



# COUNTY WICKLOW PPN SUBMISSION TO “OUR RURAL FUTURE 2026– 2031”

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Date: Friday, December 12, 2025

**Submitted by:** County Wicklow Public Participation Network (PPN)

**Basis of submission:** This submission reflects the ‘Lived experiences’ from County Wicklow PPN membership. The consultations sessions online took place Monday 1<sup>st</sup> December, drawing on the face-to-face consultation on Transport and Community Safety (Tinahealy, 29 Nov 2025); our submission based on an analysis and aligned to the seven consultation questions.

## 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 by 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 523 diverse member groups, some of these groups are networks. PPN representatives are volunteers who have served as a voice for the community on structures including: the Local Community Development Committee; Wicklow County Council Strategic Policy Committees, Co Wicklow Children & Young People’s Services Committee; 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.





## Executive Summary

This submission reflects the **lived experience of County Wicklow communities**, both rural and urban, and responds to the consultation questions for *Our Rural Future 2026–2031*. It aligns with national frameworks such as Town Centre First, Connecting Ireland, and Local Authority Climate Action Plans.

### Key priorities include:

- **Balanced regional development:** Addressing growth pressures on the East Coast and dispersed settlement patterns in West Wicklow.
- **Safe everyday mobility:** Delivering a **Rural Active Travel Network (RATN)** integrated with public transport, ensuring walking and cycling routes connect homes, villages, schools, and transport hubs.
- **Food security and affordability:** Supporting small farms, protecting prime soils, and enabling local food systems to reduce food poverty.
- **Tourism and sustainability:** Managing visitor pressure on fragile sites through car-light, cycle-led tourism and park-and-ride solutions.
- **Community resilience:** Streamlining volunteer burden, multi annual funding, and emergency preparedness using Civil Contingencies models.
- **Climate adaptation and biodiversity:** Embedding SuDS, nature-based solutions, forestry reform, and community energy initiatives.

These actions aim to **design rural places around people, not traffic**, safeguard food and farms, and make community action easier not harder. They reflect Wicklow’s realities and deliver on the vision of thriving, inclusive, and sustainable rural communities.

## Q1. Emerging opportunities and challenges for rural Ireland

- **Growth pressure East vs. West Wicklow:** Rapid population and housing demand on the East Coast, with spillover to West Wicklow, require early investment in safe local walking, cycling and demand responsive transport to avoid car dependence and to support *Town Centre First*.
- **Food security & affordability:** Transport gaps, local retail monopolies and rising costs are pushing families into **food poverty**; policy must support local production, small farmers, allotments, market gardening, and affordable access.
- **Tourism pressure on fragile sites:** Glendalough, Sally Gap and Hollywood village experience severe weekend congestion and air quality, amenity impacts; tourism growth must be car light, managed and community benefiting.
- **Safety & resilience:** Rural safety depends on lighting, crossings and active travel links to bus stops as well as coordinated emergency preparedness for storms and floods.
- **Runoff & local flooding:** “Urban creep” (paved gardens and driveways) increases flood risk; apply SuDS, nature based retrofits at source.



## Q2. Does the draft statement reflect your aspirations? (What we'd add/adjust)

Support with two additions to make the “**how**” explicit and the values clearer:

1. Add **respect for land itself** (not only “landscape”):

“...rooted in deep respect for our language, culture, heritage, **and the land itself**, where wellbeing is at the heart of rural life.”

2. Make connectivity concrete:

“...where **active travel and public transport** are embedded as primary everyday modes alongside digital access and inclusive local services.”

These edits strengthen alignment with the paper’s own emphasis on connectivity and balanced development.

## Q3. Should anything be added to the four core pillars? (Cross-cutting)

Make **sustainability and future generations** a **cross-cutting duty** across every pillar, modelled on Wales’s **Well-being of Future Generations Act** (long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration, involvement), to avoid conflicts between economic actions and environmental goals.

## Q4. Specific actions for Pillar 1 – Thriving Rural Places (Wicklow priorities)

The consultation’s Pillar 1 priorities mention **enhancing public transport** and revitalising towns and villages; we ask that the action plan explicitly and substantially expands ‘**active travel**’ beyond greenways, delivering safe, direct, everyday mobility between rural homes, villages, schools and transport hubs.

