



**Submission to Wicklow County Council's  
Tree Management Strategy**

**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 over 300 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; all of the Wicklow County Council Strategic Policy Committees; 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.

## Community Consultation

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) or they can be read in the "Our Vision for Community Wellbeing in Co Wicklow" booklet. 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.

Our Vision for Community Wellbeing connects to the Global Goals for Sustainable Development (see Appendix 2). Co Wicklow PPN believes that this submission directly connects to Goals 3, 13 & 15.



Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages



Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts\*



Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Sharon Jackson and Annette Vaucanson Kelly, the Co Wicklow PPN Representatives, representing the environment, on the Climate & Biodiversity Action Strategic Policy Committee, supported the development of this submission. **It is informed by an online survey which received 255 responses,** as well as the consultations for Our Vision for Community Wellbeing in Co Wicklow and regular engagement with our member groups.

The online survey consisted of three separate parts:

- Part 1 consisted of 21 statements which participants were asked to either strongly agree; agree; neither agree or disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with.
- Part 2 provided participants with the opportunity to include additional suggestions and
- Part 3 provided participants with the opportunity to highlight their personal experiences/anecdotes in relation to tree management in their community.

Co. Wicklow PPN wishes to thank the 255 members of the public who filled out this Survey, naming places and sharing expertise and experiences.

The collated responses to the 21 Statements are presented in Appendix 1 of this submission; the 193 personal comments have been transcribed word for word and are submitted in Appendix 2.

We present now what *appear* to us to be among the most striking findings of this Survey and ask on behalf of the PPN membership that they are considered in the drafting of the Wicklow County Council Tree Management Strategy.

### Survey Statements

An Annual Plan listing proposed tree pruning and felling works for the year ahead should be prepared and adopted by the Council. This would then be posted to the WCC website.

The Council should only fell trees in exceptional circumstances & as a last resort.

Requests for felling from an individual should be weighed against the public amenity value of said tree or trees.

Wicklow County Council should draw up clear guidelines on the procedures to adhere to before felling of a tree/s can take place.

Before felling is sanctioned, a designated and trained Council official must ensure that the felling complies with the NPWS guidelines & Article 10 of the EU Habitats Directive.

Where felling is the only option, it must be done in closed season (except in cases of imminent danger) and after the neighbours/stakeholders in the vicinity have been consulted.

Felling should be supervised to avoid collateral damage to hedgerows and other trees, adjacent properties, and nearby natural areas (streams, wildlife corridors, etc.).

Appropriate re-planting should take place as soon as possible after tree felling.

Public utilities (e.g. Irish Rail, ESB, National Transport Authority, etc) should be required to comply with Wicklow County Council's guidelines.

A hotline should be created, and the telephone number and office name widely circulated, so that members of the public can report illegal, out-of-season and/or suspicious felling, with the assurance of timely follow-up action.

A budgeted Tree Plan for each Municipal District should be prepared. It would address the planting of trees, and the protection and maintenance of existing trees and hedgerows.

Wicklow County Council should actively favour planting species of trees native to Ireland.

Existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows should be mapped.

Tree Protection Orders should be granted for some of the more exceptional mature trees and areas of hedgerow, as well as those of particular heritage or amenity value.

Wicklow Council should continue to act in unison with An Taisce in preserving Ireland's natural heritage, i.e. Wicklow's biodiversity and natural habitats.

Surveys on tree cover and hedgerows, as well as other tree surveys already carried out and included in Local Area Plans (as in Ashford and Wicklow Town), should be updated and restored.

Wicklow County Council's Tree Management Strategy should include plans to re-wild certain areas of Council-owned land.

Some Council-owned land should be allocated as garden allotments and some areas proposed for planting with orchards and/or nut trees.

Wicklow County Council should include in the Tree Management Strategy a clear commitment to ban and fine any use of harsh pesticides by Council personnel, except in the control of certain named invasive species.

Environmental Impact Assessments should be carried out to ensure that soils, water courses and natural habitats, as well as the health of insects, pollinators, birds, and wildlife, is not impacted.

