

# Louth County Council

# Local Biodiversity

# Action Plan

Pre-Draft Consultation  
Discussion Paper



Comhairle Contae Lú  
Louth County Council



Cistithe ag  
An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council





# Have your say!

## Louth County Council would like to hear your views on nature.

We are seeking feedback on how we should be addressing biodiversity loss and your priorities for biodiversity action in Louth to inform the development of a new Local Biodiversity Action Plan for 2025 – 2030.

It is a requirement by Government under our National Biodiversity Action Plan that all Local Authorities and Government departments have a Biodiversity Action Plan in place by the end of 2026. The development of this plan aims to help to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity within Louth over the next five years. This will be achieved by prioritising, developing, initiating and coordinating actions in partnership with local communities and organisations.

With the recent appointment of a Biodiversity Officer, under the Heritage Council's Biodiversity Officer Programme Louth County Council has commenced this process. A Pre-Draft Consultation Paper has been prepared to provide background to the development of Louth's Plan.

Submissions are sought from all interested parties including members of the public, community groups and organisations during this first phase of the preparation of the Plan.

## How and why should I get involved?

For our Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan to be successful it must reflect your local biodiversity priorities. Knowing what is important to the people of Louth helps to ensure that local knowledge feeds into the process and informs the development of biodiversity actions and priorities that are important to you.

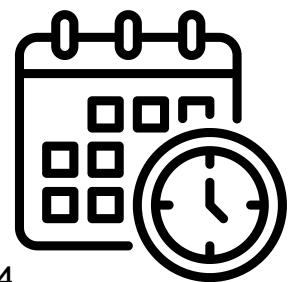
By providing feedback now, you can help to shape the development of the Louth County Council Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

**Deadline for responses: 4pm Friday 6 December 2024**



### Attend a drop-in event:

Dunleer Library: 3-5pm Tue 19 November 2024  
Carlingford Library: 3-5pm Fri 22 November 2024  
Dundalk Library: 3-5pm Fri 29 November 2024  
Drogheda Library: 10-12pm Sat 30 November 2024  
Ardee Library: 3-4:45pm Sat 30 November 2024



### Complete an online survey:

Please complete the online survey on <https://consult.louthcoco.ie/>



### Send an email:

Please email your feedback to [biodiversity@louthcoco.ie](mailto:biodiversity@louthcoco.ie)



### Write a letter:

Helen Hanratty, Biodiversity Officer. Louth County Council. County Hall. Millennium Centre. St. Alphonsus Road. Dundalk. County Louth. A91 KFW6.

# Biodiversity

## It's in our nature!

Biodiversity is short for biological diversity. The words biodiversity and nature can be used interchangeably to describe the huge array of living organisms on Earth. Biodiversity includes all species of bacteria, micro-organisms, algae, fungi, plants, animals (both wild and domesticated) and the genetic variety within species. It also includes the variety of habitats in which they live. Biodiversity is the variety of life on Earth and the natural patterns it forms and processes it drives in our ecosystems.



## We want to hear from you

What do you see as the most significant challenges facing nature in Louth?

What actions should be taken to protect and restore biodiversity in Louth?

What actions do you take to support nature in Louth?

What are the barriers to taking biodiversity action and how could Louth County Council support you?

What changes in local biodiversity have you seen in your lifetime?

Why is nature important to you?

What is your vision for the future of Louth's biodiversity?

# Why does biodiversity matter?

Biodiversity provides many of the basic services that make life possible for people. It is essential to our environment, livelihoods, economic prosperity, culture, health and wellbeing. It provides us with a huge range of resources; the food we eat, the medicines, materials and clothing we use. It drives ecosystem services like pollination, decomposition of waste, flood control, erosion and carbon storage. It purifies the water we drink and the air we breathe, it is our life-support.

Biodiversity shapes our landscape, history and culture. It's all round us, in the places we live, work and relax. It underpins the sustainability and productivity of the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors, as well as the many businesses and industries which depend on the natural environment or on natural raw materials. Biodiversity regulates climate and protects us from extreme weather and other effects of climate change. Biodiversity must be protected and resources used sustainably.

Human activity means that biodiversity is under threat. Nearly 95% of the Earth's land surfaces have been modified by activities such as urban development, agriculture, infrastructure, energy production and mining. Over 20% of assessed species in Ireland are threatened with extinction with 85% of the 59 most precious EU habitats in unfavourable status. In Ireland we have lost 30% of our semi natural grasslands in the past decade and more than half of our native plants are in decline. Climate change drives further biodiversity loss, with degraded habitats less resilient to the impacts of climate change. We need to take action to address these twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.

