

WICKLOW MOUNTAIN VIEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF WICKLOW UPLANDS COUNCIL



SUMMER 2008

Wicklow Mountain Views –
The Newsletter of Wicklow Uplands Council

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear friends

Someone once said that every problem presents an opportunity. If this is so, Wicklow Uplands Council is working at a time of great opportunity!

Over the past months, Wicklow Uplands Council has been having a very difficult time maintaining consensus with Wicklow IFA Executive members and supporters of theirs who are members of our board of directors. Simply put, many of our farming colleagues are worried about aspects of our communications and decision-making procedures. It is clear now that, despite everyone's best efforts, these procedures have not always achieved the necessary clarity and consensus. There are also major concerns about our organisation's possible responses to Minister John Gormley's call for public discussion about development of a National Landscape Strategy (an element of the Programme for Government 2007/2011) and with the discussion of landscape management generally as evidenced by Heritage Council policy.

In order to achieve a resolution of these issues, we have been working with Wicklow IFA officers, under the gentle and constructive facilitation of Mr Noel Keyes, director of Wicklow County Tourism and a member of the Heritage Council. Thankfully, these detailed discussions have led to an agreement on procedures, which have been adopted by the boards of both organisations. We are very grateful to Noel for his support and wise counsel. My colleague directors and I welcome this process and its outcome and look forward to moving ahead now to tackle the challenges and opportunities facing Wicklow Uplands Council.

The issue as to whether or not the Board should be involved in discussion of current and future landscape management, characterisation, designation etc. is complex and difficult. Many



farmers take a view that designation has generally negative implications for their economic sustainability and independence and that it imposes unnecessary and often wrong-headed restrictions on their stewardship of their land. The other view holds that regulation has been and will be a fact of life and that it makes sense to participate in debates about its formation and implementation in the hope that the genuine fears and concerns of local people can be heard and accommodated. Out of respect for Wicklow IFA concerns, our directors have re-stated their intention to suspend discussion at board level of these issues until further notice.

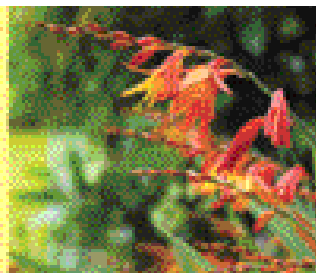
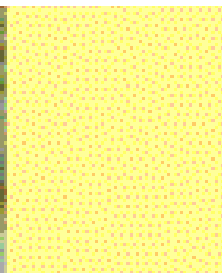
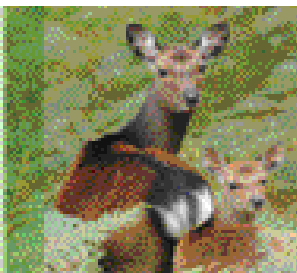
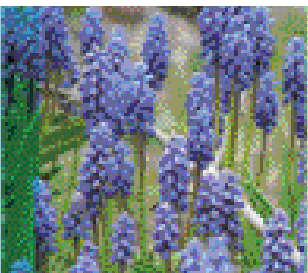
From my own point of view, the situation in which we find ourselves is problematic and hopeful in equal measure. We realise that it was conflict that brought us together almost 15 years ago (the Luggala Interpretative Centre controversy) and that, in such a broad church as Wicklow Uplands Council, dissent would never be far away. So long as we keep the common good in mind and continue to treat each other and all stakeholders with dignity and respect, I am confident that Wicklow Uplands Council will transform these problems into real opportunities.

Meantime, life at Wicklow Uplands Council goes on. We are in the midst of a very busy schedule of projects and activities, which you can read about elsewhere in this newsletter. I wish to make special mention of the Private Woodland Owner's project, which is offering co-ordination to this sector for the first time. We are especially grateful to the Forest Service: (Chief Inspector Diarmuid McAree and Landscape Architect Pat Farrington) for 80% funding and Teagasc colleagues (Frances McHugh and Dominic Joyce) for their backing. We are also grateful for the advice and enthusiastic support given to project officer Michael Doyle by so many of the private woodland owners of Wicklow and surrounding counties.

I close with tributes to our key funders, the Heritage Council, Wicklow County Council and Dublin City Council, to members of our Business Forum and to colleagues in Wicklow Rural Partnership (soon to be transformed into County Wicklow Partnership), National Parks and Wildlife Service (Wicklow Mountains National Park), Mountain Meitheal, Coillte and others. Without their support, we would not be able to continue our work for the sustainable use and enjoyment of the local landscape in partnership with those who live, work and recreate here.

Yours truly,

DERMOT J. HAND
Chair, Wicklow Uplands Council



VIEW FROM THE SIDELINES – PROFILE OF TIM C. KYNE

Tim is a member of the Wicklow Upland Council Board and of the Wicklow Dublin Mountains Board. He is determined to put West Wicklow on the map. It is, in his view, an under-resourced, under-promoted, under-used area of wondrous beauty and potential. So, through "Blessington and District Forum", and through Wicklow County Tourism he is striving to open up the area, to develop walking routes, provide proper visitor facilities and so on. The ESB, which owns Blessington Lakes, is sympathetic to their managed promotion for recreation.

The facilities that he himself has developed at the Kippure House Estate, are superb and imaginative. He says that the whole complex there has evolved not so much by deliberate planning as by organic growth – as needs demanded, and as opportunities presented. Now school groups come to complete the practical module of the Leaving Certificate Geography course; and others come to partake in adventure sport – using the climbing ropes and the sky-walks. And these facilities are used, too, by business management groups on leadership training courses.

There are conference facilities, a café/restaurant/bar, 12 guesthouse rooms, 24 self-catering units, the whole complex tucked inconspicuously into the landscape, using inter alia the enclosing walls of the old garden. There are 240 acres of woodland and grassland with a wondrous variety of flora and fauna for the continuing education and enjoyment of young and old.

Tim, himself a fluent Irish speaker from Galway, is concerned to encourage in all corners a sense of Irishness – of the Irish culture of language, the history, and archaeology of the area.

Tim grew up on a 50 acre farm, and started his career as a teacher and then moved to agri-business. He never dreamt, at that time that he would end up doing what he is now doing; but he progressively fitted himself for his role by education in agriculture (B.Agr.SC UCD), the Higher Diploma in Education UCG, an MBA in TCD, and finally a Diploma in Rural and Environmental Science UCD 1998. His wife Della, herself a TCD graduate, is his co-director in all his ventures.

