Best practice in community management of heritage-rich landscapes

December 2025

12 FOOT
The Height of Insight

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Acknowledgements

This report was commissioned by the Heritage Council following a public tender process.

The project team would like to thank the Heritage Council Project Committee for their invaluable support.

They would also like to thank all the stakeholders who agreed to be interviewed and generously shared their insights, as well as all the respondents to the landscape survey.

We are also grateful to those that shared their advice, expertise, experiences and opinions in less formal settings.

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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

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1. Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a research project commissioned by the Heritage Council to examine how community participation can be effectively integrated into landscape-scale management of heritage-rich environments. The study explores the relationships between landscape policy, governance, community engagement, and socio-economic sustainability, and proposes models to support coordinated management of Ireland's cultural, natural, and built heritage within living landscapes.

The synthesis and conclusions presented in the Executive Summary are the authors' own. They are provided to inform debate. They should not be read as endorsements or commitments by the Heritage Council. The Heritage Council's policy positions will be set in a Heritage Council Policy Statement at a later date.

The research was undertaken by 12Foot Insight Ltd on behalf of the Heritage Council using a multidisciplinary approach structured around the Methodology for Interdisciplinary Research (MIR). The study combined literature review, policy analysis, interviews, surveys, and ten national and international case studies. The team was assisted by a Heritage Council Steering Committee, and the project was delivered between August 2024 and November 2025.

1.1. Context and Purpose

Ireland's landscapes embody complex interconnections between ecology, culture, economy, and identity. They are shaped by millennia of human activity and contemporary pressures, including agricultural intensification, biodiversity loss, climate change, and renewable energy development. National and European policy frameworks such as the European Landscape Convention, the Nature Restoration Law (2024), and the Planning and Development Act (2024) increasingly recognise the need for participatory management, yet implementation remains fragmented. This project sought to identify the conditions that enable communities to play an active, long-term role in managing dynamic landscapes.

1.2. Approach

The study addressed six key questions:

- **How can community participation be effectively structured in landscape-scale management?**
- **What mechanisms support inclusive and equitable engagement?**
- **How do current drivers of change interact with heritage conservation?**
- **How can traditional and scientific knowledge be integrated?**
- **What funding models support sustained community management?**
- **What lessons can be drawn from Irish and international practice?**

Evidence was collected through stakeholder interviews, survey responses, and in-depth analysis of selected landscape initiatives. Case studies included Rathcroghan (Roscommon), Bere Island (Cork), the Tralee Bay Oyster Co-operative (Kerry), Lemanaghan (Offaly), with comparative international examples such as the Isle of Eigg (Scotland), Wild Ennerdale (England) and the Catalonian Landscape Observatory (Spain). Together, these illustrate a spectrum of landscapes and participatory management models across terrestrial and coastal settings.

1.3. Key Findings

The study identifies that effective landscape management depends on an integrated approach—linking ecological, social, cultural, and economic dimensions of place. The most resilient models share many of the following characteristics:

- Whole-of-landscape frameworks that view natural, built, and cultural heritage as interdependent components of sustainability.
- Community-led governance underpinned by formal structures, clear mandates, and ongoing access to technical and financial support.
- Authentic participation that extends beyond consultation, enabling communities to influence decisions and outcomes.
- Long-term funding mechanisms—including multi-annual, phased, or results-based schemes—that reward collective stewardship and build local capacity.
- Integration of traditional ecological knowledge and professional expertise, recognising the value of local memory and skills in managing change.
- Cross-sectoral policy coherence, supported by a national landscape policy and consistent Landscape Character Assessment standards.
- Accessible shared spaces—physical and organisational—through which communities can plan, deliberate, and coordinate action.

Conversely, fragmented policy responsibility, short-term funding cycles, administrative burden, and limited inter-agency coordination remain obstacles to landscape-scale community participation.

1.4. International Comparators

International examples provided practical reference points for Ireland. Scotland's Isle of Eigg demonstrates the transformative potential of community land ownership combined with integrated renewable energy and governance structures. England's Wild Ennerdale illustrates adaptive co-management among state, private, and community actors, embedding flexibility and ecological restoration in decision-making. The Catalonian Landscape Observatory offers a policy model that systematically links landscape values to planning and governance, while the UK Heritage Funds Landscape Partnership Scheme showcases how long-term, locally led initiatives can deliver measurable cultural, environmental, and social outcomes. Each highlights the value of institutional frameworks that enable, rather than control, community stewardship.

1.5. Implications and Recommendations

The report concludes that a coherent national landscape framework is now required to align policy, funding, and governance. This should be supported by:

1. Establishing a multi-agency committee for landscape policy integration.
2. Developing a national, standardised Landscape Character Assessment framework.
3. Creating a long-cycle funding instrument for community-led landscape projects, modelled on the UK Heritage Funds Landscape Partnership Scheme.
4. Strengthening participatory obligations across state bodies and public authorities.
5. Creating a Community Landscape Network to connect and support local initiatives.

A "whole of landscape" approach offers a pathway for Ireland to meet its environmental and cultural objectives while sustaining viable rural and coastal communities. The report provides an evidence base and practical direction for policy, funding, and institutional reform to embed this approach within national practice.

2. Introduction

Heritage landscapes in Ireland hold natural, cultural, built and intangible values shaped by complex social, political and ecological processes. This study examines both heritage and landscape as dynamic, interactive and socially constructed. Using that lens, it engages with current debates on identity, community participation, land use, conservation and governance, and sets out a holistic framework for managing heritage landscapes in Ireland.

Traditional views of heritage have focused on monumental or tangible artefacts managed by institutions. Scholars such as Harvey (2001), Harrison (2013) and Smith (2006) argue instead for heritage as an ongoing process of meaning-making embedded in everyday life, and shaped by political, economic and social forces. Landscape is likewise reconceived as a lived and evolving space formed through continuous human and environmental interaction. Work by Ingold (1993) and Lennon and Taylor (2012) emphasises temporality, relations and emotional connection.

Redefining these concepts has practical implications. If heritage is fluid and landscapes are co-produced through dwelling and memory, management must account for diverse perspectives and local knowledge systems. This report adopts Harrison's integrated approach, bringing natural and cultural heritage together under the umbrella of landscape to enable more inclusive and adaptive responses.

Ireland's landscapes reflect centuries of colonialism, land reform, migration and changing agricultural practice. Nationalist reimagining of the rural past, the shift from landlordism to occupier proprietorship, and recent ecological concerns all influence how land and heritage are valued. As Duffy (2007) and McGrath (2013) show, these narratives are layered over a geography shaped by human hands.

Policy is sometimes fragmented and under-resourced. The National Landscape Strategy (2015–2025) has seen limited implementation and currently sits with the National Built Heritage Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Departmental roles, short funding cycles and limited participatory governance hinder joined-up action. Nonetheless, there are promising examples. The Bere Island Conservation Plan shows that when communities are given resources and decision-making authority, both conservation and socio-economic outcomes improve.

Community roles are central. This report examines participatory models that position communities as co-managers and managers. Drawing on Apaydin (2018a), Waterton (2015) and Holtorf (2020), it interrogates how community is conceptualised in heritage discourse. Recognising communities as diverse, contested and dynamic, the study highlights the need for tailored governance, strategic planning and sustained support for groups that wish to manage their landscapes.

Empirical evidence comes from case studies and stakeholder interviews across Ireland, and from Scotland, England and Spain. These address funding challenges, governance mechanisms and participatory models. The research also considers the influence of international frameworks and policies, including the Aarhus Convention (1998), the European Landscape Convention, and the UK National Lottery Heritage Fund's approach to landscape-scale projects.

The research identifies what is needed to support long-term, community-led management at landscape scale, with particular attention to culturally rich landscapes where conservation requirements must be balanced with social and economic benefits. This represents a shift from fragmented, top-down interventions to integrated, participatory and place-based strategies that align heritage values with ecological and social sustainability. The reviews of literature, policy and legislation provide the theoretical and contextual grounding for the case studies, research findings and recommendations that follow.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

The Heritage Council brief for this project sought consideration of five research questions:

- How can landscape-scale, place-based management be implemented to balance conservation of built, natural and cultural heritage with local socio-economic viability?
- Which engagement and participatory decision-making mechanisms ensure inclusive, equitable involvement of all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and minority groups?
- How do key drivers of landscape change, such as afforestation, renewable energy, agricultural change and nature restoration, interact with heritage conservation?
- How can traditional local knowledge be combined with scientific evidence to create adaptive management that is ecologically robust and culturally respectful?
- Which sustainable funding models can support landscape-scale, place-based management while distributing resources and benefits fairly to local communities?

3.2. Three Phase Project Implementation

In order to capture as many of the complexities contained within the research questions as possible and to bring the team's multidisciplinary expertise to bear in answering them, the project team used the 'methodology in interdisciplinary research' (MIR) (Hinde and Kampen, 2018, p. 1211) three phased approach. Using this framework, the competences of each discipline were managed effectively to ensure collaboration and effective management: Design (conceptual and technical), Execution and Integration.

The multidisciplinary team were involved in each of these phases through a scaffolded research process which ensured that no one area of specialism came to dominate research direction and findings.

3.3. Project Team

The team included:

Cathrine Agnew: Project Manager with expertise in delivering complex initiatives, coordinating stakeholders, and developing effective communication strategies.

Shane Clarke: an urban landscape manager with over 20 years of expertise in place-based management and urban design.

Dr Silvia Gallagher: a social scientist with experience in multidisciplinary research, policy development, and stakeholder engagement.

Peter Massini: an ecologist and green infrastructure practitioner with experience in policy development

Dr Claire Nolan: an archaeologist and cultural heritage specialist with expertise in contested landscapes, community engagement, and values-based approaches to heritage.

Dr Danielle O'Donovan: a cultural heritage specialist and architectural historian with expertise in built heritage research, community focused heritage management and museums.

Jack O'Donovan Trá: a landscape management specialist with expertise in biodiversity conservation across rural, coastal, and marine environments.

This multidisciplinary project team was advised and supported by the Heritage Council Project Committee: Catherine Casey, (Head of Climate Change), Ian Doyle (Head of Conservation) and Lisa Shortall (Head of Research, Learning and Cultural Heritage).

3.4. Phase One: Study Design

The project team and the Heritage Council Project Committee agreed on the conceptual design of the study. The Heritage Council provided research questions and outlined the scope of the work. To augment and strengthen the conceptual design, key concepts were extracted from the research questions (e.g. traditional knowledge, participatory methods, socio-economic viability) and attendant information, reflected upon by the interdisciplinary team, and used as a scaffold for the technical design. The technical design of the project included bringing together the team to implement the methods in Table 3:1.

3.5. Phase Two: Research Implementation

Following the technical design, three research methods were used: qualitative interviews, online surveys, and informal stakeholder engagement.

3.5.1. Qualitative Interviews

The research questions were broken down by the project team and experts into 40 questions for interview, under the headings funding, recording the landscape, traditional knowledge, drivers of change, community mechanisms and management approaches. The first research question was broken into two parts to address management approaches and balancing socio-economic viability with conservation and is subsequently reported in two parts in the study that follows (see Appendix 10.2 for a full list of interview questions).

Table 3:1 Methods used in Technical Design

Method	Description and Rationale	Output
Stakeholder mapping exercise	Stakeholder mapping to identify key stakeholders and related projects in the field.	150 potential stakeholders identified
Literature review to identify benchmarking case studies.	Academic and grey literature review including a documentary analysis of websites and reports and a holistic identification process of case studies.	55 relevant Irish projects and 17 international projects identified as potential case studies
Literature review to provide a reading list.	Generate project keywords/themes using an interdisciplinary keyword development with the project team in order to hone a project reading list to inform conceptual/ technical design	228 papers, policies and relevant national and international literature extracted
Ranking and distribution of reading list to disciplinary experts	Readings were distributed to project team members for primary analysis where they were ranked by relevance to the overall aim of the project, and aligned to one or more of the research questions	70 highly relevant readings identified and reviewed
Application of readings to interview and survey questions	Literature review and synthesis were then applied to design research instruments	Questions within interviews and surveys.

The stakeholder long list was examined and interviewees identified using a number of criteria:

- Experience and expertise relevant to the project
- Ability to knowledgeably address a variety of landscape types: marine, urban, rural, uplands etc.
- Ensuring a cross-sectoral approach including stakeholders from as many relevant sectors as possible, e.g. semi-state bodies, government departments, agriculture, renewables, heritage, ecology, academia, community groups etc.
- Ensuring a reasonable geographical spread across the island of Ireland
- Availability and/or willingness to participate

The Project Team undertook 54 interviews between 20th January 2025 and 16th May 2025. These interviews were all guided by the questions developed by the project team and the social scientist. The approach to each interview was to create a comfortable, conversational tone where stakeholders felt confident that they could share opinions that might be difficult, controversial or challenging, in order to get a realistic and honest understanding of challenges for landscape level work in Ireland.

The majority of the interviews took place over online meeting platforms. Calls were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Danielle O'Donovan and Cathrine Agnew undertook some site visits to places where work relevant to this project was being undertaken. These visits included Bere Island, Lemanaghan Monastic Site, Wicklow Uplands, the Maharees and Tralee Bay. The recordings and transcriptions were only shared internally with the project team. Interviewees

were offered anonymity if desired. All interviewees acknowledged (see Appendix 10.4) agreed to inclusion of their names. Those that did not respond or declined, have not been listed but their insights were used in the data analysis. Any data shared outside of the team was first anonymised.

3.5.2. Survey

The survey was distributed to the longlist of 180 stakeholders, including all local authority Heritage Officers and Biodiversity Officers, excluding only those who had already been or were going to be interviewed. The Project Team and Steering Committee also shared the survey on their professional social media platforms, and via email to relevant personal contacts. The survey was available online (using Survey Monkey) for responses from 18th March 2025 to 5th April 2025.

In total 43 complete responses were received and have been used as the basis for the survey results analysed. A small number of incomplete responses or or otherwise invalid responses were excluded from the data set. The project would have benefited from a larger cohort responding to the survey, but the responses received represent a cross section of the sector which is of value.

3.6. Phase Three: Project Integration

Following the research data gathering, the data was analysed using deductive and inductive analysis. Deductive analysis starts with existing theories or concepts and applies them to the data. Researchers use predefined codes or frameworks to test or extend theoretical ideas, making this approach more structured and often aligned with specific research questions (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Inductive analysis involves building theory from the ground up. Researchers begin with raw data, such as interview transcripts or field notes, and identify patterns or themes without imposing pre-existing frameworks. This approach is particularly common in exploratory studies, where theory emerges from the data itself (Charmaz, 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Deductive analysis was used to gather data specifically relating to the research questions posed to the interviewees. Inductive analysis was used to identify wider emerging themes.

The analysis was undertaken in the following sequence.

- Cathrine Agnew and Dr Danielle O'Donovan first read and reflected upon all interview transcripts.
- Following this all transcripts were analysed using first and deductive and then an inductive thematic analysis and supporting quotes for the themes were saved.
- Transcripts were distributed to the other experts with a google sheet that contained the research questions as core themes and then blank columns for experts to add their own themes identified through inductive analysis. The interviews distributed to experts covered multidisciplinary areas, not simply areas familiar from their own area of expertise. This ensured a breadth and depth of qualitative analysis.
- The project team met to discuss the alignment between themes identified through inductive analysis and agreed on dominant themes that contributed to overall project findings.
- The project team reviewed all draft project outputs and the outputs were modified accordingly.

3.7. Project Governance and Quality Control

A number of quality assurance systems were put into place, including establishing a clear project governance structure, communications plan, data management plan, and agreed project milestones. In conjunction with this an agile approach to project management was adopted that allowed sufficient flexibility to keep up with developments in the sector during the life of the project (e.g. the passing of the Nature Restoration Regulation 2024) while always maintaining focus on project milestones, outputs and desired outcomes.

