

Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2031

Draft Plan



COMHAIRLE CONTAE AN CHLÁIR
CLARE COUNTY COUNCIL



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



***This is the moment to
transform our relationship
with nature***

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema,
Executive Secretary, United
Nations Convention on
Biological Diversity
(COP 15, 2022)



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Foreword



As the Chairman of Clare County Council and on behalf of my fellow elected members, I welcome the preparation of this Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031. County Clare is internationally renowned for its rich biodiversity, reflected in its varied habitats and species it supports, which make our county so unique. This natural wealth is not only a source of local pride but also a vital asset for environmental health and community wellbeing. This is the 4th County Biodiversity Action Plan which reflects the importance placed on biodiversity by Clare County Council and the continued commitment to promote, protect and enhance the county's natural heritage into the future.

I would like to thank the Clare Heritage and Biodiversity Forum for their valuable role and input in the preparation of the Biodiversity Action Plan, as well as communities, statutory and non-statutory organisations, individuals and stakeholders who participated in the plan-making process. They have made contributions to this comprehensive plan that builds on the

success of past biodiversity action plans by setting out a strategy that aims to address the 'biodiversity emergency' in County Clare and to halt biodiversity loss by supporting actions that promote resilient habitats and species and enhance the quality of life for current and future generations.

Protecting and cherishing biodiversity requires a whole-of-society approach and we understand that safeguarding the county's natural heritage is not the sole responsibility of any one group – it requires collaboration between all stakeholders. I encourage everyone to play a part in the delivery of the County Biodiversity Action Plan and, in so doing, to preserve and enhance biodiversity around us for all to enjoy and carry through to our future generations.

**Cllr Paul Murphy,
Cathaoirleach,
Clare County Council**



As Chief Executive of Clare County Council, I am pleased to introduce the Clare Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031. I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the plan preparation process. This plan comes at a critical time, as we face an accelerating biodiversity crisis, both globally and locally, and it sets out a clear framework to respond meaningfully and collaboratively to this challenge. The Clare Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 outlines key objectives and actions aimed at reversing biodiversity loss, supporting conservation and restoration efforts and tackling threats and pressures impacting on our natural environment.

The plan was developed through extensive collaboration with local communities, environmental groups, landowners and agencies, reflecting our shared responsibility and commitment. I would like to acknowledge the role of the Heritage Council for their support and as a partner of the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Work Programme. I would also like to

acknowledge the assistance of the Clare Heritage and Biodiversity Forum through their observations and input.

Biodiversity protection cannot be achieved by one organisation alone. It requires a whole-of-society approach to safeguard biodiversity for future generations. Education, participation and stewardship, especially among our younger generations and communities, will be vital in driving long-term change to transform our relationship with nature. This is a plan for the people of Clare and I encourage everyone to engage with the plan and to take part in protecting biodiversity that sustains us all. Together, we can build a healthier, more resilient future for nature recovery and the people of County Clare.

**Gordon Daly,
Chief Executive,
Clare County Council**



Introduction to Biodiversity

What is biodiversity about?

Biodiversity or 'biological diversity' is the variety of all life. Biodiversity includes all living things from plants such as ferns and trees to animals, including insects (e.g. butterflies) and mammals (e.g. bats), fungi, algae and all other microscopic life forms and the ecosystems of which they are part. Each of these species and organisms work together to maintain balance and support life. Biodiversity provides the essential building blocks of ecosystems.

The word 'ecosystem' describes a group of living communities and their interaction with the physical (non-living) elements of air, water, rocks and soils. Biodiversity is not restricted to rare or threatened species but includes the whole of the natural world from common species to the critically endangered and protected. Biodiversity can include havens for wildlife as large as an ecosystem the size of the Burren National Park to a hedgerow or a small pond within a garden or landholding.

Why is biodiversity important to us in County Clare?

Clare is internationally renowned for its rich biodiversity, from our Burren landscape in the north to the Shannon Estuary in the south, to Lough Derg in the east and to our rugged coastline and marine habitats in the west, together with our diversity of wetlands, peatlands, rivers, streams, semi-natural grasslands, hedgerows and native woodlands scattered throughout.

Clare's natural heritage is of local, county, national and international importance and we all have an important role to play in the protection of biodiversity and the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment. Sites of international importance include designated European sites that are Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

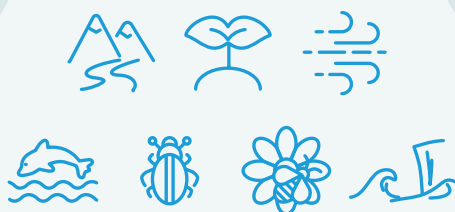
Furthermore, Clare is of national importance on account of designated Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs), Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs), Nature Reserves, Ramsar sites, Wildfowl Sanctuaries, the Burren National Park and an OSPAR site.

Biodiversity is all around us, in our homes, gardens, farms, communities, businesses, sports clubs and schools. It plays an important role in our ecosystems and the ecosystem services it provides.

Ecosystem Services



Regulating Services



Supporting Services



Cultural Services



Provisioning Services



Regulating services

Maintain natural processes:

water flow and quality, soils, air quality, biodiversity, disease, pest, pollination, coastal protection



Supporting services

Necessary for production of all other ecosystem services:

soil formation, photosynthesis, nutrient cycling, primary production, water cycling, evolution



Provisioning services

Harvestable goods:

firewood, food, medicines, raw materials, freshwater, genetic resources, pest control agents



Cultural services

Religious, heritage, spiritual, scientific, artistic, knowledge, aesthetic, sense of place, social relations, and other non-material benefits

How does biodiversity help us?

Biodiversity provides us with a wide range of benefits, contributing to environmental, economic and social wellbeing. Crucially, biodiversity provides us with a range of ecosystem services. Ecosystem services are all elements of nature that either directly or indirectly bring value to human wellbeing, and biodiversity is critical to underpinning these services.

Biodiversity provides us with ecosystem services such as food security through pollinators; clean water through functioning healthy wetland ecosystems; carbon capture through stocks tied to native woodlands and peatlands; flood prevention in the form of natural reservoirs linked to wetlands, coastal sand dunes and upland peatland habitats; education and research opportunities; amenity and recreation; and natural resources.

The protection of biodiversity in Clare is necessary to contribute to climate regulation and provide ecosystem services, including clean air and water, healthy soils, food supplies and medicines.

Recognising the role of biodiversity in the delivery of these services has informed actions aimed at protecting, conserving, restoring and enhancing our biodiversity assets in County Clare. The Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 aims to strengthen our understanding of ecosystem services and to incorporate these themes into decision making and work-related practices in Clare County Council.

Many of the services provided to us by biodiversity are at an ecosystem level. These 'ecosystem services' can be broken down into regulating services, provisioning services, supporting services and cultural services, as shown below.

85%

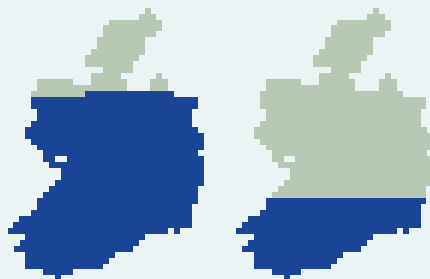
of EU habitats AND

30%

of EU listed species

of 'Unfavourable' status
(declining and deteriorating)
in Ireland

*The most recent Article 17 reports
(2019) prepared for the European
Commission assessed 85% of EU
habitat*



63%

of Irish birds declining

*The State of the
World's Birds report
(BirdLife
International, 2022)*



50%

of bee species in decline
with 1 species extinct the
Regional Red List of Irish Bees

35%

decline in the Irish
butterfly population
*The Irish Butterfly
Monitoring Scheme
(2021)*



>50%

of Ireland's native plant
species in decline, with
native grasslands suffering
the largest decline

The Plant Atlas 2020 survey

The collapse of nature: understanding the biodiversity crisis

In May 2019, Dáil Éireann declared a 'biodiversity emergency', making Ireland the second country in the world to do so. Biodiversity across Ireland, including in County Clare, has suffered major declines in recent decades.

Article 12 of the EU Habitats Directive requires Ireland to monitor and report on the conservation status of our habitats and species to the European Commission every six years.

The most recent published Article 17 reports submitted to the EU in 2019 found that 85% of EU habitats and 30% of species in Ireland are deteriorating and have an 'unfavourable' conservation status.

Other studies also point to declines in biodiversity: 26% of Irish birds are now on the Red List (Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland report), 63% of bird species are declining (BirdLife International), more than half of Irish bee species have declined since 1980 (Irish Bee Red List), over half of our native plant species are in decline (Plant Atlas 2020), while butterflies have declined by 35% (Irish Butterfly Monitoring Scheme).

Habitat loss and habitat degradation and how we manage our environment have had the greatest impact on our habitats and species. Such pressures are causing many of our once-common Irish species to decline or face extinction. All sectors of society must now act together to address the biodiversity crisis and to protect our native flora and fauna in County Clare.





The Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2031

The role and framework of the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031

The Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 will provide a framework for biodiversity action over the next six years with the aim of halting biodiversity loss in County Clare. The new plan supersedes the 3rd Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2023 which achieved much success under the auspices of Clare County Council.

The new plan aims to ensure that biodiversity in Clare is conserved, restored, enhanced and sustainably used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.

The new plan outlines a vision supported by five key pillars, five overarching objectives, specific actions, targets and KPIs. The plan is a non-statutory document underpinned by Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030, a statutory document which emphasises a "Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society" approach to biodiversity conservation, in line with the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

The national plan requires all local authorities to adopt biodiversity action plans by 2026. The Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 identifies and translates the actions of the National

Biodiversity Plan as they relate to biodiversity at local authority level and ensures that actions are implemented at local level through the plan.

The Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan looks at how we as a society (e.g. citizens, communities, businesses, local authority, state agencies) can act to address the biodiversity emergency as part of a renewed national effort to act for nature.

The plan also takes cognisance of the Clare County Heritage Plan 2024-2030 and is informed by the strategic biodiversity objectives of the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, which ensures planning complies with environmental legislation such as the EU Habitats and Birds Directives. The biodiversity plan also supports the development of planning policy and encourages best practices in biodiversity management across all functional areas within Clare County Council.

The Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 underwent Screening for Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment and was informed by international, national and local conservation strategies. The plan development adheres to the Heritage Council's guidance document: *Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan Guidelines*.

Plan preparation process

This plan demonstrates Clare County Council's continuing commitment to achieving our obligations to protect biodiversity for the benefit of current and future generations.

Objectives outlined in the previous Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2023 were reviewed to inform the development of the new plan and actions were updated to take cognisance of the many changes that have occurred in terms of plans, policies, legislation and biodiversity initiatives since publication of the previous plan.

The preparation process for the new plan commenced in 2024 and is informed by the following key steps:

Establishment of the Clare Heritage and Biodiversity Forum;

Briefing of the plan preparation process to elected members of the four Municipal District Committees of Killaloe, Shannon, Ennis and West Clare;

Publication of the Biodiversity Issues Paper to coincide with the Pre-Draft Consultation Phase;

Pre-Draft Consultation Phase: Public participation at the early stage of the plan-making process through in-person consultation workshops and creation of a dedicated 'Have Your Say' online portal (clarecoco.ie) to collate submissions received. Promotion of public participation through newspaper adverts, radio notices, press release and social media;

Development of an online questionnaire to collate feedback from participants to identify knowledge gaps and training needs;

Collation and review of submissions to inform actions for the preparation of the draft Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031;

Preparation of Draft Plan and presentation of draft plan to Clare County Council senior management team.

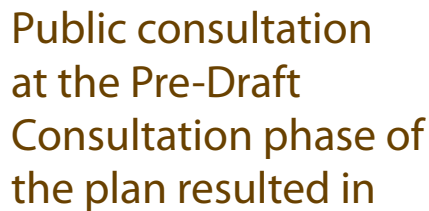
Draft Plan Consultation Phase (online portal and in-person consultation workshops)

Collation and review of submissions received.

Presentation of final plan to members of the Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC)

Endorsement of the final plan by Elected Council Members.





- Some of the key themes arising from the Pre-Draft Consultation Phase are illustrated in the word cloud.

The majority of those surveyed identified habitat loss as the greatest cause of biodiversity decline;

Just 40% of survey respondents are involved in a biodiversity project in their locality.



Clare Heritage and Biodiversity Forum

The Clare Heritage and Biodiversity Forum was established in July 2023 and represents diverse interest groups, including elected members of Clare County Council, key local authority staff, statutory organisations, semi-state agencies, environmental non-government organisations, community groups, farming representatives and educational institutions.

The role of members of the forum is to provide guidance, expertise and observations throughout the preparation phase of the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 and input into the implementation, delivery and monitoring review phase of the plan.

The forum promotes cross collaboration and fosters strong engagement among forum members to achieve actions during the lifetime of the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031.

Key achievements delivered under the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2023 and new opportunities

The Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2023 delivered several key projects and achieved key milestones which contributed significantly to achieving biodiversity objectives under the plan. The Local Biodiversity Action Fund (LBAF), administered by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, was launched during the lifetime of the plan and played a significant role in the delivery of projects along with financial support from Clare County Council and the Heritage Council.

The following key projects and milestones were achieved during the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2023:

Clare County Council's Biodiversity Manual: Best Practice Guidelines (Clare County Council, 2021)		County Clare Wetland Survey (2022-present)
	Clare Barn Owl Project (2022-present)	Clare Swift Survey (2017-2020)
Shannon-Fergus Estuaries Waterbird Usage Survey (2017-2018)	Clare Schools Biodiversity Programme (2023-present)	
Burrenbeo's 'Hare's Corner' initiative (2021-present)	Ennis Circuitscape Bat Study (2023-present)	
	Demonstration Sites for Biodiversity Management (2020)	Burren Protected Rare Flora Survey (2023-present)
Invasive species surveys, research and eradication programmes and outreach communications (ongoing)	Supporting outreach communications work packages that promote biodiversity engagement and awareness in relation to the marine, native woodland, farming sectors and non-native invasive alien species (ongoing)	
Appointment of a County Biodiversity Officer within Clare County Council in partnership with the Heritage Council (2023)	Signed as an Official Council Partner of the 'All-Ireland Pollinator Plan' (2020)	

This new Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan will identify new opportunities for biodiversity-focused actions within areas of the Council landbank; Locally Important Biodiversity Sites (LIBS) for protection; undertaking habitat and species surveys and research; collaborating with communities, landowners and key stakeholders on joint initiatives across the county and promoting biodiversity awareness; and integrating biodiversity into Clare County Council's operations.



Working in Partnership with Nature: Sustainable Solutions for Our Wellbeing

Working with the natural environment can deliver positive outcomes for society, the economy and biodiversity in County Clare.

This approach focuses on conserving and sustainably managing biodiversity to improve human wellbeing and address local challenges we face such as habitat loss, flood control, climate change, food security and mental and physical health.

Natural capital, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions are various approaches with which we can address environmental challenges to deliver ecosystem services and, at the same time, help restore and protect nature through our operations.





Natural capital

Natural Capital is an economic term used in the context of nature. It frames the world's resources such as plants, animals, water and minerals as assets or stocks that produce a range of benefits to us.

Natural capital can be expressed as a monetary or qualitative value to determine how nature benefits our economy and society. Natural Capital Accounting is a system for organising information about natural capital assets and ecosystem services to help decision-makers understand how the environment interacts with the economy.

Natural Capital Ireland conducts research and prepares natural capital accounts to support policymakers and landowners. For example, in their natural state, our bogs and wetlands in County Clare naturally function to hold and store vast quantities of water, thereby reducing pressure associated with flooding on farmland and towns and villages located further down in the catchment; this has economic cost saving benefits in terms of investment in flood relief schemes. As such, our wetlands and bogs can be referred to as a natural capital asset.



