



**Final Report**  
**January – November 2021**



Wicklow Uplands Council  
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# Contents

1. Introduction .....	2
2. Who We Are.....	3
3. What We Do.....	3
4. Our Priorities .....	3
5. Organisational Management .....	4
5.1. Governance .....	4
5.2. Our Board of Directors .....	4
5.3. Our Team .....	4
6. Representing the shared interests of the Wicklow Uplands .....	6
6.1. Submissions.....	6
7. Project Updates.....	7
7.1. Sustainable Uplands Agri-environment Scheme (SUAS).....	7
7.2. Sustainable Trail Developments .....	8
7.3. PURE Project .....	10
7.3.1. The PURE Mile Competition.....	10
7.4. Deer Management Project.....	11
7.5. Upland Path Survey.....	11
8. Heritage Week Events.....	12
9. Public Relations and Development of Social Media .....	13
10. Finance .....	14

## 1. Introduction

This reports provides an overview of the activities of Wicklow Uplands Council during the period from January to November 2021. Throughout this period Wicklow Uplands Council continued to represent the shared interests of the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands, and deliver innovative projects in response to challenges facing the region.

The uplands are a cherished landscape and represent some of our most significant natural heritage sites. It is a cultural landscape, shaped by the activities of the people and communities who have lived there for generations. Wicklow Uplands Council advocates that the people who live, work and recreate in the uplands must be provided with the opportunities to participate in decision making processes affecting the region.

While Covid-19 restrictions continued to have an impact on some of our activities in 2021, all our key projects proceeded as planned. All activities and events were held in compliance with all the relevant HSE Covid-19 guidelines and protocols <http://www2.hse.ie/coronavirus/>.

Highlights of our work programme included the ongoing implementation of the SUAS Project and the acceptance of thirteen new sites into the Project. The Deer Management Project, which was due to end in July 2021, was granted an extension to March 2022. The PURE Project received a new three-year funding commitment and welcomed a record number of community groups into the PURE Mile competition. An Upland Path condition survey was commissioned to assess levels of erosion on over 150km of paths across the Wicklow and Dublin uplands. The findings of the survey will be used to inform future management options and future funding applications as appropriate. We also continue to manage the Avonmore Way, Sugar Loaf Way, Bray Head Loop and Belmont Way walking trails in conjunction with local landowners. We are currently working on developing a walking trail to link the Sugarloaf with the Vartry Trails.

In addition to project work, we developed a number of submissions throughout the year in response to public consultations relevant to the uplands and the concerns of our members. 2021 marked the first year of implementation of our Three Year Strategic Plan 2021-2023. We welcomed a new Chairperson and reported full compliance with the Charities Regulator Governance Code.



*Figure 1 SUAS Project Site – Corrasillagh. Photo credit Brian Dunne*

## 2. Who We Are

Wicklow Uplands Council is an independent, voluntary organisation that represents the shared interests of over 40 diverse member groups and individuals in the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands. Our mission is; *'To support the sustainable use of the Wicklow Uplands in consensus and partnership with those who live, work and recreate there'*.

First established in 1997, Wicklow Uplands Council take 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.

Our membership includes a broad spectrum of non-statutory interests and includes; farmers & landowners, environment and recreation interests, tourism and economic interests and local community groups. Since establishment in 1997, our Board of Directors has operated on the basis of consensus and has never voted on a single decision. This ensures that all voices have equal weight and the resolution of all concerns.