Tim sees the function of the Wicklow Dublin Mountains Board as researching and promoting county policy initiatives, and he feels that efforts should be concentrated on a very few objectives at any time, with a determination to push them through to achievement.

David Rowe



MEMBER ORGANISATION PROFILE – WONDERFUL IRELAND



Although I grew up in Dublin, I was lucky enough to have parents that would bring me walking in Wicklow most weekends. When I moved to London after college I missed being able to escape to the hills and on

returning home in 2001 I was delighted to be able to enjoy the Wicklow Mountains once again. That summer I took a group of friends on the Wicklow Way over a number of weekends, and it was that experience that started me on the road to setting up Wonderful Ireland. Established in 2004 our holidays originally ran from Enniskerry to Glendalough but gradually grew to cover the entire Wicklow Way as well as a number of circular routes around Lough Dan and Glendalough. Having worked in

computers I designed a website myself and set about joining Fáilte Ireland's marketing group Walking Cycling Ireland. After a handful of customers the first year, the business began to grow and it has managed to double the number of customers each year. Two years ago, we began walks along the Barrow Way and last year started holidays in Kerry. Most of the customers spend their first night in Enniskerry, which many find a delightful introduction to the county. Since 2004 we have had customers from 25 countries including Tasmania, Brazil and the Faroe Islands. As the customer base is so geographically spread, the internet has been a valuable business tool and has allowed us to market Wicklow at a fraction of the cost I would have faced only 10 years ago. Occasionally there has been a travel programme about the Wicklow Way on television in another country and then I would notice a spike in bookings. The majority of our customers are from English speaking countries such as America, Canada, UK and



Wonderful Ireland walking in the Wicklow Mountains



Wonderful Ireland on Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry.

Australia. For many of them this is their first time in Ireland and they usually spend a night or two in Dublin before returning home. We survey all our customers, and Powerscourt Waterfall, Glendalough and Lough Tay are justifiably among their favourite parts of the county. Over the next few years we hope to include a number of new walks in Wicklow and encourage visitors to stay longer in the county. For further information you can check out our website at <http://www.walkinginireland.ie> or contact me at petergalvin@wonderfulireland.com

Peter Galvin
Wicklow Uplands Council Board Member

A NETWORK OF INTERPRETIVE PANELS FOR VILLAGES IN THE WICKLOW UPLANDS

Wicklow Uplands Council embarked on a new project during 2007/2008 which aims to develop a network of interpretive panels in villages in the uplands of County Wicklow. The project has built a partnership between village communities, the Heritage Officer and Local Area Engineers of Wicklow County Council and Wicklow Uplands Council. The project was funded by the Wicklow Rural Partnership LEADER+. Wicklow Uplands Council administers the project and liaises with all project partners. Community groups in Blessington, Laragh, Aughrim and Rathdrum were the pilot four villages/towns engaging in this new initiative.

An interpretive panel provides information on the wide spectrum of attractions in the locality with emphasis on built and natural heritage, local history and recreational activities. A simplified pictorial interpretation of the area, photographs and brief information are the dominant part of the design.

The most important aspect of this project is the community involvement. Community groups are encouraged to take responsibility to develop their panel. They decide on the location of the panel, type of drawing, size of the captured area, type of heritage sites and provide all information needed for each panel. The project artist, Paul Francis, develops unique pictorial landscapes based on aerial photographs and every element of the artwork is drawn by Paul's hand and then scanned using graphic computer software. The artwork is tailored specifically for the individual needs of each village. The panel designs are a clear reflection of information gathered by local people and based on best local knowledge.

The first interpretive panel was completed by community groups in Blessington in autumn 2007. Village communities of Laragh, Aughrim and Rathdrum followed with their unique interpretive panels during 2008. We thank all involved local communities, namely Blessington & District Forum, Laragh Tidy Towns, Aughrim Tidy Towns and Rathdrum Development Association for their co-operation and congratulate them on the result. The new panels are providing user-friendly heritage information and we hope that the panels will serve as popular focal points for people visiting and living in the area.

The project is continuing to run this year with Heritage Council funding and another two villages have the opportunity to develop similar panels. Interested communities should contact Wicklow Uplands Council for more information.



Left to right: John Coogan, Stephen Bray with son Niall, Seamus Balfe, Liam Fay, Murtagh O'Keefe and Pat Conlon at the unveiling of Blessington Interpretive Panel.

Blessington Interpretive Panel

Last November, the community of Blessington in West Wicklow unveiled the first, of what is hoped to be a major rollout of village interpretive panels around the county. This initiative by the Wicklow Uplands Council and supported by Wicklow Rural Partnership and Wicklow County Council was embraced by the whole of the Blessington community. Organisations such as the Blessington Tidy Towns Committee, Blessington and District Forum, businesses and individuals were all instrumental in the success of the project.



Tom and Romie McGreal unveiling the Blessington Interpretive Panel.

The artwork, designed and drawn by artist Paul Francis gives a bird's eye view of the town but also includes many historical features including Glen Ding Wood and St. Mary's Church to name but two. The panel also provides information on the long gone and lamented Blessington Tram which unfortunately is now but a distant memory. Much of the historical information was provided by local history enthusiast Aidan Cruise who assisted the artist by providing historical background information, including many photographs from long ago and the success of this project was due, in no small part to Aidan's invaluable knowledge.

Much thanks too must go to Avon Rí holiday village who provided the use of a helicopter so local photographer Jim Schofield could take aerial photographs of the town to assist the artist with the perspective required in order to complete the project. A very positive element to all this was the willingness of all local people as well as Avon Rí to provide their time and services free of charge. Local Wicklow County Council officials and staff must also be thanked for their assistance in erecting the sign in good time before the official unveiling and to Gilmer Hamilton for storing the sign in the intervening period between delivery and installation.

"The panel is an excellent addition to the town and certainly fulfils its function in informing both locals and visitors to Blessington as to the history and layout of the town" according to Liam Fay, chairman of the tidy towns committee.



Michael Sargent, Lenka Mulligan and Liam Fay giving a speech at the unveiling ceremony in Blessington.

Michael Sargent, chairman of Blessington Forum praised the community spirit shown in supporting the panel initiative. "The Blessington and District Forum were pleased to be involved in this very worthwhile project which has enabled the membership of the forum to become more aware of individual historical aspects of the town. We were also very pleased that Killian McGreal, of McGreal's pharmacy, a member of the forum was able to announce his willingness to sponsor the entire community contribution at one of the regular meetings of the forum." Many more individuals played their part in this successful venture but as ever, are too numerous to mention individually, but should be proud of what has been achieved with their help.

