represent the above interests may serve more than two consecutive three-year terms (p.47).

1.2.3 Gender Breakdown, Public & Private Representation

The LAG strives to ensure an equitable gender balance and balanced representation between public and private sectors across the LCDC/LAG membership. The LAG composition is inclusive and representative of all, including young people, women, new communities and less advantaged groups. Nine (47%) of Wicklow’s LAG’s 19 members are female. Ten members (53%) are private and 9 members (47%) are public.

Local Government interests is represented by 4 elected members of Wicklow County Council (WCC), as well as WCC CEO and Head of the LEO. Local authority members and officials may serve on the LCDC for the lifetime of the Council. However, once a person ceases to be a local authority member/official they will automatically cease to be member of the LCDC. Public bodies providing services in county Wicklow are also represented e.g. HSE, DSP and KWETB.

To ensure the membership is representative of local private interests, nominations are accepted from the PPN, the nominating structure for community and voluntary interests within the three colleges to the LCDC/LAG (community and voluntary, social inclusion and environment interests). Local development and community development companies, specifically County Wicklow Partnership and Bray Area Partnership, are also represented. Other civic society and local community interests include farming/agriculture and business/employers’ interests.

Further details of the Wicklow LAG membership are provided in the appendices.

1.2.4 Decision-making Structures / Procedures

Wicklow LCDC has procedures in place to ensure effective governance. Standing Orders for Wicklow LCDC and Department guidance on The Operation of Local Community Development Committees set out in detail the functions, composition, procedures, and operation of the LCDC including meetings, conflict of interest and decision making. LAG governance requirements outlined in the Operating Rules for the RDP 2023-2027 in relation to governance, decision making and conflict of interest will also be adhered to.

All LAG decisions are representative and support a CLLD approach. Neither the public sector nor any single interest group will represent more than 49% of the voting rights of the committee. In addition, a minimum of 51% of the members who are voting in any project selection decision will come from non-public sector partners.

Decisions will be made by consensus where possible. Where consensus cannot be achieved, decisions will be determined by a majority of the votes of the members present eligible to vote. The Chairperson of the LAG will not have a casting vote. Where there is a tied vote, a motion is deemed not to be carried. All decisions made must be transparent and non-discriminatory.

A minimum of 60% of LAG members must be present during decisions on project funding. This quorum applies to decisions made by the LCDC after all relevant conflict of interest issues have been addressed. Recognising the largely voluntary nature of the individuals involved in LEADER decision making, the operating rules provide for this requirement to be supported by a written decision-making procedure that allows flexibility and makes it easier to meet the 60% requirement. Wicklow LCDC will follow the guidance from the rules in this regard.

A quorum is required to commence an LCDC meeting, therefore meetings will be postponed or rescheduled when a quorum cannot be raised. The current standing orders state that the LCDC “will hold as many meetings as is necessary in the performance of its function but should meet no less than six times in any calendar year”. The LCDC is fully aware that the programme provides for time specific as well as rolling calls and will meet at least monthly and as appropriate to deliver on this.

Conflict of interest procedure is outlined in the standing orders. Where a conflict of interest is declared by a member, that member will leave the meeting and will not be entitled to vote on the matter in which they have an interest. This decision is the responsibility of the member. Upon returning to the meeting, the member will be notified of the decision by the Chair and no further discussion will take place. In addition to LAG members, notification of conflict of interest will also apply to all personnel involved in the application for support, including the processing and evaluating of that application. Conflict of interest will be recorded in the minutes of all decision-making meetings i.e. evaluation committee and LCDC. Additional conflict of interest procedures are outlined in the CWP procedures manual (2019). This will be amended to reflect the new implementation structures and finalised operating rules.

The current standing orders will be amended as necessary to meet and acknowledge the LEADER programme 2023-27 operating rules when the final version is available. Any other additional guidance offered by the Department or its agents will also be included. The LAG intends to continually improve processes as necessary to provide strong governance. LCDC/LAG members will engage in training to assist them in effective decision making and training will be provided for any new members joining the LAG.

1.2.5 Independent Evaluation Committee

The LAG has established an Evaluation Committee to assess and evaluate all applications for LEADER funding and is solely responsible for making recommendations for funding, or otherwise, to the LAG. The LAG has ensured the integrity of the evaluation process and put in place arrangements that are –

- fair and non-discriminatory – all applicants must be treated equally; and,
- open and transparent – applicants must be informed of the methodology and approach to evaluating each application, and the results of the evaluation should be made available to the applicant together with the LAGs final decision.

The Evaluation Committee is set up and operated in accordance with the Operating rules. Evaluation Committee members **cannot** be LAG members and membership may vary according to theme, call for applications, etc. No person associated with the Implementing Partner can be a member of an Evaluation Committee considering a LAG / Implementing Partner in-house project. Members are drawn from a wide range of experience, expertise and skills. Members can be rotated between the Evaluation Committee and the LAG, as required. This will help retain expertise within the LAG and the Evaluation Committee in the medium term.

The membership of this committee currently includes representatives from the local farming community, business interests, National Parks and Wildlife Service, WCC Heritage Officer, WCC Environment Officer and Teagasc and will be reviewed in advance of the 2023-27 programme in line with updated operating rules and LDS priorities.

A scoring framework will be used to assess all applications for funding support, a sample of which is included in the appendices. A total of 65% must be achieved by the project for it to be approved. Further detail on this is provided later in this section.

1.2.6 LAG Subgroup

The operation of a LAG subgroup comprised only of LAG members brings focus to specific policy areas and is extremely beneficial. This subgroup meets as required and to date has formulated policies for LAG consideration on programme calls, budget re-allocations and specific project policy areas e.g. tourism accommodation, publications, sports club applications etc.

Currently there are no further sub-committees or advisory committees provided for, however special interest or sectoral committees may be established where the need arises.

1.2.7 Implementing Partners' Governance and Decision Arrangements

CWP Governance Arrangements

County Wicklow Partnership (CWP) is the sole implementing partner for this LDS. CWP is a Company Limited by Guarantee and registered charity and as a publicly funded body adheres to the relevant legislation, regulations, standards and best practice with regard to its governance and operations. A Board Governance Manual (updated 2023) guide the CWP board and management team. The manual sets out the legal obligations of board members and has been prepared in accordance with best practice guidelines for organisations in the voluntary and community sector. This document outlines procedures in relation to:

- Terms of Reference (including company constitution)
- Roles and responsibilities of board members
- Role and responsibilities of officers of the board
- Code of conduct
- Division of responsibilities between the manager and the board
- Management of conflicts of interest
- Legal obligations and duties of board members
- Briefing note on the Charities Act
- Meeting frequency and structure
- Quorum and meeting attendance
- Annual General Meetings (AGMs) and Extraordinary General Meetings (EGMs)
- Decision making process
- Strategic and annual planning
- Termination of board membership
- Rotation and recruitment of members
- Induction of new directors

CWP Decision Making Process

In all cases, the CWP board aims to make decisions through consensus, having had access to appropriate information and sufficient time for discussion and debate.

The chairperson reserves the right to move to a vote where consensus cannot be reached after adequate discussion, however, it is considered that this would be a rarity.

In the instance of a vote there should be equal time allotted for discussions of the various options. All board members have one vote. For a vote to take place, members should be informed two weeks prior to the event to facilitate proxy votes. Every board member can hold one proxy vote, and should inform the chairperson of this before voting commences. Staff in attendance at meetings will not have voting rights.

1.3 LAG Roles and Responsibilities

1.3.1 Service Level Agreement

The LAG will be led by Wicklow LCDC, implemented by CWP and have a financial partner in Wicklow County Council (WCC).

The LAG delegates responsibility for specific tasks to the Implementing Partner and Financial Partner. Such delegation and operating procedures are set out in the Service Level Agreement, which details the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners concerned, and which may be updated in advance of programme commencement.

1.3.2 Wicklow LCDC

Wicklow LCDC will provide strategic direction by agreeing the LDS priorities and will also review the performance of CWP as the lead implementation body.

1.3.3 County Wicklow Partnership (CWP)

CWP as the sole implementing partner will be responsible for animation and capacity building, managing calls for proposals, processing of applications, and monitoring programme and project implementation, with management oversight provided by the LAG. CWP LEADER staff are supported and managed by the Board of CWP. The LAG as the decision-making body will formally approve all decisions on projects.

Where agreed, CWP will manage and implement internal and cooperation projects outlined in the LDS. The operational tasks associated with this role, include *inter alia* –

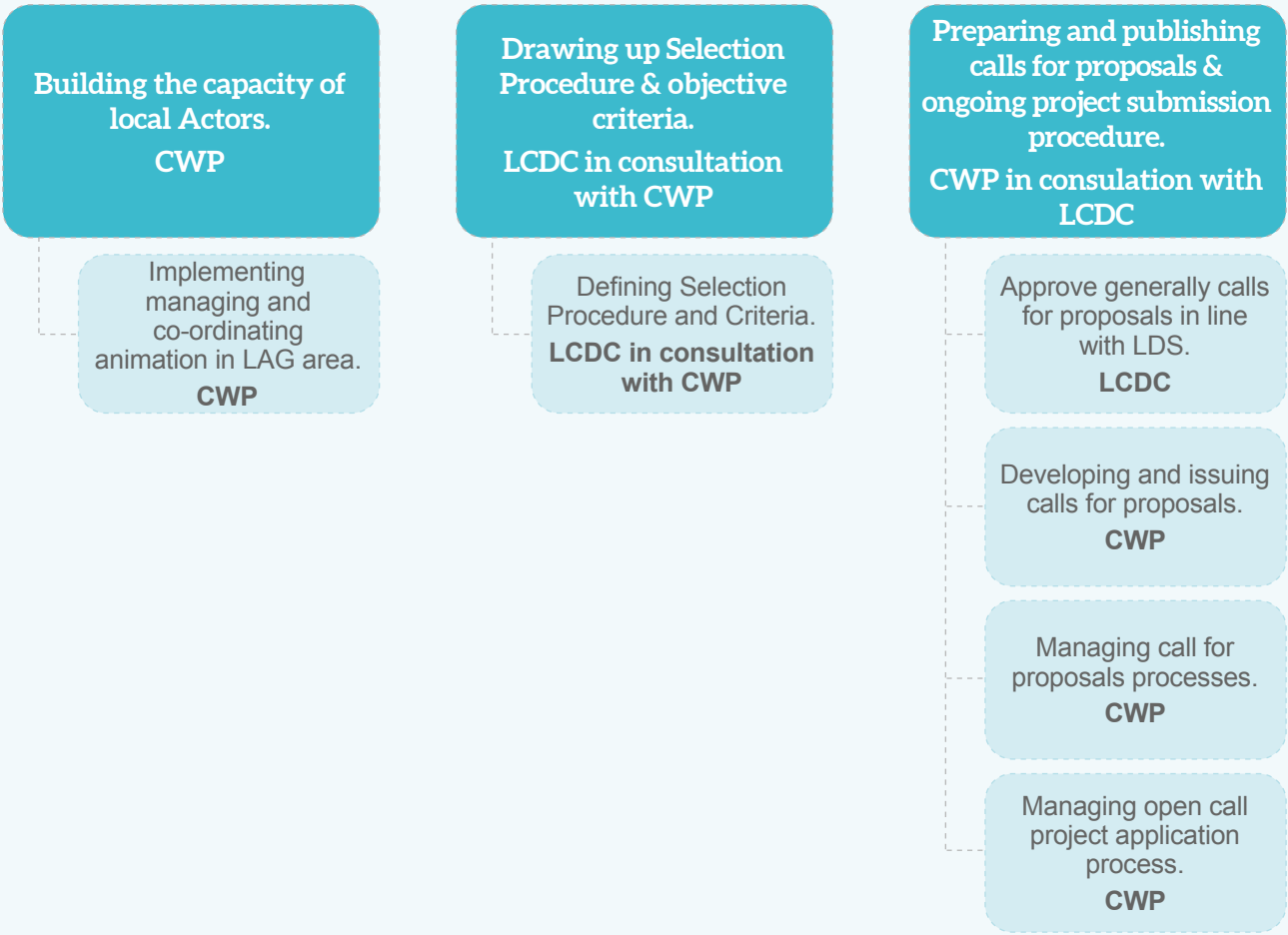
- Reports to and takes instruction from the LAG
- Arranges and delivers all promotional activities associated to the programme including open and closed call initiatives
- Assists promoters at all stages of their application and project process
- Prepares all projects for review by the Evaluation Committee
- Maintains all project files (hard copy and electronic) completing all on-line checklists as required
- Ensures all documentation is compliant for each subsequent Article 48 check
- Reviews claim documentation and ensures all in order for drawdown
- Monitors annually the outcomes of the programme
- Any other tasks detailed in the SLA

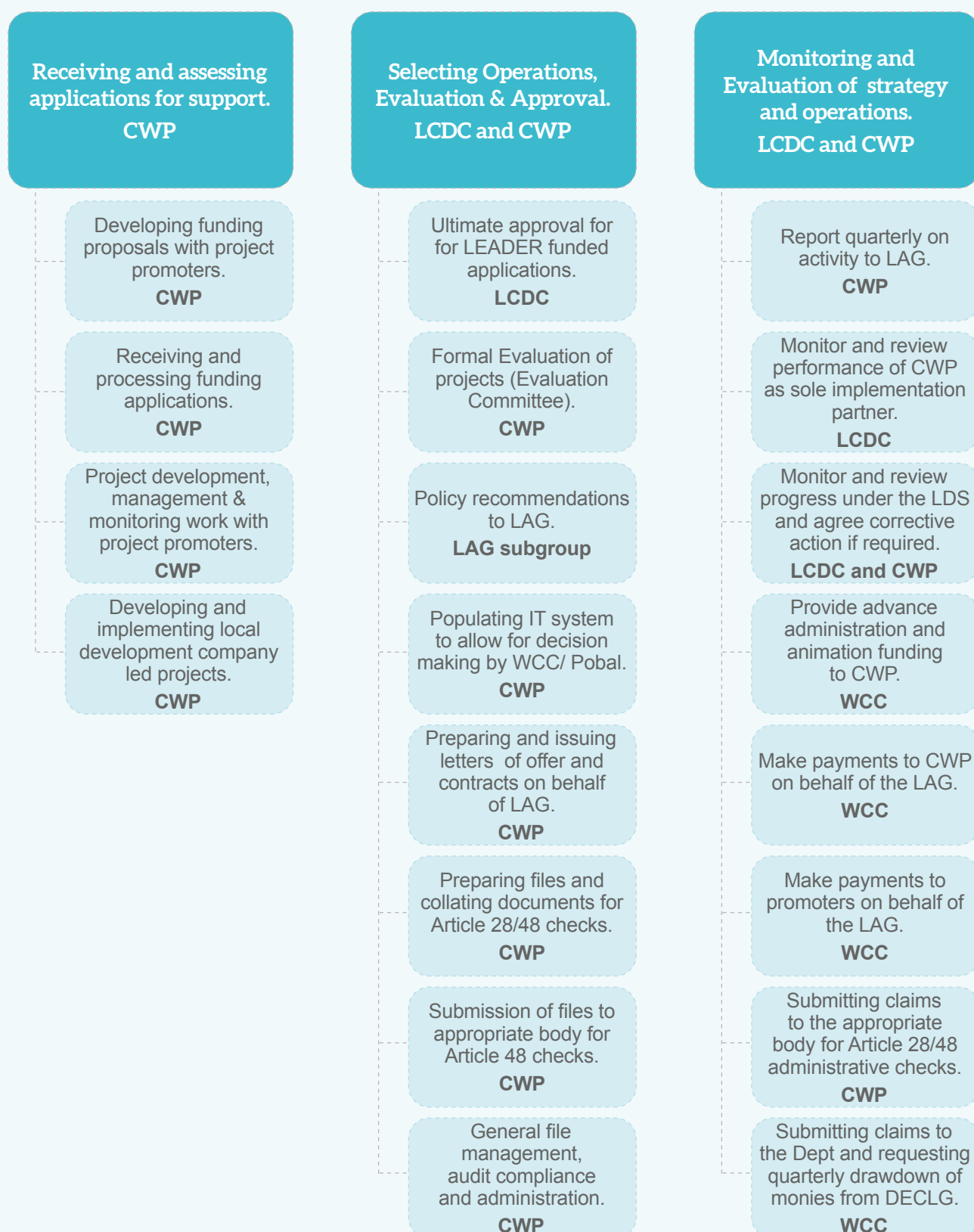
1.3.4 Wicklow County Council (WCC)

WCC will be the financial partner and will have responsibility for providing advance administration and animation funding; Article 48 checks; payment of project funds to promoters; payment of administration funds to CWP; indemnification of the LAG and CWP, and submitting claims to, and requesting drawdown of monies from, the Department. WCC also facilitates the functioning of the LCDC by providing secretarial supports.

1.3.5 High Level Roles

A high-level breakdown of the roles and responsibilities of each partner body is illustrated in the chart below.





1.3.6 Task Level Roles

CWP and WCC have worked together to support the LAG in the past and will continue to do so in the future. At task level, and with a view to streamlining and improving procedures, CWP in conjunction with WCC undertook a process mapping exercise in 2022 of the end-to-end project cycle from expression of interest through to payment stage. This illustrated the complexity of the system and helped all partners to highlight problem/ pressure points and, where relevant, to adopt appropriate interventions. The LAG procedures manual provides further detail on the partner roles at task level.

1.4 LAG Financial Management

1.4.1 Systems & Procedures

WCC will be the lead financial partner for the LAG in the operation of the RDP. The LAG will be supported by the financial systems and procedures of WCC and CWP, which will be compliant with the RDP Operating Rules 2023-27. WCC has the requisite financial management systems and procedures in place to guarantee transparency and accountability on behalf of the LAG. These are fully outlined in the financial management and procurement/purchasing procedures manuals. Payments by WCC will be made from a dedicated LEADER account to CWP as the implementing partner.

CWP has a comprehensive procedures manual detailing clear financial administration procedures for all staff to follow. These comply with current RDP Operating Rules and guide staff on the procedures to ensure a transparent, effective and secure delivery of the Programme. The procedures manual provides detail on reporting structures, operational procedures, administration and expenditure checks, controls, complaints procedure, segregation of duties, reporting responsibilities, confidentiality, financial procedures, project development, assessment evaluation and claims procedures and tendering/public procurement procedures. The procedures outlined in this manual will be updated to reflect the new operating rules of the 2023-27 programme period when finalised.

1.4.2 Public Procurement

WCC and CWP have ensured that public procurement regulations have been followed by putting processes in place to guide both employees and project promoters and both have increased their resources in this area. WCC has a comprehensive procurement/ purchasing manual and a dedicated public procurement unit to advise staff on procurement and in particular, green procurement. WCC also has a Corporate Procurement Plan (2022-2024). CWP has brought in outside expertise with the specialist skills set required to assist promoters and the LDC with compliance. CWP has provided staff with appropriate training. One of the project development officers has completed an IPA Certificate in Public Procurement. Both WCC and CWP will continually review these procedures to ensure they fully reflect current legislation. Public procurement procedures will apply to both internal and externally driven projects.

1.4.3 Auditing

As the LAG provides oversight to publicly funded programmes, both WCC as financial partner and CWP as implementing partner apply the concepts of integrity, accuracy, transparency, reliability, confidentiality, and proper disclosure and presentation.

A Statutory Audit Report to the Members of WCC for the Year Ended 31 December 2021 prepared by the Local Government Audit Service is in the appendices. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in its preparation is the Code of Practice and Accounting Regulations for Local Authorities, as prescribed by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The Council's own Internal Auditor, in collaboration with the Procurement Section, conducts quality assurance work on the public spending code.

An Auditor's Report is also available in the 2021 CWP accounts confirming that in their opinion the Company's financial statements comply with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). RDP files and administration returns are subject to regular checks from WCC / Pobal via the Article 48 process. On-the-spot controls and audits are regularly carried out by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. All financial and programme reports are submitted to the Financial Partner of the LAG, WCC, on a monthly basis.

Accounting administration for the RDP and the other company programmes is based on:

1. Recognised accounting principles, which have been translated into clear practical procedures
2. Public accountability
3. EU and State funding conditions including Commission Regulations

1.5 LEADER Staffing

The LCDC will be supported by both CWP and WCC staff.

1.5.1 WCC Staff

Two full-time equivalent WCC staff members have been assigned to support the functioning of the LCDC from existing resources with some salary support provided by the DRCD. In addition, WCC will provide support to the LCDC in its role as the LAG through the following sections:

- Community, Cultural & Social Development Section
- Enterprise and Corporate Services Section
- Finance Section (financial expertise, audit expertise, procurement)
- Environment and Climate Action Section
- Other supports where appropriate to projects (e.g. legal, planning, Irish Language)

1.5.2 CWP Staff

CWP staff will be involved in implementing the LEADER programme. CWP is engaged in the planning and delivery of a range of rural development, community development and social inclusion programmes and initiatives in Co. Wicklow. CWP can draw on the expertise and experience of its entire staff complement which will be of great benefit to LEADER given the current linkages that exist between programmes, which include:

- Rural Development Programme/LEADER 2014-2022
- Family Support Services (Wicklow Child & Family Project)
- SICAP
- Rural Social Scheme
- Walks Scheme/Rural Recreation Activation Programme
- Tús Programme
- Healthy Food Made Easy
- Social Prescribing & Wellbeing
- East Coast Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force
- Community Smoking Cessation Programme

CWP's LEADER team will be dependent on the administration budget available over the programme period. The current LEADER core staff team have a significant combined experience in rural development and programme management and through this experience have built up considerable knowledge of relevant policies and regulations as well as national and EU requirements, public procurement and state aid. Core staff include:

- CEO
- Head of Finance and Administration
- Project Development Staff (x3)
- Admin Staff (x3)

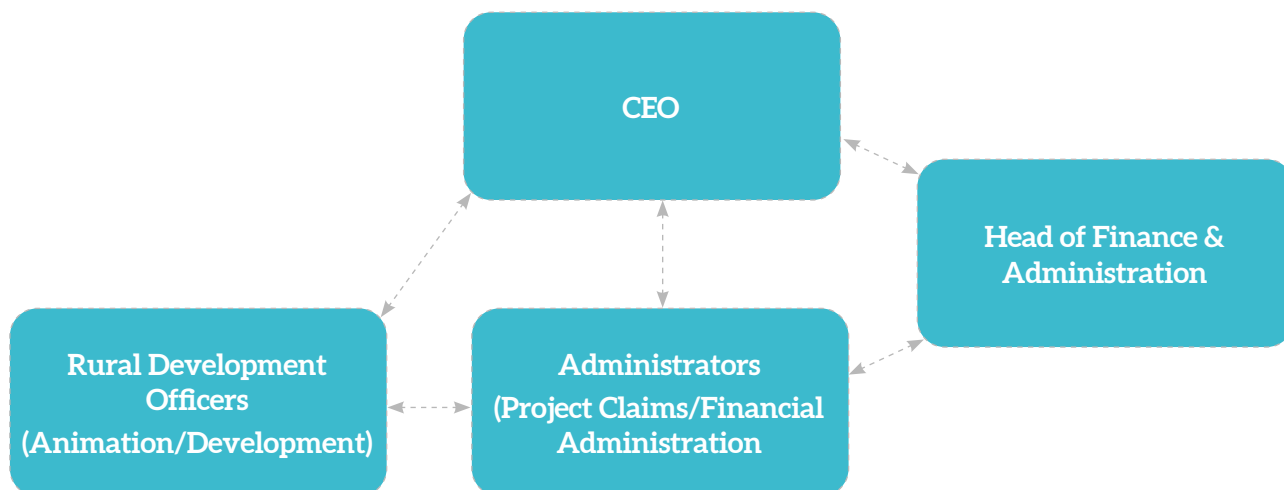
Brief descriptions of skills and capabilities of the existing RDP team are outlined below. In addition to the core staff assigned to the Rural Development Programme, CWP also provides additional staff supports in the areas of management, reception, IT, HR, and PR. CWP employs a Head of Finance and Administration Officer and has recently recruited a Governance and Compliance Officer ensuring the required standards of financial management and governance are adhered to. The company also intends to recruit for a part-time HR position. Job descriptions, required skills and salary scales for the CEO, Head of Finance and Administration Officer, Rural Development Officer, and Administrative roles are included in the appendices and full-time equivalent figures are included in the financial plan.

1.5.3 Proposed Salary Structure

Outlined in Financial Template

1.5.4 Proposed Organisational Chart 2023-2027

Below is the current organisation structure of CWP in respect of the delivery of the Rural Development-LEADER programme for 2014-2022. This organisational structure will be subject to further development and enhancement in the coming months.



1.5.5 LEADER Core Staff Skills & Experience

Brian Carty – CEO

Brian Carty has been CEO of CWP for over six years. He is responsible for the management, governance and oversight of 10 government and EU funded programmes (budget in excess of €5 million), in concert with CWP's line management team. He manages 46 core staff, with a further 180 participants on employment activation programmes.

Prior to working with CWP, he was Director with the Irish Local Development Network, the representative body of Local Development Companies in Ireland for 7 years. He had previously been national coordinator with the Area based Partnerships network from 2002 to 2009. Previous to that he was a business advisor with the then Wicklow County Enterprise Board having moved from being Director of Sligo Chamber of Commerce & Industry for 6 years.

Brian holds an BA (Hons) degree, a MA in History (European Post 1945), and a Diploma in Arts Administration, all from UCD. More recently, he completed a Higher Diploma in Project Management (2007) from the Institute of Public Administration, a Diploma in Human Resource Management (2016) from the National College of Ireland and a Certificate in Leadership for Performance and Change (2021) from Carlow I.T. (now SETI).

Maria Gildea – Head of Finance and Administration

Maria joined CWP as Head of Finance & Administration in July 2018 reporting to the CEO. Maria is a Senior Finance & Accounting professional with a Bachelor of Commerce Degree (UCD) and is a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland. She trained and studied for her professional qualifications with KPMG Dublin.

Prior to joining CWP she worked as a consultant providing accounting and finance advice to clients in the private sector. Her expertise includes business acuity/data analysis, risk mitigation, project management and process improvement with strong attention to detail and high numeracy and technical skills.

Her responsibilities include financial reporting and forecasting, budget management, cost reduction, audit preparation and compliance, engagement with a wide range of stakeholders including board of directors, local authority and funding partners. Since the last LEADER programme she has

implemented a number of enhancements to the finance and admin function including introduction of a new accounting system and reporting structure, reorganisation of administration roles and upgrades of CWP's IT and communications infrastructure.

Alison Keogh – Rural Development Officer (RDO)

Alison joined CWP as a Rural Development Officer (RDO) in October 2011 and has over 20 years' experience in LEADER having worked for various LEADER companies since 2001. Qualifications include an MBA, Higher Diploma in Co-operative Organisation, Food Marketing and Rural Development and a BA in European Studies including Italian and French. She holds Institute of Public Administration (IPA) Certificates in Local Government Studies (2023) and Public Procurement (2017).

The RDO is tasked with developing, implementing and monitoring/evaluating CWP's Local Development Strategy for the delivery of Rural Development Programmes in Co. Wicklow. This is a varied role including animation/capacity building and project development and management of both internal and external projects and sectoral strategies.

Key skills and competencies include project management, procurement, IT capabilities, report writing and analysis, communication, presentation and facilitation skills and the use of strategy, change management and monitoring and evaluation tools. Alison specialises in developing and delivering projects in the areas of tourism, recreation and community services / infrastructure and is building on experience gained in SMART Villages and Co-operation projects.

Siobhán Mehigan – Rural Development Officer (RDO)

Siobhán Mehigan is a Rural Development Professional with 14 years' experience in the sector working at a local, national and European level. Her qualifications include an MA in Community Development from NUI Galway (2009) and a BSc in Government and Public Policy from UCC (2007). Further professional qualifications include a Certificate in Tax Policy from the Tax Institute (2012) and a Diploma in Company Law from Griffith College (2015).