Wicklow's Tree Management Strategy will incorporate work towards restoring Wicklow's many endangered species to sustainable population levels (pre-1980 levels).

## **Citizen Engagement:**

1. The number and tone of the responses' points to the public's very real attachment to the trees in their neighbourhood and their keen interest in protecting them. Respondents chose at an average 93% to agree and at an average 68% to strongly agree with the 21 statements included in the survey.
2. Stop felling trees and Plant more trees were the main calls to action by respondents, many of them citing a "phenomenal amount" of tree felling and hedgerow cutting in recent years. They also point to the fact that replanting with saplings does not make up for the ecological loss of mature trees. Respondents want Wicklow's trees and hedgerows effectively protected, and Tree Protection Orders and other legal protections actively enforced. Respondents also want more trees, mostly native or native-grown species, chosen for their amenity value in consultation with trained personnel and locals.
3. Many respondents call for the appointment by WCC of a dedicated Tree Officer, supported by qualified arborists, urban landscape architects and/or the Parks and Landscape Section, following best international practice.
4. It was suggested that WCC adhere to best international practice, as is already the case in several neighbouring local authorities, namely Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown and Dublin City Council, and liaise with them to follow the strategies they have pioneered.
5. There are calls for Wicklow's trees to be mapped by a Digital Mapping Officer and the maps published on a designated website or social media platform. This would include the names of volunteer tree wardens, the dates of public information events, an up-to-date log of trees with Tree Protection Orders and the details of a 7-day hotline manned to report any unscheduled felling/pollarding/pruning that has not been agreed after a rigorous and transparent consultation process.
6. It is suggested that WCC call on and provide funding to local community groups and volunteer organisations to help with all decisions and works to local trees and green areas. Invasive species like the giant hogweed are also mentioned: these should be mapped and managed, with minimal use of herbicides/pesticides.
7. There are calls for WCC's support for the establishment and the maintenance of allotment gardens throughout the county, which, as the Covid-19 pandemic has shown, present many benefits in terms of mental and physical health, food security, sustainability, biodiversity, etc.

8. There are inspiring success stories, testifying to the public's love of trees. One family have planted 1,000 trees by hand and find it "a constant comfort to think of the trees living on after them". A village has planted 500 trees. Land has been made available and rewilded by the community in Greystones.

### **Citizen Distress**

1. The public expresses distress over incidents, some in May and March this year, some 10 years ago, where mature and even 200- and 100-year-old trees were felled, or ancient town boundary hedgerows cut back or removed. In several instances, respondents report feeling "powerless" to stop the destruction, report the damage to relevant bodies (who can the public turn to?) and ensure that the promised replanting actually happens.
2. It is hoped the Tree Management Strategy sets clear procedures to ensure felling is a last resort and that reporting suspicious tree felling (at weekends especially) can be done quickly, with appropriate follow-up. Sanctions would be heavy fines and/or restoration orders for trees of similar value.
3. Numerous respondents welcome the Tree Management Strategy and say it cannot come quickly enough. Several ask that the Strategy be prioritised and even fast-tracked to put more protections in place quickly to stop the loss of trees and hedgerows. WCC declared a climate & biodiversity emergency in April 2019, yet the felling of trees and destruction of hedgerows has continued unabated.
4. It is hoped public bodies like the ESB, Irish Rail and the National Transport Authority, among others, will have to adhere to and comply with WCC's Tree Management Strategy, in accordance with best international practice.
5. It is pointed out that the development of lands for construction has been known to involve the immediate felling of trees, removed not because of any concerns about public health and safety, but because they hindered extra development of the site. It is strongly advocated that the planning process be tightened, so that the map of trees on record from this Tree Management Strategy will impose the principle of "Felling in only exceptional circumstances and as a last resort" Before planning permission is granted, a further WCC Assessment of the site would be immediately carried out to determine the management of each tree before and during construction. Only then would the application for planning permission be advanced for further consideration. The need for more homes or more lanes for pedestrian,

bicycle or vehicular traffic cannot take precedence over the value of the amenity, health and climate action mitigation benefits offered by trees already in situ.

