

Wicklow Uplands Council

Strategic Plan

(2011-2013)

Final Version

21st April 2011

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*An Roinn Gnóthaí Pobail,
Comhionannais agus Gaeltachta
Department of Community, Equality
and Gaeltacht Affairs*



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I. Introduction to Wicklow Uplands Council

1.1 Introduction

Wicklow Uplands Council (thereafter referred to as the Uplands Council) was incorporated in 1999 as a limited company with charitable status. The organisation was developed by its members, as a response to the growing pressures facing the uplands (including the ultimately unsuccessful proposal by the Office of Public Works to establish an Interpretative Centre at Luggala) and a desire for enhanced community level participation in the decision making processes, affecting the uplands.

Since its establishment the Uplands Council has been involved in a variety of representative and project development and management work. The Uplands Council began with a very small budget and no staff. It expanded over the years with the allocation of resources by the Heritage Council which enabled the employment of staff for the first time.

The Uplands Council has two main membership categories: non-statutory organisations, groups and societies and individuals. Membership is open for a small subscription fee to all individuals, groups or societies and organisations with an interest or involvement in the uplands. The Uplands Council currently has 56 members (28 individual and 28 group/organisational). Members are assigned by the Board to one of four panels: a) Farmers and Property Owners, b) Environment and Recreation, c) Community, d) Economic and Tourism.

1.2 Mission and objectives

The mission of the Uplands Council is:

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

The Uplands Council uses a consensus model to achieve its three core objectives as follows:

1. To work together by consensus/to build understanding and get people talking
2. To represent upland communities by:
 - Highlighting pressures (including the pressure of Dublin) on the uplands)
 - Monitoring actions/activities affecting the uplands
 - Influencing policy/'uplands proofing'
 - Working with statutory agencies

- Networking with other relevant organisations
3. To stimulate/generate new ideas
- Addressing unforeseen/pressing issues (e.g. bad weather)

1.3 Role and relevance

The Upland Council's role is to bring together non statutory organisations and individuals from across a range of sectors. Council members hear one another's different perspectives and work collectively using a consensus model to develop a shared position. The role of the Uplands Council is also to represent the shared interests of its membership at local, regional and national level, through membership of various fora/structures and through the preparation of submissions and position papers on key policy issues. The existence of a shared position provides the basis for this work. In addition the Uplands Council works in partnership with other organisations to develop new initiatives or indeed to address problems within the uplands

The Uplands Council is relevant both locally and nationally as:

- a) A unique local partnership structure between groups and individuals who live, work and recreate in a particular area
- b) A local partnership structure which links with statutory bodies and other relevant organisations and groups
- c) A think tank searching for consensus
- d) An initiator of innovation
- e) A capable project management and delivery agent.

The Uplands Council works at both a strategic and a practical level. Key successes of the Uplands Council from its establishment to date have included:

At a strategic level

- Preparation of policy submissions and position papers which present the shared vision of Council members
- Participation in various conferences and events to highlight the issues impacting on the Wicklow uplands
- A Countryside Access Project (with funding and support from County Wicklow Partnership) which led to the development of six new routes. The experience and learning arising from

this initiative also fed into the development of the Access Officers Programme around the country.

- Establishment of the Protecting Upland & Rural Environment (PURE) Project which has developed a very successful system for dealing with illegal dumping in the Uplands. This project has subsequently been enlarged to include a range of project partners across a number of local authority areas.
- The establishment of Wicklow Private Woodland Owners' Group

At a practical level

- The installation of information panels in a variety of locations over a number of years
- The operation of a voluntary countryside warden scheme (over a three year period)
- The development of eco-gardens in five local Primary schools
- The completion of a various feasibility studies (e.g. 'Bunkhouse Barns', etc)
- The organisation of various walk and talk events to raise awareness of access issues
- The organisation of the Young Observer Awards for transition year students

Liaison with other organisations

- The Forest Service and others to contribute to the development of the Strategy for community based forestry in County Wicklow
- County Wicklow Partnership and others to contribute to the development of the Wicklow Tourism Strategy
- Wicklow County Council and others to contribute to the development of the Wicklow Sustainable Trails Network.
- County Wicklow Partnership and others to contribute to the development of the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy
- Various other statutory and voluntary bodies who are either working in the Wicklow uplands or whose work impacts on the uplands.

1.4 Values

The Uplands Council has the following core values;

Consensus: All decisions made by the Uplands Council will be made by consensus which by its nature will require the resolution or mitigation of minority concerns/objections. This process of consensus building is a core to the work of the Uplands Council.

