



Irish Uplands Forum

Promotes Sustainable Economic and Ecological Development in the Uplands

Fórum Cnoch na hÉireann

A spreagann forbairt inmharthana ar na hArd Tailte

Statement of Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2020

Final – October 3rd 2016

Irish Uplands Forum Statement of Strategy 2016 - 2020

What is the Irish Uplands Forum?

The Irish Upland Forum (IUF) is a voluntary body established in 1995, to assist upland communities to face the many economic, social and environmental challenges arising in the upland districts of Ireland. Its members include farmers, recreational users, ecologists, tourism and other countryside service providers who represent those who live, work or recreate in the Irish Uplands. The primary focus of IUF is the pursuit of a partnership approach to sustainable upland management of upland areas and to support upland community groups to address local challenges.

What IUF has done so far?

- One of the first achievements of the Forum was the practical support for the establishment of the Wicklow Upland Council (WUC) based on a community partnership structure.
- IUF has developed and implemented a number of educational and research projects and has contributed to the Young Observers Schools Project. Many of these projects (managed by the late IUF pioneer Professor Adrian Phillips) contributed to the development of WUC as an effective community organisation.
- IUF played a key role in the policy development of Comhairle Na Tuaithe including preparation of the first National Countryside Recreation Strategy.
- IUF has commissioned many research studies on issues related to upland communities and economy
- IUF has organised five major conferences related to the sustainable management of Irish uplands at Galway (1995), Sligo (2002), Wicklow (2007), Dungarvan (2014) and Beaufort, County Kerry in May 2016.
- IUF has recently conducted a number of successful workshops on subjects such as Upland research projects, locally led agri-environment schemes farming and sustainable recreational development.
- IUF is a proactive in its membership of Comhairle Na Tuaithe and fully supports the roll out of the Mountain Access Project currently piloted at Binn Shléibhe, County Galway and in the MacGillycuddy Reeks in County Kerry

Who are the current members of the IUF Board?

The current members of the executive board are:

Chairperson: Frank Nugent, mountaineer and founding member

Vice Chairperson: Sean Byrne, hill-farmer, County Wicklow

Secretary: Dr. Mary Tubridy, environmentalist and previous IUF Chairperson

Treasurer: Colin Murphy, Former CEO Wicklow Uplands Council

Member: Dr Deirdre Lewis, rural recreation and development consultant

Member: Helena Fitzgerald, architect and voluntary co-ordinator of Blackstairs Farming Group.

Member: Tom Byrne, Farmer, Wicklow Uplands Council rep

Member: Georgia McMillan, Mountaineering Ireland rep

To find out more about the IUF go to www.irishuplandsforum.org

Statement of Strategy 2016 and Action Plan 2016-2020

It is timely for the board of IUF to review its current role, actions and effectiveness in light of current developments in the Irish economy which are impacting on Upland communities. To this end IUF commissioned two research reports in 2015 and both were published and presented to Upland stakeholders at its conference “*Resourcing Upland Communities*” in May 2016 at Beaufort, County Kerry.

The **Uplands Community Study** was researched by consultant Alan Hill to identify and establish from direct consultation with twenty-five active community groups in Irish Upland areas, the current issues and challenges faced by local groups and how each group are trying to address them. IUF regard this study as an initial consultation process to organise a island wide network of all such groups with a view to consolidate and share the experience and individual stories of each group and to establish IUF as a unified voice for Upland Communities. See <http://irishuplandsforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Irish-Uplands-Communities-Study-2016-FINAL.pdf> for full details.

The study:

- identified and profiled twenty-five upland communities who have organised themselves to address economic and social challenges
- Found that local groups demonstrate a great commitment and resolve to address identified local challenges and issues
- The survival of most of these voluntary groups and their ability to plan properly is constantly endangered through a lack of continuity of funding. An integrated and properly resourced state funding mechanism for groups committed to the sustainable management of upland areas would improve the security of such groups, to the benefit of their areas and communities.
- The wider community will also be well served by the provision of a wider scope of countryside recreational services and a landscape that is sustainably managed by those who live, work and recreate in our upland countryside.
- Recommends the engagement of a national upland network co-ordinator to organise information gathering, dissemination, training and management support for all groups.