In May 2019 Ireland became the second county in the World to declare a biodiversity crisis reflecting the significant level of impact pressures are having on nature.

Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan was published in January 2024. Its vision is that :

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



# What are the pressures driving biodiversity loss?

Threats to biodiversity include the loss of wild spaces with habitat loss and degradation and increasing pressure from pollution, invasive species and climate change. With so many pressures impacting on biodiversity loss it is often seen as a “death by a thousand cuts”.

At a national level:

- 85% of EU-protected habitats are in unfavourable status with 46% demonstrating ongoing declining trends (NPWS, 2019).
- 30% of EU-protected species are in unfavourable status with 15% demonstrating declining trends (NPWS, 2019).
- More than half of native Irish plant species have declined in range and/or abundance the last 20 years (Plant Atlas, 2020).
- More than half of Ireland’s 100 bee species have seen substantial declines in numbers since 1980, with 30% of species threatened with extinction (Fitzpatrick et al., 2007).
- The latest review of Birds of Conservation Concern placed 26% of 211 bird species assessed on the Red list, i.e. considered to have a high conservation concern (Gilbert et al., 2021).
- A fifth of breeding and 52% of key wintering bird species are reported to have short-term declining trends ([www.eea.europa.eu](http://www.eea.europa.eu)).
- Extinction threatens 48 species living in the Irish marine environment including fish, crustaceans, shellfish and invertebrates (Fogarty, 2017).
- 80% of non-native species introduced to Ireland since the year 1500 have increased.

There is lots of scientific evidence available that shows the impact that the biodiversity crisis is having on Irish flora and fauna. Data is collected in Louth under many national monitoring programmes with Louth specific information available on data portals like the National Biodiversity Data Centre and the EPA’s [Catchments.ie](http://Catchments.ie) website.



# What is a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan?

The current Local Biodiversity Action Plan for County Louth 2021-2026 was endorsed by Louth County Council in January 2021. Louth County Council are now working to prepare a review of the 2021 Plan to reflect the current context and align with Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan. The 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan requires that all Local Authorities and Government departments have a Biodiversity Action Plan in place by the end of 2026.



Louth's Plan will be designed to provide a structured approach to biodiversity conservation at the Local Authority level. It will outline the objectives and actions needed to protect and enhance biodiversity within the Local Authority area. The plan will be developed in the context of both national and international biodiversity commitments as well as regional and local policies, priorities and aims to reflect the views of those who live and work in the County.



The Plan will provide the context for the Local Authority to work with and support local communities, agencies, NGOs and landowners, to develop plans, policies and projects to record, restore and conserve local biodiversity.

While the specific vision and objectives of each Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan will be decided upon locally, all plans should aim to record, conserve, restore and promote biodiversity, and to increase awareness, understanding and appreciation of it among the people of the area.



The aim of the Louth County Council Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2025–2030 will be to place biodiversity at the heart of the Local Authority. This will be achieved through increasing knowledge, understanding, evidence, participation, awareness and appreciation of our natural heritage to lead to effective conservation, management and protection of biodiversity for future generations.

The Plan will help to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity within Louth over the next five years.

# How will we deliver the Plan?

The Heritage Council have published Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan Guidelines recommending the approach that should be taken to prepare and deliver a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan. The aim of the guidance document is to assist Local Authority Biodiversity Officers and their respective Local Authorities in the development and implementation of effective Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plans. The document aims to serve as a comprehensive manual, offering insights into best practice, policy frameworks, and strategic and actionbased planning for biodiversity conservation at the local level.

## 1: PREPARATION

Secure agreement of the Management Team & establish a Biodiversity Working Group. Gather background data & identify gaps.

## 2: VISION & OBJECTIVES

Agree the broad aims of the plan with the Biodiversity Working Group.

## 3: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public consultation stage one: Produce a discussion paper, hold meetings & invite submissions.

## 4: PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Identify issues & needs, agree objectives & actions & prepare a draft plan, liaising with colleagues & the Biodiversity Working Group.  
AA & 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 & hold meetings.

## 7: PLAN APPROVAL

Revise the draft plan & present it to senior management, the appropriate SPC(s) & full Council for approval.

## 8: PUBLICATION

Publish & launch the new Biodiversity Action Plan.