Siobhán has been working as an RDO with CWP since 2017 after previous work on the Co-operative Sector nationally with ICOS, previous LEADER programmes in Kilkenny and West Cork and in Brussels in the European Parliament with MEP Brian Crowley. She animates LEADER applications, guides them through the LEADER process and project manages them to completion. This work requires skills in project management, generating innovative solutions to complex problems, IT and administration skills and managing committees but fundamentally working with communities and individuals in identifying and implementing project ideas. Siobhán specialises in areas of the LEADER Programme such as food development, agricultural diversification and environment projects.

Siobhan works closely with the Biodiversity Officer, Heritage Officer, Environmental Awareness Officer and Climate Action Officer of WCC, who offer a range of scientific and environmental qualifications and skills that can be drawn in support of LAG led actions and in advising LEADER project promoters.

Evelyn Murray – Rural Development Officer (RDO)

Evelyn Murray is a Rural Development Professional with over 9 years' experience in the sector. She has primarily engaged in social inclusion, community development and social enterprise with a notable emphasis on art and craft. Qualifications include a certificate in Visual Art Communication (2002) and a BA in Fine Art from Dun Laoghaire College of Art Design. She holds a Certificate in Business Management Development from Carlow IT (2012) and is undertaking a module in Social Enterprise Development at TU Dublin (2023).

Evelyn has been working as an RDO with CWP since 2018, having previously worked with a Travelling Community focused Social Enterprise for four years. Prior to this, she was self-employed for more than eight years and steered a highly prosperous craft business. She animates LEADER applications, guides them through the LEADER process and project manages them to completion. She has a diverse skill set encompassing effective project management, collaborating with committees, communities and individuals, the ability to engage with both community organisations and for-profit businesses to devise innovative solutions to bring successful projects through the programme. She has a strong

proficiency in administration & IT and has recently completed training in Adobe Illustrator and voice for broadcasting.

Evelyn specialises in social enterprise, creative industries with a specific focus on craft and rural youth. She has successfully implemented the Wicklow Social Enterprise Strategy 2019 – 2022 and she spearheaded the development of Wicklow's inaugural craft strategy.

Karen Windsor – Administrator

Karen has been part of the RDP administrative team since 2011 having commenced work with CWP in 2008 on the LDSIP (now SICAP) programme. Qualifications include BA (Hons.) in Business Studies and A Levels in Business Studies, Sociology, and Law. The administrative role includes supporting the CEO, Development Officer/s and administration; liaising with promoters, the Department, the Financial Partners, the Board, auditors, etc.; completing project budget information and reports; establishing and maintaining project files; ensuring compliance; and processing grant claim paperwork for promoters. Key skills and competencies include use of ICT systems and packages, financial reporting and audit compliance on CWP admin and project files.

Denise Healy – Administrator

Denise has worked as an RDP administrator with CWP for over 28 years. The administrative role includes supporting the CEO, Development Officer/s and administration; liaising with promoters, the Department, the Board, auditors, etc.; completion of financial returns and reports; establishing and maintaining project files; ensuring compliance; and processing payments to promoters. Key skills and competencies include use of ICT systems and packages, financial reporting and audit compliance on CWP administration and project files.

Karen O' Byrne – Administrator

Karen has been employed by CWP since 2018 and has been a member of the Leader Administration team since 2019. Qualifications include a BA (Hons) in Accounting & Finance, a diploma in information systems and she has recently completed the final examinations for Accounting Technician's diploma.

Prior to her employment in CWP Karen worked as a contract IT Business Analyst for companies such as AIG, Aviva, Dell and Capita and CWP has benefitted enormously from her skills. She completed the flowchart and process mapping of the entire LEADER end to end process. This has been an invaluable tool to CWP in understanding compliance and improving the efficiency of the LEADER administration function. Karen's key skills and competencies include attention to detail and understanding of complex process systems, use of the Microsoft Office Suite and Sage accounting software, maintenance of the general ledger for CWP, responsibility for the apportionment of all central costs and completion of the monthly administration returns for the LEADER programme.

1.5.6 Project Selection Procedures for LEADER

The process of appraising and selecting projects for project promoters and the LAG will be undertaken by both the LCDC and CWP. There are various stages to this process as outlined in the roles and responsibilities chart. In line with an agreed selection procedure and criteria, CWP will develop, issue, and manage both open/rolling and also time-specific calls for proposals as appropriate and where required. The LCDC will generally approve this process in keeping with the LDS.

Time limited calls will ensure that funding is ring-fenced in priority areas where animation activity is anticipated to precede the intervention. Time-limited calls can also be helpful in evaluating projects in a comparative way. In operating calls under the 2014-22 programme, it has been CWP's experience that time-limited calls can be very successful in animating the programme and encouraging new promoters and groups to come forward and express an interest. However, this model is less appropriate for works projects where planning and procurement procedures need to be followed in support of an application as these can result in delays.

Rolling/ open calls allow flexibility for projects where timing is critical to the project (e.g. a new business that needs to start immediately to take advantage of an existing gap in the market or a tourism project

that needs to be open in time for the peak season). However, with this model the challenge is to ensure that groups / promoters who have not previously accessed funding under the programme have sufficient support and capacity to apply in a first-come-first-served environment.

CWP not only has an open-door policy but actively promotes the programme to as wide an audience as possible to ensure that applications are received from new groups and individuals as well as previous clients. The programme will be launched at an event and a media campaign as well as a series of public meetings to be held across the county in selected locations will animate the programme generally and to target disadvantaged communities. Throughout the programme promotion will be actively carried out through social and traditional media, existing networks i.e. PPN and using contacts on the ground to help spread the word. Additional efforts will utilise different promotion methods to reach more marginalised and hard to reach groups e.g. specific geographic areas can be targeted via social media advertising tools.

CWP will receive and process applications and will work with project promoters to assist in project development and progress. CWP Development Officers will also undertake LDC-led initiatives which form an integral part of the priority actions outlined in this LDS. This will involve engaging relevant stakeholders in project development, animation and capacity building and managing the public procurement process on behalf of the LDC. CWP officers will liaise with the Department/Pobal in relation to in-house projects. When projects are ready for a funding decision, CWP Development Officers will compile a comprehensive project assessment report which will then be sent through the project evaluation process.

An evaluation committee will make recommendations on applications for funding. The membership of this committee will be independent of both the LCDC and the Board of CWP and will be selected by both the LCDC and CWP. A scoring framework will be used to assess all applications for funding support, a sample of which is included below. The scoresheet may be amended / added to in advance of the new programme to reflect theme specific priorities. A minimum score of 65% must be achieved by the project for it to be approved. The assessment criteria and weightings are as follows:

- Compatibility with LDS (20)
- Innovation (10)
- Promoter experience (10)
- Impact of project (20)
- Financial viability (10)
- Sustainability (10)
- Requirement (10)
- New promoter (10)

A final decision on the funding application will then be made by the LCDC. This process should ensure a transparent selection procedure strengthened by the LAG governance arrangements and decision-making procedures in place.

1.5.7 Relevant Experience

Since its inception in 2015 Wicklow LCDC has been proactive in establishing appropriate procedures to assist in the coordination and delivery of CLLD programmes. It is currently the management and oversight body for the LEADER and SICAP programmes in the county and it hopes to deliver a number of additional programmes in the future.

In relation to LEADER, the LCDC benefits from the experience of its programme delivery partners. WCC operates a number of EU and Exchequer funding schemes, the most relevant being those run through the Environment, Roads and Community, Cultural and Social Sections. Some examples of these include Interreg, Life, Community Grants Scheme, REDZ pilot, Town and Village Renewal Scheme, ORIS, Urban Regeneration Programme, Rural Regeneration Programme, Wicklow Community Heritage

and Cultural Awards Scheme, Grants for the Conservation of Protected Structures, Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund, and the Community Involvement Scheme.

CWP's programmes and schemes is outlined above and amounts to approximately €24 million in funding in the last three years. CWP has also leveraged additional private match-funding to assist in the delivery of local initiatives. CWP's LEADER experience is a vital input to this LDS as it has delivered a CLLD model on the ground and has promoted, managed and administered calls for proposals.

Developing an area-based approach to economic development in rural areas is evident in CWP's use of the LEADER methodologies in preparing local strategies to date. CWP animated and devised a range of plans and initiatives for the county in the 2014-22 period including Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy, Social Enterprise Strategy, Craft Strategy, Social media training for tourism and food businesses, Forest Bathing, SMART Villages training and transnational co-operation project, Biodiversity training and Climate Action training for Wicklow Communities etc.

Delivering interventions that support social inclusion and poverty reduction, in particular those that target 'hard-to-reach' communities, has been a prominent feature of CWP's programme delivery. A wide range of social and recreational infrastructure is in place as a result of the programme and includes community halls, playgrounds, skate parks, walks and the development of amenity areas to name but a few. Many of these are physically located in very rural areas of Wicklow, while others assist social cohesion in the community by bringing people together. Other LEADER supports such as training programmes and mentoring have targeted specific groups e.g. youth and rural women. This LDS builds on this and aims to target specific 'hard-to-reach' geographic areas and marginalised groups through intensive animation and capacity building initiatives.

1.5.8 Risk management procedures

WCC as financial partner has robust procedures in place for risk management. WCC's Audit Committee supports the elected members by providing an independent assessment of corporate governance, environment, risk management, financial reporting, financial management and internal audits. This committee works closely with the finance section of WCC. A Corporate Risk Register is in place and will continue to be reviewed by the Senior Management Team and the Audit Committee on an ongoing basis. CWP has two Board Committees – an Executive Committee and a Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, comprised exclusively of Board members. The Executive Committee monitors operational matters, HR, programme activities, Health and Safety, and meets monthly in advance of the full Board meeting. The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee monitors and oversees all the finance and risk assessment of the company to ensure the highest standards of good financial and risk management are implemented at all times. Programme activity reports and financial reports are submitted to the Board's Audit and Risk sub-committee and to the Board on a monthly basis. In relation to the RDP specifically, many of the control checks mentioned under auditing above also serve a risk management function.

The LAG and LAG partners are subject to the Data Protection Act 2018 and Regulation (EU) 2016/679 the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The LAG, WCC and CWP will continue to ensure that they are compliant with the requirements of the legislation in their role as 'Data processors'. CWP on behalf of the LAG has a Data Protection Policy (2021) which sets out the arrangements for ensuring the security and effective management of personal data of employees and service users. This is available in the appendices and covers procedures relating to electronic data security, IT equipment including devices, data access and data collection. CWP has a data protection co-ordinator and the data protection policy is underpinned by robust security and IT arrangements and procedures.

LDS Area Profile

Section 02



2.1 Introduction

This LDS covers all of County Wicklow. A map of the Wicklow LDS boundary area with a list of Electoral Areas can be found in the appendices. This section condenses the Summary Wicklow LECP Socio-Economic Profile (People & Place, March 2023, enhanced June 2023). It provides data relevant to the LEADER programme including urban / rural classification, farm type, land use and SEAI climate action plan graphics. More detailed information can be found in the appendices.

2.2 Wicklow Socio-Economic Profile

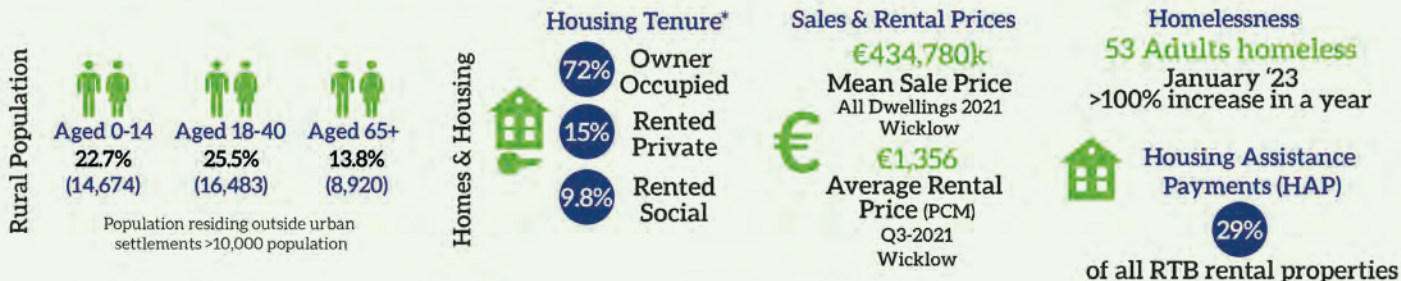
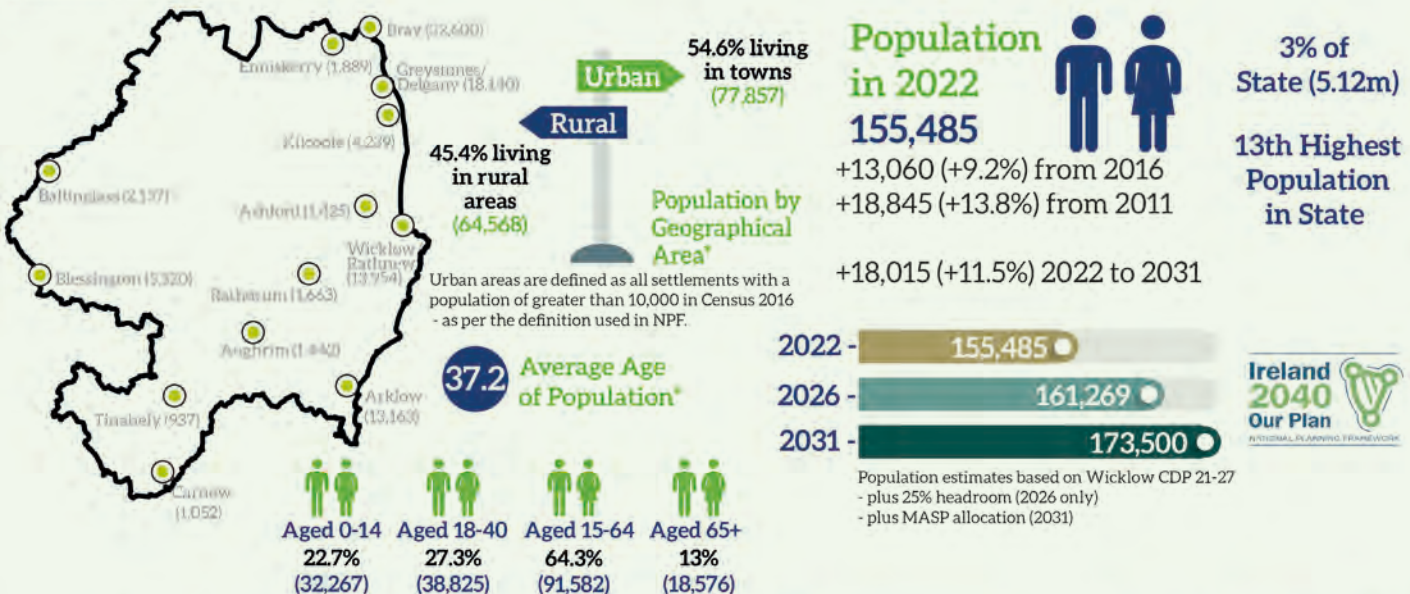
Wicklow is the seventeenth-largest county on the island of Ireland (2,027 km²). It has a population of 155,485 (2022 Census of Population), the 12th highest in the State, and a population density of 76.7 persons per km². While County Wicklow approximates median Irish values in respect of several demographic and socio-economic variables, it exhibits considerable internal diversity, partly due to its distinctive topography, and specifically its extensive uplands, which create a natural boundary that generates strong local identities. Local citizens refer to West Wicklow, East Wicklow and the Wicklow Mountains as three distinctive and clearly recognised sub-county areas. West Wicklow is reasonably well connected to Carlow, Kildare and South Dublin, and its economic structure is similar to that of the adjoining counties. The Wicklow Uplands dominate the centre of the county, and is shaped by upland farming, an extensive national park and a well-established tourism industry. The lowlands of East Wicklow provide the transport corridors that connect the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) with the southeast of Ireland. This is the most urbanised part of County Wicklow, and its economy is more entwined with that of the GDA than elsewhere in the county.

A socio-economic analysis of the county reveals north-south patterns as significant as east-west. While all of County Wicklow is affected by spill over effects from the GDA, these are most pronounced in the north of the county, and in particular along the east coast from Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown to Wicklow Town. This part of County Wicklow has high levels of commuting to the GDA; many of its enterprises are geared towards providing services to the GDA; and the provision of housing and hard infrastructure responds to the needs and opportunities of the GDA. Further south along Wicklow's east coast, particularly south of Wicklow Town, the influence of the GDA begins to dissipate, although there is some evidence that Arklow and the surrounding communities are in the second tier of GDA commuter zones.

In West Wicklow, especially along the N81 (national primary route) from South Dublin / Dublin 24 to Blessington, there is clear evidence of the influence of the GDA on housing, demographic expansion and infrastructure requirements. South of the Baltinglass Municipal District (MD) the characteristics are of a more traditional rural economy and many of its features are closer to median values for County Carlow than County Wicklow.

Wicklow County Council and other bodies are aware of this geographical diversity and several pursue local-level and sub-county approaches. It is envisaged that those involved in the Wicklow LECP, as well as other local stakeholders, will utilise this socio-economic summary to optimise their work, individually and collectively over the coming years.

Funded by The Department of Rural & Community Development



* Data sourced from CSO Census 2016

2.2.1 Demographics

Wicklow's population increased by 9.2% (+13,060 persons) between 2016 and 2022 (provisional Census 2022) to 155,485. This is marginally faster than the corresponding rate for the State (+7.6%), but it lags behind the corresponding rate for the Eastern Region (+10.6%), Meath (12.9%) and Kildare (11%). Growth has not been evenly distributed across the county - it is most prevalent in the Greystones and Wicklow Municipal Districts. Proximity to the GDA and the main commuter routes is a factor in driving population growth, and the areas with the healthiest demographic profile (growth and age structure) are Greystones, Enniskerry, Newtownmountkennedy and the surrounding peri-urban zones. As is the case regionally and nationally, Wicklow's population is ageing.

Key Facts:

- Wicklow has a total population of 155,485; an increase in population of 9.2% (+13,060) – the seventh highest among the 31 local authority areas (2022 Census);
- Population growth has been highest in the Greystones (+15%) and Wicklow MDs (+15%). Bray (+3%) and Arklow (+6.5%) recorded much lower levels of growth;
- Net in-migration is driving population growth and accounts for 59.6% of the +13,060 increase in population since 2016;
- The population is projected to increase by 16% between 2021 and 2040 – amongst some of the highest rates of increase of any county (DPH LG ESRI Baseline Population Projections);
- 34% of the population is aged 0-24 years (CYPSC age profile), compared to 33.2% nationally. The highest rates of young people (among the resident population) are generally in the north and east of the county;
- 27.3% (38,825) of the population is aged 18-40. The highest concentrations are in the north-east of the county and in Wicklow and Greystones MDs;
- 13% is aged 65+ (13.4% across the State), and the highest values are generally in rural areas and in the south of the county;
- The population is projected to experience an increase of 78% of those aged 65+ by 2040 (+17,390) (DHPLG projections); Analysis from the CSO Urban and Rural Life in Ireland (2019) describes County Wicklow as having a strong urban population living in either 'Satellite Urban Towns' (54.9%) or Independent Urban Towns (10.4%). The remainder of Wicklow (32.4%) - a large geographical area - is classified as being rural in nature but with a moderate to high level of influence from urban areas (employment based commuting). Only 2.3% of the population in Wicklow is classified as being Highly Rural or Remote Areas - these areas are mainly in the south of the county and parts of the Baltinglass MD.

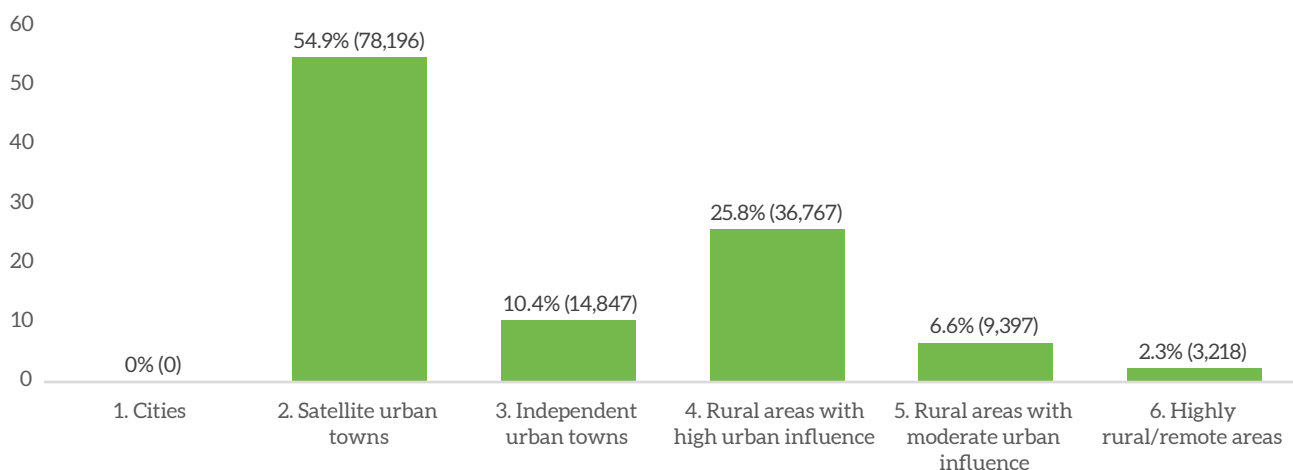
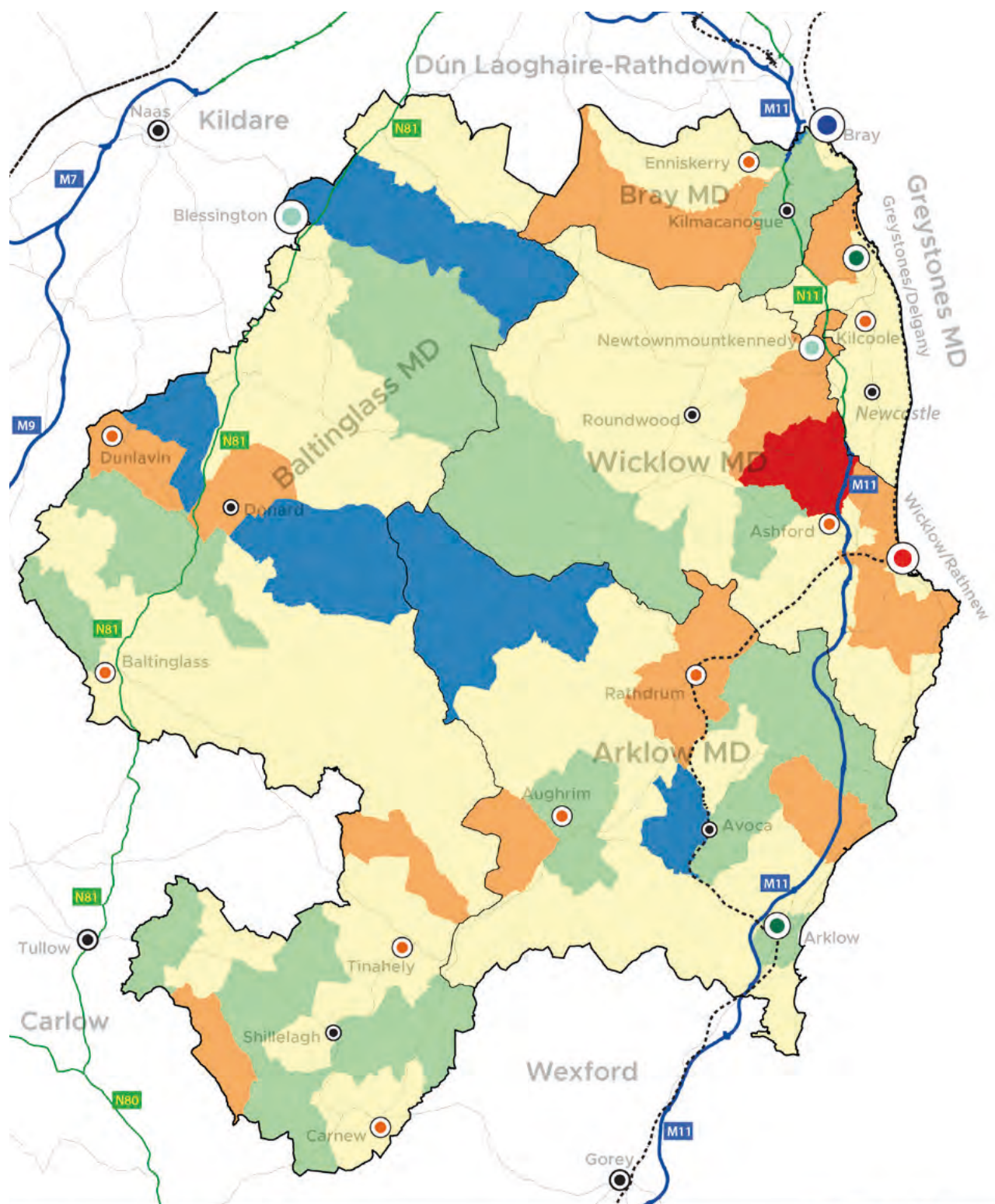


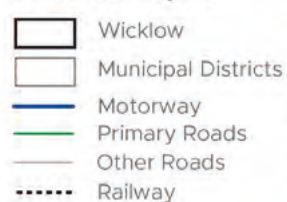
Figure: CSO Urban and Rural Classification (CSO 2019)



% Pop Change, 2016-2022



Contextual Layers



Settlement Hierarchy



Contains Irish Public Sector Data (data.gov.ie) licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CCBY 4.0) licence.
Data Source: OpenStreetMap, CSO Census 2016

Map: Electoral Division Population Change, 2016 to 2022 (CSO Census, 2022)

2.2.2 Social Indicators

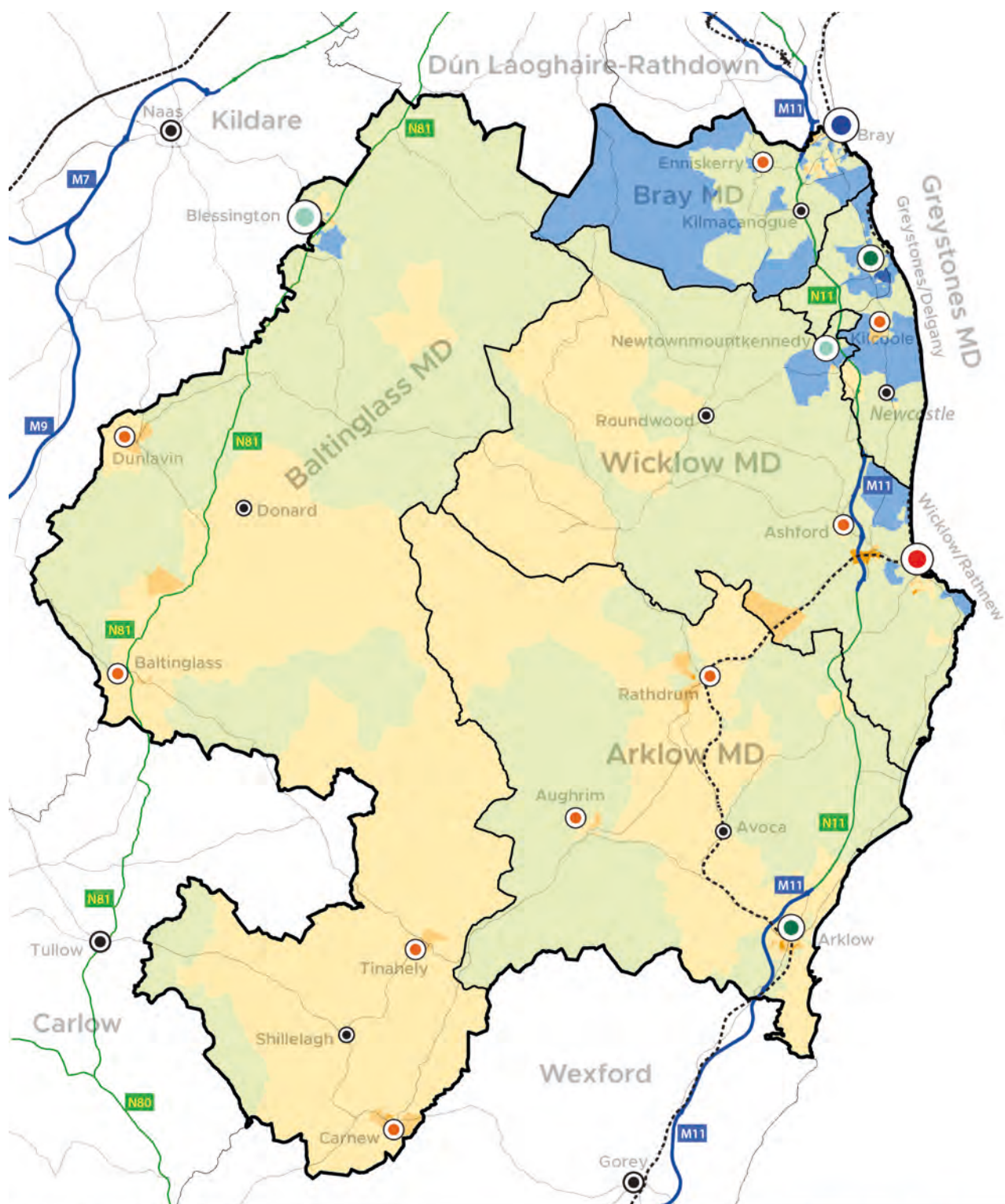
County Wicklow has become increasingly diverse in respect of nationalities, ethnicities and languages and the proportion of persons with a nationality other than Irish was higher in 2011 than in 2016. Non-Irish nationals and those with dual nationality account for 10% of the county's population. UK nationals, Poles and Lithuanians represent the most numerous nationalities – other than Irish. While the proportion of UK nationals is declining, the population of most other nationalities is increasing, with the highest proportionate increase being Romanians. Blessington and Arklow have notable concentrations of Poles, while Wicklow Town and Blessington have the highest proportions of Lithuanians among their resident populations. Polish, French and Spanish are the most widely spoken foreign languages in County Wicklow.