Blessington and District Forum

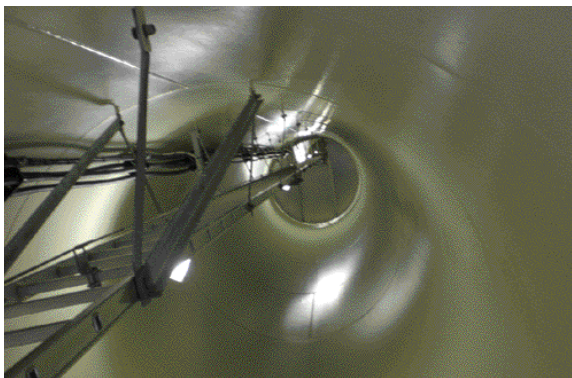
RENEWABLE ENERGY SITE VISIT

On Saturday the 23rd February a Wicklow Uplands Council Renewable Energy Group set off on an educational excursion to the future.



Tom Ryan (middle) and members of Wicklow Uplands Council Renewable Energy Group at his wind farm.

Our first call was the wind farm of Tom Ryan at Cronelea near Shillelagh. Tom has three turbines and his neighbour a further three. It was an ideal day, with a good strong wind and the rotating blades of the turbines were gently swishing producing an almost ethereal effect. Tom stressed the importance of the siting with a decrease in efficiency up to 20% between his highest and lowest turbine. We went into the lowest turbine, making our way through cattle sheltering at the turbine. Inside the turbine, there was a calming hum, flickering computer controls and a dramatic upward vista. The regulations had been less stringent when Tom started up, and so he has his own substation enabling a link into the ESB network. His neighbour, however, had to run a cable over 15km to link in to the network.



Upward vista inside a wind turbine.

The next stop was close to Kilmacthomas (Co. Waterford) to see a small 'run of the river' hydroelectric scheme developed by Sean Murphy on the Mahon River. This has a minimal environmental and visual impact, which is important, as the diversion of some water from the river is close to the road up to the renowned beauty spot of Mahon Falls. Water is then piped 3km downhill to the power station housing the turbines in a concrete shed. Due to the altitude difference, the potential energy of the upstream water is transformed downstream into kinetic energy by the turbines that produce electricity straight into the ESB network. The water is then returned to the river with minimal alteration of flow and water level. The disadvantage is that the electrical output is dependent on the natural run-off from the hill. To be commercially viable it needs to work at least 200 days annually. When we visited, the water was too low so we did not see or hear the scheme in action.



The weir on the Mahon River which provides Mahon Hydro turbine with water.



Sean Murphy explaining how the hydro turbine works.

Our final visit was to Adamstown (Co. Wexford) Biogas run by Patrick Berridge. The biogas is mainly methane, produced by anaerobic (oxygen-free) bacterial digestion. Batches of slurry, woodchip and other organic solids, about 140 metric tonnes, are mixed and loaded into the in-vessel tunnels for two weeks for initial composting. Then, they go to the digester which controls critical factors such as temperature and pH, maximises gas production and reduces possible pathogens. The biogas produced is stored in a flexible fabric gasometer and is used to heat the digester and pump the effluent. The excess is then used to power a turbine. Currently, this plant is not connected to the ESB grid but provides all farm and house electricity and heating. This anaerobic digestion appears to be easily applicable as it is not site specific and serves dual purpose. Reduction of waste volume, odour and pathogens are achieved by anaerobic digestion, while producing biogas on a small footprint. Waste still has to be disposed of but post-treatment is more manageable.

The common features of all three schemes were the sheer enthusiasm of our pioneering hosts and their willingness to show us all advantages and disadvantages. They made it all sound easy – everything controlled by computer, monitored from the comfort of the house and rarely going out as trouble-shooters. This belied the hard work that had gone beforehand. Frustration, problems with shifting ground rules in initial and ongoing planning applications combined with the difficulty connecting to the ESB network were the biggest headaches. Their determination was such that the daunting tasks of sourcing funding for the initial infrastructure, the access and development of the sites were made sound simple. Thank heavens for people of such vision and enthusiasm. May they inspire us lesser mortals! Hopefully the new ESB Strategic Framework announced earlier this year will facilitate more such projects.

Claire Chambers
Wicklow Uplands Council Board Member

FARMING FOR CONSERVATION

The distinctive karst landscape of the Burren, County Clare, is home to a unique farming for conservation project. The BurrenLIFE Project www.burrenlife.com has been in operation for the last four years developing a blueprint for sustainable agricultural management of the habitats in the Burren region designated under the Habitats Directive. Under this directive, Ireland is obliged to maintain the listed habitats in 'favourable conservation status'.

The BurrenLIFE Project aims to demonstrate best practice in biodiversity protection through practical actions for sustainable farming and habitat restoration. The project recognises the importance of traditional pastoral systems to the heritage of the Burren and acknowledges the significant links between farming and flora. The traditional winter grazing by cattle with limited supplementary feeding has been identified as an important management practice for conservation of the Burren habitats.

The BurrenLIFE Project benefits from a strong partnership which has been built up between the Irish Farmers Association, Teagasc and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (Dept. of the Environment) with funding support from the EU Commission - LIFE Nature Fund. The BurrenLIFE Project Team is represented by four full time experts in the fields of agriculture, ecology, conservation and science. A conference organised by the project team early this year presented an excellent opportunity to meet everyone involved in the project in one room, farmers, lead partners and the project team.



Catriona O'Dea, BurrenLIFE suckler beef farmer talking to participants at the conference.



Dr. Sharon Parr, Project Scientist, explaining works carried out by the project, at one of the farms in the Burren.



The Burren conservation grazers on winterages.

