

Wicklow Mountain Views



The Newsletter of Wicklow Uplands Council

Summer 2015

A Letter from the Chair



As I cruise through the last few weeks of chairmanship, I might have engaged in an end-of-term blast. The reality is that I don't have anything to blast about... I am as proud as anyone of the role and achievements of the Wicklow Uplands Council.

We took stock in many different ways as the recession played out its painful course; over the period there was a belt-tightening prudence in our approach to everything. And we came through in good shape.

Navigating the recession

With funding reduced, we kept safely afloat. We chose not to take on a consultant to tell us how to navigate into the future; instead we put our faith in ourselves as a broadly based Council and worked through a well-managed programme to agree a three-year strategy. It was a transparent process; nothing was taken away and those proposals which did not meet everyone's personal preference were listed as an appendix to the report, allowing for anyone to trace the origins of the strategy.

Post-recession Dynamic Progress of Council

Proactive

Working through consensus, the pace and breadth of the work programme may not always be fully effective. Prioritised Issues tend to be reactive, based on perceived weakness or deficiency in the uplands. In reality our main activities in the last three years have been **proactive**, for example:

- ▶ pressing for a new management deal for uplands farmers;
- ▶ The evolution of an ambitious project to connect Bray to Rathdrum and Laragh with a cycleway and walking trail.

Both programmes have benefitted from sub-committee delegation, with expert support from our managers, Cara and Dorothy.

Reactive

Sometimes we *have* to be **reactive**, when issues arise of major concern to the uplands, for example;

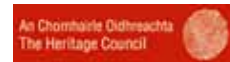
- ▶ The possible privatisation of Coillte. Members acted inclusively on behalf of communities of interest, clearly demonstrating the interconnectedness of issues, integral to the living heritage of the uplands.
- ▶ The planning application for wind turbines in the Tinahely/Aughrim area presented an issue with likely ramifications throughout the uplands and we made a powerful environmental and social argument against them.

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- ▶ We criticised Eirgrid proposals for power lines. Whilst confining our interest to the uplands, we focussed on the environmental threat to tourism and local enjoyment of special places.

Part of the Heritage Council family

The description of the Heritage Council of our role for their 20th anniversary is as an essential part of a community-based heritage infrastructure. They list six key projects showing our continuing "investment and support of 10 **Irish Uplands Partnerships** building on the success of the Wicklow Uplands Council." We are seen to be an integral part of the family of the Heritage Council. At the AGM, I shall try looking into the future, built on a secure and constructive past.

Philip Geoghegan, Chairman, Wicklow Uplands Council

Appointment of Communications Officer



Wicklow Uplands Council is delighted to welcome Lenka Mulligan to her new role as Communications Officer. Lenka formerly worked for the Uplands Council as Development Officer and in 2009 she took some time out to be with her young family. Originally from Slovakia, Lenka is an ecology graduate who married a local upland farmer in 2006 and she has a broad understanding of upland issues. She is returning to Wicklow Uplands Council on a part time basis with a focus on developing and improving communications with our members and the wider public. The primary aim of the role is to raise awareness of the Uplands Council and our work and on the issues facing the uplands. She will promote events and opportunities which encourage people to enjoy and get to know more about the Wicklow uplands. Communication was one of the key objectives identified by directors and members during the development of our Strategic Plan 2014-2016 and Lenka will play a key role in the implementation of our new Communications Plan. Lenka will be posting regularly on our Facebook page so don't forget to 'like us' to receive regular updates and stay informed.

Cara Heraty, Co-ordinator, Wicklow Uplands Council

The Heritage Council Seeks Greater Financial Support for Local Heritage Projects

Wicklow Uplands Council attended an 'Oireachtas Information Day' organised by the Heritage Council on the 13th May in Buswells Hotel, Dublin. The event was attended by 11 other heritage organisations from around the country to explain to TDs and Senators the valuable work that the Heritage Council supports and the importance of reasonable finance for the Heritage sector.

The event took place against a background of drastic cuts in the Heritage Council's budget in recent years. In 2011 the Heritage Council allocated grants totaling €4.6m to 400 local projects and this reduced to €2.25m for 370 projects in 2012. It was unable to fund any local grants programme in 2013 and last year it struggled to fund a slimmed-down grants programme with just €700,000. The Council faces an even greater challenge this year with only €547,000 available and with 612 applications from local community groups which means that the Council can only provide small grants to one third of applicants.

