

Offaly

Biodiversity

Action Plan

2025 - 2030



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



Silver River, Cadamstown - Paul Moore

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OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL FOREWORD

River Shannon at Meelick Weir looking into County Offaly - Paul Moore

We welcome the adoption by Offaly County Council of the first Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 - 2030, produced by Offaly County Council in partnership with the biodiversity working group of the County Offaly Heritage Forum. We appreciate the guidance and support of the Heritage Council and their funding towards the development of the plan and its implementation. The Plan builds on the work previously achieved under multiple Offaly Heritage Plans.

This Plan sets out a framework for the protection, conservation and management of the county's biodiversity and provides an in-depth series of actions complementing the Offaly Heritage Plan 2023 - 2027. This plan underpins and aligns with the objectives of **Offaly's County Development Plan 2021 - 2027** and the Council's recently published **Offaly Corporate Plan 2024 - 2029**. Together with the Offaly **Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2029**, this plan acts to focus the work of Offaly County Council in the coming years to obtain a more sustainable place for people to live and where nature can thrive.

The Plan has been developed to closely align with the objectives and actions of the **4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 - 2030** which ensures our work will benefit habitats and species both locally and nationally.

Through the implementation of this plan, we hope to improve our knowledge of the county's natural heritage, to raise awareness and develop appreciation of the county's biodiversity and the functions it performs.

The actions in this plan when implemented will guide the sustainable development of the county in a manner which respects and protects this important resource.

To succeed, this plan requires the support of individuals, community groups, government agencies, non-government organisations, industry and businesses. This combined focus will make strides towards the effective protection of the county's natural heritage for the benefit and use of future generations.

We wish to thank all those who contributed to the preparation of this plan, our Elected Members for their support in adopting the plan and wish those involved in its implementation every success.



Cllr. Audrey Hennessy Kennedy
Cathaoirleach



Anna Marie Delaney
Chief Executive

HERITAGE COUNCIL INTRODUCTION

We are delighted to introduce the inaugural Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan (2025–2030). This landmark plan represents a vital step in translating national biodiversity policy into local actions, reflecting Offaly’s distinctive landscapes, rich natural heritage, and engaged communities.

The Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme, established by the Heritage Council in partnership with the City and County Management Association, has been pivotal in embedding biodiversity at the heart of local decision-making. Through funding, training, and the development of networks, this programme equips local authorities with the tools to address the challenges and opportunities in biodiversity conservation. In Offaly, we acknowledge the foundational work undertaken by the Heritage Office and the Heritage Forum, whose dedication laid a strong groundwork prior to the appointment of the county’s first Biodiversity Officer in 2023.

The integrated, holistic approach to heritage embraced by Offaly County Council is particularly inspiring. The collaboration between the Heritage Forum and the Biodiversity Working Group exemplifies how natural, built, and cultural heritage are interconnected. This synergy mirrors how communities perceive and value their environment, recognising that these elements together create places of meaning, identity, and vitality.

The creation and implementation of a County Biodiversity Action Plan not only protects habitats and species but also supports local pride and resilience. The Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan embodies this ethos, drawing on community input, expert knowledge, and policy guidance to chart a course for sustainable, impactful conservation. As we face increasing environmental challenges, the implementation of this plan will be a testament to the strength of partnerships and the commitment of all involved.

The Heritage Council looks forward to supporting Offaly County Council, the Biodiversity Officer, and local communities as they deliver this ambitious and essential plan.



Dr Martina Moloney
Chairperson, The Heritage Council



Virginia Teehan
Chief Executive, The Heritage Council

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project is co-funded by Offaly County Council and The Heritage Council.

Offaly County Council would like to acknowledge the input of the County Offaly Heritage Forum and Offaly Biodiversity Working Group and their guidance and input into the compilation of this plan.

Offaly County Council would like to acknowledge the submissions made by all individuals and organisations which have been integral to creating this plan.

Photos: Dan Singer, Declan Franks, Paul Moore, Tom O’Hanlon, Dylan Vaughan, Tina Claffey, Ricky Whelan

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INTRODUCTION

The Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 – 2030 sets out the work of Offaly County Council in partnership with stakeholders to deliver the actions listed over the 5-year lifespan of the plan.

This is the first stand-alone Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan (LABAP) for Offaly, with previous biodiversity objectives included in the five **Offaly Heritage Plans** dating from 2001. This plan is written in the context of the **4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 - 2030**.

The plan was developed under the guidance of The Heritage Council, to which the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme is intrinsically linked. This plan was carefully considered in the context of the **Offaly County Development Plan 2021 – 2027** and other relevant local and regional plans such as the **Offaly Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2029**. In accordance with the commitments set out in the **SDG National Framework Plan 2022-2024** the Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan has been assessed for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) impact at SDG target level, and will progress towards meeting 12 out of the 17 SDGs.

The Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan was developed through the work of the **Offaly Biodiversity Working Group (BWG)** which was created under the **Offaly Heritage Forum** for this purpose. The BWG brought together local and national experts on a myriad of subject's from species, habitats, conservation, planning, community and policy. Additionally, representatives from across the Offaly County Council participated to shape the actions and objectives contained. Finally, the submission made by individuals, groups, organisations and agencies during the two consultation phases were clear and insightful and helped form the actions of the plan.

A photograph of a forest floor covered in a dense carpet of bluebells. The flowers are in full bloom, creating a vibrant blue sea. Several tree trunks are visible, some with moss growing on them. The background is filled with lush green foliage, and sunlight filters through the trees, creating a dappled light effect.

“Nature should be accessible to all, and we need biodiversity rich sites close to where people live”

VISION

To build on the past work of Offaly County Council and by communities across the county to protect and enhance our natural areas to benefit biodiversity and people. To do this we will work with communities, farmers and landowners, state bodies, business and anyone who possesses similar values.

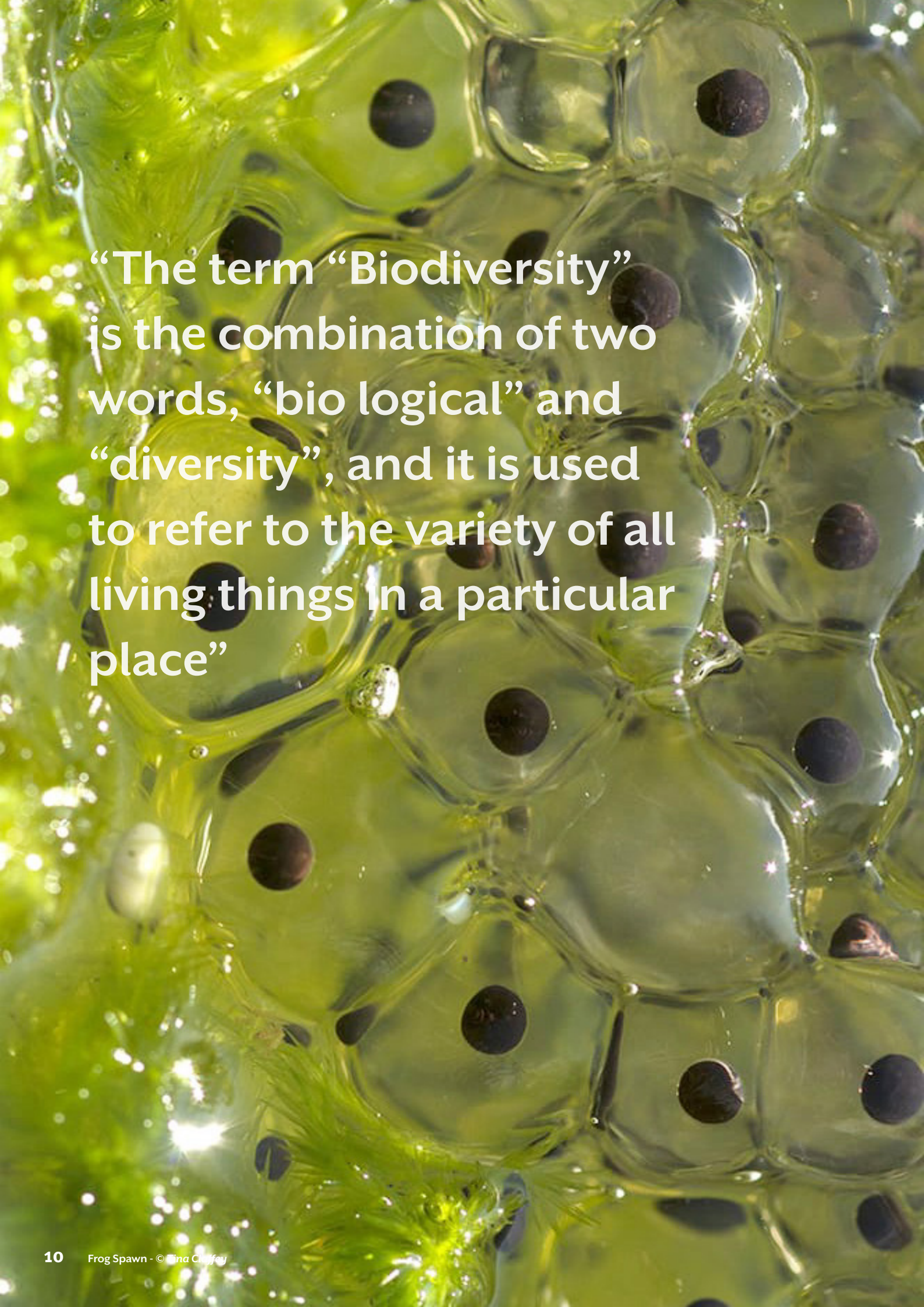
We want to protect the nature on our doorsteps, in the wider countryside and in the wilder more remote parts of the county.

Nature should be accessible to all, and we need biodiversity rich sites close to where people live, but we also need to give our habitats and native species space where it is required for them to thrive, by managing our existing habitats and creating new ones.

Our work will ensure we build climate resilience into our plans and projects to ensure our native flora and fauna are protected from the effects of climate change.



Clonoghill Cemetery, Birr – Ricky Whelan

A microscopic view of frogspawn, showing numerous green, oval-shaped cells with dark, circular nuclei. The cells are arranged in a somewhat regular pattern, and the overall appearance is that of a dense, textured surface. The lighting is bright, creating a shimmering effect on the cells.

“The term “Biodiversity”
is the combination of two
words, “bio logical” and
“diversity”, and it is used
to refer to the variety of all
living things in a particular
place”

BIODIVERSITY

What is it and why is it important?

The term “**Biodiversity**” is the combination of two words, “biological” and “diversity”, and it is used to refer to the variety of all living things in a particular place. However, it is important to remember that biodiversity is much more than just the number of different plants or animals, and is best understood when divided into its four separate levels as follows:

1. Species Diversity: refers to the number of different types of plants, animals, fungi, bacteria and other living organisms, both wild and domesticated.

2. Genetic Diversity: refers to the unique DNA which an individual plant or animal possesses. Genetic diversity is essential for populations of different species to remain healthy and functional.

3. Habitat Diversity: refers to the ‘home’ of different species, and provides its specific requirements in terms of food, shelter and a means of reproduction.

4. Ecosystems Diversity: refers to the relationships between different species, their habitats, food-webs, and their local non-living environment (geology, hydrology and micro-climate).

Ecosystem diversity is the most important of these, as it recognises that a species, or a habitat, does not exist independently of its surroundings.

Therefore, in order to protect an individual species or habitat, appropriate conservation measures must be extended to the community and physical environment in which it exists. As such, in the context of biodiversity conservation, it is vital that ecosystems diversity is understood, promoted and protected.

The conservation of biodiversity forms part of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals. **In a perfect world, biodiversity would be protected for its own sake, but in the real world, biodiversity is generally distilled into the services it can provide for society.**

These services can be broken down into regulating services, provisioning services, supporting services, and cultural services, and they have become increasingly recognised and valued as a result of our increasing awareness of climate change and biodiversity loss, and the impacts these are having both globally and locally.

1. Provisioning Services: Drinking Water, Food, Medicine, Clothing Textiles, Shelter Materials (timber, stone), Fuels.

2. Regulating Services: Water Flow (flood management and drainage), Water Purification, Air Quality, Pollination, Organic Matter Decomposition, Carbon Storage.

3. Supporting Services: Soil Creation, Nutrient Cycling, Photosynthesis, Water Cycle.

4. Cultural Services: Folklore and Heritage, Religious and Spiritual, Artistic and Aesthetic, Knowledge and Social Relationships.

OFFALY BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

This plan has been created in the context of the many related European, national and local policies and laws. **The EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030** sets targets for member states in addressing the biodiversity crisis, whilst **The Nature Restoration Law (NRL)** puts legally binding targets in place up to 2050. **The Birds and Habitats Directives** ensure our designated sites (SAC/SPAs) are carefully protected and monitored whilst the **Wildlife Act** serves us within the Irish legal context to protect nature. **The 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan** takes those European policies and applies them in an Irish ecological and legal context. It outlines plans and policies such as the **Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan** and the **All-Ireland Pollinator Plan** which should be adopted and followed by policy makers. Care has also been taken here to prepare this plan in accordance with the relevant objectives and actions contained within **The Offaly Climate Action**

Plan 2024 – 2029 (OCAP). The OCAP echoes the policies in **The Climate Action Plan 2024**, fitting them to local circumstances within Offaly and the midlands region, such as the scale of peat habitats and soils in the county. Other national and European policies and laws, such as the **National Planning Framework Ireland 2040** and the **Water Framework Directive** are closely considered in the formulation of the **Offaly County Development and Corporate Plans** to which this plan aligns.