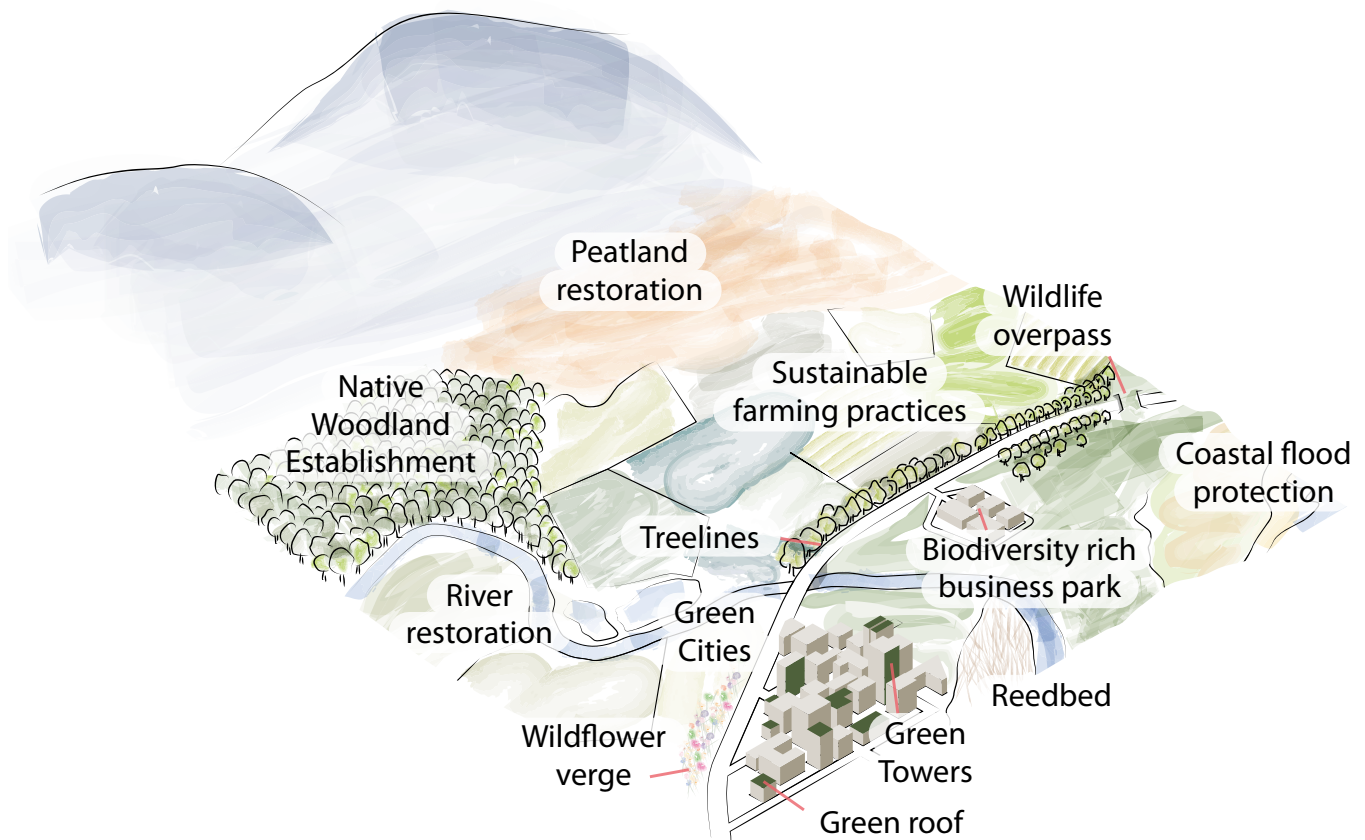
Green infrastructure

Green Infrastructure is a planned network of natural and semi-natural areas delivering quality of life and environmental benefits for communities by working with nature. It includes green spaces (e.g. hedgerows, treelines, woodlands, parks) and blue spaces (e.g. rivers), as well as features across land, coastal and marine areas.

Urban development, such as roads and housing, can fragment and split habitats, thereby impacting the green infrastructure networks and reducing biodiversity. Examples of integrating biodiversity into the built environment include urban wetlands, green roofs, rain gardens, streetscapes (e.g. footpaths), tree planting and protecting important habitats and species.

In rural areas, green infrastructure includes riparian buffers such as treelines along river channels, natural wetlands and wildlife corridors such as hedgerows. Promoting a strong and connected green infrastructure network across County Clare is vital for strengthening connectivity for the movement of wildlife.





Nature-based solutions

Nature-based solutions enhance, maintain and provide ecosystem services that help combat biodiversity loss, climate change and flooding, and promote sustainable development. By working with nature and conserving habitats such as woodlands, wetlands, sand dunes, riparian corridors and urban green spaces, these solutions not only protect us; they also help our communities adapt to increased risks of extreme weather and flood events.

Incorporating nature-based solutions into our work practices and decision-making processes enhances biodiversity and promotes social and economic wellbeing across a range of sectors in Clare, including development, tourism, recreation, sustainable agriculture, climate change mitigation and adaptation, education and scientific research.

Restoring and strengthening a sand dune through planting Marram grass along a coastline is an example of a nature-based solution which in turn protects our coastal communities from the effects of storm surge associated with extreme weather events linked to climate change. Another example of nature-based solutions includes bioswales and rain gardens in urban areas to manage surface water discharge.



Sustainable development goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which form an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership.

They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality and spur economic growth, all while tackling biodiversity loss and working to preserve our oceans and forests with a particular emphasis on SDG 15 Life on Land, SDG 14 Life Below Water and SDG 13 Climate Action.

Having participated in the 2023 SDG Champions programme, Clare County Council now serves as an SDG Ambassador, contributing to promotion, awareness-raising and implementation of the SDGs at local, regional and national levels. The Council will continue to work to integrate and embed the SDGs into the programmes and policies across all of its directorates.



Statutory Instruments and Strategic Policies Guiding the Plan

Policy context

Since the publication of the previous Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2023, there have been significant advancements in biodiversity policy at national, European and international level. These strategic policies highlight a growing recognition of the need to address biodiversity loss.

As a public authority, Clare County Council has an important responsibility to ensure its actions, plans and policies contribute in a meaningful way to the protection, restoration and sustainable management of biodiversity.

Recognising these policies in the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 ensures that broader strategic policies can be translated into conservation efforts at a local level, working in partnership with communities and stakeholders across Clare.

The preparation of the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 is guided by and aligns with the targets and objectives outlined in the following strategic documents and policies:

- UN Convention on Biological Diversity
- EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030
- International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN)
- Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030
- Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029
- Clare County Heritage Plan 2024-2030
- Clare Climate Action Plan 2024-2029
- The Biodiversity Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan (2019)
- Heritage Council's Strategic Plan 2023-2028
- Water Action Plan 2024
- Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region 2019-2031
- All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025
- National Parks and Wildlife Service Publications: Threat Response Plans and Invasive Alien Species

The strategic policy documents listed above are summarised in Appendix 2.

UN Convention on Biological Diversity

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity and the decisions taken collectively by the parties at biannual meetings – the Conference of the Parties (COPs) – provide a global legal framework for actions to protect the natural world for the benefit of all life on Earth.

The principle aims of the Convention on Biological Diversity are:

- the conservation of biological diversity,
- the sustainable use of its components and
- the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

The main mechanism by which Ireland implements this global agreement is through the development and implementation of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.

The Convention on Biological Diversity Vision:

By 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved and restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.

Legislative context

As a local authority, Clare County Council has a legal obligation and responsibility to adhere to the relevant statutory instruments regarding biodiversity protection in its daily operations and procedures. This includes adhering to statutory instruments, including the EU Habitats Directive and EU Birds Directive transposed into Irish law through the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended), the Irish Wildlife Act (as amended), the Flora Protection Order 2015 and the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

The Council will ensure that biodiversity considerations are integrated into land-use planning, stewardship of public land and sustainable development through the conservation of protected habitats and species and contributing to national biodiversity targets.

The preparation of the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 aligns with the following statutory instruments:

- EU Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC)
- EU Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC)
- EU Nature Restoration Law 2024
- Wildlife Act 1976 to 2023 (as amended)
- The Flora Protection Order 2015
- The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)
- Water Framework Directive (WFD) (Directive 2000/60/EC)
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive 2001/42/EC
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive 2014/52/EU

The statutory instruments listed above are summarised in Appendix 3.



EU Nature Restoration Law

The Nature Restoration Law was adopted in the Council of the European Union in 2024 and represents a landmark piece of legislation that will significantly influence biodiversity conservation efforts in Ireland. The law is a core element of the European Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

It sets out legally binding targets to restore at least 20% of the EU's land and sea areas by 2030, and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050. Its primary objective is to restore degraded ecosystems across the EU, focusing on those with the highest potential to capture and store carbon and reduce the impact of natural disasters (e.g. peatlands, forests, rivers).

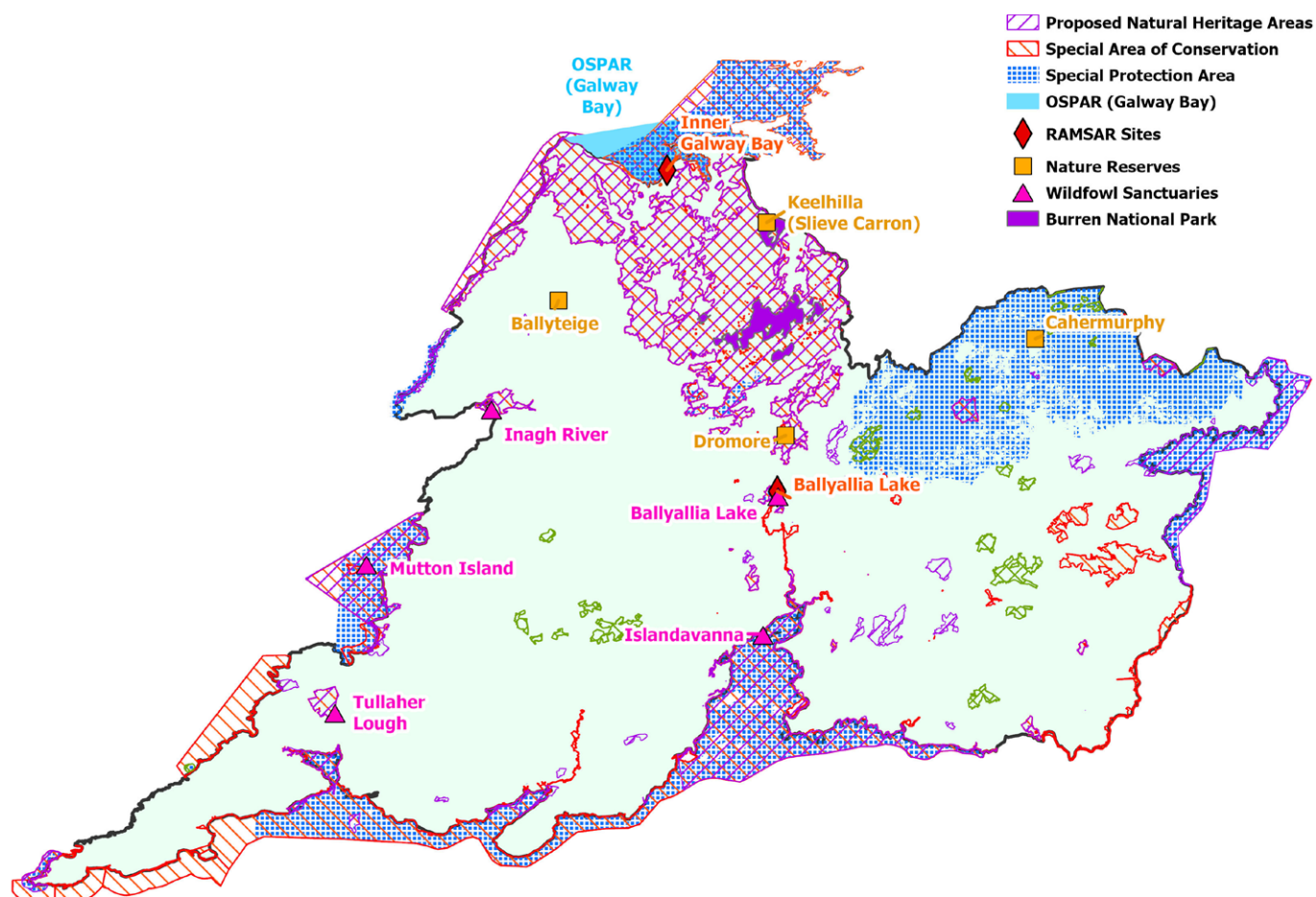


Sites of Nature Conservation Significance in County Clare

Sites of Nature Conservation Significance in County Clare
More than 20% of County Clare is designated for nature conservation, with 47 Natura 2000 sites in the county, including 37 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and 10 Special Protection Areas (SPAs), which together form the 'Natura 2000 network', sometimes referred to as 'European sites'.

Under the Birds and Habitats Directives, networks of sites of nature conservation importance have been identified by each member state as containing specified habitats or species that must be maintained or returned to "favourable conservation status". These sites are important at a European level, forming part of a European-wide conservation network known as the 'Natura 2000 network'. A full list of designated sites found in Clare is presented in Appendix 4.





- 37 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)
- 10 Special Protection Areas (SPAs)
- 13 Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs)
- 61 Proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs)
- 4 Nature Reserves
- 2 Ramsar Sites
- 1 National Park
- 5 Wildfowl Sanctuaries
- 1 OSPAR Site (Marine Protected Area)



Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are designated for the presence of habitats and/or species of conservation importance which are listed under Annex I and Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and are legally protected under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended).

Works that have the potential to impact upon the Qualifying Interests (QIs) of an SAC are subject to Appropriate Assessment requirements in adherence with Article 6(3) and 6(4) requirements of the EU Habitats Directive.

There are 37 SACs in County Clare. Some of these sites are classified for the presence of one habitat or species, such as the Lesser Horseshoe Bat, a Qualifying Interest of Newgrove House SAC. Other SACs contain numerous QIs such as the Lower River Shannon SAC, designated for fourteen habitats and seven species.



Special Protection Areas (SPAs)

Ireland is legally obliged under the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) to designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the protection of:

- listed rare and vulnerable bird species,
- regularly occurring migratory bird species and
- wetlands, especially those of international importance.

The purpose of the SPA network is to protect breeding and migratory birds in Ireland and internationally. SPAs include many wetland habitats. Each SPA will have a list of one or more 'Special Conservation Interests' and these typically comprise birds and sometimes wetlands. There are 10 SPAs within County Clare which are host to numerous bird species, ranging from seabirds such as Guillemot and Kittiwake to raptors including Hen Harrier and Merlin.

Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs)

The Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 makes legal provision for the designation and protection of a national network of Natural Heritage Areas. These areas are important as habitats and in some cases for species of plants and animals of conservation importance whose habitat needs protection. Clare has a total of 13 NHAs and most designated sites comprise raised bogs and blanket bogs (e.g. Slievecallan Mountain Bog NHA).

In addition to NHAs which are afforded full legal protection, there are a further 61 proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) which were published on a non-statutory basis in 1995 but have not since been statutorily proposed or designated. These sites are of significance for wildlife and as habitats.



National Park

There are eight National Parks in Ireland, one of which is in County Clare: the Burren National Park. This unique area in Ireland is renowned for its karst limestone habitats and as a geological resource. Over 70% of Ireland's native species of flora can be found in the Burren.

Criteria and standards for National Parks are set out by the IUCN. The Irish government has agreed, amongst other terms, to take steps to prevent or eliminate possible exploitation in National Parks.

Nature Reserves

Nature Reserves in Ireland are areas of importance to wildlife which are protected under ministerial order. Most are owned by the state; however, some are owned by private landowners or organisations.

There are four nature reserves in Clare: Ballyteigue, Dromore, Keelhilla (Slieve Carron) and Cahermurphy. Any works that have the potential to impact on a Nature Reserve should be assessed in an Environmental Impact Assessment or an Ecological Impact Assessment.



Wildfowl Sanctuaries

Wildfowl Sanctuaries are used to protect certain ducks, geese and wader species (e.g. Wigeon, Brent Goose, Golden Plover, Lapwing) from hunting, with their habitats often overlapping with some other designation. e.g. SPA.