County Wicklow has the largest proportion of members of the Church of Ireland and the third-highest proportion of Protestants, of any county in the State. The county has a below-average proportion of Irish Travellers in its resident population, although there are significant Traveller communities in Rathnew and Woodenbridge.

The county is the eighth-most affluent local authority area in Ireland. In spatial terms, affluence is largely concentrated in the Greystones Municipal District. While there has been an overall reduction in the level of deprivation since 2011, the index reveals persistent structural weaknesses in parts of Bray, Arklow and Wicklow Town, as well as emerging challenges in rural communities – most notably in the south of the Baltinglass MD and much of the Arklow MD.

Key Facts:

- 9.2% of the resident population has a nationality other than Irish (11.4% for the State). Non-Irish nationals are more likely to reside in urban than rural areas;
- Bray MD has the highest rate of population with a nationality other than Irish (11.3%);
- There are 783 persons who self-declare as an Irish Traveller - 0.6% of the resident population (0.7% across the State), with the highest numbers being in Wicklow/Rathnew;
- Based on the Pobal HP Index of affluence and deprivation, the county scores 1.4, which is above the State aggregate value of 0.6. While Wicklow is a relatively affluent county, it is the least affluent of counties adjoining the GDA;
- Arklow and Baltinglass MDs record negative values (-4.3 and -1.3 respectively). Arklow is the most disadvantaged of the five MDs and Greystones MD is the most affluent;
- As of November 2022, County Wicklow was home to 1,846 refugees from Ukraine (58,829 come to Ireland). The greatest numbers are in Bray East LEA (3.5% of the local population); and
- Just under one in five (19.1%) families with children (under 15 years) is headed by a lone parent (18.1% for the State). The highest proportions of lone parent families are in Carnew, Baltinglass and Arklow.



Pobal HP Dep Index
Relative Score, 2016



Contextual Layers



Settlement Hierarchy



**Spatial Insight
Solutions**
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Contains Irish Public Sector Data (data.gov.ie) licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CCBY 4.0) licence. Developed using QGIS. Data Source: OpenStreetMap, CSO Census 2016, Pobal

Map: Pobal HP Deprivation Index, 2016 (Pobal & CSO Census, 2016)

2.2.3 Education

County Wicklow records higher levels of educational attainment than nationally and the county has among the highest pupil-teacher ratios. Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with a younger age profile, urban-based residents, in-migration and employment in the knowledge economy and related services. Lack of formal qualifications and distance from the labour market contribute to lower attainment. Many neighbourhoods in Bray and in Arklow and its environs record below-average levels of educational attainment. In Bray, urban deprivation is a contributory factor. Educational attainment levels are generally lower in the southwest of the county, associated with transitioning directly from school to employment in agriculture and agri-industry.

Key Facts:

- A higher proportion of persons have technical, professional qualification and/or third-level degree than the State average. 11.1% completed their education without obtaining a qualification, lower than the national average (12.5%);
- 35.1% of the county's population has a third-level qualification (33.4% nationally). Greystones MD is 47.8%, more than twenty percentage points higher than Arklow MD (26.6%);
- Of the 82 primary schools, 6 (7.3%) have DEIS status – the fourth lowest rate in the State (2021/22);
- 4 (17.4%) of the 23 post-primary schools have DEIS status, lower than the national average and the ninth lowest among the State's 31 local authority areas;
- 74.7% of children are in classes of 20 to 30, higher than the State average. 14.6% are in classes with more than 30 pupils, just above the State average;
- A majority of second-level students progress to third-level education (2021 student cohort). On average, 40% progress to a university, and 38% progress to an Institute of Technology (IoT) or other HEI; and
- Among the 31 local authority areas, Wicklow has the fifth highest mean childcare costs - the highest outside Dublin. In 2019/2020, the mean weekly childcare fee in County Wicklow was €203.58, over €17 higher than the State average.

2.2.4 Economy and Employment

County rates of participation in the labour force and workforce are similar to those of Ireland. Within the county, rates (on both indicators) are highest in the Bray and Greystones MDs. Arklow and Wicklow MDs have lower proportions of persons at work and higher rates of unemployment (on a county and Eastern & Midland regional basis). Arklow MD has the greatest challenges in respect of unemployment and a reliance on traditional economic activities. In contrast, the Bray and Greystones MDs have more vibrant economic profiles.

The northeast of the county, and in particular the Greystones MD, has a higher proportion of resident workers who are employed in professional occupations and belong to the higher socioeconomic groups. Both urban and rural communities in the south and west of the county have higher proportions of persons who are in manual occupations and who belong to the lower socioeconomic groups. The data point to the importance of promoting economic diversification in these parts of County Wicklow, in tandem with socially oriented interventions that support integrated human capital and economic development.

Key Facts:

- The labour force participation rate (61.5%) has increased since 2011 (+3.3%) and is broadly the same as the State (61.4%);
- 87.3% of the labour force is classed as being 'at work', similar to the State (87.1%). Across the five MDs the variation is from 82.2% in Arklow to almost 92% in Greystones;

- More than four in every ten (23,451 or 40.3%) of the workforce commutes to work outside the county, the fifth highest in the State (only Dublin local authorities have higher rates);
- 41% of resident workers work within the county (Census 2016); 14.3% work in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and 14.3% work in Dublin City; 5% work in South Dublin and 1.4% in Fingal. Over one third of resident workers travel to work in the GDA;
- Across the Bray MD, the northern half of the Greystones MD and all parts of the Baltinglass MD (north of the Poulaphouca Reservoir), over 40% of the resident workforce commutes to the GDA. Values decline gradually as one moves from north to south;
- Relative to those who live and work in County Wicklow, outbound commuters are more likely to have a third-level qualification (67.1%), work in ICT and Professional Services industries (32.5%) and belong to the higher socio-economic groups such as 'employers and managers' (24.5%). The primary mode of transport for outbound commuters is private (78.1%);
- There are 32,551 jobs and 47,322 resident workers in County Wicklow, the 3rd lowest jobs to workers ratio of all local authorities;
- More than half the jobs in Wicklow are in Bray (8,763), Arklow (3,040), Wicklow (2,637), Greystones-Delgany (2,514) and Blessington (1,125);
- Commerce & Trade (23.0%), Professional Services (22.1%) and Manufacturing (13.4%) are key sectors to the county's economy. Combined, these sectors employ around 13,000 people; Agricultural employment is particularly significant in the south of the county, especially in Baltinglass MD (9%) and the west of the Arklow MD (5.4%);
- Manufacturing industries account for 9.7% of employment among resident workers, the sixth-lowest value in the State, with little overall change since 2011 (+0.9%). Manufacturing employment is less significant in Wicklow than Kildare, Louth and Meath, counties that surround the GDA;
- Employment in Professional Services, Commerce & Trade and the Public Sector is most prevalent in and around the main towns (notably Bray, Wicklow and Arklow) and rural communities in North Wicklow that have high levels of outbound commuting;
- There are 5,905 persons (2021 data) employed in State-assisted foreign (2,531) and indigenous (3,374) firms. There are 20 IDA supported companies located in Wicklow;
- In 2021, the Wicklow Local Enterprise Office (LEO) supported 148 clients, and these provide 655 jobs;
- County Wicklow's unemployment rate fell by almost a third between 2011 and 2016. The self-declared unemployment rate (which is different to the live-register figure) for County Wicklow stood at 12.7% (in 2016);
- Unemployment is concentrated, particularly in urban and rural areas of Arklow MD. Unemployment in Arklow MD was 17.8% in 2016. In contrast, the rate in the Greystones MD was only 8.2%;
- Median gross household income at €48,382 (2016) is over €3,000 above the State (€45,256), and is the seventh highest in the State. The highest median gross household income is within Greystones MD (€61,478). The lowest is in Arklow MD (€40,815);
- The proportion of households who derive the majority of their income from social welfare (12.7%) is the seventh lowest among the 31 local authority areas;
- The proportion of households who derive the majority of their income from State pension (12.2%) is the ninth lowest among the 31 local authority areas. However, both social welfare and pension payments for household income are highest in the south of the county in the Baltinglass and Arklow MDs; and
- Among those who live in rented accommodation an average of 31.7% of household income (2016) is expended on rent, the fourth highest among the 31 local authority areas.

2.2.5 Environment

Wicklow is a county with outstanding natural beauty, significant habitats and a wide range of biodiversity. Consequently, and in order to protect the county's environmental resources, which are fundamental to its tourism industry and sustainable agriculture, a number of legal designations are in place.

Several sites are designated as 'special protection areas' (SPAs). The largest of these are the Wicklow Mountains SPA, the Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA and the Murrough SPA along the eastern seaboard. Wicklow Head is also designated with SPA status.

A substantial part of Wicklow is also designated a special area of conservation (SAC) - the largest being the Wicklow Mountains SPA. Most of the county's coastline from Bray to Arklow along with several upland fens and bogs have been afforded SAC status - Bray Head SAC, the Murrough Wetlands SAC, Magherabeg Dunes SAC, Buckroney-Brittas Dunes and Fen SAC, Wicklow Reef SAC, Vale of Clara SAC, Carriggower Bog SAC and Glen of the Downes SAC are amongst the largest in the county. Most of the county's SACs are also proposed national heritage areas (pNHAs).

There has been a concerted effort to reduce the carbon footprint of our homes, by improving their building energy ratings (BERs) among other measures. Forty percent of the county's housing stock has had its BER assessed. County Wicklow had the tenth lowest per capita level of heat demand of all counties (2022). Total energy demand, across all sectors in County Wicklow, amounted to 893 gigawatt hours (in 2022) – the thirteenth lowest level in the State.

County Wicklow's 9 connected wind farms account for just over 6% of total national wind farms and 2.2% (93MW) of the maximum export capacity from connected wind generators. All wind farms in Wicklow are in the south of the county. At present, there are four planned solar farms with a maximum export capacity of 33mw.

County Wicklow has a dense network of rivers and some large lakes located in the county, a large proportion of which is classed as having 'High' and 'Good' status (Vartry, Dargle, Slaney etc). However, a number of rivers have been classed as having 'Poor' and 'Bad' status in the most recent WFD analysis - King's Liffey (Dublin Mountains), Barrow (east) and the Avoca, Kilcoole Stream, Newcastle and Avonbeg river networks. Of the assessed lakes, all water features are classed as having moderate to good status.

Key Facts:

- Wicklow is characterised by Pastures (large parts of Wicklow lowlands to the east and west of Wicklow Mountains), Moors/Heathland and Peatbogs (predominantly across the expanse of the Wicklow Mountains) and a dense network of forested areas (mainly coniferous);
- Most of the landscapes and seascapes that underpin the tourism industry have legal protection (Natura 2002 Framework). These are predominantly in the west and upland areas - primarily the Wicklow Mountains;
- 25.1% of assessed homes have attained a BER rating of B2 or higher (2022), the fifth highest among 31 local authorities. There is considerable scope to increase both the number of BER assessments undertaken and the proportion of homes with low energy consumption;;
- Over nine percent of the State's wind farms are hosted, with an additional contracted wind farm at Ballymanus with significant export capacity;
- There is significant potential for off-shore wind farm development with existing projects at Arklow Bank and proposed developments such as Codling Wind Park;
- Between 2018 and 2022, there was a fivefold increase in the proportion of new cars sold that were either electric or hybrid (half of all car sales in 2022);
- Among Ireland's 31 local authority areas, Wicklow has a relatively low proportion of domestic waste that goes to landfill (41%). A total of 16.6% of domestic waste is mixed dry recyclables (green bin), 12.7% is organic waste (brown bin) and the remaining 29.7% is classed as 'Other' by SEAI; and

- There is a dense network of rivers and some large lakes. A high proportion of Wicklow's rivers and lakes are classed as having good quality (WFD analysis). Some issues remain in rivers such as the Avoca, Kilcoole Stream, Newcastle and Avonbeg river networks.

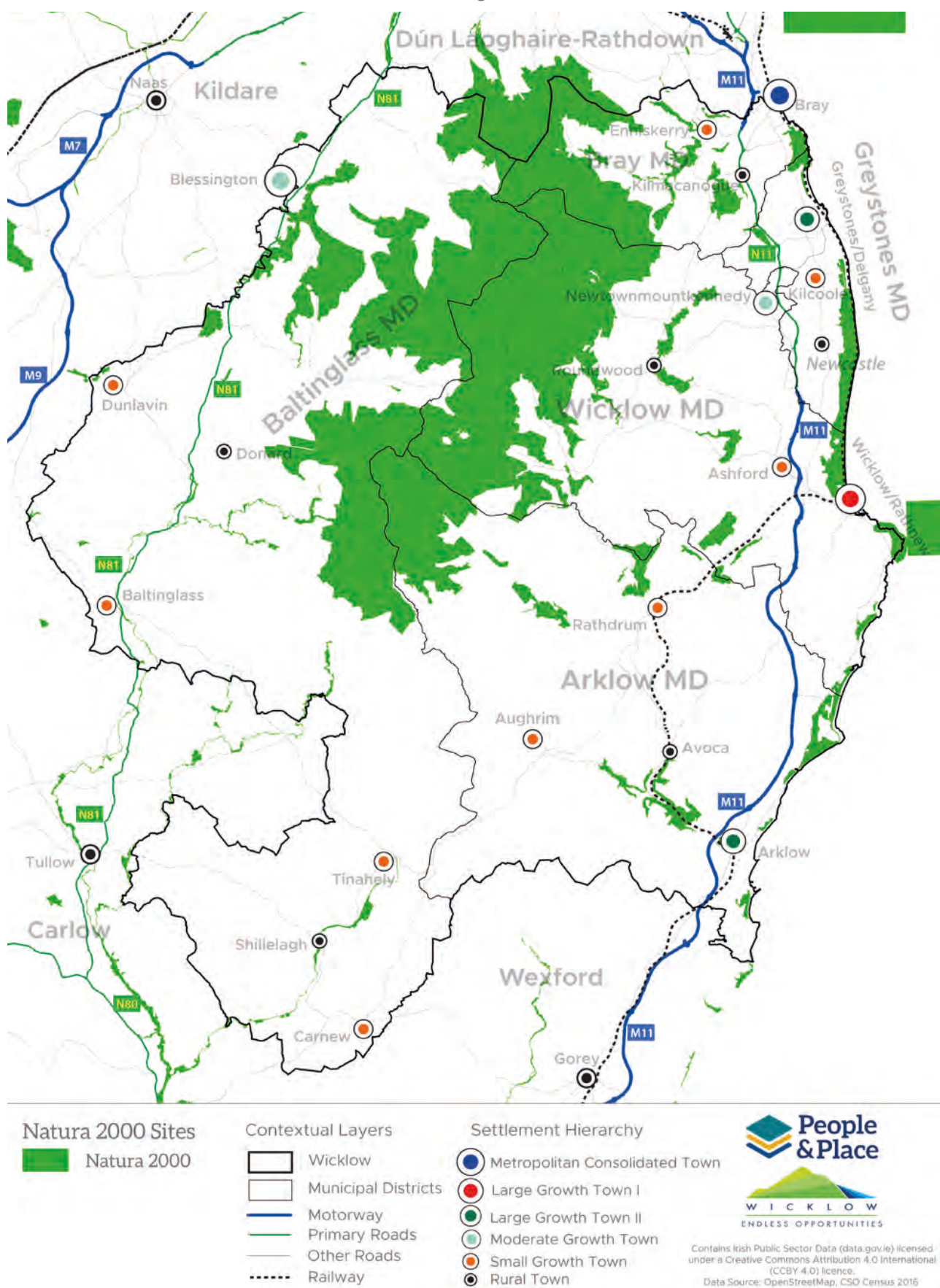


Figure: NATURA 2000 designations in Wicklow

2.2.6 Agriculture

County Wicklow's agricultural profile is strongly influenced by its physical geography. The east and west of the county benefits from its low-lying position and fertile soils, and agriculture is more intensive than elsewhere. Areas across the Wicklow Mountains are rugged and windswept and farming has always been more marginal in these locations with higher levels of grassland farm utilisation. Relative to other counties in Ireland, Wicklow has the sixth lowest area of land dedicated to farming (103,225 ha).

Key Facts:

- The median standard output (SO) per farm in Wicklow was €19,846 (2020), above the State average and also similar in output value to neighbouring Kildare and Meath.
- There is a clear south and east gradient with respect of farm types, land utilisation and standard output – as one goes from west to east, soils are more likely to be tilled, production is more intensive, and farms are more financially profitable. Agriculture in the south of the county is also very strong with intensive production across large parts of the southern parts of Baltinglass MD and all of Arklow MD; and
- Just over thirty percent of farms are classed as specialist sheep farming, the highest proportion of any farm type, with highest rates in the central and mountainous parts of the county. Only Donegal has a high proportion of its farming dedicated to this type of agriculture.
- Nearly 28% of farms are classed as specialist beef production farms focussed on the rearing and fattening of specialist cattle ; and
- Both of these farm types - Specialist Beef Production, Specialist Sheep had amongst the lowest mean and median SO(Census of Agriculture 2020).

2.2.7 Housing and Other Infrastructure

Housing stock in Wicklow is 60,113 (2022 Census), of which 5.8% is vacant properties and 976 are unoccupied holiday homes. The majority (71%) of homes are privately owned, 15% are private rented and 9% are rented from the local authority (2016 Census). The highest level of home ownership is in Greystones MD.

Key Facts:

- The sales and rental market for homes in Wicklow is amongst the most expensive in the State, particularly in the north and east of the county;
- 29% of residential tenancies are in receipt of Housing Assistance Payment (2021), with a general upward trend in the past five years;
- Providing sufficient accommodation for Ukrainians, those seeking international protection, tourists and other visitors is a growing challenge;
- There is good broadband connectivity, including from commercial providers;
- There is strong tourism, film and creative industries infrastructure and high quality natural and cultural products;
- Transport connectivity north-south is good but there are limited links east-west;

2.3 Conclusion

2.3.1 Spatial Imbalances

County Wicklow has many natural resources, a relatively young and vibrant population and high levels of labour force participation. However, it also has internal spatial imbalances due to geography, interaction with GDA, persistent and inter-generational disadvantage in some urban and rural communities and a narrow economic base and structural economic weaknesses in parts of West and South Wicklow.

Much of North Wicklow, in particular the Greystones and Bray MDs, exhibits demographic and socio-economic characteristics that are largely shaped by interactions with the GDA. The GDA also exerts considerable influence on the northwest of the county, including Blessington. However, areas south of Blessington, and in particular the southwest of the county are less influenced by the GDA. Indeed, interactions with counties Carlow and Kildare are more significant here.

Thus, County Wicklow's profile is determined by externalities as much as by local factors. These geographical realities point to the importance of inter-local authority networking and cross-county collaborations in driving and delivering economic and social progress and in ensuring environmental conservation.

2.3.2 Demographic and Socioeconomic Profile

While County Wicklow's demographics and socioeconomic profile will be shaped by several factors, the data and analysis presented in this profile suggest that:

- Wicklow's overall population will continue to grow over the coming decades, although at a slower pace than has occurred over the past twenty years, necessitating ongoing investment in town and village infrastructure and accessible services;
- The decline in the rate of natural increase implies that in-migration will become more significant in growing and sustaining population levels, maintaining a balanced age profile and in ensuring that social and health services are funded, as the Irish population is ageing;
- Wicklow's population, including young people, is urbanising and will continue to urbanise, and some parts of southwest Wicklow are vulnerable to depopulation;
- Proximity to the GDA has afforded, and in particular the north of the county, opportunities to prosper and to diversify the economic base, and such opportunities are likely to grow, associated with investments under Project Ireland 2040;
- Proximity to the GDA poses challenges in dealing with spillover effects, and without investment in social housing provision and the alleviation of agglomeration pressures in the GDA, Wicklow will find itself in a reactive mode that may compromise vision planning;
- While connectivity to the GDA and the South-East Region has improved over recent decades, the scale of outbound commuting puts pressures on infrastructure, the environment and communities. Without due investment in local economic development, ICT connectivity and sustainable modes of transportation, such pressures will increase;
- Climate action combined with low incomes and poor transport links could leave those least able to afford the transition to a low carbon economy behind, thus giving rise to further inequality. However, there are also opportunities to develop the green and circular economies;
- Infrastructural investment, including in housing, and support for quality-of-life enhancements will shape the future human geography of County Wicklow;
- Dealing with the legacies of de-industrialisation in Wicklow Town and Arklow and emerging deprivation in rural communities will require additional investment in social inclusion, community development and greater provision of opportunities for lifelong learning and upskilling;

- Employment opportunities within the county are concentrated in a few locations and supporting more SMEs, social enterprises, crafts, food and tourism businesses will spread job opportunities more evenly throughout the county;
- A significant proportion of farms are specialist sheep and beef producers, types of farming with lower SO, thus necessitating the development of diversification to ensure the long term viability of many Wicklow family farms; and
- Wicklow's Uplands and National Park are important drivers of economic development and greater valorisation of these natural resources and the ecosystem services and tourism products they provide will be important for the county and the region.

2.3.3 Gaps and Priorities

Key gaps and priorities for development in the LDS will be:

- Increases in population in peri/urban communities to the North of the county is leading to pressures on community infrastructure Towns of Bray, Greystones/Delgany, Wicklow, Blessington, Arklow, Rathdrum, Baltinglass and the Villages of Enniskerry, Newtownmountkennedy, Ashford, Kilcoole, Kilpedder and Rathnew. Villages; Enniskerry, Newtownmountkennedy, Ashford, Kilcoole, Kilpedder and Rathnew;
- Disadvantage is still present, particularly in the Arklow and Baltinglass MDs;
- Ageing population will increase demand for facilities and services and access to same;
- 9.2% of the resident population has a nationality other than Irish and Wicklow has welcomed close to 2,000 Ukrainian refugees. Diversity and integration must be considered;
- Climate action combined with low incomes and poor transport links could leave those least able to afford the transition to a low carbon economy behind, However, there are also opportunities to develop the green and circular economies;
- Employment opportunities within the county are concentrated in a few locations and supporting more SMEs, social enterprises, crafts, food and tourism businesses will spread job opportunities more evenly throughout the county;
- Wicklow is characterised by Pastures, Moors/Heathland and Peatbog and a dense network of forested areas indicating a need for added value initiatives and agricultural diversification;
- Most of the landscapes and seascapes that underpin the tourism industry have legal protection (Natura 2002 Framework). Sustainable development and environmental awareness / protection is needed; and
- There is a dense network of rivers and some large lakes. A high proportion of Wicklow's rivers and lakes are classed as having good quality (WFD analysis). Some issues remain in rivers such as the Avoca, Kilcoole Stream, Newcastle and Avonbeg river networks. Actions to improve our water resources are needed.

2.3.4 Areas That Have Benefited Least

LEADER has been operational in Wicklow for over 30 years now providing much needed supports to the communities it serves. In that time, CWP has strived to achieve an equitable balance of funding across the county. Analysis of geographic spread of funding under the 2014 – 2020 programme shows that this has largely been achieved. A mapping process is currently underway that will allow access to data on project locations through the CWP website and this will clearly illustrate geographic spread by theme. By way of example there were 33 projects supported under the Rural Towns subtheme and almost 40% were located in the towns and villages cited in the socio-economic profile as experiencing disadvantage e.g. Arklow, Bray, Baltinglass Tinahely, Carnew, Dunlavin, Annacurra. Of the 6 projects supported under the Basic Services subtheme all were in rural areas most in need specifically, Tinahely,

Annacurra, Crossbridge, Glen of Imaal, Kiltegan and Knockananna. This indicates a good level of awareness among local communities of the supports on offer through the RDP.

