



Comhairle Contae Chill Mhantáin
Wicklow County Council

Draft County Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2030



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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

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1. Introduction

What is Biodiversity in Wicklow?

Biodiversity, short for "biological diversity," refers to the variety of life in a specific area, whether it's the entire planet or a small patch of land. It includes the wide range of animals, plants, birds, insects, fungi, and microorganisms, like bacteria, that together make up our natural world. Each species and organism in this web of life works together in ecosystems, maintaining balance and supporting life.

Wicklow is rich in biodiversity - from the uplands of the Wicklow Mountains to its rivers, lakes, woodlands, grasslands, wetlands, and long stretch of coastline. These diverse landscapes support a wide range of wildlife, including breeding seabirds, rare orchids, upland plants, bats, owls, butterflies, otters, and fish. Many of these habitats and species are protected under EU and national legislation, while others, though undesignated, are no less valuable.

In 2019, Wicklow County Council became the first local authority in Ireland to declare a biodiversity and climate-change emergency, recognising the urgent need to protect nature and restore ecosystem health in the face of accelerating global decline. That sense of urgency is well founded. Like the rest of Ireland, Wicklow is experiencing serious and ongoing biodiversity loss. The main pressures include invasive or problematic species, unsustainable land-use and development, recreation impacts, pollution, and the accelerating effects of climate change. These threats are not acting in isolation - they interact and compound one another, undermining the resilience of the ecosystems we rely on.

Wicklow's natural heritage assets lie both outside and inside protected areas, and many remain poorly documented or managed. Others are degraded but restorable. Protecting and restoring our County's biodiversity will require stronger local action, more collaboration, and a renewed understanding that nature is not a luxury - it is a necessity.

Why Does Biodiversity Matter?

Biodiversity is essential for our survival. It provides us with vital natural resources such as food, clean water, medicine, and shelter, through what are known as ecosystem services: nature's way of supporting human well-being. For example:

- **Food Security:** Healthy ecosystems with thriving pollinators, like bees, are critical for growing crops such as apples, beans, and many other fruits and vegetables.

- **Clean Water and Flood Prevention:** Wetlands and forests naturally filter water, reduce the risk and severity of flooding, and help manage water supplies during droughts.
- **Climate Resilience:** Woodlands, peatlands, and other ecosystems store carbon and help reduce the impacts of climate change.
- **Health Benefits:** Time spent in nature is linked to lower rates of chronic disease and improved mental health.
- **Medicine:** A large proportion of both traditional and modern medicines are derived from plants, animals, and other organisms found in the natural world.

Beyond these practical benefits, biodiversity has intrinsic value. Every species has a right to exist. It is our moral responsibility to protect and restore biodiversity, not only for our own sake, but for future generations and the health of the planet.

What is a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan?

A Local Authority (LA) Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) is a framework for coordinated biodiversity action at county level. It sets out priorities and practical steps that a local authority can take - directly or in partnership with others - to halt biodiversity loss, restore nature, and build ecological and community resilience.

Each local authority is now supported by a dedicated Biodiversity Officer, thanks to the establishment of the National Biodiversity Officer Network. This initiative was led by the Heritage Council in collaboration with local authorities and a key objective is the development of a BAP for every county.

The primary purpose of a local BAP is to translate the goals of Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) into impactful local policies and actions. In doing so, it also supports compliance with wider national and EU obligations, including the EU Nature Restoration Law, and contributes to relevant climate, heritage, and spatial planning strategies

What is the Role of the Wicklow Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan?

This Plan builds on the previous Wicklow BAP (2010–2015), and it focuses on actions that Wicklow County Council can lead, support, or influence. These include:

- Embedding biodiversity into decision-making across Council departments.
- Protecting and managing biodiversity on Council-owned land.
- Supporting communities, landowners, and schools to take action for nature.
- Restoring degraded habitats and improving ecological connectivity.

- Addressing cross-cutting pressures such as invasive species, and unsustainable recreation.
- Improving the evidence base through data collection, monitoring, and collaboration.

This document is not a comprehensive inventory of all biodiversity work planned or required in the county. Rather, it is a targeted and evolving plan that focuses on practical delivery within the Council's sphere of influence. It is designed to be reviewed and updated regularly, and to work alongside the Wicklow Heritage Plan, Climate Action Plan, and County Development Plan.

2. Policy Context

Biodiversity protection and restoration are shaped by a complex web of international agreements, EU directives, national legislation, and local policy (see Table 2 below). This Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) aligns Wicklow County Council's actions with these broader frameworks.

International Commitments and the Convention on Biological Diversity

This Plan responds to Ireland's obligations under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), first adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The most recent framework - the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022–2030) - commits countries to halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030 through integrated, whole-of-government approaches.

The Plan also supports the goals of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), which calls for urgent action to restore degraded ecosystems as a foundation for climate resilience, food and water security, and for sustainable development.

EU Policy and Legislative Frameworks

The Wicklow BAP helps deliver on several key EU environmental strategies and legal obligations:

- The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, which sets targets for protected areas, restoration, species recovery, pollution reduction, and urban greening.
- The EU Nature Restoration Law (2024), which introduces legally binding restoration targets to be met by 2030, and beyond, across specified ecosystems including peatlands, rivers, woodlands, grasslands, marine habitats, and urban areas (see Table 1, below).
- The EU Habitats and Birds Directives, which underpin the Natura 2000 network, and require Member States to maintain or restore protected habitats and species to favourable conservation status.
- The Water Framework Directive and Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which establish targets for water and marine ecosystems, with direct links to biodiversity conservation.
- The Farm to Fork Strategy, which promotes pesticide reduction, organic farming, and nature-friendly agriculture, to support biodiversity and ecosystem health.

Key Commitments – EU Nature Restoration Plan (to be implemented by 2030 across the EU)

1. Legally binding EU nature restoration targets to be proposed in 2021, subject to an impact assessment. By 2030:

Significant areas of degraded and carbon-rich ecosystems are restored.

Habitats and species show no deterioration in conservation trends and status.

At least 30% reach favourable conservation status or at least show a positive trend.

2. The decline in pollinators is reversed.

3. The risk and use of chemical pesticides are reduced by 50%, and the use of more hazardous pesticides is reduced by 50%.