There are five Wildfowl Sanctuaries in County Clare: Ballyallia Lake, Islandavanna, Mutton Island, Tullaher Lough and a section of the Inagh River. These sanctuaries are areas that have been excluded from the 'Open Season Order' so that game birds can rest and feed undisturbed.

Ramsar Sites

A Ramsar Site is an area that is designated to conserve wetlands for waterfowl. Ireland signed up to the Ramsar Convention in 2003. Wetlands selected as Ramsar sites are considered to be of international importance and significance. Ramsar sites do not have legal protection under Irish legislation; however, they usually overlap SPAs or Nature Reserves which are legally protected. In County Clare, Ballyallia Lake and Inner Galway Bay are Ramsar sites and are of international importance.



OSPAR Site

Under the OSPAR Convention to Protect the Marine Environment of the North-east Atlantic, Ireland committed to establishing marine protected areas to protect biodiversity: OSPAR MPAs. No legislation is currently used in Ireland to legally underpin these protected areas that were established to fulfil commitments under international conventions. Ireland established a number of its SACs as OSPAR MPAs for marine habitats. Galway Bay Complex MPA occurs along the northern coastline of County Clare.



Threats and Challenges to Biodiversity

Biodiversity is declining globally at unprecedented rates. In May 2019, Dáil Éireann declared a 'biodiversity emergency', Ireland being the second country to do so.

This followed the publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service (IPBES) global assessment on the state of the world's biodiversity and ecosystem services. IPBES warns of accelerating species extinction with serious

impacts on people worldwide. County Clare is not exempt from the effects of biodiversity loss.

Causes of biodiversity loss include habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, climate change, pollution, pesticides, disturbance, drainage, overgrazing, light pollution, invasive species, land abandonment, recreation, illegal dumping and inappropriate development.

Industrialisation, agricultural intensification, historical commercial forestry practices and unlicensed operations are some examples that have contributed to the decline of biodiversity in recent decades.





Habitat loss

County Clare hosts a diverse variety of habitats, including wetlands, native woodlands, watercourses, estuaries, grasslands, hedgerows, treelines, stonewalls, limestone pavements and coastal habitats, including salt marshes, sand dunes and sea cliffs. Despite this natural heritage resource, habitat loss continues to threaten these natural ecosystems.

Urban expansion, infrastructure, forestry, agricultural intensification, peat extraction, mining, tourism and recreation can impact negatively on our habitats if not carried out sustainably. Peatlands, heathlands, hedgerows and treelines have been particularly impacted, affecting birds, mammals, insects and amphibians that rely on them. Some of the key threats resulting in habitat loss include drainage, pollution, dumping, invasive species, development, nutrient enrichment, overgrazing, land abandonment and climate change.

Clare County Council has commissioned surveys to assess the condition of habitats and species through various studies such as the Clare County Wetland Surveys, Clare Swift Survey, Clare Barn Owl Survey, Burren Protected Flora Survey, Biodiversity Conservation Plans for Visitor Destination Sites, Bat Circuitscape Studies and the Shannon-Fergus Estuaries Waterbird Usage Survey.



Nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history and the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impacts on people around the world

Intergovernmental Panel on
Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service (IPBES).



Habitat fragmentation and loss of wildlife corridors

Habitat fragmentation divides large, continuous habitats into smaller, isolated patches, disrupting species' movement in the landscape and resulting in barriers to connectivity. This can affect ecological corridors such as treelines and hedgerows, and the natural foraging patterns of birds, bats and other mammals as they search for food.

Smaller habitat patch sizes tend not to support viable species populations. For example, the Lesser Horseshoe Bat, a native species to County Clare, forages within 2.5 km of roost sites and relies on intact hedgerows, treelines and woodlands. Road schemes and artificial lighting can disrupt bat activity and block ecological corridors.

Habitat fragmentation is linked to urban development, road schemes, powerlines, artificial lighting, fish barriers, agricultural intensification and renewable energy projects. Clare County Council's is conducting desktop and GIS studies to map ecological corridors in urban areas and identify barriers to connectivity to inform Green Infrastructure strategies.



Artificial light at night (ALAN)

Artificial light in County Clare affects insects, birds, mammals, including bats, and aquatic species. Lighting along roads and hedgerows can act as barriers in sensitive areas that support bats, disturb roosting and breeding birds, cause disorientation to migratory birds, interfere with the ecology of bats and insects, and disturb foraging activities of nocturnal mammals, thereby affecting predator prey relationships.

Development-led projects must assess lighting needs carefully, especially near ecological corridors such as hedgerows, treelines and watercourses. It is important to consider artificial lighting early in the design stage of a project (e.g. shielding lights to control light spill, using motion sensors, avoiding dark ecological corridors, use warm coloured lights at appropriate Kelvin). 'Dark Skies' is an initiative that promotes awareness of light pollution and encourages responsible lighting practices in Ireland.



Pollution

Pollution significantly affects biodiversity in Clare, impacting on our natural ecosystems, species and habitats. Pollution can affect air, water and soil.

Declining water quality from point and diffuse sources threatens aquatic life, including indicator species of river health such as Mayflies, Stoneflies and Caddisflies. This has consequences for species further up the food chain such as the Otter, fish, amphibians and even riverine specialist bird species such as Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail and Dipper.

Soil loss from instream works and siltation can damage spawning beds used by Salmon and can impact on Freshwater Pearl Mussel populations. Nutrient pollution (phosphorus, nitrogen, ammonia) from agriculture, forestry and industrial activity can lower water quality status of natural watercourses.

Nature-based solutions such as tree planting along river corridors or creating buffer margins can attenuate run-off of pollutants linked to human-related activities within catchment systems.



Development and Biodiversity

Development can have negative impacts on biodiversity by altering natural habitats, disturbing ecosystems and threatening species survival. Examples include removing treelines for housing developments, undertaking development-led works in rare habitats, disturbing bat roosts and placing artificial lighting near river corridors, hedgerows and treelines.

It is important that development proposals incorporate measures which aim to mitigate negative impacts and protect and enhance existing biodiversity through the preparation of Ecological Impact Assessments, Environmental Impact Assessment Reports (EIARs), Natura Impact Statements and Habitat Management Plans.

‘Biodiversity Net Gain’ is a relatively new approach which encourages development proposals to leave habitats and species in a better state than before, supporting long-term conservation.



Disturbance and displacement

When human-related activities disturb natural ecosystems and cause habitat fragmentation, wildlife may be forced to relocate to areas with fewer resources or less suitable conditions. This displacement can lead to declines in our wildlife populations and reduced genetic diversity.

Disturbances may be temporary or short-term in duration, such as construction noise, or long-term, such as artificial light spill on semi-natural habitats impacting on roosting birds. Increased visitor numbers to popular destination sites can disturb and displace coastal nesting birds such as Chough and Kittiwake, while floodlights from sports facilities can affect bats.

This results in wildlife expending more energy to move greater distances away from the source of the disturbance which can affect reproduction success rates, upset lifecycles and result in increased competition for food and resources. Early scientific surveys are essential to inform planning for sustainable development.

Clare County Council supported one of Ireland's most comprehensive waterbird surveys conducted in the Shannon Estuary (2017–2018), to guide strategic planning through evidence-based ecological assessments in the River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA.



Pesticides

Pesticides can have a significant impact on biodiversity. When applied to crops or landscapes, pesticides can kill not only the target pest but also beneficial organisms such as bees, butterflies and other pollinators.

Pollinators are essential for plant reproduction and the health of our ecosystems. The annual value of pollinators for human food crops has been estimated at €153 billion world-wide, and at least €53 million in the Republic of Ireland. However, more than half of Ireland's 97 native bee species have declined significantly in numbers since 1980, with one third of species now threatened with extinction.

Pesticides can also accumulate in the food chain and cause long-term damage to soil health and soil micro-organisms. In aquatic environments, pesticide run-off from fields and urban areas can contaminate rivers and lakes, affecting water quality and aquatic life.



Drainage

Drainage can significantly impact on wetland habitats such as bogs, marshes, reed swamps, transition mires, turloughs, fens and wet grassland. The Clare Wetland Field Surveys have identified drainage as an environmental pressure in almost every wetland surveyed. This can be linked to activities associated with agricultural improvement works, commercial forestry, peat extraction and development.

For example, when the hydrology of wetland ecosystems is altered, it can impact on peat-forming mosses, amphibians and wetland-dependent bird species such as Curlew that rely on a high-water table for their survival. When our bogs dry out, carbon is released and the habitat becomes degraded.

Less than 1% of the EU habitat classed as 'active raised bog' now remains in Ireland. Restoration efforts in County Clare, such as the Shanakyle Bog EIP Project and Knocknahila Bog Peatland Rewetting Project, aim to reverse the impacts of drainage by rewetting peatland habitats.



Climate change

Climate change can have both direct and indirect impacts on our biodiversity, altering species distribution, abundance, habitat structure and ecosystem functions. Some species can respond to changes in the environment if local conditions become unsuitable; however, other species may struggle to adapt to changing conditions. This means that species that cannot respond fast enough to the rate of climate change (e.g. due to poor dispersal capacity) may become locally extinct.

Temperature plays an important role in the natural cycle of plant species – their growing season, producing their fruits and sustaining populations at the right time of year. Changes in temperature can affect not only these plant cycles but whole marine ecosystems, disrupting food webs and reproductive timing.

Extreme weather events such as storm surges can impact on our sand dune habitats such as Carrowmore Dunes SAC and can cause 'blow outs' and even dune collapse. This affects the natural ecosystem services that sand dunes provide us with (i.e. coastal protection) as well as causing habitat and species loss.

Climate change also weakens ecosystem resilience and reduces services such as flood control and carbon sequestration. Combined with habitat loss, invasive species and unsustainable land-use management, biodiversity faces increasing difficulty adapting to a changing climatic environment.



Invasive species

Invasive species, introduced by humans either intentionally or accidentally, pose a major threat to County Clare's ecosystems, as they spread rapidly and outcompete native species. Common invasive alien species include Japanese Knotweed, Rhododendron, Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed and Zebra Mussel.

Introduction and spread of invasive species are often caused by soil movement, importing soil, dumping of garden waste, boating and recreational activities, hedge cutting, site works and failure to implement biosecurity. To combat this, biosecurity measures such as cleaning equipment and checking imported soil are essential.

Clare County Council through the role of the Biodiversity Officer has supported training courses aimed at staff and contractors to identify and manage invasive alien species and implement appropriate biosecurity (Check-Clean-Dry); furthermore, it has commissioned surveys and treatment and eradication programmes, and has supported research projects, including 'Monitoring the Quagga Mussel in the River Shannon River System'.



Land abandonment

The decline of traditional farming practices in Clare has reduced habitat diversity, particularly semi-natural calcareous grasslands and limestone pavements, which are now degraded or lost due to a lack of management.

In the Burren, Hazel scrub increasingly replaces species-rich grasslands. Rare grassland habitats such as *Molinia* meadows are endangered due to both afforestation and reduced grazing, allowing Gorse and Willow to outcompete rare grassland habitats of conservation importance. Semi-natural grassland ecosystems rely on low intensity grazing management regimes to maintain their structure. Agri-environmental schemes can support biodiversity through results-based payments.

Historical land-use changes, such as afforestation schemes, have further displaced semi-natural habitats, threatening red-listed bird species including Meadow Pipit and Snipe, invertebrates such as the Marsh Fritillary butterfly and rare protected plants that depend on traditional farming practices.



Recreation and amenity

Trampling by foot or traffic can damage fragile habitats such as peatlands, sea cliffs and karst ecosystems that support rare flora. Outdoor tourism may disturb wildlife, especially nesting birds, and lead to habitat degradation.

Recreational infrastructure such as trails, car parks and visitor centres can fragment habitats and threaten wildlife corridors. Invasive species such as Quagga and Zebra Mussels in Lough Derg may spread via boating activities, threatening our native biodiversity in the absence of implementing appropriate biosecurity measures.

Balancing recreation activities with conservation efforts requires implementing sustainable practices, setting limits on visitor numbers and ensuring that recreational spaces are properly maintained to minimise impacts on the environment. Visitor Management Plans for popular coastal visitor destinations can help reduce impacts on designated sites, for example, and sensitive ecological receptors.



Education and awareness

Biodiversity is often viewed at species and habitat level, thereby overlooking the vital relationships, interactions and processes which make up an ecosystem. A lack of understanding and awareness can create difficulties when promoting best practice guidance for the management and conservation of biodiversity.

Providing training to Clare County Council staff and external contractors is important in the management of the Council's key functions, including sustainable development, management of hedgerows and invasive species and biosecurity. Training events in collaboration with local communities and landowners are important to upskill communities, farmers and individuals on best practices for the management of biodiversity.

Illegal dumping and littering

While illegal dumping and littering have wider social, economic, health and aesthetic implications, they also affect wildlife. These activities contravene the requirements of the Waste Act and can result in the discharge of toxic metals to the receiving natural habitats, e.g. watercourses, or the infilling of wetlands.



Ecosystems of County Clare

The rich biodiversity which County Clare boasts is reflected in the high number of statutory designated sites, along with Nature Reserves, a National Park, Wildfowl Sanctuaries and Ramsar Sites across the county.

Due to its geographic position in the west of Ireland, Clare supports a diverse range of ecosystems such as limestone ecosystems, wetlands, grasslands, marine and coastal ecosystems, woodland, freshwater, treelines and hedgerows and even biodiversity in the built environment. The future protection of County Clare's biodiversity is reliant on awareness, education and working in collaboration with stakeholders.





Wetland and peatland ecosystems

County Clare supports a diverse range of wetland habitats. These range from freshwater lakes such as Lough Derg and Inchiquin Lough, to saltmarshes and reed swamps along the Shannon Estuary, the turloughs in the Burren, raised bogs and upland blanket bogs, transition mire, fens, swamps, freshwater marshes, lagoons and ponds scattered throughout the county.

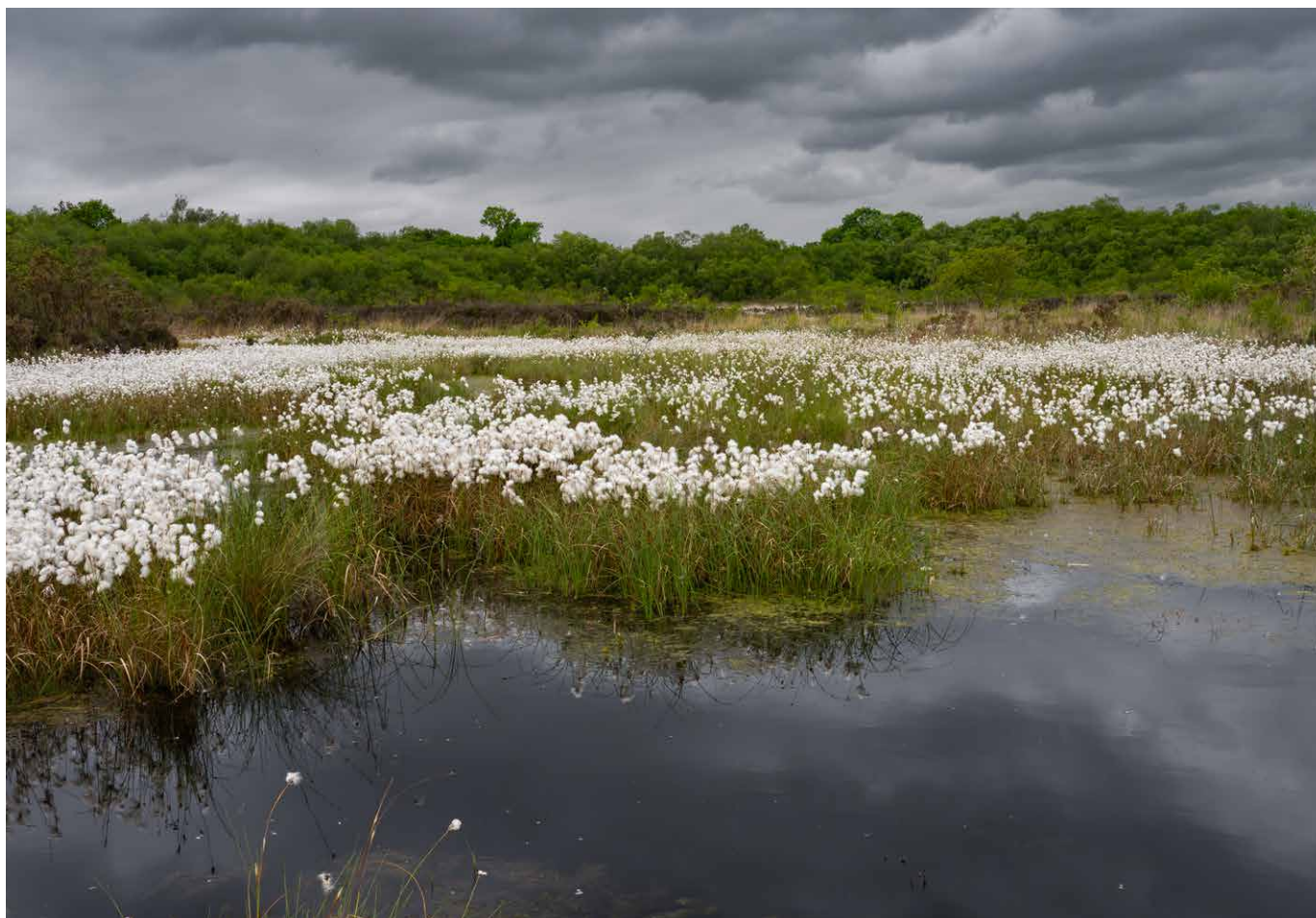
The original area of wetland habitats in County Clare is believed to have been 27%; however, the figure is now less than that due to historical and current changes in land-use management. The extensive network of wetlands in Clare serves as an important wildlife refuge for our flora and fauna and serves as a resource which protects our local communities through the provision of ecosystem services.

