



# WicklowUplands COUNCIL

## ANNUAL REPORT, 2025

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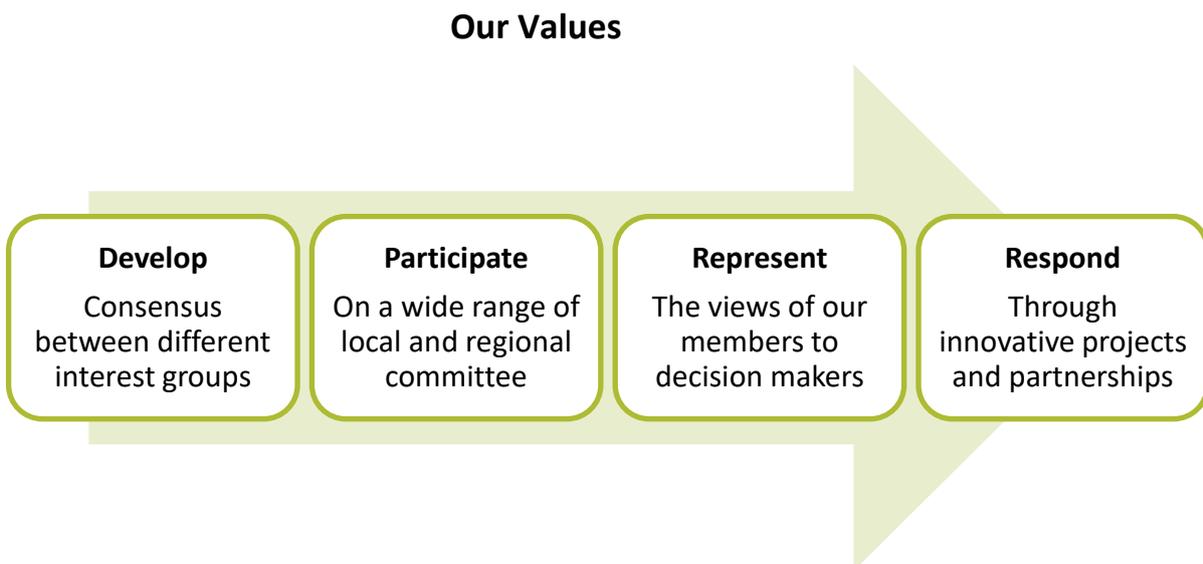
## 1. Introduction

Wicklow Uplands Council is an independent, voluntary organisation representing the shared interests of over 60 member groups and individuals across the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands. Since its establishment in 1997, the Council has promoted sustainable use of the Uplands through partnership and consensus, supporting projects that benefit local communities, farmers and landowners, and recreational users alike.

In 2025, the Council remains committed to enhancing the region’s economic, environmental, and recreational wellbeing. The new **Strategic Plan 2026–2030**, (Our Place. Our Voice. Our Future.) now complete and awaiting publication, will guide the organisation’s work over the next five years. This plan reflects the Council’s forward-looking approach and its dedication to addressing key challenges such as biodiversity loss, climate change, and water quality, while protecting and celebrating the Uplands’ natural, built, and cultural heritage.

This report summarises the Council’s activities and achievements from January to November 2025 in pursuit of its mission to:

***“Support the sustainable use of the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands through consensus and partnership with those who live, work and recreate there. “***



**Figure 1:** Diagrammatic flow of Our Values.

## 2. Organisational Management

### 2.1 Board of Directors

A voluntary Board of 26 dedicated Directors guides the work of Wicklow Uplands Council. Representing a broad range of stakeholder groups. The Board oversees the strategic development of the organisation, the Councils projects, they support the development of proposals and policy positions and ensures strong governance practices. Consensus decision-making is a core principle of the Council, with all decisions reached collaboratively.

The Board meets monthly, on the third Wednesday (excluding August and December), at the Council office in Roundwood, Co. Wicklow.

**Table 1:** List of Directors, Panels represented (WUC 2025/2026)

Wicklow Uplands Council Board Directors 2025		
Panel Group	Name	Organisation
Farmers & Landowners	Philip Maguire	Dublin IFA
	Donal Anderson	Dublin IFA
	Mary catherine Murphy	Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners
	Joe Morrissey	Wicklow IFA
	Declan O'Neill	Wicklow IFA
	Owen Brady	Wicklow IFA
	Selena McKenzie	Wicklow IFA
Environment & Recreation	Mary Molloy	Independent Member
	Máire O'Connor	Mountaineering Ireland
	Hannah O'Kelly	Independent Member
	Darren Flynn	Co. Wicklow Game Conservation
Tourism & Economic	Sean Byrne	Lough Dan House
	Eugene Stephens	Ashford Self Catering
	Dairine Nuttall	Ireland Tour Guide
	John Fenton	Independent Member
Community	Aideen Klauer	Hollywood Forum
	Ann Halpin	Hollywood Forum
	Séan Pierce	Roundwood Community Council
	Shay Cullen	Independent Member
Co-options	Louis O'Byrne	Independent Member
	Denis Halpin	Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners
	Tom Medlycott	Independent Member
	Sean Malone	Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners
	Michael Keegan	Independent Member
	Carmel Kealy	Motorcycling Union of Ireland
	Pat Dunne	Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners

## 2.2 Executive Committee

Wicklow Uplands Council Executive Committee is made up of members nominated by the Board, including the Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer, these representatives bring specific experience, perspectives or expertise to the group. The Executive Committee’s role is to provide focused oversight and to address specific matters as directed by the Board, ensuring that key actions and decisions are progressed efficiently between full Board meetings. This structure allows the Council to maintain continuity, responsiveness, and effective governance across its wide range of activities and projects.