4. Legislation and Policy Context

This section maps the statutory and policy frame within which community-led landscape stewardship must operate. It traces the intersecting EU and national instruments that shape land use and landscape outcomes, including the Common Agricultural Policy and Farm to Fork, the Water Framework, Habitats and Birds Directives, marine planning under the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, climate obligations, forestry strategy, and cultural-heritage instruments such as the UNESCO 2003 Convention. It notes enabling provisions for restoration, funding and monitoring, alongside structural gaps, such as fragmented responsibilities, centralised decision-making, uneven routes for participation, and limited pathways for traditional and local knowledge.

The legislative and policy context for landscape in Ireland is complex and fragmented. The selection listed here reflects those which are currently of high impact and importance in relation to the research questions of this project, this list is not comprehensive but represents those that the authors, interviewees, and stakeholders identified as significant. Equivalent international policies and practices were also considered; to understand how other jurisdictions are managing the landscape through policy and legislation. For a comprehensive policy review relating to land use in Ireland and a best practice review of European land use policy, see van der Kamp (2023) and Minogue Environmental Consulting (2023).

In the analysis of policy and legislation it is noteworthy that a significant proportion of documents do not explicitly address landscape as a concept, or overarching context, including those where landscape is the overarching physical context in which policy or legislation is implemented.

Ireland's Constitution recognises a natural right to private property, but it also allows the State to regulate that right in line with social justice and the common good (Bunreacht na hÉireann, Article 43). Stakeholders often cited the first part to argue that some actions are impossible. The qualifying clauses were raised less often, though they apply equally and matter for this study.

Phase 1 of the National Land Use Review estimates about 78% of Ireland is privately owned, 8% publicly owned, and roughly 14% unassigned but likely residential (O'Rourke et al., 2023). Private ownership dominates, yet the report documents cases where communities collaborate at landscape scale. The State is also the largest single landowner, creating the opportunity to model policy on its own estate.

The National Land Use Review Phase 1 (O'Rourke et al., 2023) synthesises data from across sectors and government bodies to present a picture of where land use in Ireland currently stands. The five main Corine Land Cover Classes outlined in the Land Use Synthesis Report are 67.33% Agriculture, 14.83% Wetlands, 13.33% Forest and seminatural areas, 2.4% Artificial surfaces, 2.1% Water bodies. Currently roughly 29% (20,372 km^2) of the country is included in Natura 2000 site designations, which includes two landscape scale ecological designations, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA).

The National Monuments Acts (1930–2014) are the core legal framework for the protection of built heritage and archaeology. Recorded Monuments and their associated zone of notification, account for approximately 1,004 km^2, located primarily on grassland (52%) (O'Rourke et al., 2023). Multiple academic disciplines underpin this legislation (e.g. archaeometry, dendrochronology, GIS) to shape site evaluation, excavation standards and conservation techniques. It also requires cooperation across several different organisations, the National Monuments Service, the National Museum of Ireland, Local Authorities, community organisations and the public. The act does not address

cultural/intangible heritage or the landscape scale management of change. At the time of writing the Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 is being enacted on a phased basis and this will ultimately replace the legislation from 1930-2014.

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) impacts how agriculture is practiced in Ireland and thus significantly impacts landscape. CAP has two pillars: Direct support consists of payments to farmers under several headings. The purpose is to incentivise farmers and farming in order to "guarantee EU citizens a dependable and plentiful supply of high-quality food as well as a healthy environment and preserving EU landscapes and Rural Communities" (DAFM, 2023). The payments encourage farmers to meet standards in relation to food safety, animal welfare and environmental protections. The rural development pillar includes Leader funding, EIP-AGRI and funding for farm plans, all of which will be addressed later in this report as tools at work in landscape.

In summer 2025 the EU tabled its post-2027 package which proposes ending the two-pillar structure and moving to a single fund, which would still include rural development. This move has met with resistance in Ireland and at EU level particularly in relation to the ending of ringfencing for agricultural funds (Donovan, 2025).

CAP includes specific climate and environmental protection activities with the intent of making a significant contribution to climate targets. These are managed by using Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) measures including soil protection, rotational practices for animals and crops, biodiversity measures and diversification. The effect on landscape will be through changes in the proportion of non-productive features, protection of peatland and wetlands, areas for catch crops or nitrogen fixers, and afforestation of low production and fallow areas.

Also of significance is the historic impact of CAP and agricultural policy that prioritised productivity above other considerations were payments. During the 1970s–1980s, CAP co-funding for farm modernisation and land improvement, along with price supports, incentivised the drainage of wetlands and the removal of hedgerows. Later CAP reforms introduced environmental conditions that aimed to curb such practices. Lefebvre et al. (2012), in their assessment of the impact of CAP on landscape find that "with the introduction of decoupled payments in 2003, CAP support was expected to no longer interact with farmers' production decisions and therefore to reduce its influence on agricultural landscapes. However, the farming landscape has been modernised, and the rate of change has now slowed. Schemes have maintained extensive farming practices on more marginal lands and "the necessity to comply with good agricultural and environmental standards in order to receive the full decoupled direct payment, and the implementation of agri-environmental payment schemes to encourage farmers to carry out agricultural activities favourable to the maintenance of the countryside, has positively influenced landscape provision" (p.66).

Related to this is the EU Farm to Fork Strategy which is a cornerstone of the Green New Deal. It has four specific objectives;

- sustainable food production
- sustainable food processing and distribution
- sustainable food consumption
- reduction of food loss and food waste

This strategy has the potential to have significant impacts on landscape depending on how it influences CAP review and reform and how food production may change. For example should food production become more localised, there may be interventions in the landscape to support this aim (DAFM 2025).

There is strong support for the EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC), Water Action Plan 2024 and programmes like LAWPro and Waters of LIFE aiding delivery of the plan. This level of resourcing suggests that the influence of this policy is likely to be significant, but it is important to note that the diversity of policy can be difficult to navigate and could contribute to siloing of issues rather than the larger 'landscape scale' suite of issues being addressed.

Scientific knowledge is prioritised in some legislation and policy particularly in reference to natural heritage, which is addressed in the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011) where scientific data underpins actions like site selection for SACs and SPAs and conservation objectives (based on species/habitat monitoring). Likewise the National Biodiversity Action Plan (2023-2030) (NBAP) relies on biological surveys, ecological indicators, and threat assessments. The European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 implement EU Directives for the protection and management of natural habitats, birds, and biodiversity in Ireland by establishing SACs and SPAs for habitats and bird species. The Regulations set criteria for identifying and monitoring protected sites, aligning with the EU's Habitats and Birds Directives and ensures compliance via regulation of activities relating to these areas and allows for surveillance, enforcement and management by designated authorities, such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The act makes provision for the development of management plans for these SACs and SPAs, with some mention of public authorities 'engaging in consultations regarding the development and implementation of a management agreement for such land.' (55) Again the use of the term landscape or the understanding of these areas as integrated landscapes comprising natural and cultural/built/archaeological and intangible heritage is absent. Landscape is mentioned in the context of: "land having features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna including birds, which include those features which by virtue of their linear and continuous structure, such as rivers or canals with their banks or the traditional systems of marking field boundaries, or their function as stepping stones, such as ponds or small woods, are essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species, for the purposes of the Habitats Directive or the Birds Directive."

A contentious issue for Irish habitats is Ireland's derogation from compliance with the Nitrates Directive, now the only derogation of this kind remaining in the EU. In July 2025, it was stated that for Ireland to retain the nitrates derogation for farmers from next year it must demonstrate efforts to conserve designated sites or species under the EU's Habitats Directive. Prior to this, Ireland had only to show progress in improving water quality (Cox, 2025).

One of the most recent and potentially most pressing pieces of legislation for this project is the 2024 EU Nature Restoration Law, enacted during the lifecycle of this project. It aims to restore ecosystems, enhance biodiversity, and combat climate change across the European Union. It is likely to have a significant impact on Irish land use and farming practices. Adopted as part of the EU Green Deal and Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the law establishes binding targets for nature restoration to address biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. It sets ambitious targets to restore at least 20% of degraded ecosystems by 2030, and all ecosystems needing restoration by 2050. It applies to terrestrial, marine, freshwater, agricultural, and urban ecosystems, including areas inside and outside Natura 2000 sites. Member States must develop National Restoration Plans aligned with the regulation's objectives and these plans must include clear timelines, measurable indicators, and public participation. The negotiations for this law were protracted, and it faced opposition from farming groups across Europe, including in Ireland. The law has been welcomed by a range of Irish nature protection organisations while there is anxiety in the farming community that it may threaten their livelihoods (Crawley 2025). Whether budget and capacity to deliver this ambitious law are forthcoming is yet to be determined.

EU Forestry Strategy 2030 is a significant part of the Green New Deal which if effectively implemented could make a large contribution to achieving biodiversity targets, emissions reductions, and climate neutrality. It has key objectives in relation to the protection and restoration of old growth and primary European Forests, while allowing sustainable use of wood-based resources, ecotourism, skills development, and development of bio economies. The strategy also makes use of monitoring and data collection, supporting research and innovation to improve knowledge of forest ecosystems.

Forestry support in Ireland is supported through the Afforestation Scheme 2023-2027 a government-led initiative to increase forest cover by 2027. It provides financial support and grants for planting trees on eligible land to help with climate change, increase biodiversity, and support the rural economy. The scheme offers financial incentives, including establishment grants and annual premiums for up to 20 years for farmers and 15 years for non-farmers

The Irish Regeneration and Housing Act of 2015 and the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act of the same year make no mention of heritage or landscape. The latter legislation will, however, have a significant impact on the Irish rural and marine landscape and the former may similarly affect built heritage. For example the installation of both onshore and offshore wind turbines, actions supported by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, has and will continue to impact the landscape.

The Aarhus Convention (Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters) was signed by Ireland in 1998. The EU ratified the Convention in February 2005, and it was ratified by Ireland in 2012. The EU introduced two directives to implement the Convention: Directive 2003/4/EC on Public Access to Environmental Information and Directive 2003/35/EC on Public Participation. In Ireland, Citizen Information Centres and Local Authority Public Participation Networks are often cited as the bodies fulfilling the obligations of the Aarhus Convention. However, Ireland's implementation of the Aarhus Convention has been criticised (Ryan, 2025). For example, the public environmental information service established in the wake of Ireland's adoption of the convention, ENFO on St Andrew's Street in Dublin, closed in 2009.

European Landscape Convention (ELC) was adopted by the Council of Europe in 2000. It emphasises the importance of landscapes in cultural, ecological, social, and economic contexts, recognising them as essential components of natural and cultural heritage and contributors to human well-being. The Convention seeks to promote the protection, management, and planning of landscapes across Europe and to enhance public participation in these processes. The definition of landscape formulated by the convention is now the broadly accepted definition of the term: "Landscape" means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

The convention seeks to implement the conservation of significant landscape features through careful management amidst social and economic changes. It proposes forward-looking actions to enhance, restore, or create landscapes. The convention is to be woven into national policies, seeing an integration of landscape into various sectors, including urban planning, agriculture, and tourism. Importantly for this study, the convention advocates public participation, awareness-raising, education, and training on landscape values and management, stating "each party undertakes to establish procedures for the participation of the general public, local and regional authorities, and other parties with an interest in the definition and implementation of the landscape policies" (p.11). The Convention advocates awareness raising about the value of landscapes and the provision of adequate training and education in landscape appraisal and operations, policy, protection, management, and planning.

Landscape character assessment forms an important part of the convention, as all parties must identify landscapes throughout their territories; analyse their characteristics and the forces and pressures transforming them; take note of changes; and assess the landscapes identified, taking account of the values assigned to them by the local population.

The Public Participation Network (PPN) system was officially established in 2014, introduced by the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The PPNs were created to enable local community groups to participate more directly in local decision-making and to sit on local authority committees, ensuring that the community and voluntary sector has a structured input into local government. Each local authority area in Ireland has its own PPN, and membership is open to community and voluntary groups, environmental groups, and social inclusion organisations.

Another relatively new aspect of Irish participatory governance are the Citizens' Assemblies, which were established as a form of deliberative democracy to allow randomly selected citizens to discuss and make recommendations on key national issues. The first major assembly was set up in 2016 by the Irish government, and they have since played a significant role in shaping public policy most notably for this project in reference to climate change and biodiversity.

Recent legislation has had elements that encourage or obligate varying levels of community participation and management, and the interaction of this with heritage and landscape management, along with sustainable development. The Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 is a comprehensive legal framework aimed at protecting and managing Ireland's historic and archaeological heritage.

The Planning and Development Act 2024 consolidates and revises Ireland's planning and development laws, replacing the 2000 Planning and Development Act. It outlines that regional spatial and economic strategies to be delivered by the Regional Authorities, are also to make provision for "a strategy relating to landscape and landscape character that coordinates the categorisation of landscapes, in terms of their capacity to absorb particular types of development, across the region so as to ensure a consistent approach to the protection of the landscape" (2024 Section 29(m)). The act also requires that a planning authority shall prepare a strategy for the conservation, protection, management and improvement of the natural, archaeological and built heritage and landscape in the functional area of the planning authority. In the context of this act, an agreed standard for Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) now appears more vital than ever. The question remains as to whether LCA should be undertaken at national or regional scale, something addressed in the findings of this report.

Public participation in the planning process is addressed primarily through consultation phases and through the planning processes for specific developments, where objections can be raised by the public. However the contents of these frameworks are driven by the national priorities, and in the case of these there is no obligation for Public Consultation (The Law Society Gazette Ireland, 2024).

The 2024 Act lacks a provision for a landscape conservation area, which in Section 204 of the Planning and Development Act of 2000 is stated as "A planning authority may, by order, for the purposes of the preservation of the landscape, designate any area or place within the functional area of the authority as a landscape conservation area" (201). This provision is not present in the new act.

The Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 requires rehabilitation of sites at the end of a consent and defines rehabilitation to include landscape and seascape, alongside seabed condition, water quality, wildlife and natural habitats. These duties are tied to rehabilitation schedules attached

to maritime area consents and are enforceable by the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority. The Act operates within the wider EU framework, including the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, which set environmental status and spatial planning requirements the Irish system must observe.

During the rollout of marine spatial planning in 2021, government signalled interest in locally based advisory arrangements working through local authorities, with elected members expected to have influence. Responsibility below the low-water mark is shared. Marine planning and consent sit with the MAP Act system and the National Marine Planning Framework. Underwater cultural heritage is managed by the National Monuments Service, including the Underwater Archaeology Unit, under national monuments and related heritage legislation. Biodiversity obligations are delivered through EU law and a forthcoming statutory regime for Marine Protected Areas. A feature such as a native oyster reef may therefore be engaged by multiple regimes at once, depending on the activity proposed and whether it is treated as cultural heritage, living biodiversity, or both.

Traditional knowledge has policy support in the work that the Heritage Council does as part of their remit, in training and supporting the maintenance of traditional knowledge, but there is no legislation that addresses the support of traditional skills, in the way that there is in France for example, nor does Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 mention traditional skills. However, the current programme for government contains a commitment to the exploration of the development of a National Centre of Excellence for Traditional Skills (Government of Ireland, 2025).

Ireland is party to the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The convention defines Intangible Cultural Heritage as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity." This is also the convention under which the National Inventory for Cultural Heritage is established and from which Ireland may nominate one practice a year to join the UNESCO Representative list of Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Ireland currently has five inclusions on the UNESCO list: Uilleann Piping, Hurling, Irish Harping, Falconry, and Dry-Stone Construction.

Ireland is not a signatory to the European Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention, 2005) which recognises rights in relation to cultural heritage, and the role of cultural heritage in the construction of a peaceful and democratic society (Article 1(d)). This convention requires much greater obligations on signatories than the UNESCO convention. Including to ensure legislative provisions for exercising the right to cultural heritage. It also obliges the fostering, valuing, promotion and recognition of cultural heritage. Significantly in the context of this work, Article 8 of the Convention includes a provision to 'promote an integrated approach to policies concerning cultural, biological, geological, landscape diversity, to achieve a balance between these elements' and 'promote the objective quality in contemporary addition to the environment without endangering its cultural values'.