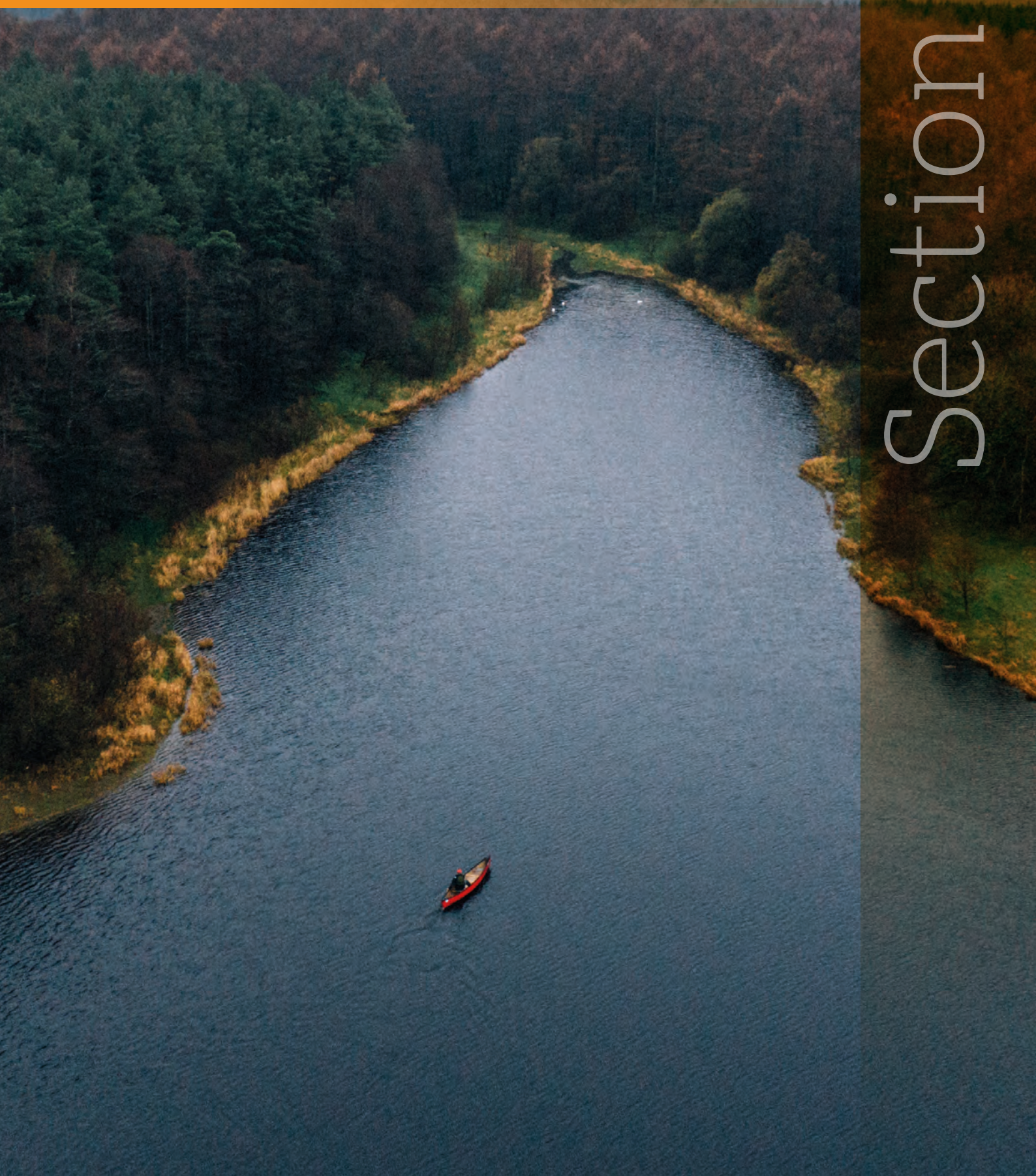
The economic development and environment sub-themes also had a good geographic spread. A time limited call encouraged environmental groups to come forward with project proposals and this resulted in approximately 80 expressions of interest being received. The majority of these groups had not previously accessed funding under LEADER and over 30 projects were supported under the environment theme. 34 tourism providers, rural enterprises and social enterprises were supported. While there was good geographic spread generally, the highest number of social enterprises that benefited are located in west Wicklow where need for such services is greatest.

A mid-term evaluation of the programme undertaken in 2020 reported that the high level of support, animation and capacity building provided by CWP to applicants was acknowledged by all partners as integral to success. Wicklow's LDS has enhanced skills and social capital among groups and individuals across the county. The level of community engagement and capacity building is evident. New and existing groups have been supported to develop in line with local needs and priorities. Many new and improved community infrastructure, facilities and amenities have been developed around the county. Such initiatives have helped to facilitate integration of new residents and to build resilience among dispersed rural communities. The strategy has supported and reacted to local needs, availing of budget flexibility and making relevant amendments, ensuring a strong CLLD approach. Where interest in specific Strategic Actions was low, there was a rationale based on local needs and changing environments.

This socio-economic profile indicates that continued promotion, animation and capacity building will be necessary under the next programme and the LAG is committed to achieving this.

CLLD and Participative Planning

Section 03



CLLD and Participative Planning

3.1 Public Consultation

3.1.1 Consultation Approach

Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) is an approach to local development that actively involves local communities in the design and implementation of development strategies. The methodology aims to empower local communities and enable them to take ownership of their own development processes. Using the principles of Participative Planning in conjunction with CLLD, the LAG in Wicklow, Wicklow LCDC and their partners, CWP and WCC, established a methodology for the development of a consultative process.

Wicklow LAG and partners were eager to carry out an open and inclusive consultation process to support the development of the LDS. The aim was to ensure that all voices who wished to speak would be listened to and to try to seek out those voices who might be typically absent from these kinds of consultation processes.

Where participation could not be organised in person, consultation took place with representatives of groups to ensure that the cross section of needs would be reflected in the LDS.

A three-pronged, bottom-up approach to consultation was designed and organised by the CWP LEADER Development Team in line with the LDS Development Guidelines and the principles of CLLD and Participative Planning.

Public, Stakeholder and Internal consultations took place in advance of deciding on what actions would be included in Wicklow's LDS.



CWP investigated new mechanisms of recording feedback from individuals and decided to use Slido to capture the ideas, comments and visions discussed in the meetings.

WCC's LEADER team supported CWP in the running of the consultation meetings and in collating feedback from attendees.

3.1.2 Number & Type of Consultation Events

Wicklow LEADER Partners agreed that seven public consultations would be organised across the county – six community-based events held in person and one online event held at the end of the process to include people who could not make any of the physical events.

The six locations ensured a geographical spread across the county. Locations were selected to enable access for any individuals with limited mobility and that there was sufficient internet access at all locations.

The one online event was held after the in person events on May 31st 2023. Interactions between people at the in-person events had a better quality than the online event and resulted in more significant combined ideas and suggestions because of shared perspectives.

The locations of the physical public consultations were as follows:

Tinahely May 2nd Location: Tinahely Community Hall Time: 7pm - 9pm	Rathdrum May 3rd Location: RDA Hall Time: 7pm - 9pm	Arklow May 4th Location: Arklow Bay Hotel Time: 7pm - 9pm
Blessington May 9th Location: Coimin Centre Time: 7pm - 9pm	Glen of the Downs May 10th Location: Glenview Hotel Time: 7pm - 9pm	Baltinglass May 11th Location: Parish Centre Time: 7pm - 9pm

3.1.3 Marketing and Promotion of Events

A broad and varied marketing strategy was developed to ensure as wide-ranging an attendance as possible. Adverts were placed in the two county-based newspapers. A press release was sent to the local papers and radio station and two printed papers and one online paper published articles about the consultation process.

Social media posts were published on CWP's facebook, Instagram and twitter pages. Paid advertising across the Meta Platforms were utilised to help promote these posts county wide. More focused paid advertising concentrated on a 15km radius around each physical location selected for events.

The LEADER Partners also utilised the networks that already exist in the county. Emails about the events were sent to all stakeholders across the county and these were shared across their networks and social media. All CWP and WCC staff were informed about the events. County Wicklow Public Participation Network, Wicklow LEO, Wicklow Uplands Council, enterprise and environment initiatives helped to promote the events.

3.1.4 Public Consultation Methodology

A professional facilitator, Suzanne Campbell (food and farming journalist and Wicklow native), was hired to support the events. Her knowledge of the county and the sectors LEADER operates in combined with her communication skills helped ensure that the consultation events were energetic, engaging and timely. She also supported the marketing campaign by promoting the public meetings. The external facilitation allowed the LEADER staff from CWP and WCC to concentrate on presenting information, recording feedback and operating the online polling of the feedback, as well as remaining the public face of the programme and first port of call.

The public meetings and all the consultation meetings were designed as structured listening sessions to ensure that the challenges and opportunities for rural development across Wicklow could be heard and recorded.

Each public meeting was opened by Wicklow LAG chairperson Pat Kennedy and CWP CEO Brian Carty. The meeting was structured around the three themes of the new programme. A brief introduction to each theme and its subthemes was given by LEADER Development Officers.

The participants at each consultation meeting were then broken into smaller groups and guided in a facilitated discussion on each theme. After the discussion, instructions were given to all participants on how to log onto Slido and they were asked to rank in priority the subthemes which should receive most funding. They were then asked to identify the needs of their local area under that theme and subsequently to possible solutions to those needs which LEADER might fund.

Slido required internet access to be available in all locations and where wifi was not available, mobile internet allowed us run Slido. As part of our advertising, people were informed that they needed to bring a smart phone to the event. Each participant was given instructions in advance of the meeting on how to log onto Slido via a QR code or step by step instructions via the Slido website with a numeric code to access each question. Not all participants were comfortable with the technology. In this instance, CWP and WCC staff supported them to access Slido on their phones or allowed them to use staff phones to ensure their views were recorded and that the process was inclusive.

Separate polls were kept for each local meeting to allow for analysis of different local needs in each area. Notes were also taken of each session which allowed for greater nuance to the headline issues being reported via Slido.

The combination of facilitated group discussion and Slido meant that people could voice their own concerns and ideas and also share and build on ideas.

The use of Slido was welcomed by many participants, and some found to be a great ice breaker in getting groups talking and chatting for a couple of reasons. It is a novelty tool being used and many people had not used it before. It is also interactive so even those participants who might not be confident talking out loud had an opportunity to type in their responses. The use of Slido was evaluated after each consultation session and it was welcomed warmly. People reported enjoying seeing the results of the polling immediately and seeing their own feedback being recorded live on screen.

Each consultation finished up with a summary of points raised, highlighting next steps in the LDS preparation process and issuing contact details for LEADER Development Officers if people wanted to follow up on anything discussed. It was emphasised in the wrap up, that the LDS would be available on the CWP website once it was approved and that was where people could see the actions to be delivered and the result of their contributions. It was further emphasised that the LEADER partners in Wicklow would be reaching out once the programme is launched to work with communities and individuals to support the implementation of the LDS. The turn out to each public consultation was as follows:

Tinahely	20
Rathdrum	19
Arklow	22
Blessington	15
Glen of the Downs	34
Baltinglass	14
Online Meeting	6
Total	130

This was a moderate turn out, despite the multifaceted and lengthy marketing and promotion campaign undertaken in advance of meetings, and may reflect some fatigue after the number of other consultation processes that had already taken place in the county over the last 12 months.

3.1.5 Engaging with Difficult to Reach Groups

No data was collected in meetings about participants' ethnicity or socio economic status and thus no record of needs or issues from marginalised groups is available from the meetings. Instead, it was agreed to speak to representatives of marginalised groups under the stakeholder consultations to ensure that the needs of different cohorts were recorded.

We used the networks already available to us that work directly with groups who would be considered marginalised or difficult to reach. We also engaged with representatives of Traveller groups, people with disabilities and those working directly with marginalised groups. Our colleagues in SICAP, the PPN, New Community Workers, Family Support Projects, promoted the events to their contacts within the communities they work with. Our promotion and marketing strategy was conscious of using both digital and traditional media to promote the events to try including as broad a base as possible in our reach.

Young people

The main youth issues raised at our public meetings related to under 18's. After the physical meetings had concluded, it was identified that the age profile of participants were primarily over 40 years old. Young people aged 18-40 are a specific target of the LEADER Programme and were not in great numbers at the physical meetings. A targeted advert was designed and directed to that age cohort to try to get greater participation via an online meeting. This online meeting was also promoted to youth organisations in the county such as Foróige, Macra na Feirme and Comhairle na nÓg. A limited number of young people participated in the online meeting.

Wicklow LEADER Partners will continue to seek new ways of reaching groups which have previously not engaged with the programme before and a renewed effort to help support projects that engage with the LEADER youth cohort will be outlined in the action plan.

Women

Women made up roughly 40% of the participants across all of the consultations. Female voices spoke and participated across all three thematic topics and across all geographic areas.

Participation from the President of the Wicklow Women in Business Network highlighted the great strides that have been made in women's participation in business in the county while acknowledging the need for additional supports for women in business.

Marginalised Groups

As detailed earlier, information about whether participants were from 'marginalised' communities was not gathered at the public meetings in order to avoid unnecessary labelling. Instead, people who work with marginalised groups and communities were consulted to ensure that their issues and problems were included in the consultative profile of the county.

The data in the Area Profile section shows that Wicklow is a relatively affluent county but that deprivation does exist particularly in the Arklow MD Area. Our consultations show that parts of Wicklow Town are also struggling with deprivation. Of the 6 public meetings that were held, 4 of them (Arklow, Rathdrum, Blessington and Baltinglass) were held in the Municipal Districts that are suffering from negative deprivation.

Community Development Workers on SICAP were consulted and they highlighted the need for additional community centres, community open space and the pressures on existing spaces. They further highlighted the lack of capacity within these communities to currently manage a LEADER application so that significant inter agency capacity building work will have to be undertaken before realising the ambition of these applicants for their communities. A new SICAP strategy will be prepared this year and it is hoped that support for LEADER Development Workers from our colleagues in SICAP will assist reaching marginalised groups and engaging with new communities.

Consultation meetings with the Wicklow Child and Family project highlighted the availability of potential sites for LEADER capital projects, yet also the need for capacity building of communities living in these areas to build leadership skills and general capacity before considering a capital LEADER project.

Consultations were held with other representatives and agencies such as Wicklow Traveller Group, Arklow Disability Action Group, and CWP project workers who work with the new communities including communities from Ukraine and asylum seekers in direct provision centres in the county. They all had a wide variety of issues to address, many of which would not be eligible under the LEADER Programme. However, they all impressed on the need for access to community facilities, outdoor areas and for social inclusion projects to help support integration into the wider community.

Targeting LEADER resources at marginalised groups will continue to be a priority for Wicklow LEADER Partners. This will require a fresh approach to community development to ensure that investments made are viable and sustainable. Wicklow LAG and its partners are cognisant of the fact that having an open door is not enough to help support marginalised groups. A partnership approach to supporting marginalised groups is necessary as their needs can be complex and require more than one solution. Work on developing cross cutting solutions for marginalised groups based on a partnership approach will be animated throughout the 2023 – 2027 LEADER programme.

Supporting applications from marginalised groups will be an action within this LDS (Local action 7.2). A distinct local action (Local Action 14.1) to help enable and support the LEADER programme animations will be focused on enabling projects to come forward under this action.

Wicklow LAG will also ensure that when applications are evaluated that additional scoring will be awarded to project applications coming from marginalised groups.

3.1.6 Stakeholder Consultations

Group stakeholder consultation meetings were organised under each theme. Ten enterprise and economic stakeholders met to discuss Theme 1. Five stakeholders met to discuss the community and social inclusion sector. Due to scheduling constraints, a group consultation could not be organised for the environment theme. Where there were gaps, separate one-to-one interviews took place outside of the stakeholder meetings. The following organisations and stakeholders were consulted as part of this process.

Theme 1 – Economic	Theme 2 - Social Inclusion	Theme 3 - Environment
Wicklow LEO	DSP	LAWPRO Community Water Officer
Wicklow Tourism	CWP SICAP	WCC climate action officer
Outdoor Recreation	Bray Area Partnership SICAP	WCC biodiversity officer
Wicklow Naturally	Comhairle na nOg	WCC heritage officer
WCC Economic Division	KWETB	WCC Climate Action Fund Officer
WCC Town Teams	Wicklow PPN	Wicklow Uplands Council
Wicklow Chamber of Commerce	WCC Broadband Officer	CWP Rural Recreation Officer
IFA	Older Persons Network	Wicklow Rivers Trust
Fáilte Ireland	Sports Partnership	National Parks and Wildlife
Teagasc	Traveller Representative	Rural Recreation officer
Craft Network	Wicklow Volunteer	An Tearmann Community Garden
Wicklow Forestry Group	HSE	
CWP SICAP	Wicklow Child and Family Project	
LEO Women's Network	Ukrainian and new community project workers	
	Family Resource Centres	

These stakeholder consultations were insightful and provided a good networking opportunity for representatives across each theme. CWP LEADER staff utilised Slido to record data and suggestions from stakeholders. Where there were gaps in representation, one-to-one meetings were held in person, via video conferencing or over the phone. Written records were kept of these conversations to document the points raised.

Similar to the public events, all participants were informed of the next steps of the LEADER LDS process and that once approved, a summary document of the LDS would be available on the CWP website.

3.1.7 Internal Consultations

The LAG members, members of the LEADER Evaluation Committee and the Board of CWP were invited to all public events. They were also brought together to facilitate a formal consultation process as the decision makers on the LEADER programme. A similar format to the public and stakeholder meetings was undertaken, introducing the participants to the new LEADER themes and recording where they felt the greatest needs were and funding priorities. Slido was again utilised to document the feedback from the LAG, Evaluation Committee members and CWP Board.

3.1.8 Summary of Key Findings from Consultation Process

The consultation process was a valuable and fruitful exercise for Wicklow's LEADER Partners. While the participation was below expectations, the quality of contributions were impressive and insightful.

The main issues highlighted by the public, stakeholders and LEADER Partners in Wicklow can be addressed by the LEADER Programme locally. Tourism is identified as a significant economic driver in Wicklow and there is a substantial demand for increased investment in tourism infrastructure and skills countywide. Addressing the shortage of tourism accommodation is key, as well as ensuring that there are sufficient activities and attractions in the county to extend the visit of tourists and visitors.

A further key finding is the importance of having community-based services and facilities across every town and village in Wicklow. The rural infrastructure subtheme will be in high demand in the 2023 – 2027 LEADER Programme.

Participants in this consultation process consistently voiced their desire to become more active in protecting and restoring their local environment. A barrier to this was access to expert advice and clear, understandable information to support environmental actions at a community led level.

This is a brief summary of the key issues mentioned in the consultation process. Greater detail on these is provided under the LDS Priority Section.

3.2 SWOT Analysis

3.2.1 Participation in SWOT Analysis

The guidelines for the development of the LDS require for a SWOT analysis to be carried out in a 'participative fashion to ensure community involvement and ownership' of the results and outcome of this consultation process and ultimately the strategy itself.

Research was undertaken in advance of commencing a SWOT analysis to help address what was lacking in the county, build on what already works well and to seize on new prospects in the county while being cognisant of global risks and minimising our vulnerability to these.

The SWOT analysis was included as part of the internal and external stakeholder consultation process. It focussed on strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats. A deliberate decision was made to keep the public consultation processes as free from jargon as possible so as not to intimidate or discourage participation.

The stakeholders organisations who took part in the SWOT are listed above (under 3.1.6) and the LAG, Evaluation Committee and CWP Board are detailed under Section 1.

Participation in the analysis at the internal and stakeholder consultations was full and varied and helped illustrate a complete picture of the needs and potential solutions in County Wicklow. The membership of these groups come from across the whole county.

3.2.2. Outcomes of SWOT Analysis

Below is a summary of the main headline items raised:

Strengths	Weaknesses/Challenges
Natural beauty of county including uplands, coastal and river	Transport limited in rural areas
National Park	Impact of Covid-19 on society
Proximity to Dublin market	Volunteer burnout
Broadband	Not enough tourism accommodation
Heritage sites	Connections between east and west of county
Informed communities	Integration of communities
Outdoor recreation	Planning issues
High population of young people	Labour availability
Wealth	Proximity to Dublin – too many day trips
Skilled and highly educated workforce	Shortage of industrial and work space
Tourism attractions	Housing and population pressures
	Security
Opportunities	Threats
Outdoor sports and activities destination	Another global pandemic
Digital connectivity	War and local impacts
Tourism built on natural assets	Recession
Population growth and large youth population	Climate change impacts and loss of biodiversity
Renewable energy potential	Volunteer burnout
Sustainable and green tourism	Popularity of other tourism markets
	Public transport
	Security concerns
	Impact of mental health

The issues are broadly in line with the issues raised during the public meetings.

3.3 LDS Priorities

3.3.1 Inclusion of Themes in LDS

The LEADER Partners in Wicklow analysed all of the information, records and Slido data that were gathered throughout the consultation process. There were clear patterns of areas that those consulted had identified as needing investment such as tourism and environment education. There was agreement that all themes required future investment.

3.3.2 Process

At each of the consultations across the three categories those whose opinions were being sought (public, stakeholder and internal), an introduction to all of the potential themes and subthemes was

presented by LEADER Development Officers. It was also outlined that the LEADER budget of €5.3 million for County Wicklow in the 2023 – 2027 Programme was lower than recent programmes and that there was an option to potentially narrow the focus of the programme on a few key themes and sub themes rather than spreading the limited budget across all themes. There was no support for a narrowed focus as there were identified needs in all subthemes across the county.

Other issues that LEADER currently has no role in were identified during the consultations including transport, housing and planning.

3.3.3 Theme 1: Economic Development and Job Creation

Based on the analysis of the polling, tourism continues to be a significant priority area for investment under the economic theme. Other subthemes have varying degrees of prioritisation in the county. Social, Community and Co-operative Enterprises featured strongly. This is reflected in the proposed project budget for theme 1.

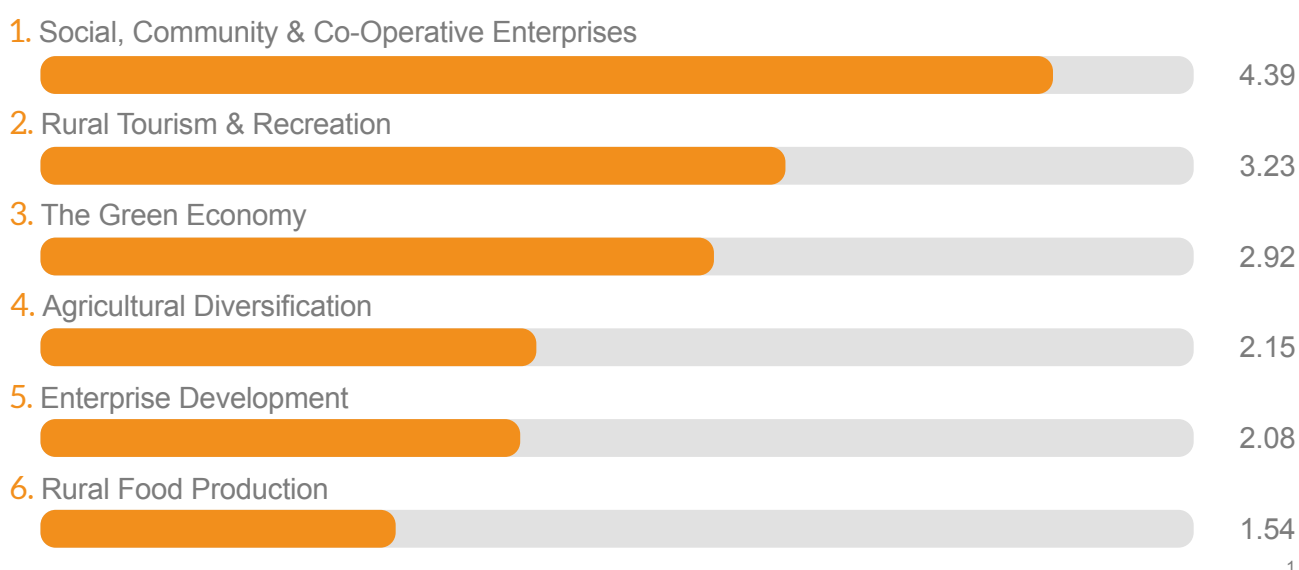
While food was not a strong contender on the polling, it did emerge in discussions as a strong sector in the county and worthy of further investment. Food was important to the brand of County Wicklow as well as an important driver of economic activity within the farming and tourism sectors.

Stakeholder meetings identified environment as a very strong cross cutting theme, particularly in the economic development and job creation theme. It was articulated convincingly that the only future for economic development in County Wicklow would be one that protects and improves the environment.

Below are the results from the LAG Partners Slido poll ranking subthemes . This is broadly in line with what was articulated during the consultation meetings, although, as noted above, tourism featured more strongly in the public meetings.

Within rural communities, employment and economic growth continues to be a significant need and this should be a significant factor throughout the actions of theme 1.

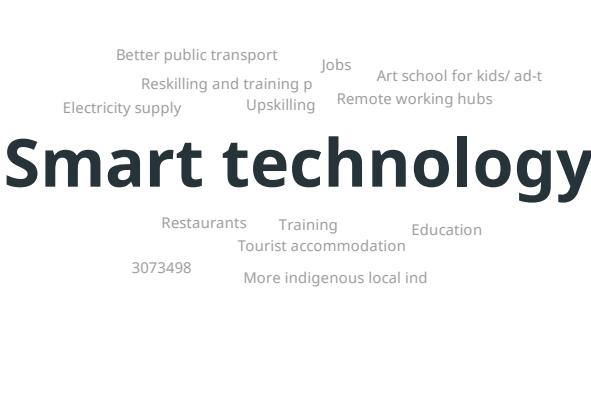
Please rank where you think Economic Development and Job Creation funding should be prioritised?



Tourism activities and accommodation, employment, technology, green economy and social enterprises were common sectors highlighted during consultations. Below are word clouds derived via Slido on the Economic Development and Job Creation Theme.

¹ LAG Partners Economic Development and Job Creation Sub Theme Ranking

What are the economic development and job creation NEEDS of your area?



What are the economic development and job creation NEEDS of your area?



Wicklow LEADER partners will work with their other partners in enterprise and economic activity in the county to support the sustainable development of a vibrant rural economy. The local objectives and actions will help enable investments in the county to support this ambition.

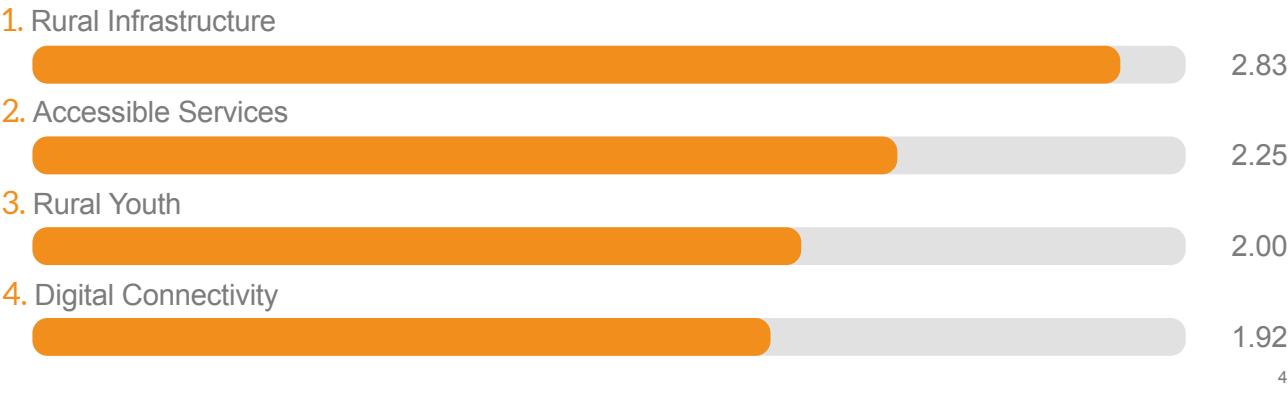
3.3.4 Theme 2: Rural Infrastructure and Social Inclusion

The need for basic services to be delivered locally and in community owned businesses was a strong message across the county. New facilities, improved facilities and improved access to facilities and services was a common feature at each level of the consultation process. The greater need for inter-generational, cross-community shared spaces within towns and villages was identified. This was of particular importance to many towns and villages across Wicklow who are currently welcoming many immigrants as well as many new Irish people who are choosing to buy homes and settle in Wicklow. People who do not have historical roots in the area need to be facilitated in participating in community activities and culture.

Inclusion was a common thread across all meetings and related to gender, age, disability, sexuality, race, ethnicity and nationality.

When the LAG Partners were ranking the sub-themes under this Theme, rural infrastructure came out as the highest priority. This again was broadly reflective of the community based, public meetings.

Please rank where you think Social Inclusion funding should be prioritised?



² Arklow Consultation Theme 1 issues
³ Blessington Consultation Theme 1 issues
⁴ LAG Partners Rural Infrastructure & Social Inclusion Sub Theme ranking

The need for non-sports activities was also a strong theme as was the need for youth and culture-based projects to help develop a greater sense of place. These 'place making' activities were discussed at all consultations.

