



January 2020 – November 2020



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newstalk



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1. Introduction

Wicklow Uplands Council (WUC) is an independent, voluntary organisation that represents the shared interests of over 40 diverse member groups and individuals in the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands. The organisation takes a partnership approach to sustainable development and promotes projects that bring value to the people who live and work in the Wicklow Uplands and to those who use the area for recreational activities. This report summarises the work and activities undertaken by the organisation from January to November 2020. Despite the challenges associated with 2020, Wicklow Uplands Council continued to engage with its' members, project partners and the general public to address some of the challenges faced in the uplands, in line its core mission;

'To support the sustainable use of the Wicklow Uplands in consensus and partnership with those who live, work and recreate there'

In geographic terms, 'uplands' are generally considered to be those unenclosed areas found above the 300m contour line. The Wicklow and Dublin uplands region contains some of our largest expanses of semi-natural habitats and a huge natural asset. They are an intrinsic part of our natural heritage and their management and enjoyment plays an important role in our cultural heritage. Upland areas deliver important ecosystem services such as drinking water and carbon storage and are associated with areas of high nature value farmland.

Wicklow Uplands Council recognises the importance of the surrounding areas, the communities, the network of towns and villages, and people living there, as playing a crucial role in the overall functioning and management of this cherished landscape.

1.1. Guiding Values

Wicklow Uplands Council operates within the following core values:

Consensus: The process of consensus building is central to the work of the organisation. Since inception, all decisions made by the Board of Directors have been made by consensus. By its nature this requires the resolution or mitigation of all minority concerns and objections.

Community Participation: Wicklow Uplands Council believes that the people who live, work and recreate in the uplands must be provided with opportunities to participate in the various local, regional and national decision making processes affecting the area. The organisation represents the views of the local people and presents their case to the statutory decision makers.

Partnership & Collaboration: Wicklow Uplands Council is committed to work for the sustainable use of the Wicklow Uplands in partnership with statutory stakeholders in the spirit of Local Agenda 21. It recognises the necessity for, and benefits of, collaboration and partnership.

1.2. Covid19

Covid19 had a sudden and unexpected impact on all activities. In line with Government guidelines, office based employees worked from home throughout the lockdown. Project work continued remotely but naturally there were some delays in delivery. All public events were postponed or ran on a reduced capacity as appropriate. All meetings of the Board of Directors and subcommittees were moved online.

Throughout the Covid19 crisis Wicklow Uplands Council took a leading role in sharing relevant content and messages through social media channels regarding responsible enjoyment of the outdoors.

2. Organisation Management

2.1. Panel Structure

Wicklow Uplands Council (WUC) represents over 40 diverse member groups and individuals. The membership of WUC is divided into four panel groups; farmers & landowners, environmental and recreational interests, economic & tourism interests, and community groups. These panels represent the shared and diverse interests found in the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands area.

2.2. Board of Directors

A voluntary Board of Directors of up to 27 individuals are elected on an annual basis. While WUC has a large Board, this facilitates representation of a broad range of stakeholders. Consensus is central to the work of WUC and no decision by the Directors is decided by a vote. A full list of Directors for 2020/2021 is included in Table 1 below.

Throughout 2020, monthly Board meetings were virtual. The well-attended regular meetings ensure that projects and programmes are progressing and directors are well informed. It also facilitates open dialogue between various interest groups. Directors take active responsibility in assisting in the delivery of projects and represent WUC on committees and at events throughout the year.

In 2020, voluntary hours by Directors attending Board and Executive meetings, will amount to **over 350 hours**. Additional voluntary hours spent on subcommittees, projects activities etc. bring this voluntary contribution to over **400 hours**. A modest calculation of the value of these voluntary hours amounts to over €4000. This represents a reduction in hours when compared with previous years, which is due to challenges around Covid19



27 Voluntary Directors

Gave over 450
hours of their time

Over €4,500

2.3. Strategic Plan and Organisation Review 2020

While 2020 brought challenges, it provided an opportunity to reflect and review activities. WUC used the opportunity to develop a new three-year strategic plan for the period 2021-2023 and to review the structure of the organisation. With the assistance of LEADER funding an external consultant, Siobhán Geoghegan Consulting, facilitated the process. The review examined the many successes and achievements to date, highlighted future challenges and opportunities, and evaluated the current organisation structure from a governance perspective. The external review process facilitated a very valuable mechanism of self-evaluation. Members, staff and key funders were surveyed and provided feedback during the review process.