**Table 2:** List of Executive Committee, (WUC 2025/2026).

Wicklow Uplands Council Board Directors 2025		
Panel Group	Name	Organisation
Farmer & Landowner	Donal Anderson	Dublin IFA
Environment & Recreation	Hannah O’Kelly	Independent Member
Tourism & Economic	Dairine Nuttall	Ireland Tour Guides
Community	Darren Flynn	Co. Wicklow Game Conservation
Farmer & Landowner	Declan O’Neill	Wicklow IFA
Co-Option	Michael Keegan	Independent Member
Co-Option	Denis Halpin	Wicklow Cheviot Sheep Owners

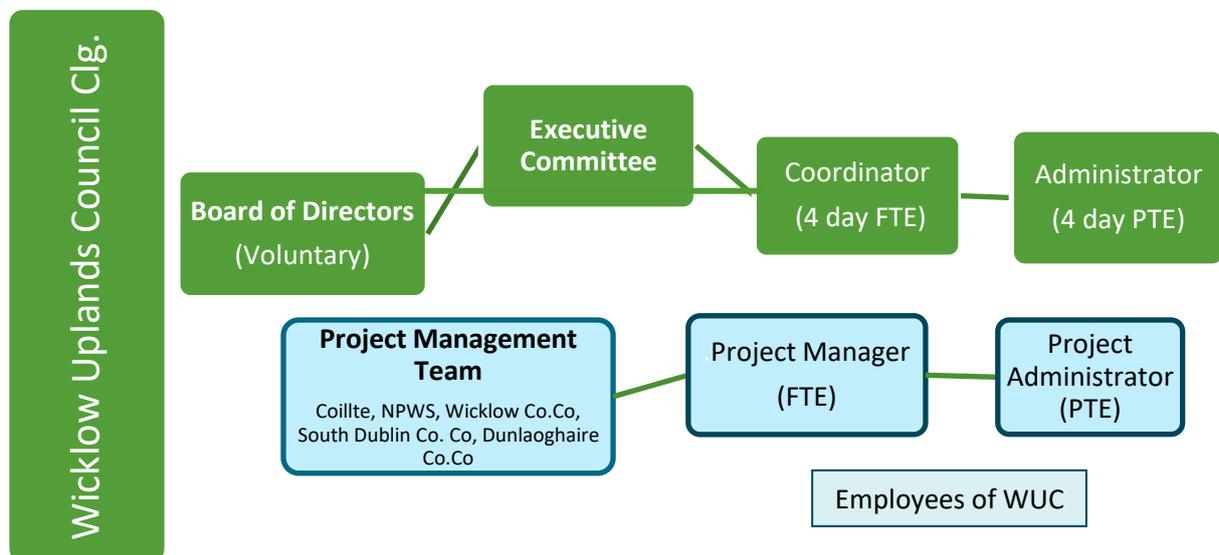
## 2.3 Staff

Wicklow Uplands Council operates with a small, dedicated team. A full-time Coordinator and a part-time Finance and Administrative Officer manage the organisation’s day-to-day operations, with office functions currently operating on a four-day schedule (Monday–Thursday, 9:00–17:00). This arrangement may be adjusted in response to funding levels, workload, and project demands.

The staff of Wicklow Uplands Council play a central role in ensuring the smooth and effective running of the organisation and the delivery of its objectives. Their work spans a broad range of responsibilities, including the preparation of funding applications for both core organisational support and specific project initiatives, as well as the management, coordination, and delivery of those projects once approved. Staff also play a key role in member engagement, communications, public relations, and outreach, ensuring that the Council’s work is visible, relevant, and accessible to its membership and the wider community. In addition, they act as representatives on various local, regional, and national fora, contributing to policy discussions, partnership development, and advocacy on upland issues, while also supporting the Board by delivering detailed reports, research, and implementation plans.

The finance and administration function underpins all of this work by maintaining accurate and compliant records, ensuring financial transparency and rigour, and managing all aspects of payments, payroll, and budgeting. This attention to detail and good governance supports the Council’s credibility as a trusted, well-managed organisation. Together, the staff provide the professional backbone of Wicklow Uplands Council—working collaboratively to advance its mission of protecting, enhancing, and promoting the sustainable use of the Wicklow & Dublin Uplands.

The Council also employs staff for the **PURE Project (Protecting Upland and Rural Environments)**, comprising a full-time Project Manager and a part-time Administrative Assistant based at the PURE Project office in Tinahely, Co. Wicklow.



**Figure 2:** Governance/Operational Structure (WUC 2025)

### 2.3 Governance Advise and Legal Opinion

In January 2025, Wicklow Uplands Council was delighted to secure pro bono legal support from A&L Goodbody, one of Ireland’s leading law firms. This partnership provides the Council with invaluable access to expert legal opinion and governance oversight, ensuring that all our policy documents, contracts, data protection measures (GDPR), and operational procedures are fully aligned with current legislation, best practice standards, and the guidance of the Charities Regulator.

This relationship offers a strong foundation of legal assurance and enhances the Council’s capacity to operate with confidence, transparency, and accountability. The support from A&L Goodbody represents a significant asset to the organisation, helping us to maintain the highest standards of governance and compliance in all areas of our work.