## 3. What We Do

Wicklow Uplands Council is a strong reference point and community forum and serves as the collective voice for the uplands region. We aim to:

- Develop consensus and understanding between stakeholder groups
- Represent the shared concerns and views of upland communities to statutory agencies
- Develop well balanced policy submissions and lead bottom-up policy development
- Respond to challenges that arise through the development of, and participation in, innovative projects and partnerships

## 4. Our Priorities

- To obtain funding to secure the future sustainability of our work
- To encourage the sustainable management of our natural heritage, habitats, and landscapes
- To continue to develop opportunities for sustainable recreation activities
- To encourage rural employment and support the retention of the rural population
- To promote the Wicklow Uplands by collectively promoting towns and villages which act as 'gateways' to the area
- To improve communications and to raise awareness of the identity of Wicklow Uplands Council and our work



Figure 2 Our Guiding Values

## 5. Organisational Management

Wicklow Uplands Council is a company limited by guarantee (CRO 310627) with charitable status (CHY 13346 and CRA 20041281). Our offices are based in the Parish Hall, Main Street, Roundwood, Co Wicklow A98 K7K6. Membership is open to both individuals and organisations and divided between four panel groups – Farmers & Landowners, Environment and Recreation Interests, Tourism and Economic and Community Groups.

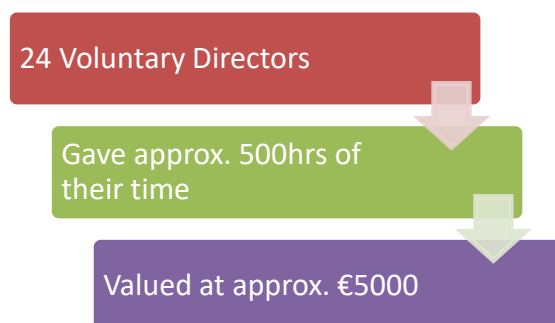
### 5.1. Governance

In 2021, Wicklow Uplands Council reported full compliance with the Charities Regulator Governance Code. Compliance with the Code ensures our organisation is managed in an effective, efficient, accountable and transparent way.

### 5.2. Our Board of Directors

A voluntary Board of Directors of up to 27 individuals are nominated annually by the members. The Board is representative in nature with a diverse range of interests, skills and expertise. Regular monthly board meetings provide a forum to discuss current issues and encourage open dialogue between different interest groups. They also provide opportunity to monitor project progress and activities and ensure that Directors are well informed of current issues. Our current Directors are listed in Table below.

In 2021, the voluntary hours accumulated by Directors attending board and subcommittee meetings, along with attendance at events and project work amounted to over 500 hours. A modest calculation of the value of these voluntary hours amounts to over €5000.



### 5.3. Our Team

Wicklow Uplands Council currently employs three staff. A full time coordinator and project manager (PURE Project), and a part time administrative officer. In addition, the services of a project manager for the Deer Project are contracted on a part time basis. Due to uncertainties around core funding, a Communications Officer was not engaged in 2021.

Wicklow Uplands Council Board of Directors 2021/2022				
		Name	Position	Organisation
Panel Group	Farmers and Landowners	Denis Halpin		Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners Association
		Pat Dunne		Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners Association
		Tom Byrne	Executive Committee	Wicklow County IFA
		Joe Morrissey	Executive Committee	Wicklow County IFA
		Owen Brady	Executive Committee	Wicklow County IFA
		Sean Malone		Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners Association
		Daniel Molloy		Wicklow County IFA
	Environment and Recreation			
		Louis O'Byrne	Chairperson	Individual Member
		Bob Galvin		Bray Coast Care
		Jim Sheehan		Mountaineering Ireland
		Russell Boland		Individual Member
	Community			
		Pauline Fahy		Glendalough & District Development Association
		Garvan Hickey		Individual Member
		Claire Chambers		Roundwood & District Community Council
		Nomination Pending		
	Economic and Tourism			
		Eugene Stephens		Ashford Self Catering Cottages
		Dairine Nuttall	Secretary	Wicklow Nordic Walking & Ireland Tour Guide
		Geoffrey Seymour	Honorary Treasurer	Roundwood & District Community Council
		Sean Byrne	Executive Committee	Lough Dan House, B & B
	Co-Options	Donal Anderson		Dublin IFA
		Carmel Kealy		Motor Cycle Union of Ireland
		John Flynn		Co Wicklow Game Conservation Council
		Philip Maguire	Vice- Chairperson	Dublin IFA
		Michael Keegan		Individual Member
		Declan O'Neill	Executive Committee	Wicklow IFA