During discussions about rural youth, there was a greater communication of needs for under 18's rather than the LEADER defined rural youth. These included playgrounds, youth facilities, mental health initiatives or youth activities. When pressed on the need to create a vibrant rural community to entice more 18-40year olds to live, work and socialise in rural towns and villages, examples such as youth arts projects, community environment / climate projects and an increased amount of social outlets were suggested as being important for young people of that age.

Below are word clouds generated from the Slido feedback on the Rural Infrastructure and Social Inclusion Theme.

What are the social inclusion NEEDS in your community?



5

What are the social inclusion NEEDS in your community?



6

The issues raised under Rural Infrastructure and Social Inclusion are varied. Many of them can be addressed quickly and with a few strategic investments made in the county. Others require lengthy animation and co-operation work to engage marginalised groups and new communities.

Wicklow LEADER Partners want to reflect all of the communicated issues and allow for a wide variety of projects to come forward for funding subject to programme operating rules.

3.3.5 Theme 3: Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaption

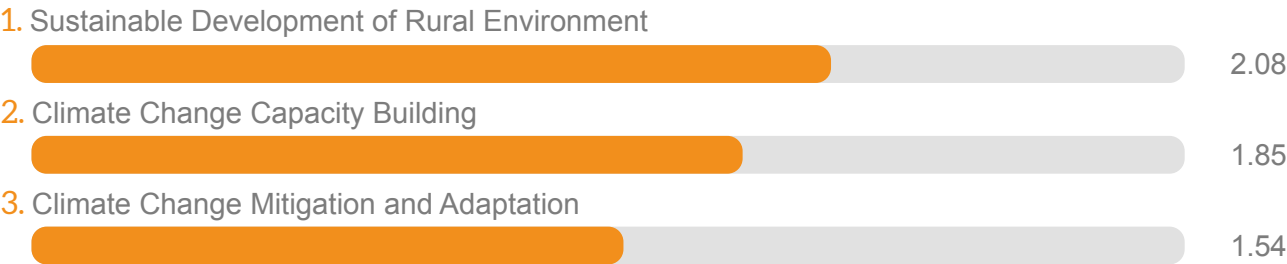
Across all consultation meetings, people clearly articulated the great and imminent need for action on Climate Change and Biodiversity crises. However, when prompted, many people were still unsure about what kinds of projects they should engage in. As a result, education was the primary need identified as well as support to help communities identify and carry out projects.

The LAG partners reflected this sentiment when prioritising subthemes and identifying projects for funding.

⁵ Glenview Consultation Theme 2 issues

⁶ Tinahely Consultation Theme 2 issues

Please rank where you think Environment and Climate Action funding should be prioritised?



On discussing this sub theme, suggested projects included citizen-science river water sampling, community gardens and allotments and more planting for biodiversity. Communities would also like to see examples of projects of different scales locally. The environment stakeholders interviewed impressed the need for greater sharing of stories and examples to help inspire and inform other communities, groups and organisations about what kinds of projects work. The circular economy also featured in the feedback received on Slido as well as greater need for environment services such as EV charging and water refill stations to be widely available.

What are the environment and climate action NEEDS in your community?

What are the environment and climate action NEEDS in your community?



3.3.6 Local Objectives

Based on all of the above feedback, ideas and suggestions, it was agreed by Wicklow LEADER Partners to include all of the suggested subthemes as Local Objectives. These local objectives will be further refined into actions on the LDS Action Plan in Section 5.

An additional Local Action was identified to help support the subthemes outlined in the LDS Guidelines. This Local Action to allow LEADER support go towards Cross Cutting and Strategic LAG led initiatives is important to delivery of the whole strategy. While many projects under each theme will come forward from broad animation and promotion of the programme and its funding, it was deemed important to strategically allocate funding for activities required to help animate those projects and initiatives that do not evolve so quickly. Having a distinct local objective to focus on animation and capacity building activities will ensure that there is a targeted and focused effort at including marginalised groups. This

⁷ LAG Partners Environment Sub Theme Ranking
⁸ Rathdrum Environment issues
⁹ Baltinglass Environment issues

local objective will also enable the LAG to react quickly to any changes in the community with suitable interventions as necessary.

Wicklow LEADER Partners have extensive experience in delivering capacity building, training initiatives and studies, which lay the bedrock of future development work.

Examples of projects identified and designed internally in CWP with support from stakeholders in external and partner organisations during the 2014 – 2022 LEADER programme include:

- Social enterprise strategy and training programmes,
- Support on the development of a food strategy and investment in Wicklow Naturally
- SMART villages training and international co-operation project
- Investment in climate change and biodiversity awareness raising initiatives
- The creation of a craft strategy and craft network
- Training for tourism and food businesses in social media
- Outdoor recreation studies
- Training to support youth and social enterprise initiatives pivot during Covid

While these projects took significant time and resources to design, tender and project manage, they have had a great return on investment in terms of the outcomes achieved and enabled flexibility in our responses to emerging needs and to address gaps when projects did not come forward naturally. These projects were managed by CWP and supported by WCC with financing and cash flow. It is the ambition of Wicklow LEADER Partners to continue this animating activity and to remain responsive to unforeseen needs.

Potential examples could be:

- Identifying models of engagement with historically hard to reach and marginalised communities as well as new communities in County Wicklow
- Expanding understanding of the SMART communities model and place making
- Cross cutting climate action and biodiversity initiatives
- Support for networks in identified sectors as well as young people and women in business.

3.3.7 Cross Cutting Themes

In order to make sure of a well-balanced, innovative and socially inclusive community and economy for Co Wicklow, while equally ensuring that climate change mitigation and adaptation is to the fore, this LDS has been developed with the two cross-cutting objectives as referenced in Theme 3, as core underlying principles to be considered under all themes: –

- Sustainable Development
- Climate Change, Mitigation and Adaptation

The consultation process was undertaken with these core principles to the forefront. Actions have been designed and proofed against these core principles across all the three LEADER themes for the 2023 – 2027 programme. The following understanding was central to the planning and development of the Wicklow LDS.

Sustainable Development

To support our communities, economy and environment, this LDS will encourage a creative and innovative approach to sustainability. Small businesses will be supported to develop and grow through sustainable thinking and product innovation and local job creation. Equally, communities will be encouraged and supported to develop unique and sustainably creative solutions to local problems and

to pilot innovative area-based approaches, while keeping the environmental impact and climate change to the fore. The seven LEADER principles and the CLLD methodology will be utilised to animate all projects being considered under the programme.

New models and flexible ways of delivering sustainable concepts will also be supported within 'hard to reach' communities in order to achieve sustainable long-term development. Learning and effective models of delivery and practices from other regions will energise creative thinking at local level. This LDS contains actions and approaches that seek to provide a positive bedrock for sustainable innovative development and will prioritise interventions that seek to find inventive solutions to the issue of climate change at local level.

Climate Change, Mitigation & Adaptation

Wicklow's LDS seeks to contribute towards the reduction of the county's carbon footprint and acknowledges that there is a need for awareness raising and capacity building in this area. Building practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions will be encouraged and supported within Wicklow's business and community sector. Businesses that seek to explore renewable sources of energy will be prioritised as Ireland grows closer to its 2030 greenhouse gases reduction target. In addition, this LDS acknowledges that climate change and biodiversity are inextricably linked and that biodiversity itself can support efforts to reduce the negative effects of climate change through conserved habitats. Communities in Wicklow will be supported to develop local biodiversity projects in line with best practice sustainable development.

The actions contained in this strategy will ensure that Wicklow's environment is protected through expert knowledge, advice, and best practice guidance towards sustainable development to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Wicklow Specific Cross Cutting Themes

Wicklow LAG will endeavour to apply further cross cutting themes to ensure balanced rural development and that projects are not activated in isolation of the other priorities of the programme.

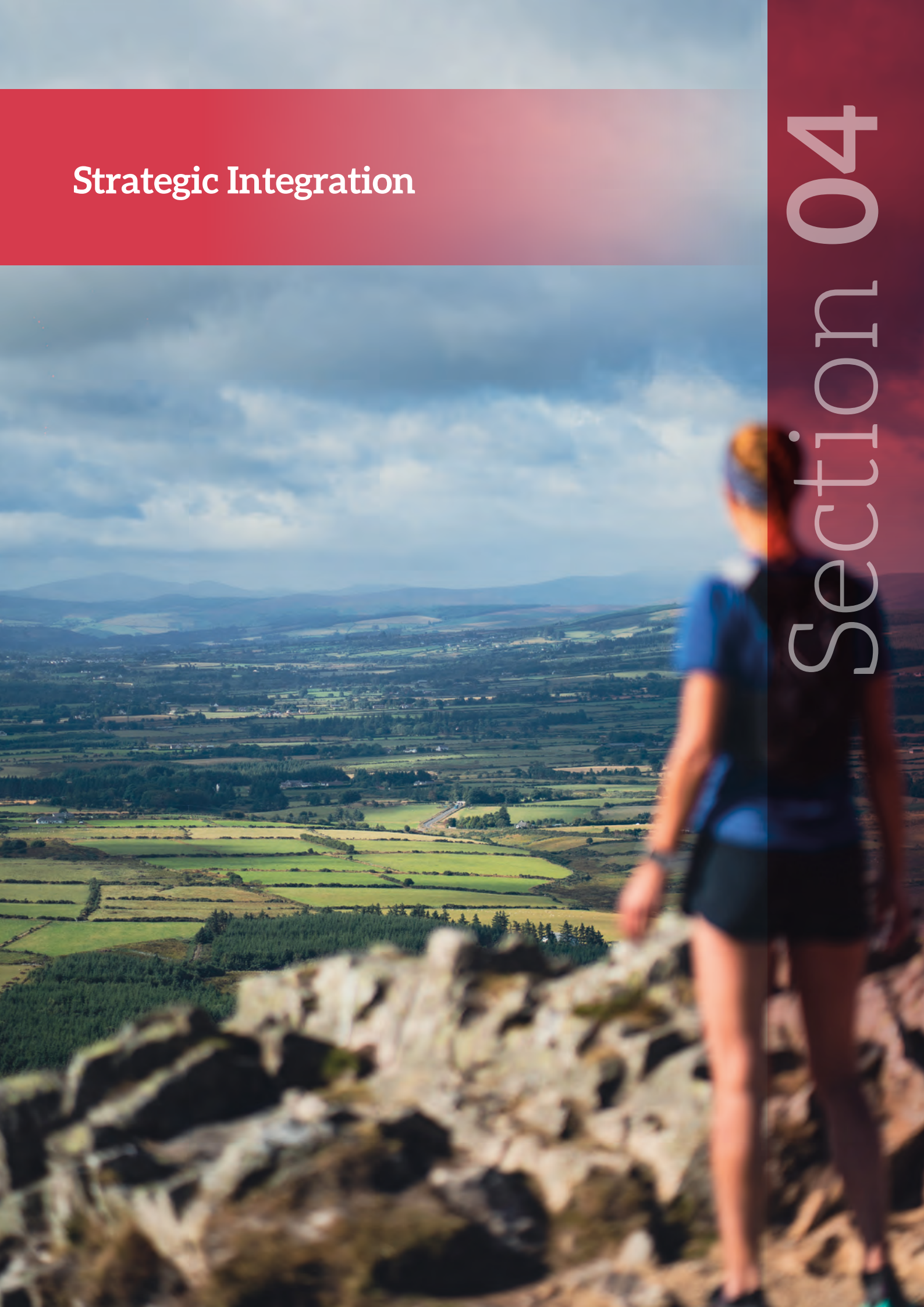
Any projects that support the development of vibrant rural Wicklow will be encouraged and supported to make applications under the programme. This will include deliberation of whether projects support:

- the creation of quality employment
- marginalised groups, youth and women
- place making
- the SMART communities concept

These cross-cutting themes will be implemented through the LEADER Evaluation Committee scoring sheet and in LAG project policies, which will be developed before the 2023 – 2027 Programme is rolled out.

Strategic Integration

Section 04



Strategic Integration

4.1 Introduction

As one of a number of strategies targeted at local development in rural areas, it is vital that this LDS complements and feeds into an integrated approach to rural development. For the purposes of demonstrating strategic alignment of the objectives of this strategy, relevant international policies and EU, national, regional, and local plans have been consulted and included. It is not possible to include them all here however brief descriptions of the most relevant are presented in this chapter. New and emerging policies and thinking will also be incorporated at strategic levels throughout the lifetime of this strategy. To illustrate the extent of Wicklow LAGs commitment to alignment and integration in practice, this chapter also includes sections on networking and co-operation at all levels.

4.2 Policy Context

4.2.1 International and EU Policies

International policies this LDS aims to closely align to include the UN Sustainable Development Goals and EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Specific policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy 2023 – 2027, the European Green Deal, SMART Villages Initiative and EU Rural Pact also provide a roadmap for the approach being taken through this LDS and are also key themes in national, regional and local planning policy. While all referenced plans have been considered in the development of this LDS, only those prioritised for this LDS are being cited.



Launched over 60 years ago in 1962, the EU's **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** is a partnership between agriculture and society, and between Europe and its farmers. The current CAP Programme runs from 2023 to 2027 and includes a package of almost €10 billion for rural Ireland. Particularly important to communities and rural businesses is the LEADER Rural Development Programme element of the CAP Programme which funds the development and implementation of Local Development Strategies across the EU. A total of €180 million has been approved for funding LEADER projects across Ireland from mid-2023 under the themes of; Economic Development & Job Creation, Rural Infrastructure & Social Inclusion and Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment and Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation. Wicklow has hugely benefited the implementation of the LEADER programme over the last 30 years and Wicklow LAG welcomes the opportunity to continue to do so into the future.

The **European Green Deal 2019 – 2050** introduced by the European Commission in December 2019, is a comprehensive package of policy initiatives that set out to address climate change, protect biodiversity, promote sustainable agriculture, foster clean energy transition and ensure a circular economy to make the EU's economy sustainable, climate neutral and environmentally friendly by 2050. This policy is to be actioned through the Just Transitions Framework which will help member states to achieve this aim. This vision is incorporated into the LDS for Wicklow and is reflected and included in the LDS Action Plan.

The **EU Rural Pact** was launched by the EU commission in 2021 and is the Long-term Vision for the Rural Areas. It aims to create sustainable, resilient and inclusive rural areas that contribute to the overall well-being and prosperity of the country by 'amplifying rural voices and bring them higher on the political agenda, structuring and enabling networking, collaboration and mutual learning and encouraging and monitoring voluntary commitments to act for the vision'. While this vision may vary based on specific local priorities and needs, some elements are inter-territorial and are considered

in the development of this LDS through animation, capacity building, networking and co-operation actions.

The **EU Action for SMART Villages** initiative was launched by the European Commission in 2017. While there is no legal definition of a 'smart village' within EU legislation, Smart Villages (more commonly referred to as 'SMART communities' including rural towns in an Irish context) are rural communities that leverage innovative technologies and approaches to enhance the quality of life, economic opportunities and sustainability of rural areas and local communities. Much has been achieved in the development of this concept through LEADER in Wicklow in recent years including the successful delivery of a transnational project, the emergence of a local SMART Villages network and the establishment of links with a number of communities across the EU and beyond through EU SMART villages and S-Communities networks. This is evident in the Cross-Cutting and Strategic LAG led initiatives of this LDS action plan.

4.2.2 National Policies & Frameworks

National policies provide a clear roadmap to follow in the development of local plans including the Wicklow LDS. Overarching plans including **Our Rural Future** and **Project Ireland 2040** provide the main framework pertaining to rural development.

Government, state body and national authority policies and strategies influencing specific sectoral areas of the LDS include:

- Delivering our Green Potential – Government Policy Statement on Growth and Employment in the Green Economy
- The Climate Action Plan 2023
- White Paper on Enterprise
- Rural Economic Development in Ireland - Teagasc
- Food Wise 2025
- Ireland's Ancient East (2017)
- Path To Growth, People, Place and Policy - Growing Tourism to 2025
- National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027
- Coillte Recreation Policy 2016
- The National Landscape Strategy (NLS)
- National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022
- National Remote Working Strategy
- Heritage Ireland 2030
- Sustainable Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland 2019 – 2024
- Connecting Ireland – Rural Mobility Plan
- The National Volunteering Strategy 2021 – 2025
- Healthy Ireland Framework 2019-2025
- Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children & young
- National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making

Desk research was carried out on the above documents to fully inform the development of this LDS. This list of documents is not exhaustive and policies at this level are too numerous to reference individually so a brief synopsis of national documents of priority to the delivery of this LDS only will be described

here. It must also be noted that several local strategies are in place relating to specific sectoral areas e.g. climate action, tourism, remote working, digital optimisation and social inclusion. These local plans reflect the aims and objectives of national policies in these sectors while also providing specific direction for the LDS at county level. Local strategies of priority to the LDS actions will be presented later in the chapter.

Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021 – 2025 is of significant strategic importance and provides a framework for the development of rural Ireland over the next five years transforming the quality of life and opportunity for people living in rural areas in the context of a post-COVID-19 recovery and Brexit environment. The vision is “for a thriving rural Ireland which is integral to our national economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing and development. An Ireland which is built on the interdependence of urban and rural areas, recognises the centrality of people, the importance of vibrant and lived-in rural places, and the potential to create quality jobs and sustain our shared environment”. This is to be achieved through the following themes: optimising digital connectivity, supporting employment and careers in rural areas, revitalising rural towns and villages, enhancing participation, leadership and resilience in rural communities, enhancing public services in rural areas, transitioning to a carbon neutral society, supporting the sustainability of agriculture, the marine and forestry and supporting the sustainability of coastal communities. The actions are overarching and are illustrated across all themes of the LDS action plan.

Project Ireland 2040 - The National Planning Framework (NPF) published in February 2018, is a 20-year high level strategic plan to guide development and investment in Ireland. The companion to the NPF is the National Development Plan (NDP), a ten-year strategy for public investment. Their joint publication as ‘Project Ireland 2040’ enables the alignment of investment with spatial planning. The NPF highlights the importance of a more environmental and climate focused approach to planning and recognises the pressures of development in urban areas and the importance of reversing population decline in rural towns and villages. The NPF seeks to enable opportunity through the key principles of SMART specialisation, clustering, orderly growth, placemaking and future proofing. These key elements are also echoed in LDS actions.

The **White Paper on Enterprise** contains seven priority enterprise policy objectives: integrating decarbonisation and net zero commitments, placing digital transformation at the heart of enterprise policy, advancing Ireland’s FDI and Trade value proposition, strengthening the Irish-owned exporting sector, enabling locally trading sectors to thrive, stepping up enterprise innovation and building on strengths and opportunities. These will primarily be supported through the economic development and job creation themes of LEADER and are evident in LDS actions relating to the green economy and the development of rural enterprise.

Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, developed an umbrella destination package called **Ireland’s Ancient East – Path To Growth (IAE)** in 2017. ‘Ireland’s Ancient East provides visitors to the Emerald Isle with the perfect opportunity to explore and discover 5000 years of Ireland’s history and culture’. The initiative covers 17 counties including Wicklow and is segmented into three unique areas, The Land of 5000 Dawns, The Historic Heartlands and The Celtic Coast.

Under IAE, each county will also have a **Destination Experience Development Plan (DEDP)**. Tendering for the DEDP for Wicklow is due to commence later in 2023 once the Masterplan for Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park is completed by WCC. Fáilte Ireland were consulted directly in the preparation of this plan to ensure LDS tourism actions aligned to the proposed objectives of the DEDP for Wicklow. Overall, the combination of historic and cultural heritage, natural beauty, proximity to Dublin and the range of outdoor, indoor and cultural activities on offer make Wicklow a highly attractive tourist destination and this LDS will work towards enhancing this offering through its tourism actions.

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport acknowledged the importance of the role played by local communities in contributing to Ireland’s tourism product and experience in its 2015 report, **People, Place and Policy - Growing Tourism to 2025**. ‘People and Place’ and the concept of placemaking feature heavily and the plan refers to the important role of communities in maintaining and improving

the quality of both our inland waterways and coastal locations, the protection of native biodiversity, soil quality and geology, and the maintenance of our high level of air quality. Proposed LDS actions such as support for community tourism initiatives and citizen science related environmental activities reflect the sentiments of this policy.

4.2.3 Regional Policy

The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) was established in 2015 to guide policy making, provide monitoring & oversight and to enhance the coordination of the counties which form the mid-east region; Wicklow Kildare, Meath and Louth. The **Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)** 'identifies the region's key strategic assets, opportunities and challenges and sets out policy responses to ensure that people's needs such as access to housing, jobs, ease of travel and overall well-being are met, up to 2030 and beyond'. The RSES sets out a spatial plan, economic strategy, metropolitan plan, investment framework and climate action strategy for the region. Several opportunities have been identified for Wicklow specifically based on unique local assets such as:

- Strong network of Wicklow County and Market Towns
- Regional Ports in Arklow and Wicklow Town
- Bray as the location of Ardmore Studios, its accessibility by public transport and retail, service and industrial sectors
- Wicklow-Rathnew as a major employment and tourism / recreation hub
- Administrative services provided by Wicklow Town
- The Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) of the RSES identifies strategic areas for infrastructure and services in Wicklow including the North-South Corridor (DART), Strategic Employment Locations Bray, Fassaroe, Greystones
- Redevelopment of IDA sites at Greystones

This LDS will coordinate actions to ensure it aligns with the RSES and **Mid-East Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024** which states the following key objectives for the region:

- Position the Mid-East as the primary location for the development of agri-food hubs
- Develop and operate a Content Creation Enterprise Hub at Wicklow County Campus
- Enable the development and expansion of equine businesses across the mid-east
- Develop key projects that facilitate job creation opportunities that result in the transition to a low carbon economy
- Support the continued development of a positive enterprise ecosystem in the Mid-East.

4.2.4 Local Policies and Plans

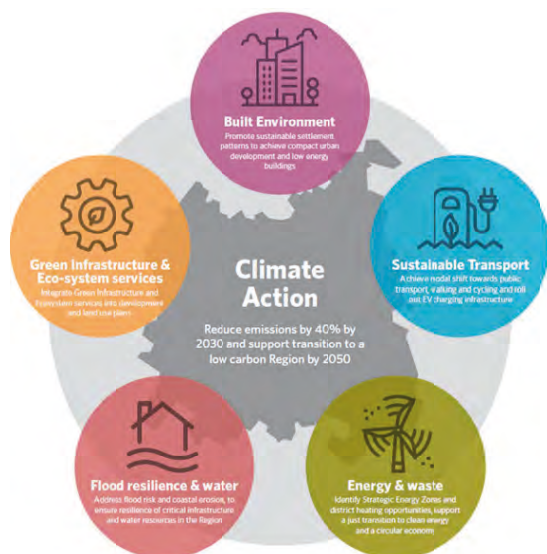
The **County Development Plan (CDP)** sets out a strategic spatial framework and 'bigger picture' planning considerations for the proper planning and sustainable development of County Wicklow for the period 2022 and 2028. While it focuses on this time period as paramount, it is also framed towards the long-term development objectives of the County beyond 2028. A core strategy demonstrates alignment with national and regional development objectives and takes account of projected population information.

As outlined in the socio-economic profile, the positioning of the mountain range has created a socio-cultural habitus of east, west, and south which causes real challenges for the identity of Wicklow as a single county. Many people in the western region of the county are physically closer to the large towns of Naas and Carlow and consider themselves to be disadvantaged by distance from the eastern administration capital of Wicklow Town. The same disadvantage is evident in the south of the county. This feeling of disconnect is further compounded by the requirement on rural dwellers in the south

and west of the county to register in adjoining counties in order to access many mainstream public services, including schools and colleges. The lack of transport and linked transport further compounds this problem and adds to a sense of isolation. These differences cause further problems in terms of obtaining a true picture when statistically quantifying needs and service provision in the county.

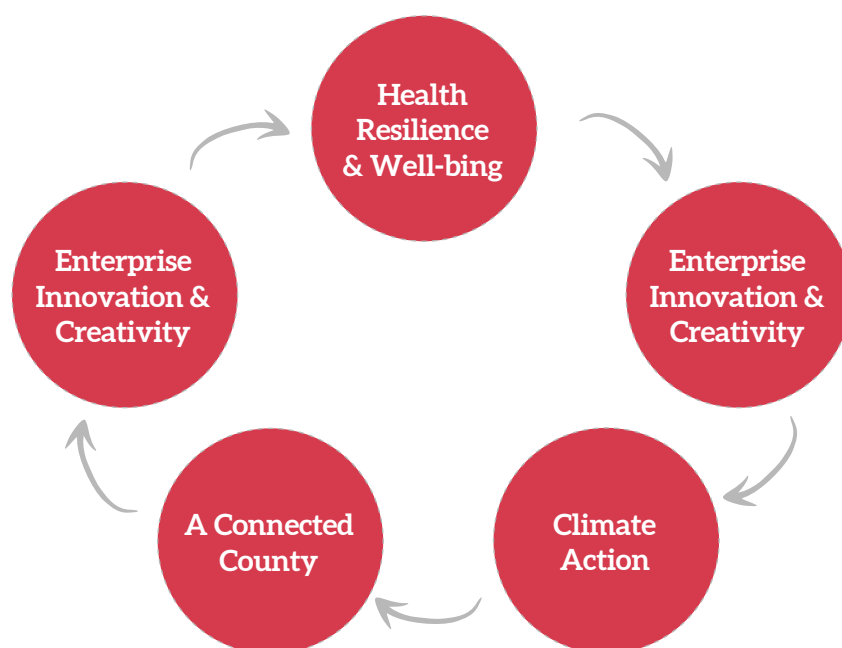
Three main themes based on the framework provided by the RSES form the basis of the CDP: Healthy Placemaking, Economic Opportunity and Climate Action. The CDP is comprehensive in its scope with chapters provided on core strategy, settlement strategy, town and village centres (placemaking and regeneration), housing, community development, built heritage, economic development, retail, tourism and recreation, sustainable transportation, water services, flood risk management, waste and environmental emissions, information communications and energy, natural heritage and biodiversity, green infrastructure, marine planning and coastal zone management. An implementation and monitoring plan is also provided. The LECP and this LDS will aid the delivery of the CDP through direct interventions to drive the physical, economic and social development of the county.

This LDS seeks to support the CDP to achieve balanced regional development throughout the entire county, which is evident in the targeting and prioritising of under-developed, under-resourced and geographically disadvantaged areas as specified in LDS actions.



(Source CDP/ RSES)

Focused on delivering the objectives of the CDP and rooted in community, **Wicklow's Local Economic Community Plan (LECP)** aims to support and steer the economic, social and cultural development of the county over the next six years. At its essence, the Wicklow LECP seeks a strong collaboration between grass roots community, all relevant community focused agencies and any applicable framework documents (both existing and new) to ensure best impact. Through this methodology, Wicklow's LECP aims to 'harness maximum synergy across the community planning framework for the county'. The LECP is currently in draft so some of the detail may be amended in the coming months. The draft LECP has identified five high-level goals; Health, Resilience and Well-being, Enterprise, Innovation and Creativity, Climate Action, A Connected County and Equality, Diversity and Just Transition.



The Enterprise, Innovation and Creativity goals provide for the following: support skills development, promote sustainable tourism, support a vibrant creative and screen sector, sustainable expansion of the food and beverage sector, development of the circular and green economies, capitalise on natural resources, develop the social enterprise sector, promote a thriving green economy, promote climate action and green skills training, support low carbon enterprises and address any gaps in enterprise centre space in the county.

Under Climate Action the objectives are focused on environmental proofing, community climate action initiatives, supporting enterprises to deliver on climate change targets, biodiversity and the development of renewable energy opportunities.