A summary description of the policies and laws mentioned above is given in **Appendix Three**.



POLICY CONTEXT OF THE PLAN

What is a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan (LABAP)?

The LABAP is designed to provide a structured approach to biodiversity conservation at the local authority level. It outlines the objectives, strategies, and actions needed to protect and enhance biodiversity within respective local authority areas.

The plan is developed in the context of both national and international biodiversity commitments as well as regional and local policies, priorities and local consultation and is aligned with existing environmental policies and legislation. A Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan provides the context for the local authority to work with and support local communities, agencies, NGOs and landowners to develop projects to record and conserve their local biodiversity within a regional and national context.

Up until 2024, actions for biodiversity have been incorporated in the Offaly Heritage Plans. The Offaly Heritage Plan 2023-2027 looked forward to the appointment of the biodiversity officer and stated that the plan will be revisited and expanded with their arrival. Now with a full-time biodiversity officer in place since March 2023; increased financial and staff resources and focus on the biodiversity crisis, a more in-depth plan is being rolled-out.

Under the actions of the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan, it is a requirement for all government departments and local authorities to have Biodiversity Action Plans in

place by the end of 2026. With this target to meet, Offaly County Council undertook the process in 2024 to set out its plan for the 5-year period between 2025 and 2030.

Context of the LABAP

The 4th National Biodiversity Plan (NBAP) was published on 25 January 2024. It is the national plan setting out the high-level strategic objectives for government to action and achieve over the period of the plan (2023 – 2030).

National Biodiversity Action Plan -

Overall Strategic Objectives

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

Of the 195 actions listed under the 5 strategic objectives, 23 actions from 5 strategic objectives are deemed the responsibility of our local authorities. These actions are listed on Table 13 – **NBAP Actions relevant to local authorities** in the appendix.

Of the 195 actions listed under the five strategic objectives, 23 actions from five strategic objectives are deemed the responsibility of our local authorities. These actions are listed on Table 13 – NBAP Actions relevant to local authorities in the **Appendix One** of this document.



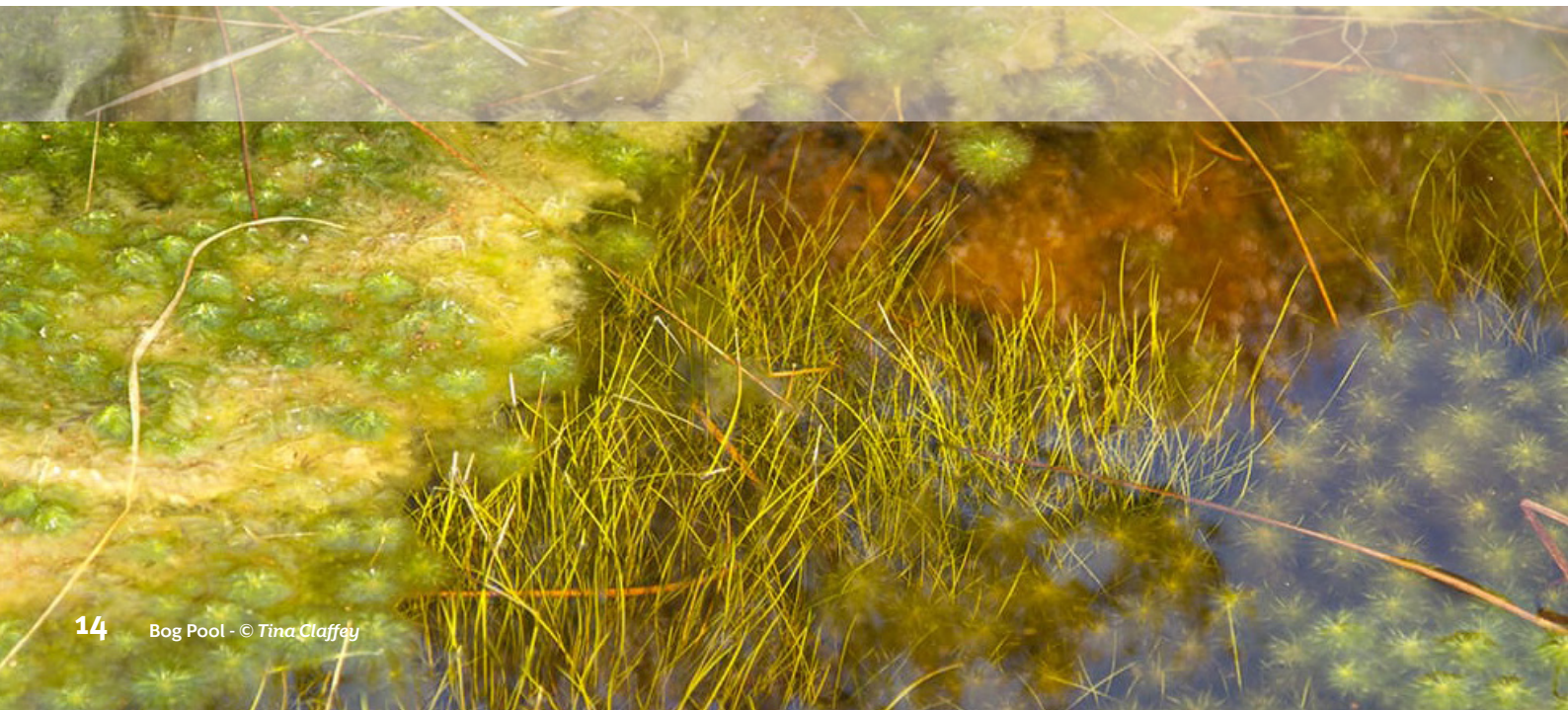
LABAP Development Stages

A LABAP is developed over a series of stages to ensure it fulfils its brief. For example, a Biodiversity Working Group was formed to guide and steer the process. In addition, consultation with the public and other appropriate stakeholders must take place at both pre-draft and draft stages. The Plan also aligns with other national, regional and local policies such as the County Development Plan, which all takes time to consider and carry out.

An indicative timeline with key stages is illustrated and set out by the Heritage Council in their guidelines for the preparation of the LABAPs.

BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN STAGES

- 1 PREPARATION**
Secure agreement of the Management team and establish a Biodiversity Working Group. Gather background data and identify gaps.
- 2 VISION AND OBJECTIVES**
Agree the broad aims of the Biodiversity Plan with the Biodiversity Working Group
- 3 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT**
Public consultation stage one: produce a discussion paper, hold meetings and invite submissions.
- 4 PLAN DEVELOPMENT**
Identify the issues and needs, agree objectives and actions and prepare a draft plan, liaising with colleagues and the Working Group. AA and SEA Screening.
- 5 PLAN REVIEW**
Present the draft plan to the Management Team and SPC for comment/approval.
- 6 PUBLIC REVIEW**
Public consultation on draft plan: make the plan available online through libraries and hold meetings.
- 7 PLAN APPROVAL**
Revise the draft plan and present it to Senior Management, the appropriate SPC(s) and full Council for approval.
- 8 PUBLICATION**
Publish and launch the new Biodiversity Action Plan.



OFFALY BIODIVERSITY WORKING GROUP

The establishment of a Biodiversity Working Group is a pivotal step in the development and implementation of a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan (LABAP).

The primary role of this working group is to provide guidance and expertise throughout the planning, implementation, monitoring and review phases of the LABAP. Responsibilities include reviewing existing biodiversity data, identifying key conservation priorities, recommending strategies and actions, and monitoring the progress of the LABAP's implementation. The working group also serves as a liaison between the Local Authority and various stakeholders, ensuring that the plan is both comprehensive and community backed.

Offaly Biodiversity Working Group Members

- Brian Caffrey** – BirdWatch Ireland, Head of Surveys and Monitoring | **Caroline Lalor** – FarmPeat, Project Manager/Ecologist
Cathal Flood/Basil Mannion - LAWPRO | **Colm Malone** – NPWS Conservation Ranger
Fiona Devery – Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland - Offaly County Recorder
George Smith – Bryophyte recorder for Offaly and Ecologist (Blackthorn Ecology) | **Ricky Whelan** – Offaly County Council Biodiversity Officer
James Condrón – Offaly County Council A/Senior Executive Planner | **Pat Foley** – Offaly PPN Rep (environment)/Offaly Heritage Forum



Members of the Offaly Biodiversity Working Group L to R: , James Condrón, Brian Caffrey, Ricky Whelan, George Smith, Pat Foley
Front: Fiona Devery and Caroline Lalor

OFFALY LABAP 2025 – 2030

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Surveys + Monitoring

Actions under this objective will aim to help identify the condition of habitats and the diversity and extent of our plant and wildlife populations. It is vital that we survey these groups and monitor their condition over time. These surveys help us to identify key priority areas for action and how efforts and resources should be directed over the life of the plan. For example, past actions delivered under the Offaly Heritage Plans have included County Swift Surveys which have resulted in interventions and direct conservation action for Swifts in Offaly.

Actions for Biodiversity

Actions included under this objective will relate to direct and physical interventions and projects to increase, improve and benefit our habitats, flora and fauna within the county. The Tullamore Living River project and the Syngefield Demesne project in the Birr area are examples of the type of direct action that can be taken to increase habitats and benefit biodiversity in the county.

Alien Invasive Species (AIS)

Actions here will link directly to national policy and work to identify and eradicate Alien Invasive Species. For example, Offaly County Council has an ongoing and successful Japanese Knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*) which was identified as a problem species in 2009. Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) was identified as a problem on the Camcor River in 2017, works to reduce and monitor its distribution are ongoing. Because of the threat of new or previously unrecorded Alien Invasive Species (AIS) to the flora and fauna of the county we need to keep this objective and related actions to the fore front of our plans.

Building Resilience

Actions here will refer to futureproofing our approach to making our habitats and conservation projects climate resilient in terms of changing weather patterns, more frequent flooding events and wildfires being relevant examples. These actions together with the actions listed in the Offaly Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2029 will be vital in conserving the habitats and species here in Offaly.

Awareness + Engagement

Actions under this objective focus on building awareness of environmental topics and biodiversity across the county by engaging with communities, groups and stakeholders. This will include sharing the joy of biodiversity, recording what is in your area as well as awareness of the threats and issues affecting wildlife and wild places and how we can all be involved in the solutions. Actions might include, the hosting of events, conducting training and upskilling events for community groups, citizen science initiatives and promoting schools' biodiversity programmes such as the green flag initiatives.

A photograph of a bog wetland landscape. In the foreground, there are tall, dry, brown reeds and grasses. In the middle ground, there is a body of water with several bare, dark trees. In the background, there is a line of trees and a forested hill under a clear blue sky.

“Actions under this objective focus on building awareness of environmental topics and biodiversity across the county by engaging with communities, groups and stakeholders”

OCC BIODIVERSITY PROJECT CASE STUDY

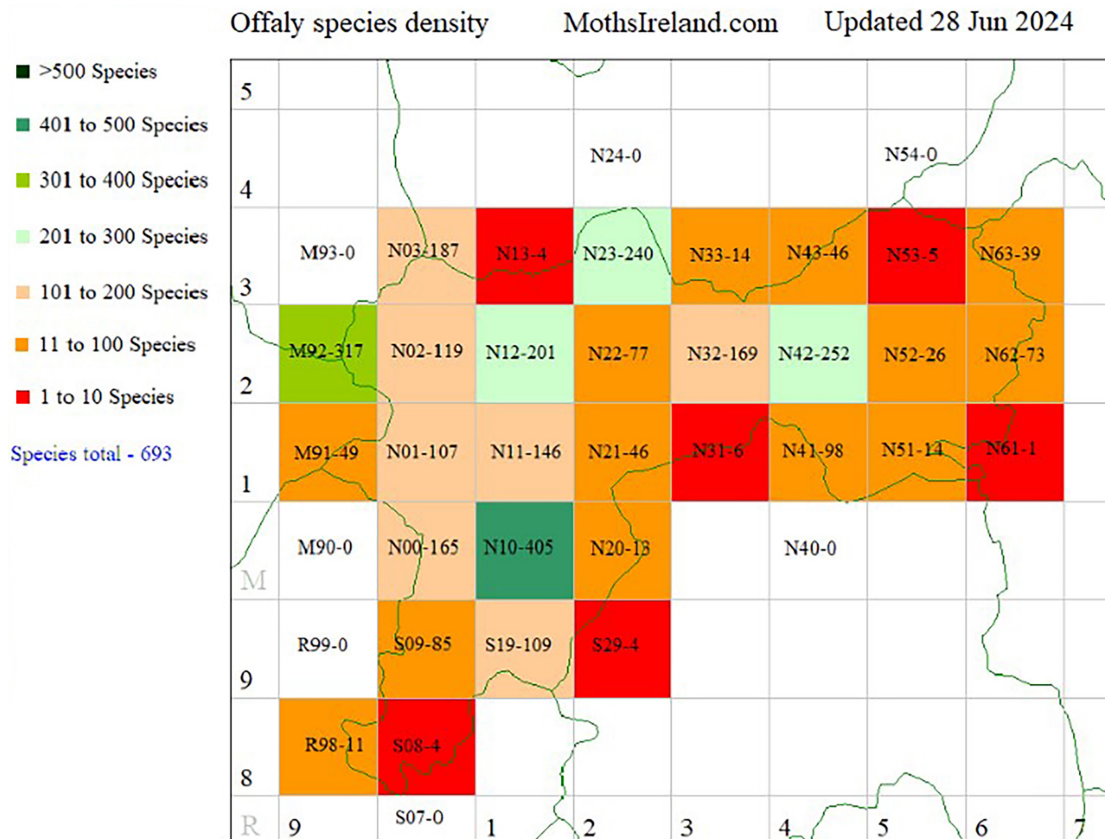
1. CITIZEN SCIENCE

Positive collaborations between the Offaly Heritage Office, the National Biodiversity Data Centre, ENGOs and specialist groups has increased citizen science activities and resulted in greater biodiversity recording in Offaly.