4. At least 10% of agricultural area is under high-diversity landscape features.

5. At least 25% of agricultural land is under organic farming management, and the uptake of agro-ecological practices is significantly increased.

6. Three billion new trees are planted in the EU, in full respect of ecological principles.

7. Significant progress is made in the remediation of contaminated soil sites.

8. At least 25,000 km of free-flowing rivers are restored.

9. There is a 50% reduction in the number of Red List species threatened by invasive alien species.

10. Losses of nutrients from fertilisers are reduced by 50%, resulting in the reduction of fertiliser use by at least 20%.

11. Cities with at least 20,000 inhabitants have an ambitious Urban Greening Plan.

12. No chemical pesticides are used in sensitive areas such as EU urban green areas.

13. The negative impacts on sensitive species and habitats – including on the seabed through fishing and extraction activities – are substantially reduced to achieve good environmental status.

Table 1 List of EU Restoration Law targets for 2030.

National Biodiversity and Climate Policy

The Wicklow BAP serves as a local delivery mechanism for Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (2023–2030), which emphasises the role of local authorities and community-based action. It also complements:

- The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, which embeds biodiversity and nature-based solutions into national climate objectives.

- The NClimate Action Plan 2024, which identifies ecosystem restoration as a central strategy for both mitigation and adaptation.
- The Biodiversity Sectoral Climate Change Adaptation Plan, which sets out actions for landscape connectivity, invasive species control, ecosystem services, and co-designed urban refuges.
- The River Basin Management Plan (2022–2027), which integrates water quality, hydromorphology, and ecosystem restoration.

Recognising the long-term value of biodiversity and ecosystems to society and the economy, this Plan also acknowledges the emerging importance of Natural Capital Accounting in informing public policy and land-use decision-making.

Public Sector Biodiversity Duty

Under Section 59B of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023, all public bodies, including local authorities, have a statutory duty to promote the conservation of biodiversity in the exercise of their functions. This legal duty strengthens the case for integrating biodiversity into policies, projects, and operations across the public sector.

Wicklow's BAP provides a clear framework to support this integration at the local level.

Regional and Local Alignment

This Plan is designed to work alongside Wicklow's other strategies and planning instruments, including:

- The Wicklow County Development Plan 2022–2028, which contains multiple objectives related to green infrastructure, ecological corridors, and biodiversity.
- The Wicklow Climate Action Plan, which includes actions on biodiversity and promotes nature-based solutions for resilience and emissions reduction.
- The Wicklow Heritage Plan 2021–2025, which includes actions on biodiversity education, citizen science, and data gathering.
- The Eastern and Midlands Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) (2019–2031), which outlines regional priorities for biodiversity, connectivity, and ecosystem services.

This BAP is also intended to be a living document - one that can be reviewed, updated, and refined as new evidence emerges, partnerships evolve, and policy continues to shift.

Level	Policy / Legislation	Relevance to Wicklow BAP
International	UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)	National Biodiversity Action Plan developed under CBD commitments
	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022–2030)	Sets targets to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030
	UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030)	Promotes ecosystem restoration as climate and biodiversity action
EU	EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030	Sets restoration and protection targets; promotes urban greening and sustainable farming
	EU Nature Restoration Law (2024)	Introduces binding restoration targets across multiple ecosystems
	Habitats and Birds Directives	Legal foundation for Natura 2000; requires protection/restoration of listed habitats & species
	Water Framework Directive / Marine Strategy Framework Directive	Environmental objectives for aquatic and marine biodiversity
	Farm to Fork Strategy	Reduces pesticide and fertiliser use; promotes organic and diverse farmland habitats
National	4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (2023–2030)	Framework for coordinated national action; calls for local authority BAPs
	Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023, Section 59B (Biodiversity Duty)	Legal duty for all public bodies to promote biodiversity conservation
	Climate Action Plan 2024	Integrates biodiversity into climate adaptation and mitigation efforts
	Biodiversity Sectoral Climate Change Adaptation Plan	Outlines biodiversity resilience actions, including connectivity and invasive species
	River Basin Management Plan 2022–2027	Supports aquatic ecosystem restoration and improved water quality
Regional / Local	Eastern & Midlands Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)	Sets regional goals for biodiversity, connectivity, and green infrastructure
	Wicklow County Development Plan 2022–2028	Integrates biodiversity through zoning, green infrastructure, and policy objectives
	Wicklow Climate Action Plan	Promotes nature-based solutions for resilience and emissions reduction
	Wicklow Heritage Plan 2021–2025	Supports community engagement, education, and local biodiversity action

Table 2 Summary of Policy Context

3. The State of Nature in County Wicklow

Wicklow Biodiversity

County Wicklow has a rich mosaic of habitats and is deservedly known as the Garden of Ireland. The county stretches from the summit of Lugnaquilla - Leinster's highest peak at 925 metres - through river valleys, farmland, and native woodlands, to over 60 km of coastline along its eastern flank. This landscape also contains a high proportion of semi-natural habitats, many of which remain ecologically important both within and beyond protected sites.

Wicklow's habitats include blanket bogs, native and mixed woodlands, upland heaths, limestone grasslands, rivers, lakes, shingle beaches, wetlands, sea cliffs, dunes, and species-rich grasslands and hedgerows. Many of these habitats contain species protected by law under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, as well as Ireland's Wildlife Acts and Flora Protection Order. Some of Wicklow's most valuable sites for biodiversity are legally protected as part of the Natura 2000 network - including Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) - or as proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) (see Table, 3 below). However, important biodiversity also exists outside protected areas, particularly in the form of hedgerow networks, wetlands, species-rich road verges, traditional field boundaries, and farmland habitats.

The county's large area of upland habitat - including blanket bog, heath, and mountain grassland - supports species such as the red grouse (*Lagopus lagopus scotica*)¹, peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)², as well as rare upland plants³. Rivers such as the Avoca and Vartry provide habitat for numerous bird species and could be restored to support the abundant populations of salmon and trout they once held. Wicklow's rich coastal habitats support breeding seabirds, waders, and rare dune flora. Wicklow also harbours protected bat species, otters (*Lutra lutra*)⁴, and amphibians such as the smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*)⁵.