The **Irish Uplands Socio-Economic Profile** is a report into Ireland’s inhabited and farmed upland areas compiled by Dr. Caroline Crowley, Crowley Research, in conjunction with Dr. Brendan O’Keeffe and Shane O’Sullivan, PhD, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. The study focused on the electoral divisions of 17 upland areas and drew on data from the census of Population, Census of Agriculture and Pobal - HP Deprivation Index to assess populations, social and industrial structures, and farming activities. The analysis of evidenced based socio-economic conditions and their implications for upland communities will help inform upland futures. See: <http://irishuplandsforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Irish-Uplands-Socio-Economic-Profile-2016-FINAL.pdf> for full details.

The study found that:

- The population structure reveals higher youth and elderly populations and lower demographic vitality. Altogether, the data indicate more traditional rural

communities that experience a relatively high degree of outmigration of young adults taking with them their economic and reproductive potential, as well as cultural capital after years of education and travel. Such outmigration leaves behind a population with a higher proportion of early school leavers and a smaller proportion of residents with a third-level education, especially among males.

- The upland female labour force has lower participation and employment rates than found in the State overall, indicating fewer females of 15 years and older are either available to work or in employment. Males have a higher unemployment rate, while ‘under-employment’ is likely characteristic of low viability upland farms.
- Overall, 76% of upland households comprise families with children compared with 71% for the State. Thus, upland areas remain attractive areas to raise a family but accessing health and child care, pre-school, primary and secondary school services are all likely to be more challenging and heavily dependent on private transport.
- Natural resources in upland areas tend to constrain the type of farming activity and the intensity of production that is attainable, compared to farming in lowland areas, each of which reduces farm competitiveness and incomes and thus its economic viability into the future. Agricultural activity also varies across upland ranges according to differing geographical characteristics.
- The study stresses the need to support the potential of communities who strive to maintain what they have in terms of people and places of exceptional natural beauty. These groups want to regenerate and maintain the cultural and social and economic life of rural upland districts. They want to develop a vibrant economy to keep their communities together based on the sustainable management of local landscape, provision of eco-services and outdoor recreational resources.

Upland Conference Mandate

The delegates at the closing session of the **Resourcing Upland Communities** conference at Beaufort in May 2016 endorsed the findings and recommendations of both reports and mandated the IUF to go to government (Minister for Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs) to seek funding for the appointment of a Uplands Communities Network Co-Ordinator and multi annual funding for integrated Upland Groups committed to the sustainable management of upland areas.

The following strategy and action plan sets out IUF’s work programme for 2016-2020

Vision Statement

The Irish Upland Forum will be a collective voice advocating the sustainable management of Ireland’s uplands and providing informed support to partnership based groups that share this aim so as to build a vibrant network that will contribute to the realisation of the full potential of upland people and places

IUF Guiding Principles:

Uplands provide society with a range of priceless eco-services including being sources of clean drinking water, significant carbon stores, home to diversity, some of our wildest landscapes and they provide outstanding recreational experiences. The sustainable management of these services can be guided by the following principles:

- Respect for the special natural environment of the area;

- Recognition of diverse interests and the importance of ensuring all voices are heard;
- Nourishment and maintenance of a partnership approach;
- Enhancing the quality of life of residents;
- Fostering appropriate enterprises;
- Recognition of the role of hill-farmer in maintaining these unique environments;
- Adherence to eco-tourism principles (See <http://www.ecotourism.org>)
- Transparency and respectful communications

Voice

IUF communications will inform national policy by providing an integrated stakeholder response to discussions and proposals regarding upland issues and communities.