This survey of relevant legislation and policy is not exhaustive, and it is worth noting that ministerial statements, departmental guidance, policy proposals and other government tools play a role in the implementation of the conventions, directives, laws, and policies addressed above. The impact of any one of these pieces of legislation is also determined by funding, resources, approaches to implementation and in some cases enforcement.

New policy contexts such as the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the CAP Strategic Plan (including the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) and the EU Nature Restoration Law all set targets for nature on agricultural land. Learnings from the Burren Programme and other similar projects will be vital in implementing these policies and adhering to legislative obligations.

4.1. Conclusion

Read together, current instruments offer partial scaffolding for landscape-scale stewardship but leave important weaknesses. Environmental directives and CAP deliver clear targets and tools, yet integration across sectors remains inconsistent, and community roles are not systematically embedded in planning or finance. Marine and climate legislation introduce new duties and opportunities, while cultural-heritage frameworks recognise practice and place, but links to statutory land-use decisions are often indirect.

Ireland's non-adoption of certain participatory conventions sits uneasily with the ambition for locally anchored action. These tensions set the agenda for the literature review (following section), which examines what governance forms, participatory approaches, financing models, and knowledge practices are shown by research to make community stewardship credible, durable and effective at landscape scale.

5. Literature Review

This review assembles the scholarship needed to understand community-led stewardship at landscape scale, and to ground the case studies that follow. It takes landscape as a socio-ecological system and treats cultural, natural and built dimensions together, reflecting international literature on cultural landscapes and Irish debates about integrated practice. It also recognises Ireland's particular context, including the legacies of land ownership, contested meanings of landscape, and the limited implementation of integrated approaches to date.

The section is organised around the main arenas where communities and institutions meet in practice. It first reviews critical discourses in heritage and landscape that shape how value, identity and sense of place are negotiated. It then examines governance and organisational forms required for credible community stewardship, noting the current thinness of evidence on what makes landscape-scale governance succeed. Participation and social learning are considered as the means by which legitimacy and adaptive capacity are built. The review also covers resourcing and finance, with attention to administrative burden and access for smaller actors, and turns to knowledge and evidence, including the roles of traditional skills, scientific expertise and hybrid tools such as Landscape Character Assessment, participatory and deep mapping, GIS and citizen science. A final strand addresses the main drivers of landscape change in Ireland and their implications for culturally rooted, negotiated responses.

5.1. Critical Discourses in Heritage

In recent decades, there has been extensive critical reflection on the meaning of heritage. Harvey (2001) conceptualises heritage as an ongoing process embedded within everyday life, whether recognised or not. Harrison (2013, p. 3) observes that "we live in a time that is distinctive in the ways in which definitions of heritage have expanded to such an extent that almost anything can be perceived to be 'heritage', which in turn risks the term coming to mean nothing at all."

Pendlebury (2009) argues that heritage is shaped by prevailing cultural, political and economic values, making its definition inherently contested. Various social and economic groups often interpret heritage differently and may diverge significantly in how they believe it should be managed. One community's valued site or tradition may be seen differently, or not valued at all, by another. The processes of identifying and assigning value to heritage are therefore complex and multifaceted. If heritage is not simply an inherent quality of objects or places but is instead actively identified and labelled, it follows that this process serves specific social, cultural, or increasingly, economic and political functions.

Gardner (2018) emphasises that the meanings ascribed to cultural heritage vary across different groups and through different heritage discourses. In many nation-states, tangible heritage is used in a singular or monolithic manner for such varied functions as emphasising national identity or encouraging tourism. However, for local communities, the significance of heritage may shift over time through sustained and practical engagement with heritage in daily life. Such perspectives can challenge dominant narratives within heritage discourse. Smith (2006) introduced the concept of the "Authorised Heritage Discourse" (AHD) to describe how official heritage narratives in Western contexts are constructed and maintained. These narratives often exclude community voices, characterising individuals outside of professional heritage sectors primarily as passive audiences (Smith and Waterton, 2009, p.29). Smith's work prompted many scholars to break with the AHD

by creating a polyvocal approach to historical narrative, as van Donkersgoed states “sharing the authority to narrate the past is therefore a crucial step to allow uncertainty back into the historical narrative” (van Donkersgoed, 2024, p.1)

Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises heritage not as a fixed inheritance but as a product of dynamic processes of valuation and conservation. Pendlebury (2009) asserts that value is central to conservation; societies conserve what they deem valuable, and the act of conservation itself can generate cultural, economic, and social value.

Thomas (2022) raises important questions regarding the conceptual divide between cultural and natural heritage. Scholars such as Lowenthal (2005) and Harrison (2015) have interrogated this dichotomy. This study adopts Harrison’s holistic view, allowing for the inclusion of natural, built, cultural, and intangible heritage under the encompassing framework of landscape and vitally, this is also the view of heritage outlined in the 1995 Heritage Act which established the Heritage Council.

5.2. Critical Discourses in Landscape

Lennon and Taylor (2012a) describe that, like heritage, landscape is increasingly seen as a cultural construct in which any given individual’s sense of place and memories are inherent. Societies make places through a continual process of inhabiting and changing the landscape. The movement to redefine landscape, which began in the early 1990s, brought with it a new reading of landscape as a cultural product and a cultural process. Inherent in this is the recognition that to understand ourselves and human identities we need to look searchingly at our landscapes because through their history of being made, they are a clue to culture, and our ordinary everyday landscapes at that, not just the national icons.

The theory of cultural landscapes began with Carl Sauer (1925), who argued that landscapes are shaped by cultural practices and human agency, laying the foundation for cultural geography. The concept gained global recognition through UNESCO in 1992, which formalised cultural landscapes as heritage, acknowledging their value as dynamic interactions between people and place. Lennon and Taylor (2012b) argue that the concept of cultural landscape has universal application and is inextricably tied to notions of living history where landscape itself is a rich historical record.

Tim Ingold (2000) brings the perspectives of archaeology and anthropology into unison through a focus on “the temporality of the landscape”. He believes that such a focus might enable us to “move beyond the sterile opposition between the naturalistic view of the landscape as a neutral, external backdrop to human activities, and the culturalistic view that every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space” (2000, p.14). As such, Ingold’s work has much in common with Harrison’s views on cultural and natural heritage outlined above. Ingold argues for what he calls “a ‘dwelling perspective’, according to which the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves” (2000, p. 234).

5.3. Critical Discourses in Community

All societies consist of overlapping and dynamic groups, shaped by factors such as age, gender, occupation, social background, and individual values (Holtorf, 2020). Cultural heritage, likewise, comprises diverse influences accumulated over time. However, heritage discourse, such as the AHD noted above, sometimes overlooks this complexity, favouring simplified narratives that obscure the heterogeneous nature of both communities and heritage.

Apaydin (2018b) critiques the tendency of the heritage sector to conceptualise "community" as a singular, homogenous entity. Crooke (2010) further emphasises that social, cultural, political, and economic backgrounds of community members have been historically neglected in heritage studies. Waterton (2015) notes that any given community is inherently diverse, encompassing various subgroups. With such diversity, approaches to engender participation need careful design on a case-by-case basis, as Apaydin states "not developing unique and critical methodology for each project in community engagement raises more questions than answers and solutions" (2018b, p. 4).

The day-to-day relationship communities maintain with heritage can be insufficiently acknowledged, for example Jones (2017) argues that "expert-driven modes of significance assessment tend to focus on historic and scientific values, and consequently often fail to capture the dynamic, iterative and embodied nature of people's relationships with the historic environment in the present" (2017, p. 22). For Jones, value is inherently subjective, shaped by personal experiences, collective memory, and ongoing relationships with material culture. Butland (2018) points to the example of Angkor Wat and the attendant cultural landscape, which through a joint focus of the monuments as a cultural symbol and an economic driver creates a duality whereby the site has both an active and a passive role - on the one hand a monument to a past civilization and on the other, key to the socio-economic development of the contemporary population. Butland describes how "despite this awareness of Angkor's contemporary role, there was little mention [in UNESCO documentation] of Angkor's value for the local community" (2018, p. 75).

In response to critiques of top-down approaches, there has been a shift toward participatory practices in heritage management. Apaydin (2018b) highlights instances of success, albeit sometimes hindered by vague objectives and unclear theoretical frameworks. It is now widely recognised that community memory, heritage, and material culture are inseparable (Apaydin 2018a). Heritage both reflects and shapes community identity, and thus, understanding heritage necessitates unpacking the social, cultural, political, and economic dynamics that form communities (Crooke 2010).

Holtorf (2020) cautions against treating cultural heritage as a universal solution for fostering social cohesion. While heritage can serve as a symbol of collective identity and motivate conservation efforts, it may also reinforce divisions. Relying heavily on identity politics risks weakening the broader social fabric by prioritising group-specific narratives over inclusive dialogue.

A critical, reflective approach is therefore essential, one that questions what constitutes a community and how heritage impacts their present and future. In this report, we consider both communities of interest, united by shared focus or goals, and communities of place, defined by geographic location. Understanding complexities is key to equitable and meaningful heritage engagement.

5.4. Ireland, Land and Landscape

As Patrick J. Duffy (2007) explains, the development of the Irish landscape extends deep into prehistory. Ordnance Survey efforts in the 19th century and antiquarians like George Petrie and John O'Donovan contributed to documenting Ireland's heritage, both tangible and intangible. Duffy notes that nationalist narratives have sometimes idealised a Gaelic rural past, but it is important to remain cognisant that Ireland's landscape history is deeply entangled with British political and cultural influence which extends from the earliest days of the Anglo Normans, through plantation and confiscation in the 16th and 17th centuries, to the eventual transfer of the land to those who farmed it in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

There is a wealth of literature dedicated to exploring, explaining and reading the Irish landscape. Mitchell and Ryan (1997) chart the Irish landscape chronologically from its geological development to the impact of early man, through early and high medieval archaeology, to modern agricultural development. Aalen, Whelan & Stout (1997) provide a comprehensive overview of the development and features of rural settlement. A second edition (2011), produced after the 'Celtic Tiger' era, adds further layers of new development and loss, such as the large housing developments of the boom era and the loss of once common rural built heritage features, such as handball alleys. The second edition continues where the first left off in discussing change as a constant in the Irish rural landscape and 'facing the future'. As one reviewer put it 'clearly the magnificence of the historic landscapes described in the Atlas has not been matched by our willingness to protect them at either an official or unofficial level' (Gibbons, 2012).

When Terence Reeves-Smyth wrote about the Irish demesne landscape in the volume discussed above, this had been the subject of few publications. Since then his work has been augmented and extended by both O'Kane (2013) and Costello (2015). O'Kane's work explores the development of picturesque Ireland, including the calculated reuse of earlier landscape features such as ruined abbeys in the construction of vistas and mise en scène. It assesses the impact of landscape painting in the planning, publishing, landscaping and design of Ireland's historic landscapes and details the planned exploitation of the Irish landscape as a tourism asset. Costello focusses on the impact of the concept of 'improvement' on the Irish landscape, which led to the creation of both ornamental gardens and an impetus for large scale tree plantation.

Land has for hundreds of years been a point of contention, and perhaps the discussion and management of landscape has inherited some of this embedded tension and complexity. As Campbell (2021) describes "there is often a dark side to the Irish landscape, with stories of exclusion and the removal of the poorest and powerless from these places … it is easy to miss this in the picturesque representations of these landscapes and the mantle of economic progress" (2021, p. 77). The history of land ownership in Ireland remains a topic of scholarly fascination, reflected in a number of recent publications by Dooley et al. (2024) and Dungan (2024). These studies tease out the complexity of the Irish struggle for land ownership, which was far more complex than a clear-cut dispute between Anglo-Irish aristocracy and the landless peasantry conducted through agrarian violence and the 'Land War'.

Dungan (2024) describes how land reform in the late 19th century, orchestrated through the mechanisms of the Land Acts, the Congested Districts Board and the Land Commission, was an impactful and ultimately successful process. In 1870, before William Gladstone introduced the first Land Act, only 3% of Irish farmers owned their own land and 97% were tenants. By 1930, those figures had reversed. McGrath (2013) maintains that current landscape issues and contestations are tied to a preoccupation with property and that has resulted in a view of land purely as a commodity. The commodification of land, its mapping and measuring as a unit of value through acts like The Down Survey, is rooted in the impact of colonisation. Campbell (2021) suggests that to understand Ireland outside this postcolonial legacy we need to look at Ireland "outside the Anglophone experience" (2021, p.79). He describes that if the Irish have a difficulty in reconnecting with nature and place in, this is due to the disconnect between contemporary scholarly knowledge and the way land and nature was understood in the past. He points to Dinnseanchas or "place-lore" which mingles topography, families, ownership and genealogy as the means by which people and landscape were tied together (2021, p.84). Dungan sounds a final note of caution about land in Ireland – capitalist economics still have an impact on land ownership, with stud farms, dairy farmers and new investors seeking to buy land for carbon sequestration all threatening to change a landscape where land is largely owned by those who work it.

Duffy (2007) describes Ireland's natural landscapes, not as untouched wildernesses but as environments profoundly shaped by geological, climatic, and human processes over millennia. He challenges the notion that nature and culture are separate, emphasising instead how the natural landscape forms the foundational canvas upon which cultural landscapes are layered. Today, natural landscapes in Ireland are increasingly seen through the lens of conservation and sustainability. Forestry, overgrazing, and development pose serious threats. Protected areas like national parks and Natura 2000 sites aim to conserve biodiversity and geological heritage, but tensions persist between economic use and ecological conservation. Duffy argues that natural landscapes must be understood as both ecological systems and cultural artefacts. The historical human imprint on the so-called 'natural' Irish environment demands a more integrated approach to landscape heritage and environmental stewardship. Similar arguments are made by Costello (2025), who describes that the uplands of the Iveragh peninsula bear the marks of historic agricultural intensification that can be traced back hundreds (if not thousands) of years.

Fogarty (2017) exposes how centuries of deforestation, overgrazing, pollution, drainage, and poor land management have devastated Ireland's native wildlife and ecosystems. Fogarty calls for radical rewilding, better enforcement of environmental law, and a renewed cultural relationship with nature. Narin (2024) describes that restoration of land for nature requires a change in the direction of land use and ongoing management to ensure that the negative human impacts on wildlife and habitats are suppressed. This will take vision, commitment and determination and will require collaboration and buy-in from politicians, public bodies, commercial entities, voluntary organisations, private landlords and members of the public. Outside of discussing the impact of farming and human land use processes there is little discussion of built, cultural or intangible heritage in these volumes; it appears that the integrated approach to landscape heritage and environmental stewardship is still lacking outside small pockets of research.

Within the context of Irish agriculture, processes of nature restoration largely sit under the umbrella term of High Nature Value Farming. Modern agricultural economics is based upon "high-input, high-output specialised production on large units that employ a small proportion of the working population … these farm enterprises are largely tied to agri-food businesses highly tuned to the global marketplace for the disposal of commodity surpluses and even more so, value-added processed foods" (O'Shaughnessy & Sage, 2018, p.186). O'Shaughnessy & Sage (2018) argue that productivist approaches have a poor record of social and environmental sustainability, and score poorly for inclusion and economic sustainability, with all but the most productive lands requiring the support of subsidies. A dichotomy is growing between "intensively managed farms located in the best agricultural regions and those more economically marginal operations which are struggling to survive in peripheral yet ecologically important landscapes" (2018, p. 187).

Innovative approaches have been taken to promote sustainable farming practices while preserving the unique ecology and cultural heritage landscapes, the most notable being The Burren Programme which was grounded in a results-based and action-based payments system related to environmental outcomes and farm enhancements (Maguire et al., 2020). The work of The Burren Programme is being continued through the operations of Farming for Nature, who are disseminating their message at national scale through a podcast series and a recent publication The Farming for Nature Handbook (Hart et al., 2025). The authors address high-input high-output approaches, arguing that "farming for nature can help farmers to restore natural systems, such as nutrient, water and carbon cycling, on their farms. When these systems are fully functioning, reliance on fertilisers, chemicals, fuels and feed naturally decreases, improving resilience and reducing the risks associated with the vagaries of global price fluctuations and commodity shortages". The authors also make strong arguments for diversification, creating new 'synergistic loops' in the farm,

spreading risk and opening up “a range of succession options for future generations to develop their own enterprises on the farm” (2025, p. 9).