"Over the past 20 years, the Heritage Council has built a unique, community-based heritage infrastructure embracing every county and many community organisations across Ireland. During that time, the value and effectiveness of investing in heritage in this manner has been well researched, documented and demonstrated" said Mr. Starrett, the Chief Executive of the Heritage Council.

He also points to the critical role the Heritage Council has played in growing public awareness and appreciation of heritage issues: "For example, through our support for the county heritage officer network, our outreach through Heritage Week, the Heritage in Schools Programme, the Irish Walled Towns Network, and our Museums Standards Programme, I am satisfied that we have helped to enhance greatly the public value attached to our heritage".

He also said that despite the massive budgetary cuts and the consequent decimation of the Council's community grants programme, "the community-based infrastructure that has been built up has shown itself resilient and flexible and is clamouring for modest financial support to implement many projects." "Today we are asking TDs and Senators to support local community organisations in developing our economy through valuing and investing in our local heritage assets. Given the welcome if slow economic recovery now under way, this is the time to start investing once again in these communities in a phased and incremental way over the next few years", he added.

Over the last 20 years the Heritage Council has worked with a range of partners to establish a local heritage infrastructure that is based on vital connections between people and place. Such an approach offers immense potential in terms of Ireland's development and it is the Council's ambition that the next 20 years will see this work continue to expand and engage communities across Ireland.

Isabell Smyth, The Heritage Council



The Heritage Council staff and representatives of all heritage organisations who attended the Oireachtas Information Day at Buswells Hotel, Dublin.

Workshop on Locally-led Agri-environmental Schemes

Since the government announced that c.€70million will be available for locally-led agri-environmental schemes there is particular interest in Wicklow as this funding could support the vegetation management scheme developed by Wicklow Uplands Council.

To discuss the government's proposal Wicklow Uplands Council, the Irish Uplands Forum and the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism is holding a day long meeting on July 6th in Glencree. The workshop will involve four short talks; from a representative of the Rural Development Section of the Department for Agriculture; Dr Andy Bleasedale, upland farming specialist in the NPWS; Dr James Moran, Sligo IT and Michael Davoren, Burren farmer. There will also be a walk and talk to an upland farm near Glencree with small group discussions. Participation and input from everyone attending will be welcome and encouraged.

A detailed programme is available at www.wicklowuplands.ie and www.irishuplandsforum.org.

Mary Tubridy, Irish Uplands Forum



'From Corries to Coast'
A Celebration of the Geological Heritage of County Wicklow
Photographic Competition 2015

€500 in Prizes!

Closing Date: 31st July 2015



Entries are open for our Photographic Competition 'From Corries to Coast – A Celebration of Wicklow's Geological Heritage'.

More info on www.wicklowuplands.ie



Wicklow County Council
COMRADE CHAIRS ACRES MOUNTAIN

A Plan for Improved Management of Upland Habitats

Our hill farmers have shaped the landscape and biodiversity in the Wicklow uplands over the past 6000 years. With appropriate management systems, farming has the capacity to continue to provide optimal conditions for upland biodiversity. However there has been a steady decline in hill sheep farming in recent years. This is now associated with under-grazing in some areas leading to a threat to certain types of biodiversity and the accumulation of unmanaged upland vegetation, mainly bracken, heather and gorse.

