



Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan Guidelines

2024



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Guidance Document

The Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme is a Heritage Council Initiative. In addition to supporting the programme financially, the Heritage Council takes an active role in providing training and development opportunities for Biodiversity Officers and developing guidance for important parts of the programme.

The aim of this 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 (LABAPs). The document aims to serve as a comprehensive manual, offering insights into best practice, policy frameworks, and strategic and action-based planning for biodiversity conservation at the local level.

1.2 Aim of a Biodiversity Action Plan

The LABAP is designed to provide a structured approach to biodiversity conservation at the local authority level. It outlines the objectives and actions needed to protect and enhance biodiversity within a specific local authority area. The plan should be developed in the context of both national and international biodiversity commitments as well as regional and local policies, priorities and local consultation. A local Biodiversity Action Plan provides 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 their local biodiversity within a regional and national context.

While the specific vision and objectives of each Biodiversity Action Plan will be decided locally,

a City or County Biodiversity Action Plan 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 plan can also be used to inform decision makers, to gain the support of the key players and to forge new partnerships in protecting and raising awareness of biodiversity. It enables a range of players to engage in discourse on the importance of natural heritage in terms of its global, cultural, educational, academic, economic, recreational, aesthetic, and personal values, in addition to its own intrinsic value.

1.3 The Heritage Council

The Heritage Council is a statutory body established under the Heritage Act 1995 with a mission to engage, educate and advocate to develop a wider understanding of the vital contribution that heritage makes to social, environmental and economic well-being. The Council's remit includes built, natural and cultural heritage, and the linkages between these.

The Heritage Council's Strategic Plan 2023-2028 guides engagement with local authorities, communities, and other stakeholders. Supporting the development of city and county Biodiversity Action Plans is a crucial component of this work, as it sets out a strategic framework for the conservation, management, and promotion of natural heritage at the local level.

The Heritage Council plays a pivotal role in the conservation of biodiversity in Ireland. As an advisory body, it provides expertise, funds research, supports initiatives aimed at the conservation of natural heritage and actively engages with the planning process in relation to biodiversity at protected sites and in the wider

countryside. The Council works in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organisations to facilitate the integration of biodiversity considerations into policy and practice.

Biodiversity Officers employed in partnership with the Heritage Council under the auspices of the Biodiversity Officer Programme, manage the biodiversity function within a city/county in a coordinated manner, as part of an integrated approach to conservation of built, natural and cultural heritage. A Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan aims to guide this work in an action-focussed way, linking local and national policy with action on the ground.

1.4 The Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan

Local Authorities are instrumental in the conservation of biodiversity within their jurisdictions. They are responsible for the planning and management of local ecosystems, ensuring sustainable development, and enforcing specific environmental regulations. The Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan serves as a strategic tool to support and guide these efforts.

A City or County Biodiversity Action Plan is a local authority document but should address the concerns and needs of the community and relevant agencies and groups with the city or county, underpinned by the principle of shared stewardship of biodiversity. A Biodiversity Action Plan provides a platform to reach consensus on how best local biodiversity can be conserved and managed on a partnership basis, and a way to focus a range of collective energies and initiatives.

The plan should be delivered by a number of groups working in partnership (The Biodiversity Working Group). The plan should identify a vision for the biodiversity of the city or county

and priorities for action, over a specified period, and should include a mechanism for monitoring impacts, review and evaluation.

1.5 Relationship between Heritage Plan and Biodiversity Action Plan

In many local authorities, a City or County Heritage Plan is already in place, setting out a vision and strategic objectives for the promotion, conservation, best practice, and access to local built, natural and cultural heritage. Informed by national and local policy as well as public and community engagement, the Heritage Plan contains objectives for all the heritage of the city or county, including biodiversity. In many cases, this Heritage Plan will be a high level strategic document, and the Biodiversity Action Plan fits in at the next level in the hierarchy of plans ([see Figure 1](#)), containing the objectives and actions which will translate the strategic aims of the Heritage Plan into action on the ground.

The production of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan will be undertaken by the Biodiversity Officer with the help of the Biodiversity Working Group, often set up under the auspices of the Heritage Forum. The Biodiversity Officer will also work closely with other departments of Local Authority in developing the Plan. It is envisaged that the Heritage and Biodiversity Officers will collaborate closely throughout this process. National support and co-ordination of this process is provided by the Heritage Council.

1.6 Relationship between biodiversity action plans and county development plans/local area plans

The 4th edition of Ireland's **National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2023 – 2030** states that “local authorities play a key role in biodiversity conservation through the planning

system". There are several targets identified under 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, regarding designated areas and protected species*) that are relevant for local authorities in their plan making functions. However, of key importance is Outcome 3C (*Planning and development will facilitate and secure biodiversity's contributions to People*). Action Numbers 3C2 and 3C3 are especially important, whereby the objectives of the NBAP are to be aligned and integrated within the statutory land use plans. In addition, actions 1B9, 1C5 should also be key considerations for all plans.

The **National Planning Framework – Project Ireland 2040**, identifies "*Enhanced Amenities and Heritage*" as one of our national strategic outcomes. Within this, the NPF correctly notes that built, cultural and natural heritage has intrinsic value in defining the character of urban and rural areas, adding to their attractiveness and sense of place. This national policy is supported by **Development Plans – Guidelines for Local Planning Authorities** was prepared for county and city councils in June 2022. Within these guidelines, there are detailed requirements for local forward planning objectives. Features of natural value are our heritage assets, and mandatory objectives under the themes of 'heritage and landscape' have been identified throughout these guidelines. There is an obligation on local authorities to ensure the inclusion of such objectives in their statutory plans.

These guidelines also rightly note that the majority of the country "lies outside of the network of protected sites, and that there are many other sites which are of local importance for flora and fauna". Local authorities have an important role to play in preventing the loss of such sites. Features such as hedgerows,

river corridors, ponds and small stands of trees etc. provide important habitats, and land use plans if aligned with biodiversity action plans can play an important role in protecting these assets. The identification of these non-designated assets often has objectives in county development plans and local area plans. However, the planning system may lack the expertise and resource to map and identify these assets. Biodiversity action plans can fill this important knowledge gap by identifying key network connections which are important for local biodiversity but could also link designated sites. These network connections can link habitats across local authority areas, ensuring greater potential for species dispersal and colonisation. These networks of watercourses, hedgerows etc should form a new layer of "local nature network connection" designations that are on par with local nature reserves.

It is also important to note that it is only in county development plans that proposed Natural Heritage Areas can receive any statutory protection. Therefore, this further amplifies the need to link biodiversity action plans to statutory county development plans. While local area plans offer further opportunity for more local based provision for biodiversity restoration projects in planning. Local area plans are required for settlements with a population over 1500, and are prepared more regularly than county development plans, which are reviewed every 6 years. These plans are a more detailed expression of county development plan policies and cover not just settlements but often their surrounding environs. Natural heritage is a key element of such local area plans, and again there is an obligation for biodiversity action plans to feed into their preparation.

A Hierarchy of Plans

The development and expansion of heritage services at local level requires clarity on the hierarchy of plans. To ensure that the holistic nature of heritage - as intended in the Heritage Act and as perceived by the Heritage Council Strategic Plan - is fulfilled at local level, a hierarchy of plans may be used. This is at the discretion of local management, and ideally would be agreed among all heritage professionals within the local authority. This structure entails a City/County Heritage Strategy at the high level, providing objectives for the translation of national heritage policy to the county level. The next level in the hierarchy will involve Local Action Plans for elements of heritage including biodiversity.

TIER ONE: COUNTY HERITAGE PLAN

The City or County Heritage Plan (or Strategy) is a strategic document that sets out the overall vision and goals for the management and protection of heritage in the county. It should be informed by the Heritage Act 1995, Heritage Ireland 2030, the Heritage Council strategy, other local, national and international policy and legislation and the views of the local community. This strategic approach to heritage management involves considering heritage as a whole and developing a single management framework that encompasses all types of heritage and all heritage professionals within the local authority. This will allow for a more coordinated and efficient approach to heritage management and will assist in ensuring that all aspects of heritage and all professionals in the local authority are considered in decision-making.

County Heritage Forum

The County Heritage Forum is a consultative body that brings together representatives from a range of stakeholders, including heritage organisations, local agencies, and the community. It provides a forum for discussion and debate on heritage issues, and it advises the local authority on the creation and implementation of the City/County Heritage Plan.

TIER TWO: LOCAL ACTION PLANS

Local Action Plans set out specific objectives and actions for managing and protecting heritage in a particular area, such as biodiversity, archives, archaeology, heritage engagement, education etc, within the context of the City or County Heritage Strategic Plan. Each Local Action Plan is developed by a Working Group that includes representatives from relevant stakeholders and is led by heritage professionals within the local authority. The Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan fits into this tier of plans.

This hierarchy of plans ensures that the Heritage Act 1995 and national and regional heritage policy are translated to local action in a coordinated and effective way. The City or County Heritage Plan provides the overall framework for managing and protecting heritage in the county, while the Local Biodiversity Action Plan and Biodiversity Working Groups focus on action for biodiversity conservation in delivering the overall strategy of the Heritage Plan.

Figure 1: Proposed structure for a hierarchy of plans relating to heritage at local authority level.

