



**Submission to Heritage Ireland 2030 Public Consultation**

**By**

**County Wicklow Public Participation Network**

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## **Introducing County Wicklow Public Participation Network**

County Wicklow Public Participation Network (PPN) was established in July 2014 under the directive of the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government and in accordance with legislation in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (Section 46). Public Participation Networks were established to be an independent structure that would become the main link through which local authorities connect with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in a process to facilitate communities to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system.

Co Wicklow PPN has 273 diverse member groups, some of these groups are networks in their own right. PPN representatives serve as a voice for the community on structures including: the Local Community Development Committee; Housing & Corporate Estate Strategic Policy Committee; Planning & Development Strategic Policy Committee; Transport, Water & Environment Strategic Policy Committee; Community, Cultural & Social Development Strategic Policy Committee; Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee; Wicklow County Childcare Committee; Co Wicklow Children & Young People's Services Committee; Co Wicklow Local Sports Partnership; Wicklow County Tourism Board; Co Wicklow Volunteer Centre, County Wicklow Partnership, and Co Wicklow Joint Policing Committee. PPN Representatives strive to ensure that the needs of the community sector are prioritised within local policy processes.

## **Consultation with Communities**

In 2018, Co Wicklow PPN consulted community groups across the 5 Municipal Districts of Co Wicklow, asking them "What is your vision for community wellbeing for this and future generations"? We asked them to consider this question under the following headings:

- Environment & Sustainability
- Health (physical & mental)
- Work, Economy, & Resources
- Social & Community Development
- Participation, Democracy & Good Governance
- Values, Culture & Meaning

The responses we received were documented and are available to download from our website: [www.countywicklowppn.ie](http://www.countywicklowppn.ie). We ran 11 workshops, 5 online consultations and accepted 2 submissions in total. The consultations facilitated the development of an overarching vision for each Municipal District along with community visions and high-level goals under each heading. The county vision was developed in the same way.

## **Heritage Ireland 2030 Public Consultation**

**Vision:**

**Ireland's heritage is valued, enjoyed and protected for future generations.**

Theme 1: National Leadership and Heritage

Theme 2: Heritage Partnerships

Theme 3: Communities and Heritage

Have Your Say questions in the consultation document:

What is the most important thing Heritage Ireland 2030 needs to deliver?

**A time-bound action plan endorsed and resourced by Government that in turn will deliver:**

- **Immediate, meaningful change in the management of Ireland's natural heritage, including the marine environment.**
- **Investment in heritage awareness and protection of built heritage.**

This urgent need for a radical change of direction was communicated effectively by President Michael D Higgins to the recent National Biodiversity Conference and can be summed up in this one line from the President's address: 'If we were coalminers we would be up to our knees in dead canaries.'

There are no specific recommendations in Heritage Ireland 2030 for the different aspects of heritage. There seems to be no understanding of the value of the natural world, or the need for resources for nature conservation beyond its value for tourism.

There is no understanding of the impact of climate change on conservation, and the potential for land use change to help alleviate this, or the essential role of planning in landscape protection.

Achievement of the objectives in Heritage Ireland 2030 requires commitment from the highest level, a radical approach and substantial investment. It requires an inter-departmental action-planning process, a timeline for action, and clear allocation of resources.

What do you think of the vision for Heritage Ireland 2030? Is there anything we should add?

The draft vision in Heritage Ireland 2030 aligns quite well with the views expressed when Co. Wicklow PPN brought community groups in each of the five Municipal

Districts in Co. Wicklow together in 2018 to develop a shared vision for community wellbeing. The importance of heritage, and the natural environment in particular, came through strongly in the community wellbeing consultations, along with the desire for communities to work collaboratively with statutory bodies in the stewardship of our natural and built heritage. The responses we received were documented and are available to download from our website: [www.countywicklowppn.ie](http://www.countywicklowppn.ie).

CWPPN recommends the addition below to strengthen the vision for Heritage Ireland 2030 and to focus towards delivery of the vision:

Ireland's heritage is valued, enjoyed and protected for future generations **through a commitment by Government to prioritise wise management of our heritage.**

What are the biggest challenges facing our heritage?

- Lack of government commitment and joined-up action to protect Ireland's natural environment.
- The impact of global climate change, and embracing how wise land use management could build resilience into our landscape to help alleviate the impacts of climate change.
- Ireland's marine environment, 10 times larger than our land area, is often overlooked, yet the marine environment is fundamental to the healthy functioning of our planet and therefore must be recognised, valued and protected for future generations.
- Planning decisions and development do not support sustainability and liveability.

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What do you think of the draft objectives in the document? In your view, is there something important missing?

### **Theme 1: National Leadership and Heritage**

The introductory statements under theme 1 (to do with culture, economy and society, and also the beauty and irreplaceability of our built heritage and habitats),

do not communicate effectively the fact that continued human life depends on our ability to reverse current unsustainable patterns of natural resource usage.

The objectives are wide-ranging positive statements, many of which are urgent in the context of climate change, to deliver on these will require a comprehensive and well-resourced action plan.

### **Theme 2: Heritage Partnerships**

The introduction and objectives read well, but we have seen similar language in so many previous government documents (National Biodiversity Action Plan, National Landscape Strategy and some of the other document listed on page 9) and so little action has resulted. The objectives need to speak strongly of commitment and a new approach, especially in relation to caring for our natural heritage.

