

DRAFT MAYO HERITAGE AND BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

August 2023

**A partnership strategy,
prepared by the
County Mayo Heritage Forum**



Comhairle Contae Mhaigh Eo
Mayo County Council



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

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1. Introduction

The Heritage Act 1995 states that the national heritage includes monuments, archaeological objects, heritage objects, architectural heritage, flora, fauna, wildlife habitats, landscapes, seascapes, heritage parks and gardens, wrecks, geology and inland waterways.

In 2003, UNESCO adopted the inclusion of intangible cultural heritage into the meaning of heritage. The Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (The Faro Convention) promotes a wider understanding of heritage and its relationship to communities and society. The Convention encourages us to recognize that objects and places are not, in themselves, what is important about cultural heritage. They are important because of the meanings and uses that people attach to them and the values they represent.

Biodiversity is the variety of all living things and the interactions between them. Biodiversity is our life support system, and it provides us with ecosystem goods and services such as clean water, carbon sequestration, good air quality, pollination, healthy soil, food and medicine, timber and fibre for material. Biodiversity provides us with everything we need to survive.

In essence our heritage is what we have inherited from the past, to value and enjoy in the present, and to preserve and pass on to future generations. It comprises: **the tangible** – our historic sites, buildings, monuments, objects in museums, artefacts and archives; **the natural** – our rivers and lakes, landscapes, woodlands, bogs, uplands, native wildlife, insects, plants, trees, birds and animals; and **the intangible** – including our customs, sports, folklore, crafts, skills and traditions.

Heritage plays an important role in how we think and feel about where we live – it gives us our sense of place. Heritage and biodiversity contribute to our social, cultural and economic well-being. It is important that we preserve and protect these resources now so that future generations can continue to enjoy the wide diversity of benefits our unique cultural, natural and built heritage provides.

2. Policy Context

Mayo County Council's **Corporate Plan 2019-2024** sets out the council's goals and objectives for the county. It aims to promote well-being and quality of life of citizens and communities and to enhance the attractiveness of the county as a place in which to live, work, visit, invest in and enjoy. Its vision is for a county that is inclusive, sustainable, prosperous and proud.

The **County Mayo Development Plan 2022–2028** is the legal and strategic land use management plan for the county, setting out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the county. The Mayo Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy complements the County Development Plan, and other statutory plans, by aiming to promote the policies and objectives contained in these plans, and by setting out practical measures that can be taken to identify, protect and manage our heritage and biodiversity at the local level. The Strategy promotes the principle and importance of local community involvement in achieving these objectives.

The 17 **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) were adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which set out a 15-year plan to achieve the goals, which are a blueprint to realise a better and more sustainable future for all.

Ireland's Programme for Government ***Our Shared Future*** makes significant commitments to Ireland's national heritage and biodiversity. These commitments include continued support for Heritage Officers in the areas of heritage education, health and well-being and citizen science and strengthening the number of biodiversity and conservation officers within local authorities.

Heritage Ireland 2030, Ireland's national Heritage Plan, was launched in February 2022. It is built around a vision of our heritage, in all its forms, being at very centre of local and national discourse, valued by all and cared for and protected for future generations.

The ***National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021*** highlights a key role for local authorities in biodiversity conservation.

The ***All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021 – 2025*** seeks to strengthen pollinator friendly management of public parks and green spaces, integrate the Pollinator Plan into future county/city development or biodiversity plans, and raise awareness of pollinators and existing initiatives at local authority level.

Our Place in Time, the Heritage Council Strategic Plan 2023-2028, launched in February 2023, seeks to celebrate and promote Ireland's heritage, while also identifying the challenges to be overcome to secure it into the future.

Mayo Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023-2027, launched in February 2023, aims to expand the engagement by citizens of Mayo with culture and heritage, thus nurturing creativity and imagination.

The ***Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021*** establishes the legislative basis for Ireland to become a climate resilient, biodiversity-rich and climate neutral economy by 2050. The National Climate Change Adaptation Framework also places an emphasis on the vulnerability of climate sensitive sectors, and, in this regard, Ireland has Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plans in place for both Built and Archaeological Heritage and for Biodiversity, each of which identify challenges and opportunities which inform the implementation of the Mayo Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019 – 2024. Mayo Co. Council has commenced the preparation of a Local Authority Climate Action Plan.

The draft Mayo Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy has also been informed by ***Project Ireland 2040*** and the ***National Development Plan***; the ***National Peatlands Strategy 2015***; the ***National Landscape Strategy 2015 – 2025***; ***Places for People – Government Policy on Architecture***; ***Framework and Principles for the Protection of Archaeological Heritage***; and the ***Creative Ireland*** Programme.