Participation: The 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 planning and management processes affecting the Uplands.

Partnership & Collaboration: The Uplands Council recognises that supporting the sustainable use of the Wicklow uplands will involve a range of organisations, agencies and supports and is committed to participating in collaboration and partnerships.

1.5 The development of the Strategic Plan

The development of the Strategic Plan for the period 2011-2013 took place in parallel to a review of the operations of the Uplands Council. The findings arising from the review process fed directly into the strategic planning process and vice versa.

The review and strategic planning processes involved:

- An examination of the wider national and local policy and contexts in which the Council operates,
- A review of secondary data (including previous reviews and strategic plans, funding applications and project reports, board minutes and reports, staff work programmes, policy submissions as well as key local and national policy documents and plans and wider European and international literature on the sustainable management of upland areas)
- Consultations with internal and external stakeholders and discussions with the Board.

See Appendix 1 for details of the consultations undertaken.

II. Background and context

This section provides details of the key challenges facing the Wicklow uplands and the Uplands Council.

2.1 Key challenges facing the Wicklow uplands

See Table 2.1 for details of the key challenges facing the Wicklow uplands and its communities.

| <i>Challenges</i> | <i>Description</i> | |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Economic | Regulation | Businesses face challenges in terms of meeting the demands associated with increasing levels of regulation & paperwork. |
| | Tourism | The Wicklow uplands only benefit from tourism day trips; people do not generally overnight in Wicklow. There is a need to support tourism by supporting the development of additional activities for visitors and locals alike. |
| | Employment | The economic downturn has seen a reduction in the number of part-time jobs and contract jobs available to people in the uplands. |
| | Farming | The 2000 Agriculture Census identified 2410 farms in Co. Wicklow, a substantial proportion of which are in the upland areas. While farmers generally face uncertainty in relation to Common Agricultural Policy post 2013 ¹ , agriculture was one of the few sectors to show positive growth in 2010. 'Agriculture ² is viewed as an important driver of economic recovery, with 150,000 jobs and annual output of €24bn nationally, with potential for further growth'. |
| | Business | Small local businesses have to cope with a lot of planning issues |
| Social | The uplands are host to significant numbers of individuals and groups who travel to the uplands to pursue their recreational interests. Many people in the uplands commute to work (generally to the urban centres) and | |

¹ November 2010 saw the European Commission publish a communication on "The CAP towards 2020" which outlines options for the future CAP and launches the debate with the other institutions and with stakeholders. The legal proposals are due to be presented in 2011.

² The Teagasc 2009 National Farm Survey found that off farm employment accounted for 81% of household income on part-time farms and 38% of income on full time farms. On 35% of farms the main farm operator had off-farm employment while on 51% of farms, the farmer and/or spouse had off farm employment.

| | |
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| | are accessing a lot of the services they require in the urban centres. |
| Climate | Adapting to /mitigating climate change requires changes in behaviour in terms of the increased development and use of renewable energies and green technologies, as well as reductions in levels of energy consumption. |
| Land use | There are overlapping land uses with complex land ownership patterns. |
| Technology | Some places in the uplands have very poor mobile phone and broadband coverage. In other places connection speeds are slow, making business difficult |
| Demographics | There has been an influx of people to the uplands. Some small rural schools would have closed but for the arrival of additional children to the area. The economic downturn raises fears in relation to young people and emigration which in turn has implications for local service provision/transport and social cohesion |
| Governance | The uplands are at the margins of decision making- the voices of upland communities are less heard. Management of the Uplands involves four local authorities making change processes complex |
| Access | The infrastructure (walking routes, secure parking, etc) necessary to provide local, tourists and visitors with access to the hills does not currently exist, posing problems both for land owners and people who want to recreate in the uplands |

2.2 Key challenges facing the Uplands Council

See Table 2.2 for details of the key challenges facing the Upland Council.

| Table 2.2 The key challenges facing the Uplands Council | |
|--|--|
| <i>The Key Challenge</i> | <i>Description</i> |
| Membership | Membership of the Council has grown annually. There is a need to continue to increase the overall membership. There is a need to include more representatives from the community sector (from across the entire uplands area), environmental interests and tourism and other economic interests. |
| Governance | Board decisions must continue to be made by consensus. A formal rotation policy is to be developed for Office Holders and subsequently for Board Members. A clear documented rationale is to be introduced for co-options while some changes also need to be made to the general operation of the panels (in terms of the regularity of meetings, and the provision of input and feedback to the Board, etc).. The Tourism and Economic Panel and the Community Panel need additional support and further strengthening. The topography of the uplands means the uplands are split on an east/west basis and the Council must proactively seek |