A Connected County is to be fostered through improved transport infrastructure, quality broadband and improved facilities for remote working and co-working. Ensuring that an increase in digital services does not exclude people from society is also an objective here.

The goal of Equality, Diversity and Just transition is to be achieved through the following objectives: support diversity including the integration of minority groups, promote inclusion, equality and community engagement, a fair approach to climate action through just transition, and address gaps in service provision.

Health, Resilience and Well-being features objectives relating to social regeneration, a strong civil society, community, sport and recreational infrastructure, improving health and health equity, well-being of children and young people, well-being and quality of life of older people, community safety and the provision of strategic direction for service delivery including but not limited to SICAP and LEADER.

CWP is a key delivery partner in relation to many of the LECP goals and objectives referred to above. This is evident in the mirroring of many of these objectives in the LDS action plan. This close alignment of the Wicklow LDS with the LECP will ensure a stronger impact for enterprises and communities on the ground.

While the LECP steers this LDS in a holistic way, there are also a number of **local sector specific strategies** and plans in place that guide strategic direction on different aspects of climate action, economic development and social inclusion. Local strategies have particular significance to this LDS as CWP and Wicklow LAG are often specifically named as a partner or implementing body through programmes delivered including LEADER and SICAP.

Many of these **local strategies** have been prepared by WCC including: Wicklow Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, Wicklow Food and Beverage Strategy, Wicklow Tourism and Marketing Plan,

Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy, Glendalough & Wicklow Mountains National Park Masterplan (draft), Wicklow Screen Strategy, Wicklow Digital Strategy, Healthy Wicklow, Slaintecare, Wicklow Age Friendly Strategy, Wicklow Food Poverty Research Report and Local Link Rural Transport Programme Strategic Plan. These plans have all fed into the development of the LECP which is referenced above. While all of these strategies are important and will be referenced throughout the implementation period of this LDS a brief synopsis of those most relevant to the LDS action plan is provided below.

In March 2019 over 800 students in Wicklow participated in the School Strike for Climate. In response WCC became the first local authority in Ireland to declare a climate and biodiversity emergency. The **Wicklow Climate Change Adaptation Strategy** was prepared by WCC under the guidance of the Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) and was adopted by Council in September 2019. The plan acknowledges how the effects of climate change are already evident in Wicklow and are expected to continue into the future. The science of climate change, current policies, the Wicklow context in terms of topography and population and a suite of proposed actions for climate adaptation and mitigation under six themes are presented - local adaptation governance and business operations, infrastructure and built environment, land use and development, drainage and flood management, natural resources and cultural infrastructure and community health and well-being. Wicklow LDS actions align closest to themes 5 and 6 here which are focused on the natural environment and informed and resilient communities. Specific actions are outlined under theme 3 of this LDS.

The **Wicklow Food and Beverage Strategy 2019-2022** provides direction for Wicklow to become a place for high quality food production and a destination for food lovers. The strategy has five goals: tell the Wicklow food story, develop a food activity calendar, increase food stakeholder networking, get local food to local consumers and provide appropriate business supports to assist start up and established local food and beverage producers grow their business. This plan is currently being updated. Through LEADER, Wicklow LAG has been instrumental in providing support for the implementation of this strategy and will continue to do so through its next phase. This is reflected in LDS actions under the support for food enterprises sub-theme.

Wicklow Tourism Strategy and Marketing Plan 2018 – 2023 guides the tourism sector in Wicklow through the following aims: establish Wicklow as a year-round destination, capture more overnight tourism, encourage the provision of alternative forms of accommodation, convert day visitors to staying visitors, integrate development of tourism infrastructure and assets, strategic marketing and promotion and sustainable development. This is to be achieved through the priority actions of new accommodation, key towns as visitor hubs, masterplan for Glendalough, growing thematic experiences and developing a common narrative. The tourism actions of this LDS will contribute directly to these as support for accommodation, indoor/outdoor activities, festivals and events and community heritage tourism all feature in the LDS action plan.

Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2020 – 2025 was developed by Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee (WORC) a local stakeholder representative group. This plan defines outdoor recreation as a sector that 'includes all sports and physical activities undertaken either formally or socially in natural outdoor settings.' Participation in outdoor recreation has increased significantly since COVID-19 and this poses challenges as well as opportunities for the sector in Wicklow. The strategy aims to support more quality outdoor opportunities, programmes and places, encourage enjoyment and discovery and to create more awareness of the product offering. This local strategy closely aligns to the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2027 and the principles of Comhairle na Tuaithe. Minimising impact, the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and policies including Leave No Trace are key cornerstones. The LDS action plan features specific interventions for outdoor recreation under the rural tourism sub-theme that can help achieve these aims e.g. Blueway and Greenway development, trails infrastructure, ancillary infrastructure, clustering opportunities etc.

Wicklow Digital Strategy 2019 – 2022 is aligned to the aims of the Digital Ireland Framework and focused on the themes of improving digital skills for all, increased opportunities for remote working, and building infrastructure to encourage greater use of digital technology in all aspects of life. Much has been achieved since this plan was adopted. Wicklow has benefited greatly from the National Broadband

Plan with 8 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) now installed at community facilities across the county. While unserved pockets still remain, Wicklow largely has good broadband infrastructure. A new digital strategy for Wicklow is currently being prepared by Wicklow's Broadband Officer who was consulted in the development of this LDS to ensure alignment with the new plan. Potential actions are detailed under the optimising digital connectivity sub-theme of the LDS action plan.

The **County Wicklow Screen Sector Development Strategy 2022 – 2026** sets out the county's objectives and actions to support the growth of Wicklow's local film and television production. There are two central pillars - the development of a Content Creation Enterprise Hub and the rebranding and upgrading of the Wicklow Film Office to Screen Wicklow. Taking the two central pillars of this strategy together there are two subsequent major areas that can be developed and advanced to enhance County Wicklow as a screen content hub - skills development of the workforce and bolstering domestic screen content production. These actions will be built upon through the Economic Development actions of this LDS.

A number of LAG-led **CWP Strategies** are also of importance to this LDS. As a local development company operating across the county, CWP has strived to inform strategic direction in specific sectors where gaps were evident and the company has a clear remit. Most recent examples of this are the development of a Social Enterprise Strategy and a Craft Strategy for Wicklow. CWP also has a primary role in the implementation of actions recommended through these strategies which are specifically referenced under the enterprise development and social, community and co-operative enterprises sub-themes of the LDS action plan. CWP has also identified rural youth and SMART communities as areas that could benefit from similar strategic supports under LEADER in the future.

Social Enterprises seek to achieve a social, societal, or environmental impact, rather than maximizing profit. The National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022 acknowledges that such enterprises are gaining recognition as a component of the overall entrepreneurial ecosystem. **Wicklow Social Enterprise Strategy 2019-2022** and **Wicklow Social Enterprise Review 2023** echoes many of the national social enterprise policy themes and aims to implement the following actions locally: deliver dedicated project supports, promote the concept of social enterprise, demonstration social enterprises, sustainability via collaboration, scaling up, creating social value, supporting leadership and forging alliances.

Social enterprises in Wicklow are expanding and deliver a wide range of services including childcare, eldercare, recycling, and community cafes. Many have received training, mentoring and capital supports through the LEADER programme 2014-2022 with nearly €1million committed to social enterprises in Wicklow during this period. However since Covid 19, Brexit and the war in Ukraine, many are now operating in a difficult environment, are still dependent on funding supports and are reliant on a high level of volunteerism. This LDS makes provision for interventions in this space that will help social enterprises reduce their dependency on grants and to build more sustainable income streams. This will be achieved through targeted collaborative actions that will address Wicklow's social enterprises at various levels of development whilst ensuring that social entrepreneurial environment is created and supported. Specific attention will be driven in the area of Rural Youth Social Enterprise development which is reflected in the Social Enterprise Review document.

The **Wicklow Craft Strategy 2023-2027** provides a clear strategic roadmap for the development of the craft sector in the County. Set across 3 strategic Pillars – a visible and viable craft economy, a collaborative, connected and supported craft community and an innovative, knowledgeable and contemporary craft sector it holds five actionable priorities – the development of Wicklow craft clusters, Wicklow craft trail, development of a craft strategy group and craft liaison officer, Wicklow craft and design branding and website and Education, Training, Development and Supports. The overall aim is to help create a more cohesive, collaborative and supportive network for those working in the traditional and contemporary craft sectors in Co Wicklow. This LDS will support relevant actions under the Economic Development theme.

4.3 Networking

4.3.1 Partnerships

Wicklow has a strong history of working in partnerships based on mutual respect. Both the LCDC and the LDC as Implementing Partner have built up strong network linkages at local, regional and national level.

This strong base of working collectively will be continued through the work of this LDS. As outlined in Section 1, the collective membership of the LCDC offers immediate access to a wide network of representatives from the community, economic, and environmental pillars through their respective networks, departments, programmes and communities, representing a robust joined up approach.

Many initiatives achieved to date in the county have been reached as a result of strong collaboration between relevant agencies. There are many examples of successful projects made possible as a result of co-operation between the community, private, statutory, and non-statutory bodies at various levels. Partnership projects include playgrounds, trails, and multi-use games areas throughout the county. Wicklow's Outdoor Recreation Committee draws all relevant partners together in the pursuit of sustainable recreation development and management.

This LAG recognises that effective and targeted networking provides an opportunity for greater dissemination of information, enables peer-to-peer learning, stimulates innovation, and promotes good practice. Wicklow LCDC representatives and its partners will participate in the following local, regional, national, and international networking structures to ensure shared learning and good practice in relation to the roll out of the 2023-2027 LEADER Programme. In addition, thematic clusters will be formed as programme animation gets underway and networks at county, local, and higher levels will emerge organically. Wicklow LAG and partners intend to participate fully in relevant networks to ensure cross-learning and models of good practice are part of the work of this LDS.

4.3.2 Local Networks

LAG and LAG Partner representation on existing and future Local Networks is as follows:

Tourism

- Wicklow County Tourism
- Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy Committee (WORC)
- Wicklow Tourism Alliance
- Wicklow Way Management Committee

Enterprise

- Wicklow Naturally Food & Beverage Network
- Wicklow Social Enterprise Network (emerging)
- Wicklow Craft Strategy group (emerging)
- Local Enterprise Office (LEO)
- LEO Women in Enterprise Network

Community

- PPN
- Social Inclusion Networks
- Wicklow SMART Villages network (emerging)
- Town Teams

Youth

- Comhairle na nÓg
- West Wicklow Rural Youth Consortium (emerging)

Environment

- Wicklow Uplands Council
- Wicklow Environmental Network (emerging)
- Wicklow Heritage Forum

Renewable Energy

- Wicklow Private Woodland Owners Group
- SEAI sustainable communities

Other

- LAG Evaluation Committee
- Wicklow Network for Older People
- Wicklow Local Link
- Various SICAP Networks involving – women/youth/new residents/etc.
- Wicklow RSS Scheme and Tús Programme
- Various inter-agency groups

4.3.3 Regional and National Networks

Participation on networks at national level serves as effective channels through which rural policy development can be influenced. Wicklow LCDC together with CWP fully understand the importance of this role and representation on such networks on behalf of the LCDC. Wicklow LCDC will participate on relevant networks in order to effectively participate, share, and learn from this cluster approach.

In addition, the LCDC as a cross-sectoral representative body will be in a position to influence national policy through its engagement in policy discussions, submissions and participation in various inter-departmental groups.

LAG and LAG Partner representation on existing and future national and regional networks is as follows:

National

- National Rural Network (NRN)
- Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)
- County & City Management Association (CCMA)
- Department of Rural and Community Development Operating Rules Working Group
- Various Department clusters/networks/sub groups
- Various sectoral networks as relevant to the work of the LDS
- Office of Government Procurement (OGP) Procurement Network

Regional

- Ireland's Ancient East LEADER Regional Network
- Various inter-territorial and trans-national networks that may be required
- Rural Development Officers Regional Network (Wicklow/Carlow/Wexford/Laois/Offaly/Kildare/Kilkenny/Rural Dublin)
- Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)
- Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly

4.3.4 International Networks

Participation on networks at international level has been crucial to CWP in finding potential partners for LEADER co-operation which is key for learning and developing good practice at local and community level. LAG and LAG Partner representation on existing and future International Networks include:

- European LEADER Association of Rural Development (ELARD): This network offers potential to engage with up to 1,075 LAGs from 23 countries
- Transnational Partners/Networks – This network will be formed as a result of trans-national projects and will have effective clusters where new innovative area-based approaches and models of best practice can be shared and disseminated among the partners.
- EU SMART Villages Network
- EU S-Communities Network

4.3.5 Collaboration with Other Agencies

As the implementing partner, CWP brings over 30 years' experience working collaboratively with numerous agencies and support programmes at local, regional, and national levels. CWP is committed to this partnership approach, which aligns with the core principles of LEADER, and has proven highly successful in generating greater impact for individuals and communities. Additionally, CWP recognizes the importance of avoiding duplication of efforts and strives to ensure that limited resources are directed towards areas with the greatest need.

The following are the main statutory and community service providers in Wicklow that are relevant to and will support the implementation of strategic LEADER actions and operations outlined in this LDS:

- Wicklow County Council
- Local Enterprise Office (LEO)
- Enterprise Ireland
- Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)
- Fáilte Ireland
- Visit Wicklow – www.visitwicklow.ie
- Teagasc
- Bord Bia
- Kildare/Wicklow Education & Training Board
- Rural Link
- Coillte
- Wicklow Uplands Council
- Wicklow Public Participation Network
- Wicklow's Tús Programme
- Wicklow's Rural Social Scheme
- Wicklow's Walks Scheme
- Co Wicklow Network for Older People
- Foróige
- Wicklow National Park & Wildlife Services

4.4 Co-Operation

4.4.1 Strategic Links

Wicklow LCDC believe strongly that this LDS will be greatly enhanced through co-operation projects as a mechanism to expand future learning. Such projects will help to increase competitiveness and capacity development through sharing and disseminating of new skills and know-how through CLLD approaches. This activity is an important aspect of the LEADER methodology, supporting both the LAG and Project Promoters to engage with their partners by exchanging knowledge and understanding, leading to best practice being developed and adopted, and collaborative actions identified and animated.

There are a number of strategic actions contained in this LDS that would benefit greatly from an inter-territorial or trans-national partnership as a mechanism to learn from mistakes, broaden local views, and improve local strategies and approaches and help achieve common goals through critical mass. Potential for co-operation exists across all actions of this LDS. However it is considered to be key to LAG-led actions.

In recognition of the many benefits of transnational co-operation, CWP has been actively seeking to develop relationships with LAGs and other local actors across the EU and beyond. Through the CWP SMART Villages project 2021 - 2022 strong links were made between community groups at local and international levels between Wicklow and LAG areas in Finland, The Basque County in Spain and Poland. Projects for 2023 – 2027 in the areas of forestry, outdoor recreation, women in tourism and youth initiatives are currently being explored through these relationships.

In June 2023, CWP participated in the S-Communities symposium hosted by Vila Boa do Bispo, Portugal which brought together LAGs, academics and elected representatives from Austria, France, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Latvia, Cyprus, Spain, Portugal, Czech Republic and Poland. A wide range of potential actions across all themes were discussed through this networking opportunity and will be examined further once the programme commences.

4.4.2 Potential Inter-Territorial Co-operation Projects

Rural Tourism Inter-territorial Project

This is an inter-territorial tourism project with neighbouring counties including Carlow, Wexford and Kildare. Tourism businesses and communities in Wicklow need to ensure that they are well-positioned to take advantage of the IAE brand. Working in co-operation with neighbouring counties within IEA will strengthen Wicklow as a destination. Tour operators will offer packages to the larger sites and the LEADER Programme must work towards strengthening the offering among the more rurally dispersed smaller attractions and sites so that they can compete with the larger attractions. Sub-packages and destination clustering will present the visitor with an opportunity to drill down and engage 'off the beaten track' and experience the heritage, folklore, and traditions of rural Ireland.

Wicklow, Wexford and Waterford Blueway

Much animation and planning has been undertaken to encourage the development of a Blueway from Bray, along the coast of Wicklow and Wexford, to Waterford. This would bring a significant boost to marine tourism and would incorporate marine heritage, water-based activities and business and community clustering. Wicklow Outdoor recreation Strategy highlights the need for more marine and water opportunities, thus involvement in a cluster would serve to improve Wicklow's prospects in this area. Learning and sharing between regions would provide an opportunity for innovation and new approaches to be considered in a Wicklow context. Equally, Arklow has a strong Maritime Heritage

Museum and models of good practice can be shared among the partners. There is also opportunity to expand this project to learn from other countries e.g. the Cinque Terre and Mattinata Trail in Italy.

Other projects identified where co-operation on an inter-territorial or trans-national basis would align with this LDS include:

- Rural Youth Engagement Co-operation, Wicklow/Kildare
- Community Heritage Tourism Co-operation, Wicklow/Wexford/Carlow/Kildare
- Wicklow/Carlow Community Facilities Amenity area development

4.2.3 Potential Trans-National Co-operation Projects

Development of Added Value Timber Products for Private Woodland Growers

A strength of Wicklow is the volume of timber being grown in the county and in private lands. Currently, the price timber growers are getting for their products is not sufficient to sustain rural timber growing enterprises. A co-operation project with territories with greater experience in developing value added timber enterprises is being proposed to support Wicklow's timber growers to develop a sustainable timber enterprise. Potential partner LAGs have been identified in Finland to help progress this concept.

SMART Communities Project

This transnational project would build on the success of the CWP 2021-2022 SMART Villages project between Wicklow and LAG areas in Finland, The Basque County in Spain and Poland. This project could feature training, networking and common / mirror actions between the partner areas across a range of themes pertinent to SMART communities e.g. digital innovation, CLLD approaches, social innovation, environmental actions and climate action initiatives. New partners will also be considered and links have already been made in this regard with LAG areas in Scotland and a second LAG group in Finland.

4.3.4 Potential for Co-operation Outside of the EU

Fitzwilliam Estate – Coolattin House and Canada Connection

There is potential to establish a co-operation project between the communities of Carnew/ Shillelagh in South Wicklow with Ontario in Canada. Between 1847 and 1856, the Fitzwilliam Estate in south Wicklow arranged for 6,000 men, women and children to be transported from New Ross, Wexford on emigrant ships, such as the Dunbrody, to Quebec in Canada. Many settled in Ontario. The records of this estate are among the most comprehensive in the country and many have been digitized through the Wicklow and National Library. There is a huge connection between these two areas which was tested during The Gathering in 2013 through an initiative called 'Canada Come Home' and more recently in the Shoeboxes International Summer School 2022. Strong links have already been forged between the Coollattin Canadian Connection community group based in Carnew and Smiths Falls, Ontario.

LDS Action Plan

Section 05



Action Plan

Theme 1: Economic Development and Job Creation

Local Objective 1: Support individuals and enterprises in their actions in championing the development of Wicklow's green economy	
Financial Allocation (€)	€150,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	<p>Two Strategic Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support the creation and development of enterprises that are operating in the green economy 2. Promote the concept of the Green Economy in County Wicklow as a low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive local economy
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>Wicklow County Council (WCC) was the first local authority in Ireland to declare a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency. Nationally, Ireland has targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 42% by 2030. The 2015 Paris Agreement further highlights the immediate need to act on climate.</p> <p>The socioeconomic data shows that one third of working residents in Co. Wicklow work in the Greater Dublin Area and with over 78% of workers using private transport to access employment, there is a significant need to develop a local green economy.</p> <p>The draft LECP identifies comparable objectives in their high-level goals 1.5, 1.8 and 1.10. Local consultations strongly identified support for green economy actions. The local economy also needs to lead the way in transitioning towards a low carbon, clean, mitigating market and society.</p> <p>Government initiatives such as the Support Scheme for Renewable Heat are important drivers of demand for biomass. It would be most beneficial to Wicklow's rural economy and the timber growers in Wicklow if this biomass could be locally sourced and produced.</p> <p>The creation of renewable energy is a core solution to climate change. Support is required to help grow the adoption of new renewable energy technology in conjunction with partners in the sector.</p> <p>The circular economy requires intervention to help inform people of the importance of reducing waste but fundamentally, ensuring goods stay in circulation for as long as possible. This will require awareness raising work as well as skills development in repairing or upcycling goods.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	<p>Subtheme 1a</p> <p>The Green Economy.</p>

Strategic Action 1.1 Support the creation and development of enterprises that are operating in the green economy

Title of Strategic Action	Support the creation and development of enterprises that are operating in the green economy
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>Supporting communities, producer groups and businesses to develop bio-economy, renewable energy, biomass and any other enterprises that help support efforts at mitigating climate change and sustaining our rural areas. Green social enterprises as well as for-profit enterprises will be considered under this action.</p> <p>Enterprises who are not part of the traditional green economy but who are seeking to ensure their businesses are part of the solution to climate change and are looking to change their business model to using more sustainable practices will also be supported in this strategic action. This may include innovative solutions to energy creation or waste disposal.</p> <p>These actions may include the purchase and installation of renewable energy equipment, studies and research into models for community or producer group led actions and businesses looking to adapt their processes to reduce waste or environmental impact.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Community / Producer Groups, Private Enterprises, Social Enterprises
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership
Collaborating Organisations	WCC Environmental Section, Wicklow Uplands Council, Wicklow Timber Growers Co-operative, SEAI, Partner LAGS for potential Co-operation Projects
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	Number of Projects: 5 Number of Jobs Sustained: 5 Number of Jobs Created: 5

Strategic Action 1.2 Development of the Green Economy	
Title of Strategic Action	Promote the concept of the Green Economy in County Wicklow as a low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive local economy
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action aims to support rural communities in the transition towards a green economy. This transition requires skills development, capacity building and idea generation support for communities to identify, plan and roll out actions that support the creation and development of their local green economies.</p> <p>The circular economy will be a core theme to this action, but as the concept is not broadly known, promotion of it and developing capacity and skills in this area will be important stepping-stones to the transition to a green economy.</p> <p>Central to the circular economy is supporting efforts at keeping goods in circulation for as long as possible and reducing energy on production and on waste disposal of goods. This may include actions on repairing or upcycling goods for further use.</p> <p>Initiatives that promote local green economic actions are part of Place Making and will be supported under this action. Arklow in particular has expressed a desire to become a 'Green Town' and has been designated a 'decarbonisation zone' by WCC. Arklow wants to leverage the work being done on this project to benefit the wider economy.</p> <p>Many climate-mitigating actions are expensive or exclusionary. The inclusion of a cross section of communities in these actions will be important to ensure social inclusion and a just transition, including targeting marginalised groups and young people. Projects under this action will be required to illustrate accessibility to a cross section of society and supportive of breaking down financial barriers to the development of the green economy.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Community Groups, Town and Village Development Groups, Rural Youth, Marginalised Groups
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow, with a focus on Arklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership
Collaborating Organisations	WCC, Tidy Town Associations, Town Teams, SEAI
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects funded: 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x Training • 1 x A&D

Local Objective 2: To provide for investment in Agricultural Diversification where farmers or farm family members are seeking to increase on-farm income and sustain their farming enterprise

Financial Allocation (€)	€100,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	One Strategic Action: 1. Support for on farm enterprises through investment in capital, marketing, analysis & development (A&D) and training support
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>Entrepreneurial use of farm resources for non-agricultural purposes will be supported under this LEADER Programme. By supporting farmers and farm families to develop on farm enterprises, they can develop alternative income sources while maintaining their farm family structure as a less intensive, more environmentally sustainable model of farming than intensified farms.</p> <p>Farming in Wicklow is profitable but the profitable, intensive farms are concentrated in the south and east of the county. However, 58% of farms are in specialised beef or sheep farming which are less profitable than dairy or tillage enterprises and concentrated in upland areas.</p> <p>There is a strong connection to agriculture in the county and this was voiced in the consultations. The value of the brand of Wicklow as a food producing county is great and it was felt having a supported agriculture sector was a key part of this brand.</p> <p>Support for women and young people in farm families to diversify is key to this action. Their role in on-farm work is essential to the success of their farms but supporting them to help identify and develop additional on-farm income streams is a central ambition of this action and will contribute to sustaining vibrant rural communities for young people and farm families to live in.</p> <p>Sectors such as tourism, food production and manufacturing are typical sectors supported under agricultural diversification. Renewable energy, green economy actions and innovative rural enterprises are a target under this local action.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	Subtheme 1b Agricultural Diversification.