3. What We Do

Mayo County Council established a heritage office in 2003, as part of the Local Authority Heritage Officer Programme of the Heritage Council. The first County Mayo Heritage Plan was published in 2006 and the first County Biodiversity Plan in 2010.

We aim to promote pride, appreciation and enjoyment of all aspects of Mayo's heritage by

- Raising awareness, including through publications, seminars, talks and workshops.
- Assisting communities and individuals to plan and carry out heritage projects based around their local areas.
- Providing information and advice on all aspects of heritage and biodiversity.
- Carrying out research and collect and collate heritage data.
- Inputting into local and national policy
- Working with the County Mayo Heritage Forum in the preparation and implementation of the County Mayo Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy.

The County Mayo Heritage Forum is an advisory group established by Mayo County Council to assist the council in the preparation and implementation of the Strategy. The Forum represents a partnership of elected representatives, council officials, and representatives from state agencies, local development, community groups and farming and education sectors and local heritage groups. The membership of the Mayo Heritage Forum is included in Appendix 1.

The Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy will provide for proactive future sustainable management, protection and promotion of our heritage and biodiversity, including effective communication and enhanced visitor experience. Through the Strategy, we will promote and encourage the use of the Irish language as part of our heritage. Climate change will be considered in all aspects of our work.

4. How the Strategy was Developed

The County Mayo Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy has been formulated by the County Mayo Heritage Forum, co-ordinated by the Mayo County Council Heritage Officer. It aims to build on the achievements of previous County Mayo Heritage and Biodiversity Plans. It is written in the context of the national Heritage Plan, *Heritage Ireland 2030* and the Heritage Council Strategic Plan 2023-2028, *Our Place in Time*.

The process of preparing the Strategy commenced in January 2023, when a workshop was held with the Mayo Heritage Forum to consider the strengths of Mayo's heritage and biodiversity assets and the key issues and challenges facing heritage and biodiversity in the county. This workshop additionally considered what priority areas or thematic areas the Mayo Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy should focus on.

Following the workshop, a public call for submissions was issued in relation to heritage and biodiversity in Mayo. A consultation questionnaire was devised, and the public were invited to input into the development of the draft Strategy by completing the online survey and/or attending one of four pre-draft consultation drop-in information sessions held in Castlebar, Ballina, Claremorris and Belmullet. 135 submissions were received, and this input from the public has been central to shaping the draft Strategy.

The feedback from the public was considered by the Heritage Forum at a workshop on the 30th of March 2023. The themes to be included in the plan were refined and the process of framing key objectives took place at a subsequent Heritage Forum workshop held on the 27th of April 2023.

This draft document reflects the many contributions and suggestions made during the public consultation process. Many of the submissions received will also inform the development of specific actions in the annual action plans which will be implemented over the lifetime of the Strategy.

The final Strategy will be subject to Appropriate Assessment, under the EU Habitats Directive, prior to implementation.

5. Delivering the Strategy

The Heritage Officer will work with the County Mayo Heritage Forum to oversee the delivery and of the new County Mayo Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy 2023-2030. Mayo County Council and the Heritage Council will provide the core funding for the implementation of the strategy.

Each year, an implementation/action plan will be developed to assist in the delivery of the strategic objectives. The issues facing heritage and biodiversity will likely change over the period of this Strategy. The annual action plans will ensure we can deliver on the strategic objectives, enable us to be flexible and respond to new opportunities and priorities as they arise. The actions contained in the annual action plans will be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound (SMART).

Delivery of annual action plans will be resourced by Mayo County Council and a range of partners including the Heritage Council, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Creative Ireland, Department of Community Rural and Community Development and Leader.

6. Monitoring and Review

The County Mayo Heritage Office will co-ordinate and manage the day-to-day implementation of the County Mayo Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy. The annual action plans will be developed and published at the start of each year and will form the basis for annual monitoring and review. The Heritage Forum will monitor progress of the delivery of the County Mayo Heritage and biodiversity Strategy at its quarterly meetings.

Thematic Areas and Strategic Objectives

8 no. thematic areas have been identified for inclusion in the Draft Mayo Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy. Under each thematic area, a number of strategic objectives are proposed, which are outlined below. Given the complex and interconnected nature of our heritage and biodiversity, there are inevitably overlaps between the 8 thematic areas and their associated strategic objectives. While biodiversity and climate have been identified as stand-alone themes, both are cross-cutting and are intrinsic to the other themes in the Strategy.