## 2.4 Funding 2025

In 2025, Wicklow Uplands Council was financially supported by:

- LAWPRO Catchment Support Fund
- Wicklow County Council
- Philanthropic support
- Members subscriptions and contributions.
- Project Administrative overheads (dedicated)

Core funding to Wicklow Uplands Council enables it to leverage specific project funding through various sources. Collectively core funding amounted to ~€80,200 and allowed for the employment of staff, professional fees, office overheads & operational expenses. This is made up as follows



**Figure 3:** Breakdown of Core Operational Funding Sources (WUC 2025)

- Wicklow County Council           €15,000
- LAWPRO                               €46,000
- Philanthropic                       €10,000

- Programme Administrator €7,500
- Membership Subscriptions €2,335

In 2025 the specific project income amounted to over €240,000.00

- Protecting Upland Rural Environment Project [PURE] & PURE Mile initiative.

Several small projects were applied for and secured by Wicklow Uplands Council in 2025 or through collaboration with other organisations.

- Desired Future Conditions Statement – Visioning Recreational Management - Workshop (€16,000)
- EU Horizon SpongeWorks participation with Wicklow County Council, LAWPRO and East Wicklow Rivers Trust (€10,000)
- Heritage Council ‘New Fleece of Life’ Weaving Wicklow’s Wool Heritage into a Sustainable Future (€14,000)
- Pilot Rhododendron Control programme (€36,000)
- Community Foundation Ireland – Community activation fund to support the collaborative Community Climate Action Fund (2024) Gully Planting Project along the headwaters & streams of East Wicklow River Catchments with East Wicklow Rivers Trust (€10,000)

The operation and delivery of projects is a small source of additional income for Wicklow Uplands Council, a nominal administration/facilitation fee can be charged on appropriate projects which is dictated by the funding stream and the funding organisation.

Key Priorities as per 2021 – 2023 Strategic Plan	Progress 2025
<p><b>To obtain funding to secure the future sustainability of our work</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing efforts to find new arrangements beyond 2025 have been investigated.</li> <li>• Several small projects with associated administrative fees were secured, which has covered the cost of specific action around those projects.</li> </ul>

<p><b>To encourage the sustainable management of our natural heritage, habitats, and landscapes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All projects and activities are centred around the protection and sustainable management of the upland landscape.</li> <li>• Wicklow Uplands Council has a strong portfolio e.g., SUAS, Deer Management, Upland Path Condition Survey and the ongoing PURE project.</li> <li>• More recently Pilot Rhododendron Control, Desired Future Conditions Statement, Upland Gully Woodland Planting, SpongeWorks.</li> </ul>
<p><b>To continue to develop opportunities for sustainable recreation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wicklow Uplands Council is responsible for the management of 30km of walking trails including The Avonmore Way, Sugar Loaf Way, Bray Head Loop and the Belmont Way. Through 2025 the focus was branding the route from Sugar Loaf to Roundwood – ‘The Sugarloaf Way’.</li> <li>• In 2025 and into 2026 re-routing the Avonmore way will be a focus which has been supported under the trails fund administered by POBAL.</li> </ul>
<p><b>To encourage rural employment and support the retention of the rural population</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our projects support the local economy e.g., Trail Developments – encourage more visitors and support local business.</li> <li>• Pilot Rhododendron control and volunteer training and upskilling. Wicklow Uplands Council employees several staff and contracts local consultants, operators and other.</li> </ul>
<p><b>To promote the Wicklow Uplands by collectively promoting towns and villages which act as ‘gateways’ to the area</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A network of interpretative panels continues to be created in towns and villages across Co Wicklow.</li> <li>• 2025 brought together 3 villages with a desire to deliver these expanding on the 13 already established, these to be realised in 2026</li> </ul>

## 2.4 Strategic Plan 2026-2030

The process of bringing WUC Strategic Plan together began later than originally anticipated in 2024, but strong collaboration and clear governance ensured its successful completion. Following the establishment of the project timeline and governance arrangements, the Executive took responsibility for overseeing the development of the plan, ensuring that each stage was aligned with WUC's long-term vision and priorities. Extensive consultation was undertaken with the Board, members, and a wide range of stakeholders, including funders and partner organisations, to ensure the plan reflected both internal priorities and the external environment.

A key milestone was reached in May 2024, when the overall strategic framework was signed off by the Board. This framework provided the structure and focus for the more detailed work that followed.

Building on this input, the detailed Strategic Plan was finalised and presented to the Board for approval in October 2025, where it was formally endorsed. The completed plan was then presented to members at the meeting held on 5 November 2025. This marked the culmination of a thorough, collaborative process, resulting in a robust strategic direction for WUC to guide its activities and decision-making in the coming years.

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

#### 3.1 Membership

The membership of Wicklow Uplands Council is what truly makes the organisation unique. It brings together a diverse and representative mix of individuals and groups from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives. who share a common interest in the future of the uplands.



*Image; A meeting with members of the 4 panel groups of the Wicklow Uplands Council, 2025, (stock image WUC)*

Members include farmers and landowners, environmentalists, recreational users, community organisations, academics, scientists, and heritage and cultural advocates—all united by their connection to and care for the Wicklow upland landscape. This diversity of experience and outlook is one of the Council’s greatest strengths, fostering open dialogue, balanced decision-making, and a collaborative approach to addressing the complex challenges and opportunities that affect the Uplands.

Among the Council’s members are both active volunteers, who contribute their time and expertise to specific projects, committees, and events, and passive volunteers, who engage through consultation, feedback, and ongoing support of the Council’s mission. Each plays an important role in shaping the organisation’s work and keeping it rooted in the lived experience of the upland community. This inclusive and participatory structure ensures that many voices are heard and respected, allowing Wicklow Uplands Council to act as a unifying forum where sustainable land management, biodiversity, heritage, and recreation can be discussed and progressed collectively for the long-term benefit of the uplands and all who depend on them.