Clare is also host to other wetland habitat types such as reservoirs, wet grasslands, wet alluvial woodlands, estuaries, rivers and floodplains. Many of these are regarded as being internationally important, including Ballyallia Lake SPA to the north of Ennis and Tullagher Lough and Bog SAC located near Doonbeg in West Clare. The Ramsar Convention provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

Species that depend on wetlands, such as migratory winter birds, including Barnacle Goose and Whooper Swan, or Common Frog and Smooth Newt, are specifically adapted to wet conditions and not found elsewhere. If wetland habitats decline (e.g. through drainage), these species decline also.

Many carnivorous plants, including sundews, Butterwort and bladderworts occur in peatlands. The bog builder Sphagnum moss can be found widely in raised and blanket bogs across Clare. Clare County Council has supported restoration efforts of degraded blanket bog systems, such as the Knocknahila Bog Peatland Rewetting Project, which aims to reverse the impacts of drainage by rewetting peatland habitats.

The Council has also commissioned several county-wide wetland inventory surveys and wetland guidance publications for local communities. The Clare Wetland Survey GIS and Desk Study 2022 mapped 821 wetland areas; over 600 lacked background surveys. Field surveys were carried out across the county from 2023 to 2025 to assess the county's wetland resource.





Grassland ecosystems

Grassland is the most recognisable and common type of habitat in County Clare and is managed primarily for agriculture, including grazing livestock and silage crop production. Highly modified improved grasslands for intensive agriculture support fewer plant species, typically dominated by monoculture species such as perennial rye-grass.

In contrast, calcareous grasslands, found in the Burren for example, are species rich, comprising a vast range of wildflowers and grasses which sustain pollinator populations, other insects and birds by providing a nectar and pollen source and a variety of grass seeds.

The latter sites are host to an array of wildflowers such as Yarrow, Common Knapweed, Selfheal, Common Bird's-foot Trefoil, Cat's-ear, Lady's Bedstraw, Ox-eye Daisy, Field Scabious and a number of species of orchids. Species-rich grasslands in County Clare are managed using conservation grazing techniques, incorporating low stocking levels, implementing a low nutrient input management regime and avoiding the use of pesticides.

Grassland habitats are influenced by underlying soils, geology, acidic and alkaline conditions, climate and management practices which, in Clare, together result in wet grassland, dry humid acid grassland and calcareous grassland.

Some sites in Clare are designated specifically for rare grassland types; these include Ballyteige SAC near Lisdoonvarna, designated for the EU Annex I habitat 'Molinia Meadows', which also supports the protected Marsh Fritillary butterfly. Former agri-environmental schemes, such as the Burren Programme working in partnership with local farmers in north Clare, supported the conservation of semi-natural grasslands. More recently, the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) includes measures targeted around the establishment of native wildflowers and semi-natural grasslands.

Clare County Council has commissioned county-wide habitat surveys over the years to identify native grassland types largely concentrated in the east, south-east and mid-Clare regions, and signed up as a Council partner to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan in 2020.



Limestone ecosystems

The Burren plateau of north Clare is the most well-known example of a limestone ecosystem in Ireland, renowned for its karst formations, listed as a UNESCO Geopark and the county's only National Park. The Burren is of international ecological significance for the habitats and species found there. With its limestone pavements, turloughs and orchid-rich grasslands, the Burren relies on traditional farming practices for its continued existence.

The soluble, alkaline nature of limestone provides unique habitats such as limestone pavements, calcareous (orchid-rich) grasslands, turloughs, calcareous fens, juniper scrub, petrifying springs and caves. Limestone pavements occur on level, gently-sloping or terraced limestone bedrock weathered and broken along joints characterised by 'clint and gryke' formations.

Limestone ecosystems are renowned for their rare flora. County Clare is the only known site for the rare plant Arctic Sandwort in Ireland, listed on the Flora Protection Order and in the Red Data Book of Vascular Plants. Twenty-two of Ireland's twenty-seven orchid species occur in the Burren at Carron and Kilnaboy, including Bee Orchid, Fly Orchid and Early Purple Orchid.

Turloughs are temporary, shallow, groundwater-fed lakes and are renowned for their botanical interest. A good example is Lough Gealain, while Carron Turlough is the largest turlough in Europe. When in flood, some turloughs support nationally important numbers of migratory waterbirds such as Whooper Swan.

Karst ecosystems are also important for invertebrates. The Burren Green moth is found nowhere else in Ireland or Britain and Mullaghmore alone hosts twenty-eight of Ireland's thirty-three butterflies.



Coastal ecosystems

The coastline of County Clare supports diverse habitats along the Atlantic Ocean, notably Galway Bay, Liscannor Bay and the Shannon Estuary. Coastal habitats such as sand dunes, salt marshes, sea cliffs, lagoons and shingle and gravel banks all are vital in sustaining our coastal biodiversity.

The sea cliffs of Clare, particularly the Cliffs of Moher and Loop Head Peninsula, are host to thousands of nesting seabirds, including Kittiwake, Fulmar, Guillemot and Black Guillemot, Razorbill, Puffin and Chough. The sea stacks, ledges, crevices and caves provide ideal nesting opportunities away from predators. The Cliffs of Moher SPA is among Ireland's most important seabird colonies.

The coastal grasslands provide feeding opportunities for Chough, a species undergoing declines within the SPA. Other coastal habitats, such as sand dunes located along the west and north coast of Clare, comprise Marram grass and support plants such as Kidney Vetch, Sea Holly and Sea Spurge, while ground nesting birds such as Skylark and Meadow Pipit use the dunes for nesting. Good examples of well-developed sand dunes can be found at Carrowmore Dunes SAC located near Doonbeg.

Coastal lagoons are shallow, brackish waters separated from the sea by a narrow natural barrier made up of sand, shingle or cobble. Lough Donnell is an example of a coastal lagoon in County Clare located between Quilty and Doonbeg. Lagoons such as Lough Donnell support a variety of waterbirds, particularly waders such as Curlew, Dunlin and Lapwing.

Salt marshes are coastal wetland habitats found within the Shannon Estuary, including Poulmasherry Bay, Ballycorick Creek and Kildysart. The marshes support wintering waterbirds and act as a carbon store.

Clare is also notable for its beaches and the biodiversity that these habitats support; they consist of sand, shingle and gravel. Sometimes, shingle accumulates to form elevated ridges or banks above the high tide mark and are referred to as shingle and gravel banks or 'storm beaches'.



Marine ecosystems

The marine waters off the Clare coast are internationally significant for critically endangered species such as Flapper Skate, White Skate and Angel Shark. The shallow marine waters also support other species of conservation significance such as Sixgill Shark, Tope, Blonde Ray and Thornback Ray. The Kilkee Reefs, a designated Marine SAC, are an example of important rocky shore where certain plant and animal communities occur that are only found on the west coast of Ireland.

Marine environments can be intertidal (muddy, shingle, gravel shores), subtidal (comprising habitats of the seabed), larger waterbodies (such as estuaries and open marine water) and inlets and bays. Clare has two bays, Liscannor Bay and part of Galway Bay. Both Grey and Harbour seals, for example, are known to haul out regularly at Mutton Island which is a known pupping site.

Clare's rocky shore is rich in marine life and comprises Common Limpets, Common Mussels, Seagrass, several species of seaweed, Periwinkles, Starfish, Shore Crabs and fish species, while Mackerel swim in large shoals off Loop Head in search of Sprat.

The Shannon Estuary supports a resident population of Bottlenose Dolphin, a qualifying interest of the Lower River Shannon SAC. The Irish Whale and Dolphin Group surveys Bottlenose Dolphins and monitors other cetaceans, including Humpback Whales.

Efforts to introduce legislation are under review with the overall aim to protect, conserve and restore biodiversity in marine ecosystems and to commit to designate 30% of Ireland's seas as Marine Protected Areas by 2030. Clare County Council through the role of Biodiversity Officer is supporting the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group and other stakeholders to build a Strategic Marine Alliance in local communities which support citizen science, scientific research and outreach engagement.



Hedgerows and treelines

Linear habitats such as hedgerows and treelines are vital linkages connecting elements of biodiversity in the landscape. They act as corridors connecting wildlife to various habitats and biodiversity hotspots.

Robust, intact hedgerows and treelines offer a lifeline to biodiversity in County Clare; these remaining fringe habitats provide a refuge for species groups, including mammals such as Pygmy Shrew, Badger, Hedgehogs and bats, pollinators, other insects and nesting birds. The Lesser Horseshoe Bat uses hedgerows and treelines to commute and forage, following the insect source associated with these habitats.

Diverse hedgerows include Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Holly, Elder, Hazel, Guelder Rose, Spindle, Willow, Rowan and Birch,

often alongside treelines dominated by Ash, Oaks, Sycamore and Alder. Fruits and berries sustain wildlife such as Wren, Blackbird, Whitethroat, Dunnock, Willow Warbler and Robin.

The grass verges and earthen banks of hedgerows support pollinators such as Solitary Bees, Mining bees, butterflies and moths. Grass verges also play a role in species' life cycles, such as Ragwort and the Cinnabar Moth.

Managing our hedgerows in a sustainable way is essential for the movement of wildlife. Hedgerows and treelines are important Green Infrastructure assets that provide a range of functions, including trapping silt and sediment run-off, sequestering carbon, regulating water movement to help prevent flooding, providing shelter for farm animals and helping prevent airborne diseases spread.





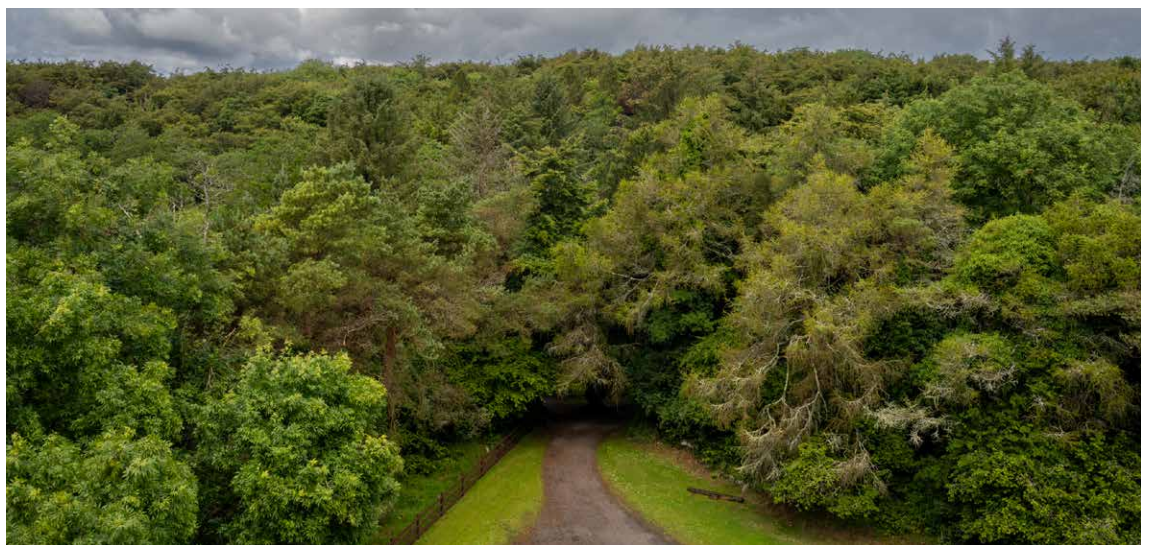
Woodland and scrub

With approximately 18% of County Clare covered in woodland, the county supports a diverse variety of native woodlands, including rare long-established and ancient woodlands such as Garrannon Wood near Cratloe and Glenomra Wood SAC in East Clare.

Woodlands can be classified into semi-natural, highly modified/non-native, scrub/transitional or linear woodland. The underlying soil type and environmental conditions determine the type of trees that grow. For example, waterlogged or saturated ground supports wet woodland, such as wet Pedunculate Oak-Ash, while wet Willow-Alder-Ash woodland typically supports Alder, Willow, Ash and Pedunculate oak. Examples can be found at Dromore Woods Nature Reserve near Ruan.

Riparian woodlands, dominated by Willow and some Alder, occur along river margins and offer perching posts for Kingfisher such as the River Shannon. Acid peat sites support bog woodland dominated by Birch with Rowan, Scot's Pine and Oaks often found fringing raised bog habitats in east and south-east Clare. Ravines and valleys with long-established woodland support epiphytes and rare plant species such as the Killarney Fern in west Clare. The Burren features species-rich Hazel scrub and Hazel-Ash woodland on limestone areas. Cahermurphy Nature Reserve in east Clare contains diverse oak woodland habitats.

Promoting native woodland creation is vital for biodiversity as it supports native animals, including Pine Marten, Red Squirrel, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jay and Lesser Horseshoe Bat. Clare County Council has mapped several woodland parcels through county-wide habitat surveys.





Freshwater ecosystems

Rivers and streams are vital ecosystems for aquatic biodiversity, supporting species such as Salmon, Trout, Otter, aquatic invertebrates such as Mayflies, Stoneflies and Caddisfly larvae, and the rare Freshwater Pearl Mussel.

Unfragmented freshwater ecosystems are crucial for fish migration and spawning, especially for Salmon and Trout, whose life cycles span freshwater and marine environments. In County Clare, these fish migrate up-catchment to spawn on fine gravel sediments, for example in tributaries of the River Fergus.

Mayflies and Stoneflies are biological indicators of river health and are used to inform water quality status. The greater their diversity, the better the water quality. The Freshwater Pearl Mussel is a species that is extremely sensitive to water pollution and requires clean water with low pollution levels. It occurs in three Clare catchments: Doonbeg, Shannon–Graney/Scariff and Shannon–Woodford. The conservation status of the Cloon catchment population is

currently assessed as ‘unfavourable’.

Otter is listed as a qualifying interest of the Lower River Shannon SAC and establishes natal dens, holts and couches along river corridors. Specialist riverine bird species such as Dipper, Grey Wagtail and Kingfisher can be found on the Inagh River.