Strategic Action 2.1 Support for on farm enterprises	
Title of Strategic Action	Support for on farm enterprises through investment in capital, marketing, analysis & development (A&D) and training support
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This local action will enable farmers and members of on-farm families to expand their entrepreneurial skills to sectors outside of agriculture. Through support of LEADER funding, members of farm families can get assistance in the development of their ideas into action and into profitable enterprises.</p> <p>This action will focus on supporting enterprises to develop and expand including food, tourism, renewable energy, and manufacturing.</p> <p>Applicants can be micro, small or medium sized enterprises and they can be for profit or social enterprises.</p> <p>These actions will be required to help create a diverse rural economy while also sustaining traditional farming businesses.</p> <p>Particular emphasis will be placed on supporting young people and women in farm families under this action.</p> <p>Actions to be considered for support will include capital, marketing, analysis and development and training projects.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Farmers and farm family members and in particular female and younger farm family members
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow, with a focus on upland regions of Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership
Collaborating Organisations	Wicklow LEO, Teagasc, Enterprise Ireland, Network Ireland (Wicklow Branch)
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects: 5</p> <p>Number of Jobs Created: 3</p> <p>Number of Jobs Sustained: 5</p>

Local Objective 3: Support enterprises and communities to develop and enhance the Rural Tourism and Recreation product in Co. Wicklow	
Financial Allocation (€)	€700,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	<p>Three Strategic Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support for the development of existing and new innovative Tourism Enterprises 2. Promote and support Heritage, Festivals & Events and Community-based Tourism Initiatives 3. Encourage and enhance the Outdoor Recreation offering in Wicklow
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>Tourism plays a central role in Wicklow's rural economy and it is essential that it continues to develop in a sustainable way. The county has a strong existing product featuring experiences such as Avondale Beyond the Trees and Wicklow Gaol; heritage sites including Glendalough and historic houses and gardens; outstanding natural assets including a National Park, mountains, lakes and coastlines; picturesque and vibrant towns and villages and a renowned walking and outdoor recreation offering including the Wicklow Way and the Bray-Greystones cliff walk.</p> <p>The consultation process strongly evidenced that accommodation, indoor/outdoor activities, outdoor rural recreation, cultural and heritage initiatives, festivals and events and community-based tourism projects should be priority areas for investment through LEADER. Actively promoting an environmentally sustainable and regenerative tourism offering was also highlighted in the stakeholder consultations. This will protect the local environment and Wicklow's brand as the Garden County, bring visitors to stay in Wicklow and provide economic and employment opportunities for the local community.</p> <p>This compliments Fáilte Ireland's tourism proposition for the region - Ireland's Ancient East, which aims to achieve growth through capital investment in destination towns and urban animation, festivals and events, greenways, blueways and outdoor recreation, including water-based activities, underpinned by digital innovation and driving climate action. WCCs Tourism and Marketing Plan also mirrors these goals. A Fáilte Ireland Destination Experience Development Plan (DEDP) for Wicklow is due to commence in 2023. Consultation with Fáilte Ireland has confirmed that LDS actions will need to align with this document but are compatible with what is being proposed under the DEDP.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	<p>Subtheme 1c</p> <p>Rural Tourism and Recreation</p>

Strategic Action 3.1 Enterprises and Accommodation	
Title of Strategic Action	Support for the development of existing and new innovative Tourism Enterprises
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action aims to encourage private enterprises to develop and/or grow businesses that will stimulate tourism in Wicklow. The needs analysis informed by the public and stakeholder consultations highlights the requirement for accommodation as well as a range of both indoor and outdoor activities.</p> <p>The need for accommodation is further evidenced in WCC's Tourism Strategy and Marketing Plan (2018) which lists the provision of new offerings as a priority action. LEADER can make significant impact in the provision of budget and alternative types of accommodations e.g. pods, glamping and other innovative units of which there is a current undersupply. Repurposing old buildings will also be encouraged. The majority of these will come under the Fáilte Ireland 'Welcome Standard' of which there are only 14 registered in the county. In line with local tourism policy, the LAG only supports Fáilte Ireland approved units and it is hoped that some of the approximately 400 unregistered units available via booking engines will be encouraged to register through the capital, marketing and training investment opportunities offered by LEADER.</p> <p>Significant potential exists to bring forward a range of diverse land and water-based outdoor and indoor activity projects. Examples of projects supported by LEADER to date include kayaking, paddle boarding, sea angling, sea safaris, splash park, biking, e-biking, tourist trains, electric karting, maritime museum, etc. Support for similar innovative experiences will be encouraged.</p> <p>A mix of large and small-scale capital investment are the primary supports envisaged under this action. However, feasibility studies, marketing and training initiatives will also be considered.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Private Enterprises
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership on behalf of Wicklow LAG
Collaborating Organisations	Fáilte Ireland, Wicklow Tourism (Membership based network), Wicklow Tourism Alliance (Alliance of local tourism stakeholders), WCC Economic Development Section
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects supported: 10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x Accommodation • 5 x Activities • 1 x Feasibility Study • 1 x Training Initiative • 1 x Marketing Initiative <p>Number of Jobs: 8 FTE</p>

Strategic Action 3.2 Heritage, Festivals & Events and Community-based Tourism Initiatives	
Title of Strategic Action	Promote and support Heritage, Festivals & Events and Community-based Tourism Initiatives
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action is aimed at community groups and social enterprises that contribute to generating tourism in Wicklow. Tourism data analysis shows that visitors are seeking out unique cultural experiences and Wicklow has a lot to offer here. This also fits well with Fáilte Ireland's IAE proposition where history, culture and sense of place are key.</p> <p>Support for heritage initiatives featured strongly in the consultations, e.g. genealogy, Coolattin Estate, granite villages of West Wicklow, as did the need to support cultural expression and celebration such as Tinahely Show and promoting our natural heritage e.g. Red Kite walk. This action is also intrinsically linked to Wicklow's food and craft sectors, support for which will be continued through actions 1d and 1e of this LDS.</p> <p>Wicklow's lively towns and scenic villages have a lot to offer both visitors and locals alike. Community groups active in the county are keen to continue to promote their local area through joint traditional and online marketing initiatives and local community festivals & events. These initiatives are also very important for community pride and place-making.</p> <p>Smaller-scale capital investment is the primary support envisaged under this action. However, feasibility studies, marketing and training initiatives will also be considered.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Community Groups, Town Teams and Social Enterprises
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership on behalf of Wicklow LAG
Collaborating Organisations	Fáilte Ireland, Wicklow Tourism (Membership based network), WCC Heritage Officer & Heritage Forum, WCC Arts Office, WCC Community Cultural and Social Development Section
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects supported: 10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x Small-scale capital projects • 4 x Festivals / Events • 1 x Feasibility Study • 2 x Collaborative marketing initiatives • 1 x Training Initiative

Strategic Action 3.3 Outdoor Recreation	
Title of Strategic Action	Encourage and enhance the Outdoor Recreation offering in Wicklow
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action targets both private promoters and community groups contributing to the development of the outdoor recreation product in Co. Wicklow. This action will contribute to the work currently being carried out by Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee (WORC) through the County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2020-2025 which defines outdoor recreation as ‘all sports and physical activities undertaken either formally or socially in natural outdoor settings.’</p> <p>The strategy aims to support more quality outdoor opportunities, programmes and places, encourage enjoyment and discovery and create more awareness of the product offering. This local strategy closely aligns to the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2027 and the principles of Comhairle na Tuaithe. Minimising impact, the protection of environmentally sensitive areas and policies including Leave No Trace are key cornerstones.</p> <p>Activities will compliment, not duplicate, the supports on offer under funding streams such as the Walks Scheme and Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) providing capital, enhancement and maintenance supports for new and existing outdoor recreation infrastructure including land and water-based recreation, Greenways and Blueways</p> <p>Opportunities for LEADER activity include infrastructure supports, ancillary infrastructure supports, hubs and clusters, water recreation, trail related activity, research and animation, training and awareness education. This LDS also seeks to address some of the challenges faced on busy sites including security and littering and to encourage the promotion of lesser known trails.</p> <p>LEADER staff will continue to work closely with the outdoor recreation team on the above initiatives as well as new collaborations including potential for a transnational co-operation project with a LAG in Finland.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Private Promoters, Community Groups
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership on behalf of Wicklow LAG
Collaborating Organisations	WORC, Coillte, NPWS, OPW, Mountaineering Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, WCC Economic Development Section
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects supported: 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 x Mixed-scale capital projects • 1 x Feasibility Study • 1 x Training Initiative • 1 x Co-operation project <p>Number of Jobs: 5 FTE</p>

Local Objective 4: Support and expand Enterprise Development in Wicklow providing capital, marketing, and analysis and development support where needed as a stimulus to creating a vibrant rural economy

Financial Allocation (€)	€200,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	<p>Two Strategic Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategically support Craft, Film & Creative Industries to aid economic growth 2. Provide strategic support and initiatives to fuel growth of Wicklow SME's
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>The aim of this objective is to foster business development growth by 2027, with a particular emphasis on inclusive economic development through assistance for female entrepreneurs. To achieve this overarching goal, specific efforts will be directed towards two key areas: the craft and creative industries sector, as well as small and medium enterprises (SMEs).</p> <p>Through the implementation of the Wicklow Craft Strategy (WCS) 2023-2027, this objective seeks to strengthen the craft sector, to leverage their potential, showcase their unique talents and help generate sustainable livelihoods. As outlined in the WCS, 81% of those working within Wicklow's craft sector are female with 50% operating with no formal structure and 41% as sole traders. Living largely in eastern side of Wicklow in a town or urban setting, research found that as a unit they are fragmented, disjointed, undervalued and hard to reach. To ensure success, the objective will provide tailored supports such as access to capital, skill development programmes, networking and marketing assistance, while being cognizant of avoiding duplication with existing support systems offered by Wicklow's LEO.</p> <p>Support too will be given to aid the implementation of the Wicklow Screen Sector Development Strategy 2022-2026.</p> <p>The objective will address the specific needs of SMEs offering access to feasibility studies, capital supports, marketing support and networking opportunities. Recognizing the importance of climate change and environmental sustainability, this objective will prioritize projects that demonstrate a positive contribution to the environment and align with the cross-cutting themes of the Local Development Strategy.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	Subtheme 1d Enterprise Development

Strategic Action 4.1 Craft and Creative Industries	
Title of Strategic Action	Craft, Film and Creative Industries
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>By 2027, through the implementation of the Wicklow Craft Strategy 2023-2027 and the Wicklow Screen Sector Development Strategy 2022-2026, this action will provide support to the creative industries sector as a whole. The aim is to give increased value to the 'process of creativity as a concept' and is directly in line with the findings as outlined in the LECP - Enterprise, Innovation and Creativity section. This action acknowledges the profound impact of creativity in driving economic and social progress and by harnessing the craft and film industries as catalysts, and will amplify the effectiveness of Action 1.3 of the LECP.</p> <p>The action will support the Wicklow Craft Strategy's strategic priorities covering the development of craft clusters, branding and marketing Wicklow craft, creating a Wicklow Digital Craft Trail and establishing a Wicklow Craft Education Programme.</p> <p>The action will support the implementation of the Wicklow Screen Sector Development Strategy 2022-2026 and provide support for creative industries.</p> <p>The action will also foster craft projects in the circular economy focussed on recycling and upcycling.</p> <p>The successful execution of these initiatives will result in increased employment opportunities, place a stronger value on the creative process, aid tourist attraction and nurture artistic talent.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	New and Existing Businesses working in the creative industries sector
Geographic Area	County wide, with 3 Craft Clusters planned as part of the Wicklow Craft Strategy
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership
Collaborating Organisations	WCC, Wicklow LEO, Enterprise Ireland. Design Craft Council of Ireland, Visual Artists Ireland
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects to receive financial support: 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 x Capital • 2 x Training • 1 x A&D

Strategic Action 4.2 Support for Wicklow Based enterprises and enterprise initiatives	
Title of Strategic Action	Support for Wicklow Based enterprises and enterprise initiatives
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>To bolster rural economies this action focuses on empowering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Acknowledging the substantial employment of these indigenous industries, it aligns directly with the LECP goal of Enterprise, Innovation and Creativity and encompasses many of the actions outlined therein. This LDS action aims is to create more job opportunities within Wicklow contributing to a reduction in the need for residents to commute.</p> <p>LEO services are currently limited to assisting small businesses with up to 10 employees, however, there is a review underway to determine if all SME clients can access the complete range of LEO services. Enterprise funding is currently not available to SMEs that are not classified as high potential start-ups or which do not have export potential. This action will work towards addressing this gap and will be directed towards providing capital, R&D, and training/mentoring support. Furthermore, this support will be extended to micro enterprises that are currently ineligible for LEO assistance but hold strategic importance at the local level.</p> <p>In addition to aiding individual enterprises, local initiatives such as enterprise centres, remote working hubs, and other similar programmes that demonstrate potential demand for their services will also receive support.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Start Up and Expanding Enterprises
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership
Collaborating Organisations	WCC, Wicklow LEO, Enterprise Ireland
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 - Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects supported: 4</p> <p>Number of Jobs Created: 6</p> <p>Number of Jobs Sustained: 6</p>

Local Objective 5: Encourage the development of the local and rural food sector including enterprises and promotional activities	
Financial Allocation (€)	€400,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	<p>Two Strategic Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support and expand the creation and development of food and beverage enterprises across County Wicklow 2. Initiatives to promote the food sector, healthy food and not for profit food projects that support the development of the overall rural food economy
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>The food sector is a vibrant, varied and successful economic actor in County Wicklow. Wicklow's Food and Beverage Strategy illustrates the strength of the sector in the county. Our Rural Future and Food Wise 2025 both highlight the importance of the sector nationally. The sector has seen significant investment through the LEADER programme since its inception and through other agencies such as Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland and WCC. There was strong support for the sector, food tourism and Wicklow Naturally in the consultations.</p> <p>Rural food production remains a significant driver of economic activity and employment in the county and requires ongoing investment. The sector capitalises on local strengths including agriculture and ingredient production and its access to markets to Dublin and across Ireland through the road networks within easy access of our rural areas.</p> <p>Wicklow's Food and Beverage Strategy was launched in 2019 (and is currently under review) and led to the creation of the 'Wicklow Naturally' network and has supported many projects which have been funded through the LEADER programme and supported by WCC.</p> <p>The strategy aimed to tell the Wicklow food story, develop a food activity calendar (business to consumer), increase food stakeholder networking (business to business), get local food to local consumers and provide appropriate business supports. :</p> <p>This LDS action will continue to deliver on these goals and will identify and support any new challenges or opportunities that evolve during the duration of this LEADER Programme.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	<p>Subtheme 1e</p> <p>Rural Food Production</p>

Strategic Action 5.1 Food Enterprises	
Title of Strategic Action	Support and expand the creation and development of food and beverage enterprises across County Wicklow
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>Food and beverage enterprises have long been recognised as generators of good quality local employment and a significant driver of economic activity in their local areas, especially those creating products with locally produced ingredients.</p> <p>The job creation potential within these enterprises is significant as many are classified as artisan, which requires a 'hand- made' element in their production.</p> <p>Larger food businesses not classified as artisan are also important from a job creation perspective as their requirements for employees and skills are varied and include food production, sales, packaging and distribution, marketing and promotion and administration.</p> <p>An emphasis will be placed on supporting sustainable, green food businesses in this programme. Food businesses that can demonstrate efforts at including environmental processes to their business practices will be encouraged and promoted.</p> <p>Capital, A&D and training initiatives will be assisted under this action.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	New and Existing Food and Beverage Enterprises
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership
Collaborating Organisations	WCC, Wicklow LEO, Wicklow Tourism, Wicklow Naturally, Bord Bia, Teagasc
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 - Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects: 6</p> <p>Number of Jobs Existing: 10</p> <p>Number of Jobs Created: 10</p>

Strategic Action 5.2 Promotion and Development of Food Sector	
Title of Strategic Action	Initiatives to promote the food sector, healthy food and not for profit food projects that support the development of the overall rural food economy
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action aims to help support networks in Wicklow, including Wicklow Naturally, to drive the promotion and support of the local food economy. The concept of place making is important to the promotion of Wicklow as a food county and a food destination. Wicklow has a longstanding brand of being the 'Garden of Ireland' and initiatives aided under this local action should help support this and other place making strategies. These actions are crucial to both the food and tourism sectors.</p> <p>Part of developing a robust local rural food economy is ensuring that people are aware of the importance of and quality of locally produced food. Projects such as 'Edible Bray', open days to farms or food production businesses help educate and inform people about how food is produced and what kinds of food are produced locally. Similar types of initiatives will be supported under this action.</p> <p>Efforts at promoting more environmentally efficient methods of producing food and social enterprises looking to address food waste or food poverty will also be supported under this action.</p> <p>There is significant scope for achieving greater efficiencies within food businesses through the development of farmers markets, combined sales or distribution and food production hubs. Initiatives such as these will be investigated and supported in conjunction with partner organisations in the sector.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Wicklow Naturally, Wicklow Tourism, Community Gardens, Farmers and Food Producers
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership
Collaborating Organisations	WCC, Wicklow LEO, Wicklow Naturally, Wicklow Tourism, Farmers, Community organisations
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 - Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects: 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 x Capital • 1 x Marketing • 1 x Training

Local Objective 6: Social Enterprises	
Financial Allocation (€)	€450,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	One Strategic Action: 1. Continue to develop a strong Social Enterprise Sector
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>This objective aims to build on substantial work already carried out in the county under the previous LEADER programme 2014 – 2022. In Wicklow, 14 social enterprise projects received support during this period, with a total investment of nearly €1 million. These projects included 3 A&D, 3 training, 4 large-scale capital works and 4 small-scale services/works projects. This commitment embraced the principles outlined in the National Social Enterprise Strategy 2019 – 2022 and the Wicklow Social Enterprise Strategy 2019 - 2022. A review of the Wicklow Strategy has just been carried out in 2023 and is presented along with the LDS. It is a comprehensive framework that outlines our continued focus to nurture and maximize the potential of social enterprises within the county. This is also directly in line with Action 1.7 of the LECP whose aim is to create – <i>“A county-wide thriving social economy which addresses social and environmental issues in an innovative and inclusive way”</i>.</p> <p>Our Rural Future recognises social enterprises as vital components of local rural economies. Wicklow’s social enterprises (totally over 90) help to bridge market gaps that may not be appealing to commercially-driven companies and under this LDS they will continue to be supported.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	Subtheme 1f Social, Community & Cooperative Enterprises

Strategic Action 6.1 Social Enterprise Development	
Title of Strategic Action	Social Enterprise Development
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action will build upon previous social enterprise programme achievements and help sustain the development work already carried out. This will focus on providing ongoing support to existing social enterprises while also looking to promote the establishment of new ones. The aim is to build a dynamic ecosystem of social entrepreneurship in the county.</p> <p>During our consultation process, networking emerged as a key requirement for social enterprises. This LDS will prioritize collaboration among Wicklow's social enterprises. In addition, and in line with the traditional support methods under the last programme, this LDS will also provide assistance in areas capital, marketing, analysis and development, training, mentoring, capacity building and awareness building.</p> <p>Addressing the needs of youth social entrepreneurship and innovation emerged as a key priority in the consultation process. This LDS will provide support in this area. A significant foundation in this regard is, the Wicklow Summit Social Video training series, set to launch in Q3 2023 (www.summitsocial.ie).</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Communities and Individuals, particularly in regions affected by reduced or lost local services.
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership
Collaborating Organisations	WCC, Wicklow PPN, Social Entrepreneurs Ireland, Microfinance Ireland, Clann Credo.
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects: 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x Capital • 1 x Training / Capacity / Networking • 2 x Analysis and Development

Theme 2: Rural Infrastructure & Social Inclusion

Local Objective 7: Encourage and support investment in Rural Infrastructure as a means to develop social cohesion	
Financial Allocation (€)	€600,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	<p>Two Strategic Actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve community Infrastructure in towns and villages experiencing the pressures of accelerated development 2. Encourage investment in community Infrastructure in rural locations and areas experiencing disadvantage
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>As evidenced in the socio-economic profile, Wicklow's geography and proximity to Dublin has a major influence on the county. Some areas, particularly those located to the north, have good access to services and economic opportunities. Further south these facilities and services are a lot less available.</p> <p>Both areas have challenges. Significant increases in housing development to the north has brought an influx of new residents from a variety of Irish and international backgrounds but community infrastructure is often insufficient. Conversely, communities based in more rural areas often have a dispersed population and attract limited investment.</p> <p>The actions proposed dovetail with and directly support many of the health, resilience and well-being goals identified in the draft Wicklow LECP (2023). CWP is a key stakeholder in this plan and through its suite of programmes is directly tasked with the delivery of many of its goals. LECP themes were echoed in the consultation process where the need for social and recreational infrastructure, in particular for young people and older generations, was highlighted as a key factor in fostering community health and well-being and social integration.</p> <p>Infrastructure projects require a strong community-led and partnership approach with other relevant bodies e.g. WCC and local landowners, and CWP development staff will continue to work with community groups to guide and facilitate this process. As referenced in chapter 2 Wicklow LAG will strive to ensure that there is good geographic spread of funding across communities of all types.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	Subtheme 2a Rural Infrastructure

Strategic Action 7.1 Rural Towns Infrastructure	
Title of Strategic Action	Improve community Infrastructure in towns and villages experiencing the pressures of accelerated development
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action targets towns and villages that have experienced the pressures of significant population increases in a relatively short period of time without adequate investment in community infrastructure. The socio-economic profile shows that while all towns have experienced these pressures, some have been more pronounced e.g. Arklow and Greystones/Delgany.</p> <p>Targeted interventions will be required for towns that are not only experiencing population increases but also do not fare well in terms of affluence and deprivation index scores such as Arklow, Rathdrum and Baltinglass. Animation and training initiatives will be employed to ensure areas most in need receive support.</p> <p>LEADER can help these communities address problems by supporting them to develop and/or enhance rural infrastructure, e.g. playgrounds / skateparks/ MUGAs, public realm initiatives including greenspaces and eligible streetscape enhancements. Consultations showed the need for a more diverse range of outdoor facilities post COVID-19 to provide communities with healthy and safe spaces to interact.</p> <p>Actions will compliment rather than duplicate the efforts of other national and local support schemes including the Urban Regeneration Development Programme, Community Enhancement Scheme and the Town and Village scheme.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Community Groups, Town Teams, Tidy Towns, Sports Clubs
Geographic Area	<p>Towns: Bray, Greystones/Delgany, Wicklow, Blessington, Arklow, Rathdrum, Baltinglass</p> <p>Villages: Enniskerry, Newtownmountkennedy, Ashford, Kilcoole, Kilpedder and Rathnew</p>
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	Wicklow Partnership on behalf of Wicklow LAG
Collaborating Organisations	WCC(Community Cultural & Social Development, Wicklow Sports Partnership
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects supported: 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 x Mixed-scale capital projects

Strategic Action 7.2 Rural Areas Infrastructure	
Title of Strategic Action	Encourage investment in community Infrastructure in rural locations and areas experiencing disadvantage
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action targets villages and rural areas with dispersed populations that have been experiencing more modest growth or de-population. Most of the centre of the county across a wide area extending from Dunlavin eastward to Roundwood and southwards to Rathdrum showed some growth. Tinahely and areas around Rathdangan experienced population decline.</p> <p>Areas that do not fare well in terms of affluence and deprivation index scores will be targeted. Throughout the south of Baltinglass MD and across much of the Arklow MD there are extensive areas of rural disadvantage with some villages classified as disadvantaged in the Pobal HP Index, namely Aughrim, Carnew, Dunlavin and Tinahely. Amination and training initiatives will be considered to ensure areas most in need receive support.</p> <p>LEADER can help small rural communities by providing facilities that contribute to social cohesion, especially intergenerational space where people can meet and socialise and provide a focal point for community engagement. Examples are playgrounds / skateparks/ MUGAs, public realm initiatives including green spaces and eligible streetscape enhancements.</p> <p>Care will be taken to compliment rather than duplicate the efforts of other national support schemes including the Rural Regeneration Development Fund, Town and Village scheme, Community Enhancement Scheme and CLÁR.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Community Groups, Town Teams, Tidy Towns, Sports Clubs
Geographic Area	All areas outside those mentioned in 7.1 with particular emphasis on Aughrim, Tinahely, Dunlavin, Carnew, areas south and west of Arklow and south of Baltinglass
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership on behalf of Wicklow LAG
Collaborating Organisations	WCC (Community Cultural & Social Development, Wicklow Sports Partnership
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects supported: 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 x Mixed-scale capital projects

Local Objective 8: Enhance and develop Accessible Services to foster social inclusion	
Financial Allocation (€)	€400,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	Two Strategic Actions: 1. Improvement of Physical Access to local Facilities and Services 2. Facilitating Local Service Provision in rural areas
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>Consultations clearly demonstrated that actions to foster social inclusion and tackle rural isolation are needed more than ever, particularly efforts to include the most marginalised and hard-to-reach communities, new communities, women and young people. Facilitating the provision of local services and access to these services will lead to more equal opportunities and will improve the quality of life for everyone in the community, particularly for those most in need.</p> <p>Access to transport was cited as a major barrier for rural dwellers in Wicklow - particularly for young people - in accessing opportunities, facilities and services in the area. In addition to the provision of services, SMART initiatives including technology-based options will be rolled-out as a means to address this issue.</p> <p>The actions proposed compliment and directly support many of the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Just Transition goals identified in the draft Wicklow LECP (2023). CWP is a key stakeholder in this plan and through its suite of programmes is directly tasked with the delivery of these goals. Specifically, to support diversity and integration of minority groups in our society, implement community development principles of inclusion, equality and meaningful engagement of marginalised groups, implement a fair and inclusive approach to climate action through a just transition model. Improving the health and well-being of our most vulnerable, young people and older people is also to be achieved here.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	Subtheme 2b Accessible Services

Strategic Action 8.1 Improvement of physical access	
Title of Strategic Action	Improvement of Physical Access to Local Facilities and Services
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action is aimed at community groups and sports clubs across the county seeking to improve access to facilities and services. Physical access can be a challenge for many in our society e.g. those with a disability, people with mobility issues (in particular older people) and young families e.g. with buggies. 14% of Wicklow's population have at least one disability, 13% are aged 65+ years and 7% of the population is aged 0 – 4 years.</p> <p>LEADER can support communities to develop and/or enhance access to community facilities e.g. surfacing of car park/entrance areas, walkways around pitches, lighting, access points for facilities/activities such as angling, sensory paths. Access can also be facilitated through the use of technologies like hearing loop systems.</p> <p>Targeted interventions are needed for areas and groups that have not previously accessed funding or who have not recently benefited from the programme. Programme promotion and animation will be key along with the use of local networks e.g. PPN. Time limited calls may be considered as a method to bring forward these communities. Projects that can also demonstrate positive environmental impact e.g. use of more environmentally friendly materials, will be encouraged</p> <p>Actions will compliment rather than duplicate the efforts of other national and local support schemes including the Urban Regeneration Development Programme, Community Enhancement Scheme and the Town and Village scheme.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Community Organisations, Town Teams, Tidy Towns, Sports Clubs
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	Community & Voluntary Organisations, Town Teams, Tidy Towns, Sports Clubs
Collaborating Organisations	WCC Community Cultural & Social Development, Wicklow Older Peoples Network, Disability Federation
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects supported: 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x Mixed-scale capital projects • 1 x Feasibility Study

Strategic Action 8.2 Facilitation of local service provision	
Title of Strategic Action	Facilitating Local Service Provision in rural areas
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action targets community groups and sports clubs seeking to enhance existing or to develop new services for all. There are over 400 community & voluntary, social inclusion and environmental groups registered with Wicklow PPN involved in the provision of a wide range of activities, e.g. community centres, community development, arts and culture, heritage, rescue services, sports, healthcare supports and community education.</p> <p>The need to maintain these vital services and respond to growing need for additional ones featured heavily in the consultation process. COVID-19 has left people feeling defenceless with many still reluctant to engage in community life and it left people already feeling isolated in a more vulnerable position. Wicklow has also welcomed approx. 2,000 Ukrainian refugees. These challenges came on top of the long-standing efforts of community groups providing voluntary services to ensure basic community needs were being met.</p> <p>LEADER can encourage communities to develop basic services for people of all ages and backgrounds as a means to foster social integration e.g. developing / upgrading community buildings and community centres, capital supports for equipment to run music and drama groups, dance classes, youth cafes, toddler groups, active retirement and older peoples' services and kitchen facilities.</p> <p>Targeted interventions are needed for areas / groups that have not previously accessed funding under the programme e.g. programme promotion and animation. Time limited calls may also be considered as a method to bring forward these communities. Social media campaigns tailored to specific geographical areas or social groups are also useful tools. Consideration will also be given to projects that demonstrate positive environmental impact, SMART community concepts and social inclusion.</p> <p>Actions will compliment schemes including the Urban Regeneration Development Programme, Community Enhancement Scheme and the Town and Village scheme.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Community Organisations, Town Teams, Tidy Towns, Sports Clubs
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	Community & Voluntary Organisations, Town Teams, Tidy Towns, Sports Clubs
Collaborating Organisations	WCC Community Cultural & Social Development, Wicklow Older Peoples Network, Comhairle na nÓg
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects supported: 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x Mixed-scale capital projects • 1 x Feasibility Study

Local Objective 9: Optimising Digital Connectivity in Wicklow to allow for improved access to opportunities and services

Financial Allocation (€)	€100,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	One Strategic Action: 1. Fostering SMART Communities by encouraging the local adoption of new technologies and enhancing Digital Skills
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>Digital technology has transformed our lives and enabled changes in the way we communicate, learn, work and socialise. COVID-19 forced many of us to embrace new technologies as a way to stay connected. Through local community and stakeholder consultations it was apparent that while some people adapted relatively easily and technology opened up a new world, others were left behind as they could not afford the technology, did not have access to adequate broadband infrastructure or did not have the skills to engage.</p> <p>While unserved pockets still remain, Wicklow largely has good broadband connections and has benefited greatly from the National Broadband Plan with 8 Broadband Connection Points (BCPs) now installed at community facilities across the county including Arklow, Knockree (Youth Hostel), Ballinacor, Ballycoog, Crossbridge, Clermont Campus, Dunlavin GAA Club, Brockagh Centre Laragh. Now that major infrastructure issues have been addressed the challenge is to encourage the use of same to ensure maximum community benefit.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	Subtheme 2c Optimising Digital Connectivity