¹ Colhoun, K. and Cummins, S. (2013) 'Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland 2014–2019 (BoCCI 3)', *Irish Birds*, 9, pp. 523–544.

² National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) (n.d.) *SPA site synopses for Wicklow Mountains SPA and raptor monitoring data*. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

³ Curtis, T. and Wilson, F. (2007) *Wicklow Rare/Threatened and Scarce Plant Survey 2007*. Unpublished report. National Parks and Wildlife Service

⁴ National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) (2019) *Article 17 Reports – Otter (Lutra lutra), EU Habitats Directive Annex II & IV*. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

⁵ Fossitt, J., Smiddy, P. and Hayden, T. (2012) *Amphibians and Reptiles of Ireland*. Irish Wildlife Manual No. 45. National Parks & Wildlife Service and National Biodiversity Data Centre.

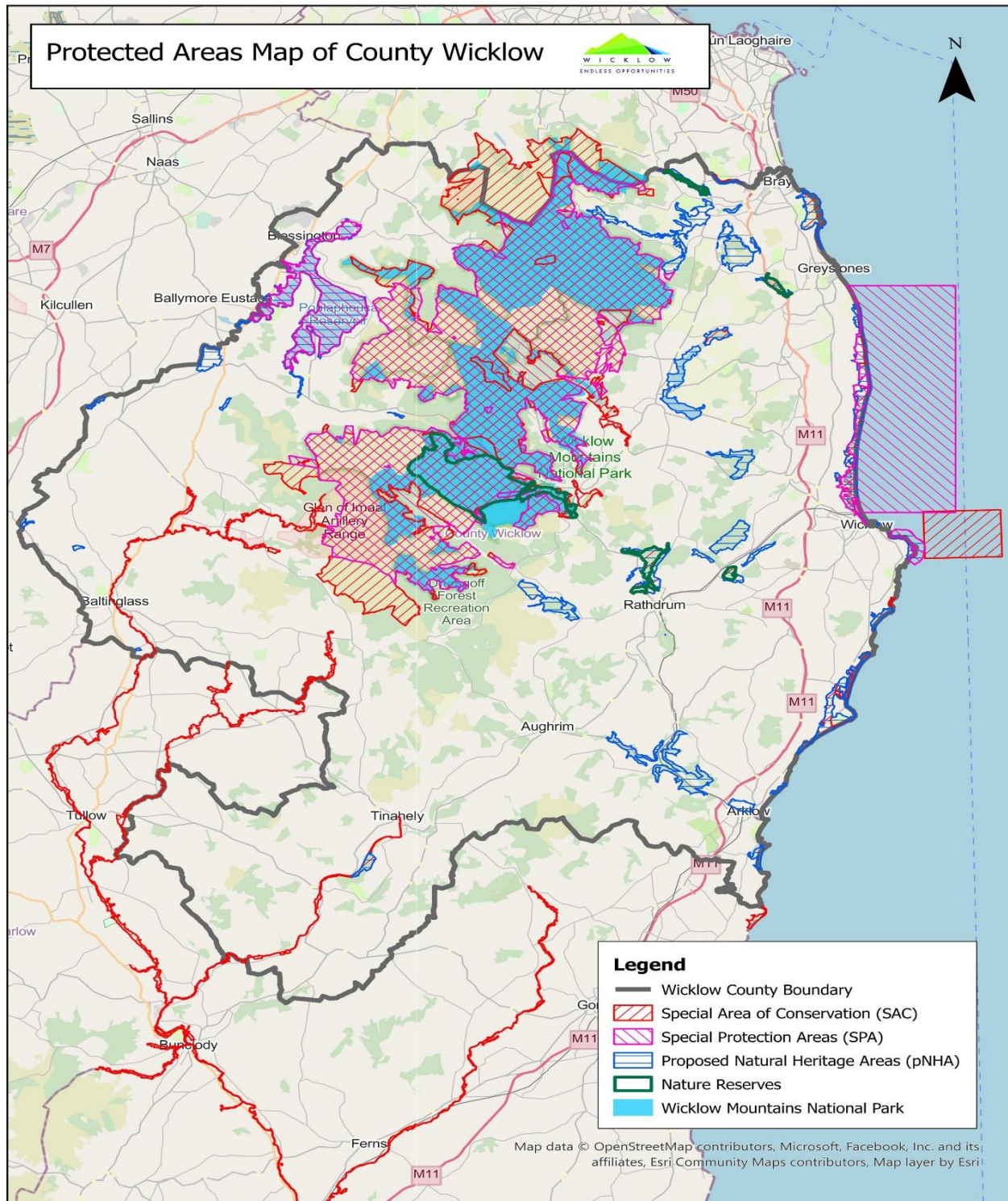
Woodlands, particularly ancient and semi-natural fragments, are especially valuable but poorly mapped. Native species such as holly, hazel, oak, and birchⁱ⁶ dominate these habitats in some areas, but non-native conifer plantations also make up a large proportion of Wicklow’s land cover. Native woodlands support specialist bird, mammal, invertebrate, and ground flora communities and are increasingly vulnerable to fragmentation, deer pressure, and other invasive species.

Wicklow’s farmland and rural landscapes contain important biodiversity features such as traditional hedgerows, species-rich grasslands, and wet grassland mosaics. These often occur on marginal or low-intensity farmland and are under pressure from intensification, abandonment, or development.

Designation Type	Number	Example Site
National Park	1	Wicklow Mountains National Park
Nature Reserve	6	Vale of Clara Nature Reserve
Special Protection Area (SPA)	4	Wicklow Head SPA
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	15	Brittas Bay SAC
Proposed Natural Heritage Area (pNHA)	35	Arklow Marsh pNHA
Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)	112	Sessile Oak on Quarry Road, Killincarrig
Special Amenity Area Order (SAAO)	1	Bray Head SAAO

Table 3 Table of Protected Area Designations and sites in Wicklow

⁶ Perrin, P.M., Martin, J.R., Barron, S.J., O’Neill, F.H., McNutt, K.E. and Delaney, A. (2008) *National Survey of Native Woodlands 2003–2008*. Irish Wildlife Manual No. 33. National Parks & Wildlife Service.