Conservation efforts to maintain and improve water quality and restore river habitats have been carried out by the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO), Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), organisations and local communities through European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs) and under other funding support schemes. Clare County Council has commissioned Freshwater Pearl Mussel surveillance in the Cloon catchment and has supported research studies, including the ‘National Mayfly Survey of Ireland’ and ‘Monitoring the Quagga Mussel Invasion in the River Shannon System’.



Built environment

Urban areas comprise green spaces such as parks and also water features which support wildlife; the capacity of these areas to support biodiversity can be enhanced through improved wildlife-friendly management.

Private gardens and buildings in towns and villages across County Clare can play an important role in supporting biodiversity and can act as ecological stepping stones in urban areas while also improving societal wellbeing.

Derelict buildings and bridges in urban areas can support species such as Swift, Dipper and Daubenton's Bat where crevices in stonework can provide nesting and roosting opportunities. Stone walls and other stone buildings may support diverse flora with abundant lichens, mosses and ferns.

Homeowners and Tidy Towns Groups participate in pollinator-friendly initiatives such as implementing long-flowering meadows to support butterflies, Bumblebees and Solitary Bees, partnering

with the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan and participating in biodiversity recording initiatives such as Flower Insect Timed (FIT) counts.

Other actions that can enhance biodiversity include pond creation, installing bird feeders, planting trees and erecting bird boxes. There are opportunities to integrate biodiversity features into building and public space design, such as bee and Swift bricks, green roofs, tree planting, streetscapes (e.g. footpaths) and rain gardens to strengthen ecological corridors and enhance green infrastructure.

These efforts address biodiversity loss, reduce pollution, mitigate climate change and enhance wellbeing by connecting people with nature. Clare County Council has commissioned ecological surveys to identify and protect urban biodiversity in County Clare, including projects such as the 'Clare Swift Survey 2017-2020' and 'Survey of Trees in Towns and Villages of County Clare'.



Pillars, Objectives and Actions of the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2031

The Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2031 is underpinned by an overarching vision, five key pillars, five objectives and fifty-eight actions that will guide Clare County Council's Biodiversity Work Programme over the next six years.

Each action comes with key performance indicators (KPIs) and a target. The actions and objectives are informed by Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023–2030 and run in parallel with the strategic biodiversity objectives outlined in the Clare County Development Plan 2023–2029, the natural heritage actions presented in the Clare County Heritage Plan 2024–2030 and targets and objectives from a range of policy documents.

The plan also takes cognisance of the relevant statutory legislative instruments that relate to biodiversity, including the EU Habitats Directive, EU Birds Directive, the Wildlife Act and targets set out under the EU Nature Restoration Law.

Public participation in the plan consultation process, together with contributions from members of the Clare Heritage and Biodiversity Forum, has been instrumental in the formulation of actions which promote collaborative partnerships and adopt a whole-of-society approach to halt biodiversity loss and to protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity in County Clare for future generations.



PILLAR 1:	PILLAR 2:	PILLAR 3:	PILLAR 4:	PILLAR 5:
Developing and Researching the County's Ecological Network	Integrating Biodiversity into Our Work Practices	Restoring, Enhancing and Conserving our Biodiversity Assets	Raising Biodiversity Awareness and Education for Present and Future Generations	Building Collaborative Partnerships for Nature
Objective: Support and strengthen our database to conserve, manage and enhance biodiversity within the county through data collection, mapping and research.	Objective: Promote and integrate biodiversity conservation into decision-making processes and operations through policy, best practice and procedures.	Objective: Deliver actions which aim to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity and to reverse biodiversity loss at a county-wide level by 2031.	Objective: Raise awareness and appreciation of biodiversity within the county through education, training and outreach initiatives.	Objective: Enhance collaboration among all people adopting a whole-of-society approach to protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity within the county.
Pillar 1 includes actions that aim to carry out research and data collection through undertaking ecological baseline surveys, habitat mapping and scientific studies to protect and enhance sites of ecological importance, strengthen connectivity and our understanding of ecosystem services, inform decision making in CCC and inform the development of the county's Ecological Network Map.	Pillar 2 includes actions which aim to integrate biodiversity into our work practices and decision-making processes through best practice. They are primarily aimed at conserving and enhancing biodiversity through the Council's operations and procedures.	Pillar 3 covers actions aimed at practical restoration, conservation and enhancement measures for biodiversity. This also extends to commissioning baseline surveys to inform the approach to halt biodiversity loss.	Pillar 4 includes actions aimed at promoting biodiversity awareness through various training, educational, creative and outreach engagement initiatives, encompassing a wide range of stakeholder groups across the county. These actions aim to educate and encourage stakeholders to take conservation actions for biodiversity.	Pillar 5 includes actions that foster strong support and collaborative partnerships within and between local communities and other stakeholders to promote actions that deliver for nature and identify new opportunities for biodiversity enhancement.

A close-up photograph of two damselflies perched on a thin, green, vertical stem. The damselflies have vibrant blue bodies and long, segmented abdomens. Their wings are transparent with a delicate, grid-like pattern of veins. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural, aquatic environment. The lighting is bright, highlighting the textures of the insects and the stem.

*Biodiversity in Clare is
valued, conserved, restored
and sustainably used,
maintaining ecosystem
services, sustaining a
healthy planet and
delivering benefits
essential for all people*

Vision for the Clare County
Biodiversity Action Plan
2025-2031

PILLAR 1:

Developing and Researching the County's Ecological Network

OBJECTIVE 1:

Support and strengthen our database to conserve, manage and enhance biodiversity within the county through data collection, mapping and research.

Establishing the ecological network and researching the county's biodiversity resource requires a review of existing baseline studies and datasets, commissioning up-to-date surveys, researching our landbank, mapping existing biodiversity hotspots, undertaking scientific research, informing knowledge data gaps and identifying ecological corridors that connect isolated biodiversity hotspots and ecosystems in the county.

An Ecological Network Map of Clare can assist in triaging Locally Important Biodiversity Sites (LIBS) for example and identifying how activities interact and impact on these sites.

Researching our biodiversity assets helps to identify new opportunities that aim to strengthen the ecological network within the county and support more biodiversity and climate resilient ecosystems.

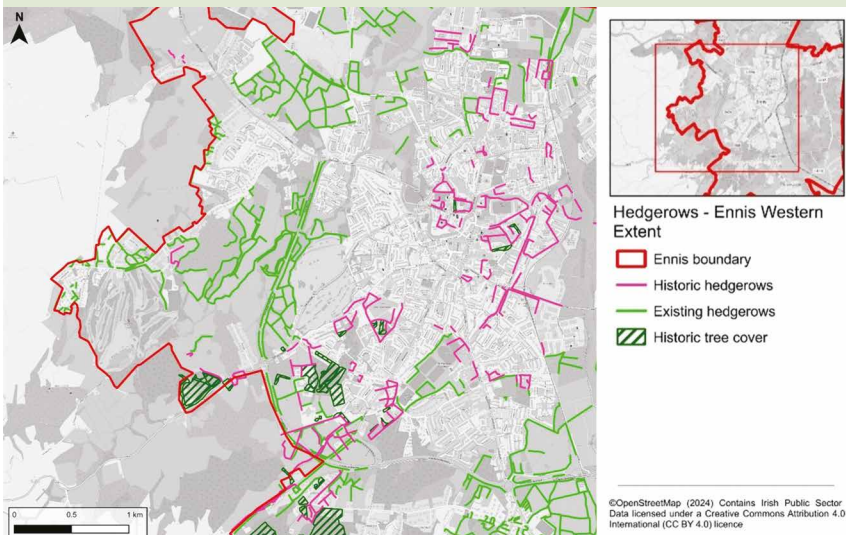
Clare County Council has an important role to play as a leader in influencing decision-making processes with regard to land management, sustainable planning and development and promoting habitat connectivity. The Council has commissioned several county-wide habitat and species inventory surveys and the actions outlined under this objective will build on this important work.

CASE STUDY 1

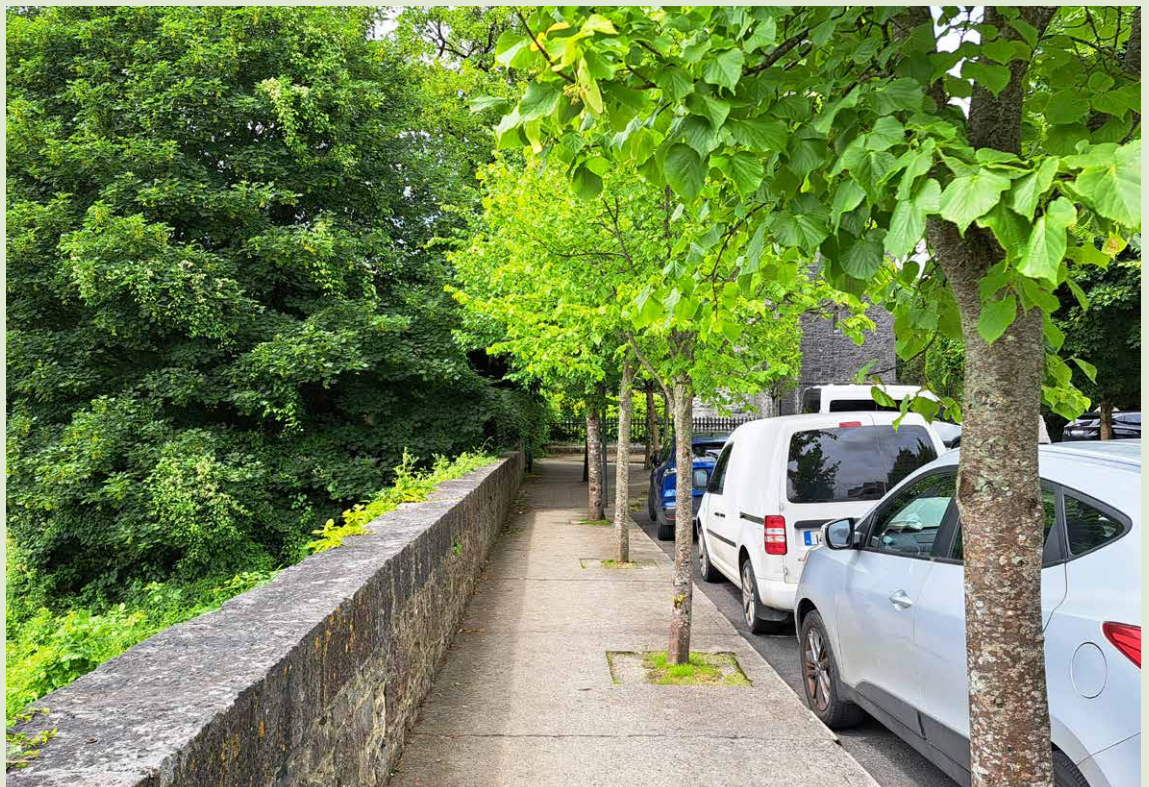
'Nature Connections: Ennis Ecological Networks Project'

The Ennis Ecological Networks Project is an ongoing study led through the role of Clare County Council's Biodiversity Officer to identify and strengthen ecological corridors in Ennis town and environs and to inform future green infrastructure strategies. The study looks at the settlement of Ennis from the perspective of ecological corridors and stepping stones for the movement of wildlife.

It involves mapping biodiversity hotspots such as wetlands, woodlands, limestone pavement, bat roost sites and designated sites, and assesses how ecological corridors such as treelines, hedgerows, linear woodland and watercourses connect these biodiversity hotspots to facilitate the movement of wildlife. The study also looks at how species groups such as pollinators, bats, fish and birds interact with the urban environment.



A desk study and GIS mapping exercise assisted in identifying existing ecological corridors, identifying barriers and obstacles to connectivity and identifying opportunities to enhance and strengthen ecological corridors that connect biodiversity hotspots. The study also highlights the importance of urban habitats, such as parks, other green spaces and water features, and how their biodiversity value can be enhanced, collaborating with key partners and improving social wellbeing for the people of Ennis.



PILLAR 1: Developing and Researching the County's Ecological Network

OBJECTIVE 1:

Support and strengthen our database to conserve, manage and enhance biodiversity within the county through data collection, mapping and research.

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
1.1	Develop an Ecological Network Map (ENM) of Clare to inform landscape connectivity for wildlife and protect the county's Green Infrastructure assets taking cognisance of ecological corridors, stepping stones and pinch points.	To protect and enhance sites of ecological importance, strengthen connectivity and inform decision making in CCC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of County Ecological Network Map. 	Economic Directorate
1.2	Strengthen understanding of natural capital and ecosystem services.	To establish baseline information on ecosystem services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of presentations and talks delivered. 	Economic Directorate
1.3	Continue to identify, map and enhance 'Locally Important Biodiversity Sites' (LIBS) and ecological corridors to inform Green Infrastructure Strategies with a view to protecting this ecological resource.	Data collation of biodiversity areas evaluated as being of local importance (higher value), county, national and international importance and to protect and enhance connectivity between these areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desktop study and GIS mapping completed. Annual habitat and species surveys completed. 	Economic Directorate
1.4	Continue to undertake county-wide habitat surveys and mapping, building on previous baseline inventory surveys to inform data collection and the ongoing development of the Ecological Network Map.	To address information gaps, protect and enhance sites of ecological importance, strengthen connectivity and inform decision making in CCC.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of surveys completed and mapped. 	Economic and Tourism Directorates

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
1.5	Carry out a biodiversity audit of the Council's landbank with a view to implementing enhancement actions.	To address knowledge gaps and the potential for biodiversity enhancement actions.	• Audit implemented.	Economic Directorate
1.6	Engage with third level institutions and other research bodies to support scientific research in the field of biodiversity in collaboration with CCC.	To support scientific research that informs our understanding of biodiversity assets within the county.	• Number of research projects completed.	Economic Directorate / External stakeholders
1.7	Research sites of natural conservation value along the Clare coastline to fully understand the implications of climate change and sea level rise and the potential approaches to mitigation, adaptation and building resilience.	To identify important areas affected by climate-change pressures such as habitat fragmentation, habitat and species loss. Explore ways to create climate resilient ecosystems.	• Study on important natural heritage areas vulnerable to climate change implemented.	Economic Directorate / External stakeholders

PILLAR 2:

Integrating Biodiversity into Our Work Practices

OBJECTIVE 2:

Promote and integrate biodiversity conservation into decision-making processes and operations through policy, best practice and procedures.

Clare County Council has a responsibility to adhere to the relevant legislation governing the protection of biodiversity and to ensure that the Council's day-to-day operations and procedures are compliant with the key statutory instruments, including the EU Habitats Directive, EU Birds Directive, Irish Wildlife Act (as amended), Planning and Development Acts and the EU Water Framework Directive.

These responsibilities can be achieved by integrating care for biodiversity into our work procedures.

The plan involves cross departmental collaboration in the Council to ensure that biodiversity is integrated and prioritised into decision making processes to deliver best ecological practice to protect and enhance biodiversity in an integrated way.

Staff training on ecological sensitivities and developing robust guidelines is essential to ensuring that long-term sustainable management of the natural environment is considered in every aspect of local governance and the Council's operations.



CASE STUDY 2

'Working in Harmony with Nature: Guiding Biodiversity Best Practice'

Clare County Council is the first and only local authority in Ireland to produce a comprehensive biodiversity manual targeted at a local authority's operations and procedures having regard to biodiversity: *Clare County Council Biodiversity Manual: Biodiversity Best Practice Guidelines*. The main objective of the manual is to guide the implementation of best ecological practice in the Council's functions.

The manual provides practical guidance to Council staff for the protection of biodiversity and outlines biodiversity legislation and policy, and detailed procedures for work practices that directly affect biodiversity, including hedgerow management, grass and verge management, the use of pesticides, tree management, retrofitting public lighting for bats, drainage procedures, operations during the bird nesting season, prioritising initiatives under the 'All-Ireland Pollinator Plan' and other enhancement actions.

Clare County Council through the role of the Biodiversity Officer have organised biodiversity training workshops designed to implement best ecological practices such as promoting the sustainable management of hedgerows and implementing biosecurity to reduce the spread of invasive species. Similarly, the Council have also delivered workshops aimed at integrating biodiversity into project design such as streetscapes and public realm enhancement (e.g. footpaths), rain gardens, wetland protection, nature-based solutions, biodiversity enhancement and compliance with environmental reporting.