2 Biodiversity in Ireland

Biological diversity, or biodiversity, is the term given to the variety of life on Earth. The biodiversity we see today is the result of billions of years of evolution, shaped by natural processes and, increasingly, by the influence of humans. It forms the web of life of which we are an integral part and upon which we so fully depend.

This diversity is often understood in terms of the wide variety of plants, animals and micro-organisms. So far, about 1.75 million species have been identified, mostly small creatures such as insects. Scientists estimate that there are actually about 13 million species, though estimates range from 3 to 100 million. Biodiversity also includes genetic differences within each species, for example, between varieties of crops and breeds of livestock. Chromosomes, genes, and DNA, the building blocks of life, determine the uniqueness of each individual and each species.

Another aspect of biodiversity is the variety of ecosystems that occur, such as forests, wetlands, mountains, lakes, rivers, and agricultural landscapes. In each ecosystem, living creatures, including humans, form a community, interacting with one another and with the air, water, and soil around them.

It is the combination of life forms and their interactions with each other and with the rest of the environment that has made Earth a uniquely habitable place for humans. Biodiversity provides a large number of 'goods and services' that sustain our lives.¹ It is important to emphasise the value of biodiversity in its own right, for its innate existence and species history, in addition to its value to humankind.

Ireland possesses a diverse array of ecosystems, including coastal zones, freshwater bodies, peatlands, grasslands, and woodlands. These ecosystems are home to a wide variety of

species, contributing to the country's rich biodiversity. The importance of biodiversity for Ireland cannot be overstated; it serves as the backbone of the nation's ecological, social, and economic well-being. Increasingly, some countries are recognising the need for Right for Nature, whereby, Nature (which encompasses Biodiversity and the natural world) is considered as a legal entity with rights.

Ecologically, biodiversity contributes to ecosystem resilience, productivity, and stability. A diverse ecosystem is often more robust and better able to withstand environmental stress, thereby providing a range of ecosystem services such as water purification, carbon sequestration, and flood regulation.

Economically, biodiversity is a cornerstone for sectors like agriculture, forestry, and fisheries. The genetic diversity within species can be crucial for breeding programmes, resilience against pests and diseases, and adaptability to changing environmental conditions. Furthermore, biodiversity has a direct impact on tourism, a significant contributor to the Irish economy. Natural landscapes and wildlife attract tourists, thereby generating revenue and creating employment opportunities.

Socially and culturally, biodiversity has intrinsic value. Natural landscapes and the species they host are often interwoven with cultural identity and traditional practices. Moreover, the aesthetic and recreational value of biodiverse ecosystems contributes to human well-being, offering spaces for relaxation, inspiration, and physical activity.

The societal benefits of biodiversity are manifold. Ecosystem services, such as pollination, are vital for agriculture and, consequently, food security. Wetlands act as natural water filtration systems, while forests

¹ Introductory paragraphs from The Heritage Council (2003) Guidelines for the production of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (draft).

play a role in air purification. These services are not just ecological amenities; they translate into public health benefits and economic savings. Biodiversity has educational and scientific significance. Studying diverse species and ecosystems contributes to our understanding of life on Earth, leading to medical discoveries, technological innovations, and insights into climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Despite its importance, biodiversity in Ireland and globally faces many threats. Habitat loss and fragmentation, due to agricultural expansion, urbanisation, infrastructure development, pollution, invasive species, and climate change all have a cumulative impact, leading to a decline in species populations and the degradation of natural ecosystems.

Climate change is altering habitats and species ranges and triggering extreme weather events that can devastate local ecosystems. The changing climate can also facilitate the spread of invasive species, which can outcompete, prey upon, or bring diseases to native species, further diminishing local biodiversity.

Overexploitation of resources, such as overfishing and unsustainable forestry practices, directly depletes populations and disrupts natural ecosystems. Pollution, including nutrient runoff from agriculture and waste discharge into water bodies, further exacerbates the loss of biodiversity.

The development and implementation of robust Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plans are crucial steps in addressing these challenges and conserving Ireland's rich biodiversity for future generations.

2.1 Strategic Context

As a partner of the Heritage Council, the local authority Biodiversity Action Plan should reflect relevant objectives and actions of the Heritage Council Strategy 2023-2028 "Our Place in Time"¹.

The development of a Local Biodiversity Action

Plan is also informed by and developed in the context of national and international policies and plans such as those summarised in the following sections.

The Heritage Council Strategic Plan

The Heritage Council's Strategic Plan "Our Place in Time 2023-2028," sets out a comprehensive vision for heritage conservation and management in Ireland. This plan is structured around six strategic pillars: Leadership and Stewardship, Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss, Research, Partnership, Communities, and Education and Engagement.

It outlines a series of actions and initiatives aimed at recording, conserving and enhancing Ireland's natural, built, and cultural heritage. The plan emphasises collaboration, community involvement, and sustainable practices, reflecting a commitment to heritage as a vital component of national identity and societal well-being.

Local Authority Biodiversity Officers are crucial in translating the Heritage Council's strategic vision into tangible action at the local level. Their role involves leading, building capacity, and facilitating natural heritage initiatives within local authorities and local communities. By aligning their efforts with the strategic pillars of the Heritage Council's plan, Biodiversity Officers can ensure a cohesive and effective approach to biodiversity conservation. This alignment is essential for addressing the unique challenges and opportunities present in different localities, while also contributing to broader national biodiversity objectives.

2.2 National and International Biodiversity Policy and Legislation

Understanding the various legislative and policy tools which relate to biodiversity is crucial for biodiversity conservation. Translating the legal requirements and policy priorities into targeted action on the ground is the role of the Biodiversity Officer.

International Level

Ireland is a signatory to conventions and agreements aimed at biodiversity conservation, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Bonn Convention and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD):

Established in 1992, this is a cornerstone international agreement aimed at conserving biodiversity, promoting sustainable use of natural resources, and ensuring equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources. Ireland, as a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), has an obligation to conserve biodiversity at national and local level.

Ramsar Convention: Under the Ramsar Convention, Ireland is committed to the conservation and wise use of wetlands. This involves the designation of wetlands of international importance and the implementation of wise use principles, which include sustainable water management practices and habitat restoration.

CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora):

This treaty regulates the international trade of wildlife species, aiming to ensure that such trade does not threaten the survival of endangered species.

Migratory Species Convention (Bonn Convention):

This UN treaty provides a global platform for the conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial, aquatic and avian migratory animals and their habitats.

European Union Level

Within the EU framework, Ireland is bound by directives like the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive, which aim to protect species and habitats.

EU Birds and Habitats Directives

The EU Birds Directive aims to protect all wild birds and their habitats within the European Union, while the Habitats Directive focuses on the conservation of natural habitats and wild fauna and flora. Ireland is obligated to designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to safeguard these critical habitats and species.

Water Framework Directive

In terms of our aquatic natural heritage, the WFD is pivotal for managing the aquatic environment. The key objectives of the WFD are set out in Article 4 of the Directive. It requires Member States to use their River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) and Programmes of Measures (PoMs) to protect and, where necessary, restore water bodies in order to reach good status, and to prevent deterioration. Good status means both good chemical and good ecological status. The main responsibility for the WFD lies with the Environmental Protection Agency (chemical status) and Inland Fisheries Ireland (ecological status). Watercourses strongly interact with other habitats identified in the Habitats Directive with hydro-morphological changes directly impacting habitats such as riparian woodlands etc.

EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: This strategy aims to protect nature, restore ecosystems and effectively manage natural resources by 2030.

Nature Restoration Law: A new addition, this law aims to restore degraded ecosystems and promote the recovery of declining species. It is a crucial part of the EU Green Deal and is designed to make the EU economy sustainable by turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities. At time of writing in early 2024, detail of agreement and implementation of this regulation on the ground in Ireland is still to be agreed, but it is hoped that the regulation will have a significant impact on biodiversity conservation at the local authority level.

National Level

Nationally, Ireland has its own set of policies and legislation geared towards biodiversity conservation, including the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030. Local Authorities are expected to align their LABAPs with these national commitments to ensure a cohesive approach to biodiversity conservation across the country.

Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000

The Wildlife Act 1976, along with its amendment in 2000, serves as the cornerstone of wildlife protection in Ireland. These Acts make provisions for the protection of wild animals and the conservation of their habitats.

Wildlife Amendment Act 2023

Ireland's fourth National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) carries significant weight following the commencement of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023, in November 2023, which requires all public service bodies, including government departments, agencies and local authorities to integrate biodiversity into their plans, policies and programmes.

National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030

Ireland's Fourth National Biodiversity Action Plan aims to halt the loss of biodiversity and improve the status of Ireland's species, habitats, and ecosystems. Local Authorities are expected to develop their own action plans in line with this national strategy. The vision for biodiversity stated in the plan is ***"Ireland in 2050 –A Vision for Biodiversity: Biodiversity in Ireland is valued, conserved, restored and sustainably used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people"***.

Planning and Development Act 2000

The Planning and Development Act has significant implications for biodiversity as it governs land-use planning and sustainable development. Local Authorities are responsible

for ensuring that City and County Development Plans and local area plans are consistent with biodiversity conservation objectives.

Heritage Ireland 2030

The national heritage plan outlines the vision for Ireland's heritage over the next decade. It places a strong emphasis on the conservation of natural heritage, including biodiversity, and provides a policy framework with which Local Authorities should align.