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| | representation and engagement from the western side of the uplands. |
| Partnership and representation | Work is to continue on the deepening of strategic partnerships with key organisations. There is also the challenge posed by the need for continued representation of upland community's interests on key structures/fora at local, national and European levels and for continued development of informal linkages with a variety of key local organisations. |
| Resources | <p>Meeting operational costs</p> <p>Locate the resources necessary for the basic operation of the organisation. The Heritage Council has provided this support over the last number of years. Cuts to the overall budget of the Heritage Council means there will be less support available from this source over the lifetime of this plan.</p> <p>Staffing</p> <p>There are only sufficient resources to recruit a part-time staff-member in a Coordinator role on a short term contract. The long serving CEO retired in Spring 2011. The reduction in staffing levels will require an increasing reliance on member input.</p> <p>Undertaking projects</p> <p>The Uplands Council needs to locate resources to support project specific activities. The LEADER Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 is probably the most readily accessible potential source of funding. The development of successful LEADER funding applications is a skilled and time-consuming process.</p> |
| Communications | There is a need for more communication with the wider membership. A wider communications strategy needs to be developed for 2011-2012. The website is to be re-developed and update regularly thereafter, with the creation of an online discussion forum for people interested in the uplands. |

2.3 Key priorities for the Uplands Council for the period 2011-2013

The Uplands Council's mission and core objectives are ambitious. They require engagement and consensus building. Consensus building among different interest groups is a slow, complex and challenging process. The limited nature of resources available to support the operation of the Uplands Council (one part-time Co-ordinator) means that the Uplands Council and its individual members need to be realistic about what can be achieved with more limited resources needs to be realistically achieved. The focus must be on a small number of key priorities and projects. The organisation must be led by its objectives rather than funding availability. Where a decision is

made to undertake a particular project, it must be self financing, include a range of interest groups and make a clear contribution to the development of a shared vision of the Uplands Council. The key priorities for the Council over the period 2011-2013 are contained in Table 2.3.

| Table 2.3. The key priorities for the Uplands Council (2011-2013) | |
|---|---|
| <i>Priority</i> | <i>Actions include:</i> |
| Engagement with and support for consensus building among those who live, work and recreate in the Wicklow uplands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nurturing and deepening the shared sense of purpose among existing Council members - Increasing and broadening the membership base to include more representatives from across community, tourism, economic and environmental sectors in particular - Identification of the key needs of local communities in the uplands |
| Representation of the shared interests of those who live, work and recreate in the Wicklow uplands | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Influence key decision making/policy structures/fora - Development of responses to policies particularly where they have the potential to have an impact on the Uplands and its various communities - Developing and deepening of strategic alliances and partnerships |
| Development of innovative/pilot projects to support uplands sustainability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of possible pilot projects - Identification of potential funding sources on an annual basis - Preparation of funding applications - Management of pilot projects |
| Organisational development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial management/Location of other funding/resources - Organisational changes - Internal communications - Wider promotional/communications work - Staff management, |

III. The Strategy

Priority 3.1. Engagement with and support for consensus building among those who those who live, work and recreate in the Uplands

*Objective: To engage with and support consensus building among the people, groups and
communities who live, work and recreate in the Uplands*

3.1.1 Nurture and deepen the shared sense of purpose among existing Council members

- Facilitate regular board meetings
- Maintain board numbers to ensure a range of skills and experiences are available to the organisation
- Continue to develop the panel structures
- Continue to provide support to the executive

3.1.2 Increase and broaden the membership base to include more representatives from across community, tourism, economic and environmental sectors in particular

- Increase the membership of the Uplands Council
- Increase size and geographical spread of the community panel membership
- Strengthen and grow the membership of the tourism and economic panel
- Recruit more members from with environmental interests

3.1.3 Identify the key needs of local communities in the uplands

- Identify and work with three local communities to undertake a local needs analysis (one per year)
- Feed the findings of the needs analysis into the work of the Council

Key Performance Indicators

- **Number of ‘well attended’³ Board meetings**
- **Increase in membership numbers**
- **% increase in the membership of the different panels**
- **Successful completion and use of the needs analysis**

³ The Uplands Council has defined the term ‘well attended’ as > 70% attendance.