Following the publication by Offaly County Council of the “State of the Wild” by John Feehan in 2007 and the establishment of the Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) in the same year, Offaly Heritage Office has supported citizen science initiatives by promoting national species surveys and helped upskill local volunteers through, providing survey and identification materials, hosting training events and workshops together with the NBDC and under the Offaly Naturalists Field Club annual programme.

Offaly County Council has commissioned a number ENGOs and specialist groups on ecological + species, such as BirdWatch Ireland on County Swift Surveys in 2017 and 2023, surveys which depended on local knowledge and input from citizen scientists.

Further to this the development of a moth trap loan scheme by Offaly County Council and the formation of a network of citizen science moth trappers in the county has led to a huge increase in the number of moths and other insect species being recorded in Offaly, including many new species to the county being identified.



“the formation of a network of citizen science moth trappers in the county has led to a huge increase in the number of moths and other insect species being recorded in Offaly”



Angled shades Moth - Ricky Whelan

BIODIVERSITY IN OFFALY

Offaly is rich in biodiversity and contains many habitats and perhaps is best known for its bogs. These bogs dominate the county landscape, but other important biodiversity sites help complete the overall mosaic, from the eskers to the Shannon Callows and the Slieve Bloom Mountains. Many of these important areas are protected under national and European legislation and are detailed below. Between them they host protected plants and animals and without these key sites we couldn't boast the huge diversity of native flora and fauna that calls County Offaly home. These sites are tremendously important for biodiversity and are afforded certain protections due to their designations. This is not to undervalue the non-designated areas in our county, the area we might refer to as the wider countryside, includes farmland, cutaway bog, rivers, hedgerows and a suite of other habitats that are home to the majority of the county's plants and animals. Our wider countryside must also be respected, managed and enhanced to protect the nature it contains.

Ecological Network

An Ecological Network of a county comprises the following:

1. Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) which make up "NATURA 2000" sites. Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) and proposed Natural Heritage Areas together with Nature Reserves and Locally Important Biodiversity Sites (LIBS).
2. General natural features/connections – ecological corridors/networks i.e. hedgerows/smaller stands of trees, watercourses, scrub land, smaller wetland sites.

Designated Sites for Nature

There are a number of designations which offer protection or require that particular areas of our natural heritage are managed. These are set out in the Offaly County Development Plan 2021 - 2027 and are set out here for context.

These include:

- Natura 2000 sites - Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA)
- Natural Heritage Areas (NHA) – designated under the Wildlife Amendment Act (2000).
- Other sites for environmental or ecological protection such as Wildlife Sites (including Statutory Nature Reserves),

Ramsar Sites, Flora Protection Order Sites, Wildfowl Sanctuaries, Biogenetic Reserves and Sites designated for the protection of plant species and habitats.

Natura 2000 Sites (European Sites)

Both Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas form part of the 'Natura 2000' network of sites throughout Europe, also known as European sites. Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), which are listed in Annex I (habitats) and Annex II (species – not birds) of the EU Habitats Directive have been selected because they support habitats and plant and animal species that are rare or threatened in Europe and require particular measures, including the designation of protected sites, to conserve them. Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which were established under Annex I of the Birds Directive, have been selected because they support populations of birds of particular species that are rare or threatened in Europe and require particular measures, including the designation of protected areas to conserve them. The Birds Directive also recognises that habitat loss and degradation are the most serious threats to the conservation of wild birds and therefore places great emphasis on the protection of habitats, such as wetland landscapes, for endangered as well as regularly occurring migratory species.

Site Name	Site Code
All Saints Bog and Esker SAC	000566
Charleville Wood SAC	000571
Clara Bog SAC	000572
Clonaslee Eskers and Derry Bog SAC	000859
Ferbane Bog SAC	000575
Fin Lough (Offaly) SAC	000576
Island Fen SAC	002236
Lisduff Fen SAC	002147
Mongan Bog SAC	000580
Moyclare Bog SAC	000581
Pilgrim's Road Esker SAC	001776
Raheenmore Bog SAC	000582
Ridge Road, Southwest of Rapemills	000919
River Barrow and River Nore SAC	002162
River Shannon Callows SAC	000216
Sharavogue Bog SAC	000585
Slieve Bloom Mountains SAC	000412
The Long Derries, Edenderry SAC	000925

Table 1: Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) in County Offaly

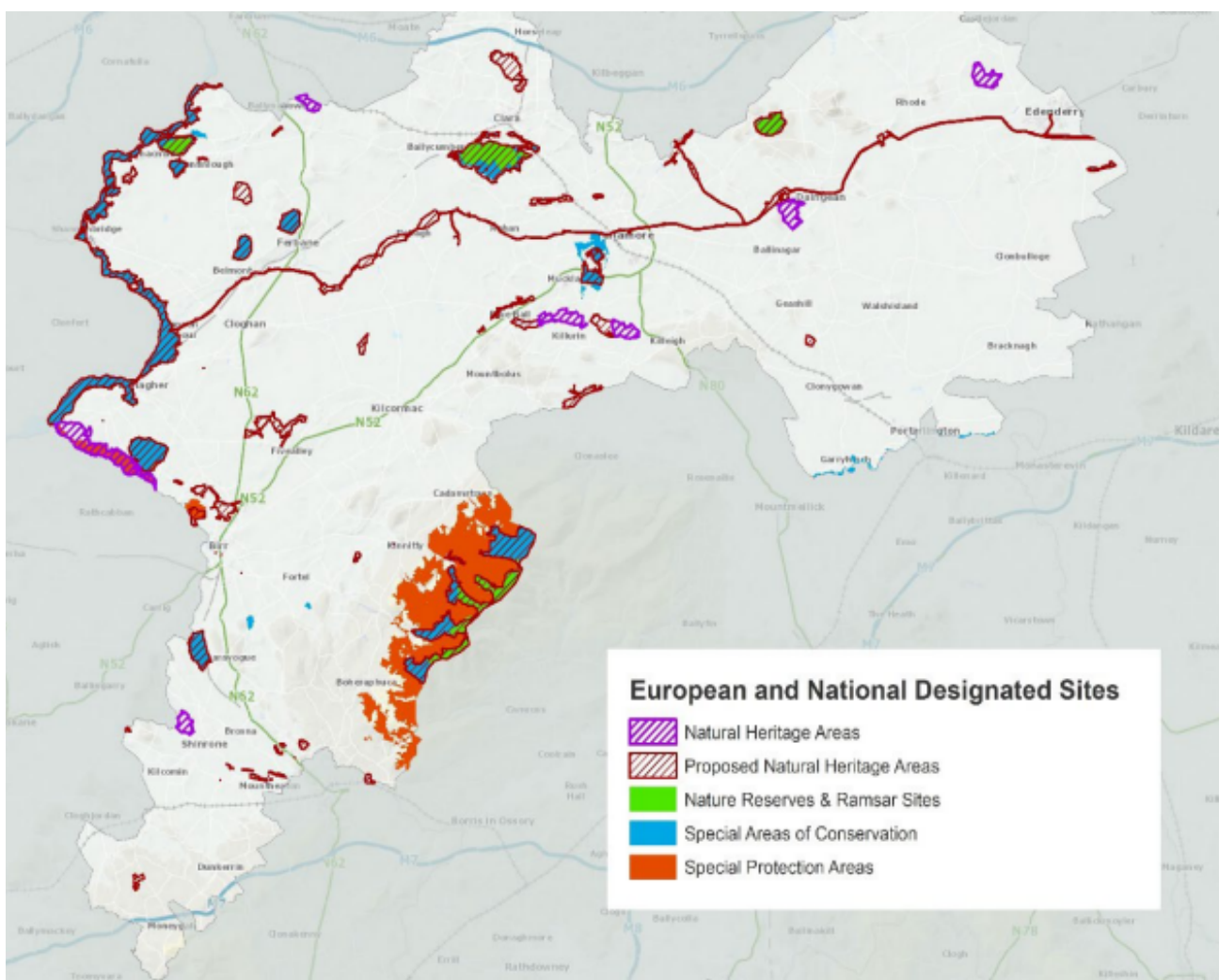
Site Name	Site Code
All Saints Bog SPA	004103
Dovegrove Callows SPA	004137
Middle Shannon Callows SPA	004096
Mongan Bog SPA	004017
River Little Brosna Callows SPA	004086
Slieve Bloom Mountains SPA	004160

Table 2: Special Protection Areas (SPA) in County Offaly

It is a requirement under the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), for a County Development Plan to include objectives for the conservation and protection of Natura 2000 sites (European sites) and other sites. A Planning Authority must have regard to any European Site when making a decision in relation to a plan or project. All plans or projects, unless they are directly connected with or necessary to the management of a Natura 2000 site, are required to be subject to screening for Appropriate Assessment, to determine if they are likely to have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site, in view of the

sites conservation objectives, either individually or in combination with other plans or projects.

A project or plan may only proceed if it can be concluded on the basis of Appropriate Assessment that there will be no adverse effects on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site. If adverse effects are likely, or in cases of doubt, then derogation under Article 6 (4) shall apply, but only in cases of imperative reasons of overriding public interest or based on human health or public safety if it relates to a priority habitat or species.



European and National Designated Sites in Offaly

Natural Heritage Areas and proposed Natural Heritage Areas

Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) are designated sites of national importance for habitats and species in Ireland.

NHAs are established under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act, 2000, but are conserved and protected under the Wildlife Acts, 1976 (as amended). In addition, there are 51 pNHAs in County Offaly, published on a non-statutory basis in 1995, which are of significance for wildlife and habitats but have not since been statutorily proposed or designated.

However, county development plans do provide a level of protection via the planning system for pNHAs, along with NHAs.

Site Name	Site Code
Black Castle Bog NHA	000570
Cangort Bog NHA	000890
Clonydonnin Bog NHA	000565
Daingean Bog NHA	002033
Hawkswood Bog NHA	002355
River Little Brosna Callows NHA	000564
Screggan Bog NHA	000921

Table 3: Natural Heritage Areas in County Offaly

Site Name	Site Code	Site Name	Site Code
All Saints Bog and Esker	000566	Kilcormac Esker	000906
Annaghmore Lough Fen (Offaly)	000413	Kinnitty (domestic dwelling, occupied)	000579
Ballintemple Bog	000882	Lough Boora	001362
Ballyduff Esker	000885	Lough Coura	000909
Ballyduff Wood	001777	Lough Nahinch (Tipperary)	000936
Banagher (domestic dwelling, occupied)	000567	Lough Nanag Esker	000910
Birr (domestic dwelling No. 1, occupied)	000569	Milltown, Shinrone	002065
Birr (domestic dwelling No. 2, occupied)	000658	Mongan Bog	000580
Brackens dwelling near Whiteford	002058	Mount St. Joseph Woods	000913
Camcor Wood	000889	Moyclare Bog	000581
Charleville Wood	000571	Murphys Bridge Esker	001775
Clara Bog	000572	Pallas Lough	000916
Cloghanbeg	002059	Pilgrims Road Esker	001776
Clonad Wood	000574	Raheen Lough	000917
Clonllyn Glebe Bog	000893	Raheenmore Bog	000582
Clonfinlough Esker	000892	Ridge Road, SW of Rapemills	000919
Clorhane Wood	000894	River Shannon Callows	000216
Derrykeel Meadows	000897	Roscrea Bog	000583
Doon Esker Wood	001830	Ross and Glenns Eskers	000920
Dovegrove Callows	000010	Sharavogue Bog	000585
Drumakeenan, Eagle Hill and Perrys Mill	000900	Slieve Bloom Mountains	000412
Drumakeenan National School	002064	St. Josephs, Mountheaton	002063
Ferbane Bog	000575	The Long Derries, Edenderry	000925
Fin Lough (Offaly)	000576	Woodfield Bog	000586
Golden Grove Woods	000903	Woodville Woods	000927
Grand Canal	002104		

Table 4: Proposed Natural Heritage Areas in County Offaly

Other Sites for Environmental and Ecological Protection

There are a number of other sites across the county that have been designated for environmental and/or ecological protection. It is imperative that these sites are protected and conserved for the protection of flora and fauna, for their significant amenity value and for their ongoing educational resource value.