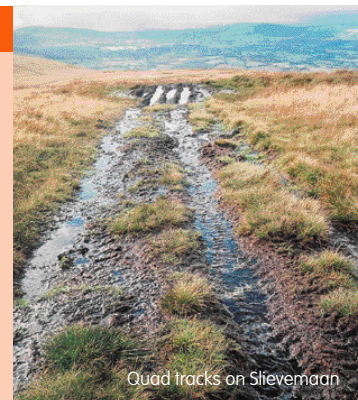
The BurrenLIFE Project has been taking a farm-level approach and has had notable success in the implementation of farm-specific management plans on 20 participating farms (area of 3000 ha). During the conference we had an opportunity to visit individual farms and hear farmers speaking about their involvement in the project. The participating farms benefit from a wide range of actions defined by the BurrenLIFE Project. These include determination of sustainable grazing levels and flexi grazing systems (expressed as a number of 'grazing days' for each field), encouraging winter grazing with limited supplementary feeding, removal of scrub (mostly hazel), improving water supply on winterages through purchase and installation of new pipes and tanks, repairing walls between fields, creation of new trackways across fields to enable feeding and extended grazing, and a detailed monitoring of ecological, environmental, agricultural and socio-economic indicators. An interesting innovation of the project is the development of a special BurrenLIFE Concentrate Ration. This feed was formulated to cater specifically for the nutritional needs of cattle on winterages. Targeted use of the ration encourages higher levels of grazing on these areas compared with that achieved under a silage or hay-based regime. These actions improve the conservation status of priority habitats and also contribute substantially to sustainable farming of the region. Another action arising from the project is marketing of 'conservation grade' Burren beef and lamb.

At the conference it became very obvious that the farmers are very pleased with the outcomes of the project and they wish to continue in the scheme. However, the BurrenLIFE funding will finish in summer 2009 and the current challenge is to build on the spirit of partnership, by securing funding to

continue with the scheme and to enable extension of the farming for conservation project to all interested Burren farmers. BurrenLIFE shows a sustainable way forward for the farmers of the Burren and their heritage. This project demonstrates that agriculture has a central role to play in halting the loss of biodiversity and shows a way to build on the farming traditions that have survived over thousands of years. For the Burren it is important that farming communities will continue to produce quality food from a quality environment. By taking this farming for conservation approach, and combining scientific and farming expertise in a positive partnership, the BurrenLIFE project is delivering benefit for all.

MOTORISED VEHICLES ON THE HILLS

In the last year motorbike, quadbike and 4-wheel drive activity in the Wicklow Mountains has escalated considerably, resulting in serious erosion damage. Following a recent change to the laws concerning protection of Special Areas of Conservation, such as Wicklow Uplands, the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) now has some means of addressing the problem. Signs are currently being erected by the NPWS to advise the public that the recreational use of all-terrain vehicles in these areas is prohibited by law. A prosecution can result in fines of up to €3,000 and/or six months in prison. To take action against this damage, the NPWS needs information on the locations where vehicles are active and the points they are using to access the hills. If you see the illegitimate use of motorised vehicles on the open hillside, please phone the **NPWS Duty Ranger on 087 9803899**.



Quad tracks on Slieveann



Local Involvement in Countryside Management

LOCAL INVOLVEMENT IN COUNTRYSIDE MANAGEMENT - WHAT IS WORKING?

Highlights of 2007 Conference

In October 2007 over 120 people including farmers, community representatives, outdoor enthusiasts and rural development workers gathered in the Glendalough Hotel for a two-day conference to answer the question 'Local Involvement in Countryside Management – what is working?' Through a combination of field trips and indoor sessions, participants engaged in discussion on farming, forestry, countryside recreation and rural planning, looking at how all of these subjects can be addressed through working in partnership.

A number of threads ran throughout the conference – the importance of sustaining rural communities, the challenge of achieving balance between different expectations of our countryside, and the need for authorities and agencies to respect local knowledge. Participants got to see, and discuss, successful models of local involvement in countryside management; examples which suggest how wider local involvement might be achieved. This account gives a flavour of some of the activities and discussion which took place over the two days.

Wicklow models

As the lead partner in organising this event, the Wicklow Uplands Council experience was in the spotlight. Following presentations on Wicklow Uplands Council's structure and current projects, Philip Maguire gave a farmer's view of the Wicklow Uplands Council, mentioning a number of factors which he believes make involvement worthwhile. These include having a forum for exchanging views and building understanding; the strength of a united voice and the capacity to undertake worthwhile projects. He identified the main challenge as the time and effort required to build relationships with statutory bodies. Philip concluded by highlighting the vital role which farming plays in the Wicklow uplands and the opportunities which arise from increased demand for quality food and alternative energy sources.

On a field trip to Glenmalure, participants listened intently as farmer Pat Dunne described his involvement in the Wicklow Countryside Access Service (WCAS), a pilot project to develop short access routes for hillwalkers. The access routes are



Farmer Pat Dunne speaking about his involvement in an access project.

permissive paths; not public rights of way. On the Dunne's land extensive work including construction of a wooden footbridge and restoration of an old stalker's path, was carried out by Mountain Meitheal, the voluntary footpath repair crew. On other routes within the project the farmers who own the land are being paid to carry out any necessary work. Upon completion of each route, insurance is undertaken by Wicklow County Council. Visitors were keen to learn more about this positive example of an innovative, partnership-based solution to the difficulties related to access to upland areas.

The WCAS model grew from the success in developing the Tinahely Railway Walk, a 2.5km walking route along a former railway line developed by Tinahely Area Development in partnership with local farmers. Members of Tinahely Area Development proudly shared their story of voluntary effort and landowner goodwill, combined with advice and funding support from local development agencies. The outcome is an amenity which attracts visitors to the area and provides safe and pleasant recreation for local residents.



Helen Lawless of Wicklow Uplands Council talking to participants at the conference.

Eamonn Doran from the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) enthralled visitors to Tomnafinnoge Wood, which adjoins the Tinahely Railway Walk, explaining the work carried out in restoring the woodland and creating walking trails for the public. The Derry river, which had been flooding the woodland, was freed of debris and through restoring the natural flow, fish have now returned. The key to this success was partnership between NPWS and the local fishermen, emphasising the true value of local knowledge.



Tom Lyng (Coillte), Bill Murphy (Coillte & Mountain Meitheal) with Gerry Patterson (Mountain Meitheal) at the conference dinner.



Joss & Nora Lynam and Prof. Frank Convery at the Conference Dinner.

The challenge of landscape management

Local knowledge was also central to Brendan Dunford's presentation on the BurrenLIFE project in Co. Clare. Brendan highlighted the need for future landscape management to be grounded in the understanding of the land held by landowners and local communities. He propounded that supportive land management models are required, which turn the legal obligation to maintain our environment into an opportunity for farmers.

