


# Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2030

## Issues Paper



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council





Westmeath County Council wish to acknowledge the role of the Heritage Council in funding the Local Authority Biodiversity Officer Programme and in particular, supporting the preparation and implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan, in partnership with the Council.


# What is Biodiversity?

**Biodiversity is the variety of life on Earth, in all its forms and all its interactions. It's the wealth and diversity of all living things we see throughout our County, our rich wetlands, bogs, hedgerows, eskers, grasslands, rivers, woodlands, parks, and green open urban spaces. We are witnessing an unprecedented habitat and species loss; which must be halted.**

It is an objective of the 4<sup>th</sup> National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) that each Local Authority prepares a County Biodiversity Action Plan which will provide a framework for the conservation of biodiversity and natural heritage at a local level. The Westmeath biodiversity officer will work in collaboration with a representative group to produce a Biodiversity Action Plan for the county.



**The aim of the Biodiversity Action Plan is to provide a structured approach to protect and restore biodiversity at a local level.**



# Biodiversity in Westmeath

**Westmeath has a rich variety of natural heritage from the northern hills, across the drumlins and lakes to the River Shannon. The county supports a range of rich diverse habitats and species including wetlands, woodlands, hedgerows, rivers, grasslands, bogs, canals and eskers.**

There are a number of internationally protected sites within the county. Sites designated of EU importance include 17 Special Areas of conservation (SACs), 11 Special Protection Areas (SPAs); collectively known as Sites of Conservation Importance (SCIs).

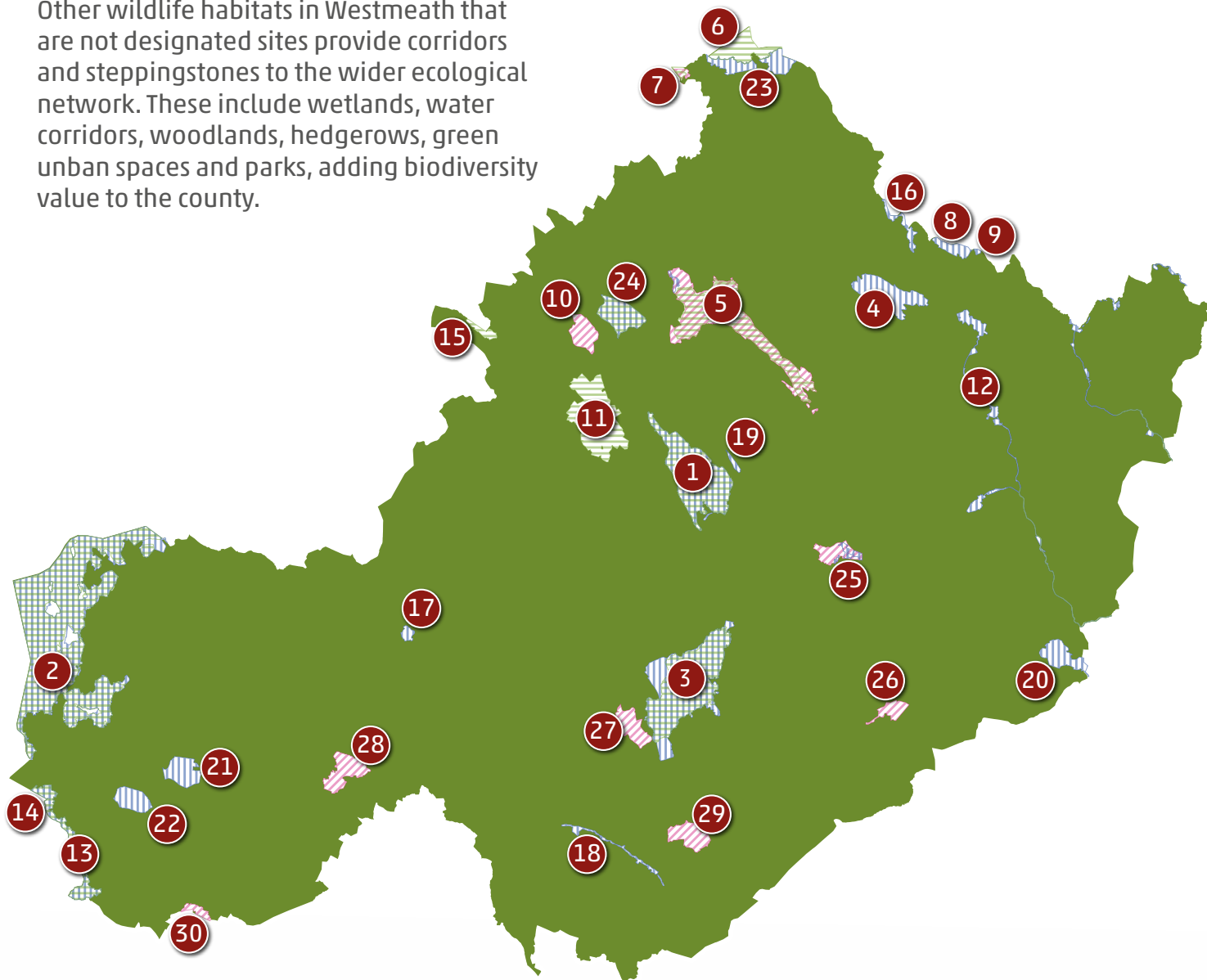
These sites carry priority habitats and species and are referred to as the Natura 2000 Network and they are legally protected under the EU Habitats Directive. In addition to EU designations, we also have 9 nationally important Natural Heritage Area (NHAs), and 32 proposed (pNHAs) as places where plants and animals exist in a relatively natural state.