Climate Action Plan and Local Authority Climate Action Plans

The Climate Action Plan 2023 sets out ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change. Local Authority Climate Action Plans are localised strategies that align with the national plan, and they should include measures for biodiversity conservation as part of a holistic approach to climate action.

Many other policies and regulations including the EIA Directive and the Nature Restoration Law will impact on and inform the work of the Biodiversity Officer and guide the development of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

By understanding and integrating these various commitments, policies, and legislative frameworks, Local Authorities can develop comprehensive and effective LABAPs that not only meet national and international obligations but also address local biodiversity needs effectively.

This guidance document aims to provide Local Authority Biodiversity Officers with the tools to develop and implement effective LABAPs in line with these commitments.

3 Setting the Scene: Understanding Biodiversity in a Local Authority Area

3.1 Analysis of Existing Data

Before embarking on the development of a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan (LABAP), it is crucial to have a thorough understanding of the existing biodiversity within the local authority area. This involves the collection and analysis of existing data on local flora, fauna, and ecosystems. Data sources may include previous surveys research and studies, planning files and frameworks, national biodiversity databases, and academic research. The analysis should aim to identify key species, habitats, and ecological networks within the area, providing a context for prioritising conservation action and a baseline against which future changes can be measured.

A useful starting point for a Local Biodiversity Action Plan is to establish a database at the local level on the state of knowledge of local biological diversity. This will contain information of relevance to the local area, and could be built upon and added to, as the amount of information at the local level increases. Clearly information on designated sites will comprise a significant component of this database, but the focus of the local database should be to generate and make accessible information on the biological diversity of the wider countryside, outside designated sites.

The National Biodiversity Data Centre may be able to assist with the development of this database, to ensure that a consistent approach is adopted by the individual local authorities.

To build upon the compilation of information on the local biodiversity resource, a stock taking of the main habitats and species that occur within the area or have occurred in the area in the relatively recent past should be done. This should identify features that are of:

- ▶ international and national interest, or
- ▶ locally distinctive, or locally rare and therefore of local conservation interest, or
- ▶ historical interest.

An audit of the local biological diversity resource need not be a major undertaking. In its simplest form it can comprise a list of species and habitats that fall into the categories shown above, which over time can be added to as more information becomes available. However, ideally an audit should involve a review of selected key habitats and species, together with any information available on historical or current population/extent trends and status. Should there be insufficient information available to do a thorough audit of the biodiversity resource at this stage, data collection should be prescribed as a priority target in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Despite the difficulties that may arise in undertaking a biodiversity audit of the local authority area, the value of such an audit should not be underestimated, as it is the first step in providing an objective and factual basis for identifying priorities by the Biodiversity Working Group. It will also form the basis upon which any future monitoring programme can be developed.

3.2 Aspects of local biological diversity interest

Those aspects of biodiversity that are of local importance for conservation will depend on the part of the country under consideration. Members of the Biodiversity Working Group and other local experts who are most familiar with their local area, are best placed to identify these aspects of local biodiversity, at least at

the initial stages of the process. The selection of species and habitats considered to be of local importance will reflect the knowledge, understanding and interest of the local community, and this local perspective is to be encouraged. However, as Species and Habitat Action Plans are produced at the national level, and formal national targets and actions for selected species and habitats are agreed, the process at the local level will need to be flexible to allow these national targets to be translated into action at the local level.

3.3 Analysis of Threats and Opportunities

Once the existing data is collated, the next step is to analyse the threats and opportunities facing local biodiversity. Threats could include habitat loss or fragmentation, pollution, or invasive species. Opportunities may involve areas of land that could be restored or conserved, or local initiatives that could be leveraged for biodiversity gains. Understanding these elements will help in the formulation of a more effective and targeted LABAP.

3.4 Data Gaps

It is inevitable that there will be significant gaps in the knowledge on aspects of biological diversity at the local level. At this early stage in the Local Biodiversity Action Planning process it is unrealistic to expect all of these information gaps to be filled, and an appreciation of the extent to which information is lacking is an important element in the introduction of policies and programmes which address the conservation of biological diversity. The identification of information gaps will emerge from the collation of existing information and the biodiversity audit. The Biodiversity Working Group will also need to be aware of any surveys that are currently being undertaken or are planned by other agencies or organisations.

Once information gaps are identified, a concerted effort should be made to ensure that some of these gaps are filled. The filling of these information gaps should comprise some of the key actions in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Ways in which the information gaps could be filled include:

- ▶ data on habitats and species be collected as part of existing initiatives e.g. incorporate habitat mapping as an element of the Local Area Plan or Landscape Character Assessment
- ▶ avail of Heritage Council or LBAF funding to undertake specific surveys
- ▶ linking with national or regional initiatives such as national research, survey or habitat and species monitoring programmes
- ▶ initiate new recording and mapping projects.

3.5 Tools for data collation, gap analysis and survey

Data may occur in many forms and some older data might be only available in hard copy. Deciding the most effective way to collate data is important and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) are now the most common way that ecologists survey and collect data. Each LA may have different systems for example for mapping or drafting. It would be important to establish what GIS is available in the LA and if the Biodiversity Officer can obtain the software, licence and also basic training.

All data should be incorporated into LA datasets and made available to decision makers, planners etc.

Local and National Interest groups may have valuable local information. Sources include NGOs (see details of many of the excellent



Irish NGOs concerned with biodiversity at the website of the Irish Environmental Network, www.ien.ie), EPA, GSI, NPWS and NBDC.

3.6 Engaging with Local Biodiversity Experts and Stakeholders

Collaboration with local biodiversity experts and stakeholders is crucial for the success of any LABAP. Experts can provide valuable insights into local ecosystems, contribute to data collection, and offer advice on effective conservation strategies. Stakeholders, including landowners, local community groups, businesses, and other governmental and non-governmental agencies and organisations, have an interest in the local environment and can offer support in various forms, from volunteer work or data to expertise advice or financial contributions. Engaging these groups early in the planning process ensures a more comprehensive and community-backed approach to biodiversity conservation, in line with national and international commitments.



4 Biodiversity Action Plan Preparation Process

4.1 Key Steps

Step 1. Preparation

The initial step is to secure the agreement of the local authority management team for the preparation of a Biodiversity Action Plan and the establishment of a Biodiversity Working Group. This is mandated in the Service Level Agreement between the Heritage Council and local authorities, but time should be taken to ensure genuine understanding and buy-in to the process at senior level as well as clarity on how the new structure and action plan will fit with existing Heritage Forum and Heritage Plan. This will vary from area to area depending on local structures and resources.

The collection and collation of baseline data on biodiversity in the county is an essential stage in the process ([see Section 3](#)). This will facilitate description of the current ecological context of the area, and can be used to identify gaps, prioritise research and conservation effort, and familiarise the Biodiversity Officer with the city or county and the people and groups active in the area.

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. 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 may 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.

By carefully considering the role, composition, and communication strategies of the Biodiversity Working Group, Local Authorities can ensure that their LABAPs are both robust and effective. This collaborative approach not only enriches the plan with diverse perspectives but also fosters a sense of collective responsibility for biodiversity conservation within the community.

Detailed guidelines for setting up and managing Biodiversity Working Groups as part of the Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan process are in [Section 5](#).

Step 2. Vision and Objectives

Crafting a Compelling Vision for Biodiversity Conservation

A compelling vision serves as the cornerstone of any successful Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan. It provides a long-term aspiration that guides all subsequent planning and action, inspiring stakeholders and the broader community to engage in biodiversity conservation efforts. Crafting this vision requires a deep understanding of the local biodiversity landscape, as well as the challenges and opportunities it presents.

The vision should be both ambitious and realistic, capturing the essence of what the community aims to achieve in terms of biodiversity conservation. It should be articulated in a way that resonates with a wide range of stakeholders, from landowners and local residents to policymakers and businesses. For example, a vision statement might read: ***“To establish [Local Authority Area] as a leader in biodiversity conservation, where rich and diverse ecosystems thrive alongside a vibrant and sustainable community.”***

Setting Clear, Measurable, and Achievable Objectives

Once a compelling vision has been established, the next step is to translate this into a set of clear, measurable, and achievable objectives. These objectives serve as the roadmap for the LABAP, outlining the specific outcomes that the Local Authority aims to achieve within a defined timeframe. Objectives should be prioritised.

Each objective should be:

- ▶ **Clear:** It should be unambiguous, providing a straightforward description of what is to be achieved.
- ▶ **Measurable:** It should include indicators that allow for the tracking of progress over time.
- ▶ **Achievable:** While objectives should be ambitious, they must also be realistic given the resources available and the specific challenges of the local context.

Objectives could range from habitat restoration and species protection to community engagement and policy integration. For instance, one objective might focus on restoring a specific wetland area, while another could aim to increase community participation in biodiversity conservation efforts by a certain percentage.

Aligning Objectives and Actions with Local and National Priorities

Ensuring that the objectives and actions of the Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan are aligned with both local and national priorities is crucial for success and long-term sustainability. This alignment not only streamlines efforts but also maximises the impact of resources allocated for biodiversity conservation.

Integration with Other Local Authority Policies and Strategies

The LABAP should be designed to complement and synergise with other strategic plans within

the local authority, such as development plans and climate action plans. This integrated approach ensures that biodiversity considerations are embedded in all aspects of local governance.