The review and new plan is in the final stages of completion and will be published in December in time for 2021. The plan sets out a series of ambitious objectives for the next three years. Central to this will be building on the successes of our current key projects, while at the same time, investigating new initiatives and policy developments in line with our mission to support those who live, work and recreate in the uplands. A key strength of Wicklow Uplands Council is our ability to form effective partnerships with a wide range of groups including, individuals, communities, statutory and non-statutory stakeholders to achieve collaborative projects and initiatives and this is central to the new plan.

Table 1: Wicklow Uplands Council Board of Directors 2020/2021			
		Name	Organisation
Panel Group	Farmers and Landowners	Declan O'Neill	County Wicklow IFA
		Pat Dunne	County Wicklow IFA
		Tom Byrne	County Wicklow IFA
		Joe Morrissey	County Wicklow IFA
		Owen Brady	Individual Member
		Sean Malone	Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners Association
		Daniel Molloy	Individual Member
	Environment and Recreation	Bob Galvin	Bray Coast Care
		John Flynn	Co Wicklow Game Council
		Louis O'Byrne	Individual Member
		Russell Boland	Individual Member
	Community	Finian McEvoy	Glendalough & District Development Association
		Martha Mitchell	County Wicklow Farm Family Group
		Garvan Hickey	Individual Member
		Claire Chambers	Roundwood & District Community Council
	Economic and Tourism	Eugene Stephens	Ashford Self Catering Cottages
		Dairine Nuttall	Wicklow Nordic Walking & Ireland Tour Guide
		Geoffrey Seymour	Roundwood & District Community Council
		Sean Byrne	Lough Dan House, B & B
	Co-options	Carmel Kealy	Motor Cycle Union of Ireland
		John Medlycott	Individual Member
		Donal Anderson	Dublin IFA
		Philip Maguire	Dublin IFA
		Jim Sheehan	Mountaineering Ireland
		Denis Halpin	Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners Association

2.4. Wicklow Uplands Council Team

WUC currently employs 3 staff in the following positions.

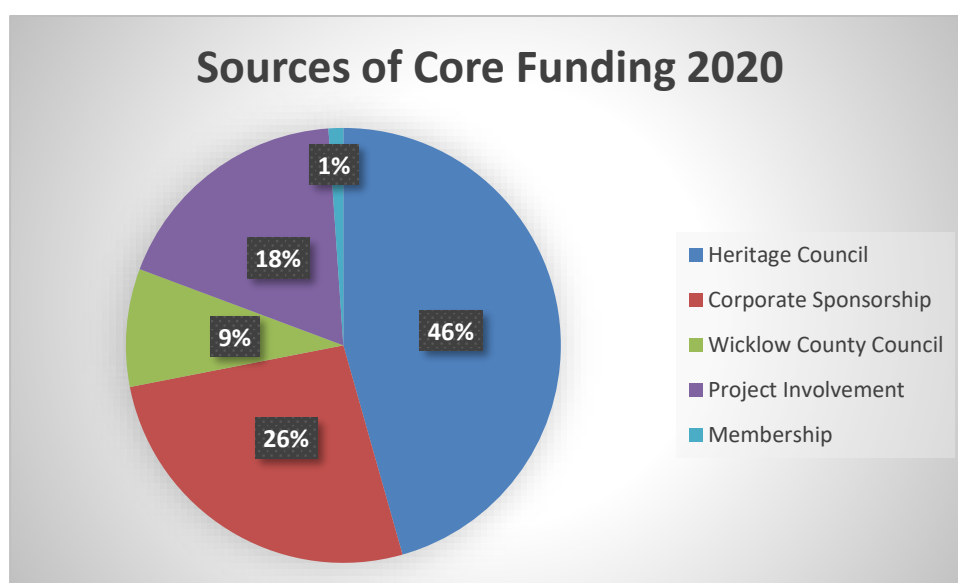
Position	Timeframe
Coordinator	Full time
Administrative Officer	Part Time
PURE Project Manager	Full Time

WUC also contracts the services of a part-time Project Manager for the Deer Management Project and a Communications Officer.

