



## **Heritage Ireland 2030 Consultation Submission February 2019**

### **Wicklow Uplands Council**

Wicklow Uplands Council is an independent voluntary organisation which works *'To support the sustainable use of the Wicklow Uplands through consensus and partnership with those who live, work and recreate there'*.

### **What is the most important thing Heritage Ireland 2030 needs to deliver?**

Heritage Ireland 2030 needs to build on the significant achievements of the Heritage sector in Ireland to date. Wicklow Uplands Council stresses the vital role that communities are currently playing in managing and interpreting heritage at a local level. This role cannot be underestimated but to continue to do this Heritage Ireland needs to ensure the effective delivery of appropriate support structures and resources.

### **What do you think of the vision for Heritage 2030? Is there anything we should add?**

The plan states that it will focus specifically on built and natural heritage. We are aware that cultural heritage is dealt with other plans and strategies, however given that built, natural and cultural heritage are so intrinsically linked it seems at odds not to include cultural heritage within the plan.

Cultural and Heritage Tourism is expanding rapidly specifically from Eastern countries such as China and Heritage 2030 needs to take cognisance of this.

### **What are the biggest challenges facing our heritage?**

One of the biggest challenges that we see facing our heritage is a lack of resources and investment. This is true both at a higher level in terms of the national agencies and bodies who have responsibility for managing our heritage and also at a local level for organisations like Wicklow Uplands Council and various local community groups who play a role in promoting and protecting heritage.

The ongoing budgetary constraints faced by the Heritage Council are of concern and a potential threat to the future management of our heritage. The fundamental role that the Heritage Council plays in developing partnerships and supporting initiatives and groups such as Wicklow Uplands Council should be significantly enhanced. We advocate that the Heritage Council should be adequately staffed and financed to ensure that it can successfully implement its recently launched 'Heritage at the Heart' Strategic Plan 2018 -2022. The loss of the Heritage Council's Community Grants Scheme in 2019 was a major blow to many local groups and communities that have relied on the grants to promote and protect their local heritage

Similarly Wicklow Uplands Council advocate that the National Parks and Wildlife Service need to be adequately staffed and financed to ensure that they can meet their objectives for the management



and conservation of our most important natural heritage sites. Given that Ireland has EU conservation obligations for these areas appropriate resources are paramount.

In addition, the unknown consequences of Brexit will undoubtedly bring about challenges for our heritage. The continuation and development of cross border partnerships is fundamental to a full cultural understanding of the island of Ireland.

The unenclosed land in the Wicklow/Dublin Uplands is of high value for biodiversity and is of European conservation importance for habitats and birds. This is recognised by the designation of a substantial area of the uplands region as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA). These areas are among the most important and especially the most visited natural, and cultural, heritage areas in the country due to the presence of peatlands and associated biodiversity and the proximity to Dublin.

The main challenges for the management of upland areas include:

- The decline in upland farming; farmers have traditionally been the custodians of habitats but an ongoing reduction in farming activities has seen a decline in the quality and condition of associated habitats. There is growing awareness that traditional farming activities supports greater biodiversity. However, there needs to be a more integrated approach between the Department of Arts, Heritage and Culture and the Department of Agriculture Food and Marine to develop cohesive policies to support extensive farming practices.
- Climate Change is one of the greatest threats to all aspects of our heritage. Upland areas possess the largest areas of peatland in the country and therefore hugely important in terms of carbon storage and sequestration. Correct management of these areas is vital.
- The decline in the rural economy is a major challenge. Vibrant and engaged local communities are fundamental to local heritage interpretation and management. This decline can only be addressed with an integrated and multi government department approach.

**What do you think of the draft objectives in the document? In your view is there something important missing?**

Effective national leadership in heritage management is critical and we reiterate that appropriate staffing and resources are required for all agencies.

Wicklow Uplands Council stresses the importance of a bottom up approach to management and the ability of local people to have their say in the decision making process. Wicklow Uplands Council has for the past 20 years demonstrated that the bottom up approach is hugely successful.

**What changes are happening right now that might impact on our heritage?**

There are numerous changes happening at present which may impact our heritage. While there are some negative impacts there are of course other changes which present exciting opportunities to have a positive impact on our heritage:



- **Sale of Luggala estate;** the sale of the 5000ac estate presents a unique opportunity for the state to purchase and increase its National Heritage Estate and add further coherence to the Wicklow Mountains National Park and protect one of Ireland's most iconic properties for future generations. The estate could be continued to be used by the film industry which up to now has been very important to the local economy. The house could be developed as a cultural centre especially for traditional music on the lines of the Tyrone Guthrie Centre at Annaghmakerrig, Co Monaghan.
- **Luggala Carriage Collection;** the late Garech De Brun bequeathed his carriage collection to the state. This is a hugely important collection of international significance. The state should accept and create a facility and museum which would become a major visitor attraction. Wicklow Uplands Council advocates that the collection should be kept within Co Wicklow.
- **The proposed development for Avondale House and Forest Park;** this could be greatly enhanced and developed to include a Heritage Park like Bunratty and Cultra. A museum for Co Wicklow could be included within the estate similar to those in other counties. The Luggala carriage collection could be housed at Avondale
- **The Shillelagh Heritage Trail ;** This trail, developed by the local community, promotes the Fitzwilliam – Coollattin – South Wicklow heritage and includes; the estate village of Shillelagh, the oldest Oak forest in Europe, industrial heritage and buildings of major architectural importance. Community driven initiatives like this are hugely important in the promotion and interpretation of our heritage and can provide a much needed boost to local economies which are less visited. These initiatives should be nurtured and promoted.

### **How can we work together and engage all our communities under Heritage Ireland 2030?**

Recognising the role that communities play in interpreting and managing their local heritage is hugely significant. There are many great examples of community organisations across the country who are actively engaged in heritage management e.g. Wicklow Uplands Council, The Community Wetland Forum, The MacGillycuddy Reeks Forum as well as groups such as the Tidy Towns and The PURE Project (Protecting Upland and Rural Environments). Initiatives like these should be nurtured and celebrated to encourage greater participation.

The network of County Heritage Officers has been extremely effective throughout the country in engaging local communities with their heritage. This network should be maintained and developed to allow further engagement as just one heritage officer for each county is an enormous responsibility.

### **How can we ensure Heritage Ireland 2030 delivers?**

National and local champions for heritage will be vital to ensure that the plan is a success. There are already well established organisations, both national and local, to ensure Heritage Ireland delivers. These organisations are ideally placed to strategically distribute resources to local community groups. However they need to be appropriately staffed and financed.