There are four Statutory Nature Reserves in County Offaly as listed in Table 4.6 below. Statutory Nature Reserves have been given a priority designation in association with the EU

Habitats Directive. The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands came into force for Ireland on 15 March 1985. Ireland presently has 45 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance and 4 of these are located in County Offaly covering a total area of 2,979 hectares. Biogenetic Reserves are designated by the Council of Europe and are natural habitats which are especially valuable for nature conservation in Europe. There are currently fourteen Biogenetic Reserves in Ireland, four of which are in County Offaly.

Nature Reserve / Area (hectares) Main Habitats
Slieve Bloom Mountains 2,300 Blanket bog
Clara Bog 460 Raised bog
Mongan Bog 119 Raised bog
Raheenmore Bog 162 Raised bog

Table 5: Statutory Reserves in County Offaly

Ramsar Site Area and Site Number
Clara Bog 460 415
Mongan Bog 127 416
Raheenmore Bog 162 417
Slieve Bloom Mountains 2,230 335

Table 6: Convention on Wetlands (RAMSAR) Sites in County Offaly

Site Name
Clara Bog
Mongan Bog
Slieve Bloom Mountains
Raheenmore Bog

Table 7: Biogenetic Reserves





Bog Pool - © Tina Claffey

Locally Important Biodiversity Sites (LIBS)

Locally important biodiversity sites may be considered as sites or areas of non-designated lands that are of greater importance to biodiversity than other lands. These may for example include, woodland, natural and semi-natural grasslands, rivers, streams, ponds and other wetland habitats, remnant areas of raised bog, eskers, demesne parkland and other such habitats. They may also include locations that have particularly high levels of different species.

These sites are often well known and recognised locally but are without the same protections afforded to designated sites.

It is an action of this plan to identify and map such sites and group them together with designated sites to form an Ecological Network Map of County Offaly. This map will allow us to identify key areas of biodiversity interest, which when combined with more general natural features such as wildlife corridors and stepping stones will constitute the entire ecological network of a county. It will also identify opportunities to improve connectivity between these areas.

This will help slow and stop habitat fragmentation and improve the overall resilience of these habitats and the movement of species including native aquatic animals, mammals, birds and plants.



“This will help slow and stop habitat fragmentation and improve the overall resilience of these habitats”





OCC BIODIVERSITY PROJECT CASE STUDY

2. BARN OWL PROJECT


The Barn Owl project is a great example of collaboration between an ENGO BirdWatch Ireland, the County Council, citizen scientists and landowners. A comprehensive county survey was carried out first which assessed the current number of active nests, while also identifying suitable nesting sites which can be assisted with a nest box.

With funding from the Local Biodiversity Action Fund (LBAF) administered by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) and the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Offaly County Council have been able to support the provision of Barn Owl nest boxes and the monitoring of Barn Owl broods throughout the county.

The funding has enabled BirdWatch Ireland together with local expert volunteers and landowners to choose and install specialised nest boxes in suitable safe locations on properties throughout the county. Following uptake of the boxes by owls, identified by monitoring by landowners and local volunteers, sites are revisited in the nesting season. Barn Owl nestlings are ringed under licence and biometrics recorded which allows conservationists to track populations locally and feed into national census figures and conservation plans.

In recent years and reflecting the national trend, Barn Owl populations in Offaly are on the rise with ecological reasons, improved awareness and conservation efforts being cited as the main drivers of the increase.



A Long-eared Owl is perched on a dark tree branch. The owl has a mottled brown and grey pattern on its head and neck, with a prominent white throat patch. Its large, bright yellow eyes are wide open, looking directly at the camera. The background is filled with out-of-focus green leaves and some hanging seed pods, suggesting a natural, forest-like habitat.

“Biodiversity” is the combination of two words, “biological” and “diversity” and it is used to refer to the variety of all living things in a particular place”

THREATS TO BIODIVERSITY IN OFFALY

We have a great diversity of habitats and species in County Offaly, however the extent and number has shrunk considerably compared to that of the past. Our biodiversity globally and nationally is under threat from a range of issues. Table 8 gives an overview of the main threats facing the various habitats and their associated species in Offaly. There are many threats to our biodiversity in Offaly. The main threats are described in detail below:

Habitat loss & Fragmentation

The National Biodiversity Plan identifies habitat loss and degradation as the main factor eroding biodiversity in Ireland today. Although Ireland's landscape and habitats have been modified by human activity since the retreat of the last Ice Age, the pace and scale of change rapidly accelerated from the latter half of the 20th century. Habitat loss and degradation can happen through both legal and illegal activities, from legitimate land clearance to illegal peat harvesting or deliberate fires in our uplands. The rapid development of houses, roads and other infrastructure in our towns and countryside, together with major changes in agricultural and other land-use practices have led to a major loss of habitats and habitat fragmentation. Fragmentation happens when, for example, a road cuts through a patch of landscape creating two smaller landscape areas. Smaller habitat areas generally support fewer species and lower population numbers of the species present. The removal of landscape features such as hedgerows further reduces available habitat and connectivity. Increasing fragmentation leads to a loss of connection and/or increasing distance between patches, which has negative consequences for the ability of plants and animals to move through the landscape and to sustain viable populations.

Climate Change

The biodiversity crisis and the climate crisis are intrinsically linked. Climate change accelerates the destruction of the natural world through droughts, flooding and wildfires, while the loss and unsustainable use of nature are, in turn, key drivers of climate change. Climate change can affect our habitats and species in a myriad of ways. Drier and hotter weather conditions will increase the risk of wildfires. In recent years Offaly has experienced large scale wildfires

in the Slieve Bloom Mountains which destroyed vast areas of upland blanket bog and forestry and impacted on vulnerable ground nesting birds including our threatened Hen Harrier. Unseasonal summer floods have significantly impacted on our lowland wet grasslands, nowhere more than along the Shannon Callows which were once a stronghold for breeding Corncrake and where ground nesting wading bird species such as the Curlew and Redshank are in decline. The increasingly early flowering period of trees, shrubs and plants is causing all sorts of difficulties for insects and their avian predators. Their lifecycles are fine-tuned to coincide with the flowering period of certain plants, which ensures an abundance of food supply during the breeding season. Changes to flowering periods as a result of climate change may prove problematic for many species.

But just as the crises are linked, so are the solutions. Nature is a vital ally in the fight against climate change. Nature-based solutions, such as protecting and restoring peatlands, other wetlands, increased care & management of hedgerows and forest ecosystems will be essential for emission reduction and climate adaptation.

Alien Invasive Species

Alien Invasive Species are plants or animals that have been introduced in Ireland outside their natural range. Alien species can sometimes become 'invasive' when they spread rapidly and outcompete the native flora and fauna. In Offaly, the problem with invasive species is mainly limited to alien plant species that grow in and along some of our hedgerows, woodlands and watercourses. Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam have been monitored and managed for years but require ongoing management to eradicate fully. Rhododendron Ponticum and Cherry Laurel cast a dense shade in some woodlands, preventing ground flora from establishing and new tree saplings emerging. New emerging threats are being identified continuously, with a significant Alpine Newt population being identified in 2023 following aquatic habitat surveying, as well as the dramatic spread of the Quagga Mussel in the Shannon catchment. Threats from alien species must be monitored and managed and will require close interagency collaboration.

Pollution

All forms of pollution pose a serious threat to biodiversity, but nutrient pollution of waterbodies; pesticide pollution of soils and waterbodies and light pollution are the most relevant forms of pollution in Offaly. Nitrogen and phosphorus are common pollutants in our rivers, originating from two main sources, chemical fertilizers and manure that are applied to fields to increase crop growth, any unabsorbed nitrogen and phosphorus leaches into nearby rivers and groundwater, leading to eutrophication of ecosystems and sewage overflows contribute to the nutrient loading on our rivers. The common use of pesticides in farming has raised concerns about their potential adverse effects on pollinators and farmland birds.

Light might not be the first type of pollution that comes to mind, but artificial light can have negative impacts on biodiversity. Many animals have evolved to be nocturnal such as Bats, Moths and Barn Owls. They hunt or move around under the cover of complete darkness, with only the light from the moon or stars to guide their flight. Lighting can impact on bats' roosting sites, commuting routes and foraging areas and disturb bats' feeding behaviour.

Habitat	Primary threats to habitats and associated flora and fauna
Grassland	Intensification of farming practices or abandonment
Hedgerows	Removal of hedgerows and lack of proper hedgerow management
Woodland	Lack of woodland management, invasive species, extreme weather events such as storms and droughts
Rivers	Nutrient enrichment, water pollution, channel straightening, barriers to fish migration, river maintenance, extreme rainfall events
Wetlands	Infilling and drainage
Uplands	Wildfires, forestry, disturbance
Bogs	Drainage, illegal peat harvesting, wildfires
Gardens	Use of glyphosate-based "weed killer"

Table 8: Primary threats to habitat types in Offaly





**“Climate change can effect
our habitats and species
in a myriad of ways”**



OCC BIODIVERSITY PROJECT CASE STUDY

3. TULLAMORE WETLAND

This project shows the importance of collaboration across departments in Offaly County Council and the positive impact across the board of developing a wetland project which has resulted in improved water quality, a new green area to walk in Tullamore, and increased habitats for biodiversity.

Tullamore Wetlands is a new 1.5ha habitat developed by Offaly County Council in recent years and is located on the edge of Tullamore, off the R443 across from Tullamore Fire Station. Originally developed to improve the water quality and to enhance the environmental and amenity value of the area, the benefits of this new habitat are many.

Initiated by the Environmental Team, in a cross-departmental approach between the Climate Action Team, Biodiversity Officer and Municipal District colleagues, Tullamore Wetland is managed to maximise the benefit to biodiversity.

The wetland habitat includes areas of open water suitable for roosting and foraging waterbirds, whilst the emergent vegetation such as the reeds give cover for nesting birds including, Mallard, Coot and Sedge Warblers. The network of pools and shallow water areas host hawking dragonflies and damselflies and provide suitable habitat for aquatic invertebrates such as water beetles that form an important part of the overall wetland ecosystem.

Some other features include a large and diverse wildflower assemblage derived from natural regrowth and planting of native wildflower species such as Yellow-rattle, clover and Ox-eyed Daisy together with many more. This diverse sward is an important food source for pollinating insects from early spring, through to the autumn and supports a range of bumblebee, butterfly and moth species as well as a myriad of other insect life.

Finally, hundreds of native tree species have been planted on site to increase tree cover which has many advantages in terms of climate action and biodiversity.



“The benefits of this new habitat are many”

WORK SO FAR

Before the appointment of a biodiversity officer to Offaly County Council in March 2023, biodiversity matters were under the remit of the heritage officer. The role of a heritage officer involves all aspects of a county's heritage, including, built, cultural and natural (biodiversity) heritage. County biodiversity actions and priorities were addressed under the Offaly Heritage plan 2023 – 2027 and the four previous plans. These plans have been formulated by the heritage officer together with the Offaly Heritage Forum which consists of members representing all heritage areas.

There have been many biodiversity programmes and projects actioned throughout the respective heritage plans from events and advocacy, alien invasive species monitoring and eradication to implementing the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

Some examples include:

- **The Offaly Naturalists Field Club** was established in 2007 with the first summer school convened in Kinnitty that year. Since then, a full annual programme of events has been scheduled with the Offaly County Council Heritage Office, collaborating with expert naturalists and organisations. Events vary in their focus, are free and open to all to attend. Since beginning, hundreds of events have been hosted under the banner and people have been immersed in Offaly's natural heritage at events hosted across the county. The Offaly Naturalists' Field Club Summer School hosted by John Feehan attracts enthusiasts from around the country.

- **Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam** monitoring and control measures were implemented in the county as early as 2009. Since then, a programme of staff training in identification and treatment, physical and chemical control by OCC staff and contractors and monitoring has significantly reduced the prevalence of both species across the county. This approach has been very successful and has been replicated across other local authorities.

- The **All-Ireland Pollinator Plan** has been adopted by Offaly County Council and many actions implemented in its day-to-day operations and its policies. The most notable of these is a halt on the use of glyphosate by our local authority since May 2022 following the adoption of the policy by elected members. Offaly County Council has

also been involved in No Mow May, and pollinator friendly management of sites, including many burial grounds under the care of the council.

- **Ecological surveys** including, county hedgerow surveys, invasive species, Swifts, Barn Owls, Tufa Springs and Grasslands have all been commissioned and complete with a range of follow-on projects and conservation measures completed.



- **Publications** on the rich natural heritage of Offaly have been produced, many in partnership with John Feehan such as *The Wildflowers of Offaly* and others in collaboration with the Heritage Officer Network, the Heritage Council and partners such as *Saving Swifts* and *Gardening for Biodiversity*.

- Offaly County Council is actively **managing Syngesfield Demesne** in Birr for biodiversity and has created a new wetland in Tullamore as part of the **Tullamore Living River Project**.

- Offaly County Council has been **engaged with communities** in implementing biodiversity measures locally, for example, through supporting the creation of local biodiversity action plans and through training and knowledge-sharing events together with groups including the Tidy Towns Network.

- Offaly County has hosted **staff training** on topics such as, pollinators, planning for biodiversity, Nature Based Solutions (NBS) and Alien Invasive Species Management and the conservation of swifts through the planning process.