## 6. Representing the shared interests of the Wicklow Uplands

Throughout 2021, Wicklow Uplands Council continued to represent the shared interests of the Wicklow Uplands. An effective way of meeting this objective is through participation on a number of fora and committees. These include:

- Co Wicklow Public Participation Network
- Dublin Mountains Partnership Consultative Forum
- Irish Uplands Forum
- Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)/ PPN
- National Upland Network Partnership
- St Kevin's Way Management Committee
- Wicklow County Tourism
- Wicklow Heritage Forum
- 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

### 6.1. Submissions

In 2021, a number of submissions were developed on relevant policy areas, public consultations and issues of concern to our members. These included:

- Feb – A submission on the ***Microgeneration Support Scheme Consultation***
- Feb – A submission on ***Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains Visitor Management Masterplan***
- Mar – An observation raised concerns on a ***planning application for a proposed windfarm at Kilranelagh Hill***. The site is included within the Baltinglass Hillfort Complex and concerns were raised about impact to the archaeological integrity of the site
- Mar – A submission on the ***Review of the National Parks and Wildlife Service***
- Jul – Support was given to an ***application to develop tourism in South West Wicklow under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund***
- Jul – A submission in response to ***consultation on Coillte's BAU Strategic Plans***
- Sept – A submission on ***Draft Wicklow County Development Plan***
- Sept – A submission on the ***Proposed Interventions of Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027***.



Figure 3 SUAS Demonstration Event 2021 - Photo Credit Brian Dunne



## 7. Project Updates

Since inception, Wicklow Uplands Council has responded to the challenges and issues that arise at a local level through the initiation and delivery of innovative projects and partnerships. All projects are operated in partnership with relevant stakeholders and are centred around the sustainable management of natural heritage. Highlights of our projects in 2021 include:

### 7.1. Sustainable Uplands Agri-environment Scheme (SUAS)

2021 marked the fourth year of implementation of the SUAS Project. 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. It is officially operated by WUC SUAS, a wholly owned subsidiary of Wicklow Uplands Council.

The innovative project aims to address the challenge facing upland farmers through the following actions:

- i) Establish and effectively activate new commonage management groups to take responsibility for the management of commonages by its shareholders
- ii) Complete ecological baseline surveys of individual upland area and to assess condition and make management recommendations
- iii) Increase farmer's knowledge of the environmental and management issues on their upland areas, leading to the development of management plans agreed by the farmers, ecologist and relevant stakeholders
- iv) Support farmers with the implementation of management plans by providing training and supports
- v) Develop sustainable grazing regimes

An initial ten sites were selected to participate in the project, this included 46 farmers managing a total land area of 2,786ha of upland habitat.

Based on the learning from the first three years of the project, in 2021, the initial 10 sites are moving to a score based payment system. Under the new system the condition of the habitats on each site is scored. The better the condition the higher the score. The scores are directly linked with payments with the higher scores receiving higher payments. Farmers continue to be paid for works to improve the condition of the habitat. This system provides incentive to carry out the habitat improvement works.



*Figure 4 Granamore Commonage – Photo Credit Brian Dunne*



Due to high levels of interest in the project, a third and final call for new farmers to join was opened in 2021. A further 13 sites were selected to take part. The farmers on the new sites will undergo habitat training and will carry out habitat management measures under simple management plans.

Measures carried out to date include:

- Vegetation management activities including; controlled burning of heather, mechanical cutting, bracken bruising and spraying
- Introduction of cattle to graze and trample heavy vegetation
- Active shepherding and distribution of mineral bucket to attract sheep to areas which need more grazing
- Planting of native trees along stream gullies to protect water quality and develop woodland corridors
- Drain blocking on boggy areas to improve water retention, protect the integrity of the peat and support the carbon sequestration
- Areas of bare peat have been identified for trial peat restoration measures later in the year



*Figure 5 Gully Tree Planting on Granamore Commonage - Photo credit Ann Fitzpatrick*

## 7.2. Sustainable Trail Developments

Wicklow Uplands Council developed and 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. The long term vision for these routes is the development of a long distance off road walking route along the east of the county linking from Bray in the north to Woodenbridge in the south. The route will connect the villages along the way including Kilmacanogue, Roundwood, Annamoe, Laragh, Rathdrum, Avoca and Woodenbridge.