Theme 1. Community

Communities are key custodians of heritage and biodiversity. We recognise the role that heritage can play in supporting inclusion and diversity in local communities. Engaging, working with and supporting communities (including local, new, farming, youth etc.) we will

- build capacity and encourage inclusive community involvement and engagement in heritage and biodiversity.
- Establish a network for local heritage groups.
- Continue to support local communities participating in the National Tidy Towns Competition, National Heritage Week, Biodiversity Week, and other heritage and biodiversity initiatives.
- Encourage and support communities, groups and individuals to access funding to care for heritage and biodiversity.
- Continue and increase support for the Mayo County Council Community Heritage Grant Scheme.

Theme 2. Biodiversity

Conserving, managing, enhancing and restoring biodiversity is an overarching theme of this Strategy, intrinsically linked to all other themes in the Strategy. Throughout the period of the Strategy, we will

- Support the implementation of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.
- Promote planting and management of hedgerows and native trees.
- Promote best practice in the control and management of invasive species.
- Continue mapping and surveying of Mayo's wetland sites.
- Conduct an audit of Mayo County Council land/property to identify, conserve and enhance biodiversity potential.
- Continue to support the preparation and implementation of Local Biodiversity Action Plans
- Explore and promote opportunities for habitat conservation, enhancement and restoration.
- Seek the appointment of a Biodiversity Officer through the Local Biodiversity Officer Programme in partnership with the Heritage Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Prepare a County Biodiversity Action Plan.

Theme 3. Awareness and Education

Heritage and biodiversity contribute enormously to quality of life, health and well-being and the cultural and economic development of the county. We will strive to find effective ways of communicating this value. Examples of best practice in heritage management and exemplar projects will be developed, identified and highlighted. We will continue to promote and provide training opportunities on all aspects of heritage and biodiversity management; and provide heritage and biodiversity input/advice on Mayo County Council's activities, as appropriate. We will

- Develop an annual programme to raise awareness and improve understanding of heritage and biodiversity and the myriad of benefits they provide.
- Advise and guide communities, owners and occupiers, landowners, council staff and developers on the care and conservation of heritage and heritage sites.
- Hold biodiversity and traditional skills training workshops, including dry-stone walling, lime, historic iron repairs, hedgerow management, seed collection etc.

Theme 4. Historic and Archaeological Heritage

Care, conservation and management of historic sites, including archaeological heritage, protected structures, structures included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH), historic thatched structures, vernacular structures, architectural conservation areas, historic town and village centres, historic designed landscapes, historic graveyards etc, will be supported. Sustainable access and interpretation of heritage sites, as appropriate, will be promoted, to enhance visitor enjoyment and understanding:

- Highlight and promote the value of our vernacular heritage and support the delivery of *A Living Tradition - A Strategy to Enhance the Understanding, Minding and Handing on of Our Built Vernacular Heritage*
- Develop and promote projects which support the revitalisation of town centres and placemaking and encourage appropriate re-use of historic buildings and their settings
- Commission Conservation Management Plans for heritage sites, as appropriate
- Work with owners and occupiers to support the conservation, maintenance and promotion of historic structures and monuments, in association with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Theme 5. Research and Data Collection

Accurate and up-to-date information on our natural and built heritage resources, their extent and condition to provide the evidence base for heritage and climate action is vital. Over the lifetime of the strategy, we will continue to research, record and collect data on Mayo's built, natural and cultural heritage. Data collected will be hosted on Mayo County Council's GIS system, HeritageMaps.ie and the National Biodiversity Data Centre portal, as relevant and made available to the public. Opportunities for research will be identified:

- Undertake surveys to collect heritage data where information gaps exist and disseminate data.
- Encourage citizen science and local heritage audits and recording projects.
- Promote the use of digital technologies to record and preserve our cultural heritage and make accessible to all.

Theme 6. Climate

Climate change poses significant threats to our natural and built heritage assets. While climate is included here as a stand-alone theme, climate action is fundamental to all our work, and it is an overarching theme, intrinsic to all activities within this Strategy:

- Work with the Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) and Mayo Climate Office to input into the preparation and implementation of the Local Authority Climate Action Plan
- Support the implementation of the *Built and Archaeological Heritage and Biodiversity Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plans*
- Undertake an assessment of the key cultural and natural heritage assets in Mayo County Council ownership to assess their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.
- Promote nature-based solutions which support biodiversity for climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Theme 7. Intangible Cultural Heritage

Our intangible cultural heritage encompasses our oral traditions and expressions, including language. It includes our social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature, traditional farming practices, and traditional craftsmanship, including the skills that sustain our tangible heritage. Throughout the lifetime of this Strategy, we will promote and celebrate Mayo's living cultural heritage:

- Enhance engagement with practitioners, communities and stakeholders on the promotion and safeguarding of Mayo's intangible cultural heritage.
- Carry out audit of oral heritage collections.
- Develop a digital repository of oral history.