- Offaly County Council has been active in **raising awareness of biodiversity** through many initiatives including the hosting of events annually during Biodiversity Week and Heritage Week, awareness campaigns broadcast on regional radio and through its support of and involvement in the *Wildflowers of Offaly* youtube series and *In the Your Nature* Podcast, as well as constant and ongoing social media activity.



Silver River, Cadamstown - Paul Moore



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The 2030 Agenda was adopted by all 193 United Nations member states in 2015. It is a “plan of action for people, planet and prosperity” and provides an internationally agreed framework to balance the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development. The Framework is made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) and 169 targets with the overall objective of achieving a more sustainable, prosperous and peaceful future for all.

Ireland’s National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2018-2020 acknowledges that local government “has a crucial role to play in translating national policies into tangible practical actions that can help to concretise the SDG objectives into our individual and communities’ behaviours and goals.” Following this Ireland’s next National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024 under Strategic Objective 2 focuses on integration of the SDG’s in “Local Authority work to better support the localisation of the SDGs” and incorporate specific actions to do so which include:

- i. Showcasing, sharing and building on existing initiatives.
- ii. Capacity building and awareness raising.
- iii. Embedding the SDGs in Governance and reporting frameworks.
- iv. Incorporating the SDGs within local planning frameworks.
- v. Community Engagement

Furthermore, local authorities are recognised as one of Agenda 2030’s nine ‘Major Groups’, which play a crucial role in sustainable development and Agenda 2030 also highlights the particular role of local authorities and communities in sustainable urban development.

In accordance with the commitments set out in the SDG National Framework Plan 2022-2024 the Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan has been assessed for SDG impact at SDG target level. The assessment was carried out consider each of the 50 actions under the five strategic objectives. It can be seen in the SDG Wheel Figure 10 that the Offaly BAP 2025-2030 will progress towards meeting 12 out of the 17 SDG’s. The assessment also indicated that the Offaly BAP 2025-2030 is contributing to the progression of 33 out of 169 total SDG targets.





SDG Wheel demonstrating the progression of the Offaly 2025 - 2030 to meeting the UN SDG's



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD

1 NO POVERTY 	2 ZERO HUNGER 	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING 	4 QUALITY EDUCATION 	5 GENDER EQUALITY 	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION
7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY 	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 	9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 	10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES 	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES 	12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
13 CLIMATE ACTION 	14 LIFE BELOW WATER 	15 LIFE ON LAND 	16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS 	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS 	

The findings and information provided in Figure 11 highlights the broad scope of the Offaly BAP 2025-2030 and the importance of progressing sustainable development locally in Offaly.

It demonstrates that the impact extends beyond biodiversity action and into other dimensions of sustainability such as economic, social and health.

In Table 9 the top 2 SDGs in which the Offaly BAP 2025-2030 will contribute towards are SDG 15 life on Land, and SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities.

The findings of the SDG assessment will strengthen coherence between local Policy and National Policies in relation to sustainable development for all.



	<p>SDG 15 Life on Land</p>	<p>The actions set out in the Offaly BAP 2025-2030 progress 9 out of 12 targets under SDG 15</p>
	<p>SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities</p>	<p>The actions set out in the Offaly BAP 2025-2030 progress 5 out of 10 targets under SDG 11</p>

Table 9: Top two SDGS contributed to under the Offaly Biodiversity Plan 2025 - 2030

SDG 15 - LIFE ON LAND	
15.1	Conserve and restore terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems
15.2	End deforestation and restore degraded forests
15.3	End desertification and restore degraded land
15.4	Ensure conservation of mountain ecosystems
15.5	Protect biodiversity and natural habitats
15.8	Prevent invasive alien species on land and in water ecosystems
15.9	Integrate ecosystem and biodiversity in governmental planning
15.A	Increase financial resources to conserve and sustainably use ecosystems and biodiversity
15.C	Combat global poaching and trafficking
SDG 11 - LIFE ON LAND	
11.3	Inclusive and sustainable urbanization
11.4	Protect the world's cultural and natural heritage
11.5	Reduce the adverse effects of natural disasters
11.7	Provide access to safe and inclusive green and public spaces
11.B	Implement policies for inclusion, resource efficiency and disaster risk reduction

Table 10: SDG Targets progressed under SDG 15 and SDG 11 through the Offaly BAP 2025 - 2030

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

The actions of the Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 – 2030 are listed in the following tables. Actions have been grouped under five strategic objective categories listed below. Given the nature of the plan, actions will often overlap and apply to more than one category.

All lower-order plans and projects supported by this plan (for example, site management plans, habitat management/creation projects) shall be subject to Appropriate Assessment Screening, where necessary, in accordance with the requirements of the

European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (as amended) or the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), as the case may be.

All objectives and actions contained were chosen to align with the key priorities of the **4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 – 2030**. This ensures Offaly County Council is contributing its part to benefit biodiversity locally and regionally in line with Ireland’s national strategy which in turn takes its direction from the **EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy**.

Strategic Objective 1 - Surveys and Monitoring

Actions under this objective aim to ensure we collect and map the data required to locate, identify and quantify the species and habitats across the county of Offaly. These actions will allow us to plan and act to protect and enhance natural habitats and the flora and fauna that reside there. These actions will involve collaboration with organisations such as The National

Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) and ENGOs such as BirdWatch Ireland and the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) on the collection of biological records and habitat data. These actions support the ongoing efforts of citizen scientists as well as professional biologists through commissioned survey and monitoring programmes and the formulation of county, regional and national species atlases and similar outputs.

Table 11: Strategic Objectives and Actions of the Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 – 2030

N	Action	Indicators	Partners
1	Support Citizen Science Initiatives to encourage awareness and recording of species together with the National Biodiversity Data Centre.	Increased biodiversity records	NBDC
2	Commission a full county wetland survey.	Survey completed	WSI
3	Provide policy guidance through future County Development Plans to ensure new amenity infrastructure (i.e. greenways, bike trails etc) are designed, constructed and managed in line with biodiversity protection and enhancement best practice.	Policy included in next Offaly CDP	OCC Planning, Roads, Tourism, + Active Travel sections
4	Create “Offaly Ecological Network” map + site list, of all sites of ecological importance in the county to include, Natura 2000 sites, NHA/pNHAs and locally important sites.	Ecological Network Map Produced	OCC IS, Planning sections
5	To identify Locally Important Biodiversity Sites (LIBS) in Offaly according to Heritage Council guidelines, and ensure these are mapped and protected through inclusion of policies in the County Development Plan.	LIBS listed and included in OY CDP	OCC Planning section, HC, NPWS, ENGOs, Landowners
6	Implement a process to monitor the changes resulting in the implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan actions at council level.	Annual data published	NBDC, HC, TLIs
7	Commission ecological surveys to help inform county policy and related projects.	Relevant surveys complete	ENGOs, External Consultants, TLIs
8	Work to enhance quarry habitats for biodiversity following the end of commercial extraction through the planning process.	New after-use guidelines implemented	Quarry Owners, OCC Planning section



Strategic Objective 2 - Actions for Biodiversity

Actions under this objective represent many of the direct interventions that Offaly County Council will make to protect and enhance nature and habitats through new and focused projects as well as during the day-to-day work of the relevant

local authority sections. These actions align closely with the policies contained within the Offaly **County Development Plan 2021 - 2027**, the **Offaly Corporate Plan 2024 – 2029** and **Offaly Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029**.

N	Action	Indicators	Partners
9	Establish Offaly County Council Biodiversity Action Plan Implementation Group.	Four meetings held and progress report published annually	Climate Action Team, Planning, Roads, Housing, Community, MD Offices, Corporate Services sections & others
10	Create an Offaly County Council flagship site managed for biodiversity in the Edenderry MD, akin to that of Tullamore Wetlands and Syngefield Demesne.	Manage new site in Edenderry MD.	OCC Edenderry MD Office
11	Create Management Plans for Syngefield Demesne (Birr), Blundell Park (Edenderry) and Tullamore Wetlands Tullamore).	Draft and publish plans	OCC MD Offices, OCC Climate Team, Corporate section
12	Formalise policy to ban glyphosate-based herbicide by OCC (except for specific circumstances - Invasive Species eradication).	Formal policy adopted	NBDC, MD Offices, OCC Roads, Housing sections
13	Enhance biodiversity potential of OCC parks (creating site specific plans where required).	Draft and publish plans	MD Offices
14	Create and agree 10-year plans for burial grounds to protect and improve species diversity.	Draft and publish plans	OCC Water + Environment, Cemetery Committees, Local Groups, Parish Groups
15	Support local communities with the creation + implementation of Biodiversity Action Plans.	Increase number of published plans	TT Network, Community Groups, PPN, OCC Community Section
16	Work with faith communities to identify lands within respective dioceses suitable to implement biodiversity measures in collaboration with local parish and communities.	Number of sites under management for biodiversity	Bishops' Office, Parish Committees and Clergy
17	Implement the recommendations of the Offaly Hedgerow Survey 2024.	Number of recommendations competed	OCC Roads section, Land Owners, IFA
18	Implement the recommendations of the Offaly Tree Guidelines 2023 - 2028.	Number of recommendations competed	OCC Climate Team, Forward Planning and MD Offices
19	Support ENGOS, landowners and local communities in the delivery of conservation initiatives for priority species.	Annual programme of projects funded	ENGOS, Landowners, community Groups, NPWS, HC
20	Support ENGOS, landowners and local communities in the conservation of existing wetlands and creation of new aquatic habitats.	Annual programme of projects funded	LAWPRO, IFI, An Taisce, HSI, IFA
21	Implement actions of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan for Councils.	Increase pollinator actions across OCC lands	NBDC, MD Offices, TT Network, Community Groups, ENGOS
22	Support initiatives under the Water Framework Directive that contribute to the restoration of ecology in water bodies, and the Blue Dot Catchments Programme.	Number of projects funded	LAWPRO, OCC Water + Environment Section
23	Protect existing and maximise nesting opportunities arising from new developments for Swift, House Sparrow, House Martin, Swallows and bats.	Increase nesting opportunities across Offaly settlements	BWI, OCC Planning, Housing sections

Strategic Objective 3 - Invasive Alien Species (AIS)

Actions under this objective act to address the ever-present and increasing threat of Alien Invasive Species (AIS) to our native flora and fauna and the knock-on impacts to our habitats and landscape as well as the unseen impact on agriculture, industry and even tourism. Actions here conform to the European Union (Invasive Alien Species) Regulations

2024, prioritising the objectives of the National Biodiversity Action Plan. Actions here require collaboration between bodies including the National Parks and Wildlife Service, The National Biodiversity Data Centre, Inland Fisheries, Waterways Ireland, private landowners and the wider public.

N	Action	Indicators	Partners
24	Continue control of invasive flora and fauna species - Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam being the two main AIS plant species of concern in Offaly	Decrease in AIS on OY roads network	OCC MD Offices, NBDC, Contractors
25	Prioritise the assessment and management of new IAS discoveries in the county in collaboration with other counties + agencies.	Limit the impact of AIS in Offaly	Other LAs, NPWS, NBDC
26	Support research and monitoring projects focusing on AIS in Offaly.	Annual research project support	TLIs, NBDC, NPWS
27	Upgrade the county alien invasive species management strategy /GIS Mapping.	Strategy adopted and map produced	NBDC, TLIs, OCC IS, Roads section



Strategic Objective 4 - Building Resilience

Actions under this objective will ensure the work the Council completes is done so in a strategic manner, looking ahead to identify how our county may be impacted by climate change, urban expansion, sustainable energy development and changes in agriculture. Whilst these issues will affect our county and lifestyles in many ways, they will also have significant negative impacts on our habitats and native flora and fauna, thus requiring us to adapt and plan in all the

actions we take for biodiversity over the term of this plan. We will work closely with our colleagues in the Offaly County Council Climate Action Team and Forward Planning, together with national bodies such as The National Parks and Wildlife Service, Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) and The Heritage Council to be prepared and rise to the challenge.

N	Action	Indicators	Partners
28	Work with the relevant authorities to support the preparation of, and implement, Ireland’s Nature Restoration Plan, when adopted, and where relevant for Offaly County Council, to help achieve national restoration targets.	Relevant policies adopted by OCC	DHLGH, NPWS, HC
29	Undertake review of Ecological Network Map (see Action 6) to identify important biodiversity corridors/stepping stones and gaps and pinch-points which may be addressed to create and enhance connectivity for biodiversity between sites.	Produce Offaly Ecological Network Strategy	OCC Planning, Forward Planning,
30	Work with relevant agencies annually to continue to assess wildfire risk to bogs and upland habitats and management of same.	Arrange/attend meetings, create “risk map”	Laois CoCo, Offaly Fire Service, NPWS, Coillte
31	Consider provision being made for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for planning applications, to be included in the next County Development Plan.	Adopt approved development standards	OCC Forward Planning, Housing
32	Include climate resilience and future proofing into new biodiversity projects, plans and policies.	OCC staff training pilot completed, create case studies	CARO, HC, OCC Climate Team, Forward Planning, Housing sections
33	Undertake study to identify the habitats and species most at risk from climate change in the county.	Desk based study conducted	OCC Climate Team, CARO, NPWS, HC, TLIs, others
34	Explore funding models for carbon offsetting to fund local wetland and woodland development.	Funding sources identified	OCC Climate Team + Community section.
35	Develop targeted county policies which will result in improved habitats and benefit biodiversity (e.g. Light and Nocturnal Species).	New policies implemented	OCC Climate Team, MD Offices, Housing and Roads section, ENGOS, TLIs
36	Promote the use of Nature Based Solutions (NBS) in local authority projects.	Increased number of NBS projects complete	OCC Roads, Housing, Regen, Planning sections
37	Identify and map Locally Important Biodiversity Sites (LIBS) in County Offaly, according to Heritage Council guidelines, to ensure their continued protection through existing or new policies in the County Development Plan	LIBS list included in OCC CDP	OCC Corporate, Planning sections, HC, others

Strategic Objective 5 - Awareness and Engagement

Actions under this objective will ensure that Offaly County Council takes a collaborative approach in its work towards the betterment of biodiversity in the county. These actions aim to ensure Offaly County Council sections collaborate on focused biodiversity projects and include elements beneficial to biodiversity indirectly where appropriate.