Map A Location of Protected Areas in Wicklow

Threats in Wicklow

“Biodiversity is central to human well-being, but we are destroying it and, therefore, undermining our own future.” Sir Robert Watson, Former Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services speaking to the Citizens Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, 2022

The most recent comprehensive global assessment of biodiversity and ecosystem services is the IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, published in May 2019⁷. This report concluded that human actions, including habitat destruction, overexploitation, pollution, and climate change, are causing widespread declines in species populations, threatening numerous ecosystems and the services they provide. It further warned that the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services has significant consequences for human well-being, including food security, water availability, and human health. The report highlighted the urgent need for transformative changes in policies and societal behaviour to address the biodiversity crisis and achieve sustainable development goals.

Ireland was only the second country in the world to declare a ‘biodiversity emergency’, which is commendable. However, the country is undergoing unprecedented and alarming declines in biodiversity.

- Greater than 50% of native Irish plant species have declined in range and/or abundance when compared with historic records extending as far back as the 1950s⁸.
- Nearly 33% of our semi-natural grasslands have been lost in the last decade⁹.
- Over 50% of Ireland’s 100 bee species have seen substantial declines in numbers since 1980, with 30% of species threatened with extinction¹⁰.
- 85% of our EU-protected habitats are in unfavourable conditions, while 30% of our 60 EU protected species are in unfavourable status¹¹.

⁷ IPBES (2019) *Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*. Brondizio, E.S., Settele, J., Díaz, S. and Ngo, H.T. (eds). IPBES Secretariat, Bonn, Germany.

⁸ Walker, K.J., Preston, C.D., Duke, S. and Vincent, P. (2023) *Plant Atlas 2020: Mapping Changes in the Distribution of the British and Irish Flora*. Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/book.110970>

⁹ Perrin, P.M., Martin, J.R., Barron, S.J., O’Neill, F.H., McNutt, K.E. and Delaney, A. (2008) *National Survey of Native Woodlands 2003–2008*. Irish Wildlife Manual No. 33. National Parks & Wildlife Service.

¹⁰ Fitzpatrick, U., Murray, T.E., Byrne, A., Paxton, R.J. and Brown, M.J.F. (2007) ‘Rarity and decline in bumblebees – A test of causes and correlates in the Irish fauna’, *Biological Conservation*, 136(2), pp. 185–194. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/222708832>

- 26% of birds are on the Red List and considered to be of conservation concern¹².

The global and national threats listed above are all apparent in Wicklow. But the County faces a particular suite of threats which have informed the development of this plan.

The main threats to biodiversity in County Wicklow are as follows:

1. Invasive Species and Deer

Invasive species, in particular deer, followed by rhododendron, cherry laurel, and other non-native plants are among the most pressing threats to Wicklow's biodiversity. Deer overgrazing suppresses natural regeneration, while invasive plants displace native ground flora and prevent woodland recovery, especially in the uplands and native forests.

2. Unsustainable and Inappropriate Agricultural Practices

The expansion of intensive farming, inappropriate practises and, conversely, a lack of management in some areas all have significant ecological impacts. The extent and management of conifer plantations, especially on sensitive soils, is also a major issue in Wicklow. Impacts include soil degradation, nutrient runoff, hydrological disruption, loss of species-rich grasslands and field boundaries, and drainage of wetlands. All of this leads to a loss of diversity in habitats that once supported a wide variety of wildlife.

3. Unsustainable Recreation.

Wicklow's popularity for walking, biking, swimming, and other outdoor activities has increased rapidly - amplified by social media trends and proximity to Dublin. High footfall in certain hotspots leads to erosion, littering, habitat trampling, and disturbance to wildlife. Ground-nesting birds are especially vulnerable, and they and other sensitive species are increasingly affected by off-leash dogs.

4. Development and Land-Use Change

Urban expansion, commercial infrastructure, road upgrades, and forestry operations continue to alter Wicklow's landscapes. These activities lead to fragmentation and degradation of habitats, increased pressure on water bodies and wetlands, and the loss of ecological connectivity needed for species movement and resilience.

¹¹ **National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)** (2019) *The status of EU protected habitats and species in Ireland – Article 17 Report*. Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

¹² **Gilbert, G.** (2021) *Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland: 2020–2026*. BirdWatch Ireland and RSPB Northern Ireland.

5. Climate Change

Warming temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, more frequent extreme weather events, and rising sea levels are already affecting biodiversity in Wicklow. Upland and coastal ecosystems are especially vulnerable, with climate pressures interacting with other threats to reduce resilience.

6. Lack of Data and Adaptive Management

Effective biodiversity action depends on good evidence. Yet, in many cases, we lack baseline data, up-to-date surveys, or consistent monitoring for key habitats and species in Wicklow. Without this foundation, it is difficult to track change, evaluate impact, or adjust management in response. Adaptive management, which uses monitoring results to inform ongoing decisions iteratively, is essential, but underused. Improving our evidence base is a core aim of this plan, enabling more responsive, effective, and accountable biodiversity actions.

What have we done so far in Wicklow

Wicklow County Council has been undertaking work on biodiversity through the Heritage Office for many years, through Projects such as the Swift Project, the Barn Owl Project and the coastal restoration initiatives. These efforts have been augmented since 2019, with the formation of the Climate Action Team, including the Biodiversity Officer. The delivery of projects continues alongside ongoing support for community actions, which have been steadily increasing as interest in biodiversity grows. Tidy Towns groups, local biodiversity groups and local environmental organisations are playing a key role in nature protection and enhancement efforts, and they are supported through awareness raising activities, advice, workshops, training, and the creation and dissemination of pollinator and biodiversity resources.

Some examples are outlined below.

1. Clermont Campus Restoration

The Clermont estate, at the edge of The Murrough Wetlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC) has been acquired by Wicklow County Council. As part of the habitat management plan prepared for the site, works are underway to enhance its biodiversity value while respecting its historic character. In 2024, nearly one hectare of invasive cherry laurel was cleared. The area will be replanted with native woodland species and others selected to reflect the site's designed landscape and heritage context. In addition, throughout 2024 and 2025, a series of public engagement events were held at the venue, allowing Clermont campus to become a biodiversity 'hub'.