PILLAR 2: Integrating Biodiversity into Our Work Practices

OBJECTIVE 2:

Promote and integrate biodiversity conservation into decision-making processes and operations through policy, best practice and procedures.

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
2.1	Promote best practice in the use of pesticides in Clare County Council's operations in adherence with Clare County Council's Biodiversity Manual: Biodiversity Best Practice Guidelines for herbicide use.	To manage the use of pesticides sustainably and explore alternatives to minimise use and impact on ecological receptors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of events held. 	Physical Directorate; Council-wide
2.2	Deliver biodiversity training courses to council staff and external contractors and implement the Clare County Council's Biodiversity Manual: Biodiversity Best Practice Guidelines into Council operations.	To promote best ecological practice in the Council's operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of training events delivered. Resource material supplied. 	Economic, Council-wide
2.3	Deliver hedgerow training courses to council staff and hedge cutting contractors.	To protect and manage the hedgerow resource in a sustainable manner and to strengthen the ecological corridor network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E-learning course developed. Number of training events delivered. 	Economic Directorate supported by Physical, Social, Tourism and Rural Directorates
2.4	Retain natural features and promote and incorporate biodiversity enhancement in the design of new buildings, housing, public realm projects and other proposals as appropriate (e.g. swift nest boxes/swift bricks, native tree planting, rain gardens (SuDS), enhancing streetscapes, pollinator-friendly measures).	To enhance biodiversity in urban areas and the built environment and promote ecological connectivity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of projects completed. Number of workshops delivered. 	Economic, Physical, Social, Tourism, and Rural Directorates
2.5	Incorporate and promote Biodiversity Net Gain and nature-based solutions into practice and decision-making in CCC.	To ensure development has a measurably positive impact ('net gain') on biodiversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of training talks delivered. Number of projects completed. 	Economic Directorate supported by Physical, Social, Tourism and Rural Directorates

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
2.6	Protect all designated European sites (SACs and SPAs) in accordance with the EU Habitats Directive; and separately NHA sites ensuring all proposed developments are subject to ecological assessment requirements.	Protect and ensure all designated sites achieve favourable conservation status.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate Assessments and EIARs submitted through the planning application process. 	Economic Directorate supported by Physical, Social, Tourism and Rural Directorates / NPWS
2.7	Adopt 'bat- friendly' lighting for new public lighting proposals and upgrade/ retrofit existing lighting infrastructure wherever possible to strengthen dark corridors for bats and other nocturnal mammals.	To ensure habitat connectivity for bats and to minimise barriers associated with artificial light on key foraging and commuting habitat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of proposals that have adopted bat- friendly lighting, informed by bat studies. 	Economic and Physical Directorates supported by Tourism, Rural and Social Directorates / TII
2.8	Protect bat roosts sites and ensure development proposals are subject to appropriate ecological assessments; and identify biodiversity enhancement opportunities.	To strengthen ecological corridors, protect bat roost sites and educate groups on local bats.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of biodiversity enhancement landscape plan. Number of ecological assessments submitted and tracked through the planning process. 	Economic Directorate supported by Physical, Tourism, Rural and Social Directorates, Council-wide / NPWS
2.9	Align projects delivered under the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) using the Accelerator Action Tool	To implement SDGs as they relate to biodiversity at local authority level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accelerator action tool updated. 	Economic Directorate.
2.10	Engage with the Council-led visitor attractions that Visitor Management Plans are completed which include the management of visitor impacts and reduction of threats such as disturbance and habitat degradation to sensitive ecological receptors.	To reduce threats and pressures on biodiversity associated with visitor numbers at Council-led visitor attractions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of visitor management plans that include visitor flow analysis and impacts commissioned. Site-specific strategies (in consultation with the Biodiversity Officer and NPWS) to manage visitor flow developed. 	Tourism Directorate

PILLAR 3:

Restoring, Enhancing and Conserving Our Biodiversity Assets

OBJECTIVE 3:

Deliver actions which aim to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity and to reverse biodiversity loss at a county-wide level by 2031.

Clare County Council will play a central role in supporting and engaging conservation efforts across the county. This includes actions aimed at practical restoration and biodiversity enhancement efforts and supporting initiatives that focus on reversing biodiversity loss in collaboration with key stakeholders. The plan will prioritise habitat and species surveys to inform conservation priorities and guide evidence-based decision making.

This objective also focuses on identifying new opportunities for biodiversity enhancement such as hedge planting, tree planting, pond creation, habitat restoration, nest box installation and managing sites that align with the All-Ireland pollinator Plan. The Council is committed to addressing the challenges impacting on biodiversity loss and supporting initiatives that will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity at a county-wide level by 2031.

The data will build on previous survey efforts and will focus on improving the conservation status of habitats and species in County Clare.



CASE STUDY 3

'Reviving Peatlands: Breathing Life into Knocknahila Bog'

Knocknahila Bog Peatland Rewetting Project is a partnership with a local farmer, Knocknahila Community Biodiversity Group and Clare County Council's Biodiversity Officer. The project was completed in 2025 and involved rewetting 27 acres of blanket bog in west Clare which involved the construction of peat dams and a network of contour peat bunds to raise water levels for the establishment of Sphagnum mosses, the main peat forming agent of bogs.

The project aims to restore degraded sections of the bog through rewetting to create optimal conditions for a rare habitat known as 'active blanket bog' and to provide a refuge for ground nesting Red-Listed birds, including Snipe. Ecological and hydrological studies were carried out using topographical data to focus targeted rewetting and inform rewetting design. An experienced peatland contractor installed peat dams and bunds and Clare County Council's Biodiversity Officer oversaw implementation of the work.

Sphagnum mosses were recorded colonising in submerged pools over summer months in 2025 and the bog provides a haven for wildlife including dragonflies, damselflies, pond scaters and amphibians. This is a demonstration project to showcase to local communities, farming organisations and schools how rewetting techniques can deliver for nature conservation projects, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, research, education and social wellbeing.



PILLAR 3: Restoring, Enhancing and Conserving Our Biodiversity Assets

OBJECTIVE 3:

Deliver actions which aim to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity and to reverse biodiversity loss at a county-wide level by 2031.

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
3.1	Identify potential biodiversity opportunities for tree planting and woodland creation.	To achieve long-term benefits for biodiversity, climate and human wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sites identified, surveyed and planted with native trees. 	Physical and Economic Directorate
3.2	Undertake a woodland inventory survey to identify and map native woodland habitats in the county.	To identify previously undocumented native woodland sites of high conservation importance in the county.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Native woodland surveys and mapping completed. Submission of data to inform Article 17 reporting on habitat condition and extent. 	Economic Directorate
3.3	Undertake a tree survey for identified locations in the county.	To protect and manage trees in a sustainable manner and identify biodiversity enhancement opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Tree Map datasets acquired. Number of tree surveys completed and mapped. 	Economic Directorate supported by Physical Directorate
3.4	Where possible, support local nurseries specialising in the conservation of native trees, plants, seeds and genetic food crops that are of provenance to County Clare.	To support and promote local seed sources for re-use in the county that are of local provenance to Clare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of projects supported. Number of workshops held. 	Economic Directorate supported by Physical, Tourism, Rural and Social Directorates / External Stakeholders
3.5	Support and promote local organisations that develop and implement biodiversity initiatives working with farmers, landowners and local communities to establish native woodlands, native tree planting, traditional orchards, pond creation and other biodiversity enhancement measures.	Work with landowners, farmers and community groups to carry out biodiversity enhancement actions in their local area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of projects completed, and meetings held. 	Economic Directorate / External Stakeholders

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
3.6	Undertake a hedgerow and treeline audit at sites of ecological importance for the Lesser Horseshoe Bat and other species, working in partnership with key organisations.	To address knowledge gaps and enhance ecological corridors and connectivity for wildlife including the Lesser Horseshoe Bat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hedgerow and treeline surveys completed, and number of engagements held. Submission of data to inform Article 17 reporting on habitat condition and extent. 	Economic Directorate / External Stakeholders
3.7	Undertake a county-wide wetland inventory survey to identify and map the wetland resource in County Clare.	To identify, protect and conserve previously undocumented wetland sites in the county.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County-wide wetland survey and mapping completed and engagements with stakeholders held. Submission of data to inform Article 17 reporting on habitat condition and extent. 	Economic Directorate
3.8	Support and work with landowners in the county to carry out restoration and biodiversity enhancement projects (e.g. peatlands and grassland conservation, Marsh Fritillary butterfly).	To promote the conservation and ecosystem services of peatland habitats in the county and create a wildlife refuge for rare habitats and fauna.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of projects completed. 	Economic Directorate
3.9	Continue to support rare flora surveys, including both terrestrial and aquatic environments, working in partnership with BSBI, NPWS, IFI and other relevant agencies.	To record and map rare flora records within the county in partnership with key organisations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of surveys completed. Number of records submitted to relevant bodies. 	Economic Directorate

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
3.10	Continue to support the work of the Shannon Dolphin Project, including monitoring surveys of Bottlenose Dolphins, mapping habitats of the Shannon Estuary, habitat restoration, outreach communication and education programmes and ongoing scientific research.	Raise awareness of marine ecosystems and cetaceans to members of the public and undertake surveys to inform knowledge gaps, habitat restoration and scientific research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of annual reports and data shared. • Provision of maps and shapefiles. • Number of workshop and events held. • Number of schools visited. • Collaboration with key stakeholders, third-level projects supported, publications and research projects completed. 	Economic Directorate / Irish Whale and Dolphin Group
3.11	Upon publication of the National Invasive Species Management Plan, explore the feasibility of developing an Invasive Species Management Strategy for the county.	To develop a management strategy at county-wide level to treat, control and where possible eradicate problematic invasive species.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of engagements held to inform development of a strategy. 	Council-wide
3.12	Support targeted surveys and eradication programmes for the treatment and control of invasive alien species in partnership with the relevant agencies and stakeholder groups.	To support initiatives that aim to survey, treat, control and where possible eradicate problematic invasive species in the county in partnership with the relevant agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of surveys completed. • Number of treatment and eradication projects completed. 	Physical, Social, Economic, Tourism and Rural Directorates / LAWPRO / NPWS / External Stakeholders
3.13	Engage with communities, state agencies and organisations to carry out conservation and restoration of biodiversity sites through the provision of technical advice and where possible funding supports (e.g. sand dunes, native woodlands, hedgerows, marine habitats, semi-natural grasslands).	To maintain and restore the conservation status of habitats through community initiatives, adopting best ecological practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of meetings with communities and key stakeholder groups held. • Number of projects supported. 	Economic Directorate supported by Physical Directorate / NPWS / External stakeholders

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
3.14	Work with LAWPRO, IFI and other bodies to develop strategies for safeguarding and improving river corridors for wildlife to enhance aquatic biodiversity.	To protect and improve the conservation status of aquatic ecosystems within the county.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of engagements held. 	Physical and Economic Directorates / LAWPRO / IFI / other bodies
3.15	Complete the actions for councils outlined in the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, promote the initiative and identify new sites for the management of pollinators.	Increase areas that are managed for pollinators across the county	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of pollinator-managed areas created and increased. Council pollinator-friendly actions and reporting completed. 	Economic, Physical, Tourism, Rural and Social Directorates
3.16	Develop and implement initiatives that build on and support the protection of birds of conservation concern, e.g. red-listed bird species and Annex I birds (EU Birds Directive), commission surveys and identify enhancement opportunities in partnership with key stakeholders.	To create nesting opportunities for endangered birds with a view to reversing population declines associated with habitat loss in collaboration with key stakeholder groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of nest boxes and other conservation measures completed. Number of engagements held. 	Economic and Tourism Directorates / BirdWatch Ireland / NPWS / External Stakeholders
3.17	Support collaboration and sharing of ecological studies (where possible) between organisations that deliver practical measures for the conservation of habitats and species in the county.	Develop shared knowledge to inform practical enhancement and restoration actions for habitats and species.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of collaborative projects completed. 	Economic Development / External Stakeholders / Coillte/ NPWS
3.18	Develop and implement Biodiversity Conservation Management Plans/ Management Strategies for sites of ecological importance within Clare County Council's landbank.	To protect and enhance biodiversity assets within our landbank.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of ecological surveys and Biodiversity Conservation Management Plans completed. Number of actions in the plan implemented. 	Economic Directorate supported by Tourism Directorate

PILLAR 4:

Raising Biodiversity Awareness and Education for Present and Future Generations

Objective 4:

Raise awareness and appreciation of biodiversity within the county through education, training and outreach initiatives.

Promoting education, engagement and awareness encourages sustainable practices to protect and conserve our biodiversity assets for present and future generations. Citizen science initiatives promote participation to get the wider public involved in recording and monitoring biodiversity in our homes, gardens, farms, communities, businesses, sports clubs and schools.

The plan will build strategic partnerships to deliver innovative arts-based and creative learning initiatives, supporting biodiversity school initiatives, engaging local businesses on awareness, promoting biodiversity-focused projects through media platforms and support local organisations across the county.

Furthermore, the plan will support biodiversity-themed festivals and national nature-themed events (e.g. National Biodiversity Week, National Heritage Week) while producing guidelines and publications which are important ways to deliver and raise awareness of biodiversity to the wider public. Clare County Council is committed to enhancing the visibility of biodiversity by promoting environmental education and encouraging active engagement in conservation efforts to benefit present and future generations.



CASE STUDY 4

'Roots of Change: Inspiring Biodiversity through Education'



The Clare Schools Biodiversity Programme was established in 2023 and is coordinated through Clare County Council's Biodiversity Officer with support from Creative Ireland Clare and Clare Libraries. The initiative provides biodiversity workshops to primary and secondary schools across Clare that are undertaking the theme of 'biodiversity' as part of An Taisce's Green Schools Programme to progress their green flag.

It funds biodiversity workshops delivered by educational specialists and promotes creative learning through a range of activities, including developing a habitat map on school grounds, habitat identification,

leaf artwork, identification of native trees, bird identification, freshwater invertebrate identification, invertebrate model making, setting up bird feeders and devising a monitoring programme for students to document and monitor wildlife on school grounds.

The initiative raises students' awareness of biodiversity through creative learning. School biodiversity workshops were also funded through the Heritage in Schools Scheme administered by the Heritage Council. Together, the Clare Schools Biodiversity Programme and the Heritage in Schools Scheme reached out to over 1200 students across Clare since 2023.

PILLAR 4: Raising Biodiversity Awareness and Education for Present and Future Generations

OBJECTIVE 4:

Raise awareness and appreciation of biodiversity within the county through education, training and outreach initiatives.