There are seven national parks in Ireland (Glenveagh, Wild Nephin, Connemara, Burren, Killarney, Wicklow Mountains, and Páirc Náisiúnta na Mara, Ciarraí, with a new park under development at Boyne Valley), covering approx. 950 km sq. The parks are categorised according to the criteria and standards for National Parks set by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1969. In their robust review of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Stout and Ó Cinnéide (2021) note that the capacity of NPWS teams to engage with communities will increasingly be a key success factor in working with communities on nature conservation, with farmers and bog owners on agricultural measures and peatland restoration. The authors recommend that as part of its future workforce planning, the NPWS needs to recruit dedicated community liaison staff with expertise in community engagement and knowledge of participatory approaches to conservation. Since this review a new Strategic Action Plan (2022-2024) was put in place and through this a new management structure was established to provide the strategic and joined up leadership that the organisation needed. Through a significant funding increase, the NPWS grew their staff from 349 in 2020 to 548 in June 2024 (NPWS, 2024). In 2024 the NPWS began a public consultation on the future of Irish national parks, ‘Your Parks, Your Say - the future of Ireland’s National Parks’, submissions closed in February 2025, and no report has been produced at time of writing.

Ireland’s newest national park in Kerry is called Páirc Náisiúnta na Mara, Ciarraí (the Kerry Seas National Park). This park represents Ireland’s first marine national park. In September 2024 the Minister with responsibility for oversight of the operations of the NPWS announced a national public consultation on Páirc Náisiúnta na Mara, Ciarraí inviting members of the public, groups and organisations across the country to have their say on the future where submissions could be made via survey, email or in writing (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024).

Ireland’s 7,500km of coastline has been the subject of a large volume by Devoy et al. (2021a), The Coastal Atlas of Ireland. Like the landscape atlas publication, the Coastal Atlas takes a multidisciplinary approach which charts the geological development of the Irish coastline to its current appearance and the extensive landscapes of coastal Ireland. Ireland’s coast and seas are a checkerboard of natural and built heritage features defined by cold water coral reefs, seagrass meadows, native oyster reefs, shipwrecks, sand dunes, cliffs, Napoleonic towers and megalithic tombs alongside buildings and infrastructure of a historic maritime industry that depended on the abundance of marine life in Irish waters. As “the quintessential island”, Ireland’s coastal landscape is perhaps its most definitive landscape feature (Devoy 2021b).

UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention officially recognised cultural landscapes in 1992 defining them as “works of nature and of man, the combination of which produces a landscape of outstanding universal value” (UNESCO, 1992). Although many of the texts reviewed above describe the Irish landscape as just that, the term ‘cultural landscape’ is less current in these texts and in Irish heritage discourse than might be expected. Understanding the Irish landscape as a cultural landscape and taking the broad view of heritage as natural, built, cultural, and intangible under the encompassing framework of landscape is vital to undertaking an integrated approach to landscape management in Ireland. Lack of integrated thinking manifests itself in areas like peatlands, where for example both the intangible and the tangible, especially archaeology, are often neglected and sometimes even completely absent from conservation projects (Flood et al. 2021; Gearey & Everett 2021; Nolan et al. 2024).

Frequent damage to archaeological sites and monuments, including the continuing loss of peatland archaeological landscapes (Nolan, 2025; Nolan et al. 2024), indicates that there is limited

implementation of heritage protection legislation. It also suggests that in certain instances there is a lack of awareness and monitoring of archaeological sites and monuments in everyday landscapes (Gearey & Everett 2021; Nolan 2025; Nolan et al. 2024).

This brief exploration of integrated cultural landscape management indicates the need for Ireland to learn from international best practice in this area. This is discussed in the next section, to further address the context of the research questions of this study.

5.5. Government and Management Approaches for Landscape

For any community to manage a landscape, there must be an organisational structure in place to allow for collective decision making, strategic planning, financial regulation and the administration of funding. This is perhaps the least well-developed aspect of community landscape management in academic discourse, despite being so fundamental to management success, and highlights the importance of the work undertaken by this study. In their study of the Irish Community Water Development Fund Osawe et al. (2023) find that "In the absence of systematic data collection for funded projects, it is impossible to comprehensively understand what are the critical success factors both within projects and community groups. That information is critical to earmark funding to projects and groups with a higher likelihood of success. The same information can be beneficial in devising which types of groups need additional support and training to develop their internal capacity to lead viable behaviour change projects within their communities" (p.11). Knowledge gaps also make it "difficult to predict (and if necessary, replicate) specific engagement actions or activities at the community level that can foster behavioural change towards sustainable living. Second, there is little insight into how to scale programmes or initiatives to achieve wider sustainable impacts" (p. 2)

Best practice in heritage landscape governance increasingly recognises the essential role of local communities as stewards, not just beneficiaries, of cultural and ecological values. UNESCO's Handbook for Conservation and Management of World Heritage Cultural Landscapes (2009) affirms that "people associated with the cultural landscape are the primary stakeholders for stewardship". This reflects a shift towards participatory models where professionals act as facilitators rather than unilateral managers. The Open Method of Coordination's 2018 report on Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage noted that important conceptual shifts need to take place to facilitate community governance of heritage. These include:

- A transition from 'government' to 'governance', moving from state-centric decision-making to collaborative, networked approaches.
- Cultural heritage as a 'commons', seen as a shared resource needing collective governance.
- Shift from 'audiences" 'to 'participants', encouraging co-creation and participatory sense-making of cultural value

The Culture, Heritage, Identity: Impacts of Climate Change (CHICC) project exemplifies this trend, integrating community archaeology and citizen science to co-develop conservation responses to climate threats at local sites (Kerr & Riede, 2022). These initiatives underscore that when governance is participatory and inclusive, the outcomes are more enduring and democratically legitimate.

UNESCO has developed a set of principles for managing cultural landscapes in order to balance the needs of the local population with socio economic sustainability (Mitchell et al. 2009). These are:

- People associated with the cultural landscape are the primary stakeholders for stewardship
- Successful management is inclusive and transparent, and governance is shaped through dialogue and agreement among key stakeholders
- The value of the cultural landscape is based on interaction between people and their environment, and the focus of management on this relationship
- The focus of management is on guiding change to retain the values of the cultural landscape
- Management of cultural landscapes is integrated into larger landscape context
- Successful management contributes to a sustainable society

These principles are found echoed in the texts that follow, particularly shared governance and the idea that value is created by the interaction of communities with communities.

Adaptive co-management (ACM) has been applied globally as an approach to address a variety of environmental and resource challenges – forestry, fisheries, wildlife, parks and protected areas, wetlands, and climate change adaptation (Plummer et al., 2017) The rationale for ACM is sustainability and social-ecological resilience: it aims to address environmental challenges through a collaborative and learning-oriented place-based process, and thereby brings about ecologically sustainable livelihoods. Monitoring and evaluation of management and governance approaches is imperative for learning and adaptation, and learning is a critical ingredient in transformational change. In their study of ACM in four UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, Plummer et al. found that "ACM efforts in all four BRs had a myriad of positive results as well as ecological and livelihood effects" (pp. 79).

Adaptive governance is not only about inclusion but also about cultivating resilience and learning, ensuring that heritage values evolve while remaining meaningful in the face of ecological, cultural, and climatic transitions (UNESCO, 2009). Adaptive management approaches and opportunities for social learning emerge as success factors in a number of the case studies below.

Managing heritage landscapes as social-ecological systems requires embracing their complexity and dynamism. Malmborg et al. (2022) demonstrate how participatory resilience assessments in Sweden built local actors' capacity to work with the interdependence of ecosystem services, landscape values, and institutional silos. Exercises like ecosystem service mapping and conceptual system modelling fostered strategic thinking and systemic awareness, strengthening participants' ability to influence change over time. Resilience is also a central theme in the work of Aimar (2024) in discussing the management of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. He notes that "site-based and place-related heritage, people- and community-centred approaches, living heritage, community-led changes, sense of place, and adaptation are crucial to achieving landscape resilience" (p.247). Aimear also notes the need for integrated management systems that continuously, and perhaps adaptively as noted above, align the dynamic concepts of context, planning, inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes to the preservation of the Outstanding Universal Values that characterise a cultural landscape.

Sokka et al. (2021) found four types of cultural heritage governance, with differing weights with regard to public authorities, civil society, markets, and citizens. Governmental, corporatist, service-led, and co-creative cultural heritage governance types were identified, which reflect the shifts in participatory approaches to governance from state-centred activities to the proliferation of civil society, and from professionally dominated to more citizen-based activities. Danielsson et al.'s (2018) work on local participatory governance identified four models: Instrumental – top down – Interest-based – mediated – citizen as customer, Deliberation-based – reflected, Functional – co-produced. What emerges from the literature is the dominant preference for co-created and the co-produced - essentially the same approach and the antithesis of top-down impositions.

While Fischer (2000) found that meaningful nonexpert involvement in policymaking shows how the deliberations of ordinary citizens can help solve complex social and environmental problems by contributing local contextual knowledge to the professionals' expertise. He also warns that citizen participation is a complicated and uncertain business that needs to be contextualised, and carefully thought out in advance. Gill et al. (2020) in their training module on Participation in Cultural Heritage Preservation listed the factors that limit participation, these include:

- Possible parties and stakeholders do not participate
- Missing political will and support
- Missing freedom of action and design
- Disregard of legal standards and statutory thresholds
- Constant stalemate.

They note that in participatory design it is vital to be able to demonstrate the limits of participation when it comes to preservation issues based on, for example, legal regulations and conservation needs.

A legal structure helps maintain that co-operative working atmosphere (Galway, 2016). Groups may come together as an ad hoc committee, a committee with constitution and rules, a company (limited by guarantee), a co-operative and a friendly society. The case studies shared in this report describe a range of groups constituted in many of these ways, apart from the example of a friendly society. These governance structures are extensively explored in the case studies that follow.

The management of commons or common pool resources, often at landscape scale, by communities of users offers an interesting model for community governance of landscapes. Ostrom (1990) identified 8 principles for managing common pool resources (CPR). These principles relate to canonical 'common pool resources' or 'commons', the 'big five' types of common pool resources where these conditions are often present: fisheries, pasture, forests, irrigation systems, and water resources, such as aquifers. In these types of 'canonical' cases, there is generally a static number of people in the community, where livelihoods are highly dependent on a shared resource, and the consequences of non-cooperation, the unsustainable depletion of those resources, are both evident and mutual. Ostrom's principles have proved enduring and led to foundational theoretical advancements revealing that collective action has been a consequential feature of local environmental governance for generations and a positive force for sustaining environmental resources. For these types of cases, a diagnostic approach using the 8 principles is feasible and useful for supporting sustainable and collaborative management. Tralee Bay Oyster Fisheries, the subject of a case study below, use many of these rules in the governance of the natural resource they manage.

Figure 5.1 Ostrom's 8 Principles for Sustainably Managing Common Pool Resources

Clearly defined boundaries: The boundaries of the resource system, such as irrigation systems or fishers, and the individuals or households with right to harvest resources units are clearly defined.	**Graduated sanctions:** Users who violate the rules-in-use are likely to receive graduated sanctions (depending on the seriousness and context of the offense) from other users, officials accountable to users, or both.
Proportional equivalence between benefits and costs: Rules specifying the amount of resource products that a user is allocated are related to local conditions and rules requiring labour, materials and/or money inputs.	**Conflict-resolution mechanisms:** Users and their officials have rapid access to low-cost, local arenas to resolve conflict among users or between users and officials.
Collective-choice arrangements: Many of the individuals affected by harvesting and production rules are included in the group who can modify these rules.	**Minimal recognition of rights to organise:** The rights of users to devise their own institutions are not challenged by external governmental authorities, and users have long term tenure rights to the resource.
Monitoring: Monitors, who actively audit biophysical conditions and user behaviour, are at least partially accountable to users and/or are users themselves.	**Nested enterprises (for resources that are parts of larger systems):** Appropriation, provision, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolution, and governance activities are organised in multiple layers of nested enterprises.

Research building upon Ostrom's 8 principles (Yonder et al. 2022) suggests that new theoretical work is needed to deal with any environmental problems that have the features of CPRs, where there are competitive uses but the detrimental effect is long term rather than immediate and it is thus difficult to prevent people engaging in those uses (i.e., the ability to exclude users from the common pool resource). These dynamics create a social dilemma where short-term individual benefits are pitted against collective, long-term costs (Dietz et al., 2002). Community collective action to manage river catchments to prompt community behaviour change for the common good are discussed below in relation to the Rivers Trusts.

Research by Pusey (2025) gathers evidence for the commons beyond canonical 'common pool resources', providing examples of alternative forms of social (re)production, collective property and social organisation that replace individualistic conceptions of property ownership with co-production and co-management of more collective forms of goods, and of spaces. In the same volume, Gkartizios (2025) uses the lenses of repair, relatedness, rights and re-enchantment to examine community management of resources other than land, such as community pubs, shops and housing trusts which offer a 'non-market' answer to housing provision. He shows that many initiatives to repair rural infrastructure through community ownership of local assets depend on leadership, networks and social enterprises. Similar forms of practical, collective activity are evident in the case studies below, where collaborative care of rural infrastructure in the form of mending dry stone walls emerges as a powerful tool not only for built heritage conservation but also for community cohesion.

These examples of community infrastructure ownership in Ireland are currently few in number with no associated literature to review, but examples like Forbairt na Dromoda in Kerry, a community enterprise that has constructed a community facility offering a range of essential services, including

6 houses for the elderly, a social centre, remote working facility, child care centre and hostel is an example of such activity (Forbairt na Dromoda, 2025). Forbairt na Dromoda have also recently bought the local pub (Mac an tSíthigh, 2025).

Effective participatory governance at landscape scale relies on supportive legal and institutional frameworks. Scottish legislation (e.g. the establishment of the Scottish Land Fund in 2001 and the Scottish Land Reform Acts 2003, 2016) empowers communities to acquire land in the public interest. Community organisations in both rural and urban Scotland have legal rights to buy land and other property (largely buildings, but including assets such piers, slipways, and river fishing rights), as well as financial support via the Scottish Land Fund (a UK Government Community Ownership Fund was established in 2023). Scotland is unusual in creating new forms of property ownership by a community: private ownership that usually refers to legal ownership of title by a company or charitable organisation with a constitutional type tightly defined by Scottish law (McKee et al. 2025). Community bodies (generally a company limited by guarantee) are typically required to have constitutions that demonstrate geographically defined, open membership, local control, public benefit objectives and non-profit distributing status, although the precise wording required to specify these characteristics varies between mechanisms (McKee et al., 2025, p.146).

The Council of Europe's Landscape Convention mandates public participation in landscape policymaking. Stout and Ó Cinnéide (2021) argue for a shift from fragmented, under-resourced state approaches to ones that centre on community led management as a key success factor in conservation. As Shrubsole (2024) urges, heritage and land stewardship must become more democratic, not just in rhetoric but through practical levers, finance, ownership rights, and devolved/multi-level governance. Without such scaffolding, participation risks remaining symbolic rather than structural, thus supportive policy and funding levers are vital aspects of a move to community management of land.

O'Rourke (2005) in her discussion of the controversy over a proposed visitor centre in Mullaghmore in the Burren suggests that the Irish public are not naturally predisposed to participatory governance. She asserts that the legacy of authoritarian Church and state means that there is not a cultural practice of participatory democracy, resulting in power being experienced as based in paternalistic precedents and so "it is not surprising to find that any form of bottom-up, participatory development, or even collectivism, is fraught with problems. It is difficult to get people to attend public meetings … those who do rarely voice an opinion. The few that participate are seen to do so under the pressure of party politics, community pressure or vested interests, rather than to express their true feelings" (O'Rourke, 2005, p.484). This theory resonates with a historic view that Irish people are culturally individualistic (e.g. Connolly et al. 2019; Ramamoorthy et al. 2007). The results of a recent study with farmers in County Roscommon suggest that this may be true at least in the case of certain groups, where it was identified that the individualist nature of farming presented challenges to cooperative working and the creation of new cooperative initiatives (TASC 2023). Other disciplines touch upon the culture of Irish politeness or indirectness, for example in Hiberno English which "favours consensuality and agreement … showing a tendency towards indirectness and tentativeness" (Vaughan, 2023).