Biodiversity considerations should be integrated into the decision-making processes of the local authority. This could involve conducting biodiversity impact assessments for new development projects or incorporating biodiversity targets into other strategic plans.

The Local Authority Heritage Plan outlines the strategic priorities for natural heritage within the local jurisdiction. The LABAP should identify synergies with these priorities. For example, if the plan emphasises the conservation of local wetlands, the LABAP could include specific objectives and actions aimed at wetland restoration and protection.

The LABAP should be designed to complement the Local Authority Climate Action Plan. Objectives could include the promotion of nature-based solutions to climate challenges, such as the restoration of peatlands for carbon sequestration or the planting of native tree species to mitigate flood risks.

Heritage Council Strategic Plan 2023-2028

The Heritage Council's Strategic Plan provides a national framework for biodiversity conservation. By aligning the objectives and actions of the LABAP with the six pillars of the Heritage Council's Strategic Plan, a Biodiversity Officer can ensure a robust, integrated, and community-engaged approach to biodiversity conservation at the local level.

The Biodiversity Officer can use the overarching pillar of "Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss" to inform the development of objectives at the local authority level. This could include utilising the network of Biodiversity Officers for sharing best practices, research, and resources; taking

advantage of training courses to build skills that are directly relevant to the role of a Biodiversity Officer. Work on designing local policies that protect high-carbon habitats and soils, and encourage sustainable farming practices that sequester carbon, would align closely with the Council's objectives. Biodiversity Officers can leverage the Heritage Council's focus on education and engagement to create local programmes that educate the public on the importance of biodiversity and climate action.

Heritage Ireland 2030

Heritage Ireland 2030 sets out the national vision for Ireland's natural heritage. The LABAP should be aligned with its overarching goals, such as the promotion of sustainable management of natural resources and the enhancement of biodiversity. This could involve setting local objectives that contribute to the national targets for habitat restoration, species protection, and public engagement in natural heritage.

National Biodiversity Action Plan

The National Biodiversity Action Plan is the primary document outlining Ireland's strategy for biodiversity conservation. The LABAP should be closely aligned with its objectives, ensuring that local actions contribute to national goals.

By carefully aligning the LABAP with both local and national priorities, Local Authorities can ensure a cohesive and effective approach to biodiversity conservation. This not only amplifies the impact of individual actions but also fosters greater collaboration and resource-sharing among different levels of governance.

By crafting a compelling vision and setting clear, measurable, and achievable objectives, Local Authorities can develop a LABAP that not only guides effective action but also inspires and mobilises a wide range of stakeholders. This ensures that the plan is both robust and capable of delivering meaningful impact in the realm of biodiversity conservation.

Step 3. Public Engagement

An important objective is to build public awareness and, ultimately, public support. A sense of common ownership of the plan by all those who contribute to it, within the council and by the wider public, should be a fundamental objective of the process.

The identification of local issues and needs can be achieved through a public participation exercise. This can identify the issues facing the community and should identify what the various stakeholders want to see achieved for the heritage over the period of the plan.

Public participation in the plan making process can commence with the production of an issues or discussion paper which introduces the public to the concept of a Biodiversity Action Plan, and summarises the outcomes of previous plans, if relevant. The paper will help set the context for public involvement in the development of the new plan. For areas where a previous Biodiversity Action Plan has been implemented, the discussion paper can include a summary of the achievements of the previous plan, the results of an evaluation of the plan, and a summary of the key changes in policy context since the publication of the previous plan. Discussion papers and consultation documents should make clear reference to the partnership between the local authority and the Heritage Council in preparing and implementing the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

For areas where the first plan is being created, the discussion paper may include some background on the biodiversity of the county, some findings from the data gathering stage, information on the Heritage Council Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme, and perhaps pose some questions for those considering participation to consider.

In addition to a discussion paper, public participation in the process can be facilitated

through meetings (online or in person), presentations to interested groups, discussions with elected members at Municipal District level, direct invitation to participate and advertisement in local media to invite submissions from interested parties. Many local authorities now use online consultation portals and these are a convenient way to reach many people but should not be used to the exclusion of those who may not have access to relevant technology or internet. The commencement of the public consultation should be advertised clearly in local print or broadcast media (see template advert wording below) as well as via social media.

		An Chomhairle Oidhreachta The Heritage Council
Name of Local Authority		
<p>[Name of Local Authority] is seeking your assistance with the preparation of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan.</p>	<p>The consultations will be held in the following venues:</p>	
<p>You are invited to participate in the consultation process and avail of the opportunity to identify biodiversity issues and needs at local level and to discuss mechanisms to address them locally. All interested individuals and organisations are welcome to attend.</p>	<p>[one meeting should be held in each Municipal District]</p>	
	<p>Written submissions are also invited and should be received by the Biodiversity Officer by</p>	
	<p>[date should be at least six weeks from the date of the ad]</p>	
<p>For further information please contact: [contact details of Biodiversity Officer] [website for online consultation]</p>		

Figure 2: Suggested Biodiversity Action Plan public advertisement.



The following is an indicative list of the types of bodies and organisations that should be invited to make submissions to the Biodiversity Action Plan. It would be appropriate to contact these directly in addition to the public advertisements:

- ▶ Local authority (elected members, management team, other relevant professionals eg Heritage, Planning, Environment, Climate, Roads etc)
- ▶ relevant state and semi-state agencies eg National Parks and Wildlife Service, Coillte, Teagasc, Bord na Mona, Waterways Ireland, Inland Fisheries Ireland, EPA, LAWPRO etc
- ▶ landowner representative groups (e.g. IFA, ICMSA, Macra na Feirme, etc.)
- ▶ The Heritage Council
- ▶ Local non-governmental organisations
- ▶ Community representatives including the Public Participation Network for the City or County
- ▶ Local development bodies, e.g. LEADER, area development partnerships, etc.
- ▶ groups representing socially excluded and disabled people
- ▶ local interest-groups (wildlife, environmental etc.)
- ▶ schools and educational institutions
- ▶ business representative groups (Chambers of Commerce etc.)

Step 4. Plan Development

The results of the public consultations and submissions should be compiled by the Biodiversity Officer and presented to the Biodiversity Working Group to allow the group members to identify and discuss the full range of issues which may be considered in the Biodiversity Action Plan, the relative priority of each of these issues, the short and long-

term implications of dealing with each one, and possible alternative strategies for action. It will not be possible to deal with all the issues identified, so decisions will have to be made and priorities identified for the period of the plan. It is a good idea to ensure that the Biodiversity Action Plan seeks to address a combination of long and short-term issues over the period of the plan, as some long-term issues may extend beyond the period of the plan.

Prioritising Actions Based on Urgency and Feasibility

Effective action planning begins with a thorough assessment of the biodiversity challenges and opportunities within the local authority area. Once these have been identified, it is crucial to prioritise actions based on their urgency and feasibility. Urgent actions are those that address immediate threats to local biodiversity, such as habitat destruction or the spread of invasive species. Feasible actions are those that can be realistically achieved within the available timeframe and with the resources at hand.

To prioritise actions, consider employing a scoring system that takes into account the severity of the threat, the potential for positive impact, and the feasibility of implementation. This will enable creation of a ranked list of actions that can serve as the backbone of the Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan.

Setting Clear Targets and Indicators

Once actions have been prioritised, the next step is to set clear, measurable targets and indicators for each action. Targets should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART).

Indicators are the metrics by which you will measure the success of each action. These could be quantitative, such as the number of hectares of habitat restored, or qualitative, such as the level of community engagement

in biodiversity initiatives. It is crucial that these indicators are easy to measure and monitor over time to ensure the effectiveness of the LABAP.

Allocating Resources and Responsibilities

The final step in action planning is the allocation of resources and responsibilities. Each action in the LABAP should have a designated lead, whether this is a specific department within the local authority, a partner organisation, or a community group. This ensures accountability and facilitates effective implementation.

Resource allocation should be realistic and based on a detailed budget that accounts for both financial and human resources. This includes not only the direct costs of each action but also the ongoing costs of monitoring and evaluation.

Effective action planning is a multi-step process that involves prioritising actions based on urgency and feasibility, setting clear targets and indicators, and allocating resources and responsibilities. By following this approach, Local Authorities can develop a robust and achievable LABAP that makes a meaningful contribution to biodiversity conservation.

Step 5. Plan Review

The draft Biodiversity Action Plan should be approved by the Management Team after agreement by the Biodiversity Working Group, and it should be presented as a draft to the relevant Strategic Policy Committee(s) by the Biodiversity Officer. Timing of these meetings are set in advance, so the date of the likely meeting should be sought in good time, to ensure that the draft is ready in time for circulation to members in advance of the meeting.

Step 6. Public Review

Once the draft has been agreed by the Strategic Policy Committee, it should be made available for the public to comment. Effective stakeholder engagement and public participation are crucial elements in the development and implementation of a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan. This section outlines a two-stage approach to public engagement, along with detailed recommendations on how each stage should be handled.

- ▶ Make the draft LABAP available in multiple formats, including online and hard copies at local libraries and community centres.
- ▶ Use visual aids like infographics and maps to help explain complex issues.
- ▶ Hold a second round of public meetings to present the draft LABAP and invite feedback.
- ▶ Again, provide a clear mechanism for stakeholders to submit their views and set a deadline for submissions.