Notably, 5 of the designated lakes are listed on the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as waterfowl habitat. Loughs Glen, Derravaragh, Iron, Owel and Ennell. Similarly; 3 of these lakes are also registered as International Bird Areas (IBAs) noted for lakes supporting significant populations of waterfowl Lough Iron-Glen, Derravaragh and Ree, both these designations reinforce the importance of these lake habitats for birds.

There are several rare and threatened Annexed animals, plants and birds listed under the Wildlife Act and EU Birds Directive that warrant protection in Westmeath.



Other wildlife habitats in Westmeath that are not designated sites provide corridors and steppingstones to the wider ecological network. These include wetlands, water corridors, woodlands, hedgerows, green urban spaces and parks, adding biodiversity value to the county.



## MAP LEGEND

 **Special Protected Areas**

 **Special Areas of Conservation**

 **Natural Heritage Areas**

## **Numbered Areas**

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Lough Owel                        | 16. White Lough, Ben Lough and Lough Doon |
| 2. Lough Ree                         | 17. Ballymore Fen                         |
| 3. Lough Ennell                      | 18. Split Hills and Long Hill Esker       |
| 4. Lough Lene                        | 19. Scragh Bog                            |
| 5. Lough Derravaragh                 | 20. Mount Hevey Bog                       |
| 6. Lough Sheelin                     | 21. Carn Park Bog                         |
| 7. Lough Kinale and Derragh Lough    | 22. Crosswood Bog                         |
| 8. Lough Bane                        | 23. Moneybeg and Clareisland Bogs         |
| 9. Lough Glass                       | 24. Garriskil Bog                         |
| 10. Lough Garr                       | 25. Wooddown Bog                          |
| 11. Lough Iron                       | 26. Milltownpass Bog                      |
| 12. River Boyne and River Blackwater | 27. Nure Bog                              |
| 13. River Shannon Callows            | 28. Ballynagrenia and Ballinderry Bog     |
| 14. Middle Shannon Callows           | 29. Cloncrow Bog (New Forest)             |
| 15. Glen Lough                       | 30. Clonydonnin Bog                       |

# Threats to Biodiversity

**Despite Westmeath's rich biodiversity and natural heritage, regrettably our natural areas have suffered biodiversity loss. Our ecosystems are under ever increasing pressure with many native species in decline or threatened, and in some cases at serious risk of extinction.**

These pressures include agricultural practices, urban and domestic wastewater pollution, interference with and removal of native habitats as well as an increase in commercial forestry, drainage, and the spread of invasive species. The following headings constitute threats to biodiversity in the county and we need to plan and act in a way that minimises these threats.