2. Wicklow Barn Owl Project

Barn Owls are once again being recorded across County Wicklow, with confirmed breeding now documented in nearly one-third of the county's 10 km squares, the highest level in over 50 years. The Wicklow Barn Owl Project, a collaboration between the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Wicklow County Council, and BirdWatch Ireland, with support from the Heritage Council and the Local Biodiversity Action Fund, has been instrumental in tracking this recovery and supporting the species through practical conservation measures.

By 2024, more than 114 nest boxes had been installed across the county, with 13 successful broods recorded and over 30 young fledged in a single season. Some nest boxes were used within weeks of installation, demonstrating the ongoing need for safe nesting sites. The project has also built strong community engagement through public talks, local events, and active social media outreach - helping to foster pride and awareness of the return of this elusive and iconic bird to Wicklow's countryside.

3. Restoration and Management at Brittas Bay

Wicklow County Council has led extensive works at Brittas Bay, one of the county's most ecologically important coastal sites. In partnership with NPWS, actions have included the removal of invasive sea buckthorn, with dozens of dedicated volunteers contributing their time and effort over multiple seasons. These efforts have been accompanied by targeted dune restoration works, including the trialling of different methods to stabilise and recover sensitive habitats. Public engagement has also been a key pillar, with the annual "Behind the Beach" programme raising awareness of coastal biodiversity and responsible recreation. A site-specific management plan has guided these works, highlighting the importance of detailed planning for nature-sensitive restoration and access.

4. Our Plan for Nature

2030 Vision: A County Restoring Nature

It is 2030, and the tide is turning. Across Wicklow, people can see signs of nature recovering, a barn owl overhead, a meadow buzzing with pollinators, a woodland with young native trees regenerating.

The Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan has become a living document, guiding practical action, informing land-use decisions, and connecting people with the nature around them. Through new partnerships and better supports, community groups, farmers, and local schools are managing land for biodiversity, creating ponds, restoring hedgerows, and monitoring local wildlife.

More of Wicklow's most sensitive sites now have management plans in place, and actions are being implemented. Wetlands are being restored, invasive species controlled, and deer impacts reduced through cooperative strategies. The Council has increased its internal capacity and works more closely with national agencies and local stakeholders.

People's expectations have changed. Not everything is neat and tidy anymore, and almost everybody agrees that it looks fine. Road verges, housing estates, and public lands are being managed with nature in mind, and a shared understanding has taken root: that we share this space with nature and we must behave accordingly.

Objectives

“TO PROTECT OURSELVES, WE MUST PROTECT NATURE”

Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin,

Chair of the Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity Loss in Ireland

The Objectives which have informed the development of this plan and the actions herein are as follows:

Objective 1: Embed Biodiversity in Local Authority Planning and Practice

Integrate biodiversity into Wicklow County Council’s policies, planning, operations and service delivery by building internal capacity, preparing for future obligations, and leading by example in the implementation of best practice.

Objective 2: Protect and Enhance Biodiversity through Community-Led and Local Action

Support communities and local initiatives to protect and enhance biodiversity by enabling learning, collaboration, and practical conservation efforts across towns, villages, and the wider countryside.

Objective 3: Restore and Connect Biodiversity across Wicklow’s Landscapes

Implement and support habitat restoration, creation, and management measures that improve ecosystem resilience and connectivity, particularly in urban, upland, and freshwater environments.

Objective 4: Collaborate at Scale to Address Shared Biodiversity Challenges

Work in partnership across sectors and landscapes to tackle shared challenges — including deer management, other invasive species, upland restoration, outdoor recreation impacts, and river connectivity - through joined-up and coordinated approaches.

Objective 5: Strengthen the Evidence Base to Guide Action and Track Progress

Improve biodiversity data collection, monitoring, and evaluation systems to support evidence-based decision-making, identify priorities, and adaptively implement the Biodiversity Action Plan.

Actions 2025–2030

Mainstreaming biodiversity into decision making, and leading by example through implementation of best practice	Measurement Indicators	Lead and partners	Time S/M/L
1. Establish a Biodiversity Forum with representatives from key sectors and community groups. To evolve into a Biodiversity Steering Group on adoption of the plan.	BWG group established No. meetings held	Biodiversity Officer (see list of members)	Completed
2. Advance county-wide mapping of Wicklow's ecological networks and biodiversity features of particular concern or interest, for internal and external use.	LIBS county map layer Other maps as appropriate	Biodiversity Officer (plus internal ecology team) WCC GIS WCC Data Officer Heritage Council NPWS External experts	S/M
3. Use maps to showcase work undertaken by WCC and partners, and to highlight areas where ecological connectivity could be further enhanced.	Map of WCC-owned land MD pollinator friendly sites and tree maps	Biodiversity Officer (plus internal ecology team) WCC GIS WCC Data Officer MDs External consultants	M
4. Review existing policies, including the WCC Glyphosate Policy and Tree Policy, and update where necessary.	Reviewed Tree and Glyphosate policy	Environment section (plus internal ecology team) MDs External Consultants	S
5. Support relevant WCC sections by providing advice and guidance on minimising negative impacts on biodiversity, and identifying opportunities for biodiversity enhancement in Council works.	List/library of guidance materials shared	Biodiversity officer (plus internal ecology team) MDs Roads section Active travel section Housing section Planning section Wicklow Partnership (sports, recreation)	M