Public awareness and education are essential for the success of any LABAP. The more the community understands the importance of biodiversity, the more likely they are to engage in conservation efforts. The Biodiversity Officer may consider development of educational materials that can be distributed at public meetings and through schools, use of social media to share updates on the LABAP's progress and to highlight success stories. A dedicated website or a specific section of the Council website can be created for the LABAP, where stakeholders can find all relevant documents and updates.

Stakeholder engagement and public participation are essential components of an effective LABAP. By following these guidelines, Local Authorities can ensure that their LABAP is both robust and widely supported.

Step 7. Plan Approval

Submissions and comments received on the draft Biodiversity Action Plan should be compiled and assessed by the Biodiversity Officer and presented with recommendations to the Biodiversity Working Group for its consideration. The Biodiversity Working Group make the necessary amendments to the draft plan, following which it should be submitted to senior management and the Strategic Policy Committee for final approval. Once approved by the SPC, the plan can go before the full Council for approval.

The timing of these meetings should be carefully planned, particularly as the SPCs may only meet quarterly. Meeting dates for all SPCs for the year will be available from the start of each year.

Step 8. Publication

Following approval by the elected members in the full Council, the Biodiversity Action Plan should be published and distributed to all those who contributed to the process as well as to the wider public. Copies should be made available in local libraries and other suitable local venues (eg community centres, Nature Reserves) and the document should be made available online. Copies should also be sent to the Heritage Council.

Consideration can be given to a formal launch of the Plan which will help to raise the profile of the Biodiversity Action Plan and the Biodiversity Office locally, particularly if this is the first plan for the area.

A summary of the stages of development of a Biodiversity Action Plan is shown in [Figure 3](#). The timeline for development of the plan is likely to take 12-18 months. Where possible, public consultation during the summer months and over holiday periods should be avoided.



Biodiversity Action Plan Stages



Figure 3: Stages of development of a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan.



5 Local Authority Biodiversity Working Group

These guidelines have been developed for Local Authority Biodiversity Officers by the Heritage Council. The details may be adapted as required at local level.

5.1 Role of the Local Biodiversity Working Group

Local Authority Biodiversity Working Groups are non-statutory advisory groups established by the local authority to provide observations and advice on the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

The role of the Working Group is to collaborate with the Biodiversity Officer in writing the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, to provide feedback and assistance in the implementation of the objectives and actions of the plan, to monitor progress and to evaluate impacts of the plan.

The Working Group should aim to:

- ▶ Promote exchange of information, good practice and a discussion of biodiversity topics.
- ▶ Provide observations on the Local Biodiversity Action Plan
- ▶ Create potential for collaboration among member organisations
- ▶ Help raise awareness of biodiversity
- ▶ Assist with community engagement and communication.

5.2 Best Practice in Public Participation in Decision-Making

Biodiversity Working Groups should be established and managed in accordance with best practice principles of public participation in

decision-making. The operation of the Heritage Council's Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme will also include opportunities to consult with and involve the wider public in the work of the Office, and best practice should also be used to ensure inclusivity in this sphere. This includes:

- ▶ Be inclusive and transparent. Make sure that all relevant people have the opportunity to participate, regardless of their background or interests. Provide clear and timely information about the decision-making process and how public input will be used.
- ▶ Use a variety of participation methods. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to public participation. In addition to the Biodiversity Working Group, use a variety of methods, such as public meetings, surveys, online forums, and citizen panels, to reach a diverse range of people.
- ▶ Provide meaningful opportunities for input. Public participation should be more than just a token gesture. Give the public real opportunities to provide input on the decision-making process and to have their input considered seriously.
- ▶ Give feedback to the public. Let the public know how their input was used in the decision-making process. This will help to build trust and encourage future participation.

5.3 Establishment of the Biodiversity Working Group

The exact manner of establishment of the Biodiversity Working Group is a matter for decision at local authority level, but these guidelines will assist in clarifying best practice from the point of view of the Heritage Council.

Where there is an existing and well-established City or County Heritage Forum in place, the Biodiversity group should be established as a working group of the Heritage Forum, with membership supplemented as necessary with additional members. This would mean that some members of the Heritage Forum could represent the Heritage Forum on the Biodiversity Working Group and ensure clear communication between both groups. The Biodiversity Officer should also attend meetings of the Heritage Forum. Other working group members should be chosen to represent the breadth of organisations and groups active in the biodiversity field in the county.

Where there is not an established City or County Heritage Forum in place, the Biodiversity Working Group may be established through a combination of

- ▶ Existing sub-committees of eg Strategic Policy Committees
- ▶ Direct invitation to relevant identified bodies to nominate a representative.
- ▶ Public advertisement for applications for membership.

This approach ensures that the Biodiversity Working Group is representative of a wide range of stakeholder interests. Any public call should be designed to be as transparent as possible in terms of how membership and eligibility will be defined and any limitations in place (e.g. if there is a cap on numbers) and the procedure for nomination or application for individual membership.

5.4 Membership and Representation

Composition: Who Should Be Involved?

The composition of the Biodiversity Working Group should be diverse to ensure a multi-disciplinary approach to biodiversity

conservation. It should include representatives from the Local Authority, including elected members and staff such as planners, engineers, environmental and climate action officers, who have a direct role in policy implementation. Inclusion of local biodiversity experts, such as ecologists and conservationists, is crucial for providing scientific guidance. Stakeholder representation is also essential; this could include local landowners, community groups, businesses, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in environmental conservation. Additionally, it may be beneficial to include policy experts who can navigate the complexities of national and international commitments.

Membership should be representative of the diversity of the local population, reflecting the range of geographic, biodiversity and population interests and may be drawn from the following sectors:

- ▶ Community and voluntary groups
- ▶ Local heritage and biodiversity organisations or groups
- ▶ Local government officials
- ▶ Local Elected Representatives
- ▶ Local development and business
- ▶ State agencies of relevance to biodiversity conservation
- ▶ Educational institutions
- ▶ Landowners and farming representatives

Every effort should be made to ensure that the numbers of state agency representatives and representatives of civil society are balanced. Gender balance should also be the goal. Membership may be capped at a certain number for practical operation reasons – this can be decided at local level.

Representative groups should fulfil the following criteria:

- ▶ Have biodiversity conservation as their main goal or a large part of their operation
- ▶ Operate at a county-wide or regional level
- ▶ For national organisations, a significant presence in the city or county is required
- ▶ For voluntary groups, membership must be transparent and open to all

Representative bodies should be asked to nominate one member to the Biodiversity Working Group. Where a nominated person is appointed to the Working Group, a second nominee from the same body may be designated as the alternate and may substitute for the member from time to time.

It may be decided at local level to provide for the secondment of Individual members with specialist knowledge or specific experience on an occasional basis by agreement of the members of the Biodiversity Working Group. If this is done the process by which members of this type are selected should be detailed in the Terms of Reference.

Working Group members will remain in place for the period of the Biodiversity Action Plan (usually 5 years) after which time membership should be reviewed as part of the plan review process. Local Elected Representatives will remain in place for the lifetime of the Council, after which time membership will be reviewed.

5.5 Operation of the Biodiversity Working Group

Setting up Regular Meetings and Communication Channels

Effective communication is key to the success of the Biodiversity Working Group. Regular meetings should be scheduled to review

progress, discuss challenges, and plan future actions. The frequency of these meetings may vary depending on the phase of the LABAP; however, a quarterly schedule is often effective.

In addition to face-to-face meetings, it is important to establish other communication channels for ongoing collaboration. This could include a dedicated email group, a secure online platform for document sharing, or a newsletter to update all stakeholders on the group's activities and achievements. These channels not only facilitate better coordination among group members but also serve to keep the broader community informed and engaged in the biodiversity conservation efforts.

Terms of Reference for the group should be written and agreed at local level – a draft template for Terms of Reference is attached in [Appendix One](#).

Role of Working Group Chair

The Biodiversity Working Group should have a Chair, who can be nominated by the members of the Working Group or elected by simple majority of the members to serve for a specified term. The role of the chair is to chair the working group meetings, to ensure all members are afforded a chance to participate, and to collaborate with the Biodiversity Officer to ensure the business of the meetings is transacted smoothly. The Chair plays a key role in building and maintaining consensus among group members. This is important because the group's success depends on the cooperation and collaboration of all members. By providing leadership and guidance to the group, the chair can help to ensure that the group's work is successful and impactful. Ideally the Chair of the Biodiversity Working Group should not be the Biodiversity Officer. A decision may be taken at local level that the chair will be an elected representative, or that it should be a community representative.

Work Programme

Each autumn, a proposed work programme for the following year should be discussed, along with project partners and how funding will be sought. Decision on which projects are pursued is ultimately a matter for the local authority. Details of projects progressed and updates on progress of projects should be reviewed at each working group meeting.

Secretariat

Secretariat to the Working Group should be provided by the local authority. This will include convening meetings, booking rooms etc, and recording minutes. The Working Group should aim to communicate efficiently and in a timely manner with all participants.

5.6 Principles

Biodiversity Working Group members should commit to good practice principles, including:

- ▶ Attending all scheduled Biodiversity Working Group meetings and where this is not possible, to arrange for an alternate;
- ▶ Sharing relevant information and communicating with other Working Group members;
- ▶ Making timely contributions to assist with the implementation of the Biodiversity Plan.