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
4.1	Collaborate with cross-functional departments within Clare County Council (e.g. Tourism, Clare Libraries and the Environmental Awareness Office) to raise awareness of biodiversity during National Biodiversity Week and National Heritage Week and participate in citizen science initiatives.	To promote partnerships and engagement during National Biodiversity Week and National Heritage Week.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of talks and events held. 	Economic, Tourism, Physical and Rural Directorates
4.2	Promote and raise awareness of biodiversity and climate adaptation during Climate Action Week and National Tree Week.	To promote biodiversity during National Climate Action Week and National Tree Week.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of events for Climate Action Week and National Tree Week that have a biodiversity theme. 	Physical Directorate
4.3	Support and promote active participation in the An Taisce Green Schools programme through the Clare Schools Biodiversity Programme, forest school initiatives and engagement with students in third level institutions.	To promote education and learning around biodiversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of biodiversity educational workshops held. Number of forest school events supported. 	Economic Directorate supported by Physical and Rural Directorates / External Stakeholders
4.4	Support the implementation of the Heritage in Schools Scheme as it relates to biodiversity.	To promote education and learning around biodiversity in primary schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of school biodiversity workshops held. 	Economic Directorate / External Stakeholders
4.5	Promote and raise awareness of biodiversity through the arts in partnership with Clare Libraries, the Arts Office, Creative Ireland and other organisations.	To enhance outreach efforts aimed at promoting and raising awareness of biodiversity through creative learning and education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of art projects completed. 	Economic and Rural Directorates / External Stakeholders

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
4.6	Develop interventions that address Invasive Alien Species through education and awareness, and promote recording of invasive species in the county.	To educate and raise awareness of invasive alien species to stakeholders and CCC personnel to promote biosecurity and best practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of training events delivered. • Collaboration and engagements held with key organisations. 	Economic and Physical Directorates supported by Rural Directorate / External Stakeholders
4.7	Raise awareness of the biodiversity work programme among the public through the media, online digital platforms, including CCC's website, publications, social media, e.g. 'Greener Clare', and install wildlife signage in public spaces.	To engage and inform members of the public on biodiversity initiatives and actions through online digital platforms and signage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of social media engagements and press releases. • Public wildlife signage installed. 	Economic Directorate
4.8	Profile and raise awareness of habitats and species of the Shannon Estuary, Galway Bay and other sites in the county.	To profile and raise awareness of wetland birds of the Shannon Estuary and other species of conservation concern.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of projects completed. • Engagement with neighbouring local authorities held. 	Economic Directorate
4.9	Continue to work with LAWPRO, IFI and other relevant organisations to promote awareness of aquatic ecosystems (e.g. natural watercourses, riparian corridors and lakes).	To raise awareness of aquatic ecology and promote best practices governing the protection of our freshwater resource within the county.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of engagements and talks delivered. 	Physical and Economic Directorates / LAWPRO / IFI / other relevant organisations.
4.10	Promote and raise awareness of the county's flora and fauna and nature-positive initiatives (e.g. dark skies) to community groups, educational institutions, landowners and other stakeholders working in partnership with key organisations.	Promote awareness of important habitats, species and nature-positive initiatives in the county.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of resource material. • Number of events held. • 	Economic Directorate

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
4.11	Raise awareness and promote the conservation importance of bird species (e.g. White-tailed Sea Eagle, other raptors, Chough and seabirds) of County Clare.	To highlight the conservation importance of raptors to local communities, students and farming groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with neighbouring local authorities held. Publication of resource material. Number of events held. 	Economic Directorate
4.12	Promote recording of species groups and support studies that inform species conservation status and ecosystem health.	To raise awareness of Irish invertebrate communities through citizen science and support scientific research to assess their conservation status.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of training courses and talks delivered. Number of scientific studies supported (e.g. mayfly survey). 	Economic Directorate
4.13	Implement biodiversity awareness and conservation training within the Council's county-wide 'Code of Practice' for sustainable tourism in Clare tourism businesses to encourage engagement in biodiversity conservation and enhancement actions.	To raise awareness of biodiversity and encourage engagement and uptake of biodiversity enhancement actions in the Clare tourism business sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshops on biodiversity awareness attended. Contributions to local biodiversity projects as measured by the 'Code of Practice' for sustainable tourism in Clare tourism businesses documented. Number of biodiversity enhancement actions completed by Clare businesses as measured by the 'Code of Practice' for sustainable tourism in Clare tourism businesses. 	Tourism Directorate
4.14	Produce ecological guidelines and publication of resource material (e.g. booklets).	To provide information and educate stakeholders on best ecological practices and promote awareness through publication of resource material.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of resource material produced. 	Economic Directorate

PILLAR 5: Building Collaborative Partnerships for Nature

OBJECTIVE 5:

Enhance collaboration among all people adopting a whole-of-society approach to protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity within the county.

Enhancing collaboration among all stakeholders to protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity within County Clare requires a collective, whole-of-society approach.

This involves engaging with a wide range of groups, including local communities, government bodies, businesses, environmental organisations, schools, sports clubs, landowners, farmers, individuals, to work together to halt biodiversity loss and identify new opportunities to enhance nature.

The approach highlights the importance of recognising biodiversity as a collective responsibility and integrating conservation efforts into all aspects of our community and economic activities across County Clare.

By fostering partnerships, sharing knowledge and promoting sustainable practices, the people of Clare can create a more coordinated effort for preserving the natural environment.

Ultimately, this collaborative effort aims to ensure that biodiversity is protected while also supporting social wellbeing within communities in the county.



CASE STUDY 5

'Faith in Nature: Resurrecting Clare Churchyards for Biodiversity'

The 'Return to Nature Clare Church Biodiversity Project' is a pioneering pilot initiative funded by Clare County Council and the Local Biodiversity Action Fund, and led through the role of Clare County Council's Biodiversity Officer. Developed in 2023, the project partners with the Dioceses of Killaloe, Laudato Sí Ireland and 18 community groups across 16 parishes to implement biodiversity actions on church grounds.

Actions included the creation of wildflower meadows on church lawns, installing nest boxes on church structures for red-listed Swift, installing bat roost boxes, planting pollinator friendly native trees and bulbs, erecting bird tables and bird feeders and working with neighbouring farmers to install nest boxes for the barn owl.

The project works closely with BirdWatch Ireland, NPWS, Irish Seed Savers, Men's Sheds, schools, biodiversity experts, farmers and provides training courses to upskill local communities. Church grounds have been transformed into wildlife havens and now support orchids and wildflowers such as Marsh Orchid, Bee Orchid, Common Spotted Orchid, Ox-eye Daisy and Selfheal.

Building on the success of 2024, additional parishes were signed up in 2025 and there are now 23 churches across Clare undertaking actions for biodiversity on church grounds, continuing the mission of nature recovery and collaborative stewardship.



PILLAR 5: Building Collaborative Partnerships for Nature

OBJECTIVE 5:

Enhance collaboration among all stakeholders adopting a whole-of-society approach to protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity within the county.

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
5.1	Continue to work with faith communities to carry out biodiversity actions on church grounds, graveyards and parish lands.	To promote community engagement to carry out biodiversity actions at locations that are central to community life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of biodiversity projects completed, and communities signed up. 	Economic Directorate / External Stakeholders
5.2	Collaborate with recreational sports clubs, businesses and schools to carry out biodiversity actions and promote citizen science.	To promote engagement, awareness and biodiversity enhancement actions through new partnerships in the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of biodiversity projects completed. 	Economic and Physical Directorates supported by Social Directorate
5.3	Work with key stakeholders (landowners, NGOs, local communities and other relevant groups) in the conservation of semi-natural habitats (e.g. native trees, hedgerows) and promote uptake of schemes that benefit biodiversity (e.g. DAFM Native Woodland Schemes).	To value our natural heritage and to promote schemes that enhance biodiversity in the county.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of talks delivered. 	Economic Directorate / External stakeholders
5.4	Support marine and coastal organisations to build strategic alliances in marine areas working in partnership with local communities and key stakeholders to promote marine biodiversity, data collection and management actions.	Build a strategic alliance in at least one marine area where a future marine protected area can be effective and inclusive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of public events held and attended. Number of social media engagements undertaken. Number of community members contributing to social memory archive. Number of publications completed. Number of validated records of whales and dolphins recorded. Citizen science initiatives (e.g. Coastwatch, IWDG) promoted and implemented. Number of scientific reports completed. 	Economic Directorate / Irish Whale and Dolphin Group / Other External Stakeholders

Action No.	Action	Target	Key Performance Indicator	Implementation
5.5	Collaborate and support organisations in the county by providing biodiversity training to local communities, landowners and farmers and where possible, support biodiversity-themed festivals and events.	Increase training and awareness of biodiversity to local community groups, landowners and farmers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of training workshops / outreach events held. Number of biodiversity themed festivals supported. 	Economic Directorate / External Stakeholders
5.6	Promote and engage with local communities (e.g. Tidy Towns, local interest groups) to develop Community Biodiversity Action Plans, support biodiversity initiatives, advise on funding streams and encourage citizen science initiatives at a local level.	Increase the number of Community Biodiversity Action Plans in the county in accordance with the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2031, promote biodiversity funding opportunities and increase participation in citizen science initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of engagements held. Number of training events delivered. 	Economic Directorate supported by Physical and Rural Directorates / External Stakeholders
5.7	Engage and support local communities, landowners, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and other relevant stakeholders to protect the Burren National Park, all wildlife sanctuaries, proposed NHAs, nature reserves and natural watercourses, and that their educational and conservation values are enhanced and promoted.	To protect this natural resource within the county and ensure that the conservation importance of these areas is promoted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of events delivered. 	Economic Directorate, Council-wide / NPWS / External Stakeholders
5.8	Where feasible, support and engage with locally and nationally-led European Innovation Partnership (EIP), LIFE Programmes and Priority Action Areas projects wherever possible.	To support European and nationally funded initiatives that promote actions to halt biodiversity loss in the county.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of projects supported. Engagements with stakeholders held. 	Physical and Economic Directorates / Stakeholders
5.9	Continue to collaborate and partner with members of the Clare Biodiversity Forum to advise and deliver actions under the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031, working in partnership with the Heritage Forum.	To provide feedback and assistance in the implementation and monitoring of the Clare County Biodiversity Plan 2025-2031	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Heritage Forum meetings held. Actions to assist in the implementation of the plan completed. 	Economic, Physical and Rural Directorates / External Stakeholders



Implementation, Monitoring and Reporting of the Plan

Plan Implementation, Monitoring, Reporting and Resources

Clare County Council will prepare an annual project plan of biodiversity projects and initiatives to be undertaken in each respective year throughout the lifetime of this plan. This will include an implementation and monitoring plan that identifies targets and key milestones within the specified project timelines.

Funding will be sourced and secured to ensure the implementation of the annual Biodiversity Work Programme to achieve timely project deliverables and outputs which align with the actions of the plan. Monitoring the implementation of the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan will be overseen by the Biodiversity Officer.

The Clare Heritage and Biodiversity Forum will provide feedback and assistance in the implementation and monitoring of the plan. The forum will provide an opportunity for cross-collaboration and partnership among forum members.

Each action within the Biodiversity Action Plan has at least one associated key performance indicator (KPI) which allows for measuring progress in their implementation.

The plan promotes collaboration with all stakeholders to adopt a whole-of-society approach to the protection, conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in County Clare.

Progress Report

An annual progress report on the delivery of plan actions will be prepared by Clare County Council's Biodiversity Officer. The annual progress report will be submitted to the Council's Chief Executive and presented to the Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee within Clare County Council.

The progress of the Biodiversity Action Plan will be included in Clare County Council's annual submission under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023 which requires all public bodies to submit an annual report on its performance of its commitment under the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2023-2031.

Biodiversity Duty Form

The Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023 places the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 on a statutory footing. There is an obligation for local authorities to have regard to the objectives and targets of the NBAP in the performance of their functions. An online survey to allow public bodies to fulfil their reporting obligations has been developed by the NPWS.

Actions outlined under the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 (underpinned by the NBAP) will be reported on an annual basis with input from cross-departmental directorates within Clare County Council. The information provided by the Council will be collated by NPWS and will contribute towards informing the implementation review of Ireland's 4th NBAP.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1: Clare Heritage and Biodiversity Forum Members

Forum Member	Organisation	Role
Cllr Clare Colleran Molloy	Clare County Council	Public Representative
Cllr Gabriel Keating	Clare County Council	Public Representative
Cllr Dinny Gould	Clare County Council	Public Representative
Barry O'Loughlin	Clare County Council	Biodiversity Officer
Congella McGuire	Clare County Council	Heritage Officer
Candace Ingram	Clare County Council	Senior Executive Planner
Helen Quinn	Clare County Council	Senior Planner
Karen Foley	Clare County Council	Environmental Awareness Officer
Kenneth Reid	Clare County Council	Graduate Climate Action Officer
Helen Walsh	Clare County Council	County Librarian
Helen Carty	National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)	District Conservation Officer (Clare)
Stephen Walsh	Irish Farmers Association	Chair of Clare IFA branch
John Lusby	BirdWatch Ireland	Raptor Officer/Project Manager
Ian Hutchinson	Coillte	Forester
Don Cullinan	Ennis Tidy Towns	Committee member
Jonathan Coates Farrell	Inland Fisheries Ireland	IFI Inspector for Clare
Brendan Dunford	Burrenbeo Trust	Secretary
Declan Murphy	Teagasc	Environment & Technology Advisor/Agricultural Sustainability & Support Advisor
Sarah Hegarty	Green Schools (An Taisce)	Green Schools Travel Officer (Clare)
Tony Walsh	Clare Public Participation Network (PPN)	PPN Representative
Simon Berrow	Irish Whale and Dolphin Group	Chief Science Officer
Karen Kelleher	Clare Scouts Club	County Commissioner/County programming co-ordinator
Linda Lynch	National Monuments Service	Archaeologist
Leah Ní Thailtigh	An Clár as Gaeilge	Language Planning Officer

APPENDIX 2:

Summary of Strategic Policy Documents Guiding the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031

Strategic Policy Documents Guiding the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031



UN Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

At the United Nations (UN) 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity was established. Ireland signed the Convention on Biological Diversity in the year it opened and ratified it in 1996. The text of the convention, and the decisions taken collectively by the Parties at biannual meetings (the Conference of the Parties, or COPs) provide a global legal framework for actions to protect the natural world for the benefit of all life on Earth. The principle aims of the Convention on Biological Diversity are:

- the conservation of biological diversity,
- the sustainable use of its components and
- the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

The main mechanism by which we implement this global agreement is through the development and implementation of National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.



EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030

The EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 is a comprehensive plan which aims to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 with a target to protect 30% of land and sea areas, restoring nature and ecosystems in Europe, reducing pesticide use and ensuring biodiversity is integrated into fisheries, agriculture and forestry practices. The objective of the EU Biodiversity Strategy is to ensure that Europe's biodiversity will be on the path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of people, the planet, the climate and its economy. The strategy includes a target to create an ambitious nature restoration plan. Local authorities will play a crucial role in integrating the strategy at a local level by integrating biodiversity into policies and planning processes.



The International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN)

The International Union for Nature Conservation is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it, including the global conservation status of animal, fungi and plant species. One of the main functions of the IUCN is to monitor the worldwide status of species through its 'Red List'. It is an important assessment tool to inform action for biodiversity conservation and policy change, and provides information on range, population size, habitat and ecology, use and/or trade, threats and conservation actions. The IUCN Red List and the NPWS regional lists, are used to assess and prioritise species for conservation purposes which will be relevant to *Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan*.

Strategic Policy Documents Guiding the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031

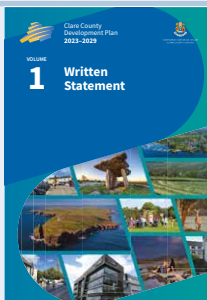


Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2023-2030

The National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 sets out actions through which government, civil and private sectors will undertake to achieve Ireland's 'Vision for Biodiversity'. The NBAP has five overarching objectives:

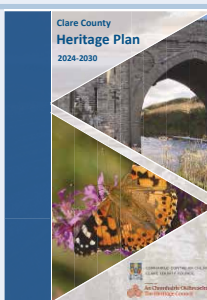
- Objective 1: Adopt a Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society Approach to Biodiversity
- Objective 2: Meet Urgent Conservation and Restoration Needs
- Objective 3: Secure Nature's Contribution to People
- Objective 4: Enhance the Evidence Base for Action on Biodiversity
- Objective 5: Strengthen Ireland's Contribution to International Biodiversity Initiatives

The National Biodiversity Plan is a high-level strategic document, with many of its actions aimed at local authority level, and it strives for a Whole-of-Government, Whole-of Society approach to the governance and conservation of biodiversity. Under Objective 1, all local authorities are required to "have a Biodiversity Action Plan adopted by the end of 2026 which is subject to regular review and revision processes".



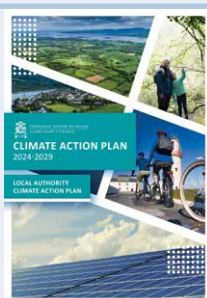
Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029

The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 sets out five strategic principles, including sustainability, by encouraging the integration of economic, environmental, social and cultural considerations into policies and objectives, climate action through the implementation of the National Planning Framework, and resilience to ensure goals are achieved. These strategies are implemented within the legislative and policy context that Ireland has ratified, including the EU Birds Directive, the EU Habitats Directive and the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, and national and county biodiversity action plans. The biodiversity, heritage, green infrastructure and environment sections of the County Development Plan focus on several key areas to ensure sustainable development and environmental protection is achieved. Chapter 15 of the County Development Plan comprises 30 strategic biodiversity objectives.