Brendan noted that through the Rural Environment Protection Scheme we are starting to place a value on scenery, water sources and having a diversity of habitats. The practice of compensating landowners for providing environmental and related services is now taking shape. The next challenge is to achieve a land management regime that seeks to support, rather than control farmers, that gives farmers the scope to move forward, rather than be frozen in time. This is in concert with the Heritage Council's vision for the future of the Irish landscape, which CEO Michael Starrett quoted in his opening address to the workshop:

"... a dynamic, living landscape, one which accommodates the physical and spiritual needs of people with the needs of nature in a harmonious manner, and as a result brings long term benefits to both."

The challenges in achieving the balance which is inherent to this vision were particularly evident in the discussion sessions on rural planning, where inconsistencies in planning policies, lack of capacity in local authority planning departments and contradictory national policies were all highlighted. The planning group concluded there was need for a fundamental re-think of planning in rural areas, and that this should be centred on ensuring sustainability of rural communities.

Partnership and local communities

Over dinner, guest speaker Prof. Frank Convery, Chairperson of Comhar, the Sustainable Development Council put forward a view that all statutory organisations – given authority and resources by the citizen – should be obliged to engage seriously and substantively with communities and relevant non-governmental organisations in a two-way partnership. In his view, such partnerships require mutual respect, enthusiasm, professionalism and good information to enable informed decision-making.

A discussion session led by Mary Tubridy from the Irish Uplands Forum and Billy Murphy from the County Wexford Partnership sought to identify the fundamental principles in establishing a partnership to promote local involvement in countryside management. A set of principles emerged, based on an earlier draft from David Rowe (see table).

Overall the conference demonstrated that there are many successful models of local involvement in countryside management. There are good programmes and initiatives in place, yet there is a sense that these exist in isolation; national policy and structures need to be more embracing

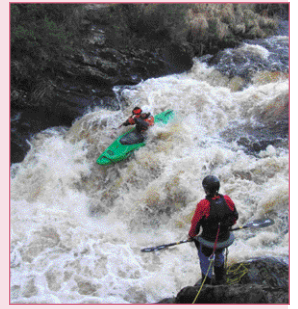
and supportive. While this unique conference helped to move forward thinking on some very important issues, it is not the final word. In the context of rising population (particularly in the east coast area), the soaring cost of commuting and the loss of basic services in rural areas, it is perhaps time for further debate, at a national level, on how we can achieve sustainability in rural communities.

This conference was jointly hosted by Wicklow Uplands Council and the Irish Uplands Forum with funding support from the Heritage Council, Wicklow County Council and Wicklow Rural Partnership (Leader+). Presentations from the event and reports of discussion sessions are available on www.wicklowuplands.ie. The organisers extend their thanks to all those who contributed to this conference, including funders, speakers, field trip leaders, reporters and of course the participants, in particular we want to thank all those who contributed their time in a voluntary capacity.

Principles for establishing local sustainable development partnerships

1. **Represent all relevant views and organisations.** Groups should not be excluded because they disagree and the partnership may need to take particular measures to represent women and children. If the partnership is area-based all members should be familiar with the locality. As the local community/environment is the host of the partnership, members from outside should be aware that they are there at their invitation.
2. **A good chairperson is essential.** A good chairperson is not involved in issues, steers clear of personalities or overheated discussion, and maximises the potential of all to contribute to the partnership. Every representative must feel wanted. If they don't feel good about the partnership they won't contribute to it and it won't work.
3. **An Executive is necessary.** Operating things by part-time voluntary assistance is too unreliable. Funding is therefore necessary. If you believe in what you are doing you will get funding – but never as much as you think you need!
4. **Be creative** in demonstrating the partnership. Carry out a project, something that is interesting, which is evidence of the results of the new partnership approach as soon as possible.
5. **Partnerships should not be shy about looking for external assistance.**
6. **Assume that co-operation and consensus will not happen on some occasions and that not all members will be equally engaged with all issues.** Make arrangements to deal with conflicts. eg. if there is disagreement over an issue agree to park it for a while and work on areas of agreement.
7. **A new partnership should try to get a good relationship going quickly with the most relevant statutory body.** Make sure some early projects are done with significant inputs from the statutory sector, semi-states or voluntary bodies. Close links with a LEADER company (or similar body) are particularly valuable.
8. **Keep in touch with grassroots.** This is not easy, but if not achieved a new local partnership can become just another organisation to distrust. Newsletters, newspaper and radio reports, seminars on subjects of local interest, school projects – all help.
9. **Belief.** Always believe in the huge potential of what you are setting out to do.

AN OUTDOOR RECREATION STRATEGY FOR COUNTY WICKLOW



Wicklow Uplands Council is one of a number of organisations participating in a Wicklow Rural Partnership project to develop an Outdoor Recreation Strategy for Co. Wicklow. Following from publication of the National Countryside Recreation Strategy by Comhairle na Tuaithe in 2006, Wicklow is the first county to tackle the preparation of a county-wide strategy. The strategy aims to provide a framework for the future development and management of outdoor recreation activities within the county. Other partners in the project include Wicklow County Council, Coillte, the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Wicklow IFA, Wicklow VEC, Fáilte Ireland, and the Irish Sports Council.

Every week, increasing numbers of people are taking to the hills, forests, rivers and coast of Wicklow for sports and leisure activities. This activity needs to be managed, to minimise damage and disturbance, and also to improve the recreation opportunities for visitors and local residents. Outdoor recreation covers sporting and leisure activities which take place in the countryside on land (public and private), air and water. The scope of the project includes over 30 separate activities, all of which take place in Co. Wicklow. These range from hillwalking, mountain-biking and kayaking, to less obvious pursuits such as angling, swimming and bird-watching. A priority for the project is to enable more Wicklow residents to participate in outdoor recreation; hence the project advisory group includes representatives from local community groups.

Over recent months extensive consultation has been carried out with recreation groups, local communities and individual participants in outdoor recreation activities.

A public workshop held in Glendalough during May attracted almost 40 participants. A key driver behind the strategy is the opportunity for Wicklow to gain greater economic benefit from the high volume of recreation activity taking place here. With increased funding through the new Rural Development Programme and support through the National Development Plan, there is scope for private and community-based initiatives to cater for the increasing recreational demand. The strategy will help guide Wicklow Rural Partnership's investment in outdoor recreation and tourism under the new Rural Development Programme 2007-2013.

Focused discussions are taking place to explore a number of themes which have emerged from the consultation process. The themes are:

- Enterprise/Tourism;
- Environment;
- Information;
- Strategic Management;
- Trails;
- West Wicklow.