Working Group members agree to the following principles with regards to the operation of the group:

- ▶ GDPR – All communication should be in line with GDPR guidelines.
- ▶ Transparency and openness – all documents will be made available by the local authority to the Members and meeting reports will be promptly circulated.

- ▶ Equality and respect – all Members will be afforded equal opportunity – by the Chair and by other Members – to voice their opinion and contribute to the work of the Working Group. There is an overriding obligation for Members to always treat each other with respect.
- ▶ Efficiency – The work and meetings of the Working Group will be managed in as efficient a manner as possible, and Members are requested to respect the time investment by other Members.
- ▶ Collegiality and tolerance – the Members of the Working Group will work together in the spirit of collegiality and tolerance.
- ▶ Common goal – the Members of the Working Group will work together towards a common goal of conserving the biodiversity of the city or county through the Biodiversity Plan.

5.7 Conclusion

Biodiversity Working Groups play an important role in ensuring that Local Biodiversity Action Plans are developed and implemented in a collaborative and inclusive way, with input from a wide range of stakeholders. By following these guidelines, local authorities can establish and manage Biodiversity Working Groups that are effective and efficient.

6 Assessment

6.1 Appropriate Assessment

The requirement for “Appropriate Assessment” is set out in Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). The Habitats Directive is transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 as amended. European Sites are defined in Regulation 2(1) of the Habitats Regulations and comprise Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs), at all stages of designation commencing with the Minister’s notice of intention to designate.

An Appropriate Assessment (AA) is an assessment of the potential adverse effects of a plan or project (alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas. These sites are protected by National and European Law. Detailed guidance for Appropriate Assessment is available from the NPWS².

The AA guidance states: “Plans include all statutory and non-statutory land use, framework and sectoral plans and strategies to the extent that they have the potential to have significant effects on a Natura 2000 site. This incorporates ‘plans and programmes’ covered by the SEA Directive, and **other plans and strategies, including those that are designed or intended to benefit the environment or heritage, such as Heritage and Biodiversity plans**, recreation/amenity plans or strategies, and River Basin Management Plans.”

Stage 1 Screening for AA

Screening determines whether appropriate assessment is necessary by examining:

- 1) whether a plan or project can be excluded from AA requirements because it is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site, and
- 2) the potential effects of a project or plan, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans, on a Natura 2000 site in view of its conservation objectives and considering whether these effects will be significant.

Competent Authorities

The AA Guidelines State: ***“The competent authorities in Ireland are the national, regional or local authorities that are charged with or responsible for consenting, authorising, adopting or deciding to proceed with a plan or project. From a planning and land use perspective, the competent authorities are considered to be the regional authorities, the planning authorities and An Bord Pleanála. It is the competent authority’s responsibility to obtain the information to enable it to screen a plan or project for AA and, if required, obtain from the proponent of the plan or project the NIS. Obviously if a plan or project is being proposed by a competent authority itself, the competent authority will be responsible for the production of the NIS. The competent authority is then responsible for carrying out AA and for maintaining a complete audit trail of the AA process.”***

Expertise

Work on the AA/NIS can be carried out by an in-house team preparing the plan, if they have the requisite ecological and other expertise at their disposal. Alternatively external specialists may

² Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009) Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland Guidance for Planning Authorities. Available at https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/NPWS_2009_AA_Guidance.pdf

be engaged for the purpose, or a combined approach involving in-house and external expertise may be adopted. If it is carried out in-house, the team will be best placed to quickly feed the results of the process back into the plan preparation process but it is essential that the team has at its disposal the necessary competencies to deal with the planning, ecological and other technical issues involved. Consultants, on the other hand, may bring a degree of objectivity to the process, and may be required for their ecological or other expertise.

A combination of the two approaches may well offer the best solution, with specialists engaged to assist the team as required at different stages in the process.

435 of 2004), as amended by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 200 of 2011), particularly Schedule 1, which sets out the “Criteria for determining whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment”.

A screening statement should be produced according to the requirements of government guidelines for planning authorities³. Sufficient time and budget should be allowed in the plan preparation process for AA and SEA screening, so that screening determination statements are prepared for public view at the same time that the draft plan goes on display for public consultation.

In planning the preparation of Heritage and Biodiversity Plans, sufficient time and budget should be allowed to incorporate AA screening to the process. If screening demonstrates that significant effects are certain, likely or uncertain, the plan must either proceed to Stage 2 (AA), or be rejected.

6.2 Strategic Environmental Assessment

Local Biodiversity Action Plans, as non-statutory land use plans require to be screened for the requirement for SEA in accordance with the requirements of:

- ▶ The SEA Directive, particularly Articles 3(3), 3(4) and 3(5) in relation to ‘screening’; and
- ▶ The European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. No.

³ Prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2022) Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities. Government of Ireland, Dublin. Available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e1aa-strategic-environmental-assessment-guidelines-for-regional-assemblies-and-planning-authorities/>

7 Irish Language

In crafting Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plans, the incorporation of the Irish language is not only a legal requirement but a unique opportunity to enrich Ireland's biodiversity conservation efforts. The Irish language, with its historical depth and cultural significance, offers a distinctive perspective on Ireland's natural heritage. This document provides guidelines for embedding the Irish language into biodiversity work at local level, emphasising its role in enhancing our understanding and appreciation of Ireland's diverse ecosystems.

The Irish language can be utilised in various ways within Biodiversity Action Plans. For instance, the inclusion of Irish names for native species, habitats and place names can deepen local engagement and awareness of biodiversity. These names often carry historical and ecological significance, providing insights into the characteristics and cultural importance of species and ecosystems. Additionally, educational materials and public outreach programmes in Irish can foster a stronger connection between communities and their local environment, promoting stewardship and conservation efforts.

The following sections detail the legal requirements for the translation of Biodiversity Action Plans into Irish, as per the Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021. Beyond these legalities, local authorities are encouraged to actively integrate the Irish language into biodiversity initiatives, using it as a tool to celebrate and conserve Ireland's unique natural heritage. This approach not only aligns with legal obligations but also contributes to a richer, more inclusive biodiversity conservation strategy.

7.1 Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021

The Official Languages Act 2003 and the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021 are intended to promote the use of Irish for official purposes and set out the duties of public bodies in relation to the official languages of the State (Irish and English). The Acts place a number of significant requirements on public bodies regarding the use of the Irish language. For full details of all requirements, Heritage and Biodiversity Officers should consult with the Irish Language Officer of their local authority, or with An Coimisinéir Teanga. The Act establishes the duty to publish certain core documents simultaneously in Irish and English, including any document setting out public policy proposals. Advice received by the Heritage Council in relation to Heritage and Biodiversity Plans (22nd January 2024) states "Oifig an Choimisinéara Teanga would favour all such documentation being available in both official languages."

7.2 Public Consultation

Under Section 10A of the Official Languages Act 2003, any policy document issued by or on behalf of a public body, in draft form for public consultation must be issued in both official languages, simultaneously. As Heritage and Biodiversity Plans will be subject to public consultation, the Heritage Council advice is that both the draft and the final plan should be made available in both official languages simultaneously.

7.3 Irish Language Scheme

Irish Language Schemes are specific to local authorities and therefore are not all uniform in

terms of their commitments. Irish Language Schemes will be discontinued when Standards (section 19A) are applied to each public body – local authorities among them. These Standards are not yet available, and Irish Language Scheme requirements will continue until Standards are applied. If a local authority has committed – in its Irish Language Schemes – to making documents like the Heritage and Biodiversity Action Plans available in both official languages, then they must continue to do so.

7.4 Translation

Local Authorities should allow for the cost and time associated with professional translation of both draft and final Biodiversity Plans in preparing these plans. The advice of an Coimisinéir Teanga is that public bodies should use the panel of accredited translators established by Foras na Gaeilge. Contact details for accredited translators is available at www.forasnagaeilge.ie/support/translators-and-editors.

7.5 Conclusion

While adhering to the Official Languages Acts 2003 and 2021 is crucial, the ultimate objective in developing City and County Biodiversity Action Plans should be to fully embrace the Irish language as a key element of biodiversity conservation. Integrating the Irish language goes beyond translation; it involves using the language to highlight the cultural and ecological significance of Ireland's natural heritage. Examples such as incorporating Irish names for species and habitats, and developing Irish-language educational resources, can significantly enhance public engagement and conservation efforts. By committing to this approach, local authorities will not only fulfil legal requirements but also play a pivotal role in conserving and celebrating the Irish language as an integral part of Ireland's rich biodiversity narrative.



8 Implementation and review

Creating and implementing a Biodiversity Action Plan is an iterative process. The plan is continually evaluated, and modifications made based on experience. Over a five-year cycle, the plan is prepared, implemented, evaluated, followed by another cycle of planning and implementation based on the outcome of consultation and ongoing evaluation.

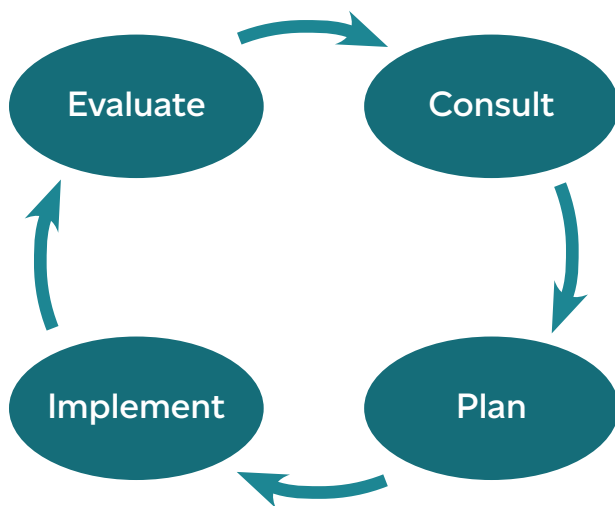


Figure 4: Biodiversity Action Plan cycle of implementation and review.