Strategic Action 9.1 Smart Communities and Digital Skills	
Title of Strategic Action	Fostering SMART Communities by encouraging the local adoption of new technologies and enhancing Digital Skills
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action is aimed at community groups and social enterprises / entrepreneurs that intend to support the revitalisation of rural areas through social and digital innovation.</p> <p>A new Digital Strategy for Wicklow is currently being prepared by WCC aligned to the aims of the Digital Ireland Framework. It will build on the themes of the 2019-22 Digital Strategy for Wicklow which include improving digital skills for all, increased opportunities for remote working, and building infrastructure to encourage greater use of digital technology in all aspects of life.</p> <p>LEADER can play a pivotal role in implementing this. However, activity must be able to adapt to future plans which may include new priorities. Proposed activities include SMART community initiatives, remote working hubs, digital upskilling (outside formal training through mainstream education), access to digital technologies e.g. tablet banks, and innovative community activities that bring people together e.g. online cultural events and coding programmes.</p> <p>It should be noted that while largely positive, an air of caution arose from the consultations in relation to this action as it was felt that a balanced approach should be taken here. While technology can connect us digitally it can also isolate us socially and young people in particular are vulnerable to this.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Community Groups, Social Enterprises, Social Entrepreneurs
Geographic Area	All of county Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership on behalf of Wicklow LAG
Collaborating Organisations	WCC Broadband Officer & Community Cultural and Social Development
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects supported: 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x Mixed-scale capital projects • 3 x Training / animation initiatives

Local Objective 10: Rural Youth	
Financial Allocation (€)	€100,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	One Strategic Action: 1. Deliver customized, adaptable, and innovative learning opportunities for Rural Youth
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>The CAP Strategic Plan defines a young person as aged 18-40 years. Based on the latest data available through the social economic profile, this cohort in Wicklow is 27.3% (38,825) of the population with the highest concentrations in the north-east of the county and in the MDs of Wicklow and Greystones.</p> <p>The consultation process highlighted the need for rural youth supports countywide, with a higher level of need identified for West Wicklow. This action aims to provide holistic and tailored supports to address the unique interests and skills of Wicklow's youth, especially targeted interventions for young people who are disengaged from social, economic and educational activities. By offering diverse training initiatives encompassing creative industries, social innovation, entrepreneurship and climate change, the goal is to empower young people to progress socially and advance towards additional education or economic activities. Supporting young people to connect, participate and become actively engaged in their local community will build on LECP Action 5.6.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	Subtheme 2d Rural Youth

Strategic Action 10.1 Actions to engage rural youth	
Title of Strategic Action	Deliver customized, adaptable, and innovative learning opportunities for Rural Youth
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>Customized training initiatives will be designed to address the identified needs as outlined by the young people themselves and will work with their aspirations to offer them a pathway to development and success.</p> <p>This action will empower young individuals to develop essential skills, knowledge, and competencies that align with their personal interests and ambitions.</p> <p>The training opportunities will be innovative and flexible to adapt to the changing needs and interests of young people over the time frame of the programme. Training / engagement projects that incorporate elements of creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, entrepreneurship and those that address the issue of climate change will be activity encouraged. Projects that work with the concept of youth active citizenship will also be supported.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Youth Groups / Collectives of Young Individuals / Young people countywide.
Geographic Area	All of county Wicklow, with a specific focus in West Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership
Collaborating Organisations	WCC, Kildare/Wicklow ETB, local youth consortiums, SICAP Programme, inter-agency group e.g. Young Social Innovators / Foróige / Youthreach
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 – Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	Number of Projects and Training Courses receiving financial support: 3

Theme 3: Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment and Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

Local Objective 11: improve the number and quality of actions seeking to support the sustainable development of Wicklow's Rural Environment

Financial Allocation (€)	€500,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	One Strategic Action: 1. Promotion of the restoration and protection of Wicklow's local rural environment
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>Wicklow has widely regarded beautiful scenery and environment. The county boasts uplands with rich peaty habitats, lower areas with lush grasslands, coastal, river valleys, lakeside landscapes, large towns and remote rural areas, and a number of Special Areas of Conservation. All of these areas contribute to Wicklow's economy, community and sense of place.</p> <p>The LECP draft Goal 2 aims to sustain these unique and precious environments and efforts to protect and sustain our local rural environment will be central to this LDS. This is not only critical to our efforts to tackle climate change and the biodiversity crisis but also to ensure that Wicklow remains a vibrant, liveable, workable county.</p> <p>Participants in the consultation process were eager to get involved in environment actions but did not know where or how to begin. LEADER can capitalise on this sentiment, inform, and enable actions that will support the sustainable development of the rural environment.</p> <p>Wicklow's individuals, communities and enterprises will be encouraged to engage with our local water resources, to protect and improve local biodiversity and to help develop of renewable energy locally. These actions will be informed by expertise that will ensure they are effectively reversing climate damage and encouraging long-term restorative solutions.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	Subtheme 3a Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment

Strategic Action 11.1 Promotion of the restoration and protection of Wicklow's local rural environment	
Title of Strategic Action	Promotion of the restoration and protection of Wicklow's local rural environment
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>Initiatives such as community gardens and community planting, habitat development and projects that seek to protect endangered species will be encouraged under this action.</p> <p>Rivers, Lakes and the Sea were historically used in Ireland as merely ways of travelling and dumping grounds. While enormous work has been done to date in changing people's perceptions and habits around this, more needs to be done to get people to take ownership of their local water assets and to engage in activities to protect and celebrate them into the future.</p> <p>The biodiversity crisis is sometimes over-shadowed by the climate change crisis but it is no less important. Projects that strive to achieve a net biodiversity gain, such as the promotion of multispecies planting and pollinator friendly planting will be encouraged.</p> <p>Creation of renewable energy and adoption of renewable energy technology will be supported and encouraged to aid our transition from carbon heavy energy sources.</p> <p>Any innovative proposals which support the development of a sustainable environment will be considered under this action</p> <p>Currently WCC are preparing strategies on biodiversity and climate action. The LEADER programme will work with these strategies in delivering the most strategic use of resources for County Wicklow.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Community and Environment Groups, Tidy Towns Groups, Town Teams, Private Promoters, Sustainable Energy Communities
Geographic Area	All of county Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership
Collaborating Organisations	WCC Climate Action team (including biodiversity officer, LAWPRO, climate action officer, heritage officer), Wicklow Uplands Council, East Wicklow Rivers Trust, Pure Mile Project, Rural Recreation Officer, Tús Programme, PPN Environmental Pillar, SEAI
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 - Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects: 20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 x Capital

Local Objective 12: Improve capacity to address climate change through awareness raising, skills development and promotional activities	
Financial Allocation (€)	€200,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	One Strategic Action: 1. Capacity building to empower climate action and environmental actions
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>The goal of creating a county that is low carbon and climate resilient, has reduced energy dependence, is sustainable in the use of resources, and has a vibrant green economy requires an engaged and informed people.</p> <p>The consultations indicated that individuals and communities are keen to get involved in climate change actions and eco system restoration. This action is in line with local, national and international policy and agreements.</p> <p>However, due to the heavy scientific nature of much of the advice in the environment sector, many communities are unsure of where to start.</p> <p>Capacity building initiatives should be science based and expertly led but the delivery of these actions will have to be accessible by all in the community. Efforts at a socially inclusive approach to climate change capacity building will be prioritised. The whole community should be engaged in this subject, regardless of socio economic status, educational background or any other potentially exclusionary factors.</p> <p>Promotion of environmental actions that communities have already engaged will help inspire and spread the word of what can be achieved at a community and individual level.</p> <p>Publication of information, signage, websites, reports and video will be encouraged to help raise awareness of Wicklow's local climate and what can be done to protect and enhance it.</p> <p>The development of networks to share ideas and support actions will be an important part of this objective. Stimulating projects that inspire further action will be supported.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	Subtheme 3b Climate Change Capacity Building

Strategic Action 12.1 Capacity Building to empower climate action and environmental actions	
Title of Strategic Action	Capacity Building to Empower Climate Action and Environmental Actions
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This strategic action will break down barriers to action in communities across the county.</p> <p>It will deliver local climate action training, biodiversity awareness training and support communities to undertake specific technical studies to achieve best practice in developing local projects.</p> <p>Training and awareness raising initiatives will be delivered in an informed, expert, factual methodology and apply techniques that help inspire action by participants.</p> <p>Citizen science initiatives where individuals are gathered to take part in recording and documenting the status of the local climate and biodiversity in the county will be animated.</p> <p>Projects that help inform, promote and create awareness of local habitats, species and environmental strengths and the need to protect these will be animated. Signage projects, websites, video production or other means of communication about our local environment will be a focus under this local action.</p> <p>CWP and partners in the Environment Section of WCC will investigate the creation of a local network or discussion group to enable sharing of advice, learning and support. Many of the projects being engaged in are modest, but collectively all of these actions together will make a significant countywide effort at combating climate change and erosion of our biodiversity.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Community & Environmental Groups, Tidy Towns Groups, Rural Youth
Geographic Area	All of county Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership
Collaborating Organisations	WCC, Wicklow Uplands Council, PPN Environmental Pillar, East Wicklow Rivers Trust, Town Teams
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 - Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects: 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 x Training • 4 x Marketing / Promotion

Local Objective 13: Improve Wicklow's Climate by supporting actions that actively mitigate climate change damage in the county	
Financial Allocation (€)	€75,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	One Strategic Action: 1. Investment in climate mitigating actions which actively support reversing the damage of climate change or minimising the impacts of climate change in County Wicklow
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>It is not sufficient at this stage of the climate change crisis for us to focus only on awareness raising initiatives. It is vital for the whole world, country and our local environment that actions are taken on actively mitigating the damage done to our environment.</p> <p>Projects to be funded under this objective will need to have a clearly identified change problem in their application and illustrate what the benefit(s) to solving that local climate change problem will be.</p> <p>Actions may include renewable energy generation, innovative solutions to local flooding issues, water conservation initiatives as a solution to summer droughts or unique solutions to sensitive landscapes struggling with the effects of climate change.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	Subtheme 3c Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Strategic Action 13.1 Investment in climate mitigating actions which actively support reversing the damage of climate change or minimising the impacts of climate change in County Wicklow	
Title of Strategic Action	Investment in climate mitigating actions which actively support reversing the damage of climate change or minimising the impacts of climate change in County Wicklow
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>This action will help fund capital works and equipment that will enable communities and individuals to reverse damage to their local environments.</p> <p>Investments in renewable energy technology, implementation of innovative solutions that will help regenerate local environments and works that will help limit further damage to the local area will be supported under this action.</p> <p>Projects with innovative solutions, experimental or unique proposals that have the potential to be a future model for climate mitigating actions will also be considered under this action.</p> <p>While these may not have a guaranteed mitigating impact, encouraging innovative solutions is a core principle of LEADER and climate change mitigation requires a suite of actions to help reverse the damage already created. These will align to the Wicklow Climate Action plan.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Private Promoters / Landowners, Community groups
Geographic Area	All of County Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership
Collaborating Organisations	WCC, Wicklow Uplands Council, SEAI
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024 - Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects: 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 x Capital

Local Objective 14: Cross Cutting and Strategic LAG led interventions	
Financial Allocation (€)	As this is a cross cutting action it does not have its own specific financial allocation. Projects will be funded through the appropriate sub-theme at the time project is developed. Estimated combined value of projects under this action will be €200,000
No. of Strategic Actions under this Local Objective	One Strategic Action: 1. Cross Cutting and Strategic LAG led interventions
Rationale for the Local Objective (max 250 words)	<p>While LEADER adds value to all actions by ensuring innovation and targeting unmet needs, this has been most evident in the development and implementation of CWP-led projects. Internal projects valuing approx. €500,000 were approved under the 2014 – 2022 LEADER programme period and played a pivotal role in demonstrating the true value of the CLLD model as well as having significant impact on the ground.</p> <p>A core ethos of LEADER is that it remains a development programme as opposed to a grant programme. Strategic actions enable local LEADER partners to identify gaps in existing supports and to design and implement actions to help meet these needs in a way that cannot be achieved through top-down actions.</p> <p>LAG-led projects to date include Development of Wicklow Craft Strategy and Wicklow Social Enterprise Strategy as well as actions implementing the recommendations of same including network establishment and support as well as implementation of the Wicklow Food and Beverage Strategy, SMART Villages training and transnational co-operation project, social enterprise training, youth social enterprise training and community training in biodiversity and climate action.</p> <p>Significant time and effort is required from the CWP development team in researching, animating, procuring, project managing and implementing these projects. Support in drawing down the funding is undertaken by the admin team. WCC as financial partner has also enabled these projects, providing the LAG with the necessary bridging funding required.</p>
Alignment with LEADER Sub-theme	This objective aligns with all subthemes.

Strategic Action 14.1 Cross cutting and strategic LAG led interventions	
Title of Strategic Action	Cross Cutting and Strategic LAG Led Initiatives
Brief Description of the Action (max 250 words)	<p>It is the LAG's ambition to continue animation and development work undertaken in the previous programme and to remain responsive to unforeseen needs. A new objective for the proposed actions here was deemed appropriate as they tend to be cross-cutting activities e.g. food and tourism, climate and community.</p> <p>There are further opportunities in place making, climate, co-operation, SMART initiatives, youth projects, actions targeting women and female rural entrepreneurs, targeting marginalised and hard-to-reach groups, new communities and groups that have not previously accessed LEADER funding. This LDS also needs to remain agile and responsive to unanticipated needs and events which has become starkly evident in recent years with COVID and the war in Ukraine.</p> <p>Potential examples could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> expanding understanding of the SMART communities model and place making cross-cutting climate action initiatives identifying models of engagement with historically hard to reach and marginalised communities as well as new communities in County Wicklow support for networks for identified sectors e.g. SMART communities as well as young people and women in business. inter-territorial and transnational co-operation projects <p>Wicklow LAG prides itself on being able to adapt to unanticipated needs and projects will be applied for where required and as identified by the LAG and partners in line with relevant policies and LEADER programme objectives.</p>
Primary Target Group(s) for this Strategic Action.	Community Groups, Social Enterprises / Entrepreneurs, Rural Enterprises.
Geographic Area	All of county Wicklow
Organisation(s) delivering this Strategic Action.	County Wicklow Partnership on behalf of the LAG
Collaborating Organisations	WCC, Sectoral agencies and groups referenced across all sub-themes as required.
Timeframe for Delivery	Q1/2024-Q4/2026
Anticipated Outputs/ Indicators	<p>Number of Projects: 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 x animation / training initiatives 1 x co-operation project

Implementation of the CLLD Strategy

	2023 (€)	2024 (€)	2025 (€)	2026 (€)	2027 (€)	Total €
Theme 1: Economic Development and Job Creation						
Sub-theme 1a. The Green Economy		60,000.00	60,000.00	30,000.00		150,000.00
Sub-theme 1b. Agricultural Diversification		40,000.00	40,000.00	20,000.00		100,000.00
Sub-theme 1c. Rural Tourism & Recreation		280,000.00	280,000.00	140,000.00		700,000.00
Sub-theme 1d. Enterprise Development		80,000.00	80,000.00	40,000.00		200,000.00
Sub-theme 1e. Rural Food Production		160,000.00	160,000.00	80,000.00		400,000.00
Sub-theme 1f. Social, Community & Cooperative Enterprises		180,000.00	180,000.00	90,000.00		450,000.00
Total	0.00	800,000.00	800,000.00	400,000.00	0.00	2,000,000.00
Theme 2: Rural Infrastructure & Social Inclusion						
Sub-theme 2a. Rural Infrastructure		240,000.00	240,000.00	120,000.00		600,000.00
Sub-theme 2b. Accessible Services		160,000.00	160,000.00	80,000.00		400,000.00
Sub-theme 2c. Optimising Digital Connectivity		40,000.00	40,000.00	20,000.00		100,000.00
Sub-theme 2d. Rural Youth		40,000.00	40,000.00	20,000.00		100,000.00
Total	0.00	480,000.00	480,000.00	240,000.00		1,200,000.00
Theme 3: Rural Infrastructure & Social Inclusion						
Sub-theme 3a. Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment		200,000.00	200,000.00	100,000.00		500,000.00
Sub-theme 3b. Climate Change Capacity Building:		80,000.00	80,000.00	40,000.00		200,000.00
Sub-theme 3c. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation		30,000.00	30,000.00	15,000.00		75,000.00
Total	0.00	310,000.00	310,000.00	155,000.00		775,000.00
Total Budget Cost	0.00	1,590,000.00	1,590,000.00	795,000.00	0.00	3,975,000.00

LDS Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

Objectives

The objectives of this Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (M&EP) are to ensure that LDS aims and objectives are being met, added value is being achieved and that adequate systems and procedures are in place. It will also demonstrate if adequate resources are in place and if they are being used efficiently and effectively.

In terms of **governance and co-ordination** arrangements, Wicklow LCDC will provide strategic direction and management oversight of the programme. This includes reviewing the performance of CWP as the lead implementation body against agreed LDS priorities. CWP as the sole implementing partner will be responsible for programme monitoring and evaluation and will collect, collate and where appropriate disseminate project and performance related information. WCC as financial partner may also provide information and updates to the LCDC.

While this M&EP follows the guidelines set out by the monitoring framework, it also allows for innovative approaches to programme evaluation at a local level. Therefore, this plan will employ a variety of appropriate methodologies to gather local information from a range of sources. A 'pluralistic' approach will be taken in this regard in that both **quantitative and qualitative** evaluation processes will be used as this is widely accepted as the most effective approach to addressing complex issues and achieving quality data analysis. This will ensure that the impact of the programme on the ground is being thoroughly assessed and that both anticipated and unanticipated outputs and outcomes are recorded.

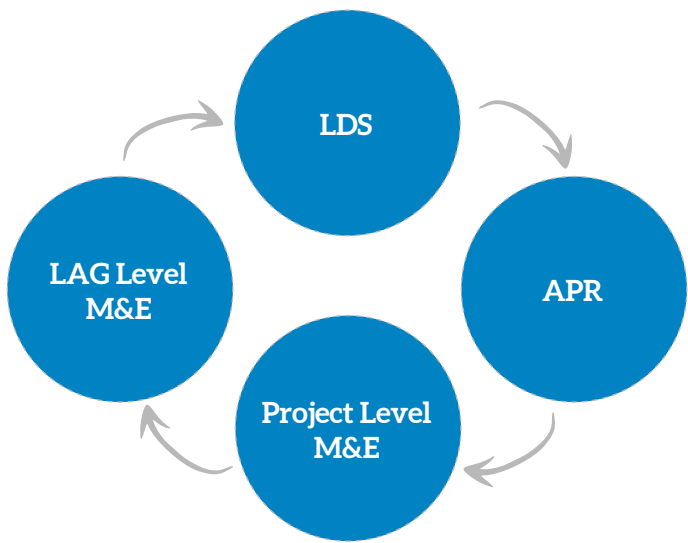
Evaluation

The LDS will be regularly evaluated to ensure;

- Actions and resources are targeting need and do not duplicate the work of other bodies
- The programme is adding value
- The LDS remains relevant and flexible to local changing needs
- Continued alignment/proofing with national and local strategies (e.g. Our Rural Future, LECP and future policies)
- A quality programme is in place for local communities and project promoters.

Locally **added value** is primarily being interpreted as the collective range of intended and unintended project outcomes as a result of inputs e.g. new community services and enhanced social integration as an outcome of a capital project input e.g. new community centre build. CWP captures inputs, outputs and outcomes for every project supported. All promoters are requested to provide a report on same as part of the claims process. This type of information is typically disseminated in individual case studies.

LEADER also adds value in that projects are approved on the basis that they target market gaps or meet a need not being served by other agencies and programmes at that time. In all instances projects are either not able to proceed without LEADER funding or would be carried out on a much reduced level. An external evaluation of the 2014 – 2020 programme acknowledged that the high level of animation and capacity building supports offered through the development team were integral to the success of the programme. This is a particularly innovative aspect that goes beyond grant provision, developing the confidence and skills of individuals and community groups and enabling them to access the supports available. This is challenging to measure but can be gleaned through surveys and end of project reports with promoters. However external evaluation is likely the most appropriate method to apply.



Monitoring & Evaluation Process Chart

This M&EP intends to measure **all themes** of the programme using a wide range of **data requirements**. The impact of economic development and job creation theme projects can be assessed through quantitative data collected through the ICT system e.g. FTEs. Added value here could be evident in a collective marketing project that increases visitors to the county. The number of people benefiting from an infrastructure project is a required data set for community projects; however the social inclusion benefits of same provide enhanced benefit. The additional merit of projects under the environment theme can be evidenced by an increased level of awareness of local natural assets among the community as a result of a project e.g. water-based training. Aside from the

quantitative indicators, these outcomes are difficult to measure in any prescriptive way but qualitative analysis through surveys, focus groups, case studies and reports is crucial to capture the remarkable value of LEADER projects at local level.

The LCDC, through CWP, intends to use a range of **evaluation tools** to assess performance. **Self-evaluation** tools include core monitoring and evaluation methods such as sampling, use of questionnaires and surveys, stakeholder analysis, focus groups, documentation review, biophysical measures (measurement over time), direct observation, cost benefit analysis, semi-structured interviews and case studies. **External evaluation** of interventions and processes will also be undertaken where required to provide an objective perspective on performance and to employ creative methods of feedback. Public procurement processes will be adhered to in this regard. Evaluations will be carried out at appropriate **milestones**. An Annual Performance Report (APR) will be submitted at the beginning of each year as part of the self-evaluation process and external evaluations will be arranged at appropriate intervals e.g. mid-term.

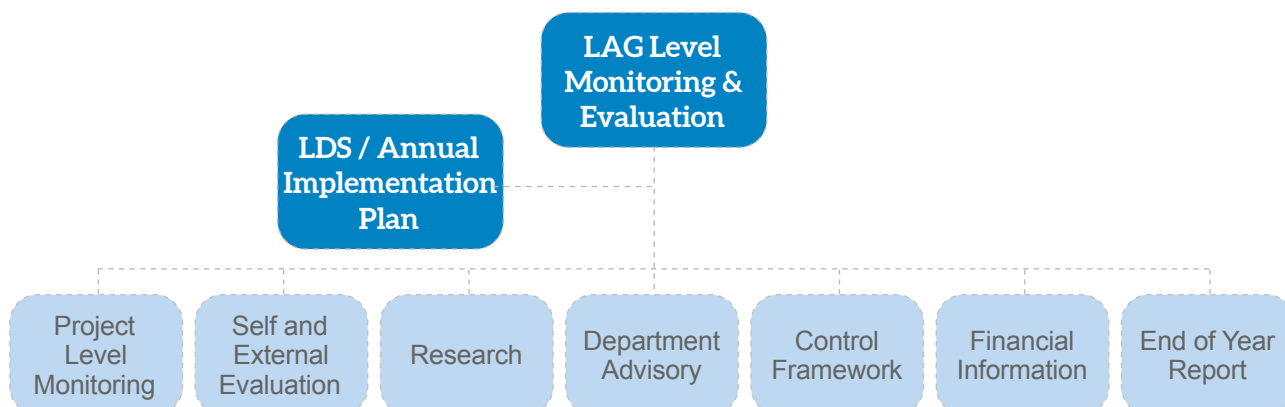
Monitoring

The M&EP is fully in line with the LEADER monitoring framework outlined in Section 4 of the RFT and will incorporate the two levels of programme monitoring required which take place at project and LAG levels respectively.

At **project level**, ongoing monitoring will involve the capture of project information against the specific performance indicators set for each theme and sub-theme of the Programme. This data will be measured against the LDS targets set for each Local Priority Action. Both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected throughout the project life cycle but primarily at the following critical stages and will be collated and disseminated as appropriate: Pre-Application, Application Stage, LAG Assessment of Application, Reporting on Outputs/Outcomes – Project Payment Stage, Ongoing Project Monitoring.

CWP as the implementing body is responsible for the collection and reporting of project data. The primary tool used to capture this information is the LEADER ICT system. At a minimum, the required fields of the LEADER ICT system are completed at specified stages. However, further quantitative data is collected for internal and external reporting purposes and qualitative data is also gleaned through regular contact with project promoters.

LAG level monitoring provides a broader evaluation which is more strategic in nature and draws from the evaluation process outlined above and a range of additional data sets as illustrated in the diagram on the next page:



A primary indicator of overall performance is **financial information**. Reports compiled by CWP on the LEADER programme budgets will help the LAG to monitor activity. These will provide a detailed breakdown of commitment and spend /claim information relative to budget headlines. WCC as financial partner may also provide information and updates to the LCDC on advance funding to CWP, payments to CWP, promoter payments, and claims submitted to the Department.

Drawing on all the above sources, an **Annual Performance Report (APR)** will be provided to the Department by CWP on behalf of the LAG outlining progress made during the year against local objectives set out in the LDS and annual implementation plan. The APR will outline the practical actions and activities required to deliver on the LDS and will relate back to the overarching themes and sub-themes.

The APR will contain project level analysis and other indicators such as financial performance and qualitative information. Local successes, operational issues/challenges and progress on cross-cutting objectives will be highlighted. Information on LAG governance, organisational structure, operations and decision making within the LAG will also be contained in this report.

The success of the LDS is primarily measured using the information collected from project level monitoring. All LDS priority actions outlined in Section 5 of this LDS reference back to a programme theme and sub-theme and set out overall targets to be achieved using the prescribed programme indicators. The LEADER ICT system will be used to input this data and generate reports on quantitative and qualitative programme elements.

In addition to disseminating information to the managing authority, reports and findings prepared by CWP on programme performance and thematic/sectoral issues and successes will be made available to the **public** as appropriate via CWP's website and social media pages or seminar events. CWP's website and social media will be regularly updated to reflect new activity. The M&E plan will be resourced through the administration budget of the RDP 2023-2027 with additional supports provided to the LCDC by WCC.

External Monitoring and Controls

The **Department of Rural and Community Development** will be collecting information from all individual LAGs and collating this into a national report summarising key trends, patterns and issues emerging on an annual basis. This will assist in evaluating performance against a national perspective. The **control framework** is also a useful performance tool. Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Department Auditors and EU officials conduct regular on the spot audits/inspections on project files and administration returns and issue individual and national findings. Internally, CWP staff review files for compliance and have additional controls in place (e.g. CWP drew up its own file check list for public procurement documentation). These are outlined in CWP's procedures manual.

In its role as financial partner to the LAG, WCC are also involved in control checks and monitoring. Based on review and control information, the Department may offer further guidance in the form of policies and circulars amending the operating rules.

In addition to the APR, Wicklow LCDC/CWP will forward information to assist in the mid-term review of LEADER at national level and will participate in any other requests for qualitative and quantitative information as required e.g. post and ex-ante programme evaluation of LEADER programmes.

Appendices

Section 06



Required Appendices

Appendix 1 LAG Information

- 1.1 LCDC Standing Orders September 2014
- 1.2 Service Level Agreement – LCDC & CWP 2014
- 1.3 CWP CEO Job Description
- 1.4 CWP Head of Finance and Administration Job Description
- 1.5 CWP Rural Development Officer Job Description
- 1.6 CWP RDP Administrator Job Description

Appendix 2 LAG Area Map

- 2.1 Map of the LDS area including Electoral Divisions

Appendix 3 LDS Financial Plan

Additional Appendices

Appendix 4 LDS Financial Plan

- 4.1 LAG Membership Profiles June 2023
- 4.2 Revised Guidelines for the Operation of LCDCs (2016)
- 4.3 LAG Procedures Manual (2019)
- 4.4 LEADER Article 48 Operational Procedures
- 4.5 LEADER Process Maps (2022)
- 4.6 WCC Procurement Policy and Procedures 2018 (due to be updated)
- 4.7 Wicklow County Council Audit Report 2021
- 4.8 County Wicklow Partnership Audit Report 2021
- 4.9 CWP Board Governance Manual (including company constitution) (March 2023)
- 4.10 CWP Data Protection Policy (2021)
- 4.11 Independent Evaluation Committee (IEC) Scoresheet
- 4.12 Photographs from Public Consultation Meetings
- 4.13 Additional Slido Feedback information
- 4.14 Marketing and Advertising of Public Consultations

Wicklow Local Development Strategy
was prepared for Wicklow Local Community
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