Through these discussions potential projects will be identified for inclusion in the strategy. With the large number of organisations involved, there is a particular emphasis on projects which can be delivered through partnership. The draft strategy should be ready in autumn 2008; to learn more about the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy project, check out www.wicklowleader.ie/outdoorrecreation.php or contact the Wicklow Uplands Council office.

WET, WINDY AND WONDERFUL

During March, the Countryside Access & Activities Network (CAAN) and the Heritage Council jointly hosted a conference in Enniskillen Co. Fermanagh with the intriguing title 'Wet, Windy & Wonderful'. The objective was to explore the impact of climate change on Ireland's landscapes and seascapes and the implications this will have for the future enjoyment of countryside recreation in Ireland.

Over two days of excellent presentations, it became clear that the world is undergoing a period of climate change and that this will have both positive and negative impacts on countryside recreation. The need for flexibility in adapting to climate change was highlighted, as was the importance of engaging society as a whole with the issue.

Evidence was provided that overall Ireland's summers are becoming warmer and dryer, while our winters are becoming milder and wetter. These changes offer opportunities for tourism and outdoor recreation. With better summers, especially in the South East, domestic tourism is

likely to increase. The tourist season will become longer and we may benefit from more North European visitors as the Mediterranean could become uncomfortably hot.

On the downside, extreme weather events, such as floods and droughts, are becoming more frequent. An increase in peatland erosion has already been observed in the Peak District Park in UK, with peat drying out during the summer and then getting washed away by intense winter rains. As well as erosion in upland areas, this results in siltation of lakes and rivers.

Fáilte Ireland presented research showing that scenery is the main attraction for visitors to Ireland, but that visitor satisfaction is declining. The speaker queried the validity of Ireland's clean, green image and emphasised that if we are to capitalise on the tourism and recreation opportunities presented by climate change, we need to put in place environmental management systems to revive our rural tourism product before that clean, green image is lost.

WICKLOW PRIVATE WOODLAND OWNERS' PROJECT

Meeting the Needs of the Private Woodland Owners in County Wicklow



Natural regeneration of native Aspen for biodiversity at Newcastle, Co. Wicklow.

In autumn 2007 Wicklow Uplands Council received funding from the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food to identify and address the needs of the private forest owners in Co. Wicklow.

There are approximately 11,000 ha of privately owned woodlands in the Wicklow area, composed of 67% conifers and 33% broadleaves. Most of the woodlands are in the 10 to 20 year age category and coming into production stage. Michael Doyle, an experienced forester, was appointed to co-ordinate the project. Michael worked with Coillte before he set up his own forestry consultancy in County Wicklow. He was one of the main surveyors on the Private Woodland Inventory in 1973. Michael has a good understanding of the needs of private woodland owners in Wicklow and he states: "The private woodland estate can be compared to a matrix of small factories dotted all over County Wicklow, each producing the same very valuable, renewably natural product. The 'factories' are managed by over 500 different owners, many of whom are new to the business of growing timber. Private forest owners can only benefit by coming together to form a group that will give them a very strong voice in the timber industry and in the forming of forestry and environmental policy".

A Steering Committee of 11 members which was set up to oversee the project was selected from people with a wide range of knowledge and experience in forestry and project management. Membership included Wicklow County Council (Heritage Office), Teagasc, Forest Service, Wicklow Rural Partnership, Woodlands of Ireland, Coillte, representatives from the timber industry and Wicklow Uplands Council. The Committee has worked hard to build up a pool of information and has gained valuable knowledge by communicating with similar projects that have been up and running for some time now in Counties Donegal, Clare and Kerry.

The Committee felt it was important to get feedback from the woodland owners themselves regarding the project. With the support of Teagasc and the Forest Service, 400 questionnaires were sent out to private forest owners in County Wicklow in late February 2008. The owners were asked if they would like to become members of a Wicklow Private Woodland Owners' Group and were to provide some basic information on their woodlands, area, high forest type etc. The response to date has been very encouraging with 133 replies received, giving a strong mandate to proceed with the project. A number of owners requested that the project scope be extended to include border areas of Counties Dublin, Kildare, Carlow and Wexford.

The next step in the project was to find out the views and needs from the owners themselves and to set up a short-term Study Group for this purpose. 16 owners were selected from the respondents to the questionnaires based on location, size of woodland, type of woodland, timber production forestry and environmental forestry. At meetings of the Study Group in April, May and June many important issues were identified, among which were:

- Grant payments/difficulties/delays;
- Benefits of pooling resources to improve sales prices;
- Exploring new markets;
- Lack of knowledge on establishment and maintenance of woodlands;
- Green Payments;
- Inventory of woodlands;
- Damage by deer and grey squirrel;
- Wood energy-opportunities;
- Danger of fires;
- Access and forest road grants.

A number of these issues will be prioritised as deliverables in the short term and will form the focus of the Wicklow Private Woodland Owners' Group.



Members of the Interim Committee of Wicklow Private Woodland Owners' Group (left to right): Clive Crammond, Brian Mulligan, Sean Eustace, Christian Osthoff, Della Kyne, Graham Boyd, John Byrne, David Brabazon, Joe Walker, Frank Maguire and Chris Keogh.

The inaugural meeting was held in Lynham's Hotel, Laragh, on 25th June. This meeting was attended by 53 private woodland owners, who decided unanimously to set up the Wicklow (and surrounding areas) Private Woodland Owners' Group. Presentations focusing mainly on farm forestry were made by Michael Doyle (Project Manager), Pat Farrington (Forest Service), Dominic Joyce (Teagasc), Siobhán Geoghegan (Wicklow Rural Partnership/Rural Development Programme), Deirdre Burns (Wicklow County Council) and Sean Eustace (Project Study Group). An interim committee of 12 woodland owners was elected. Members include Clive Crammond, Brian Mulligan, Sean Eustace, Christian Osthoff, Della Kyne, Graham Boyd, John Byrne, David Brabazon, Joe Walker, Frank Maguire, Chris Keogh and Shane Delahunt.

The cost of running the group for the next three years will be researched and funding will be sought to support its work for a start up period. Wicklow Uplands Council's secretarial and other resources are at the disposal of the owners' group in its start-up phase. An early objective of the Owners' Group will be to form a Wicklow Forest Forum. This Forum will meet periodically and will provide opportunities for information exchange between private interests and the relevant statutory bodies.

In the mean time a desk study of the private forest estate in County Wicklow is ongoing for the purpose of producing a long term timber forecast. The Forest Service has supplied information and maps of the woodlands. Information on individual owners is data protected and will not be available for circulation. However, this information, together with data provided by the owners' questionnaire, will provide all details necessary for the desk study.