The Biodiversity Action Plan should be accompanied each year by an Annual Action Plan which indicates how the strategic plan will be actioned, and details who is responsible for each action, the budget, funding source, target outcomes and delivery date. Action plans for the lifetime of the plan should not be prepared all at once as action plans for subsequent years may be determined by the implementation and evaluation of the preceding year. Projected costings should only be included in the annual work programmes rather than in the plan itself. The plan may contain an indicative figure for the implementation of the entire plan.

It is important to set a pace of implementation that can be maintained throughout the entire plan. This should attempt to take account of the inevitable issues that will arise throughout the implementation of the plan, and which will divert the attention of the Biodiversity Officer.

8.1 Keeping stakeholders informed

The elected members will be a crucial part of the process, as they represent the people of the city or county and will be the ones that will endorse the Biodiversity Action Plan on their behalf. In keeping elected members informed, keep in mind that biodiversity conservation is just one of a number of issues that they are expected to deal with. The information they receive should, therefore, be concise, timely, relevant and accessible. They should receive regular updates on the progress of the Biodiversity Action Plan preparation and implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan in line with a predetermined information programme. Such information should be succinct and focussed.

Other stakeholders should be kept informed on the progress of the plan. Suitable communications formats can be agreed at local level but will include regular press releases, annual reports on work carried out, information on the local authority website and social media, annual seminar and Biodiversity or Heritage Week events.

8.2 Rolling Out the Action Plan

Once the LABAP has been finalised and published, the next step is its implementation. This involves initiating the actions identified in the plan, in accordance with the priorities, timelines, and resource allocations that

have been established. An implementation schedule should be developed which outlines the timeline for each action, along with the responsible parties. The plan should be communicated to all stakeholders, ensuring that everyone is aware of their roles and responsibilities. Implementation can start with actions that are both high-impact and feasible, to generate early successes that can build momentum.

challenges can be useful in informing future actions and updates to the LABAP. By taking an iterative approach and celebrating successes along the way, Local Authorities can ensure that their LABAP remains both effective and relevant.

8.3 Regular Reviews

The LABAP should not be viewed as a static document but as an evolving plan that is subject to regular reviews and updates. Being “iterative” in this context means that the plan is continually refined based on the outcomes of implemented actions, new scientific data, and changing community needs.

Regular reviews of the LABAP should be conducted to assess the progress of each action against its targets and indicators. The plan should be updated as necessary to account for new information or changes in circumstances. The Biodiversity Working Group and other stakeholders should be involved in the review process to gather diverse perspectives and insights.

8.4 Celebrating Successes and Learning from Challenges

It is important to acknowledge and celebrate the successes achieved through the LABAP, as this can boost morale and encourage continued engagement from stakeholders. At the same time, challenges and setbacks should be viewed as learning opportunities. Successes should be publicised through various channels, such as local media, social media, and community meetings. “Lessons learned” reviews can be conducted to identify what worked well and what could be improved. Both successes and

9 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are integral components of a successful Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan. They ensure that the plan remains on track, that resources are used effectively, and that the actions taken are having the desired impact on local biodiversity. This section outlines the importance of regular monitoring, the tools and techniques that can be employed, and how to evaluate and adapt actions as necessary.

9.1 Importance of Monitoring of the Implementation and Impact of the Plan

Regular monitoring is essential for several reasons:

- ▶ **Accountability:** It ensures that those responsible for implementing actions are held accountable.
- ▶ **Resource Allocation:** It allows for the reallocation of resources to actions that are proving to be most effective.
- ▶ **Transparency:** Regular updates on the progress of the LABAP can be shared with stakeholders, maintaining public trust and engagement.

A monitoring schedule should be developed which aligns with the targets and indicators set out in the plan. Responsibility for monitoring will be the responsibility of the Biodiversity Officer, though collection of data may be assigned to specific individuals or departments within the local authority. Annual progress reports should be published and made widely available.

9.2 Evaluating the Effectiveness of Actions and Adapting as Necessary

Evaluation is the process of assessing whether the actions taken are achieving the desired

outcomes. This involves comparing the data collected through monitoring against the targets and indicators set out in the LABAP.

A formal evaluation should be conducted at the midpoint of the plan and at the end of the plan period. The evaluation process can be used as an opportunity to engage with stakeholders and gather their feedback on the LABAP's effectiveness. If actions are found to be ineffective, consideration can be given to adapting them or replacing them with more effective alternatives.

Monitoring and evaluation are not one-off activities but ongoing processes that are essential for the long-term success of any LABAP. By regularly monitoring progress and evaluating effectiveness, Local Authorities can ensure that their biodiversity conservation efforts are both impactful and accountable.

10 Funding and Resources

Securing adequate funding and resources is a critical aspect of implementing a successful Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan (LABAP). This section outlines various potential funding sources, the importance of leveraging partnerships for resource sharing, and key considerations for budgeting and financial planning.

The Local Authority should establish a Biodiversity Action Plan Implementation budget within the Local Authority annual budget. This can be used as match funding to leverage other investment in biodiversity in the city or county.

Effective financial planning is essential for the successful implementation of any LABAP. This involves not just securing initial funding but also planning for the ongoing costs of actions, including monitoring and evaluation. For all projects proposed a detailed budget should be produced covering both capital and operational expenses. Where possible, budgets should include contingency funds to account for unexpected costs or challenges.

10.1 Heritage Council Funding

Since the 1990s, the Heritage Council has supported the implementation of local authority Heritage Plans, with funding of €971,845 transferred to local authorities for implementation of Heritage Plans in 2022. A similar fund has been created to support Local Authorities in implementing biodiversity action plan projects at local level, with a budget in 2023 of €375,000. The Heritage Council offers funding to Local Authorities for the implementation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans on a match funding basis. Match funding of 25% must be provided by the Local Authority for projects funded by the Heritage Council under the City or county Biodiversity Plan scheme.

The Biodiversity Plan fund is available only to Local Authorities who have engaged a Biodiversity Officer through the Heritage Council's Biodiversity Officer Programme. Any funding received by a Local Authority under this scheme must be managed by the Biodiversity Officer. With the exception of Year one, when funding is available to assist with the creation of the Biodiversity Action Plan, Biodiversity Action Plan funding will be available for the implementation of plans from approved draft stage onwards - The plan process must, therefore, be at least at step five of the eight steps outlined above.

There will be a number of other funding sources available to the Biodiversity Officer to complement Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan Implementation budget, which will vary over time. Attendance at the Training and Development sessions organised quarterly by the Heritage Council will assist in informing the Biodiversity Officer of additional funding opportunities.

10.2 Other Funding Sources

Other possible sources of funding for implementation of LABAPs include:

- ▶ **Local Biodiversity Action Fund of the NPWS:** The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) offers a dedicated fund aimed at supporting local biodiversity initiatives. This fund can be particularly useful for projects that align closely with national biodiversity objectives.
- ▶ **EU Funding:** Various European Union grants and programmes are available for biodiversity projects, particularly those with a transnational or regional focus.
- ▶ **Private Sector:** Corporate social



responsibility programmes and private foundations often provide grants for environmental projects, including biodiversity conservation.

Partnerships can be a valuable way to augment the resources available for implementing your LABAP. Collaborating with NGOs, academic institutions, and even other local authorities can provide access to additional expertise, manpower, and financial resources. Potential partners should be identified early in the planning process. The most productive collaborations involve clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each partner.

10.3 Strategic Focus Over Opportunistic Funding

While it is often tempting to pursue all available funding opportunities, it is crucial to ensure that

the LABAP remains strategically focused.

Funding should be viewed as a means to achieve the plan's objectives, rather than letting available grants dictate the actions taken or prioritised. It is good practice to always refer back to the LABAP's core objectives when considering funding opportunities, and to be cautious of funding that requires a shift in focus or diverts resources away from priority actions.

Securing adequate funding and resources is a multifaceted task that requires careful planning, strategic focus, and effective collaboration. By considering all available funding sources, leveraging partnerships, and maintaining a strategic approach, Local Authorities can maximise the impact of their biodiversity conservation efforts.

11 Communication and Outreach

Effective communication and outreach are essential for the success of a Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan. Not only do they raise awareness about the plan and its objectives, but they also foster community engagement and support. This section outlines strategies for raising awareness, engaging with local media and community groups, and utilising digital platforms for communication. Heritage Council Communications staff are available to assist Biodiversity Officers with all aspects of this important role. In all communications the role of the Heritage Council in developing and supporting the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer programme should be acknowledged.

11.1 Raising Awareness About the LABAP

The first step in any communication strategy is raising awareness about the Biodiversity Office and the LABAP itself - what it is, why it is important, and how people can get involved. A suite of communication materials should be developed, including brochures, posters, and infographics, that can be distributed at community events and public spaces. It is possible to partner with local schools and community groups to incorporate biodiversity into their actions, using the LABAP as a framework.