Priority 3.2. Representation of the shared interests of those who live, work and recreate in the Wicklow uplands

Objective: To influence policy formulation, development and implementation through engagement with decision makers and decision making structures to ensure the views and diverse needs of upland communities are highlighted and addressed

3.2.1 Participate in key decision making/policy influencing structures/fora

- Participate in a number of key decision making/policy influencing structures including:
 - Wicklow County Tourism and Wicklow Heritage Forum
 - Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee
 - The Wicklow Joint Policing Liaison Committee
 - The Irish Uplands Forum
 - The Dublin Mountains Partnership
 - Wicklow Local Sports Partnership
- Provide regular feedback from these structures for Board meetings

3.2.2 Continue to respond to policies particularly where they have the potential to have an impact on the Uplands and its various communities

- Continue to respond to requests for submissions
- Continue to make representations/presentations at a variety of relevant fora.
- Highlight the impacts of particular policies on the Uplands

3.2.3 Continue to build and work as part of strategic alliances/in partnership with other organisations

- Explore and develop an initiative focused around an area/s of common concern with other organisations concerned with the Uplands and/or the variety of upland communities

Key Performance Indicators

- **Number of feedback reports provided to the Board from the various structures it is represented on**
- **Number of submissions made**
- **Number of presentations given**
- **Number of strategic alliances/partnerships developed**

Priority 3.3. Development of innovative/pilot projects to support Uplands sustainability

Objective: To test and promote the use of innovative initiatives and responses to address gaps in services and /or provide increased access to opportunities and/or address unforeseen events support the sustainability of the uplands, or to address a particular issue affecting the uplands.

3.3.1 Identify and agree possible projects on an annual basis

- Current funding restrictions mean that the focus of this priority must be on a small number of key areas and projects. A small number of key areas where innovative responses are required have been identified by identified by the Uplands Council as follows:
 - Engagement with the people who live and work in the uplands,
 - Access to opportunities (for those who live, work, recreate in the uplands),
 - High nature value land use (including vegetation management)
 - Security in the Uplands

3.3.2 Identify potential funding sources on an annual basis

- Develop a database of possible funding sources and their various timetables
- Update this database regularly

3.3.3 Prepare the necessary funding application/s

- Develop and submit the necessary funding applications (min. one per annum)

3.3.4 Management of funded projects

- Implement the funded project

Key Performance Indicators

- **Number of project funding applications submitted**
- **Number of projects funded**
- **Extent and nature of learning arising from the project work.**

Priority 3.4. Organisational development

Objective: Ensure that the structures, procedures and policies of the Uplands Council are adequate to deliver this strategic plan

3.4.1 Implement effective financial management to ensure the financial viability of the organisation and maximise funding opportunities:

- Undertake the necessary reporting and financial control to maintain current funding and meet best practices
- Develop and prepare the necessary additional funding applications
- Prepare the Annual Reports.

3.4.2 Implement the organisational changes arising from the review

3.4.3 Implement and further develop internal communications

- Develop, implement and monitor internal meeting schedules
- Record keeping and file management systems in place
- Ongoing ICT systems management and development

3.4.4 Implement and develop a wider promotions and communications strategy

- Develop a wider promotions and communications strategy (2011-2012)
- Re-develop and re-launch the Uplands Council website
- Launch the Strategic Plan and 2011 priorities
- Create an online discussion forum for people interested in the uplands.
- Update and re-launch the newsletters for a more targeted audience

3.4.5 Staff Management

- Undertake regular staff reviews and support sessions
- Support the development of the staff and volunteers

Performance Indicators

- **Uplands Council meet all financial and reporting requirements**
- **Number of funding applications developed**
- **Percentage increase in the number of web-site hits**
- **Increase visibility of the Uplands Council in the local media**

IV Plan implementation and evaluation

4.1 Plan implementation

Responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Strategic Plan will rest with the Upland Council Board. Progress in relation to the implementation of the plan will be assessed using a series of Performance Indicators. There is a minimum of three headline performance indicators for each of the four priorities. Under the headline performance indicators will be action specific indicators. See Table 4.1 for an overview of the headline indicators. Staff work plans will be directly related to the achievement of these action specific indicators. The Uplands Council Board will review overall plan implementation and progress twice per year in May and in November. Depending on progress and the emergence of new issues, the plan may be amended and updated. Changes to the strategic plan made after the twice annual review must be approved by the Board at the May and November meetings respectively. The Annual Work Programme, which enables the implementation of the Plan, must be signed off by the Board at the November meeting.