1. **Rural Active Travel Network (RATN)** as core infrastructure:
  - **Inter-village spines** (5–12 km), **last-mile links** with lighting, crossings, secure bike parking at bus and rail sites, accessible paths and crossings to Local Link stops, TFI bus corridors, and rail stations (e.g., Bray, Greystones environs), with secure bike parking and wayfinding.
2. **Active greenways as transport corridors**
  - **Treat strategic greenways as transport spines where they connect settlements**, not only as tourism assets, and finish missing links. Members cited the longstanding concept for a Greystones Cross roundabout Kilmacanogue corridor: projects like this should be progressed, connected into village streets, and signposted to schools, hubs and stations, not left “in the ether.”



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3. **Feeder “small-road” links:** short path extensions (often 100–500 metres) to bring clusters of 10–20 houses onto a safe route, the kind of micro-links repeatedly requested by residents (e.g., Hollywood example where a short extension would have let children cycle to school). These are high-impact, low cost fixes that current projects often omit.
4. **Vision Zero rural toolkit:** 30 km/h village cores, raised crossings at stops, schools, tactile and audible signals kept in service.
  - **Speed management:** 30 km/h default in village cores and school streets; 50 km/h maximum on settlement approaches with gateways; selective “quiet lane” 40–50 km/h designations on rural connectors with strong pedestrian and cycle markings.
  - **Crossing safety:** raised tables, zebra crossings at bus stops, schools, community centres; lighting standards for all stops and crossings (addressing women’s safety at night).
  - **Accessibility by design:** tactile paving, continuous footways across side roads, seating intervals, and audible signals maintained for visually impaired users.  
These mirror the safety and accessibility concerns raised by members and by our Community Safety submission.
5. **Integrate with Connecting Ireland and TFI Local Link:** Treat each new changed route as an **Active+PT**<sup>1</sup> **corridor** with safe approaches and real-time info/shelters; expand loop and shuttle services for dispersed West Wicklow.
  - Funding safe walk and cycle approaches to each stop (within 800 m catchments),
  - Providing shelters, lighting, real time info and bike parking as standard,
  - Scheduling demand responsive shuttles and loops to villages and hubs where fixed routes are sparse (critical for West Wicklow).  
Connecting Ireland has expanded rural bus links since 2021; the next phase should lock in first last mile active travel by default.
6. **Cycle-led tourism & park-and-ride** near hotspots (Glendalough, Hollywood) to move visitors from cars; require SEA, air-quality, biodiversity checks and proof of local benefit.
  - **Rural E-Mobility Package:** E-bike grant top-up for rural households; cargo e-bike pilots for families and small farms.
  - Charging, Lockers and secure parking at Connected Hubs and transport nodes, recognising the role of hubs in enabling local living and hybrid work.
  - Cycle training and road-sharing education for motorists, farm machinery operators and cyclists delivered with schools, clubs and community groups (a “Community Cycle Teams” model proposed by members).

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### <sup>1</sup> Active+PT - Active Travel plus Public Transport.

- **Active Travel:** Walking, cycling, and other non-motorized modes (including e-bikes) for everyday trips.
- **Public Transport (PT):** Bus, rail, and other shared transport services.

When we say **Active+PT corridor**, we mean a transport route or network that **integrates safe active travel links with public transport stops and hubs**. For example:

- A rural bus route where every stop has **lit footpaths, safe crossings, and secure bike parking**.
- Cycle paths or quiet lanes that connect villages directly to **Local Link bus stops or train stations**, so people can combine cycling/walking with bus or rail for longer journeys.

This approach makes **door-to-door sustainable travel possible**, reducing car dependency and supporting climate goals.



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7. **15-minute village catchments** for large estates (Arklow and Rathdrum): safe links to shops, schools, GP; support community shops and or co-ops and affordable delivery models to cut food cost penalties.
8. **N81 for all users:** Ensure safety schemes (Whitestown Lower, Hangman's Bend & Tuckmill) deliver protected walking, cycling, village calming, and safe crossings to bus stops.
9. **Rural "Basics First"** programme to address:
  - Footpath gaps and disrepair,
  - Overgrown hedgerows and verges blocking sightlines and signs,
  - Guardrails at crossings were called for,
  - Maintenance of lighting and audible pedestrian signals,
  - Blue Badge spaces in village centres and at rivers and lakes where communities gather.

Members repeatedly flagged these as everyday safety barriers; addressing them quickly will deliver immediate quality-of-life gains.

10. **SuDS / nature-based streets:** discourage impermeable paving; retrofit porous surfaces and rain gardens; run public campaign **"Don't pave your floodplain."**
11. **Prime soils & small farms:** protect best farmland near growing towns; zone space for allotments and market-gardening to strengthen local food systems.