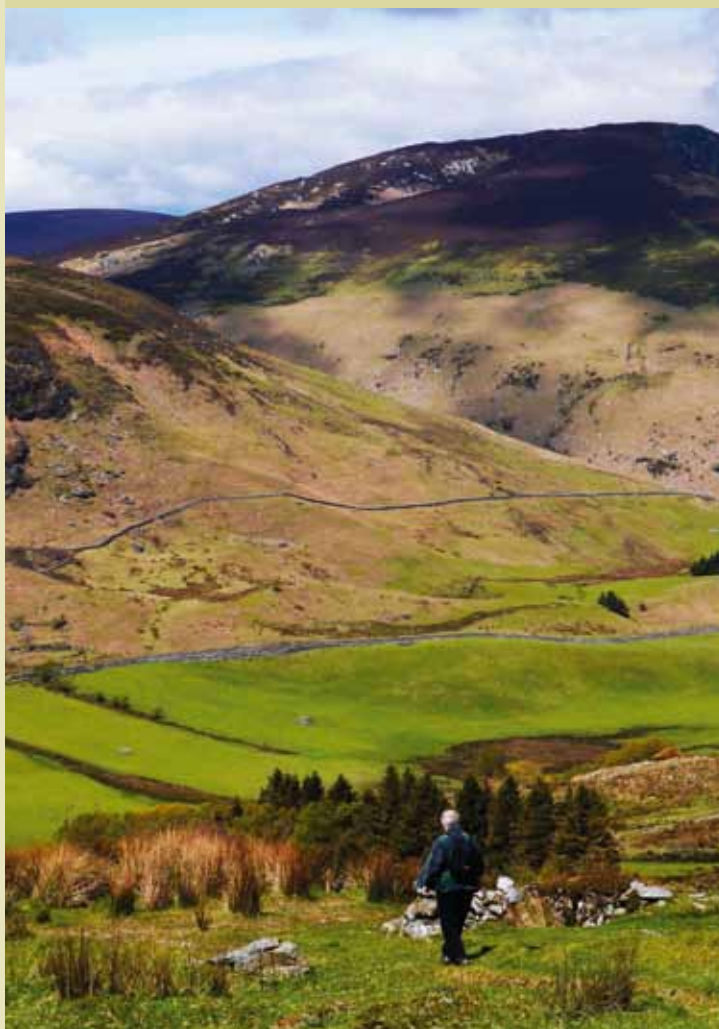
As witnessed over the past few months this build-up of fuel poses a serious health and safety risk to people living and recreating in the hills and our cherished wildlife and upland habitats. The special nature of the area is recognised by c30,000 hectares of the county now designated as a Special Area of Conservation with the Wicklow Mountains National Park at its centre. Wildfires also pose a serious threat to forest properties (c21% of County Wicklow) across the uplands many of which adjoin the open hill.

In 2011 a Working Group was established by Wicklow Uplands Council to tackle the issue of vegetation management. Representation on the Working Group includes Wicklow hill sheep farmers, recreational users, Teagasc, NPWS, Wicklow Uplands Council and the Irish Uplands Forum. Over 30 meetings and site visits took place over a period of three years examining management issues and gaining an understanding of the perspectives of the key stakeholder groups. In 2013 'A Study to Identify Best Management of Upland Habitats in County Wicklow' was commissioned by Wicklow Uplands Council and launched by the Minister for Agriculture Simon Coveney. The need for support for management of hill areas was clearly identified and a locally led Sustainable Upland Agri-Environmental Scheme (SUAS) was proposed with detailed key management prescriptions. The full study is available on www.wicklowuplands.ie.

The review of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) in 2013/2014 was very timely in this regard and the Wicklow Working Group alongside a National Uplands Group lobbied for the provision of a Locally Led Environmental Schemes under Pillar II. The option for Locally Targeted Schemes was successfully included in the RDP and they will sit on top of the GLAS Scheme and the Basic Payment Scheme in a tiered structure.

In May 2015 the Working Group representatives met with Rural Development Programme officials at the Department for Agriculture, Food and Marine to further discuss the proposal for the Wicklow uplands. They welcomed the Wicklow proposal and advised that an official call for applications for a competitive process will be issued in autumn 2015. Wicklow Uplands Council will be developing our application over the coming months and is hopeful of securing funding. The local schemes are expected to be operational by 2016.

A fundamental feature of the scheme proposed for Wicklow is the development of management plans for upland farms. They will be prepared with input from upland ecologists, farmers and farm planners. They will be based on initial habitat mapping and habitat condition assessments and will specify where and what actions are necessary to enhance habitats and protect key



species. While most actions will relate to grazing management, plans may also specify controlled burning with maps clearly identifying areas that are suitable on a rotational basis and areas which are unsuitable for burning such as blanket peat, bracken and areas with vulnerable species. Controlled burning would be carried out by a trained group ideally with the support of the relevant authorities, the Fire Service, Gardaí and NPWS and with careful regard for neighbours and visitors.

It must be recognised that there is a significant difference between the devastation caused by uncontrolled wildfires compared with the use of controlled rotational burning which provides forage and shelter for sheep while creating a mosaic of habitat structures and food for wildlife.