11.2 Engaging with Local Media and Community Groups

Local media and community groups can be powerful allies in raising awareness and fostering community engagement. Press releases should be issued to local media outlets to announce key milestones or successes of the LABAP. The Biodiversity Officer can engage with community groups by offering to give talks

or workshops on local biodiversity issues and the role of the LABAP.

11.3 Utilising Digital Platforms for Communication

Online platforms offer a cost-effective and far-reaching means of communication. The Biodiversity Officer may choose actions such as creation of a dedicated webpage or website for the LABAP where people can find all relevant documents, updates, and contact information. The Biodiversity Officer should utilise social media platforms to share updates, success stories, and upcoming events related to the LABAP.

11.4 Building Capacity for Future Engagement

Effective communication and outreach will not only support the current LABAP but also build capacity for future plans. By establishing strong communication channels and fostering community engagement, a foundation of support is created, which can be leveraged when developing future biodiversity action plans. Successful outreach strategies and community engagement activities should be documented for reference in future planning. Active mailing list or community database should be maintained, to facilitate quick and easy communication for future LABAP iterations.

All communications on the Biodiversity Action Plan and the operation of the Biodiversity Office should reference the Heritage Council as funder and strategic partners in the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme. Details of how this should be included are available from the Heritage Council and guidance will be provided at Biodiversity Officer Training and Development sessions.

National Heritage Week and Biodiversity Week

There are many occasions through out the year when special days or weeks can be used to highlight biodiversity and the Local Biodiversity Officer. Biodiversity Week in May is a great opportunity to raise awareness of and public engagement with biodiversity. The week is co-ordinated by the Irish Environmental Network on behalf of the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

National Heritage Week is a Heritage Council initiative in August each year, and is an ideal

time to showcase the work of Heritage Council programmes including the Local Authority Heritage and Biodiversity Officer Programmes. All Heritage Council grantees are required to organise Heritage Week events, and Biodiversity Officers are encouraged to start planning for natural heritage events early. Designated days during the week, such as Wild Child Day and Water Heritage Day may be useful to promote biodiversity specific events, but a range of natural heritage events through out the week should be the aim, in collaboration with the Heritage Officer.

12 Appendices

Appendices can be used in the Local Authority Biodiversity Action Plan, to provide a comprehensive resource that will be invaluable for implementation and future revisions, while keeping the main body of the plan concise and accessible.

Appendices might include:

- ▶ Glossary of Terms
- ▶ List of Relevant Legislation and Policies
- ▶ Templates and Tools for Biodiversity Assessment and Action Planning
- ▶ Stakeholder Engagement Plan
- ▶ Timeline of plan development
- ▶ Summary of submissions received during public engagement



Appendix One Biodiversity Working Group Template Terms of Reference

These are guideline Terms of Reference developed by the Heritage Council, to be adapted as required before adoption at local level. If the Biodiversity Working Group is established as a Working Group of the City or County Heritage Forum, this should be stated, with details of how membership and reporting will be organised between the two groups.

[City/County] Council Biodiversity Working Group

Terms of Reference

The Biodiversity Working Group is a non-statutory advisory group established by the local authority to provide observations on the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The group is established as a working group of the [City/County] Heritage Forum, and members of the working group will report back to the Heritage Forum on the actions of the Working Group, to ensure that the natural heritage objectives of the [City/County] Heritage Strategy are implemented.

Role of the Biodiversity Working Group

The role of the Biodiversity Working Group is to collaborate with the Biodiversity Officer on the Local Biodiversity Action Plan, assist in delivery of the Objectives and Actions of the plan, to monitor progress and to evaluate impacts of the plan.

The Biodiversity Working Group will aim to:

- ▶ Promote exchange of information, good practice and a discussion of biodiversity updates
- ▶ Provide observations to the [City/County] Biodiversity Action Plan:

- ▶ Create potential for collaboration among member organisations
- ▶ Help raise awareness of biodiversity
- ▶ Assist with community engagement and communication;

Establishment of the Biodiversity Working Group

This section should contain details of how the Working Group has been established and how membership was decided – as outlined in the Guidelines, these details will vary from authority to authority. The relationship (if any) to the County Heritage Forum should be stated here.

Membership and Representation

Membership of the Biodiversity Working Group will be representative of the diversity of the local population, reflecting the range of geographic, biodiversity and population interests and will be drawn from the following sectors:

- ▶ Community and voluntary groups
- ▶ Local heritage and biodiversity organisations or groups
- ▶ Local government officials (including Heritage, Environment, Planning, Climate)
- ▶ Local Elected Representatives
- ▶ Local development and business
- ▶ State agencies of relevance to biodiversity conservation
- ▶ Educational institutions
- ▶ Landowners and farming representatives

Each representative group will be invited to nominate one representative to the group and one alternate. Every effort will be made to ensure that the numbers of state agency representatives and representatives of civil society are balanced. Gender balance will also be a goal.

Representative groups must fulfil the following criteria:

- ▶ Have biodiversity conservation as their main goal or a large part of their operation
- ▶ Operate at a county-wide or regional level
- ▶ For national organisations, a significant presence in [*city or county*] will be required
- ▶ For voluntary groups, membership must be transparent and open to all

Individual members with specialist knowledge or specific experience may occasionally be seconded by agreement of the members of the Biodiversity Working Group

Biodiversity Working Group members will remain in place for the period of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (usually 5 years) after which time membership will be reviewed as part of the plan review process. Local Elected Representatives will remain in place for the lifetime of the Council after which time membership will be reviewed.

Operation of the Biodiversity Working Group

- ▶ The Biodiversity Working Group will meet 4 times per annum. Additional meetings may be held during the preparation of the Biodiversity Action Plan.
- ▶ Meetings will be held in person at County Hall [*LOCATION*] or at biodiversity or project related sites as appropriate. In-person, virtual

or hybrid meetings may be held as agreed by members or as circumstances require.

- ▶ Notice of meetings (minimum 7 days), specifying the business to be transacted will be given.
- ▶ Minutes of all meetings will be recorded by the local authority and will be circulated to all members.
- ▶ A quorum will be required before meetings are held, this will be one third of the total membership plus one. If a quorum is not present within 30 minutes of the scheduled start time of the meeting, the meeting will be rescheduled.
- ▶ The Biodiversity Working Group may establish working groups to undertake specific projects or studies in relation to actions of the Biodiversity Plan.
- ▶ The Biodiversity Working Group will have a Chair to be elected by simple majority vote of the members for a term of two years.
- ▶ In the event of the chair not being present at a meeting, the chair for that meeting will be elected by those members present provided there is a quorum for the meeting

Secretariat

Secretariat to the Working Group will be provided by the local authority. This will include convening meetings, booking rooms etc, and recording minutes. The Working Group will seek to communicate through electronic means as far as possible while ensuring accessibility for all members is maintained. The Working Group members will be provided with information in a timely manner in advance of meetings.

Principles

The members of the Biodiversity Working Group will commit to:

- ▶ Attending all scheduled Biodiversity Working Group meetings and where this is not possible, to arrange for an alternate;
- ▶ Sharing relevant information and communicating with other Biodiversity Working Group members;
- ▶ Making timely contributions to assist with the implementation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Biodiversity Working Group members agree to the following principles with regards to the operation of the group:

- ▶ GDPR – All communication should be in line with GDPR guidelines.
- ▶ Transparency and openness – all documents will be made available by the local authority to the Members and meeting reports will be promptly circulated.
- ▶ Equality and respect – all Members will be afforded equal opportunity – by the Chair and by other Members – to voice their opinion and contribute to the work of the Biodiversity Working Group. There is an overriding obligation for Members to always treat each other with respect.
- ▶ Efficiency – The work and meetings of the Biodiversity Working Group will be managed in as efficient a manner as possible, and Members are requested to respect the time investment by other Members.
- ▶ Collegiality and tolerance – the Members of the Biodiversity Working Group will work together in the spirit of collegiality and tolerance.
- ▶ Common goal – the Members of the Biodiversity Working Group will work together towards a common goal of conserving the biodiversity of [City/County] through the Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Image information

Front cover: (Clockwise from top left) Lesser horseshoe bat (Ruth Hanniffy), Installing swift nest boxes, Co Laois (Alf Harvey); Blackberries (Usna Keating); Grey Heron (Shutterstock); Heritage Week Bat Walk, Portlaoise (Alf Harvey).

Inside front cover: Killeslin, Co Laois (Martin Doyle)

Opposite page 1: Herb rich meadow, the Burren, Co Clare (Catherine Casey)

Pg 11: Bumble bee (Catherine Casey)

Pg 12: Heritage in Schools peatland study with St Riaghan's NS as part of the LIFE Wild Atlantic Nature school pilot (Aengus Kennedy)

Pg 17: Fox (Adobe Stock Images)

Pg 20: Offaly Field Naturalists Club outing to Lough Boora Parkland (Paul Moore)

Pg 22: Otter (Shutterstock)

Pg 30: Peacock butterfly (Usna Keating)

Pg 35: Exploring the wildlife of Castlecomer (Vicky Comerford)

Pg 38: Biodiversity Officers for Kerry, County Galway, Cork City and Monaghan visit a Peatland Climate Action Scheme bog restoration site in Co Offaly (Catherine Casey)

Inside back cover: Irish stoat (Ruth Hanniffy)



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