## 3.2 Representations

Throughout 2025 Wicklow Uplands Council continued to represent the shared interests of the uplands on several fora and committees. These include:

- Co. Wicklow Public Participation Network
- Dublin Mountains Partnership Consultative Forum
- Irish Uplands Forum
- Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)/ PPN
- St Kevin’s Way Management Committee
- Wicklow County Tourism
- Wicklow Heritage Forum
- Wicklow Biodiversity Action Group
- Wicklow Local Sports & Recreation Partnership
- Wicklow Multi Agency Animal Welfare Committee
- Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee
- Member of Leave no Trace Ireland
- Member of the EUROPARC Federation

## 4. Project Updates

Throughout 2025 Wicklow Uplands Council continued to administer several projects (trail development, PURE, Pilot Rhododendron Control, Desired Future Conditions Recreational Management, History of Sheep & Wool in Wicklow). All projects are developed from the bottom-up and delivered in partnership with various relevant stakeholder organisations. This bottom-up approach along with wider agency support, ensures that projects are delivered in an effective and sustainable manner.

An outline of project activities is included in the sections below. Full details of all projects can be found on our website [www.wicklowuplands.ie/projects](http://www.wicklowuplands.ie/projects).

### 4.1 SpongeWORKS



The EU Horizon Project SpongeWORKS represents an exciting new chapter in Wicklow's contribution to European collaboration on climate resilience and water management. Wicklow has been selected as an Associate Region, partnered with the L  ze region in France, under the leadership of Wicklow County Council, with Wicklow Uplands Council, the East Wicklow Rivers Trust, and LAWPRO as key project partners.

Since the project's launch, Wicklow has been successfully onboarded, introduced to the broader network of international partners during the General Assembly in Toulouse, France, in September, and a detailed workplan has been drawn up. Early work has focused on sharing information locally and building awareness of this innovative initiative.





**Images;** A meeting with European SpongeWORKS partners, field visit to the Léze Valley, France, September 2025. (image courtesy WUC)

SpongeWORKS is centred on developing and demonstrating nature-based ‘sponge’ solutions—approaches that help landscapes absorb, store, and slowly release water to reduce flooding, bolster drought resilience, and restore biodiversity. It brings together science, community action, and policy innovation to tackle climate-related water challenges in a holistic way. Wicklow’s participation as the only Irish region among just eight selected across Europe underscores the importance of its upland environments in addressing these issues. As water from the uplands forms the headwaters of our rivers and streams, upland communities sit at the very start of that journey, playing a crucial role in shaping downstream water quality and resilience.

The Aghrim River has been chosen as the study area for the project in Wicklow.

Here, the project team will engage with local communities to explore how both small urban initiatives and rural landscape interventions can work together to deliver tangible benefits for people and nature. From creating buffer zones, development of infiltration ponds and to restoration of wetland habitats. SpongeWORKS offers a unique opportunity to connect local action with European-scale learning, while showcasing how Wicklow’s upland landscapes and communities can help shape a more sustainable and climate-resilient future for all.

## 4.2 Sustainable Trails Development

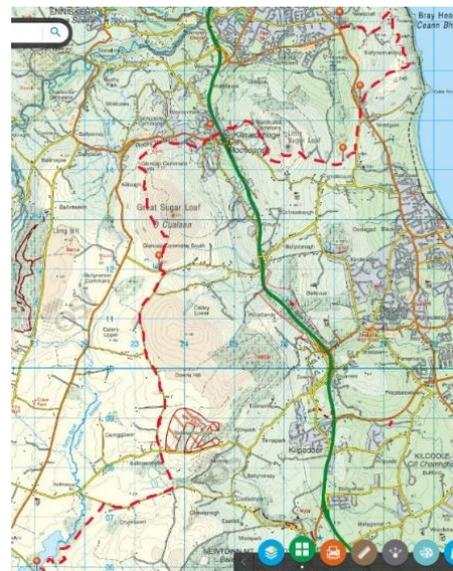
Wicklow Uplands Council continues to manage the Avonmore Way, Belmont Way, Bray Head Loop and Sugar Loaf Way and Vartry walking trails – over 30km. Our long-term vision continues to be the development of a long-distance off-road walking route along the east of the county linking from Bray in the north to Woodenbridge in the south. The route will connect the villages along the way including

the Sugarloaf way now links Kilmacanogue to Roundwood and eventually Annamoe, Laragh, Rathdrum, Avoca and Woodenbridge.

After much negotiation and surveying through 2022 to 2024, a new walking trail linking Sugar Loaf and the Vartry Reservoirs was opened. The agreed name is the SugarLoaf Way as it is recognised and iconic, (in 2022 it was suggested to be ‘The Callary Way’) the 9km route now connects the Sugar Loaf to the Vartry Trails providing a waymarked walking route from Bray to Roundwood – over 30km from Bray Seafront. The new long distance trail links Bray Head, the Little Sugar Loaf, the Great Sugar Loaf and the Vartry Reservoirs.

As the trails increase the connectivity between towns and villages along the way, it supports local economies and importantly provide links with public transport at various points along the route.

*Route from Bray to Vartry Reservoirs*



The latest section is being managed in partnership with Wicklow Uplands Council and Wicklow County Council and Coillte.

### 4.3 Desired Future Conditions Workshop – Visioning Recreational Management

In early October, Wicklow Uplands Council hosted a Desired Future Conditions Workshop – Visioning Recreational Management, marking an important step in shaping a shared, long-term approach to visitor and recreation management in the Wicklow Uplands. This initiative grew out of ongoing discussions within the Council regarding the increasing pressures on upland environments, including dogs off leads disturbing livestock and wildlife, inappropriate parking, littering and illegal dumping, and path erosion that contributes to sediment runoff and habitat degradation.