Whether or not past participation difficulties stem from an innate cultural individualism, there is evidence to suggest that they do relate to limiting national governance structures. In a recent article in The Examiner, Reidy notes that Ireland was ranked last out of 39 countries in a local autonomy self-rule index in 2016, in an article stating that "Ireland has [the] weakest local government system in Europe" (Reidy, 2024). This implies that the issue has some structural or systemic origins. Forde (2020) describes that "it is difficult to see how participatory governance can grow, flourish and become sustainable at any level of government in a context where most of the decision making

power is concentrated in central government" (p.7). She points to positive developments such as local area development companies, public participation networks, along with locally coordinated Age-Friendly City and County and Healthy City and County as important participative initiatives which suggest Ireland is progressing its participative agenda. Forde cites Blomgren Bingham et al. who describe that participatory governance structures should be planned and introduced at different times and stages in the policy cycle, thereby enabling citizens to understand whether their role is in clarifying preference early in policy development, in choosing among concrete policy options later, or in enforcing policy after choices are made (p. 15). This is a key point, and closely relates to issues raised in the stakeholder findings discussed below in relation to community consultations. Forde also notes the importance of learning to design and conduct participative processes and the need for venues to foster deliberative decision making, further points raised in stakeholder discussions.

Despite this apparent lack of 'self-governance' in Ireland, it is important to note examples where communities have addressed the places they live at landscape scale, the Irish Tidy Towns movement, which was initiated by the then Bord Fáilte in 1958 (Daly, 2008), is a notable example. Heritage Council initiatives like Adopt a Monument foster and facilitate communities to care for local monuments through a range of supports (Abarta Heritage, 2020). Moving to landscape scale, the work of the Irish Walled Towns Network, another Heritage Council initiative, is notable. Through targeted support, networking and opportunities for social learning between towns, this programme has delivered 20 years of sustained success (Heritage Council, 2024).

Another important community movement operating at landscape scale are the Rivers Trusts. The Rivers Trust began in the UK, and operates as an all island body in Ireland, with a Director tasked with supporting the large network of local trusts across the island (currently 11 in the Republic, 2 cross border and 5 in the north) (Mann, 2017). Trusts operate within the policy context of the EU Water Framework Directive and Ireland's Water Action Plan 2024 / River Basin Management Plan 2022–2027. These plans set national measures for restoring waters, and local Rivers Trusts have grown capacity to act as local partners in delivering the plans. The work of the Rivers Trusts is supported by the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) which has dedicated staff working at local authority level. Funding is delivered via the Community Water Development Fund (CWDF) which is administered by LAWPRO, who have signed a formal partnership agreement with the Rivers Trust. Systematic monitoring of water quality by The Rivers Trust sets useful baselines for measuring progress and this data is complimented by data produced by the Environmental Protection Agency. The Rivers Trust's 2024 State of Our Rivers (Island of Ireland edition) collates condition, pressures and case studies, allowing for shared baselines (The Rivers Trust, 2024).

The Maigue Rivers Trust Co. Limerick is the subject of a recent case study by Weiner et al. (2024). They outline a theoretical context, the integrated catchment management approach where four stakeholder groups: stakeholders, regulators; professional stakeholder organisations; local stakeholder organisations; and members of the public work together. The first two stakeholder groups work in a 'top down' manner and the latter two in a 'bottom up' fashion and only where genuine integration of these two approaches is achieved can integrated catchment management be successfully delivered.

A catastrophic slurry leak into the River Maigue in 2014 was catalyst for the foundation of the Maigue Rivers Trust, which developed in "three phases from an informal group responding to a pollution incident, to the formation of an initial core volunteer group aided by Limerick City and County Council staff, and ultimately, to a formal charity, with a dedicated project officer" (Weiner et al., 2024, pg. 85The authors find that "most of the catchment and water stewardship initiatives would not have been possible without the enthusiasm of participants, an organisational structure (Maigue Rivers Trust), a champion (Project Officer) and supporting structures (core funding and

funding awards for training and resources) (pg. 86). They find that Maigue Rivers Trust achieved the balance of top down and bottom-up integration and have operated successfully, although core funding remains a challenge.

5.6. Balancing Socio-Economic Viability with Conservation in Landscape

World Heritage designated landscapes remain the best studied cultural landscapes in the world in terms of their management and the pressures of balancing conservation with the livelihoods of local communities. Despite Article 5 of the World Heritage Convention encouraging participation of residents in the identification, nomination and protection of World Heritage properties (UNESCO, 2005, p. 3), the local communities can be seen, in some cases, to be an 'unwanted extra' in cultural landscapes (Pannell, 2006, p. 44).

In a 'whole of landscape approach' to conservation, the difficulty of balancing conservation and development remains prominent. Van Assche (2010) argues for planning that "looks beyond the recognised heritage sites, includes a much larger subset of traces of the past in its deliberations and is sensitive to heritage as defined by different communities" (p. 273-4). The problem for regulators at the operational level is that it is difficult to balance development needs and heritage concerns when whole landscapes are the basis for management. In a perhaps reductive view Sullivan (2005) asserts that bureaucracies deal much more easily with an inflexible and unchanging dead past (archaeological sites or monuments) than they do with living heritage and cultural landscapes. UNESCO has sought to address the tension between static past and living present through their World Heritage Cultural Landscapes Principles, of which Principle 6 is "successful management contributes to a sustainable society" (Mitchell et al., 2009, p.36). The case study of the Tara-Skryne Valley below demonstrates the tension between conservation and development at play in Ireland. An attempt to create a Landscape Conservation Area in a landscape of high archaeological value was rejected by stakeholders in part due to a concern about inhibition of development. Another case study, that of the Catalonian Landscape Observatory, acts as a counterfactual to this fear of landscape recording and designation - here recording the complexity of the values embedded in landscape helps smooth development processes.

There are numerous case studies of UNESCO World Heritage Sites that point to the challenge of maintaining cultural landscapes based on traditional practices that are under threat. As a micro case study of this phenomenon it is instructive to look at the rice terraces of the Philippine Codilleras, high altitude terraces that can only be farmed by hand, surrounded by picturesque villages where once thatched roofs were steadily being replaced by corrugated iron or even fully replaced by modern concrete structures Mitchell et al. (2009). Villalón (2012) describes how poverty diminishes the sense of pride that is a strong, influential resource to motivate the local community to keep up the heritage values and traditions of the site. The locals felt that manual work in the fields was a form of oppression and bondage to the land, a continuation of an outdated lifestyle based in poverty. To escape this, the young are sent away for education and encouraged to remain in urban areas for employment, leaving the older generation to work the terraces. Traditional architecture, village life and farming in the old manner are perceived as outdated. Integrated management planning and bottom-up efforts to revive traditional skills within the local community to maintain the landscape were incentivised by exploiting their economic potential as a tourism destination through training guides and building/restoring traditional houses to offer guest accommodation. This spirit of cultural revival included the intangible value of the Ifugao culture, when in 2008 the 'Hudhud Chants of the Ifugao' were inscribed in the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Villalón, 2012).

The problems identified for World Heritage Sites like those described by Villalón can be translated across many cultural landscapes, including those in Ireland like the Burren and upland hill farms where farming, biodiversity, and cultural landscapes are deeply intertwined. Without active farming, traditional landscapes risk both ecological and cultural loss but traditional, extensive farming practices have little economic value. Traditional winterage grazing in the Burren had declined due to changing cattle breeds, time pressures on part-time farmers, and agricultural policy. As a result, valuable upland areas had become overgrown with scrub, reducing biodiversity and farming potential. This problem was directly and successfully addressed by The Burren Programme, but an analysis of this successful project still found that small farms often find agri-environment schemes like the Burren Programme less financially attractive than alternatives, and farmers express frustration over limited returns from tourism despite their role in maintaining the landscape. These factors collectively threaten the sustainability of traditional farming and rural livelihoods in the region (Maguire et al., 2020).

Integrated Landscape Management (ILM) is a collaborative approach that seeks to support sustainable land use. The approach brings together diverse stakeholders, including governments, communities, private sector actors, and civil society, to manage natural resources in a way that balances environmental, economic, and social objectives across entire landscapes. Rather than addressing land use challenges in isolation, ILM promotes coordinated planning and action across sectors and spatial scales, recognising the interconnectedness of ecological systems and human activities. The approach is especially valuable in contexts where competing demands, such as agriculture, conservation, water management, and urban development, must be reconciled to achieve sustainable outcomes (Denier et al., 2015). ILM is grounded in principles of multi-stakeholder engagement, shared understanding, collaborative planning, and adaptive management. It has gained international traction as a strategy for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and for enhancing climate resilience and biodiversity conservation (Sayer et al., 2013).

ILM emphasises locally defined priorities and inclusive governance, aiming to deliver both global environmental benefits and improved local livelihoods but texts on the subject consistently miss the fourth pillar of sustainable development, culture (understood as cultural heritage, creativity, cultural industries, crafts, cultural tourism), as recognised on 17 November 2010, in the framework of the World Summit of Local and Regional Leaders - 3rd World Congress of United Cities and Local Governments, held in Mexico City (UCLG, 2010; Sabatini, 2019).

As yet, few works take a holistic view, a ‘whole of landscape approach’ that addresses all four pillars of sustainability. A research review that brought relevant work together, Wright & White (2024) find that emphasis should be placed on supporting community-led projects that value local knowledge, cultural heritage and diverse stakeholder perspectives. This can help communities develop tools to assess and preserve both environmental and cultural ecosystems. There is a need for policies and frameworks that integrate cultural and natural heritage management. Policymakers and heritage organisations should shift towards more inclusive, community-based frameworks that reflect diverse cultural values and inform long-term strategies for land use, conservation and sustainability (Wright & White, 2024).

Achieving a balance between heritage protection and sustainable use of cultural heritage resources remains a difficult and controversial issue (Caust & Vecco, 2017). By seeing heritage as part of a modern dynamic cultural system (Sing’ambi & Lwoga, 2018), it can be recognised that through the process of living, heritage is fundamentally connected to a sense of place and identification with the surrounding contemporary space (Apaydin, 2018b). As people will constantly create, transform and experience space and place, the boundaries between old and new places must be recognised as complex and authentic heritage spaces as similarly multifaceted (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004).

In Scotland, the acquisition of land and assets by communities has been seen as resulting in far-reaching economic, social and environmental outcomes, suggesting that landscapes managed by communities are balancing socio-economic development with landscape conservation. A 2014 review of 12 community holdings found that since community acquisition, the total turnover had increased from £1.7 million to £6.1 million, with staffing increasing from 22 to 103 and capital investment of £34 million, including substantial investment in renewable energy (McKee et al., 2025, p. 148). There is evidence of reduced out-migration and increased individual and community confidence and cohesion, associated with collective action and security of tenure, which enhances community capacity and motivation, and facilitates long-term planning. Furthermore, the process of community land acquisition can also impact on community energy, capacity and empowerment in relation to local decision-making processes and commonly results in the emergence of local leaders, as well as increased transparency in decision-making (McKee et. al, 2025). Evidence suggests that when communities are motivated and empowered to manage land at scale, they are capable of managing in both sustainably and in a highly participatory fashion, as demonstrated by the Isle of Eigg case study below.

In the context of heritage-rich landscapes, tourism is often pursued as a sustainable form of economic development that leverages rather than damages cultural landscapes. Tourism can be seen as a path to preservation of traditional skills, knowledge and spaces, where they might otherwise be at risk from the pressures of globalisation (Lennon and Taylor 2012a & b; Butland 2018). For example, the cultivation of traditional handicrafts in the villages within the Angkor Park is about expanding the 'authentic' landscape of heritage (Butland, 2018). However, post Covid communities' relationship with tourism has become complicated, as places once marred by overtourism were 'rediscovered' as places to live by local residents. UNESCO recognise overtourism as a threat, with a recent report stating that "If allowed to develop too fast, in an unsustainable way... tourism can undermine the very assets that people want to visit... little or no social or economic benefit accrues to local communities" (Markham et al., 2016, p.22).

5.7. Mechanisms for Community Engagement in Landscape Management

Participatory management in landscape care offers clear benefits: it shares responsibility, integrates diverse knowledge, increases implementation capacity, fosters trust, reduces enforcement burdens, and enhances public commitment (Selman, 2004). Most successful examples occur at smaller scales. This aligns with existing funding structures that support annual, community-led projects (although Landscape Partnership Funding is providing a longer term funding structures for this work, see case study below. While 'engagement' and 'participatory management' are often used interchangeably, the latter implies deeper stakeholder involvement and greater responsiveness from project managers (Selman, 2004). Selman's research suggests that people are more likely to participate in specific, purposeful projects, such as managing orchard-scapes or greenways, than in abstract, large-scale initiatives. Thus, citizen initiatives complement but do not replace strategic planning for extensive landscapes at regional authority or governmental level (which appears to suggest there are limits to the scale of landscapes which communities can actively manage, particularly in a voluntary capacity).

Selman points to promising models of community-led management:

- Specialist communities managing large landscapes (e.g. Dutch farmers participating in the In Natura initiative, in the below case studies, Farming Rathcroghan),
- Specialist communities managing specialist areas (e.g. Erie Canal corridor groups, part

of the Canadian Heritage Corridors Programme, in the below case studies, Tralee Bay Oyster Fisheries, Hometree),

- General communities managing specialist areas (e.g. Terryland's People's Forest Park, Galway, in the below case studies, Wild Ennerdale).

Effective participatory planning requires three foundations:

- A knowledge base (professional and lay expertise),
- A relational base (stakeholders and networks),
- Mobilisation capacity (resources and influence) (Healey et al., 2002).

The CHeriScape project (Fairclough et al., 2020) was a three-year exploration from a (mainly western) European perspective of the cultural, social and environmental policy connections between the concepts and practices of landscape and heritage. The project offers valuable insights into community engagement for participatory landscape management:

- Embrace landscape dynamism over strict preservation
- Develop governance tools to counter market failure in heritage and landscape stewardship
- Frame landscape as a common, enabling democratic participation.
- Use education, storytelling, social media, and interdisciplinary dialogue to support engagement

These findings link with adaptive co-management approaches discussed already above, which embrace dynamism. UNESCO principles also chime here, with their concept of 'managed change'. Landscape as commons has already been noted in relation to communities acquiring common resources.

BurrenBeo's Heritage Keepers Project (Bird & Reilly, 2023) focussed particularly on the idea of 'knowledge base' and 'education, storytelling, social media and interdisciplinary dialogue' as described above. It provided structure, ongoing support, and funding, enabling participants, from schoolchildren to local groups, to move from awareness to action through developing a 'sense of place' to becoming active heritage researchers in their own right through introduction to a suite of online heritage resources. Networking among groups fostered social learning, reinforcing a sense of shared purpose (Bird & Reilly, 2023).

The key outcomes of the Heritage Keepers programme agree with the success factors for such projects identified elsewhere: locally relevant knowledge, increased agency, and a growing sense of collective empowerment. These are some of the core building blocks of community stewardship as described by Peçanha Enqvist et al. (2018). The authors argue that community stewardship has the potential to address a wide range of issues, empowering communities to address local concerns (even linked to global drivers of change).

Goffee and Jones (2006) identify four traits in successful leadership that inspire and empower their followers. These have a relevance for those planning projects who hope to inspire deep and sustained participation in any given set of stakeholders. These quantities are authenticity, significance, excitement, and community. Authenticity manifests as followers seeing the leader as personally committed and demonstrating it in their actions and interactions. Significance manifests as followers needing to be acknowledged for their contribution and their role. Leaders are able to

excite others through their own excitement and passionate commitment to the cause, business or task in hand. And finally community leaders are able to engender a sense of community in those they lead by fostering a sense of belonging and celebrating the successes and achievements of that community. These four traits can be identified in the work of many of the management teams of the landscape case studies outlined below - most notably a passionate commitment to their mission which inspires others, knowledge that the work of the community must be acknowledged and celebrated.