- Climate change
- Habitat loss and fragmentation
- Pollution
- Invasive alien species
- Over exploitation
- Disturbance to Wildlife
- Nutrient enrichment
- Drainage



# Biodiversity and Climate Change

Biodiversity is one of our biggest allies in reducing the impact of climate change. Healthy ecosystems need to be conserved to increase resilience to climate impacts. As we transition to a biodiversity rich and climate neutral economy by 2050 the Biodiversity Action Plan must tackle climate breakdown at a local level.

**Create Ecosystem resilience**

**Bring Nature to Urban Areas**

**Create Green Areas for Trees, Plants and Pollinators**

**Protect Wetlands, Peatlands, Forestry, Grasslands**

**Rewilding & habitat restoration**

**Connect Wildlife Areas linking Green Corridors**

**Nature based solutions for rainfall**

**Change in precipitation**

- Decrease in crop yields, vulnerable to disease, stress, invasives
- Reduction in water quality & increase in water stress

**Changes in air temperatures & seasonal patterns**

- Shift in migration patterns of fish, birds, moths, butterflies, and insects
- Change in species distribution
- Vulnerable to diseases
- Invasive alien species expansion
- Plants and trees flowering too early
- Change in crop yields

**Increased extreme weather events**

- Extreme heavy rainfall
- Increase in river flow, pollution risk
- Damage from winter storms, flooding, summer wildfires & drought

**Warming ocean temperatures**

- Change in species distribution
- Sea level rise risk to river ecosystems

# Progress to date in advancing the Biodiversity agenda in Westmeath

The ambitious actions included in the previous Biodiversity Action Plan for Westmeath have helped to progress objectives to protect and develop the ecological network, monitoring and research and raising awareness in the county. The Council continue to support the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan and report annually on these actions to the National Biodiversity Data Centre.