These actions will ensure Offaly County Council continues to collaborate with and support Community/Voluntary Groups, Sports Clubs, Schools and others to engage in efforts to benefit nature on their lands and in their respective localities. Actions here include supporting projects, events and training.

N	Action	Indicators	Partners
38	Support the establishment and work of voluntary biodiversity groups carrying out citizen science projects in Offaly, such as an Offaly Bat Group.	New groups established, new citizen science led surveys underway	ENGOS, Community Groups
39	Create county policy on bat friendly lighting.	Policy adopted	BCI, HC, OCC MD Offices, Roads, Housing, Active Travel sections
40	Plan annual schedule of OCC staff biodiversity training.	Annual training programme completed	OCC all sections, HC, ENGOS, external contractors
41	Plan an annual schedule of biodiversity training and awareness raising events for relevant community groups/public.	Annual programmes completed	Community Groups, OCC Community section, ENGOS, NBDC, others
42	Pilot a biodiversity initiatives in a social housing scheme which may include; green roofs, green walls, wetland & ponds SUDS, green carparking, nest boxes in facades, wildflower meadows and wildlife friendly shrubs and trees in open space.	Housing scheme pilot undertaken	OCC Housing section
43	All Council housing, parks and infrastructure projects to include biodiversity enhancement proposals.	Increased biodiversity measures implemented across OCC lands & projects	OCC Climate Team, Housing, MD Offices, Roads, Regen, Planning, Active Travel sections
44	Research + support the creation of a biodiversity demonstration garden with a community partner.	Biodiversity demonstration garden in operation	OCC community section, MD Offices, NBDC, Community Groups
45	Initiate a project in collaboration with farming groups to highlight and celebrate the importance of farmland for biodiversity.	Project(s) underway	IFA, Macra na Feirme, CI, BBT, ENGOS
46	Promote the delivery of the Green Schools Programme in the county.	Increased uptake in the scheme	EAO, An Taisce
47	Promote and expand the delivery of the Heritage Councils Heritage in Schools Programme in the county.	Increase schools uptake to the national average	HO, HC
48	Advocate for the protection + enhancement of nature and spaces for nature in Offaly through print, broadcast, social media and through other media such as podcasts, online video and short films.	Increased year on year media outputs	OCC Corporate, Community, IS, Tourism sections, Community Groups, CI, HC, local + national media outlets
49	Work with Local Enterprise Office Offaly to promote biodiversity friendly initiatives as part of sustainable economic development.	New initiatives underway	OCC LEO, ENGOS
50	Work with OCC Culture and Creativity Team to promote biodiversity through creative projects, and with support from the Creative Ireland programme.	Initiatives underway	OCC C+C Team, Libraries, Arts Office
51	Work with all OCC sections to make biodiversity enhancements where opportunities arise (e.g. Regeneration, Roads).	New initiatives underway	OCC all sections
52	Conduct awareness campaign on the importance of stone walls/ structures for biodiversity.	Number of projects complete	BSBI, BBS, Community Groups
53	Build links with sports clubs and promote adoption of biodiversity positive measures on club grounds (i.e. through the GAA Green Clubs Programme).	Number of new clubs engaged and projects underway	GAA, Community Groups, Offaly Sports Partnership, Sports Ireland

BBS	British Bryophyte Society	BBT	Burren Beo Trust	BSBI	Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland
BWI	BirdWatch Ireland	CARO	Climate Action Regional Office	ENGOS	Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations
HC	The Heritage Council	HSI	Herpetological Society of Ireland	IFA	Irish Farmers Association
IS	Information Systems	LAs	Local Authorities	LAWPRO	Local Authority Waters Programme
MD	Municipal District	NBDC	National Biodiversity Data Centre	NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
OCC	Offaly County Council	TLIs	Third Level Institutions	TT	Tidy Towns
WSI	Wetland Surveys Ireland	EAO	Environmental Awareness Officer		

Table 12: Acronyms explained

WHAT NEXT?

Implementing the Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 - 2030

The future success of the Plan depends upon the input from all organisations and groups involved in looking after our natural heritage. Joint action is the foundation of the biodiversity action plan initiative. The Offaly BAP will provide the focus for all groups involved. The development of a strong working partnership between the local authority and the voluntary sector, community groups, state agencies, businesses and landowners are essential for successful implementation of the action plan. Offaly County Council will be the main coordinating body overseeing the implementation of the biodiversity actions. The local authority will also provide support for other organisations and private landowners, to see where and how they can contribute towards the implementation of the actions. The Biodiversity Officer shall be the main coordinator within the County Council and act as the contact person for issues related to the Biodiversity Action Plan. Offaly County Council will endeavour to support communities, landowners and relevant organisations who undertake initiatives to support the strategic objectives of this plan. Support will come in the means of advice, training and upskilling, financial resourcing via available grant schemes (i.e. Local Biodiversity Action Fund, Heritage Council biodiversity funding) and through collaboration in Offaly County Council-led biodiversity projects.

Resourcing the Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030

Offaly County Council has one full-time Biodiversity Officer who is tasked with overseeing the delivery of this plan.

The current funding directly available to deliver the Action Plan in Offaly is around €130,000 per year. This may change but it provides a framework for the scope of the actions proposed. This figure includes the internal biodiversity budget and funding allocations from the Heritage Council and biodiversity grant funding available via the National Parks and Wildlife Service's Local Biodiversity Action Fund (LBAF) from The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Monitoring Success

The Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 – 2030 will be monitored on an ongoing basis through the implementation group and with regular updates from the Biodiversity Officer to the Offaly Heritage Forum. A mid-way review will take place in 2027 to track progress and to help ensure the actions of the plan will be completed during its 5-year lifespan. Progress will be reported via the **Offaly County Council Annual Report**.

APPENDIX ONE

Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 – 2030

Consultation at Pre Draft Stage

Extensive consultation took place during the Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan pre-draft stage. Public consultation took place over the course of six weeks between Monday, March 11th and Wednesday, April 24th 2024. A range of meetings and events were arranged and promoted via print, broadcast and social media. A full list of consultative measures is listed in Table 1 below. Further to public consultation, key stakeholders such as the environmental

NGOs, the IFA, Bord Na Mona, Coillte and others were invited to make submissions. Finally, internal engagement within Offaly County Council took place via council meetings, Special Policy Committee Meetings (SPCs), cross-departmental meetings and with management.

Consultation Type (Pre-draft Stage)	Number Completed	Discription
Public (in person)	10	Public walk-in, group meetings, events
Offaly County Council Internal	9	Council meetings, MD meetings, Strategic Policy Committees, Think Ins
Public (online)	1	Online consultation meeting
Media Print/Broadcast/Online	4	Midlands Radio 103 - Let's Go Green, press release publications (local print + online media)
Biodiversity Working Group	3	Scheduled meetings (Feb, May, Jul)
Heritage Forum	1	May meeting
Social Media Campaign Posts	15	Various - Offaly County Council social media platforms

Table 13: Consultation during the Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan pre-draft phase

All submissions received during the consultation period were acknowledged, filed and considered by the Biodiversity Working Group (BWG) at its 2nd meeting held

on May 1st, 2024. Suggestions that met the criteria have been integrated into the list of action found on Table II in the **Objectives and Actions section** of this plan.



Ricky Whelan OCC Biodiversity Officer, Breda O'Driscoll, Eddie Nolan, Fiona Devery, Ekaterina Koneva, Bernie Finneran, Adrian Haines and Tommy Moody at the Birr MD Public-Walk-In event in April 2024 - Offaly County Council



CONSULTATION AT DRAFT-PLAN STAGE

A further consultation phase took place following the publication of the Draft Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan. This phase involved consultation with stakeholders including the public, community groups, environmental groups and organisations, state and statutory bodies. The draft plan was published online on the Offaly County Council website in both English and Irish and was made available for view to the public at county offices in Tullamore.

During this phase the plan underwent Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment screening with the screening reports also published on the Offaly County Council website.

All submissions received during the consultation period were acknowledged, filed and considered by the Biodiversity Working Group and internally by the Offaly County Council Management Team. New submissions relevant to the plan which included measures that were not included by the existing draft were integrated and the updated plan returned for further screening and sign-off.



Date	Consultation activity
5th Aug 2024	Draft-plan public/stakeholder consultation opens
6th Aug 2024	Draft-plan posted online and at OCC in Irish + English
18th Sept 2024	Climate Action, Transport and Environment Policy SPC presentation
1st Nov 2024	Draft-plan public consultation ends
1st Nov 2024	AA + SEA Screening process begins
12th Nov 2024	Management Team Draft- plan presentation
22nd Nov 2024	Prescribed Environmental Authorities consultation ends
29th Nov 2024	ENGO consultation extension consultation ends
3rd Dec 2024	Economic Development, Planning and Regeneration Policy SPC presentation
4th Dec 2024	Offaly Heritage Forum presentation
17th Dec 2024	Final AA + SEA Screening Reports Published
18th Dec 2024	Climate Action, Transport and Environment Policy SPC presentation
20th Jan 2025	January Council Meeting (Draft-plan adoption)

Table 14: Evolution of The Offaly Biodiversity Action Plan from Discussion Paper to Draft and published plan.

APPENDIX TWO – NBAP Actions relevant for local authorities

Following are the selected Actions and Objectives in the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 which are allocated to or of most relevance to local authorities.

For the full plan see <https://www.npws.ie/legislation/national-biodiversity-action-plan>.

Target	Action	Action	Partner(s)	Indicator
Objective 1: Adopt a Whole-of-Government, Whole of-Society Approach to Biodiversity				
Outcome 1A: Governance structures and reporting outputs have improved				
From 2024, progress reports will be submitted annually to relevant Groups/Committees	1A8	The Minister will receive a report on progress on the implementation on the NBAP at least once a year and will bring that report to Cabinet	All Relevant Bodies	Reports to Cabinet
Outcome 1B: Organisational capacity and resources for biodiversity have increased at all levels of Government				
By 2024, cross- departmental capacity and capability required to achieve biodiversity targets reviewed	1B3	All relevant Departments and Government Bodies will explore the biodiversity expertise and training requirements across government to ensure the appropriate expertise is available to implement this Plan	All relevant Departments and Government Bodies	Number of new training courses; Number of staff assigned to biodiversity tasks
By 2026, all Local Authorities have increased capacity to facilitate and implement all required duties relating to biodiversity at the local level	1B9	The Heritage Council will work with Local Authorities on establishing a Biodiversity Officer Programme with a dedicated Biodiversity Officer in each Local Authority	The Heritage Council	Number of Biodiversity Officers in Local Authorities
Outcome 1C: Responsibility for biodiversity is shared across the whole of government				
By the end of 2026, all Local Authorities will have a Biodiversity Action Plan in place	1C6	All Local Authorities will have a Biodiversity Action Plan adopted by the end of 2026 which is subject to regular review and revision processes in line with relevant guideline standards	All Local Authorities	Number of Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plans in place; Number of Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plans in development
Outcome 1D: Biodiversity initiatives are supported across the whole of society				
By 2027, all Local Authorities are supported to carry out biodiversity related projects on an annual basis	1D5	NPWS will continue to support Local Authorities biodiversity projects through the LBAF, which includes action on invasive alien species, throughout the lifetime of this Plan	NPWS	Amount of funding drawn down through the LBAF
By 2026, Ireland has mainstreamed the engagement of the public and stakeholders in biodiversity-related environmental policy implementation and the conservation of biodiversity	1D12	DAFM, DHLGH and other relevant stakeholders will build and enhance engagement with terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine stakeholders and the wider community to promote the benefits of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and the responsible, sustainable use of resources	DAFM, DHLGH	Number of outreach events undertaken to promote Ireland's biodiversity and ecosystems; Number of public consultations and fora held to support stakeholder and wider community involvement in environmental policy implementation relating to biodiversity