Liu, Jim & Dupre (2022) identify several mechanisms for stakeholder empowerment:

- Joint heritage valuation
- Addressing hierarchies of need and power imbalances
- Psychological empowerment via inclusive platforms
- Emphasis on social learning and multi-level governance
- Strategic use of digital tools
- Identification of vital brokers to bridge stakeholder divides

These mechanisms again chime with works already cited in this review - particularly joint heritage valuation that links back to the conceptual underpinning of this study 'what is heritage' but finds practical echoes in works to follow like the Heritage Council's Village Design Statements (2012) and O'Regan's Landscape Circle Study (2008). Social learning is addressed further below. Vital brokers emerge in the findings of this study as 'key influentials' who can unlock access to and action from a given community.

A Pobal guide to best practice in community engagement (2025) stresses trust-building and outlines a phased engagement model:

- Planning: build relationships, co-design, early outreach.
- Implementation: communicate flexibly, ensure multiple pathways for engagement.
- Review: feedback, expectation management, impact communication.

Their adoption of the International Association for Public Participation model (inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower) offers a scalable framework to assess participation depth.

TASC's People's Transition model (McCabe 2020) offers a guide to community mapping and engagement that has been successfully applied in multiple rural and urban contexts (e.g. TASC 2023, 2024) to ensure inclusive and participative decision-making in the design of local climate solutions that are grounded in wider local development aims. The mapping phase of the model first utilises census and deprivation index data from the relevant geographic area to establish the socio-economic profile of the community, ensure that those who could be potentially underrepresented are included and to identify any challenges to participation so that they can be addressed during the engagement process. The mapping phase then identifies the 'anchor' institutions (e.g. schools, universities, churches, community groups) within the area that can support community initiatives on a long-term basis. Following this, it pinpoints existing active citizen initiatives. These three steps enable an overview of the whole community and a level of engagement that is 'inclusive and built on existing community relations and social fabric' (TASC 2023).

Masterplanning, futures planning and long-term planning are frequently mentioned as important

tools in engaging communities in landscape and landscape management. Pereira et al. (2021) describe that addressing future sustainability challenges for achieving more equitable development in global environmental assessments requires a more explicit role for bottom-up inspired futures. They advocate for exploring alternative futures that are grounded in local realities and existing practical actions, and that can be appropriately scaled to the required decision-making level. Giudice and Voghera (2024) find that active involvement of inhabitants is crucial in providing valuable insights from an internal perspective that enable the transmission of landscape and cultural heritage for future generations. They found that "encouraging civic dialogue and engagement becomes fundamental when defining landscape criticalities and degradation elements … this shared landscape action opens the path to new conceptualisations, like the common good and the democratisation of landscape" (pp. 8-9).

The community-based approach valuing and planning for the landscape are well outlined in The Heritage Council's Village Design Statements (The Heritage Council, 2012), the toolkit for which is a roadmap that embraces a new collaborative and participative approach to village planning and design. Here local communities, working in partnership with local authorities and statutory agencies, have a real voice in how their villages are planned and shaped in the future. Village residents analyse their landscape using a list of core heritage and design elements, which form the basis for the design objectives agreed by the community at a stakeholder meeting. These in turn form the basis of a consultant's brief. The outputs of the process include a shared community vision for the village in the next 15-20 years, agreed design principles and an agreed village design statements action plan.

Social learning emerges as another key mechanism in communities engaging in landscape scale management - particularly in terms of environmental damage and behaviour change. Daly et al. (2016), in an article addressing the management of river catchments, state that "without the involvement, cooperation and co-ownership of water management by local people and communities, and the opportunity to learn from these communities, the objectives will not be achieved". They cite work by Orr (2007), on the "need to take a social learning approach in water, where we learn together how to make sense of complex problems and adapt our ways of managing" (p. 165).

Reed et al. (2010) define social learning as learning which:

- demonstrates that a change in understanding has taken place in the individuals involved;
- demonstrates that this change goes beyond the individual and becomes situated within wider social units or communities of practice
- occurs through social interactions and processes between actors within a social network.

Finally, facilitation and mediation skills for those who lead participative projects are increasingly critical. Lennon and Taylor (2012b) highlights the growing importance of transversal skills, from active listening to understanding traditional systems and applying new technologies. Gill et al. (2020), in a case study of participatory processes in action in Bamburg, Germany, ask the interviewee to reflect upon the skills and attitudes essential for a cultural manager undertaking participatory work. Amongst a long list were "listening, communicating, engaging, staying objective, acting without airs and graces" (pp. 38-39). These findings underline the need to better align professional training in heritage and landscape management with participatory practice.

5.8. Funding Community Landscape Management

The standard model for funding landscape scale work is understood generally under the rubrics of urban/rural planning and regional development regulations, available commercial funding, government schemes and grants (e.g. ACRES, Public Realm Investments, European Regional Development Funds, HORIZON 2020, THRIVE). These programmes fund elements within a larger landscape and address large scale change drivers such as climate change and energy transition.

The Just Transition Fund is a key tool for supporting the territories most affected by the transition towards climate neutrality and for preventing an increase in regional disparities. Its main objectives are to alleviate the impact of the transition by financing the diversification and modernisation of the local economy and by mitigating the negative repercussions on employment (Gouardères, 2025). In Ireland, this funding supports economic diversification and reskilling for peatland communities, the digital transition and in the future perhaps transition away from carbon intensive, highly specialised farming. Banerjee and Schuitema (2022) have questioned the earlier process of deploying these funds in supporting peat workers in Ireland, suggesting that more work is needed to bridge the gap between theory and practice in practically supporting communities to make the transition to a post carbon economy. However, TASC's (2020, 2023, 2024, see above) approach to the development of inclusive, community-led climate solutions offers a promising framework for the achievement of Just Transition.

While much of the currently available funding is not modelled on emerging thinking about participatory management and community action foregrounded by the Aarhus Convention, it is notable that some measures being put in place are engaging with this kind of thinking, e.g. Irish Walled Town Network, The Town Centre First Initiative, The Historic Towns Initiative, The New European Bauhaus and EU Just Transition Funds.

Accessing appropriate funding for community-led initiatives is often challenging, as there is no one portal that shares a full listing of available funding schemes. For example, farms within a catchment area may only learn about funding for water quality measures through direct outreach by project team members. Despite a fragmented funding landscape, impressive work is emerging that gives a high-level view of the required elements to fund successful landscape scale work.

Natural Capital Ireland produced high level guidelines for funding nature restoration in Ireland in 2024 (Ní Dhúill et al., 2024). Their criteria for success include:

- Investment in an overarching nature restoration plan
- Focussing political will and rebuilding trust in environmental policy and schemes
- Investment in engagement and awareness raising
- Investment in building capacity and expertise in nature restoration
- Rapid scaling up of best practice nature restoration projects with ongoing supports
- Long-term supports (multi annual funding)
- Sustainable, scalable, ongoing and long-term with continuous monitoring and progress openly tracked

Though focussed on nature restoration, these key recommendations might easily be applied to landscape scale work, particularly the need for an overarching plan (such as the National Landscape Strategy) and the need to grow political support for such a plan as an aid to development and progress rather than a hindrance to it.

Clarke's 2015 review of landscape scale funding in the UK is vital reading for this report. He lays out a context in which formal protected areas (PA) are conservation islands within a wider landscape of intensive farming, towns, industry and transport links. The recognised need for "more, bigger, better and joined" implies the need for complementary approaches. He found that the Heritage Lottery Fund financed Landscape Partnerships (LP) represented an increasingly important vehicle for securing conservation of the natural and cultural heritage alongside the formal system of designated PA. Their reliance upon local initiative, community engagement and multi-agency participation presents significant advantages. The strength of the LP approach is that it is 'bottom up' and in some ways opportunistic. Heritage Lottery Fund, now the National Lottery Heritage Funds, Landscape Partnership funding and successful Northern Ireland programmes are the subject of a case study below.

In Louman et al. 's (2022) review of access to landscape finance they outline specific challenges for stakeholders, particularly small-scale producers for whom access to and administration of funding is challenging. They describe a challenging context for both those seeking finance and those providing it. In the case of recipients', the main challenges identified were lack of financial literacy, insufficient technical know-how about transforming conventional land-use practices into sustainable practices, lack of collateral (often related to insecure land tenure), lack of access to financial institutions, insufficient capital or income, and poor organisation. For grant providers, whether commercial or government, there can be difficulties in building a relationship of trust with communities, regulatory limitations, lack of knowledge of economics of the landscape in question, and finally a lack of examples of previous successfully funded projects means there can be a reluctance to engage with the communities trying to access funding for landscape scale work. Additionally, communities and funders groups can have very different understandings of what constitutes risk (Louman et al, 2022).

Across the sources, three requirements are clear. First, a plan-led national framework with political backing and multi-annual funding is needed to give direction and stability (Ní Dhúill et al., 2024). Second, delivery must be locally driven through partnership models that can work opportunistically across designated sites and the wider working landscape, as demonstrated by the UK Landscape Partnerships (Clarke, 2015). Third, finance must be made genuinely accessible, with capacity-building, technical assistance, and risk-sharing mechanisms that reflect local realities and tenure constraints (Louman et al., 2022). Put together, this points to the requirement for a national framework that underwrites community-centred partnerships, invests in skills and capacity building, simplifies access to finance, and requires proportionate, transparent monitoring from the start.

5.9. Drivers of Change in Landscape Management

Ireland experiences many of the same drivers as other European countries. Population movements, marginalisation of some rural areas, and local economic activities, particularly agriculture and livestock production, shape land-use decisions and contribute to both deforestation and reforestation patterns (Novotny et al., 2021).

Cultural landscapes are produced partly by natural processes but also by human drivers, and many have derived from a 'virtuous circle' of embedded socio-economic activity which draws upon and in turn reinforces local landscape services (Selman, 2007). Selman notes that a widespread problem is that the drivers which produced our distinctive heritage are increasingly obsolete, yet contemporary drivers do not seem to be creating landscapes which are intuitively pleasing or characteristically place-sensitive, at least to the general public. In some cases, this perception of what constitutes a pleasing landscape may be changing, Daugstad (2010) observes that "there are

indications from studies in Denmark that preferred landscapes and, hence, potential future heritage, might shift due to generations … young Danes prefer open and almost industrial agricultural landscapes to small-scale diverse landscapes with hedges and patches of wood " (p. 270). She notes that what are considered 'emblematic' landscapes may change if more democratic cultural heritage policies come into action. Furthermore, landscape change may be made palatable if the resisted change can be communicated such that it tells a coherent and edifying new narrative that serves contemporary social and economic realities, akin to Carlson's 'functional fit'. With the right combination of circumstances, we may be enabled to accept change and to value new landscapes because we can read and endorse their underlying story (Selman, 2007).

In one respect Ireland differs from many of its European neighbours, in that ongoing significant population growth is a driver of changes in both rural and urban settings. The development of sufficient housing and other infrastructure for this growth is a major issue that is already changing the landscape. Similar population growth is a trend in Asian countries with migration from the countryside and increased demand for natural resources. Atmospheric pollution, intrusive commercial development and insensitive public and private construction works are threats to heritage landscape, decreasing their heritage value (Lennon and Taylor, 2012b).

Renewable energy infrastructure, particularly wind energy, has altered the visual and cultural character of the Irish landscape in many areas, particularly in some in rural and upland areas. While important in contributing to climate resilience, these developments often generate local opposition due to perceived impacts on heritage, tourism, and community identity (Pasqualetti, 2011; Warren & McFadyen, 2010). The Heritage Council have sought to offer guidance here, publishing a policy research paper in 2013 which makes clear that, amongst other things, a greater application of historic landscape character assessment and a robust National Landscape Strategy are needed to manage the development of onshore wind farms in Ireland (Harvey & Moloney, 2013). In Ireland, the tension between national energy policy and local landscape values highlights the need for more inclusive, community-engaged processes in wind farm development that sees communities both consulted and remunerated for proximity to wind generation infrastructure (Brennan & Rensburg, 2016).

Nature restoration in the midlands under the Just Transition Fund and other climate mechanisms may involve rewetting of bogs. Flood et al. (2021) proposed a framework for valuing cultural ecosystem services in peatland restoration by integrating long-term stakeholder relationships with the land. The study stresses that both past and present land users must be part of decision-making (Flood et al, 2021). Other nature-based solutions to climate change can create changes to cultural landscapes. For example, water mill deconstruction in the Netherlands and rewetting of river landscapes allows for the areas to buffer more water in wet months and prevent flooding in the city of Den Bosch downstream of the water mills. The new wetter landscape also acts as a heat stress buffer for the city and prevents drought in a large area (Shotton 2024). Selman points to how much energy over the centuries has been invested in lowering water tables to enable more intensive year-round farming (Selman, 2007), a process now being reversed to allow rivers to take their natural courses to allow space for nature (Rebanks 2020, Tree, 2018).

Afforestation is a further driver of landscape change in Ireland. According to Zou et al. (2024), the Climate Action Plan 2024 prioritises increased afforestation, sustainable forest management, and greater use of harvested wood products to meet national objectives. The National Forestry Strategy seeks to expand climate-resilient, healthy forests to cover 18% of the land area.

Monoculture plantations of non-native conifers are widely perceived as harmful to landscape character. Zou et al. (2024) emphasise that social acceptance is a binding constraint. Practical

responses include early and sustained community engagement, clearer communication of co-benefits such as carbon storage, biodiversity gains and local economic activity, targeted incentives for landowners, and participatory planning and delivery. These measures increase the likelihood that afforestation proposals will be accepted and carried through.

Hometree, an Irish environmental charity, are undertaking work to educate the Irish public about native afforestation. They are creating demonstrator sites around the country to encourage the planting of native woodland (see case study below) and acquiring commercial forestry plantations to convert them into semi-natural woodlands. They note that they are not opposed to commercial forestry, but often these commercial plantations represent "the wrong tree in the wrong place" (Climate Conversations, 2021).

Save Letrim is a local pressure group seeking to manage the rapid and uncontrolled development of commercial forestry in their county. As they describe "Save Leitrim is not against all forestry, but we aim to prevent unsuitable forestry being planted in unsuitable areas. The government has a national target to have 18% of Ireland planted by 2030, which was already surpassed in Leitrim, as we have 20.1% of our county planted as of 2022" (Save Letrim, 2025). The issue raised by Save Letrim cuts to the heart of the role of the local community in managing their landscape. They want to play an equitable role in deciding on landscape developments that will materially impact the socio-economic viability and the heritage character of where they live.

Advocates of cultural landscapes warn that large-scale afforestation and rewilding can homogenise traditional landscape mosaics. Agnoletti (2006) contends that rural landscapes are cultural products and that, outside heavily industrialised areas, restoring traditional land-use patterns is often preferable to pursuing "pristine" woodland targets. Measures such as mixed cropping, wood pastures, tree rows, pollards, hedgerows and other mosaic features can better sustain both cultural character and ecological connectivity.

The move towards high nature value-based farming may change the appearance of rural landscapes, perhaps even reversing some of the negative landscape impacts of CAP. High nature value farming is based in lower impact, ecologically sound practices. This often involves traditional farming methods (Dunford et al 2025).

In Clare, tourism development may be seen as a significant driver of change and community conflict. O'Rourke (2005) describes the controversy over the development of an interpretive centre at Mullaghmore, funded by EU Structural Funds, which sparked conflict between locals and outsiders over land use. The dispute revealed deep divisions within the community and highlighted tensions between economic development and environmental protection.