*Images above and below: Stakeholder field visits and informal discussions (courtesy M Dewar Wicklow Uplands Council)*



These concerns have also been echoed in meetings of the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee (WORC) and through direct engagement with Wicklow Mountains National Park (WMNP) staff. A key issue identified was the lack of consistent messaging and signage across land management bodies such as WMNP, Coillte, and private landowners, highlighting the need for a more coordinated, landscape-scale approach to managing recreation in the uplands.

The Desired Future Conditions (DFC) framework, adapted from best practice in the United States, provided the foundation for this new process. Over two intensive days, stakeholders—including landowners, agencies, recreational groups, and community representatives—took part in field visits, presentations, and facilitated discussions to co-create a shared “Desired Future Condition Statement.” This statement will articulate how the uplands should look, feel, sound, and function in the years ahead, serving as a guiding vision for balanced, sustainable recreation management. The workshop, supported by materials prepared by Recreational Solutions Group, emphasised collaboration, evidence-based planning, and integration of both ecological science and community values. The resulting DFC statement is currently undergoing social science analysis and will be finalised before the end of the year. This work represents a significant move toward joined-up

thinking across agencies and user groups—laying the groundwork for a more unified and sustainable future for the Wicklow Uplands.



*Images above: Stakeholder field visit discussion at Miners Village, Wicklow Gap, October 2025 (courtesy M Dewar Wicklow Uplands Council)*

#### 4.4 Pilot Rhododendron Control and Management

The project was launched with a seminar event held at the An Óige Youth Hostel, Knockree, which brought together stakeholders and experts to share best practices and build local capacity.



The event featured engaging presentations from the Dúlra team based in Connemara (Forum Connemara CLG), whose work in invasive species management has created local employment opportunities and developed a highly skilled team specialising in ecological restoration and rhododendron control. Their insights into training, coordination, and long-term management strategies offered valuable learning for Wicklow landowners and practitioners.

Kate Moore, Invasive Species Officer at the National Biodiversity Data Centre, also delivered a presentation on the ecological and hydrological impacts of rhododendron invasion, explaining how dense stands of the shrub can outcompete native vegetation, alter soil chemistry, and reduce light

penetration, while its extensive root systems and leaf litter can affect water infiltration, increase acidity, and degrade water quality.

This pilot project combines practical on-the-ground removal with education, training, and awareness-raising, ensuring that control efforts are sustainable and community-led. By sharing expertise across regions and strengthening collaboration between landowners, NPWS, and local stakeholders, the initiative represents a proactive model for invasive species management in upland and peatland areas. It also highlights how early, coordinated intervention can prevent widespread ecological damage, support habitat recovery, and contribute to the long-term resilience of Wicklow's upland landscapes.

Both project 4.3 & 4.4 were funded under the Peatland & Natura Community Engagement Scheme 2025



**NPWS**

An tSeirbhís Páirceanna  
Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra  
National Parks and Wildlife  
Service



#### 4.5 Community Climate Action – Collaborative Gully Planting Initiative

The upland gully woodland planting project aims to mitigate the impacts of climate change and build climate resilience by using a proven nature-based solution in restoring and enhancing the natural ecosystem of native woodland habitats in the uplands. This reduces carbon loss, stabilises soils and slows the flow of water off the hills reducing downstream flooding and erosion impacts.

This project is a collaboration between East Wicklow Rivers Trust and Wicklow Uplands Council building on the work and report of Paddy Purser [independent forester] and Faith Wilson, [independent ecologist] 'The Development of a Gully Woodland Restoration Plan for the Upper River Dodder Catchment and the Identification and Assessment of Generic Issues of Relevance for Future Similar Projects in Ireland'. This report reviewed international practice elsewhere and set out a vision for the restoration of native woodlands in suitable locations in the uplands of Ireland.

These include areas of open ground suitable for native woodland in the uplands and the restoration of gully woodlands along headwater streams and watercourses across Wicklow. Progress in implementing the vision of woodland restoration set out in the 2008 study was initially slow and the concept took time to be adopted but in recent years projects such as the SUAS EIP which was co-ordinated by Wicklow Uplands Council supported such work. The restoration of native gully woodland habitat in the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands is continuing to develop with recent planting

of native trees in the headwater streams of the Upper Dodder by National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) on state owned land within Wicklow Mountains National Park. This work is being assisted by volunteers from ReWild Wicklow and Mountaineering Ireland and is being funded through NPWS Conservation Measures funding.

The Climate Action Fund funded project aims to complement the important native gully woodland planting on both designated and undesignated privately owned lands outside of the WMNP. These include sites along headwater streams of the Avonmore and Avonbeg catchments.

Although most flooding impacts are felt in urban centres downstream it is in the uplands where land use really has an impact. Centuries of human activities have combined to speed the flow of water off the mountains and hills. Here deforestation of native woodland, drainage, turf cutting, and overgrazing by deer and sheep have all combined to change how water flows from these areas to the sea. Overgrazing of remnant gully woodlands removes regenerating trees which buffer the adjoining watercourses. Rainfall in these areas then drains too fast, destabilising soil, and clearing natural ‘dams’ of debris resulting in deepening eroding channels and resulting in accelerated water flows with subsequent impacts downstream.

Through 2025, work was delivered at two principal sites, deer enclosures were built and individual tree guards erected to protect the planted material. Movement of materials too difficult to access areas was supported by Wicklow Mountains National Park. Contracted work was completed and volunteer support will be afforded to complete the planting at the An Óige site at Glenmalure deliver a comprehensive landscape scale body of work.