Outline Action Plan

Building on the Upland Conference 2016, IUF will:

1. Be a proactive advocate for Ireland's uplands and the sustainable management of these areas
2. Establish a formal national representative structure for Upland groups and a funding mechanism to support the employment of a National Network Co-ordinator
3. Seek multi-annual funding to support a national network of upland groups
4. Recruit a National Network Co-ordinator
5. Proactively support upland communities to realise the potential of their local people and places with a focus on innovation, collaboration and knowledge exchange
6. Represent nationally upland interests at Comhairle na Tuithe and serve on sub-groups to deliver initiatives such as the Mountain Access Project or other sustainable countryside initiatives, in interactions with relevant government departments, state and semi-state bodies
7. Research issues affecting upland areas to aid Policy development
8. Develop an education and training programme - based on identified member needs - to support local groups engaged in sustainable development

Structural and Funding Deficiency

To date the work of IUF has been carried out with a huge amount of voluntary input from individual members with sporadic and usually specific project funding. Much important work, particularly support to upland partnership groups, has not been carried out due to lack of capacity and consistent financial support. Projects and policy submissions which have been successfully carried out have been based on ad-hoc voluntary organisational efforts.

To redress this structural deficiency and to secure its future effectiveness IUF needs to:

- Secure dependable annual funding (€100K approx.) which will support the employment of a paid national co-ordinator and the provision of additional

resources such as day-time phone accessibility. IUF now seeks a core funding commitment from relevant government departments and statutory bodies to implement its work programme and objectives.

- The co-ordinator's work programme will be: to develop and maintain a national network; to each year work closely with 4-5 community groups to develop an agreed action plan for their area; to establish effective information dissemination capability including web site and to attend meetings, organise national events, network and respond to initiatives with local groups and other relevant stakeholder bodies.

Statement of Strategy 2016-2020

The following is an outline of IUF strategy with proposed timelines for each action:

Vision

The Forum will be a collective voice advocating the sustainable management of Ireland's uplands and providing informed support to communities in these areas.

What is proposed to achieve our vision?

The forum will continue its work with upland stakeholders in actions and support structures listed under the following headings:

1. Advocacy
2. Organisation
3. Research
4. Communication
5. Community Group Support

1. Advocacy

- 1.1 IUF will raise awareness of the immense natural resource that is Ireland's uplands and the wide range of benefits which society gains from these areas
- 1.2 IUF will promote the sustainable and ecological management of Ireland's uplands and actively advocate a greater national appreciation of these special places and their communities
- 1.3 IUF will represent upland interests at national level with relevant bodies and the public.
- 1.4 Continue to contribute to Comhairle na Tuaithe by attending meetings with essential aims of:
 - Ensuring as a priority the creation of national and local representative structures for countryside recreation
 - Supporting positively the implementation of the Countryside Recreational Strategy
 - Submitting research and development projects
 - Continued participation in Mountain Access Working Group
- 1.5 Apply for membership of other environmental management networks. Liaise with Northern Ireland Protected Area Network (NIPAN)
- 1.6 Prepare submissions in response to public consultation on relevant matters
- 1.7 Work with schools and youth organisations to raise consciousness of the value of upland resources with students and provide a balanced view on issues related to the future sustainability of upland communities and resource management.
- 1.8 Promote the principles of sustainable tourism and Leave No Trace

2. Organisation

- 2.1 Review of the structure and composition of the IUF board and amend memorandum and articles of association to ensure compliance with the Companies Act 2014 (2016-17)
- 2.2 Adopt the Governance Code for Community, Charitable and Voluntary Organisations and work in compliance with the code. (ongoing)
- 2.3 Source and access sufficient stable core and project funding from relevant statutory agencies relevant government departments and statutory agencies
- 2.4 Encourage all established upland groups to join and/or to participate in IUF activities and actions (2016-2020)
- 2.5 Conduct annual national meetings of upland groups and stakeholder organisations for the period 2016-2020 to swap notes and report and encourage progress (2016-2020)
- 2.6 Explore the legal and administrative issues associated with the employment of a Uplands Community Network Co-ordinator (2016-17)
- 2.7 Recruit a full-time Uplands Communities Network Co-Ordinator (2016-17)
- 2.8 Devise and monitor an annual work programme for the Uplands Community Network Co-Ordinator. It is envisaged that the Board will assign – A Networking Sub Group who will consult with and direct the co-ordinator
- 2.9 Develop a supportive framework to enable additional volunteers to contribute to IUF activities and provision of services (2017-2020)