3. Finance

WUC continues to be supported by three main sources of core funding. These are, the Heritage Council, Corporate Sponsorship and Wicklow County Council. There remains uncertainty surrounding core funding and alternative sources are actively sought. In this regard, project involvement and administration is increasingly becoming important. It has increased by 11% from 2019-2020 due to increased activity. This funding allows for the employment of staff, project spending and the running of WUC's Roundwood office.

This core funding allows for the development and leverage of significant additional project funding. Project funding is ring-fenced for their operation e.g. PURE Project, Deer Management Project, LEADER – Village Panels, Strategic Plan, Upland Path Survey



4. Representing the shared interests of the Wicklow Uplands

One of key objectives of WUC is to represent the shared interests of the Wicklow Uplands. An effective way of meeting this objective is through participation in a number of fora and committees, examples are listed below. WUC also develops policies and submissions as opportunities arise. Recent submission are included on our website.¹

- County Wicklow Public Participatory Network
- Dublin Mountains Partnership Consultative Forum
- Irish Uplands Forum
- Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) via PPN
- Wicklow County Tourism
- Wicklow Heritage Forum
- St Kevin's Way Management Committee
- Wicklow Local Sports Partnership
- Wicklow Multi Agency Animal Welfare Committee
- Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee
- Member of Leave no Trace Ireland
- Member of the EUROPARC Federation

¹ <https://wicklowuplands.ie/policy/>

5. Project Updates

Wicklow Uplands Council has initiated and participated in various projects and partnerships that bring value to the people, who live, work and recreate in the Wicklow Uplands. Despite the challenges brought by 2020, WUC continued to successfully operate and participate in a number of key projects throughout the year.

5.1. Sustainable Uplands Agri-environment Scheme (SUAS)

WUC continues to implement the Sustainable Uplands Agri-environment Scheme (SUAS) pilot project (Year 3 of 5). The SUAS Project is a European Innovation Partnership (EIP) funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM) under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. The project is officially operated by 'WUC-SUAS', a wholly owned subsidiary of Wicklow Uplands Council.

The SUAS Project is designed to support farmers in the sustainable management of the environmentally significant habitats that they farm in the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands. There are ten sites participating in the project, seven commonages and three non-commonage sites, with the associated farmers receiving remunerations for activities that support the improvement of the condition of their farmed habitats. The activities are set out in agreed ecological management plans and assessed each year by an independent ecologist.

The project experienced some delays in 2020 due to Covid19. Planned open days and study visits remain postponed until further notice. However, the majority of activities in the management plans were completed as agreed. All project reports are publically available on our website²

Activities carried out in 2020 included:

- Cutting and swiping of vegetation to create firebreaks
- Active shepherding and distribution of mineral bucket to attract sheep to areas which need more grazing
- Introduction of cattle grazing to trample and graze heavy vegetation
- Restoration of old bog roadways
- Spraying of bracken in heavily infested areas
- Health and safety training courses e.g. sprayer courses, quad training
- Controlled burning

The photo to the right shows a calf born on one of the commonage sites. The introduction of mixed grazing helps to manage heavy vegetation through trampling and browsing without the need for chemicals and burning. The Black Galloway breed was chosen by the farmer as they are a hardy breed suitable to remain on the mountain throughout the year. This is the first time in living memory that a calf was born on the mountain.



A Black Galloway calf born on the Corrasillagh Commonage

5.2. Sustainable Trail Developments

WUC is responsible for the management of the Avonmore Way and Sugar Loaf Way walking trails and also the Bray Head and Belmont Trails in conjunction with local landowners. These trails were developed strategically as they link with public transport facilities and connect to the wider upland trail

² <https://wicklowuplands.ie/suas-reports/>

network. They also play an important role in WUC's long term vision that would see a long distance off road route from the North to South of the county, linking the towns and villages along the way.