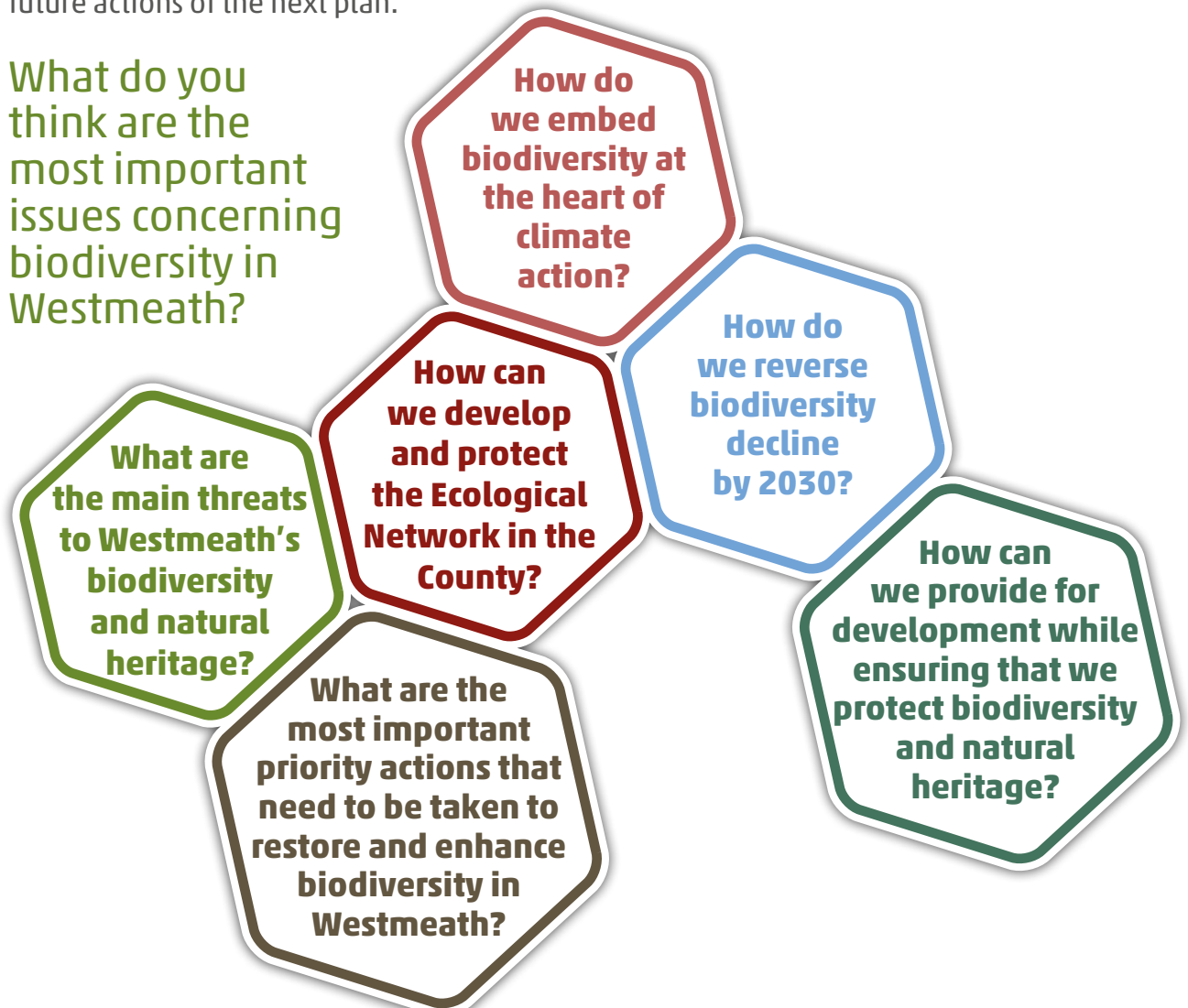
# Why a County Biodiversity Action Plan?

**The NBAP 2023 highlights the key role that Local Authorities have in promoting biodiversity conservation and coordinating biodiversity issues at a more local level. A County Biodiversity Action Plan increases focus on the issues facing Westmeath.**