6. The public acknowledge health and safety concerns in the management of trees, yet list many places where tree cover is much reduced (areas of Arklow and Bray) or healthy trees were needlessly lost, without consulting the community: Quinsbrough Rd, Annamoe, Manor Kilbride, Roundwood (including the two acres at Mullinaveigue, purchased to provide parking for the Vartry trails), Clermont grounds, Peter's Place Green, Schools Road, Bray, all along the rail line into Arklow, the road from Enniskerry to Glenree, the upper mall in Wicklow Town, the back of Abbey Park, Riddlesford, Boghall Road, Ravenswell, Sidmonton, Florence, Galtrim and Meath Rds, the Road West of Glending... Careless damage to trees is reported, like on the 21 bends out of Enniskerry or the annual brutal pruning of all fresh growth near Sidmonton Park.
7. Some landowners would welcome advice from trained officials on managing trees on their land.
8. It is hoped that the Tree Management Strategy will provide WCC with the powers needed to apply and enforce all legislation, including EU directives, on nesting seasons to all lands.
9. In summary, it is hoped the Strategy will bring clarity, increased oversight and enforcement by the WCC, increased awareness among the public, accountability and clarity, to preserve and enhance Wicklow's natural heritage in harmony with the needs of a growing population.

### **Citizen Requests**

1. To be involved: There is growing concern among the public about climate change and biodiversity loss. Citizens want to be heard and they want to be involved. Various respondents share experiences in other counties, offer to help map trees, to act as volunteer tree wardens, to be consulted on the choice of trees, etc.
2. To speed up the roll out: Since other local authorities already have Tree Management Strategies or pilot schemes in place, consultation with them is seen as a way to speed up the roll out of WCC's Tree Management Strategy, thus reducing the waiting time for the extra protections generally perceived as urgent.

3. To include a review of vacant Council lands, to rewild some, to plant fruit trees on others, to green others and allow local consultation in all cases. A comprehensive submission is presented on behalf of the Blessington area where the community have long campaigned for vacant Council lands to be made available as allotments. The 2001 Local Government Act and the County Development Plan 2016-2022 all carry mention of the multiple positive effects of allotments, promoting sustainability, well-being, biodiversity, local produce in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.
4. Some would like information about the funding/Budget/costings that will be allocated to the Tree Management Strategy. This could be included on a website or social media platform dedicated to the Tree Management Strategy, which would include news, hotline details, public awareness campaigns and events, maps and tree logs, names of the officials in charge and volunteers.
5. More resources are needed to combat invasive species, like the giant hogweed, and again WCC will need to use its powers to require the cooperation of private landowners or to map and eradicate such species on private lands.
6. The survey respondents voiced a very strong desire to invoke the very best international practice and to lead in banning the use of pesticides (95.7% of respondents agree or strongly agree with this statement), unless absolutely needed to control specific invasive species. Respondents are aware of the benefits of untidy areas, seldom mowed to enhance biodiversity.
7. The final two questions of the Survey ask that every effort be made to increase and preserve biodiversity and to protect the soil (94% of respondents agree or strongly agree with this statement)
8. A mosaic of habitats, regular counts and targeted surveys would be welcomed by 93% of respondents to confirm that WCC's Tree Management Strategy is helping return biodiversity to sustainable levels for all native species.

Wicklow PPN and its members are delighted to have been invited to contribute their experiences and pressing requirements to the deliberations that will draft a WCC Tree Management Strategy for Wicklow. We look forward to reading the First Draft of the Strategy and will be happy to contribute further to any public consultation about it.

**Appendix 1 – 21 Survey Statements and Collated results**

**Appendix 2 – Responses received to the Question - “Is there anything else you would like us to raise in our submission to WCC’s Tree Management Strategy?”**

**Appendix 3 – Responses received to the Question - “If you wish to share any personal experiences, good or bad, on this topic please do so below...”**

**Appendix 4 – The Global Goals for Sustainable Development**