| | |
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| Priority 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of 'well attended' Board meetings• Increase in membership numbers• % increase in the membership of the different panels• Successful completion and use of the community needs analysis |
| Priority 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of feedback reports provided to the Board from the various structures it is represented on• Number of submissions made• Number of presentations given• Number of strategic alliances/partnerships progressed/developed |
| Priority 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of project funding applications submitted• Number of projects funded• Extent and nature of learning arising from the project work. |
| Priority 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting all financial and reporting requirements• Number of funding applications developed• Percentage increase in the number of web-site hits• Increase visibility of the Uplands Council in the local media |

4.2. Plan evaluation

An independent external evaluation of the 2011-2013 strategic plan, will be initiated in January 2013, (subject to funding availability) for completion in June 2013. The preparation of the new Strategic Plan will be initiated in March 2013 and the evaluation will feed directly into this process.

Appendix 1. Consultations that fed into the development of the Strategic Plan

Internal One to One Interviews/discussions

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Chairperson | Declan O'Neil (Chairperson) (3) |
| Uplands Council Executive | Stephen Arthur (Treasurer), John Byrne, Sean Byrne (Assistant Treasurer), Murt O'Keeffe (Vice Chair), John Flynn (Secretary) and Philip Geoghegan |
| Directors | Eamonn Grant (PRO), Sean Malone, Claire Chambers, Daire Gilvary (Resigned Oct 2010), Philip Maguire, Pat Ewen and Mervyn Sunderland |
| Members and former office holders | Dermot Hand (former Chairperson), Tim Kyne, and David Rowe |
| Staff/Former Staff | Colin Murphy and Helen Lawless (former staff member) |

External Interviews/discussions Consultations

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Heritage Council | Michael Starrett |
| County Wicklow Partnership | Brian Kehoe |
| National Parks and Wildlife Service | Wesley Atkinson |
| Wicklow County Council | Joe Lane |
| Irish Uplands Forum | Mary Tubridy |
| Wicklow Heritage Forum | Noel Keyes |
| Wicklow County Executive Irish Farmers Association | James Hill |

Group Discussions

| | |
|--|--|
| The Board (7 Occasions) | 22 nd September 2010, 20 th October 2010, 17 th November 2010 19 th January 2011, 16 th February 2011, 16 th March 2011 & 20 th April 2011 |
| The Executive Committee | 4 th November 2010 |
| Observation at the Uplands Council AGM 28 th July 200 | |

Appendix 2. Outline Work Programme

| Actions | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Resources | Budget |
|---|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| Priority 1. Engagement with and support for consensus building | | | | | |
| 1.1 Support existing Council members | √ | √ | √ | Staff & Members | Staff time, |
| 1.2 Increase and broaden membership | Community focus | Tourism focus | Community focus | Staff | Staff time & travel |
| 1.3 Identify the local communities key needs | - | √ | √ | Student support | Staff time, student costs |
| Priority 2. Representation of the shared interests of those who live, work and recreate in the Wicklow uplands | | | | | |
| 2.1 Participation in decision making | √ | √ | √ | Staff & Members | Staff time & travel |
| 2.2 Development of policy responses | √ (2/year) | √ (2/year) | √ (2/year) | Staff & Members | Staff time |
| 2.3 Development of strategic alliances | √ (1/year) | √ (1/year) | √ (1/year) | Staff & Members | Staff time & travel |
| Priority 3. Development of innovative/pilot projects to support uplands sustainability | | | | | |
| 3.1 Identification of projects | √ (2 -3//year) | √ (2-3/year) | √(2-3/year) | Staff & Members | Staff time & travel |
| 3.2 Identification of funding sources | √ | √ | √ | Staff | Staff time |
| 3.3 Preparation of applications | √ (1/year) | √ (1/year) | √ (1/year) | Staff & Members | Staff time |
| 3.4 Project implementation | Funding dependent | | | Additional staff | Additional staff |
| Priority 4. Organisational development | | | | | |
| 4.1 Financial management | √ | √ | √ | Staff & Members | Staff time, Accountants fees |
| 4.2 Organisational changes | √ | √ | √ | Staff & Members | Legal fees |
| 4.3 Internal communications | √ | √ | √ | Staff & Members | Staff time |
| 4.4 Wider promotions and communication | √ | √ | √ | Staff & Members | Website costs/printing |
| 4.4 Staff Management | √ | √ | √ | Members | Training |