Undertaken responsibly, controlled burning is an important management tool in the future of upland habitat management together with subsequent appropriate stocking levels on the hills. This is a unique opportunity for upland farmers and ecologists to work together to provide the optimal result for upland habitats in County Wicklow while keeping hill farming alive and avoiding abandonment of the Wicklow uplands which is not in the interest of anyone.

Wicklow Uplands Council wishes to present a balanced view of local issues and how we are attempting to overcome them by working in partnership and presenting the perspective of the people who have lived, recreated in and worked the hills for generations.

Lenka Mulligan, Communications Officer, Wicklow Uplands Council

Wicklow Tourism Businesses Meet with Fáilte Ireland to progress 'Ireland's Ancient East'

Tourism operators from Co. Wicklow attended Fáilte Ireland's initial *Ireland's Ancient East* stakeholder workshop at the Amber Springs Hotel, Gorey, Co Wexford, on 12th May to learn more about the new initiative and to discuss how they can work with the national tourism authority to bring this new tourism initiative to life in the East and South region.

Ireland's Ancient East is a new touring region which seeks to attract greater international visitors by building on the wealth of historical and cultural assets in the east of Ireland. This new initiative, which includes County Wicklow, extends from Carlingford to Cork and Cavan to Carnsore and is based on 5,000 years of history, heritage and culture all located in a relatively compact region.

Speaking at the meeting, Fáilte Ireland's Head of Programmes for Ireland's Ancient East, Jenny De Saulles, explained: "The key to the initiative's success will be how local history is illuminated by local people, communities and tourism stakeholders. To that end, Fáilte Ireland is meeting and working with local interested parties over the coming months to enlist their support and expertise to bring the project to life and our tourism partners in County Wicklow have a key role to play in that regard."

Following comprehensive research in overseas markets, the initiative will be aimed at specific overseas market segments who have indicated they would be more likely to come to Ireland to take in history and culture, explore new landscapes and to connect with local heritage and nature. The proposition will be crafted along four distinct thematic pillars - Ancient Ireland, Early Christian Ireland, Medieval Ireland and Anglo Ireland.

Ireland's Ancient East is an evolving project on which work is now beginning to prepare for the tourism season next year. In the months ahead, investment in a major signage programme and supports for attractions and heritage sites will be rolled out.

Laoise Donnelly, Fáilte Ireland



Noel Keyes (Wicklow County Tourism), Jenny De Saulles (Head of Ireland's Ancient East Programme, Fáilte Ireland), Michael Nicholson (Wicklow County Council) and Martina Robinson (Wicklow County Tourism) at the recent workshop in the Amber Springs Hotel, Gorey.

PURE Multi Media Environmental Awareness Exhibition



Coláiste Bhríde students participating in PURE MUSIC competition.

The PURE (Protecting Upland and Rural Environments) project is hosting a Multi Media Environmental Awareness Exhibition in the Courthouse Arts Centre in Tinahely on the 12th July which will run for a period of 3 weeks. The exhibition concentrates on the various multimedia projects PURE has produced to create environmental awareness, featuring 16 award winning short environmental animations, 7 environmental music videos, a short

film on the community/environmental initiative, the PURE Mile and short films on illegal dumping in the Wicklow/Dublin uplands.

The exhibition opening will also include the first public screening of the recently completed primary school project entitled PURE WISDOM. This short documentary interviewed and filmed 24 junior and senior students (4 to 6 years old) from Kilcommon National School in Tinahely, Co. Wicklow and asked for their opinions and thoughts regarding the environment, illegal dumping, litter, pollution and nature. The interviews form an insightful 12 minute production which is both humorous and wise.

At the launch of the exhibition PURE will also announce the winners of the first PURE MUSIC competition. The 6 secondary schools from Wicklow, South Dublin and Dún Laoghaire who completed the PURE MUSIC environmental training programme are competing for the prize of a one day professional recording session at Temple Lane Studios in Dublin where acts such as Snow Patrol, Kanye West, Rihanna and Morrissey have recorded. Renowned Irish musician and PURE MUSIC judge Dave Hingerty will present the prize to the winning group. Dave has played with The Frames, Josh Ritter, The Swell Season, and most recently Irish band Kila, composers of the original music score for this year's Oscar nominated feature animation, 'Song of the Sea'.

For further information visit www.pureproject.ie

Ian Davis, PURE Project Manager