3. Communications

- 3.1 Become more accessible to service users through employment of a paid Uplands Network Co-ordinator and the establishment of day-time phone and e-mail contacts and base (2016-17)
- 3.2 Develop, maintain and maximise the potential of the IUF website (2016-17)
- 3.3 Continue to build IUF profile and status with key statutory agencies and other stakeholders including relevant Dail committees
- 3.4 Assemble and secure IUF archive (2016-17)
- 3.5 Develop range of corporate image materials (letterheads, compliment slips, business cards and folders) to support communications with stakeholders (2016-17)
- 3.6 Publish e-newsletters and research reports (ongoing)

4. Research

- 4.1 Develop IUF research capability by forging a partnership with relevant academic institutions to establish a centre for excellence in upland management such as provided in Scottish highlands and islands by the Centre for Mountain Studies in Perth.
- 4.2 Deepen contacts in academic institutions with a view to participation in pan initiatives such as EU Life and Horizon 2020
- 4.3 Research sustainable mountain development initiatives across Europe
- 4.4 Conduct study visits to European upland regions
- 4.5 Research and disseminate successful models of upland landscape conservation, sustainable tourism and community support mechanisms

5. Community Supports

- 5.1 Support the establishment of new Upland partnerships and the maintenance of existing upland partnership groups (2017-2020)
- 5.2 IUF each year will work closely with 4-5 community groups to assist them develop an agreed action plan for their area which will include projects and actions to enhance local services and address local issues
- 5.3 Develop a supportive framework which enables additional volunteers participate in upland partnership activities
- 5.4 Implement the training recommendations in the Upland Community Study 2016 to support the development of competent upland management groups

IUF Work Programme Funding Requirement

Budget 2017 Includes salary and PRSI for Network Co-Ordinator, research funding, facilitator and meeting room costs for meetings

Budget Item (2017)	€
Start Up Costs	9,000
Computer, Printer & IT packages, phone, desk, chairs and file storage, network connection, etc.	
Salary & PRSI	50,000
Salary €50,000	15,000
PRSI and other employment costs	
Rent	3,000
Shared accommodation with upland partnership or member NGO/NGB stakeholder	
Overheads and operating costs	5,000
Light, heat, insurance, phone, sundries, etc.	
Materials	1,000
Stationery and printing	
Management	
Review and amend arts of association and company registration	1,000
Develop legal and administrative infrastructure to support recruitment of Network Co-Ordinator	1,000
Governance training for IUF Board of Directors	1,000
Web development and maintenance	3,000
Accounts audit	2,000
Conduct national meetings, study visits and dialogue with member groups, stakeholders and the public	9,000
Research Funding - Upland Socio Economic Study - update with 2016 census data	6,000
Total	€106,000

IUF Annual Work Funding Requirement per annum (2018 -2020)

Annual Budget includes full-year salary and PRSI for Network Co-Ordinator, travel expenses for groups to participate in meetings and events, research funding, facilitators and meeting room costs for meetings.

Budget Item per annum (2018-2020)	€
Salary & PRSI	
Annual Salary Network Co-Ordinator	50,000
PRSI and other employment costs	15,000
Rent	3,000
Shared with other compatible NGO or body	
Overheads and operating costs	
Light, heat, insurances, phone, sundries, etc.	5,000
Materials	
Stationery and printing	3,000
Management	
Legal and administrative costs and annual accounts audit	5,000
Meeting facilitation with stakeholders and public	5,000
Research Funding	10,000
Total	€106,000