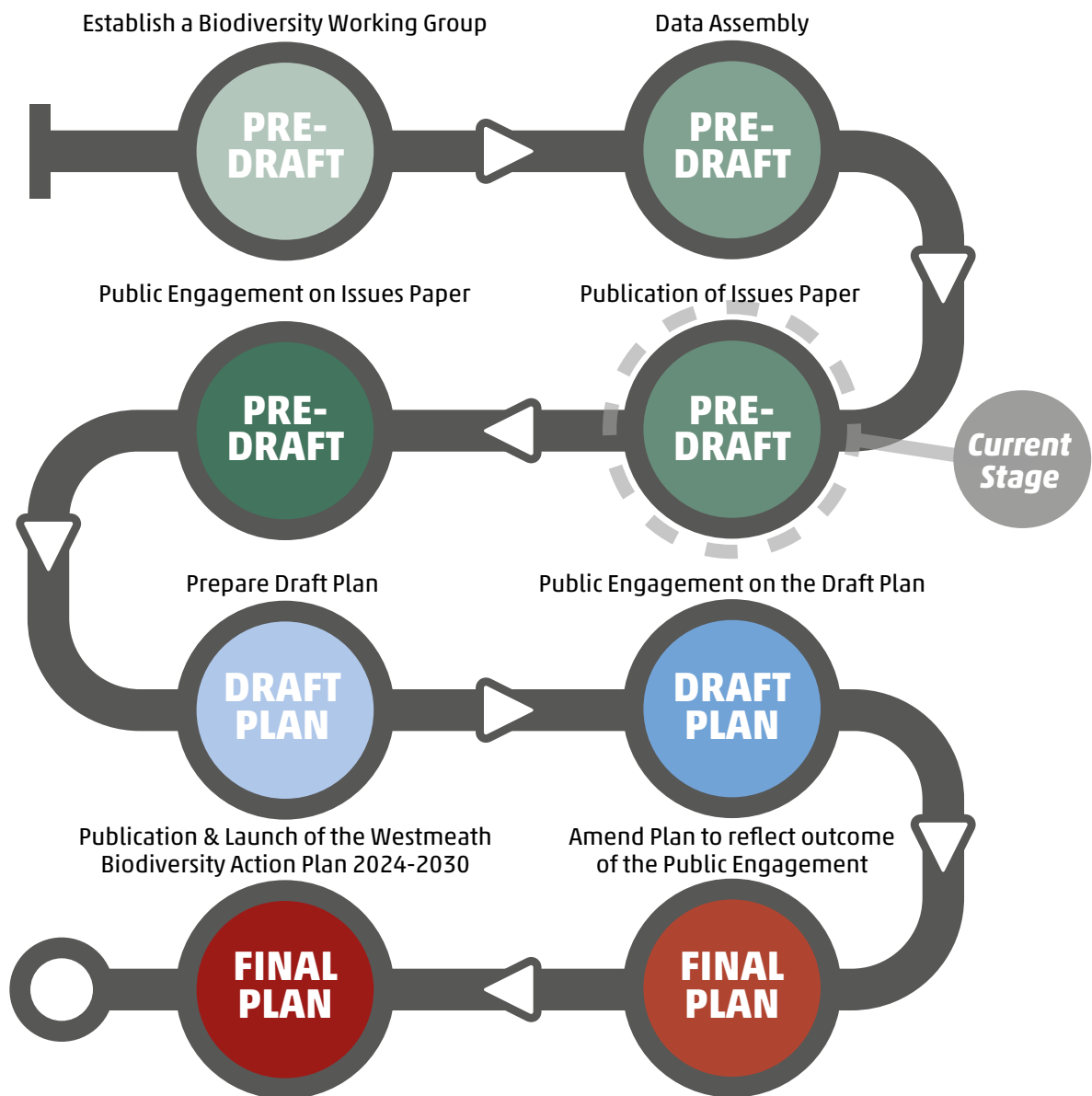
Effective action begins with a thorough assessment of the biodiversity challenges and opportunities within the county. The Biodiversity Action Plan is a policy document setting out strategies for the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity through a series of targeted actions.

We have many challenges to face in creating a climate resilient country and no net biodiversity loss by 2030. This presents an opportunity to reassess the priorities of the Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan and focus on key areas which will influence the future actions of the next plan.

What do you think are the most important issues concerning biodiversity in Westmeath?



# The Biodiversity Action Plan Process






# Join the Conversation

*"We are  
the **first generation**  
to **know** we are in  
a **biodiversity crisis**  
and the **last generation**  
that **can do**  
**anything** about it "<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Niall Ó Donnchú,  
the Director General  
of the NPWS 2023



**The Biodiversity Action Plan is a framework document that sets out a series of actions, for a six-year period, by which we aim to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of county Westmeath. This will be achieved by prioritising, coordinating and initiating actions to ensure effective conservation and raising awareness of biodiversity in partnership with local communities.**

We want to know your concerns and priorities in relation to Westmeath's Biodiversity. What aspects of biodiversity do you want to see celebrated and conserved?

The information gathered will feed into Westmeath County Council's new Biodiversity Action Plan, which will guide the implementation of priority biodiversity actions in the county over the next six years.

Please make your submission online at:

<https://consult.westmeathcoco.ie/en>

*or* in writing to:

**Administrative Officer,  
Westmeath Biodiversity Action Plan,  
Planning Department,  
Westmeath County Council,  
Áras An Chontae,  
Mount Street,  
Mullingar,  
N91 FH4N.**

- Submissions / observations may be made between 5<sup>th</sup> March – 17<sup>th</sup> April 2024 (both dates inclusive).

**Closing date  
for submissions:**



**17 April 2024**