6. Provide biodiversity training for all WCC staff, and for external contractors through tender process where feasible, to ensure compliance with statutory obligations and the application of best practices.	LGMA/CARO staff training complete	Heritage Council Biodiversity Officer (plus internal ecology team) External experts All WCC staff External contractors	M
7. Assess and plan for future national and EU biodiversity policy obligations by identifying suitable areas for restoration and biodiversity enhancement on WCC lands, ensuring readiness for the implementation of emerging frameworks.	Pending NNRP Policy/plan for restoration on WCC lands?	Biodiversity Officer (plus internal ecology team) Environment section WCC SMT External experts & consultants	M/L
8. WCC to become a partner to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2026 and support the implementation of actions across all sectors.	Signed up to the 2026 AIPP	Biodiversity Officer (plus internal ecology team) CE Elected Members MDs	M
9. Monitor and respond to the development of national policies with implications for biodiversity, including those relating to commercial forestry, renewable energy, and other land-use sectors.	Dissemination of national policy developments internally	Biodiversity officer (plus internal ecology team) CAT, Environment Section External agencies	S/M/L
10. Support the integration of ecological expertise and best practice into statutory planning and development processes by providing accessible guidance, capacity building, and specialist input to assist relevant departments in making biodiversity-informed decisions.	No. guidance notes/internal reports Planning ecologist in place Ecology team in place	CE/SMT Elected Members Biodiversity officer All relevant internal WCC sections	M/L
11. Ensure adequate resources for ecological input into planning and policy processes, including internal ecological reporting, independent review of statutory assessments (EIA, SEA, AA), and promote the use of stand-alone Ecological Impact Assessments (EclAs), where appropriate.	No. of EcAIs produced for internal use Planning ecologist in place Ecology team in place	CE/SMT Elected Members Biodiversity officer All relevant internal WCC sections	M/L

12. Ensure WCC has adequate in-house ecological expertise to implement this and future biodiversity plans by establishing an ecology team and a dedicated parks department, in line with evolving national legislation and policy obligations.	Number of ecologists employed Parks department established	CE/SMT Elected Members	M/L
13. Ensure sufficient resources are available within WCC to meet biodiversity needs by securing public funding, developing new funding models, and leveraging grants and private sector partnerships, including for large-scale and community-led restoration projects.	n/a	CE/SMT Elected Members Central Govt Private sector NPWS Biodiversity Officer	L
Citizen Science, Community Conservation and Capacity Building	Measurement Indicators	Lead and partners	Time S/M/L
14. Develop a Biodiversity Ambassadors programme to raise public awareness of the ecological value and sensitivity of amenity areas.	Programme rolled out at least one site	Biodiversity officer External experts MDs	S
15. Roll out a county-wide biodiversity citizen science monitoring and training programme.	Number of library workshops held	Biodiversity officer External experts NBDC LAWPRO County Wicklow Partnership	S/M
16. Provide training, guidance, and capacity-building support to community groups to enhance biodiversity at the local level, and facilitate the formation of new biodiversity groups in response to interest.	Number of training and awareness raising events	Biodiversity officer CAT External experts NBDC LAWPRO Library Services Youth Sector Workers	S/M/L (ongoing)

17. Support interested community groups in tree and hedgerow seed collection initiatives, and in the development of a network of tree and hedgerow nurseries.	Initiatives supported	Biodiversity officer EAO Community Groups	M
18. Deliver public engagement campaigns, events, and workshops that inspire people to reconnect with nature, take positive action for biodiversity, and act as responsible stewards of Wicklow's natural heritage.	No of campaigns, events, workshops	Biodiversity officer EAO Heritage Officer External experts LAWPRO	S/M/L (ongoing)
19. Deliver biodiversity communications, including updates, public guidance, and accessible information, and explore new formats to raise awareness and deepen public engagement.	No communications delivered	Biodiversity officer (plus internal ecology team) CAT Comms team WCC GIS External experts Town Teams PPN Library service	S/M/L
20. Support creative projects that explore the relationship between people and nature, such as nature-inspired murals, performances, or other artistic expressions.	No projects supported	Biodiversity officer EAO Arts Officer External experts	S
21. Develop practical ways to support information sharing, networking and collaboration among individuals and community groups involved in biodiversity projects and activities in Wicklow.	Proposed mechanism documented	Biodiversity officer EAO Heritage Officer External experts LAWPRO	S/M
22. Support schools in promoting biodiversity awareness and action through participation in existing programmes and by supporting practical learning and locally relevant projects.	No of schools engaged	EAO Climate Action Team Green School Heritage in Schools	S/M/L (ongoing)

23. In collaboration with relevant agencies, provide training and demonstration site visits for farmers and landowners interested in biodiversity enhancement and habitat restoration.	No of farm visit, training events	Biodiversity officer WCC Agricultural Inspector Teagasc NPWS LAWPRO ASAP/ACRES advisers External experts	S/M
24. Support farmers and landowners to implement biodiversity enhancement and landscape resilience measures on private land by offering technical guidance and access to funding opportunities.	No of farms on which measures implemented	Biodiversity officer Teagasc NPWS LAWPRO ASAP/ACRES advisers WWEN Small business/Chambers Ireland External experts	S/M
25. Investigate the potential to establish a training programme in applied ecology and land management, based in Wicklow and accredited through collaboration with a third-level institution.	Number of meetings held with stakeholders	Biodiversity officer External experts Academics	M/L
Protect, Restore and Build Resilience	Measurement Indicators	Lead and partners	Time S/M/L
26. Continue implementing targeted biodiversity restoration and management measures at WCC sites with established ecological management plans, such as key coastal locations under active restoration.	As per within plan monitoring	Biodiversity officer MDs NPWS Community Groups External consultants	S/M
27. Identify WCC-owned lands countywide with known or potential biodiversity value that require further ecological assessment, and develop site-specific strategies to guide future restoration and conservation actions.	List/map of sites No strategies developed	Biodiversity officer WCC GIS team Fire Service MDs NPWS An Taisce Community Groups External consultants	M/L

28. Promote urban biodiversity and ecological connectivity through demonstration projects and green infrastructure measures, including wildlife-friendly lighting, nature-based SuDS, green corridors, and climate-resilient habitats.	No of demonstration projects complete	Biodiversity officer MDs CAT All relevant WCC sections External consultants Chambers Ireland	S/M
29. Identify WCC-owned lands in urban and semi-urban areas with potential for habitat creation — particularly woodland and wetland — and support the implementation of biodiversity enhancement measures on these sites.	No of projects complete Ha of habitat created	Biodiversity officer MDs CAT External consultants	S/M
30. Support LAWPRO, Inland Fisheries, and other stakeholders in activities aimed at improving water quality and implementing the 3rd (and 4th) cycle of the River Basin Management Plan.	Support as needed	Biodiversity officer WCC Agricultural inspector LAWPRO OPW EWRT	S/M/L
31. Pilot conservation grazing on selected WCC lands to enhance habitat quality and support traditional land management, with a view to establishing a wider programme incorporating biodiversity and social farming objectives.	Pilot projects rolled out Wider project feasibility assessed	Biodiversity officer MDs External experts Old Irish Goat Society DRL CoCo Fingal CoCo Social Farming Ireland	S/M
32. Explore innovative nature-based solutions to build county-wide resilience.	Projects investigated	Biodiversity officer CAT MDs NPWS EWRT External experts LAWPRO OPW	M/L
33. Support projects that enhance marine ecosystems through the restoration of oyster beds, seagrass meadows, and kelp forests in suitable areas.	Projects supported/ partnered on	External project partners Biodiversity Officer CAT NPWS LAWPRO OPW External experts	M/L