Stages of development of a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan (Heritage Council)

# Louth Biodiversity Working Group



Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan highlights the key role that Local Authorities have in the protection and restoration of biodiversity at a local level. A Louth Biodiversity Working Group is being set-up to support the development, delivery and implementation of the Louth County Council Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2025 – 2030. Operating as a non-statutory advisory group, it will provide observations on the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the Plan. The Group will meet quarterly during the development and implementation of the Plan. Members will be drawn from a wide range of representative groups including:



# Biodiversity in Louth

Louth has a fantastic wealth of biodiversity which is reflected in the suite of national and international protected sites that have been designed across the County.

Our coasts, shorelines and estuaries are particularly rich in wildlife with extensive sand and mudflats, wetlands and saltmarshes supporting large numbers of wintering and breeding birds. Under the Ramsar Convention Dundalk Bay is noted as an internationally important coastal wetland area where extensive saltmarshes, seagrass beds, intertidal sand and mudflats support more than 50,000 wintering waterbirds, the largest concentration on Ireland's east coast.

The sites include priority habitats and species, are referred to as the "Natura 2000 Network" and are legally protected under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives. In addition to EU designations there are 24 proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs) in Louth, these areas were identified as places where plants and animals are considered to be in a relatively natural state. None of these areas have been legally designated in Louth and their only protection from damaging development remains their listing in County and other Development Plans or where they overlap with a European site (an SAC or an SPA).

Sites designated of EU importance include 6 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and 6 Special Protection Areas (SPAs); collectively known as Sites of Conservation Importance (SCIs).

- Boyne Coast and Estuary SAC
- Boyne Estuary SPA
- Carlingford Lough SPA
- Carlingford Mountain SAC
- Carlingford Shore SAC
- Clogher Head SAC
- Dundalk Bay SAC
- Dundalk Bay SPA
- North-west Irish Sea SPA
- River Boyne & River Blackwater SAC
- River Boyne & River Blackwater SPA
- Stabannan-Braganstown SPA

Birds are very much a highlight in Louth with much of our marine area included in the North-West Irish Sea Special Protection Area (SPA) reflecting the area's particular value in supporting birdlife. Dundalk Bay has wide areas of intertidal flats and is of international importance regularly supporting more than 20,000 wintering birds. We have internationally important populations of Light-bellied Brent Geese in both Dundalk Bay and Carlingford Lough, with populations of other bird species including the Greylag Goose, Knot, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwit also of international significance in the county.

At the Boyne Estuary an area of shingle at Baltray Dunes a particularly important breeding site for the rarest Irish tern, the Little Tern. At Stabannan-Braganstown a relatively small plain near the River Glyde supports an internationally important wintering population of Greylag Geese.

The Carlingford Mountain range, the Cooleys, is our only upland area in the county. The area is geologically important and has a valuable mosaic of wet and dry heaths, acidic grasslands and includes some areas of alkaline fen wetland systems. Carlingford Mountain is notable for the occurrence of certain alpine plants, including the rare Parsley Fern, several rare "Red List" bryophytes and for the presence of Peregrine Falcon.

The sea cliffs and headland at Clogher Head support a great diversity of coastal heath plants with Spring Squill one of the rare plants found there.

There are several rare and threatened animals, plants and birds listed under the Wildlife Act and the Floral Protection Order that warrant protection in Louth.

Outside of our protected sites we have many fabulous biodiversity hotspots across the County in our wetlands, hills, rivers, estuaries, forests, farms and gardens. The rich tapestry of habitats we have and the wildlife corridors created by hedgerows and rivers all provide homes for wildlife.

## Acknowledgements

The Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme is delivered in partnership with the Heritage Council, with the development of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan being funded through the Heritage Council Local Biodiversity Action Fund.



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Louth County Council

Cistithe ag

**An Chomhairle Oidhreachta**  
**The Heritage Council**



Art work credit: Tynan Ward  
Winner Age 8-12

Louth's Brilliant Biodiversity Art Competition 2024

All photos taken in Louth by Helen Hanratty  
Biodiversity Officer, Louth County Council

# To find out more about biodiversity in Louth

Scan the QR code:



Art work credit: Jessica Kierans  
Winner Under 7  
Louth's Brilliant Biodiversity Art  
Competition 2024

## Contact Information



<https://www.louthcoco.ie/en/services/environment/biodiversity/>



[Biodiversity@LouthCoCo.ie](mailto:Biodiversity@LouthCoCo.ie)



County Hall, Millennium Centre, St.  
Alphonsus Road. Dundalk. County Louth.  
A91 KFW6



042 9335457