### **Theme 3: Communities and Heritage**

As above it is essential that these objectives are delivered.

This is a particularly important theme for CWPPN. Through Heritage Ireland 2030 there is the potential for transformative change, examples of how this could be beneficial for communities and our shared heritage are provided below:

- People understand the importance of our natural environment and appreciate it.
- Ireland's built and natural heritage is valued and celebrated.
- A cared for and accessible natural environment supports healthy communities.
- Communities are enabled to play an active part in the preservation and protection of our heritage.

What changes are happening right now that might impact on our heritage?

Climate change, biodiversity loss, and declining water quality are all having a major impact on natural heritage.

The National Parks & Wildlife Service, which should be spearheading care for Ireland's natural heritage is starved of funding and strangled by political short termism. Not one of Ireland's six national parks has a current management plan, much less active conservation management. The need for a plan is particularly acute in Wicklow Mountains National Park, Ireland's largest national park, which is subject to high visitor pressure because of its proximity to Dublin. Approximately 14% of Ireland's land area has been designated for nature conservation under European legislation as either Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Special

Protection Areas (SPAs), yet most of the almost 600 sites have no current management plans. 630 sites proposed in 1995 for protection as Natural Heritage Areas have no legal protection, and no active management of their conservation value. Habitat quality is diminishing, unauthorised developments in designated sites remain unaddressed, and biodiversity is declining at alarming rates.

Conservation in Ireland has been a failure, especially in terms of the loss of globally important peatlands, with successive governments caving in to local vested interests and ignoring the role and importance of peatlands for flood control and carbon absorption. Cutting of peatlands should be halted and a peatland conservation programme put in place to re-wet peatlands so that they store rather than leak carbon.

Ireland's rivers and lakes are declining in quality due to nitrogen and phosphate overload from farming and pollution from local authority sewage treatment works. Incredibly we are still pouring raw sewage into our rivers, lakes and seas.

Farmers in designated conservation areas and other areas of high nature value farmland should be rewarded for environmentally friendly farming practices and should receive payments that reflect the condition of the environment. The importance of wildlife conservation to farming and landscape conservation should be taught in agricultural colleges.

Communities should be encouraged to engage in conservation activities. Indeed, the most of the successful conservation initiatives have come from local action, such as Fennor bog in Waterford and Girlie Bog in Offaly as well as schemes in the Burren.

An integrated land use plan should be developed and implemented, focused on matching land use with the productive capacity of land and improving the functioning of Ireland's ecosystems. Doing so will help clean our water, lock up carbon, regulate flooding, stimulate local economies and restore wildlife populations.

How can we work better together and engage all our communities under Heritage Ireland 2030?

- Increased funding for heritage awareness, nature connection and environmental education programmes, so that the community and all citizens are encouraged to be aware of, appreciate, and be emotionally connected with our natural environment and local heritage. This in turn will enable community stewardship of our shared heritage.

- Better funding of the Heritage Council's work, particularly community grants and heritage awareness.
- Put measures in place to allow people have better to access to built and natural heritage.
- Develop and implement conservation management plans for all national parks and sites designated for nature conservation. Integrate these plans with farm payment schemes.
- Reward sustainable farming practices, so that farmers can see that they have a key role in achieving the objectives of Heritage Ireland 2030.

How can we ensure Heritage Ireland 2030 delivers?

- A review after three years again fails to recognise the urgency of progress, especially in relation to care Ireland's natural environment.
- Heritage Ireland 2030 should be adopted as Government policy, an action plan developed within 6 months and an implementation group put in place which is accountable to the public through annual reporting of progress, and an annual public forum (open to all citizens and webcast).
- Heritage Ireland should be embedded in the next Programme for Government.

Other comments

County Wicklow Public Participation Network (PPN) was established in July 2014 under the directive of the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government and in accordance with legislation in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (Section 46). Public Participation Networks were established to be an independent structure that would become the main link through which local authorities connect with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in a process to facilitate communities to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system.

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This submission has been informed by County Wicklow Public Participation Network's Community Wellbeing consultations conducted in 2018, and the Vision statements that emerged from that process under the following headings:

- Environment & Sustainability
- Health (physical & mental)
- Work, Economy, & Resources
- Social & Community Development
- Participation, Democracy & Good Governance
- Values, Culture & Meaning

While heritage came up under a number of headings, CWPPN's Vision for Environment and Sustainability is included below because it is particularly relevant to this consultation:

**"Our wise use of resources and our care and connection with our environment enables all citizens to live healthy and sustainable lives.**

- **All planning decisions and development support sustainability and liveability.**
- **A care for and accessible natural environment supports healthy communities.**
- **All citizens have an awareness, appreciation and a strong connection to the natural environment and work to protect it."**

CWPPN's other Vision Statements and supporting information are available on:  
<http://www.countywicklowppn.ie/our-vision-for-community-wellbeing.html>

County Wicklow Public Participation Network trusts that you will take the views of our members into consideration in your further work on Heritage Ireland 2030. Should you require additional informational in relation to any of the points above please do not hesitate to contact us.

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