The importance of communicating this type of work should not be undervalued, it ensures visitors to the Uplands understand the principals of what this planting approach supports and the value of using nature-based solutions for multiple environmental benefits; Climate resilience, water quality, ecological connectivity and habitat stabilisation. The project delivered a local radio interview, a detailed evening webinar and continues to deliver social media posts ensures wide reach.

#### 4.6 ‘A New Fleece of Life’; Weaving Wicklow’s Sheep & Wool Heritage into a Sustainable Future.



Through funding from The Heritage Council’s Community Heritage Fund, Wicklow Uplands Council commenced an exciting audio-visual project exploring the history of sheep farming and the wool

industry in the region, while also highlighting new opportunities for wool in the circular economy and sustainable land management.

The project has resulted in the production of two 20–30-minute audio-visual pieces that weave together the social, environmental, and economic dimensions of sheep farming in the uplands. These pieces aim to both celebrate the deep-rooted cultural and heritage value of sheep and wool in shaping Wicklow’s rural communities and landscapes, and to draw attention to innovative ways in which this traditional resource can support modern sustainability goals — particularly in local peatland restoration work, holding water on the landscape and slowing the flow. The co- benefits to habitat restoration and biodiversity, climate resilience and better water quality.

This initiative builds upon several complementary activities, most notably the Peatland and Natura Communities Engagement Project delivered in 2024. That project undertook a feasibility study examining the potential use of locally sourced sheep fleece as an alternative to imported coconut coir in peatland restoration. The study explored the development of silt traps and drain blocking rolls made from wool, as well as the trialling of fleece matting to stabilise bare peat areas. By combining these strands, the current Heritage Council-funded project seeks to illustrate both the practical applications of local wool in environmental restoration and the barriers to developing a viable market for such products. It underscores how sheep farming—past and present—remains integral to rural heritage, biodiversity and water management, and sustainable livelihoods.



**Image:** Mr Donie Anderson SUAS participant Sheering Sheep in situ, as a trial for using Sheep Fleece as a replacement for ‘Coconut’ Coir in peatland drain blocking. (Image courtesy; H McLindon, NPWS).

As part of the project’s outreach and funding obligations, Oliver Fallen-Bailey delivered an introductory presentation during Heritage Week at Manor Kilbride Community Centre, sharing early research and interviews that set the scene for the forthcoming audio-visual pieces. The project is also supported by the Roundwood and District Folklore, Historical and Archaeology Society, whose 2024 work on the social history of the Roundwood sheep sales complements the Council’s own feasibility study and the efforts of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) with local farmers. Together, these collaborations aim to reconnect communities with their wool heritage while looking forward to innovative, sustainable uses that benefit both people and the upland *environment*.



**Images:** Manor Kilbride Community Hall, Heritage Week Event (August 2025) An introduction to the history of sheep and wool in Ireland presented by Oliver Fallen Bailey

An Audio-Visual Presentation and Discussion Evening was held at the Brockagh Resource Centre on Wednesday, 5th November, bringing together a large and diverse audience of farmers, community members, upland recreationists, environmentalists, and other stakeholders.

The event opened with an engaging video presentation, *A Brief History of Irish Wool*, which set the context for the evening by tracing the deep cultural and economic connections between sheep farming and Ireland’s rural landscape. This was followed by a detailed presentation from a Wicklow Mountains National Park / NPWS conservation practitioner, highlighting innovative work being carried out on the uplands where sheep’s wool and wool-based products are being used effectively in silt trapping, drain blocking, and peat stabilisation. These practical examples illustrated how natural materials can play a key role in restoring degraded peatland habitats.

A second video explored the wider opportunities for wool in the modern economy, showcasing its potential use across multiple sectors — from construction and insulation to horticulture and environmental management. The film emphasised the importance of using local materials for local solutions, with particular relevance to the restoration challenges of the Wicklow uplands.

The evening concluded with a comprehensive presentation by Pat Byrne on the bio-circular economy, exploring how wool fits into a sustainable model that integrates economic viability, social benefit, and environmental stewardship.

Together, the four components of the evening stimulated rich discussion and idea-sharing among attendees. Participants explored how wool — currently treated in Ireland largely as a low-value by-product — could instead be recognised as a valuable natural resource capable of supporting a sustainable local economy, environmental restoration, and the viability of young farming families managing high nature value landscapes across Wicklow’s uplands.



**Image:** Audio Visual & Discussion Evening ‘Burden to Opportunity’, Brockagh Resource Centre, November 2025. Audience and presenter image.

Links to Audiovisuals [A History of Sheeps Wool in Ireland](#) and [Burden To Opportunity - sheeps Wool](#)

#### 4.7 Protecting Upland Rural Environment (PURE) Project

Since its initiation and launch at Wicklow Uplands Council’s Annual General Meeting in 2006, the PURE Project has continued to make great strides in tackling illegal dumping and fly tipping across the Wicklow and Dublin uplands.



Key to the project’s outstanding success, is the unique partnership which saw the bringing together of statutory and non-statutory organisations (Wicklow County Council, South Dublin County Council, Dun

Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, Coillte, National Parks & Wildlife Service) working closely with local communities and relevant stakeholders to ensure the protection of the rural landscape.

The PURE Project's rapid response to removing illegally dumped waste from the landscape and its various awareness raising initiatives, have resulted in conjunction with legislative actions and national initiatives (e.g. WEEE Directive 2012/19/EU, Plastic bag levy, 2001, REPAK and Leave No Trace) in a steady reduction of illegally dumped material in the upland landscape. On an annual basis the PURE Project removes an average of 260 tonnes of illegally dumped waste from the landscape, equating to a monthly average of ~21 tonnes.

