



Public Participation Network **Kildare**

Kildare PPN Submission

Kildare County Council

Draft Biodiversity Action Plan for County Kildare

2026 - 2031

Kildare Public Participation Network
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INTRODUCTION

Kildare Public Participation Network (Kildare PPN) was established on foot of the Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement with Local Government published in 2014, which recommended greater input by communities into decision making at local Government level. The Local Government Reform Act 2014 provided for the formal establishment of PPNs and they are now operational in all Local Authority areas.

Kildare Public Participation Network (PPN), representing over 800 member groups across community and voluntary, social inclusion, and environmental pillars, welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the pre-draft of the County Kildare Biodiversity Action Plan. This plan represents a vital step forward in addressing the biodiversity crisis at a local level. Kildare's natural heritage – from its rare raised bogs to the Rye Water Valley, from native woodlands to canal systems – is both ecologically valuable and irreplaceable. However, as acknowledged in the paper, the county's biodiversity is under considerable pressure, echoing national and global trends.

The Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan provides a much-needed framework to protect, conserve, restore, and promote biodiversity across Kildare over the next five years. As a community-based network, we believe strongly in a collaborative approach that puts people at the centre of local biodiversity action. We therefore offer the following feedback and recommendations.

1. Embracing a Whole-of-Community Model

We support the “whole of government, whole of society” model outlined in the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan. To be successful, the Kildare County Council Biodiversity Action Plan must embed community participation at every level – in planning, implementation, and monitoring.

We recommend:

- Increased funding opportunities and support for community-led biodiversity projects
- Citizen science initiatives and participatory research.
- Training and education opportunities for residents, community groups, and landowners.
- Structures that enable co-creation between the Council and local organisations.

Communities in Kildare including Tidy Towns groups, farmers, youth organisations, schools, and residents’ associations are already doing the work. This plan should amplify and support their efforts.

The Kildare Biodiversity Action Plan should support community-managed biodiversity areas such as Umeras Peatlands Park and Lullymore Heritage Park. While Kildare has large areas of peatland now being restored, communities report ongoing issues with illegal dumping, shooting, fires, and quad use. Local communities must be empowered not just as passive stakeholders, but as active managers and guardians of these sites.

2. Recognising the Value of Local Knowledge

Many PPN members bring deep local knowledge of the land, habitats, and wildlife. This expertise should be actively included in decision-making, particularly in mapping and planning.

We recommend:

- Facilitating local biodiversity audits and participatory mapping.
- Creating pathways for communities to feed into data collection and monitoring.
- Ensuring traditional ecological knowledge is respected and preserved.

Local groups such as Umeras Community Development have undertaken biodiversity studies of their local bogs and have successfully built collaborations with farmers and national biodiversity agencies. This citizen-led work should be supported and scaled up with access to citizen science toolkits, including guides, equipment, and training.

3. Supporting Habitat Protection and Nature Restoration

We endorse strong, action-based commitments to protect and restore the county's valuable and vulnerable habitats: Kildare's habitats are under serious pressure. The plan must contain specific, action-based commitments to conserve and restore them.

Hedgerows and Woodlands:

- Implement pilot projects on traditional hedgerow management.
- Act on findings from the *County Kildare Hedgerow Appraisal Survey (2022)*.
- Enforce ecological surveys prior to hedgerow removal.
- Simplify the process for securing Tree Preservation Orders (our members have highlighted the need to address challenges in securing Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), citing issues with reluctance from the Planning Department to apply for them.)
- Establish a native tree and hedgerow nursery for local planting schemes.
- Clearly specified [meters] limits on removal of hedgerows.

Bogs, Wetlands, and Waterways:

- Continue to support the development of a National Peatlands Park.
- Prioritise restoration of Naas Lakes and other sensitive aquatic habitats.
- Extend the Corbally Harbour development to include conservation corridors from Great Connell to Athgarvan.
- Develop the Liffey corridor as a protected regional park, integrating green and blue infrastructure.
- Use nature-based solutions to restore river floodplains.
- Require ecologist-led designs for SuDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems).
- Use only native species in public landscaping.
- Prohibit works near riverbanks without ecological assessments.

Invasive Species:

The removal of invasive species must be science-led and joined-up; tackling individual pockets of invasive species in isolation is ineffective. Management of invasive species needs to be carried out on an intercounty basis.