34. Support existing and future EIP, LIFE, and other EU-funded projects focused on ecosystem restoration as a delivery mechanism for WCC objectives.	Projects partnered on	External project partners Biodiversity Officer CAT NPWS External experts	S/M
Collaborate at Landscape Scale for Impact	Measurement Indicators	Lead and partners	Time S/M/L
35. Support projects focused on the restoration of river corridors and natural water retention features to enhance biodiversity, reduce flood risk, and strengthen upland-coastal connectivity.	Projects supported	External project partners Biodiversity Officer CAT WUC EWRT LAWPRO	S/M
36. Support East Wicklow Rivers Trust, Inland Fisheries, and LAWPRO in delivering a barrier removal programme to improve fish passage in Wicklow rivers.	Barriers removed Km habitat opened up	External project partners Biodiversity Officer CAT IF EWRT LAWPRO	S/M
37. Support collaborative efforts to identify and advance upland restoration opportunities, recognising the unique biodiversity value of these areas and their potential co-benefits for water quality, climate resilience, and sustainable local economies.	Project proposals developed Funding applications submitted	Wicklow Uplands Council NPWS Biodiversity Officer CAT	M/L
38. Work with Wicklow Naturally and other partners to promote venison as a sustainable food source, and raise public awareness of the need to manage deer populations in Wicklow.	Campaigns or events delivered	CAT Deer Mmgmt Groups Wicklow Uplands Council Biodiversity Officer	S/M
39. Review, strengthen, and further develop evidence-based measures to address the impacts of outdoor recreation on biodiversity, ensuring that access and amenity use are balanced with the protection of nature.	Participation in no events Strategies reviewed Strategies developed	Biodiversity Officer WROC Environment Section Wicklow Tourism (&TI) Leave No Trace External experts NTA	S/M/L

40. In partnership with NPWS, WUC, and others, establish a Dark Sky Reserve in WMNP and use it as a platform to raise awareness of the need for dark spaces and to implement light pollution reduction initiatives in selected communities.	Workshops held Reserve or community certified	CAT Biodiversity Officer NPWS WMNP WUC Dark Skies Ireland Chambers Ireland	M/L
41. Support and participate in invasive species control initiatives, in collaboration with relevant agencies, targeting invasive plants, mammals, aquatic species, and invertebrates.	Programmes participated in	CAT MDs NPWS NBDC IFI Rivers Trusts Coillte LAWPRO OPW Adjacent Local Authorities	S/M/L
42. Develop mechanisms to improve communication, cooperation, and resource-sharing with national agencies and other state bodies on key issues impacting biodiversity, including forestry, water quality, recreation, and agriculture.	n/a	NPWS, Teagasc, Coillte, Forest Service, Inland Fisheries Ireland, LAWPRO, OPW, Dept of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Dept of the Environment, Climate and Communications	S/M/L
Build Evidence Base through Research and Monitoring	Measurement Indicators	Lead and partners	Time S/M/L
43. Continue to support existing species- and habitat-specific conservation projects, and work with partners to develop and implement new initiatives that align with identified priorities.	As per project	NPWS Coillte Bat Conservation Ireland Bird Watch Ireland External Researchers WUC EWRT Biodiversity Officer Other external partners	S/M/L

44. Encourage and facilitate the collection of baseline and ongoing monitoring data on priority species and habitats in the county, particularly those specified in Annexes II & IV of the Habitats Directive.	N/A (captured in actions 45-47)	NPWS Coillte Bat Conservation Ireland Bird Watch Ireland External Researchers WUC EWRT Biodiversity Officer Other external partners	S/M/L
45. Undertake an audit of existing biodiversity monitoring and research activity in County Wicklow, including species and habitat coverage, methodologies, partnerships, and data availability, to identify gaps and priorities for future work.	Audit report	NPWS Coillte Bat Conservation Ireland Bird Watch Ireland External Researchers WUC EWRT Biodiversity Officer Other external partners	M
46. Review and improve systems for biodiversity data management within WCC, and develop protocols to support the sharing of ecological data with key external partners, including the NBDC and NPWS.	System in place with SOPs	Biodiversity Officer WCC GIS NPWS NBDC Heritage Council	M
47. Investigate options for assessing the impact of conservation actions in Wicklow, and for monitoring BAP implementation.	Review of options conducted	Biodiversity Officer WCC GIS NPWS NBDC Heritage Council	m M
48. Pilot ecosystem accounting approaches on WCC Lands and assess feasibility of undertaking a comprehensive Natural Capital Assessment for County Wicklow.	Pilot undertaken	Natural Capital Ireland TCD UCD Biodiversity officer	M
49. Compile and promote information on the biodiversity value of historic demesnes and graveyards.	Sites surveyed and documented	Biodiversity Officer Heritage Officer Community archaeologist Community Groups Wildlife Estates Label	M

50. Support feasibility studies for circular economy projects which may have biodiversity benefits (e.g. wild graveyards, uses of sheep wool, use of habitat management by-products.)	No feasibility studies	Wicklow Uplands Council Other external partners NPWS	M
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5. Delivering the Plan

Developing the Biodiversity Plan – The process

This plan was drawn up according to "Guidelines for Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs)" published by The Heritage Council as a resource for Local Authorities.

To support the development of this Biodiversity Action Plan, Wicklow County Council established the Wicklow Biodiversity Working Group, as a sub-group under the umbrella of the Wicklow Heritage Forum. This non-statutory advisory group was convened to guide the planning process in collaboration with the Council's Biodiversity Officer.