Clare County Heritage Plan 2024-2030

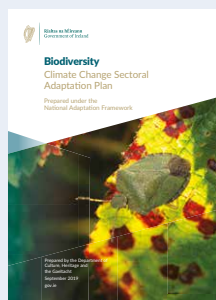
The Clare County Heritage Plan 2024-2030 outlines Clare County Council's commitment to safeguarding and enhancing the county's rich heritage over six years. This plan, the fourth of its kind, has been developed in response to the evolving challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change, and aims to build on the successes of previous plans. The Heritage Plan was formulated with extensive input from the Clare Heritage and Biodiversity Forum, local communities, stakeholders and the general public through a series of consultations and public events. The Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031 takes cognisance of actions outlined in the Heritage Plan as they relate to County Clare's natural heritage.



Clare Climate Action Plan 2024-2029

The Clare Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 is a five-year plan, underpinned by the National Climate Action Plan, and sets out key actions that will support County Clare in its transition to becoming a climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and carbon neutral economy by 2050. The Clare County Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 comprises fifteen natural environment-specific actions which aim to protect, conserve and enhance biodiversity and heritage through the implementation of effective climate-related actions.

Strategic Policy Documents Guiding the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031



The Biodiversity Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan (2019)

The Biodiversity Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan contributes to commitments made under the 2015 Climate Paris Agreement. The plan advocates for biodiversity's role and contribution to health, wellbeing and sustainable development. There are seventeen actions which relate to local authorities across the six overarching objectives of the plan including:

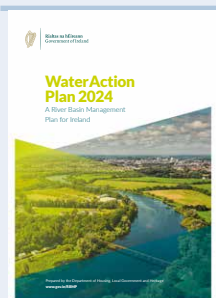
- Objective 1: Protect, restore and enhance biodiversity to increase the resilience of natural and human systems to climate change;
- Objective 2: Improve understanding of the impacts of climate change on biodiversity;
- Objective 3: Improve landscape connectivity to facilitate mobility in a changing climate;
- Objective 4: Engage society and all sectors to protect biodiversity to enhance resilience;
- Objective 5: Ensure sufficient financing is available to implement the Biodiversity Climate Change Adaptation Plan and

Objective 6: Put adequate monitoring and evaluation measures in place to review the implementation of the Biodiversity Climate Change Adaptation Plan.



Heritage Council's Strategic Plan 2023-2028

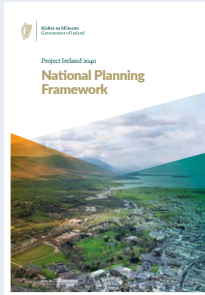
The Heritage Council Strategic Plan 2023–2028 is underpinned by six strategic pillars; Leadership and Stewardship; Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss; Research; Partnership; Communities; Education and Engagement. Under the over-arching pillar of Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss, the plan includes the provision to collaborate with local authorities, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the County and City Management Association, and to develop a network of Biodiversity Officers in each local authority. The plan also aims to ensure grant schemes will be established to encourage biodiversity protection and to ensure the role of the National Biodiversity Data Centre as a key feature of Irish natural heritage infrastructure.



National Water Action Plan for Ireland 2024

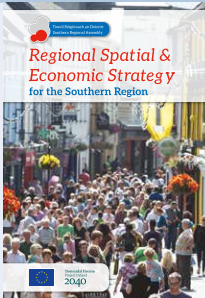
The Water Action Plan 2024: A River Basin Management Plan for Ireland outlines Ireland's strategy to protect and restore rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters under the third cycle of the EU Water Framework Directive. It builds on previous plans by enhancing integrated catchment management, increasing environmental ambition, strengthening evidence and ensuring dedicated resources. A review of Local Authority resources will support their role in water quality efforts. The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) will continue to drive local engagement and consultation with communities. A programme of measures has been drafted, targeting water protection and restoration, biodiversity and climate mitigation and adaptation across all 31 Local Authorities.

Strategic Policy Documents Guiding the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031



Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is Ireland's long-term strategic plan for growth and development up to 2040. It aims to shape regional development, manage population growth, and guide investment in infrastructure, housing, and services. The NPF promotes sustainable, compact growth in cities, towns, and rural areas, reducing urban sprawl and protecting the environment. It seeks balanced regional development through key regional strategies and aligns with climate action goals.



Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Southern Region 2019-2031

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy provides the strategic framework for regional development in the Southern Region. Its primary goal is to implement Project Ireland 2040, the National Planning Framework at a regional level, ensuring balanced and sustainable growth across the region. County Clare is one of nine counties included in the southern region. As part of the strategy's implementation, the Blue Green Infrastructure and Nature based Solutions Framework has been developed on behalf of the Southern Regional Assembly as part of the Interreg Europe Blue Green Cities Project. This Framework provides a resource for Local Authorities, decision makers and developers working in the region.



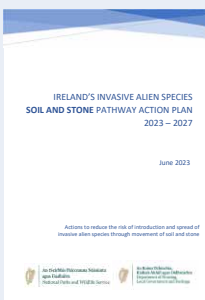
All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) 2021-2025

The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan is a collaborative initiative and shared action plan aimed at reversing the decline of pollinators across the island of Ireland. This second version of the AIPP identifies a total of 186 actions. The AIPP has six objectives aimed to make farmland, public land and private land pollinator friendly, the All-Ireland Honeybee Strategy, the conservation of rare pollinators, and strategic coordination of the plan. The plan emphasises providing food and shelter across all types of land to support pollinator populations. Clare County Council signed up as an official Council partner of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan in February 2020. The AIPP recognises that councils play a leading role in making their land more pollinator friendly.



National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS): Threat Response Plans and the Invasive Alien Species Soil and Stone Pathway Action Plan 2023-2027

The NPWS has developed several Threat Response Plans to establish a system of strict protection of species listed in Annex IV of the Habitats Directive. These three-year plans detail each species' range, distribution, habitat, threats, required actions, responsible parties and timelines. The Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2031 includes regard to current published Threat Response Plans: the *Lesser Horseshoe Bat Species Action Plan 2022–2026* and the *Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan 2024–2028*. All plans are available at NPWS Publications.



Ireland's *Invasive Alien Species Soil and Stone Pathway Action Plan 2023–2027* addresses the unintentional spread of invasive alien species and outlines local authorities' surveillance responsibilities. The plan outlines the role local authorities have in terms of surveillance of invasive alien species.

APPENDIX 3:

Summary of Legislative Frameworks Guiding the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031

Statutory Instruments Guiding the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031

European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 to 2021	The Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora) aims to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest across Europe. The Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC on the Conservation of Wild Birds) seeks to conserve all wild birds in the EU by setting out rules for their protection, management and control. The Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive are transposed into Irish legislation by means of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 / 2011) (as amended). Under Regulation 27 of the 2011 Regulations, all public authorities have a responsibility to avoid the deterioration of natural habitats and species protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives, and to exercise their functions and statutory powers in compliance with the Directives' requirements. Plans and projects are required to comply with Article 6(3) and, where necessary Article 6(4), of the Habitats Directive to ensure that an Appropriate Assessment is carried out in relation to works, plans and projects likely to impact on European sites (SACs and SPAs), whether directly or indirectly or in combination with any other plan(s) or project(s).
Wildlife Act 1976 to 2023 (as amended)	The main legislation pertaining to the conservation and protection of wildlife in Ireland is the Wildlife Act 1976, which has been amended by the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000, the Wildlife (Amendment) Acts 2010, 2012, 2021 and 2023. Currently, all bird species, 22 other animal species or groups of species and 86 species of flora are afforded protected status under the Wildlife Act. The Wildlife Act 1976 to 2023 is the basis for the designation of Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and areas designated for the presence of habitats and species of conservation value. The Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023 requires all public bodies to consider biodiversity in their plans, policies, actions and decisions and includes a new statutory duty for public bodies to prepare and submit a report to the Minister. This report must include information on measures adopted and progress made by the public body in regard to the National Biodiversity Action Plan or a Strategy.
EU Nature Restoration Law 2024	The Nature Restoration Law was adopted in the Council of the European Union in 2024 and represents a landmark piece of legislation that will significantly influence biodiversity conservation efforts in Ireland. The law is a core element of the European Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy. It sets out legally binding targets to restore at least 20% of the EU's land and sea areas by 2030, and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050. Its primary objective is to restore degraded ecosystems across the EU, focusing on those with the highest potential to capture and store carbon and reduce the impact of natural disasters. It specifically targets wetlands, forests, grasslands, rivers and lakes, heath and scrub, rocky habitats, dunes, pollinators, urban ecosystems, agricultural ecosystems, marine ecosystems and river connectivity.
The Flora Protection Order 2015	The Flora Protection Order makes it illegal to cut, uproot or damage listed species. It is illegal to alter, damage or interfere in any way with their habitats. The plants and their seed cannot be sold. This protection applies wherever these plants are found, whether inside or outside a designated site. The current list of plant species protected by Section 21 of the Wildlife Act 1976-2023 (as amended) is set out in the Flora (Protection) Order 2015, which supersedes orders made in 1980, 1987 and 1999.

Statutory Instruments Guiding the Clare County Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2031

The Planning and Development Act 2000 to 2024 (as amended)	The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) sets out the basic framework of the development management and consent system. It provides a statutory basis for protecting our natural heritage and includes the provision for the carrying out of Environmental Impact Assessments and Appropriate Assessments. There are certain classes of development that are exempt from the requirement to obtain planning permission, for example, if developed under another enactment. However, usually an exempt development will lose its exempt status should an EIA or AA be required. Under the Act, it is mandatory for development plans to include objectives for the conservation and protection of the environment. This must include the protection of natural heritage and the conservation and protection of designated sites.
The Water Framework Directive (WFD)	The Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC) provides a framework to protect all waterbodies within each European member state, including rivers, coastlines, groundwater, lakes and estuaries. The purpose of the WFD is to restore 'Good' ecological status to all water bodies and to ensure no deterioration occurs. The WFD runs in a 6-year cycle: the 1 st took place from 2009 to 2015, the 2 nd between 2016 to 2021, and the current 3 rd cycle runs from 2022 to 2027. Overall targets to improve water quality under the current cycle of the WFD for all of Ireland are outlined in the River Basin Management Plan 2022 to 2027. County Clare contains or overlaps 5 catchments: Mal Bay Catchment, Shannon Estuary North Catchment, Galway Bay South East Catchment, Lower Shannon (Lough Derg) Catchment (25C) and Lower Shannon and Mulkear Catchment (25D).
Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (SEA Directive)	The Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive refers to Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment and is implemented in Ireland through Statutory Instruments (SIs) No. 435 and No. 436 of European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (as amended by SI No. 200 and 201 of 2011). As County Development Plans and Local Area Plans could have significant environmental effects, the assessment process aims to identify where there are potential effects and how negative effects might be mitigated.
The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive	Environmental Impact Assessment is required under the EIA Directive 2014/52/EU, which is the most recent amendment to codified Directive 2011/92/EU on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment. The Directive is designed to strengthen the quality of the environmental impact assessment procedures in relation to environmental issues, including natural resources, sustainability, biodiversity and climate change. EIA is a method used by the competent authorities (e.g. Local Authority) in planning assessment to quantify the environmental impact of a development. The process ensures that sustainability and ecology, including biodiversity, are considered.

APPENDIX 4:

Designated Sites in County Clare

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in County Clare

Site Name	NPWS Site Code
Ballyallia Lake SAC	000014
Ballycullinan Lake SAC	000016
Ballycullinan, Old Domestic Building SAC	002246
Ballyogan Lough SAC	000019
Ballyteige (Clare) SAC	000994
Ballyvaughan Turlough SAC	000996
Black Head-Poulsallagh Complex SAC	000020
Carrowmore Dunes SAC	002250
Carrowmore Point to Spanish Point and Islands SAC	001021
Danes Hole, Poulnalecka SAC	000030
Dromore Woods and Loughs SAC	000032
East Burren Complex SAC	001926
Galway Bay Complex SAC	000268
Glendree Bog SAC	001912
Glenomra Wood SAC	001013
Inagh River Estuary SAC	000036
Kilkee Reefs SAC	002264
Kilkishen House SAC	002319
Knockanira House SAC	002318
Lough Gash Turlough SAC	000051
Loughatorick South Bog SAC	000308
Lower River Shannon SAC	002165
Moneen Mountain SAC	000054
Moyree River System SAC	000057
Newgrove House SAC	002157
Newhall and Edenvale Complex SAC	002091
Old Domestic Building (Keevagh) SAC	002010
Old Domestic Buildings, Rylane SAC	002314
Old Farm Buildings, Ballymacrogan SAC	002245
Pollagoona Bog SAC	002126
Pouladatig Cave SAC	000037
Poulnagordon Cave (Quin) SAC	000064
Ratty River Cave SAC	002316
Slieve Bernagh Bog SAC	002312
Termon Lough SAC	001321
Toonagh Estate SAC	002247
Tullaheer Lough and Bog SAC	002343

Special Protected Areas (SPAs) in County Clare

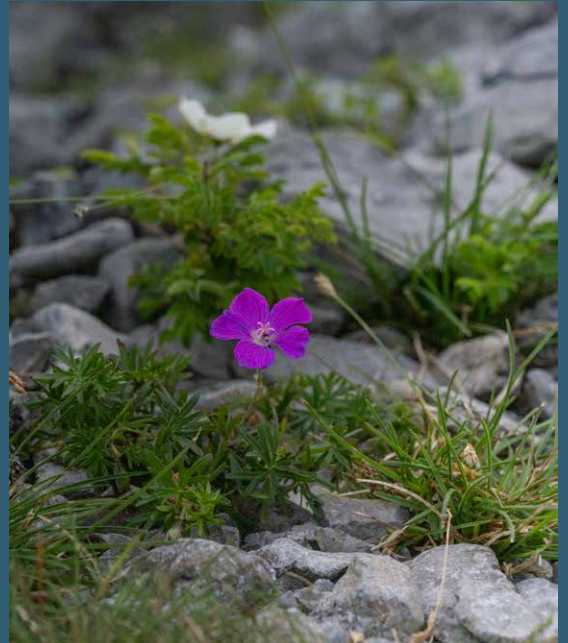
Site Name	NPWS Site Code
Ballyallia Lough SPA	004041
Cliffs of Moher SPA	004005
Corofin Wetlands SPA	004220
Illaunonearaun SPA	004114
Inner Galway Bay SPA	004031
Loop Head SPA	004119
Lough Derg (Shannon) SPA	004058
Mid-Clare Coast SPA	004182
River Shannon and River Fergus Estuaries SPA	004077
Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA	001468

Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) in County Clare

Site Name	NPWS Site Code
Ayle Lower Bog NHA	000993
Cloonloun More Bog NHA	002307
Cragnashingaun Bogs NHA	002400
Doon Lough NHA	000337
Gortacullin Bog NHA	002401
Lough Acrow Bogs NHA	002421
Lough Atorick District Bogs NHA	002377
Lough Naminna Bog NHA	002367
Loughanilloon Bog NHA	001020
Maghera Mountain Bogs NHA	002442
Oysterman's Marsh NHA	002439
Slievecallan Mountain Bog NHA	002397
Woodcock Hill Bog NHA	002402

Photography Contributions

- Enda O'Loughlin
- Wetland Surveys Ireland
- Clare County Council
- Daniel Hargreaves
- Michael O'Brien
- Kate Flood
- Barry O'Loughlin
- Rocket Science Media
- Sinead Keane
- Aine Bourke
- Kevin Collins
- Linda Hebenstreit
- Marina Levitina
- Jesmond Harding
- Irish Whale and Dolphin Group
- Thomas O'Flynn
- Alan McCarthy



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