The new truck purchased in March replaced that which has been on the road since 2006, this thanks to capital funding committed through the Department of Climate, Energy & Environment.

### **To Report fly-tipping/illegal dumping in Wicklow and Dublin Uplands**

**Email: [Info@pureproject.ie](mailto:Info@pureproject.ie)**



#### **4.7.1. PURE Mile**

First launched in 2010, the PURE Mile celebrated 15 years of activity and growth. It is a unique environmental, community initiative, which encourages communities and groups to adopt a mile of road, (or miles) or other settings, and to work together to enhance these areas by keeping them free of litter, tidy, and to research information about local wildlife and the built, cultural, & social heritage. Some groups have taken the extra step of creating websites, heritage booklets and walking routes to the benefit of locals and visitors alike.

For the 2025 Pure Mile, there are over 1000 miles of roads, mountains, woodlands, valleys, forestry, and upland amenities, involving thousands of volunteers - the largest number ever since the initiative began. Along with community groups, under the 'Clean up the Uplands' category, the PURE Mile continues to welcome special interest groups such as sports and recreational groups, scouts, schools and a growing number of corporate bodies, who are currently active across all areas of the uplands.

There were over 3,000 litter picks/clean-ups were organised by Pure Mile Groups in 2024 resulting in the collection of over 4,000 bags of litter and rubbish being removed from the Wicklow and Dublin upland region.

Wicklow Uplands Council not only sits on the cross-agency management team, but it also employs the Project Manager and Administrator, and it oversees the financial administration and governance. Wicklow Uplands Council members separate from their own community groups gather annually to undertake an Uplands spring clean, in 2025 this was completed along the Sallygap Road from Shramore Cross.



**Images above and below:** Wicklow Uplands Council Volunteer Group Pure Mile Day - Mountainous Spring Clean (April 2025) Sally Gap Road from Shramore Cross.



## 4.8 ‘Good Bog Bad Bog’

Wicklow Uplands Council was delighted to secure funding under the Community Arts Fund from Wicklow County Council to collaborate with local artist Sharon Wells on a creative communication and engagement project centred on understanding our peatland ecosystems.



Sharon’s artistic practice, which uses wool to create intricate fantasy landscapes, evolved through this collaboration to explore the true ecological and scientific value of peatlands—examining how water dynamics, soil formation, and biodiversity interact to build and sustain these vital habitats.



Through a series of hands-on workshops, participants were guided to create wool textile artworks depicting both healthy, functioning bogs that store carbon and support rich biodiversity, and degraded, water-drained bogs that emit carbon and struggle to sustain life. The workshops brought science and art together, helping communities understand that water retention is key—not only for the bog’s regeneration, but for the wellbeing of the wider landscape and its associated flora and fauna.

The culmination of this work was celebrated at ‘Good Bog Bad Bog’, a special Culture Night event held at the Schoolhouse for Art in Enniskerry, which drew a full house. The evening opened with an inspiring address from Cllr. Melanie Corrigan, Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council, who

reflected on the powerful connections between culture, community, science, and the challenges facing Wicklow’s precious peatlands.

Sharon Wells’ stunning exhibition of community-created bogscapes vividly illustrated these themes, showcasing the beauty and resilience of upland ecosystems. The event sparked meaningful conversations around biodiversity, water quality, climate resilience, wellbeing, upland tourism, responsible recreation, and marginal farming—all central to the Council’s mission.

We were particularly grateful to Jenny Sherwin of the Wicklow Arts Office for joining us during the busy Culture Night celebrations, and to NPWS staff for exhibiting their innovative sheep fleece matting, linking art and ecological restoration.



**Image:** *Good Bog Bad Bog Workshop with Michelle Philips (Bray & North Wicklow Area Partnership), Lorna Kelly (Wicklow Uplands Council, Sharon Wells (Bray based Artist) Lorna Lafferty (Bray & North Wicklow Area Partnership).*

## 4.9 FireCULT

As part of our ongoing commitment to exploring the complex relationships between landscape, culture and climate resilience, the FIRECULT project — supported by the Wicklow Uplands



Council — has seen artist-in-residence Shane Finan working with University College Dublin and utilising the Wicklow Uplands as his study area. FIRECULT, a trans-national initiative under the JPI Climate & Cultural Heritage call, investigates how changing fire regimes driven by climate change



affect both tangible and intangible cultural landscapes.

**Image:** FireCULT project team with Artist Shane Finan, Wicklow Uplands, looking at wildfire burnt landscape

During Heritage Week in Roundwood, Shane delivered a compelling public presentation, sharing his artistic investigations into how fire shapes upland landscapes, the cultural practices entwined with those landscapes, and the implications for biodiversity, heritage and land-management. The event offered a valuable opportunity to foster dialogue between artists, scientists, land-managers and the local community — and to situate the uplands within an international research framework aimed at building climate-resilient cultural heritage.



## 4.10 Dry Stone Wall Training

At the end of August, a two-day Dry Stone Wall Training Workshop took place in Avoca, delivered by the Dry-Stone Wall Association of Ireland (DSWAI) in collaboration with Wicklow Uplands Council.



The event built upon the successful programme undertaken in 2024, which explored and celebrated the often-under-recognised heritage of dry-stone walling in County Wicklow. Participants had the opportunity to develop practical skills in traditional wall-building techniques while also deepening their appreciation for this important aspect of the county’s rural landscape and cultural heritage.

Wicklow Uplands Council played a key role in promoting the event, identifying a suitable site, and managing the hospitality and logistical arrangements for participants and instructors. The chosen site offered an ideal setting for hands-on learning, providing both the right conditions for practical work and a strong connection to the local heritage of stone craft and land management.