Target	Action	Action	Partner(s)	Indicator
Objective 2: Meet Urgent Conservation and Restoration Needs				
Outcome 2A: The protection of existing designated areas and protected species is strengthened and conservation and restoration within the existing protected area network are enhanced				
By 2024, Ireland has identified preliminary areas that will be pledged as future protected areas under the EU Biodiversity Strategy	2A8	NPWS, with relevant stakeholders will identify areas that will be pledged as protected areas following the criteria laid out under the EU Biodiversity Strategy	NPWS and relevant stakeholders	Extent of pledged areas
Outcome 2B: Biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider countryside are conserved and restored – agriculture & forestry				
By 2030, in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the use and risk of pesticides is reduced by 50% by 2030	2B6	DAFM, Local Authorities and other relevant stakeholders will implement existing and new measures to reduce chemical pesticide use, in line with the EU regulatory framework for pesticides	DAFM, Local Authorities and relevant stakeholders	Percentage reduction in use and risk of chemical pesticides, and the use of hazardous pesticide, in line with the EU regulatory framework for pesticides
Continued support for native tree planting	2B11	DAFM will continue to promote and/or support native tree planting by Local Authorities and other State/semi-state bodies	DAFM	Increase in area under native tree cover; Uptake of any relevant schemes for Local Authorities or other State/ semi-state bodies
By 2027, a diversified national and local native plant stock is available for tree and landscape planting schemes	2B12	Local Authorities, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), NPWS and OPW will encourage a more reliable supply and use native species, varieties, and landraces from appropriate native sources in their landscaping works, where possible	Local Authorities, TII, NPWS and OPW	Availability of national/local sources of native species, varieties, and landraces; % of native trees used in landscaping works compared to benchmark
By 2030, in line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the decline of pollinators is halted and reversed	2B13	NBDC with partners in Northern Ireland and other actors listed in the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025 will implement appropriate actions listed in the Plan and support farmland pollinator conservation activities post-2025	NBDC and relevant stakeholders	Number of All-Ireland Pollinator Plan actions implemented; Evidence of action to support farmland pollinators post-2026
Outcome 2C: Biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider countryside are conserved and restored – peatlands & climate action				
By 2025, nature-based solutions are contributing to national climate ambitions	2C7	To support the National Climate Objective of achieving a climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy, DECC, DAFM, DHLGH, Local Authorities, and Climate Action Regional Offices will promote terrestrial nature-based solutions in national, regional, and local rural and urban programmes	All relevant stakeholders	Number of programs and policies that incorporate nature-based solutions
Outcome 2D: Biodiversity and ecosystem services in the marine and freshwater environment are conserved and restored				



Target	Action	Action	Partner(s)	Indicator
By 2027, protection and restoration measures detailed in Ireland's third RBMP are implemented to ensure that our natural waters are sustainably managed, that freshwater resources are protected so that there is no further deterioration; and where required, Ireland's rivers, lakes and coastal water bodies are restored to at least good ecological status	2D1	Relevant bodies such as DHLGH, DAFM, Local Authorities and partners will deliver a RBMP to better protect, enhance and monitor the ecological status of water during the third cycle of the RBMP	All Relevant Bodies	National Biodiversity Indicators (NBI)-B.7.ii Number of freshwater habitats reported as 'Good Ecological Status' under Water Framework Directive (WFD) monitoring Status of water quality in Ireland; Number of RBMP measures (Programme of Measures) implemented
By 2027, optimised benefits in flood risk management planning and drainage schemes are in place	2D5	OPW will work with relevant authorities to ensure that Flood Risk Management planning and associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), EIA and Appropriate Assessment (AA), minimises loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services through	OPW and relevant stakeholders	Assessment to identify and promote natural flood management techniques that may be suitable for application in Ireland; Inclusion of catchment-wide and non-structural measures within the options assessed by Flood Risk Management Plans
By 2030, 300 km of rivers are restored to a free-flowing state	2D21	DHLGH, Inland Fisheries Ireland, OPW and other relevant bodies will explore the restoration of 300 km or rivers to a free-flowing state	DHLGH, IFI, OPW and other relevant bodies	Km of rivers restored to a free-flowing state
Outcome 2F: A National Restoration Plan is in place to contribute to the ambition of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and global restoration targets				
By 2027, implementation of a National Restoration Plan has begun	2F5	DHLGH and all stakeholders across Government, will put in place restoration measures as described in the National Restoration Plan, within the appropriate timeframes	DHLGH and relevant stakeholders	Restoration measures in place according to the timeframe to be outlined in the National Restoration Plan
Outcome 2H: Invasive alien species (IAS) are controlled and managed on an all-island basis to reduce the harmful impact they have on biodiversity and measures are undertaken to tackle the introduction and spread of new IAS to the environment				
By 2030, IAS are controlled, managed, and where possible, eradicated	2H2	NPWS, together with other relevant Departments and public bodies, will develop national plans to implement aspects of the EU IAS Regulation and relevant national legislation, as well as work on cooperative plans where there is an all-island or North-South aspect for IAS impacts	NPWS and relevant stakeholders	National plans are in place to implement the relevant articles of the EU IAS Regulation (1143/2014) fulfilling Member State obligations; National Management Plan for Invasive Alien Species will be developed and implemented as set out in the programme for government; All-island cooperation on IAS between relevant authorities is agreed

Target	Action	Action	Partner(s)	Indicator
Objective 3: Secure Nature's Contribution to People				
Outcome 3A: Ireland's natural heritage and biocultural diversity is recognised, valued, enhanced and promoted in policy and practice				
By the end of 2027, the biocultural value of green and blue urban environments (GBUE) in all local authority areas is enhanced	3A3	Local Authorities will work to identify and respond to opportunities for enhancing the biocultural value of GBUE through appropriate design strategies, the use of visual and performing	Local Authorities	Number of LBAPs which include actions on enhancing the biocultural value of GBUE
Outcome 3C: Planning and development will facilitate and secure biodiversity's contributions to people				
By 2030, shared responsibility for the conservation of biodiversity acted on	3C1	All Public Authorities and private sector bodies move towards no net loss of biodiversity through strategies, planning, mitigation measures, appropriate offsetting and/or investment in Blue-Green infrastructure	All relevant stakeholders	Number of plans articulating no net loss targets
By 2024, guidance is available on best practice for biodiversity, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions in planning and development	3C2	The Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) will work to prepare and publish a Case Study Paper examining best practice in integrating green infrastructure, nature-based solutions and ecosystem services into the preparation of land use plans	OPR	Case Study Paper published by 2027
By 2030, the objectives of the NBAP, where relevant, are aligned with and integrated, within the statutory land use plans of the Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities and within LBAPs	3C3	All Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, City and County Development Plans, Local Area Plans and LBAP's shall be aligned with the objectives of the NBAP, where relevant	DHLGH, [Regional Assemblies, Planning Authorities, Local Authorities, Office of the Planning Regulator]	Number of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, City and County Development Plans, Local Area Plans and LBAPs that align with the objectives of the NBAP
Objective 4: Enhance the Evidence Base for Action on Biodiversity				
Outcome 4B: Data relevant to biodiversity and ecosystems, including conservation needs, is widely accessible and standardised				
By 2030, biodiversity and related data is widely accessible	4B7	NPWS and other relevant bodies will ensure that biodiversity and related data adheres to national open data policy	NPWS	Number of open data sets relating to biodiversity
Objective 5: Strengthen Ireland's Contribution to International Biodiversity Initiatives				
Outcome 5A: Science, policy and action on biodiversity conservation and restoration is effectively coordinated in an all-island approach				
By 2025, the All-Island Pollinator Plan (AIPP) is supported	5A5	Relevant bodies will continue to support and utilise the All- Ireland Pollinator Plan	Relevant bodies	Number of AIPP actions achieved



OCC BIODIVERSITY PROJECT CASE STUDY

4. SYNGEFIELD DEMESNE

Syngefield Demesne is a 6.5ha site which forms part of the original Syngefield Estate at the edge of Birr town. Much of the remaining parkland is in the ownership of Offaly County Council and is managed to protect its demesne parkland features, such as the veteran Oak and Horse Chestnut trees and the vista looking towards the ancient castle ruins from the perspective of the original house which is in private ownership, Syngefield is also managed for biodiversity and public access. It contains a number of important habitats including the Camcor River which forms its north-eastern boundary and associated riparian habitats.


There is a ribbon of mature riparian woodland that separates the river from the extensive grass and parkland area. This grassland is being managed in cooperation with local graziers to improve the sward diversity through a low grazing density.

It is envisaged that the grassland will improve with the diversity of wildflower species increasing over time due to the sympathetic

grazing pattern and the policy to not allow nitrogen fertilisers or other artificial inputs on the land. This will benefit the site botanically and will create a positive impact for pollinating species and other invertebrates further benefitting other wildlife such as the birds found locally, including breeding Stonechat.

Syngefield Industry estate was developed over recent decades. This has been partially screened by an embankment and a newly planted native hedgerow which will mature over time to give further separation between the industrial estate and the remaining demesne.

There are plans in place to create ponds to manage surface runoff and improve ground conditions for mature trees and create new freshwater habitats on site. These ponds will create a new aquatic habitat introducing new areas for amphibians, aquatic invertebrates and plants to flourish.

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, a large, leafy tree stands next to a small pond. A dirt path winds through the fields. In the background, there are rolling green hills, a farm with several buildings, and more fields. The sky is clear and blue.

“These ponds will create a new aquatic habitat introducing new areas for amphibians, aquatic invertebrates and plants to flourish ”

Aerial photo of Syngefeld Demesne- Paul Moore

APPENDIX THREE – Policy and Law

EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 was launched in May 2020 to provide targets for all member states within the European Union to address the biodiversity crisis. It links the recovery of biodiversity to recovery from economic recession, health threats and climate disasters. “We need nature in our lives” is a central message. The commitments proposed in this strategy pave the way for ambitious and necessary changes – changes that will ensure the wellbeing and economic prosperity of present and future generations in a healthy environment.

The strategy provides for the establishment of protected areas on at least 30% of the land and 30% of the seas of Europe and aspires to the restoration of degraded ecosystems both on land and at sea. In addition, in order to have a truly coherent and resilient Nature Network, it will be important to set up ecological corridors to prevent genetic isolation, allow for species migration, and maintain and enhance healthy ecosystems. In this context, investments in green and blue infrastructure and cooperation across borders among Member States should be promoted and supported.

The strategy requires greater efforts to restore freshwater ecosystems and the natural functions of rivers in order to achieve the objectives of the Water Framework Directive. To help make this a reality, at least 25,000 km of rivers are to be restored into free-flowing rivers by 2030 through the removal of barriers and the restoration of floodplains and wetlands. Nutrient losses to rivers and wetlands from farmland are to be reduced by at least 50%, by reducing fertilizer use by at least 20% while also ensuring that there is no deterioration in soil fertility. This is to be achieved by implementing and enforcing the existing water pollution legislation and developing nutrient management plans. The EU’s Farm to Fork strategy will also address the reduction in the use of pesticides and support wider implementation of Integrated Pest Management. At least 25% of agricultural land shall be under organic farming management by 2030, while at least 10% of the agricultural area shall comprise of high-diversity landscape features such as hedgerows, ponds, wetlands and wildflower meadows.

Achieving good environmental status of marine ecosystems, including through strictly protected areas, must involve the restoration of carbon-rich ecosystems as well as important fish spawning and nursery areas. In addition, fisheries-management measures must be established in all marine protected areas according to clearly defined conservation

objectives and on the basis of the best available scientific advice.

To bring nature back to cities and reward community action, the Commission calls on European cities of at least 20,000 inhabitants to develop ambitious Urban Greening Plans. These should include measures to create biodiverse and accessible urban forests, parks and gardens; urban farms; green roofs and walls; tree-lined streets; urban 14 meadows; and urban hedges. They should also help improve connections between green spaces, eliminate the use of pesticides, limit excessive mowing of urban green spaces and other biodiversity harmful practices. The promotion of healthy ecosystems, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions should be systematically integrated into urban planning, including in public spaces, infrastructure, and the design of buildings and their surroundings.

Protecting and restoring nature will need more than compliance with regulations alone. It will require action by citizens, businesses, social partners and the research and knowledge community, as well as strong partnerships between local, regional, national and European levels.

Key Commitments of EU Nature Restoration Plan to be implemented by 2030 across the EU

1. Legally binding EU nature restoration targets to be proposed in 2021, subject to an impact assessment. By 2030, significant areas of degraded and carbon-rich ecosystems are restored; habitats and species show no deterioration in conservation trends and status; and at least 30% reach favourable conservation status or at least show a positive trend.
2. The decline in pollinators is reversed.
3. The risk and use of chemical pesticides are reduced by 50%.
4. At least 10% of agricultural area is under high-diversity landscape features.
5. At least 25% of agricultural land is under organic farming management, and the uptake of agro-ecological practices is significantly increased.
6. Three billion new trees are planted in the EU, in full respect of ecological principles.

7. Significant progress has been made in the remediation of contaminated soil sites.
8. At least 25,000 km of free-flowing rivers are restored.
9. There is a 50% reduction in the number of Red List species threatened by invasive alien species.
10. The losses of nutrients from fertilisers are reduced by 50%, resulting in the reduction of the use of fertilisers by at least 20%.
11. Cities with at least 20,000 inhabitants have an ambitious Urban Greening Plan.
12. No chemical pesticides are used in sensitive areas such as EU urban green areas.
13. The negative impacts on sensitive species and habitats, including on the seabed through fishing and extraction activities, are substantially reduced to achieve good environmental status

The Nature Restoration Law (NRL)

on 17 June 2024, the EU's landmark Nature Restoration Law received its final approval from environment ministers in the Council of the EU. Almost 9% of Irish land is expected to be directly affected by the EU Nature Restoration Law.