### Q5. Specific actions for Pillar 2 – A Strong & Diverse Rural Economy

- **Safeguard small farms and local food systems:** Use CAP tools (redistributive supports, eco-schemes) to keep small and medium farms workable, expand farmers' markets, short supply chains, and prevent loss of high-grade soils to speculative development. (Germany's CSP provides a comparative model.)
- **Remote & hybrid work:** Invest in Connected Hubs linked to RATN/Local Link to anchor jobs locally and reduce commuting exposure.
- **Year-round, low-impact tourism:** Develop off peak, car light products (cycle routes, guided heritage, nature experiences) with clear community benefit metrics and environmental safeguards (per SEA practice).
- **Social enterprises & community retail:** Seed funding, procurement support and mentoring for community owned shops and cafés where private retail is absent critical in West Wicklow villages.
- **Digital & green skills for SMEs:** Targeted supports for e-commerce, circular economy, repair services, and cargo-bike last-mile for local deliveries.

### Q6. Specific actions for Pillar 3 – Resilient Rural Communities

- **Cut volunteer burden and duplication:** Set up a **Community Projects Support Office (CPSO)** in each county to provide templates, model specs, procurement packs, H&S, insurance guidance, and a once only grant gateway. Host a CARO-led Knowledge Commons to share toolkits and lessons nationally.



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- **Multi-annual funding & PPN capacity:** Move proven schemes to multi-annual cycles; implement the PPN Structural Review roadmap and sustain increased core funding so PPNs can coordinate, not just meet.
- **Shared mobility for inclusion:** Provide a **national umbrella insurance facility** and standard servicing protocols for bike and cargo-bike libraries (schools, GAA clubs, towns) to make family mobility affordable and safe.
- **Community safety & inclusion:** Lighting, accessible paths, CCTV at key stops, and feeling of safety surveys for women, older and disabled residents paired with Garda engagement.

### Q7. Specific actions for Pillar 4 – A Greener Rural Future

- **Climate adaptation mainstreamed:** County-level **Civil Contingencies** structures adopting NI's **Prepare–Respond–Recover** model, with vulnerable people protocols and joint exercises.
- **Nature-based water management:** Require **SuDS** in all new works and fund retrofits (porous paving, rain gardens, swales) across villages, estates; integrate with Rainwater Management Plans.
- **Forestry reform with community & biodiversity outcomes:** Update Coillte's operating expectations to balance commercial outputs with biodiversity, community benefit, building on progress to manage 30% of the estate primarily for nature and map a pathway to 50% long-term.
- **Community energy & circular economy:** Support small-scale renewables at community facilities and **repair/reuse hubs** in towns to reduce waste and energy costs.
- **Active travel + PT as climate action:** Prioritise RATN, safe last-mile to Local Link, and secure bike parking at hubs; these are high impact, low carbon measures for everyday mobility.

### Why these actions fit Our Rural Future & Wicklow's realities

- They deliver **balanced regional development, safe everyday mobility, food security, and resilience** core aims of the consultation.
- They reflect lived experience: **unsafe walking, cycling** on Bray–Greystones–Wicklow corridors; **Hollywood congestion; Rathdrum, Arklow estates** facing expensive groceries, long Public Transport detours; and the N81 safety deficit.

### How we will measure progress (metrics)

- % of rural homes within a **safe 10-minute walk, ride** of a village, school, or bus stop.
- **Perception-of-safety** scores (women, older, disabled) on paths, stops, and routes.
- **Local food access** indicators (travel time, cost to affordable groceries; allotment uptake).
- **RATN completion** (km delivered; school access links).
- **SuDS retrofits** delivered (m<sup>2</sup> of impermeable area converted).
- Publish annual **Active Travel Access Maps** (share of rural homes within a safe 10-minute walk, ride of village, school, or bus stop) and pair with community safety perception surveys (women, disability). [[caro.ie](https://caro.ie)]
- **Track food access and affordability** indicators, integrating Food Poverty Action Plan pilots and local mapping to target support where transport and competition gaps persist.



## Closing reflections

This submission is rooted in the **lived experience of County Wicklow communities** and guided by a shared vision:

- **Design rural places around people, not traffic, while respecting the land itself**, not just as a backdrop but as a living resource that sustains food, biodiversity, and cultural heritage.
- Ensure **food and farms are secure**, protecting prime soils and supporting small farmers so rural communities can thrive in a changing climate.
- Make community action **easier, not harder**, by reducing administrative burdens and enabling collaboration through practical supports and multi-annual funding.

We believe that embedding these principles in *Our Rural Future 2026–2031* will create **inclusive, connected, and sustainable rural communities** where wellbeing, resilience, and respect for the land are at the heart of every decision.



# Public Participation Network Wicklow

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