Our current focus is establishing a link between the Sugar Loaf and the Vartry Reservoirs. A plausible route has been identified, agreements are being put in place with relevant landowners and surveying is currently underway. When completed, this new route will provide a safe waymarked walking route

from Bray to Roundwood, a distance of approx. 25km. The route is being developed in partnership with Wicklow County Council.



*Figure 6 Emerging Route from Bray to Vartry Reservoirs, Roundwood*

In further developments, 2021 saw the launch of the new Samuel Hayes Bridge. The spectacular suspension bridge spans the Avonmore River and links the Avonmore Way with the Jubilee Loop in Rathdrum. The project was led by Wicklow County Council in partnership with Coillte and National Parks and Wildlife Service with support from County Wicklow Partnership and Wicklow Uplands Council.



Since Wicklow Uplands Council, established the Avonmore Way in 2016, it has sought every

*Figure 7 Samuel Hayes Bridge - Photo Credit Wicklow Co. Co.*



opportunity and advocated for such a bridge. The completion of the bridge means that walkers can now safely walk from Rathdrum or Avondale to Glendalough and Laragh. It is a hugely strategic link that connects the public transport facilities in Rathdrum with the wider upland trail network including the Wicklow Way and St Kevin's Way.

### 7.3. PURE Project

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 Environment, Climate and Communications.

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.

To date PURE has removed over 3600 tonnes of illegal dumping from the upland and rural landscape. Covert CCTV deployed by PURE has resulted in the successful prosecution of those caught illegally dumping. Earlier this year an individual was fined €4,000 along with costs of €550 and a two-year driving disqualification.

In 2021 a new three-year funding agreement was secured with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications for the period 2021-2023. In addition to annual funding of €115,000 per annum, the Department has committed funding to secure a new truck for the project. The existing PURE Truck has been in operation since the project was initiated in 2006.



*Figure 8 PURE Project Promotional Banner*

#### 7.3.1. 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. 2021 marks the twelfth year of the PURE Mile competition with a record number of entries into the competition. Due to huge demand, applications had to be closed early this year. The PURE Mile is now a household name in Wicklow and receives national praise as an important environmental initiative for local communities.

#### 7.4. 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.

Deer are an important part of our natural heritage. However, as the deer population grows there are increasingly adverse impact on crops, trees, fences etc. There are also increasing reports of road collisions with motorists. As deer have no natural predator in Ireland, their numbers need to be sustainably managed to minimise these adverse impacts but to also maintain a healthy deer population.

The Deer Management Project has successfully established five new Deer Management Units (DMUs) across the county. A DMU is a defined area which brings together the various interested parties including, landowners, hunters and relevant bodies. A deer management plan is prepared with agreed objectives to sustainably manage a healthy deer population within the area. All dispatches are logged to accurately record the level of activity in the DMU. The project has received positive national attention and was featured on RTE Primetime earlier this year.

In light of restaurant closures due to Covid-19 restriction the market for venison

Due to Covid19 and restaurant closures, the venison market collapsed. Coupled with this, recreational hunting ceased during the height of lockdown and therefore there was very limited hunting throughout 2021. Therefore, it is expected that will be further increase in the deer population.

The Project was due to conclude in July 2021 but due to reduced activity and the collapse of venison market, a time extension has been granted until the end of March 2022.



*Figure 9 Project Manager Pat Mellon speaking on RTE Prime Feature*

#### 7.5. Upland Path Survey

Given their proximity to Dublin, upland paths in the Wicklow Mountains experience very high levels of footfall compared with other areas of Ireland. Unfortunately, this high level usage has led to noticeable erosion of the most popular paths, many of which traverse Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and sensitive habitats. The majority of these paths are informal hillwalking routes rather than designated trails where there is some degree of management in place. These informal paths have evolved over decades and their growing popularity has resulted in the trampling and loss of vegetation

and consequent soil erosion. In addition to environmental damage, poor path condition detracts from the quality of people's recreation experiences. These informal paths are found throughout the Wicklow Mountains on both public and private lands but the majority are found within the Wicklow Mountains National Park.