This report will be completed by the end of August 2008 and the project is scheduled for completion in October 2008, leaving the way clear for the private owners group to move forward on the issues that are of concern to them.

WICKLOW COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS SERVICE UPDATE

In May, Mountain Meitheal completed their work on the Ziz-Zags Agreed Access Route on Pat Dunne's land, beside Carrawaystick waterfall, in Glenmalure. As this route leads towards Lugnaquilla, Wicklow's highest mountain, it is a cornerstone in the Wicklow Countryside Access Service project. Over the previous 18 months, Mountain Meitheal put 2,370 hours of voluntary work into the Ziz-Zags project, with a total of 145 people participating. The project involved construction of a wooden footbridge, step-building, path creation, drainage and restoration of a 19th century stalking path. The quality of the work is excellent and without Mountain Meitheal's voluntary input it would not have been possible to undertake such extensive work under the Access project.

Completion of Mountain Meitheal's work in Glenmalure was marked by an informal gathering at the wooden footbridge on Sunday 11th May, attended by Pat and Margaret Dunne, representatives from Wicklow Uplands Council and Wicklow Rural Partnership, as well as a large contingent of Mountain Meitheal volunteers.



Gerry Patterson, Shay Walsh & Bill Murphy of Mountain Meitheal, Pat & Margaret Dunne, Helen Lawless and Colin Murphy of Wicklow Uplands Council at the newly built bridge at the Zig-Zags.



Memorial seat on the Kanturk Access Route with Knocknacloghoge in the background.

Those walking recently in the Lough Dan area may have noticed a simple granite seat in memory of the late Ronnie Petrie, a former Wicklow Uplands Council board member. The seat, erected by the Petrie family, is on the route of the Kanturk Agreed Access Route, which traverses land owned by the Petries and Sean Byrne at Carrigeenduff on the west side of Lough Dan. The Kanturk Access Route has been developed in co-operation with the landowners, through the Wicklow Countryside Access Service project. As well as providing a defined access route to Kanturk Mountain, and onwards to Scarr, the route gives superb views over Lough Dan and the Cloghoge Valley.

The inscription on the seat includes an evocative quotation from Irish writer J.M. Synge:

"Still South I went and West and South again through Wicklow from the morning till the night"

WICKLOW COUNTY TOURISM



Wicklow County Tourism is currently working harder than ever to promote Co. Wicklow as a tourist destination both at home in Ireland and across the globe. Through its increasingly popular website, wide network of tourism service providers and businesses across the county and its range of promotional material and activities, the company is raising the profile of the Garden County far and wide.

As you may be aware, Wicklow County Tourism has undergone some major positive changes in the past year, designed to provide its members with the best quality service and to spread the word about everything that the Garden County has to offer. A lot of hard work has been going on behind the scenes to restructure the company, as well as improve the Wicklow County Tourism product, from the www.visitwicklow.ie website to its range of promotional printed materials.

A new team, based in the Wicklow Enterprise Centre in the Murrough, is now working to raise the profile of Co. Wicklow on the internet, around the country and at recent trade shows and events both here in Wicklow and in Paris.

Tourism Development Officer Fred Verdier, Press and Marketing Officer Celine Nic Oireachtaigh and long-standing Accounts Manager Dolores Hanlon are available at any time to answer your questions and provide any support required by the members. Feel free to drop by the offices for a friendly chat and a cup of tea!

Wicklow County Tourism has been extremely active over the past few months, creating a number of new brochures, maps and guides to promote the Garden County. At the beginning of May, Wicklow County Tourism launched the ever-popular Wicklow Gardens Festival 2008 at an event in the beautiful Festina Lente Garden in Bray. Gardening expert Gerry Daly and 2007 Wicklow Rose Lisa Marie Berry were special guests on the day. The Wicklow Gardens Festival is open from now until the end of September, with thirty-two stunning gardens taking part this year.

The company has also supported and sponsored a number of local festivals and events, including the successful Wicklow Arts Festival.

The company has revamped and vastly expanded its website and is now receiving an impressive number of visits every day from all over the globe. Chairman Tom Fortune and the Wicklow County Tourism team invite any Wicklow business considering membership to call into the office and become a part of this growing network. For more information on becoming a member of this organisation or for any queries you may have please ring the office on 0404 20070 or email celine@wicklowct.ie. With your support, Wicklow County Tourism can continue to grow and thrive and promote this beautiful county.

Celine Nic Oireachtaigh

TRIBUTE TO FRANK WINDER



Frank Winder represented Keep Ireland Open on the board of Wicklow Uplands Council from 1998 to 2003. Given the council's mission: "To promote the sustainable use and enjoyment of the Wicklow Uplands in partnership with those who live, work and recreate there",

his unique contribution was to discourse when potentially contentious views were being discussed. This was greatly valued and cherished by his colleagues. Frank's readiness to employ his twinkling sense of humour to lighten the articulation of his own and Keep Ireland Open's points of view and his willingness to recognise the rights and concerns of landowners were of great importance. Frank had no difficulty in understanding the benefits of a forum where difficult issues could be aired, differing voices heard and hard questions asked. The very large attendance of members of our farming and landowning panel at Frank's funeral was a testament to the respect in which he was held. His calm, modulated voice, balanced analyses and well argued pleas for consensus and compromise are greatly missed. There was, and is, much more to be done but, sadly, Frank is not around to plead for understanding, accommodation and partnership.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

All meetings will be held in the Glendalough Hotel at 8.00pm

Monday, 22nd Sept. 2008
Economic & Tourism
Panel Meeting

Wednesday, 5th Nov. 2008
Farming & Landowning
Panel Meeting

Monday, 20th Oct. 2008
Community Panel Meeting

Monday, 17th Nov. 2008
Environmental & Recreational
Panel Meeting

WICKLOW RURAL TRANSPORT IS CONNECTING WICKLOW COMMUNITIES

Wicklow Rural Transport is one of 38 Rural Transport groups being funded by the Department of Transport under the NDP 2007-2013. This is a community bus service, which operates in rural areas of County Wicklow. The primary purpose of this service is to reduce the marginalisation and social exclusion experienced by the people living in rural areas of Wicklow, especially in the South and West, by making transport available and accessible to them. This initiative is ongoing for a number of years and is becoming increasingly popular all over the county.