Theme 8. Partnerships

Effective management of heritage and biodiversity assets is best achieved by a collaborative approach, with all stakeholders working together. Maintaining, fostering and developing new heritage partnerships with diverse groups across public, private and civil society will be central to the delivery of this Strategy:

- Support the implementation of national heritage and biodiversity plans including *Heritage Ireland 2030*; *Our Place in Time – Heritage Council Strategic Plan 2023-2028*; *National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021*; *Climate Action Plan 2023 - Changing Ireland for the Better* etc.
- Seek funding opportunities and work with project partners to achieve the objectives of this Strategy. Partners include those represented on the Mayo Heritage Forum (Appendix 1) and those listed below*. New partnerships will be developed over the lifetime of the Plan.
- Encourage farming for nature practices and support implementation of EU LIFE and EIP Projects including Wild Atlantic Nature, Lough Carra LIFE, LIFE on Machair and Corncrake LIFE
- Work in partnership with third level institutes, community groups and other stakeholders to support, develop and advance research and community-led and expert-fed heritage and biodiversity initiatives.

*The Heritage Council, Geological Survey of Ireland; Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark Project; University College Dublin; Mayo GAA; Old Irish Goat Society; National Biodiversity Data Centre; Wild Nephin National Park; Creative Ireland; OPW; Vincent Wildlife Trust; other Local Authorities; BirdWatch Ireland; Museums of Mayo Network; Swift Conservation Mayo; Historic Towns Initiative; Mayo Dark Sky Park, Lough Carra Catchment Association, Local Historical and Archaeological Societies; Tidy Towns Committees.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Mayo Heritage Forum Membership

Noel Campbell, National Museum of Ireland – Country Life
Norita Clesham, South-West Mayo Development Company
Declan Cooke, Inland Fisheries Ireland
Tony Deffely, Trade Union
Bernie Finan, Public Participation Network
Cllr Peter Flynn, Mayo County Council
James Golden, Mayo North-East Leader Partnership
Sean Hallinan, Public Participation Network
Brian Hopkins, Mayo Chambers of Commerce
Padraig Joyce, Irish Farmers Association
Cora Keane, Planner, Mayo County Council
Cllr Al McDonnell, Mayo County Council
Michael McKenzie, Mayo Education Centre
Cllr Martin McLoughlin, Mayo County Council
John McMyler, Senior Planner, Mayo County Council
Cllr Jarlath Munnely, Mayo County Council
Gearóidín Ní Ghrúinéil, Mayo Historical and Archaeological Society
Fionnuala Nic Pháidín, Irish Officer, Mayo County Council
Michael O'Boyle, Marine, Mayo County Council
Margaret O'Riordan, Atlantic Technological University
Jane O'Shaughnessy, National Monuments Service
Darren Reynolds, Coillte
Tim Roderick, National Parks and Wildlife Service
Vincent Ronayne, Teagasc
Cllr Damien Ryan, Mayo County Council (Chair)
Siobhan Sexton, Architectural Conservation Officer, Mayo County Council
Cllr Donna Sheridan, Mayo County Council
Austin Vaughan, County Librarian, Mayo County Council
Gerry Walsh, Archaeologist, Mayo County Council
Co-ordinated by: Deirdre Cunningham, Heritage Officer, Mayo County Council

Appendix 2: Timetable for Preparation of County Mayo Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy 2023-2030

19 th January 2023	Heritage Forum workshop to identify proposed broad thematic areas.
February - March 2023	Pre-draft public consultation – including four public information sessions.
30 th March 2023	Heritage Forum workshop to consider pre-draft public submissions and agree themes and propose strategic objectives.
27 th April 2023	Heritage Forum meeting to agree draft Strategy.
May/June 2023	Present draft Strategy to management team and SPC.
August – September 2023	Public consultation on draft County Mayo Heritage and Biodiversity Strategy
September/October 2023	Heritage Forum meeting to review submissions from consultation and consider final draft Strategy.
October 2023	Present final draft Strategy to management team and SPC
November 2023	Present final draft Strategy to Mayo County Council for consideration and approval

Appendix 3: List of Consultees

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