

The Arklow to Shillelagh Greenway is a long-standing objective of Wicklow County Council that will provide local amenity, attract tourism and support economic growth.

Background

The project already has the support of the majority of landowners and local communities along the line. The project will bring a major new recreation and amenity attraction to the area that will provide local amenity, generate additional tourism and provide new business development opportunities.

Over the last number of years, extensive landowner and stakeholder consultation took place, route options, feasibility and design development were undertaken and environmental surveys carried out. In late 2021, the Council confirmed its decision to commence the process of seeking Statutory Approval. Notwithstanding having secured voluntary land use for much of the lands along the project route, the Council had no option but to include acquisition of land by means of Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO).

Two significant developments then occurred at a National level which has impacted on the anticipated timeline and process for delivering the project:

1. In late December 2021, the *'Code of Best Practice: National and Regional Greenways'* and the associated *'Greenway Sustainability Payments'* documents were published. These strongly promote the use of *Voluntary Land Acquisition Agreements* (VLAAs) to secure lands necessary for Greenway developments. The CPO mechanism is only to be used if VLAAs are not in place for all of the lands required at the time that planning is sought for the project.

This approach is very similar to that which Wicklow County Council was previously following however the new documents have require stepping back to ensure full compliance with the procedures set out in the *'Code of Best Practice'*. Wicklow County Council is happy to follow this *'Code of Best Practice'*.

2. In 2022, responsibility for overseeing the development of greenways was transferred from the *National Transport Authority (NTA)* to *Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII)*. In June 2022, TII published the *'Project Manager's Manual for Greenway Projects'* which was followed by the *'Rural Cycleway Design (Offline & Greenway)'* in August 2022.

While working with these new publications and guidelines it has extended the project process somewhat, however they will also facilitate a collaborative approach to the development of the Greenway and provide much greater certainty for the ultimate implementation and delivery of the project.

Where we Are Now & Next Steps


Aligning with the TII *'Project Manager's Manual for Greenway Projects'*.

Utilising as much as possible of the work undertaken to date, the Arklow to Shillelagh Greenway project is currently at the mid-way point, or *Phase 2: Options Selection*, in the *Planning and Design* stage as set out in the TII *'Project Manager's Manual for Greenway Projects'*.

In line with the *'Code of Best Practice: National and Regional Greenways'*, an Independent Agronomist has been appointed by Wicklow County Council and is freely available to all potentially

affected landowner to provide impartial opinion on the proposed scheme. Contact details of the Independent Agronomist were circulated to all such landowners in December 2022.

Consultation is ongoing with all potentially affected landowners and key stakeholders in relation to Options Selection to agree a final route and also to ensure the ultimate delivery of a high-quality Greenway facility. Wicklow County Council is currently preparing and finalising the Options Selection Report that will identify the preferred route of the Greenway.

Project Development Phases: <i>TII Project Manager's Manual for Greenway Projects</i>			
Planning & Development	Phase 0	Scope and Pre-Appraisal	
	Phase 1	Concept and Feasibility	
	Phase 2	Options Selection	
	Phase 3	Design and Environmental Evaluation	
	Phase 4	Statutory Processes	
Construction/Implementation	Phase 5	Enabling and Procurement	
	Phase 6	Construction and Implementation	
	Phase 7	Close out and Review	

Next Steps

A project website will be set up in Q1 2023 to provide project information and updates.

We will continue to engage with all potentially affected landowners with a view to entering into *Voluntary Land Acquisition Agreements (VLAAs)* to facilitate the Greenway.

Once the *Options Selection* process is sufficiently progressed and the initial assessment of the options has been completed, a public consultation will be held on the emerging preferred route. It is anticipated that public consultation will take place in Q2 of 2023 and will allow all stakeholders to provide feedback before the preferred route is decided.

Phase 3: Design and Environmental Evaluation will follow public consultation and meeting all TII requirements. This will include the detailed design of the preferred route and the preparation of environmental reports that may be required.

Phase 4: Statutory Processes will follow with Wicklow County Council applying to An Bord Pleanála for Statutory Approval (Planning). Note that the proximity of the Arklow to Shillelagh Greenway to the Derry River (part of the *Slaney River Valley Special Area of Conservation*) means that a *Natura Impact Statement (NIS)* must be prepared. Under the *Planning and Development Act*, the application must therefore be submitted directly to An Bord Pleanála rather than to Wicklow County Council.

If VLAAs are not in place for all of the required lands at the time of submitting the application, the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) approval process will also commence at this time. Note that the option for VLAA will remain available to landowners up until the CPO (if required) is confirmed. In such circumstances, the CPO must set out all the lands required for the project including those for which a VLAA has been reached. The 'Notice to Treat' and 'Notice to Enter' will only be served on landowners who have not entered into a VLAA.

Thank you for your engagement and support to date. If you have any queries in the meantime, please feel free to email wicklowgreenway@wicklowcoco.ie and we will reply to you accordingly.