The Bray Head and Belmont Trails were formally added to the National Trails Register in late 2019. An official opening was planned in early Summer 2020 but had to be postponed due to Covid19. Both trails and the Sugar Loaf Way were featured the most recent series of RTE's 'Tracks and Trails'.
<https://www.tracksandtrails.ie/trails/bray-head-belmont-demense-little-amp-great-sugarloaf-walk>

5.3. PURE Project

Wicklow Uplands Council continues to administer the PURE Project (Protecting Upland and Rural Environments) on behalf of the project partners and employs the project manager. The PURE Project is the first of its kind in Ireland and successfully tackles illegal dumping and fly-tipping in the Wicklow/Dublin uplands. PURE is a partnership project involving statutory and non-statutory organisations including; Wicklow County Council, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, South Dublin County Council, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Coillte and Wicklow Uplands Council and is funded by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. A local number to report illegal dumping operates 365 days per year and a dedicated clean up truck responds and removes it promptly.

To date PURE has removed over 3500 tonnes of illegal dumping from the uplands. Following the relaxation of Covid19 restrictions on movements there was an increase in littering in forests and scenic locations in Wicklow. This received national attention but thanks to PURE, it was removed promptly through cooperation with local stakeholders.

5.3.1. The PURE Mile Competition

The PURE Mile is a community/environmental initiative of the PURE project that encourages communities in Wicklow to keep a mile stretch of road and the immediate environment litter free while simultaneously considering the preservation and careful maintenance of the flora and fauna, ditches, hedge-rows, and any other natural or man-made features of the area. 2020 marked the eleventh year of the PURE Mile competition with almost 700 miles entered for consideration. 2020 Following excessive littering in the scenic and secluded Inchavore Valley, Lough Dan, Wicklow Uplands Council organised a clean up of the area in conjunction with a local landowner. A dumper truck load of waste was removed from the scenic location and removed by the PURE Project.



A group of Wicklow Uplands Council volunteers at the Inchavore/Lough Dan clean up

5.4. Village Interpretative Panels

Throughout 2019 Wicklow Uplands Council worked with community groups in Lacken, Shillelagh and Ashford to develop Heritage Interpretative Panels in their respective villages. The panels were completed and installed in 2020 and official unveilings took place in the summer months when government guidelines allowed. This brings to 16, the total number of panels in a network which are dotted across the county. The panels highlight local heritage features and points of interest and are a popular focal point for visitors to the area and local people. The project is funded through the LEADER programme which is operated by County Wicklow Partnership and with assistance from Wicklow County Council



The unveiling of Lacken Village Panel

5.5. Heritage Week 2020

The village panel project was used as the basis for Heritage Week activities in 2020. In celebration of 'Heritage on your Doorstep', a video was created to showcase the artwork and heritage features found in the Lacken area. Located in West Wicklow, the village is surrounded with rich heritage features and has a story attached to each. These stories tell the story of the village and the surrounding landscape https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9lw7HOG7Ec&feature=emb_logo

During Heritage Week two guided walks were held in the area to explore some of those sites and further add to the outcomes of the project.



Participants in the Lacken Historical Walk. Numbers were restricted in line with Covid19 guidelines.

5.6. Deer Management Project

The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine and The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht jointly fund the Wicklow Deer Management Project, which is managed in conjunction with Wicklow Deer Management Partnership. The initial aim of this project was to establish three new Deer Management Units (DMUs) throughout the county. The project has very been successful in establishing five DMU's. A management plan is prepared which aim to measure the adverse impacts of deer in each DMU and make recommendations on the sustainable management of the deer herd in each.

5.7. Upland Path Survey

WUC along with Wicklow Mountains National Park and Mountaineering Ireland, Mountain Meitheal, Coillte and County Wicklow Partnership are aiming to carry out a survey of upland paths in the Wicklow Mountains in 2021. This project has been in development for the past couple of years but suffered ongoing delays. A tender was issued and an application for LEADER funding now submitted for the projects. The partners are confident the project will be successful in securing funding and the works will begin in the Spring of 2021.

The survey will assess current levels of upland path erosion and will take a diagnostic approach, making recommendations on the repairs necessary to fix those paths most damaged. Over 100km of upland path in Wicklow are already identified as suffering from erosion.

5.8. Public Relations and Development of Social Media

Wicklow Uplands Council continues to improve communications through its website www.wicklowuplands.ie and through the steady growth of social media pages; Facebook (3600 likes), Twitter (1800 followers), and Instagram (1300 followers). There are now almost 4000 followers of the Facebook page and all relevant news and events are shared *via* these channels. The next version of our newsletter 'Wicklow Mountain Views' will be digital and will be published in time for Christmas 2020