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, working through the the National Monuments Service and the National Built Heritage Service, published the Built and Archaeological Heritage Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan in 2019, with an updated plan completed and due for launch in 2025 (DHLGH, 2019). The 2019 plan identifies multiple risks to built, archaeological and cultural landscapes from climate change, including increased pests and diseases, drought, wildfire and windthrow, as well as gradual ecological shifts such as changing species distributions and growing seasons. These changes also affect material heritage indirectly by disrupting sense of place and the intangible cultural practices that express it. Projects such as CHERISH show that communicating climate risks through concrete local heritage impacts can strengthen public understanding and engagement (Barker and Corns, 2023).

5.10. Recording the Landscape

The development of Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) has evolved as a vital tool in environmental planning and landscape management, offering a structured method to identify, classify, and describe distinct landscape areas based on their natural and cultural attributes (Fairclough et al., 2018). LCAs are designed to inform spatial planning, conservation strategies, and land management by highlighting the unique characteristics and sensitivities of different landscapes, integrating both physical features and perceptual qualities. The approach has since been embedded in policy frameworks, such as the European Landscape Convention (2000), which emphasises the importance of landscape in planning and governance. Attempts have been made to standardise LCA across Europe or at least create harmonised approaches to landscape mapping (Mucher & Wascher, 2007). European countries take their own approaches to landscape characterisation, such as Landscape Atlas in France and Landscape Catalogues in Catalonia (see case study below).

Ireland signed and ratified the European Landscape Convention in 2002. Even before this point, progress was made in advancing the objectives of the convention, such as the drafting of Landscape and Landscape Assessment Guidelines (DHLGH, 2000), which were issued for consultation. Workshops were held for the implementation of the Convention during the early 2000s, and the National Landscape Strategy process was initiated in 2008 with Landscape Character Assessment training workshops delivered by the Heritage Council in 2009. After public consultation the Irish National Landscape Strategy was formally launched in 2015. Unfortunately, as described by O'Regan "it initially drifted into a landscape characterisation mapping morass and has since effectively lost its impetus" (O'Regan, 2022).

The recent research study Reframe Landscape Character Assessment produced by Minogue et al. (2024) with Environmental Protection Agency funding provides a comprehensive approach to undertaking an overall landscape character assessment. Reframe recommends that LCA should be undertaken by a local/regional or national body and provide a baseline for those working at landscape scale to guide decision making regarding the nature of projects and suitability of specific locations and the toolkit standardises that process. A rigorous and useful volume which foregrounds community input, it remains to be seen whether the toolkit will be used as a building block to establish a nationwide standard for landscape character assessment in Ireland.

O'Regan's "A Landscape Circle" Study (2008) presents a deeply participatory, community-based approach to landscape, encouraging individuals and groups to engage directly with the landscapes that matter to them. Through a structured seven-step method, the guide empowers communities to understand, assess, and manage their local landscapes, fostering a sense of stewardship and ensuring that change is informed, respectful, and rooted in shared values. It views landscape as a living, multi-dimensional entity shaped by both natural processes and human influence, emphasising personal connection, memory, and responsibility.

Deep mapping is a digital humanities methodology that combines spatial analysis with rich qualitative data to produce layered, interpretive representations of place. Unlike traditional cartography, deep maps are multi-dimensional and experiential, integrating oral histories, archival materials, literary texts, ecological data, and personal narratives to reveal the cultural and temporal complexity of landscapes. Rooted in the concept of thick description (Geertz, 1973), deep mapping engages with both physical geography and human meaning-making, often using digital platforms to visualise overlapping temporalities and perspectives. This approach challenges positivist models of mapping by foregrounding subjectivity, ambiguity, and narrative. Pioneering work by scholars such as Least Heat-Moon (1991) and later expanded by David Bodenhamer (2010; 2015) positions

deep mapping as a critical tool for spatial humanities, particularly in relation to memory, heritage, and contested landscapes. Through tools like GIS, story maps, and multimedia archives, deep mapping has become an increasingly influential practice in digital heritage and landscape studies.

These rarely translate, however, into landscape scale planning and remain academic outputs, see for example Deep Maps: West Cork Coastal Cultures, a 2018 University College Cork Digital Humanities project funded by the Irish Research Council's New Horizons Award which sought to connect cultural history and marine biological research (Deep Maps, 2025).

5.11. Citizen Science

Citizen science, the active involvement of non-professional volunteers in scientific research, has become a vital method for generating large-scale, place-based data and fostering public engagement in science. It democratises knowledge production by valuing local expertise and enabling communities to contribute meaningfully to environmental monitoring, heritage documentation, and biodiversity tracking (Bonney et al., 2009; Irwin, 1995). Recent scholarship has emphasised its potential to bridge gaps between scientific institutions and the public, especially when projects are co-designed with communities rather than imposed in a top-down manner (Haklay, 2013). In heritage and environmental contexts, citizen science is increasingly recognised not just for its data outputs but also for its role in fostering stewardship, empowering marginalised groups, and supporting local decision-making (Haywood, 2014; Fritz et al., 2019). However, challenges remain around data quality, long-term sustainability, and equitable participation, prompting calls for more inclusive, reflexive practices (Phillips et al., 2019; Strasser et al., 2019).

Shotton & Prizeman (2024) took a citizen science approach in empowering coastal communities to record local coastal heritage in the context of rapidly evolving climate, coastal heritage across the world has come under increasing threat as sea levels rise and storms increase in regularity and severity. Communities living along these coastlines, and deeply attached to their heritage could have a central role to play as first-hand observers of the impact of climate change on their heritage and as partners in documentation and adaptive planning. They argue that the increase in far more user-friendly and inexpensive methods of 3D recording and visualisation can not only facilitate this documentation effort, but also enable communities to play a more active role in this process.

Tierney et al. (2024) describe how gravestone survey datasets have been recorded in the field, published and enriched, as a collective citizen science project which facilitates global genealogical research. They identify local, community led heritage projects as a subset of citizen science projects, on the basis that a group of unrelated, place-based individuals undertake a particular project for a broader benefit. Here the longevity of the project and open science approach have been definite success factors, as they describe "building trust and maintaining it over the last 13 years has been an important part of the project and a key element in our request that communities share ownership of the heritage surveys under Creative Commons licences rather than regular copyright; another element of innovation developed within the digital born origins of the project" (p. 244).

Logainm, the Irish Placenames Database (2025), has created a new area of activity Meitheal Logainm, as a crowdsourcing tool for pooling, storing and sharing data about minor place names. This initiative gives users the opportunity to record and preserve the toponymic heritage of the country by mapping and sharing minor placenames online. Minor placenames are names other than administrative placenames and population centres such as field names, which have no official status or administrative function, but they are extremely important in that they contain information

on a local level regarding settlement patterns, agriculture and industry, amongst other things. Meitheal Logainm is in use by communities across the island and offers citizens an opportunity to add layers of meaning and value to the recorded history of their landscape.

The complexity of landscape, considering the materiality of land and the cultural values of those who inhabit it, also adds complexity to the designation of special landscape areas. In this way, the issues outlined by Lennon and Taylor (2012) regarding UNESCO World Heritage sites can usefully be applied to a number of landscape designations. Often there is a separation of natural and cultural values in World Heritage evaluations, especially the autonomous and juxtaposed assessments of IUCN and ICOMOS, which contradict the 2005 Operational Guidelines intended to promote integration (UNESCO 2005). The siloed designations mirror similar tensions in SACs, where ecological criteria can override cultural land-use traditions. There is still a lack of frameworks that treat landscape heritage as both biocultural and dynamic, undermining a 'whole of heritage' approach (Lennon and Taylor 2012).

5.12. Traditional and Scientific Knowledge

The relationship between built, archaeological, cultural and intangible heritage and in turn the relationship of these to traditional and scientific knowledge is acknowledged but finds little formal discourse in academic writing. Sidelights on these relationships can be found in research into things like the relationship between snap net fishing and cot building on the rivers Nore, Suir and Barrow (Wilkins, 1998). This research has identified few examples of academic exploration of the relationship between landscape and traditional knowledge, a notable gap in an increasingly important field of enquiry. Furthermore, there does not yet appear to be research on how drivers of change might both positively and negatively impact traditional knowledge and management of the cultural landscapes. For example, the question of whether work on preventing pollution in river catchments will in turn address supply and demand issues for thatching reed in Ireland, which is at present largely imported from Eastern Europe (Wichmann and Köbbing, 2015).

Selman (2007) describes how both 'hard' and 'soft' features of the cultural landscape, where human hands have changed it: buildings, roads, deliberately planted corridors and fields, reflect the energy requirements of maintaining that landscape. These requirements are a significant component of the lifecycle impact of the 'hard' landscape and can be equivalent to several years of a building's operational energy. Thus, the landscape of carbon-neutrality will be strongly associated with careful choice of construction materials, and with subsequent renovation and maintenance (Selman, 2007).These same landscapes will also require a range of traditional skills: hedge laying and dry-stone wall building, all the methods used to construct traditional buildings – stone masonry, lime mortaring, plastering, thatching, carpentry, bodging; and traditional approaches to forestry management like coppicing.

Many of the articles reviewed here that touch upon traditional knowledge do so from the perspective of indigenous approaches to landscape management outside Ireland. For example, Ross et al. (2010) describe work in Australia where indigenous knowledge is being brought to bear in cultural heritage management legislation and practice. Here the approach to landscape assessment, included a focus on the relationship between landscape features and creation stories, archaeological data and on protecting and respecting the natural resources, animals and spiritual beings that had provided sustenance to the Quandamook community for thousands of years. This was done in consultation with the Traditional Owners of the land. Several of this project's case studies examine the ways in which Irish people are using their knowledge of the land, and Irish

traditional skills, e.g. dry stonewalling in Rathcroghan, the knowledge of Tralee Bay Fishermen, and the conversations between artists and farmers in the Dinnseanchas project.

5.13. Conclusion

The literature and policy review point to a coherent set of conditions for credible community-led stewardship at landscape scale in Ireland. Landscapes function as socio-ecological systems, so effective management integrates natural, cultural, economic and social values within a whole-of-landscape frame aligned to the European Landscape Convention and Integrated Landscape Management. Where national policy and law provide clear direction, rights and funding scaffolds, local action can gain traction. In Ireland, centralised governance, uneven alignment with national planning, and limited participatory expertise weaken this connection. Durable community stewardship depends on more than enthusiasm. It requires appropriate legal standing, clear decision-making arrangements, financial accountability, and administrative capability to manage land, assets, volunteers and funds. Participatory governance improves legitimacy and resilience when communities act as co-creators, with structured dialogue and adaptive learning built in.

The evidence also shows that short, competitive grants constrain continuity, while multi-year support for core capacity, simpler access to funds, and recognition of multiple public goods are important enablers. Social learning and networking are repeatedly highlighted, along with the practical value of facilitation, mediation and communication skills. Traditional and local knowledge should sit alongside scientific expertise, yet many craft practices remain under-documented and at risk. Landscape Character Assessment, participatory and deep mapping offer place-sensitive evidence, but their influence depends on integration with statutory decision-making. Digital tools and citizen science can widen access to data where trust, training and open standards are present. Across all of this, major drivers of change in Ireland, including climate action, energy development, peatland restoration, forestry expansion, agricultural transitions and tourism, intensify the need for culturally grounded, participative approaches to avoid conflict and the erosion of heritage values.

Against that backdrop, the case studies that follow are designed to probe where the current Irish policy and legislative context supports or inhibits these conditions, and to examine how governance forms, participation, finance, knowledge practices and evidence use operate in real settings. They address gaps flagged in the literature, including how community organisations constitute effective landscape-scale governance, how statutory planning can absorb landscape evidence generated by communities, and how social learning networks function across places and professions. The case studies aim to provide a focused test of the propositions emerging from the review of literature and policy.

6. Case Studies









Part two of this report outlines the results of field research carried out during 2025, to examine the current state of play for landscape stewardship by communities in Ireland from policy, legislation, research and guidance perspectives.

The case studies presented explore groups in Ireland, the UK and Spain who are working at landscape scale to manage heritage-rich landscapes. One case study focuses particularly on landscape scale funding, while another looks at innovative and participatory approaches to recording the landscape. Each case study addresses the research questions and answers these with data gathered either directly from interviewees or from secondary sources cited in the text.

Each case study is followed by 3-4 short key insights. The findings from the case studies are integrated with those from stakeholder interviews and the survey and presented in Section 7 Research Findings.

Table 6:1 Case Study Summary

Case Study	Governance Model	Funding Mechanisms	Opportunities	Challenges	Engagement Approaches	Outcomes
1. **Farming Rathcroghan, Roscommon**	CLG; Board of Management; Paid staff	EIP results based agri payments; Farm Walks Scheme; Just Transition Funds	Long term project staff; Integration of tourism, farming & archaeology; Place specific tailored solutions	Short term funding cycles; Initially low community trust in programmes	Long-term high-volume stakeholder engagement; Farm visits; Social learning; Community archaeology	Balanced archaeology protection & farming viability; Increased participation within the community
2. **Tralee Bay Oyster Fisheries, Kerry**	Commercial Co-operative; Board of Management; Paid staff	Commercial sales	Rotational harvesting & quotas; Natural carbon sequestration	Regulatory uncertainty, environmental pressures	Community-led marine management; Application of scientific expertise	Restored oyster stocks; biodiversity protection; Community support for MPA designation
3. **Bere Island, Cork**	Community Development Company; Paid Staff	Island specific funding; Public fundraising; Community Grants	Staff, multi-source funding	Short term funding cycles; Remote nature of the community	Participatory Strategic Planning	Heritage tourism, aquaculture; Skills retention
4. **Hometree, Galway, Donegal, Kerry, Wicklow**	Charitable trust	Forestry Grants; Arts Grants; Public Fundraising; Corporate social responsibility programmes	Creative engagement model; Changing perception of forestry	Short term funding cycles; Scaling challenges	Stakeholder engagement; Artists engagement; Corporate engagement	Afforestation; Acting as climate action advocates; Developing new models for action
5. **The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Northern Ireland**	UK-based public funding body	Lottery funding	Long-term funding capacity; Phased funding approach	Funder outside communities	Phased grant programmes; Early engagement with communities proposing projects	Multiple landscape-scale projects

Case Study	Governance Model	Funding Mechanisms	Opportunities	Challenges	Engagement Approaches	Outcomes
6. **Tara-Skryne Landscape Conservation Area, Meath**	Local authority-led pilot	Local authority funding	Public interest in heritage protection	Concerns about perceived planning restrictions	Robust engagement	Raised awareness of planning impacts
7. **Lemanaghan, Offaly**	Voluntary community group	Public fundraising; Volunteer actions	Strong cultural identity; Commitment to Lemanaghan Monastic Site	Conflict over renewable energy proposals; Fears regarding impact on Monastic site	Community advocacy; Public campaigning	Raised awareness of heritage conflicts
8. **The Isle of Eigg, Scotland**	Community ownership trust	Public fundraising; UK government grants; EU funding (pre-Brexit); Commercial (tourism, rents)	Community control over assets	Ongoing management capacity demands	Resident-led decision-making	Renewable energy, housing, crofting
9. **Wild Ennerdale England**	Private Partnership	Privately funded; UK government grants	Major landowner cooperation; High level of stakeholder engagement	Balancing visitor access & ecological conservation; Ecosystem damage from invasive disease	Flexible, adaptive stewardship; Long term staff in place	Wilding with integrated farming; High level of volunteer support
10. **Catalonian Landscape Observatory, Spain**	Government Body; Consortium of 30 private and public institutions	Spanish government and local authority funding; EU Funding; Other external project funding	Catalan Landscape Act 2005; Government and civil society support;	Climate change impacts on Catalan landscapes; Reaching some communities of interest	Public workshops; Thematic working sessions; Stakeholder consultation; Inclusive engagement practices	Development of accurate and regularly updated data sets for enabling informed development and planning; Integration of landscape in planning

CASE STUDY 1 Farming Rathcroghan, Co. Roscommon

Farming Rathcroghan EUJTF stile (IMAGE: Farming Rathcroghan 2024)

Context

Rathcroghan, the ancient capital of Connacht, has been farmed since the Neolithic period. The area, deeply woven into Irish mythology and associated with Queen Medb and the Táin Bó Cúailnge (Fox, 2024), is on Ireland's tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage status as part of a Royal Sites of Ireland complex (DHLGH, 2022).