In response to this issue, Wicklow Uplands Council and Wicklow Mountains National Park/National Parks and Wildlife Service along with Coillte, Mountain Meitheal, Mountaineering Ireland and the Rural Recreation Office of County Wicklow Partnership and Wicklow County Council have commissioned a survey of over 150km of upland paths.

LEADER funding was secured for this project and an expert path surveyor from Scotland contracted to carry out the work. The survey will assess current path condition and levels of erosion, detail recreation management issues, and produce recommended actions for future management or remedial works. The report will produce indicative costing of suggested remedial actions

This is an important project to establish a baseline of path condition, to make informed decisions on path management and to leverage future funding for areas in most need of remedial action. The fieldwork elements of the project are fully completed with the final report due by the end of the year.



*Figure 10 Heavily eroded Path on the right. Widening and further erosion of peat evident on left - Photo Credit Brian Dunne*

## 8. Heritage Week Events

In 2021 Heritage Week was marked with two events. The first was a guided walk and talk centred around Samuel Hayes, after whom the new Avonmore Way suspension bridge was named. Beginning with a talk on the life of Hayes by historian Paddy Bowe and a visit to his burial place in Rathdrum, the group were then led through Rathdrum to the new bridge. The many surrounding heritage features were highlighted along the way, including the old Flannel Hall, the Workhouse, Famine Graveyard, the Millennium Forest and Clara Vale Nature reserve.

The second event was organised by the SUAS Project. A demonstration event was held on a SUAS farm in the Dublin Hills. The farm, which overlooks the city, has some of best quality heathland habitat of all SUAS sites. The event was attended by participating farmers, stakeholder organisations and interested individuals. Also in attendance were Minister for Land Use and Biodiversity, Pippa Hackett, and Green Party TD, Deputy Stephen Matthews.

The well attended event featured a walk and talk across the hill farm with presentations from members of the steering group and project ecologist providing updates on progress and plenty of discussion around the future management of upland areas and supports required.





*Figure 12 Minister Pippa Hackett with Deputy Stephen Matthews at SUAS event with Operational Group member Helen Sheridan of UCD – Photo Credit Brian Dunne*



*Figure 11 Attendees at SUAS Demonstration Event - Photo Credit Brian Dunne*



*Figure 14 Rathdrum Heritage Week Event at Samuel Hayes Graveside - Photo Credit Brian Dunne*



*Figure 13 Attendees at Rathdrum Heritage Week Walk and Talk*

## 9. Public Relations and Development of Social Media

Wicklow Uplands Council continues to develop communications through its website [www.wicklowuplands.ie](http://www.wicklowuplands.ie) and through the steady growth of social media channels; Facebook (4443 followers), Twitter (2028 followers), Instagram (1748 followers). Due to uncertainties with core funding a communications officer was not engaged in 2021. This had an impact on our communications during the year and hence we are currently seeking applications for a Communications Officer to fill the role in 2022.



## 10. Finance

Wicklow Uplands Council is highly dependent on core funding from statutory sources. Annual core funding amounts to just over €100,000. Currently the Heritage Council and Wicklow County Council account for over half of Wicklow Upland Council's annual core funding at 55%. Philanthropic sources currently account for 29%. The remaining balance of 19% is derived from Projects administration funds (18%) and membership at 1%.

Project administration is becoming a more important source of core funding and is an essential funding source for staffing, administration, project expenditure and the operation of Wicklow Uplands Council's office in Roundwood, Co Wicklow.

Core funding allows for the leverage of significant annual project funding which is ring-fenced for the running of specific projects e.g. PURE Project (€115,000), Deer Project (€30,000), Upland Path Survey (€19,000).