Membership was drawn from a broad cross-section of organisations and sectors with a role in nature conservation and land management. These included; BirdWatch Ireland, Coillte, the East Wicklow Rivers Trust, Inland Fisheries Ireland, the Irish Farmers' Association, Mountaineering Ireland, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Public Participation Network (environmental and community pillars), Teagasc, the West Wicklow Environmental Group, and the Wicklow Uplands Council. A full list of members is provided in Annex C.

The group contributed to identifying priorities, shaping objectives, and advising on practical and policy-based actions. It also helped to ensure that the plan reflects local knowledge, on-the-ground experience, and the diversity of perspectives needed to deliver effective outcomes for biodiversity.

Consultation

A pre-draft public consultation process was undertaken from 23rd September to 4th November 2024 to inform the development of the County Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2030. This early engagement phase invited contributions from residents, community groups, landowners, environmental organisations, and other stakeholders to help shape the priorities and direction of the plan.

As part of this process, a series of in-person drop-in clinics were held at public libraries across the county, providing opportunities for face-to-face dialogue and idea-sharing:

- Ballywaltrim Library – Wednesday, 9 October, 5–7 pm
- Arklow Library – Tuesday, 15 October, 5–7 pm
- Wicklow Library – Thursday, 17 October, 5–7 pm
- Blessington Library – Tuesday, 22 October, 5–7 pm
- Greystones Library – Thursday, 24 October, 5–7 pm

These clinics were supplemented by an online consultation survey, accessible through the Council's website, and promoted through press, email networks, and social media. Respondents were invited to share their views on local biodiversity priorities, key pressures, and the kinds of actions they would like to see Wicklow County Council take, in collaboration with communities and partners.

Feedback from this pre-draft stage played a key role in identifying themes and shaping the plan's vision, objectives, and actions. In addition to public engagement, internal consultation was carried out with all relevant sections of Wicklow County Council, ensuring that the plan reflects cross-departmental insights and can be embedded effectively across Council operations. A full summary of consultation feedback is available as a separate report.

Putting the Biodiversity Plan into Action

Implementation of the Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan will be overseen by the Biodiversity Working Group and co-ordinated by the Biodiversity Officer, through the development and delivery of an annual work programme. This will be supported by Wicklow County Council, the Heritage Council, the Local Biodiversity Action Fund, and other relevant funding streams.

Delivery of the BAP will require a continued cross-departmental approach within Wicklow County Council, actively led by the Biodiversity Officer. Collaboration will be pursued with colleagues across relevant service areas, including but not limited to the Climate Action Team, the Heritage Team, the Planning Teams, the Environmental and Community sections, and Infrastructure sections.

A collaborative partnership between all stakeholders will be essential to the success of the plan. Wicklow County Council will continue to work with relevant government agencies, non-governmental organisations, community groups, and the wider public to deliver the plan's objectives and actions.

It is envisaged that, following the adoption of the plan, the Biodiversity Working Group will transition to a Biodiversity Steering Group, to support this process and provide technical input. Working groups may be convened as required to assist with delivery of specific actions or thematic areas.

Looking Forward, a Vision for 2050

By 2050, biodiversity in County Wicklow is thriving once more. Nature is no longer in retreat but visibly recovering across the county's uplands, lowlands, rivers, and coast. Woodland, wetland, and grassland habitats are being actively restored. Healthy

ecosystems support a rich variety of species, including some that had long been absent or in steep decline. Nature is better connected across the landscape, and land use decisions take biodiversity fully into account.

Biodiversity is embedded in how we plan, build, farm, and live. Local communities, farmers, and landowners are trusted and well-supported partners in protecting the natural heritage of Wicklow. Deer populations and other invasive species are under control, and adaptive management is the norm rather than the exception. Schools, businesses, and public bodies see biodiversity as part of their remit and take visible action to care for the land around them.

Wicklow County Council is a leader in local biodiversity delivery, with sustained funding, capacity, and collaboration driving progress year-on-year. The county's nature is not only more resilient to climate change; it is part of the solution.

Appendices

Appendix A Table of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Term
BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BWI	BirdWatch Ireland
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
EWRT	East Wicklow Rivers Trust
IFI	Inland Fisheries Ireland
IFA	Irish Farmers' Association
LBAF	Local Biodiversity Action Fund
LA	Local Authority
LABAP	Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan
MI	Mountaineering Ireland
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
NRL	Nature Restoration Law
PPN	Public Participation Network
pNHA	Proposed Natural Heritage Area
SAC	Special Area of Conservation
SAAO	Special Amenity Area Order
SPA	Special Protection Area

TPO	Tree Preservation Order
WCC	Wicklow County Council
WWWG	West Wicklow Environmental Group
WUC	Wicklow Uplands Council

Appendix B Protected Areas of Wicklow

Site name	pNHA	SAC	SPA
Ballyman Glen	*	*	
Bray Head	*	*	
Buckroney-Brittas Dunes & Fen	*	*	
Carriggower Bog	*	*	
Deputy's Pass Nature Reserve	*		
Glen of the Downs	*	*	
Carriggower Bog	*	*	
Holdenstown Bog	*	*	
Knocksink Wood	*	*	
Magherabeg Dunes	*	*	
The Murrough Wetlands	*	*	*
Slaney River Valley	*		
Vale of Clara (Rathdrum Woo	*	*	
Wicklow Mountains	*	*	*
Wicklow Reef	*		
Poulaphouca Reservoir	*	*	*
Wicklow Head	*	*	*
Wicklow Town Sites	*		
Great Sugar Loaf	*		
Hollywood Glen	*		
Dunlavin Marshes	*		
Powerscourt Woodland	*		
Lowtown Fen	*		
Newtown Marshes	*		
Glenealy Woods	*		
Glencree Valley	*		
Dargle River Valley	*		
Powerscourt Waterfall	*		
Vartry Reservoir	*		
Arklow Town Marsh	*		
Ballycore Rath •	*		
Ballinagee Wood	*		

Ballinacor Wood	*		
Avoca River Valley	*		
Arklow Sand Dunes	*		
Arklow Rock - Askintinney	*		
Kilmacanoge Marsh	*		
Devil's Glen	*		
Avondale	*		
Tomnafinnoge Wood	*		

Appendix C List Biodiversity Working Group Members

[Pending approval by BWG members for publication]