While EU environmental policies have in the past focused on protecting nature, the NRL aims to address nature sites that have already been degraded and restore them back to a healthy condition. This new regulation legally binds EU Member States to restore at least 20% of the EU's land and sea areas by 2030 and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050. The proposed target builds on the international commitment and obligations of the EU and its Member States as a party to the global Convention on Biological Diversity.

Regarding specific habitats covered by the new Law, Member States are required to restore 30% of habitats, including forests, grasslands, wetlands, rivers, lakes and coral beds from poor to good condition by 2030. This target will increase to 60% of those habitats by 2040, and 90% by 2050.

The NRL specifically addresses pollinators, enshrining new rules that aim to reverse pollinator decline and increase populations by 2030. Moreover, the Law includes provisions on the protection of species associated with agricultural ecosystems such as grassland butterflies and farmland birds. Under the regulation, Member States are required to enhance

the carbon stock in mineral soils and increase high-diversity landscape features on agricultural land (such as hedgerows, flower strips, fallow land, ponds and fruit trees). Regarding forestation, the NRL tasks Member States with increasing the amount of tree cover in urban spaces and contributing to the planting of at least three billion trees by 2030 at the EU level.

The regulation will now be published in the EU's Official Journal and enter into force. As soon as it is published, it will become directly applicable in all Member States. EU countries are expected to submit National Restoration Plans to the Commission within two years of the Regulation coming into force (by mid-2026).

In Ireland, work has already started on a participatory stakeholder engagement process to support the development of the Ireland's National Restoration Plan.

EU Birds and Habitats Directives

Preserving and restoring biodiversity is one of the EU's top priorities. The Birds and Habitats Directives form the cornerstones of EU biodiversity policy. They provide a strong legislative framework for all EU countries to protect the most valuable and threatened biodiversity.

The Birds Directive aims to protect all naturally occurring wild bird species present in the EU and their most important habitats. In addition to halting the decline or disappearance of bird species, the Directive aims to allow bird species to recover and thrive over the long-term.

The Habitats Directive aims to protect over a thousand species, including mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish invertebrates, and plants, and 230 characteristic habitat types. The overall objective is to ensure that these species and habitat types are maintained, or restored, to a favourable conservation status within the EU. In addition to halting the further decline or disappearance of these species and habitats, the Directive aims to allow them to recover and thrive over the long-term.

The Birds Directive (**Directive 79/409/EEC**) was adopted in 1979. It is one of the first pieces of environmental legislation to be adopted by the EU. It was amended in 2009 (Directive 2009/147/EC) - changes were made to Annex II part B due to the accession of new Member States.

The Birds Directive requires all Member States to protect all wild bird species and protect and restore their habitats. The Commission prepared a list of all regularly and naturally occurring wild bird species within the EU.

The Habitats Directive (**Council Directive 92/43/EEC**) was adopted in 1992, thirteen years after the Birds Directive. Like the Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive requires all Member States to establish a strict protection regime for species listed in Annex IV, both inside and outside Natura 2000 sites.

The Wildlife Act

The Wildlife Act, 1976, is the principal national legislation providing for the protection of wildlife and the control of some activities that may adversely affect wildlife. The Wildlife Act, 1976, came into operation on 1 June 1977. It was the only major legislation concerned with wildlife that was passed in the previous 45 years. It replaced the **Game Preservation Act, 1930**, and the **Wild Birds (Protection) Act, 1930**.

The aims of the Wildlife Act, 1976, are to provide for the protection and conservation of wild fauna and flora, to conserve a representative sample of important ecosystems, to provide for the development and protection of game resources and to regulate their exploitation, and to provide the services necessary to accomplish such aims.

Under the Act, the Minister responsible for nature conservation may afford protection to all wild species of fauna and flora. However, the 1976 Act did not provide for the conservation of fish species nor of aquatic invertebrates in general, except insofar as species may be added in agreement with the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources. Currently all bird species, 23 other animal species or groups of species and 157 species of flora are afforded protected status under the Act.

The animal species protected under the Act are:

- Badger
- Bat species
- Deer species
- Hare species
- Hedgehog
- Otter
- Pine Marten
- Red Squirrel
- Common newt
- Pygmy shrew
- Stoat
- Dolphin species
- Porpoise species
- Seal species
- Whale species
- Natterjack Toad
- Common frog

- Common lizard
- Marine turtle
- Freshwater crayfish
- Freshwater pearl mussel
- Kerry slug
- Basking Shark

The list of flora species protected under the Act are set out in the **Flora (Protection) Order 2022**.

The Act also enables the possession, trade and movement of wildlife to be regulated and controlled. Hunting and also falconry is controlled under the Act. Specific areas of importance for wildlife may be protected under the Act either as Nature Reserves, Refuges for Fauna, or by way of management agreements.

Under the Act, the Minister may provide assistance and advice on wildlife matters, undertake the necessary research and promote public knowledge and understanding of wildlife.

The Wildlife Act is not concerned with animal welfare per se, as its primary purpose is the conservation of wildlife. Animal welfare is the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture and Food.

More than 8,500 licences covering a wide range of activities are issued by the NPWS under the Act every year. CITES issues approximately 1,300 permits and certificates every year under the CITES Convention and the Wildlife Act. Almost all licences and certificates are issued free of charge under the Act. The Minister has power to attach conditions to any licence granted under the Act and to vary them.

The 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan

Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) sets the national biodiversity agenda for the period 2023-2030 and aims to deliver the transformative changes required to the ways in which we value and protect nature. The 4th NBAP has been developed with the support, advice and input of the interdepartmental Biodiversity Working Group and the independent Biodiversity Forum. Ireland's 2nd National Biodiversity Conference was held to gather insights and recommendations for the development of the NBAP and a public consultation process was held to provide further opportunities to engage with the Plan.

The 4th NBAP strives for a "whole of government, whole of society" approach to the governance and conservation of biodiversity. The aim is to ensure that every citizen,

community, business, local authority, semi-state and state agency has an awareness of biodiversity and its importance, and of the implications of its loss, while also understanding how they can act to address the biodiversity emergency as part of a renewed national effort to “act for nature”.

This National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 builds upon the achievements of the previous Plan.

It will continue to implement actions within the framework of five strategic objectives, while addressing new and emerging issues:

- **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

Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan

The **Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan** was launched on the 10th of September 2024 by Malcolm Noonan TD, Minister of State for Nature, Heritage and Electoral Reform after ten years in the making.

The Hen Harrier is a ground-nesting species that typically breeds in open upland bog and heather moorland. The 2022 National Hen Harrier survey showed that the Hen Harrier population had declined by 33% since the previous survey in 2015, to between 85 and 106 pairs. The species remains listed on the Amber-list of Birds of Conservation Concern in Ireland (2020-2026), published by BirdWatch Ireland. Additionally, the species is listed in Annex I of the EU Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) and, as such, six SPAs (Special Protection Areas) have been designated for conserving important breeding habitats and populations of Hen Harrier.

The aim of the Hen Harrier Threat Response Plan is to improve the long-term prospects for the species and to meet the objectives of the Birds Directive by:

- *“Synthesising the key scientific evidence for the Hen Harrier population decline.*
- *outlining the views and concerns presented by the relevant sectors.*
- *laying out a coordinated set of targeted actions and measures to cease, avoid, reverse, reduce, eliminate or prevent the identified threats, pressures and hazards”.*

The current plan aims to address the threats faced by this iconic raptor through a series of coordinated actions, across sectors including agriculture, forestry and wind energy. Actions will focus on informing future conservation strategies, collaboration and the further development of agri-environmental schemes and incentives, through data collection, monitoring and research. These actions will be taken across all areas important to Hen Harrier, both within and outside Hen Harrier Special Protection Areas.

All-Ireland Pollinator Plan

The **All-Ireland Pollinator Plan** is a framework bringing together different sectors across the island of Ireland to create a landscape where pollinators can survive and thrive. Its implementation is coordinated by the National Biodiversity Data Centre.

These sectors include, local authorities, business, agriculture, communities, schools, sports clubs etc to play their part in the protection and enhancement of habitats that will protect and increase our native pollinators and biodiversity as a whole on the island of Ireland.

Offaly County Council is a pledged local authority All-Ireland Pollinator Plan partner.

Offaly Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029

Offaly Climate Action Plan 2024-2029 is aligned with the Government’s National Climate Objective which seeks to achieve the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy by 2050. To secure this sustainable future for the citizens of Offaly, the Council has prepared this Climate Action Plan for the period 2024 to 2029 to create a low carbon and climate resilient County, by delivering and promoting best practice in climate action in Offaly.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 frames Ireland’s legally binding climate ambition to deliver a reduction in Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 51% by 2030. Offaly County Council will be required to reduce its Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 51% by 2030 and increase its energy efficiency by 50%. To date Offaly County Council have already begun a range of measures and initiatives to help us achieve this statutory target.

The vision for Offaly will be to transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy.

118 climate actions have been developed for Offaly County Councils Climate Action Plan under six main themes:

- Governance and Leadership
- Built Environment
- Transport
- Natural Environment and Green Infrastructure
- Community Resilience and Transition
- Sustainability and Resource Management

The National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework is a planning framework to guide development and investment over the coming years. It does not provide every detail for every part of the country; rather it empowers each region to lead in the planning and development of their communities, containing a set of national objectives and key principles from which more detailed and refined plans will follow.

The vision set out under this Framework is based on a set of values that will ensure Ireland’s long term economic, environmental and social progress for all parts of our country. In framing a new way forward, the National Planning Framework draws upon lessons learned from the National Spatial Strategy and highlights a vision of success based on better choices compared to a ‘business as usual’ approach.

Objectives of the National Planning Framework

The ultimate objectives of the NPF are to:

- Guide the future development of Ireland, taking into account a projected 1 million increase in our population, the need to create 660,000 additional jobs to achieve full employment and a need for 550,000 more homes by 2040;
- Of the 1 million extra people,

25% is planned for Dublin, recognised as our key international and global city of scale and principal economic driver,

25% across the other four cities combined (Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford), enabling all four to grow their population and jobs by 50-60%, and become cities of greater scale, i.e. growing by twice as much as they did over the previous 25 years to 2016, and

with the remaining 50% of growth to occur in key regional centres, towns, villages and rural areas, to be determined in the forthcoming regional plans – Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs).

- Enable people to live closer to where they work, moving away from the current unsustainable trends of increased commuting.
- Regenerate rural Ireland by promoting environmentally sustainable growth patterns.
- Plan for and implement a better distribution of regional growth, in terms of jobs and prosperity.
- Transform settlements of all sizes through imaginative urban regeneration and bring life / jobs back into cities, towns and villages.

- Co-ordinate delivery of infrastructure and services in tandem with growth, through joined-up NPF/National Investment Plan and consistent sectoral plans, which will help to manage this growth and tackle congestion and quality of life issues in Dublin and elsewhere

The Water Framework directive

The EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) requires all Member States to protect and improve water quality in all waters so that we achieve good ecological status by 2015 or, at the latest, by 2027. It was given legal effect in Ireland by the European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 722 of 2003). It applies to rivers, lakes, groundwater, and transitional coastal waters.

The Directive requires that management plans be prepared on a river basin basis and specifies a structured method for developing these plans. River basin management plans, which are reviewed and prepared every six years after extensive public consultation, are designed to protect and improve the water environment.

The Water Action Plan 2024: A River Basin Management Plan for Ireland sets out the measures that are necessary to protect and restore water quality in Ireland. The overall aim of the plan is to ensure that our natural waters are sustainably managed and that freshwater resources are protected so as to maintain and improve Ireland's water environment.

Offaly County Development Plan 2021 - 2027

County Development Plans describe how a local authority will develop and use particular areas in its local authority area, for example:

- Residential areas
- Commercial areas
- Industrial areas
- Recreational areas
- Agricultural areas

They also set out the development objectives for your local authority area, such as plans to improve roads and local amenities. A development plan is made up of a written statement and series of maps and span a period of 10 years (extended from 6 years) following the signing into law of the **Planning and Development Act 2024**.

The Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027

(developed in accordance with the requirements of the Planning & Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the Planning & Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)) was adopted on 10th September 2021 and came into effect 22nd October 2021.

The adopted plan comprises of the following:

- **Volume 1:** Written Statement
- **Volume 2:** Settlement Plans
- SEA Environmental Report
- Natura Impact Report
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment
- Wind Energy Strategy
- Housing Strategy including Housing Need and Demand Assessment
- Record of Protected Structures

Offaly Corporate Plan 2024-2029

A corporate plan is a central component of the local authority business architecture. Corporate planning, along with the associated monitoring and review arrangements, serve as the local authority's strategic framework for action over the duration of the five-year plan.

It links key elements such as:

- policy
- organisation
- operational activity
- governance
- performance management

Offaly County Council has prepared the **Offaly Corporate Plan 2024 – 2029** in consultation with elected members, staff and stakeholders. The Plan sets out the Council's organisation-wide strategic objectives and supporting strategies to achieve those objectives in the Council term.



Blue Bell Wood - Paul Moore



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
Offaly County Council



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 - 2030



Comhairle Chontae Uíbh Fhailí
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