The project was initiated by an audit of transport in County Wicklow in 2001, which identified that there were nearly 2,800 people living in rural Wicklow with unmet rural transport needs. The need was particularly acute among young people followed by lower income groups, older people and people with an illness or a disability. Inter-town linkages were virtually non-existent especially those between the East and West and this affected community cohesion in the County.

An extensive consultation process followed and local communities and other stakeholders such as Wicklow County Council, East Coast Area Health Board, Bus Eireann and private bus operators identified routes for each area. The routes are designed to connect with other public transport services where possible. As a result a Wicklow Rural Transport timetable was developed and everyone is encouraged to avail of these services, residents and visitors alike. The full timetable is available on www.wicklowleader.ie/ruraltransport.php. For more information please contact Breda Whelan, project co-ordinator on 0404-43462/086-3535494 or wrti@eircom.net.

BOARDWALK DEVELOPMENT IN GLENMALURE VALLEY

The recently launched Ballinacor Community Park is situated in the picturesque Glenmalure Valley and is a great example and proof of what can be achieved when a small dispersed rural community comes together and pools its resources to achieve a common goal.

Born out of necessity as the community recognised the need to have a central location where people of all ages and all abilities could meet and participate in a variety of activities including football, walking, running, basketball and tennis just to mention a few. According to Chairman Pat Kennedy, "the seed for this project was planted some 10 years ago when negotiations commenced with Coillte concerning a ten and a half acre site". The committee behind this endeavour is Ballinacor Community Project Committee and comprises of 22 members representing all the various strands of local life in the valley. This committee has worked tirelessly on this huge undertaking which required carefully phased planning coupled with a considerable financial outlay amounting to half a million.

The local and wider community responded positively and generously to the many novel fundraising endeavours such as duck races, a parish wedding and a native tree planting programme, all of which were held to raise the necessary funds. At the official opening Pat Kennedy paid tribute to local and central government for funds received and to Wicklow Rural Partnership for its involvement in the development of the Boardwalk around the perimeter of the park. Pat went on to say "this is a huge achievement for such a small area. The success to date shows the commitment of the people of the area to this project and demonstrates the committee's ability to raise the necessary funds to ensure the viability and long term success of the project which will play a key role in the future of the area and will be a major facility for the whole community".

Siobhán Geoghegan representing Wicklow Rural Partnership at the opening complemented the committee and the community for their ambitious achievement and added "this project will be an inspirational model for others and will instill enthusiasm among other communities when they see what has been achieved here in Ballinacor". A total of €51,000 LEADER funds were invested in this project, clear evidence of Wicklow Rural Partnership's acknowledgement of the huge voluntary commitment to this project.

The official opening by Rev. Olive Henderson and Fr. Oliver Crotty took place on Sunday 26th August 2007, a beautiful sunny day in Glenmalure which was suitably followed by a family sports day. The park is located on the Greenane to Glenmalure Road approx 1 mile from the Glenmalure Lodge, parking available on site.

Siobhán Geoghegan, Wicklow Rural Partnership. Patrick Kennedy, Chair, Ballinacor Community Project Committee.



Darragh Geoghegan walking the Ballinacor Boardwalk.

BOARD MEMBERS 2007-2008

FARMING AND LANDOWNING PANEL



Seán Byrne (PRO)
Farmers & Property Owners
Association (Wicklow Uplands) Ltd.



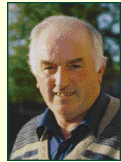
Pat Dunne
Wicklow County IFA



Philip Maguire
South County Dublin
Rural Preservation Group



Sean Malone
Cheviot Sheep Owners
Association



John Power
Roundwood IFA



Edmond Kenny
Farmers & Property Owners Assoc.
(Wicklow Uplands) Ltd



Mark Fenton
Cheviot Sheep Owners
Association

ENVIRONMENTAL AND RECREATIONAL PANEL



Pearse Connolly
Mountaineering
Council of Ireland



Pat Ewen
Motor Cycle Union
of Ireland



Michael Cogan
Active Retirement
Association



John Flynn
County Wicklow Game
Preservation Council

COMMUNITY PANEL



Stephen Bray
Blessington & District
Community Council



Claire Chambers
Roundwood & District
Community Council



Brian Kehoe
Wicklow Rural
Partnership



Eileen Kennedy
Glencree Centre for
Reconciliation

ECONOMIC AND TOURISM PANEL



Peter Galvin
Wonderful Ireland



Tim Kyne
Kippure House Estate



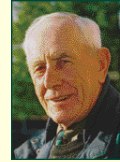
Tony Flynn
Ballycullen Lodge



CO-OPTIONS



Dermot Hand (Chair)



Murtagh O'Keeffe (Vice-Chair)
Cheviot Sheep Owners Association



**Donal Anderson
(Hon. Secretary)**



**Joe Walker
(Hon. Treasurer)**



Saive Coffey
Wicklow County IFA



Philip Geoghegan
An Taisce



Eoin Browne
Irish Canoe Union



Pearse Foley
An Oige



John Byrne
Wicklow County IFA

STAFF



Colin Murphy
Director



Helen Lawless
Countryside Recreation Officer



Lenka Mulligan
Development Officer



Margaret Murphy
Administration Officer

For further information please contact us at:
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Email: info@wicklowuplands.ie Website: www.wicklowuplands.ie

WICKLOW UPLANDS COUNCIL

Wicklow Uplands Council is an independent, voluntary organisation with charitable status. The Council provides a forum where interested non-statutory organisations and individuals can have their say in the decision making process affecting the sustainable development of the local environment in the spirit of Local Agenda 21. The Council was formally established in January 1997 and has since endeavoured to implement its core mission:

MISSION STATEMENT

'To promote the sustainable use and enjoyment of the Wicklow Uplands in partnership with the people who live, work and recreate there'.

WICKLOW UPLANDS COUNCIL SEEKS TO

- Build consensus and trust
- Foster a partnership approach to sustainable development
- Manage/transform conflict
- Protect and enhance the uplands environment
- Undertake initiatives with support from the local people
- Engage in initiatives that make economic sense

Wicklow Uplands Council focuses on issues affecting the Wicklow Uplands



Wicklow Uplands Council would like to thank the following for providing photographs for the newsletter: County Wicklow Film Commission (www.wicklow.ie), Jim Schofield Photography (www.jimschofield.com), John Griffin (www.johngriffinphotography.ie), Garrett Byrne, Eoin Browne, Martin Flynn and Peter Galvin.