Adding to the experience, the site host provided an engaging overview of the area’s history and heritage, offering valuable context to the group and highlighting how dry-stone walls have shaped and reflected the local landscape over generations. This perspective enriched the workshop, fostering a deeper understanding of the cultural and environmental importance of preserving and maintaining Wicklow’s traditional stone walls.

The event was very well received by all involved, reflecting the growing interest in heritage skills training and the Council’s ongoing commitment to supporting sustainable land management and cultural preservation across the Wicklow Uplands.



*Images; Participants from the 2 Day Dry Stone Wall Training Workshop, August 2025, Avoca Co. Wicklow with Dry Stone Wall Association of Ireland.*

## 5. Communications and Engagement



*Image; A meeting with members of the 4 panel groups of the Wicklow Uplands Council, 2024, (stock image WUC)*

Wicklow Uplands Council website [www.wicklowuplands.ie](http://www.wicklowuplands.ie) is the main repository for all Wicklow Uplands Council information, policy, projects etc. The website has an average of >1,000 Unique Visitors per month.

In 2025 WUC continued using the 'buffering' system to ensure that ongoing roll out of media post could happen seamlessly whilst not having a dedicated comms officer for the organisation, meaning that posts could be prepared in down times for delivering for upcoming and future events.

Wicklow Uplands Council continues to have a visible online presence through various channels our followers have increased across all channels by ~10% in 2025:

- Facebook followers amount to >5,000 + [www.facebook.com/WicklowUplandsCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/WicklowUplandsCouncil)
- Twitter followers amount to > 2,092 followers [www.twitter.com/WicklowUplands](https://www.twitter.com/WicklowUplands)
- Instagram followers amount to >2,864 [www.instagram.com/wicklowuplands](https://www.instagram.com/wicklowuplands)

### 5.1 Media engagement

In 2025 the roll of delivering media output lay with the administrative office. The community nature and the large stakeholder engagement of the organisation do generate local media interest (radio and print including the Bray People, The Wicklow Times and East Coast Radio). Due to the national

significance of many of its projects/programmes it does receive requests to contribute authoritative input to articles on a broad range of Upland related matters. Pieces have been presented on RTE's productions, The Independent and Irish Times Newspapers. Social media is updated with all relevant information of local, national and international concern. This spans the diverse membership group and the wider community engaging with the Wicklow uplands.

## 5.2 Personal Engagement & Events

Wicklow Uplands Council takes opportunity when it arises to show case the bottom up, consensus and partnership model approach to supporting sustainable development actions for those that live, work and recreate in the uplands. Knowledge share is fundamental to supporting a solution-based approach to conflicts and pressures experienced within upland regions.

Attendance at events and symposia is an integral part of establishing meaningful relationships being aware of wider activity and ensuring exposure. Delivering events and running engagement activities is also essential.

Below is a list of engagement events at which Wicklow Uplands was represented. Details and images of which are contained in our members updates. These can be shared on request as an appendix to this report.

- World Wetlands Day - Bog Wonders, Walk, Talk and Art Experience at Liffey Head (February 2025)
- Hollywood, Kiltegan & Donard Guilds Irish Country Womes Association Meeting (March 2025)
- Mountainous Clean Up, WUC PURE mile & Leave No Trace & An Taisce Sprin Clean (April 2025)
- Laragh SEC Evening Workshop (April 2025)
- 'Right Tree Right Place' Webinar (April 2025)
- Invasive Rhododendron (May 2025)
- LAWPRO Nature Based Solutions, Dundalk (June, 2025)
- Mountaineering Ireland (June 2025)
- WMNP Summer Series – 'Shared Landscapes (August 2025)
- A History of Sheep and Wool in Wicklow and Ireland (August 2025)
- FireCULT (August 2025)
- Water Heritage Day – Knocksink (August 2025)
- Dry Stone Wall Training Event (August 2025)

- Teagasc Upland Forum (September 2025)
- Peatland Conservation of Ireland (September 2025)
- SpongeWorks, EU Horizon (September 2025)
- IUCN – Peatland Conference (September 2025)
- Irish Uplands Forum (October 2025)
- Nature Restoration Law (October 2025)

Knowledge share is fundamental to supporting a solution-based approach to conflicts and pressures experienced within upland regions.

### 5.3 Wicklow Mountain Views – Newsletter

Attached separately

Annual Wicklow Mountain Views is published sharing valuable insights and perspectives regarding the sustainable development of the Wicklow Uplands for those that live, work and recreate there. The newsletter is shared as an E-zine, and printed copies are circulated amongst community groups, at events and on a dedicated mailing list.

### 5.4 Members Update – Bi-Monthly Circular

During the past year, the Wicklow Uplands Council introduced a series of bi-monthly Members' Updates as part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen communication and engagement with its membership base. While described as "bi-monthly," these updates are not issued on a fixed schedule but are instead circulated on an ad hoc basis. This flexible approach ensures that each update is both relevant and timely, allowing the Council to share information when there are significant progress, key developments, or items of particular interest to members — such as updates on ongoing projects, consultation opportunities, or external events related to upland management and community interests.

Each Members' Update is presented in a consistent, easy-to-read format and distributed directly via email to ensure accessibility and reach. The goal of these updates is to keep members informed about the organisation's activities, highlight achievements, and provide early notice of events or policy developments that may impact the Wicklow Uplands. This initiative has proven to be an effective communication tool, enhancing transparency, fostering a sense of connection within the membership, and supporting the Council's commitment to keeping stakeholders well-informed and actively engaged in the work of the organisation.