Community-Led Grants:

- Introduce a “**Kildare Wild Spaces**” grant scheme to support local biodiversity efforts, or expand the existing Heritage Grant Scheme to include biodiversity restoration projects.

The upcoming National Nature Restoration Strategy presents a key opportunity to designate large areas of Kildare’s peatlands for biodiversity protection. Special attention should be given to the Slate and Figile River Floodplains, which are essential habitats for thousands of protected wintering birds and are home to one of the few remaining breeding populations of Irish Curlew east of the Shannon. This area should be prioritised within the Biodiversity Action Plan and the County Development Plan.

4. Prioritising Urban and Peri-Urban Biodiversity

With growing urbanisation, nature in towns and villages must not be an afterthought.

We recommend:

- Mandating native and diverse planting in all new developments.
- Including biodiversity as part of estate management responsibilities.
- Encouraging pollinator-friendly verge and green space maintenance.
- Promoting pocket parks, community gardens, and allotments.
- Creating clear biodiversity guidelines for planners, developers, and management companies.

5. Education, Awareness and Youth Engagement

Education is key to long-term change. The Biodiversity Action Plan should include clear commitments to public awareness and youth engagement.

We recommend:

- A Community Biodiversity Toolkit or promotion of existing All Ireland Pollinator Plan resources tailored for local use.
- A county-wide campaign on biodiversity loss and what people can do, including a county-wide promotion of 'no mow May'.
- Youth-focused projects through Scouts, schools, and youth clubs.

- Inclusive outreach across all communities and backgrounds.
- Workshops on invasive species and community training in safe removal methods.
- Promoting bans on peat-based products and imported invasive plants.
- Support for biodiversity projects in sports clubs, estates, and housing developments.
- Hands-on youth involvement in community conservation activities. This real-life experience fosters both ecological awareness and community cohesion. Groups like Umeras Community Development, which manage a large local peatland, are ideally placed to host youth engagement and intergenerational learning.

6. Monitoring, Data and Community Science

We welcome the plan's focus on evidence-based action. A strong data system should empower both professionals and communities.

We recommend:

- Partnering with the National Biodiversity Data Centre and academic institutions.
- Creating a publicly accessible biodiversity portal for mapping, citizen reporting, and invasive species alerts.
- Developing a county-wide database of rare species and habitats to inform planning decisions.
- Publishing a full list of identified County Biodiversity Sites in the final plan.
- Conservation-focused community groups should be supported with tools and equipment to carry out citizen science, particularly to monitor regenerating habitats. Telling these positive biodiversity stories is vital for public engagement and policy support.

7. Resourcing the Plan

A strong plan needs strong support.

We recommend:

- Adequate funding and staffing for the Biodiversity Office.
- Clear coordination between Council departments (e.g. Planning, Housing, Transport, Parks).

- Multi-year funding schemes for community and NGO biodiversity initiatives.
- Annual reporting and accountability mechanisms to track progress.
- That Kildare County Council takes a lead role in biodiversity projects – particularly at the planning and funding stages – ensuring they are evidence-based and scientifically sound. Community groups should be central to implementation, but not overburdened with the responsibility to design, fund, and deliver these initiatives alone.

8. Additional Observations

- Kildare has one of the lowest levels of designated biodiversity areas in Ireland, and many are in decline. With Bord na Móna headquartered in the county, there is a major opportunity to develop new, large-scale biodiversity areas on former peatlands, helping Kildare contribute meaningfully to the national goal of 20% high-biodiversity area coverage.
- Invasive species management must be strategic and science-led, with a coordinated inter-county approach to be truly effective. Tackling isolated infestations is insufficient without landscape-level coordination.
- Renewable energy development must prioritise smart land use. For instance, installing solar panels on car parks and industrial roofs should be encouraged instead of developing solar farms on greenfields or wind farms on bogs.
- Biodiversity plans should include actions that promote local food systems and biodiversity-friendly farming, helping to link environmental goals with rural livelihoods.

9. Conclusion

Kildare PPN commends Kildare County Council for initiating this important process and engaging early with the public. The loss of biodiversity is a serious issue, but we also believe there's real hope – especially when local communities are part of the solution. Our network is committed to supporting this work and looks forward to collaborating with the Council, the Biodiversity Officer, and other stakeholders in the months and years ahead.

We encourage the Council to make sure the final plan includes everyone, gives people a say, and shares responsibility. Protecting nature isn't just about wildlife – it's about looking after our communities, our environment, and our future.