Farming remains an economic mainstay. However, archaeological designations (over 240 archaeological sites, 60 protected Recorded Monuments status) have created challenges. The Farming Rathcroghan project sought to create a results-based payment scheme that protects archaeology while ensuring farm viability. With initial support from a European Innovation Partnership (EIP) the project involved 30 farmers and now funded by the EU Just Transition Fund, has upscaled to 60 farmers within 3.5km of Rathcroghan Mound. It works in partnership with the Rathcroghan Visitor Centre in Tulsk.

Governance and Management

Farming Rathcroghan is a company limited by guarantee, governed by a voluntary, multidisciplinary board of directors composed of farmers, academics, state agencies and the Rathcroghan Visitor Centre management. It also benefits from full time staff that include a community archaeologist and project manager.

The Rathcroghan Visitor Centre, managed by Tulsk Action Group (another CLG), supports the work of the project. While there was initial tension between the Centre and farmers over its location in Tulsk village, sustained grassroots engagement led to improved collaboration. Now both entities combine to support tourism and conservation goals. Crucially, both projects are led by individuals with farming backgrounds, bridging the gap between heritage and agricultural interests.

Socio-Economic Sustainability Balanced with Conservation

Beyond farming, tourism is a growing income source. Previously, uncontrolled visitor access led to trespassing. The project has addressed this by enrolling farmers in the National Walks Scheme, which pays them for maintaining trails and infrastructure. A planned 13km looped walk will enhance visitor experience while protecting both farms and monuments. The Visitor Centre's trained guides enrich these experiences. Guides report that Rathcroghan's visitors prefer slow, unplugged experiences focused on folklore and connection to place.

The community archaeologist plays a vital role in helping farmers balance agricultural needs with heritage care. Their long-term presence has built trust, allowing real-time advice on managing sensitive features and integrating archaeology into daily farm decisions.

Outcomes are visible across the landscape, in restored traditional gates, innovative farm measures, defined pathways, and protected monuments. More importantly, farmers report a renewed appreciation for the land's deep cultural heritage and their role in its story. Shared training sessions in traditional skills like drystone walling, allowed farmers to work together, strengthening relationships and building networks that can help each other with repairs on their own land.

Mechanisms for Community Engagement

At its outset, the project faced local scepticism, as archaeology was viewed as an obstacle to retaining a vibrant community as well as future development. Concerns included housing shortages and fears that World Heritage designation would turn farms into a 'theme park'. Previous negative experiences with EU projects also created hesitancy and distrust.

To address concerns, the project prioritised dialogue between farmers and archaeologists. Over 450 farm visits enabled the creation of individualised farm plans to protect archaeology while maintaining productivity. This participatory approach built trust and helped farmers see the value in conserving heritage. Work continues, with ambitions to extend involvement across the full 38 km² landscape.

Traditional Skills and Scientific Knowledge

Farming Rathcroghan's origin and ethos espouses a practical, bottom-up approach. Farmers were central to developing tailored solutions including archaeological resting frames, traditional wall repairs, wildlife buffers, and improved fencing. Educational workshops helped strengthen both traditional knowledge and ecological awareness.

The project introduced a results-based payment system, informed by the other EIP models but tailored to the local archaeological context. Designed to be simple and fair, it incentivised positive outcomes for monument preservation and has since expanded due to farmer interest.

Importantly, the project respected farming rhythms. For instance, scoring was timed to avoid penalising essential activities like early spring grazing. This sensitivity helped design a system that aligned with real-world farm operations. In addition to archaeology, the project addressed climate action, biodiversity, and access, always centring the community in its goals.

Rathcroghan Key Insights

- Results-based instruments work when tailored to place. A simple, archaeology-specific scoring system, timed to farming rhythms, turned protection from a perceived constraint into a paid routine. This reflects the literature on results-based agri-environment schemes needing local calibration to gain uptake.
- Trusted intermediaries change behaviours. A resident community archaeologist provided rapid, low-friction advice at field scale, matching evidence on the value of embedded technical support.
- Designation acceptance is a social process. Early scepticism eased once payments, access routes, and guided interpretation reduced farm risk and trespass. This supports policy that couples designation with managed access, paid stewardship, and local narrative control.

CASE STUDY 2 Tralee Bay Oyster Fisheries

Tralee Bay Oyster Fisheries Co-op manager shucking oysters at Fenit Pier, Co. Kerry (Image: Tralee Bay Oyster Fisheries 2020)

Context

Tralee Bay is one of the last remaining self-reproducing native oysters (European Flat Oyster, Ostrea edulis) fisheries in Western Europe. During the 1960s and 70s, the fishery faced major stock depletion due to lack of control. In response, a co-op was formed in 1979 and, in 1981, received an Oyster Fishery Order, granting it legal authority to manage a substantial part of Tralee Bay. This control enabled the co-op to restore oyster stocks through efficient management and conservation.

Today, Tralee Bay is the primary flat oyster production area in Ireland and stands out as being entirely disease-free. Designated a Special Area of Conservation, the co-op aspires to elevate its status to a Marine Protected Area (MPA), showcasing a model for sustainable, community-led marine management across Ireland.

Management and Governance

The co-op operates with a full-time manager and a small team of six to eight staff based in Fenit. The fishery is highly regulated: around 120 co-op members exist, with 78 active fishing permit holders. Originally governed by a 13-person board comprising local and institutional representatives, the current board now consists of six directors, all fishermen. Two directors must step down annually, and can then be re-elected or replacements elected if needed.

Governance involves frequent meetings, weekly during the fishing season and monthly otherwise. Decision-making is participatory but centralised: directors evaluate proposals, consult maps and stock data, and communicate decisions to members via text. Members may raise concerns with the manager or during the AGM. Importantly, all members, including directors, receive the same daily fishing quota, reinforcing fairness and transparency.

Stock surveys are conducted every September in collaboration with BIM and the Marine Institute. The co-op also works with regulatory agencies such as the Sea Fisheries Protection Authority (licensing) and Inland Fisheries Ireland (enforcement). In addition, the co-op employs its own officers to monitor compliance, including penalties for undersized oyster landings, such as loss of quota or product.

Balancing Socio-Economic Viability with Conservation

Fishing mainly occurs from October to December, with occasional spring harvests. Most oysters are exported, particularly to Spain. Annually, production varies between 200–300 tons, driven by spatfall levels from previous years. In contrast to the 1980s when 70 boats landed just 8 tons, today's output reflects conservation led approaches to stock management.

Spat collection is a core practice. Juvenile oysters are gathered and redistributed to understocked areas, where fishing is paused to allow growth. The growth cycle spans four years. Monitoring of spat settlement, using unglazed plates and artificial collectors, guides collection and stock enhancement.

The co-op enforces strict quotas and landing rules. All oysters are processed through a centralised facility in Fenit, checked for size, packed, and shipped. Larger sizes are preferred for export markets. Conservation initiatives include a proposal to close 4,2000 hectares to towed fishing, in partnership with UCC and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, to enhance biodiversity and to act as a MPA which if successful could act as a template for further roll out of MPAs.

Mechanisms for Community Engagement

The co-op emerged from a recognised need to restore failing stocks, initially facing challenges in uniting the fishing community. Over time, the system became established, but its future is threatened by an aging membership and the difficulty of attracting newcomers. Oyster fishing is seasonal (8–12 weeks), physically demanding, and requires costly equipment. Most members rely on it for supplementary income, and fluctuating market conditions add further instability.

Funding

The co-op is entirely self-financing, operating on a production levy. However, external funding could scale up spat collection and long-term conservation. Historically, Tralee Bay was one of only two national sources for oyster seed, emphasising its strategic ecological and economic importance.

Drivers of Change

Environmental conditions strongly influence spat survival. A sea surface temperature of 17°C in early July is crucial to larvae settlement. Climate change and warming oceans pose risks to this delicate cycle.

Pollution from inadequate sewage treatment remains a major concern. Norovirus outbreaks, often triggered by discharges of insufficiently treated sewage, can contaminate oyster beds within days. Weekly testing is conducted during harvest, and buyers, mainly in Spain, are kept informed. Spanish systems allow for further purification, reducing health risks.

Recording the Landscape

Annual dredge surveys, run with Bord Iascaigh Mhara and the Marine Institute, track stock levels and biodiversity. During spawning season, the co-op uses plates and collectors to measure spatfall, helping guide stock replenishment. Upcoming collaboration with UCC will map all species in the bay, deepening ecological understanding.

Tralee Bay Oyster Fishery Key Insights

- User-led co-management with clear rules maintains stocks. A co-op with quotas, rotation, and annual surveys aligns with evidence that locally enforced rules and transparent data reduce over-extraction.
- Ecological wins are vulnerable to externalities. Water quality failures and temperature thresholds for spatfall show that fishery governance must be coupled to environmental and climate policy, not treated in isolation.
- The Tralee Bay model shows potential for replication across Ireland's coastlines, particularly if integrated with national marine protection frameworks, legal orders and monitoring partners. Without those, co-ops struggle to enforce rules.

CASE STUDY 3 Bere Island

View of Lonehort Battery, a First World War Gun Battery being conserved and redeveloped by Bere Island Projects Group (Image: 12foot)

Context

Bere Island is an 18.5 km2 island in the mouth of Bantry Bay, County Cork, with a landscape of mountainous grassland and heath. Its natural heritage includes species-rich habitats, a Special Protection Area, and unspoiled waters supporting fish and coastal bird populations. Cultural heritage includes megaliths, promontory forts, what appears to be a Viking breakwater, and 19th-century military structures. Historically, it transitioned from the O'Sullivan Bere family to various landlords, and eventually to partial British military ownership in the late 19th century. The military presence contributed employment but also land dispossession. Today, land ownership includes permanent residents, second-home owners, and the Department of Defence, which owns 72 hectares used for military training and leased farmland (Emerson, 2007).

Initiated in 2000 at the suggestion of the Heritage Council, the Bere Island Conservation Plan (BICP) was launched in 2003. It aimed to create a sustainable environment in which the community could:

- Live and work while meeting social and recreational needs
- Appreciate and build on traditional skills and ways of life
- Ensure development was balanced with environmental and cultural heritage
- Influence decisions on local development (Bere Island Conservation Plan, 2003)

It is important to note from the outset that Bere Island, as an offshore island, has benefited from a broad range of community development funding. Four community development staff work on the island, including the officer responsible for the conservation plan, and they serve 218 people, a proportion rarely found in other Irish rural or urban contexts, which must represent a key contributing success factor to community heritage development on the Island.

Governance and Management

The Bere Island Projects Group (BIPG) transitioned from a voluntary project group to an elected Island Council by 2006. Although this met the demands of the conservation plan, the election process proved challenging as neighbours on the small island were reluctant to 'go up against' each other. The BIPG is now managed via an AGM. BIPG includes representatives from across the island community and community members are enthusiastic about serving terms. The BIPG meets monthly and oversees the delivery of the BICP through a development officer. The development officer is integrated into a three-person staff team that manages broader community development projects. This structure has allowed coherent, community-led planning with a direct mandate from residents (Walsh, 2009).

The BICP underpins a suite of community initiatives including waste management, a community radio station, and a quarterly newsletter. Communication is prioritised through text alerts, community meetings, and even door-to-door updates. Activities like drama groups, fitness classes, and crafting groups have flourished, contributing to a vibrant social life. The island is an active member of the European Small Islands Network (ESIN, 2007), providing further development and learning opportunities.

Balancing Socio-Economic Viability with Conservation

A key tension addressed by the BICP was balancing heritage conservation with socio-economic viability. The community recognised that improved heritage knowledge empowered better development proposals and negotiations with agencies.

Tourism initiatives included the opening of a heritage centre (2010, since closed with a plan to reopen under the aegis of the BIPG), development of trails via the National Walks Scheme, and partial opening of Lonehort Battery. The development officer is exploring multifunctional uses for the battery, including outdoor events and craft startups that benefit the local community as well as tourists.

Mechanisms for Community Engagement

The BIPG - formed in 1987 - led the plan. Already engaged with voluntary groups and agencies, the BIPG had a strong relationship with the Heritage Council and Cork County Council. A participatory model involving community workshops, working groups, and surveys ensured broad input to the plan (Caalders et al., 2006). The community's experience with the Bantry Bay Charter Project helped them confidently represent island interests. The participatory process expanded the plan beyond conservation to include social and economic issues, highlighting sustainability and local agency as core values (Emerson, 2007). Although Emerson notes that the plan does not take the format of a traditional heritage conservation plan, its simple structure and broad, roadmap approach have contributed to its longevity.

Funding

Seed funding for the plan came from the Heritage Council and Cork County Council. The Heritage Council's Heritage Organisations Fund supports the BICP development officer, although the scheme's annual cycle poses planning challenges. Funding also comes from Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht through Comhar na nOileán. BIPG have also leveraged EU funds, including Interreg (heritage centre), Horizon 2020 (Bere Island Radio), and Creative Places (crafts and training). Smaller grants come from Cork County Council, the Arts Council, and education partnerships.

Drivers of Change

Climate: In 2023, Bere Island joined the "30 Renewable Islands by 2030" initiative to achieve 100% renewable energy independence. The BICP now incorporates climate resilience planning. Previous initiatives include native tree planting and hedgerow restoration. A dark skies feasibility study has been undertaken with community input to develop off-season tourism and reduce light pollution.

Traditional and Scientific Knowledge

The BICP emphasised traditional knowledge, oral history, and crafts. Community members have revived skills such as quilting, stone wall building, spinning, and butter making. Farmers adopted Dexter cattle and participated in beekeeping and pollinator projects. Oral history work and intergenerational knowledge sharing have supported community cohesion and creative enterprise.

Recording the Landscape

Instead of focusing on isolated sites, the BICP took a holistic landscape approach. Since 2003, multiple surveys and audits have documented architectural heritage, graveyards, and high nature value farming. Participation in ICAN and BurrenBeo's Heritage Keepers programme further enriched the island's oral history and digital heritage capacity.

Bere Island Key Insights

- The island represents a strong participatory approach to community development where a community-elected council ensures accountability and genuine local representation.
- Community development capacity underpins heritage delivery. A paid development officer and stable multi-year funding produced continuity, matching literature that volunteer-only models decline over time.
- Heritage planning works best when it sits inside a wider socio-economic plan. Positioning the BICP within services, skills, and enterprise avoided the "heritage silo" problem and lengthened the plan's life.
- Format can be simple if mandate is strong. A plain, roadmap-style plan worked because governance and communication were consistent; the lesson is to prioritise mandate and resourcing over perfect plan architecture.

CASE STUDY 4 Hometree

Nature restoration workshop with Sarah Broderick, Hometree's Head of Restoration, Co. Clare (Image: Hometree 2021)

Management and Governance

Hometree began as a tree-planting project where volunteers helped plant donor-sponsored trees. It is now a company limited by guarantee overseen by a voluntary board. Recent years have seen a rapid expansion in activity. To support future growth, the organisation invested in building its governance infrastructure, supported in part by the Heritage Council through the Heritage Capacity Fund 2023. With reference to the principles of the Charities Governance Code, Hometree's board and staff worked with a charity governance consultant to strengthen procedures.

Hometree owns eight sites across Ireland comprising 445 acres (in 2023). In its early phase, core staff worked without pay until funding became available. Volunteering remains central to its operations, through both individual volunteers and corporate partners participating as part of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) commitments.

The membership programme, sustained by monthly contributions, supports native tree planting and reflects the organisation's ethos of community accountability. Hometree acknowledges its responsibility to listen to supporters and remain open to new collaborations.

Mechanisms for Stakeholder Engagement

Community groups increasingly seek support from Hometree for project development or funding bids, especially when they are not legally constituted. As it relies on charitable donations and project funding itself, Hometree does not always have capacity to assist. In some cases, however, the organisation has been able to apply for funding to carry out projects in collaboration with groups who would not have been able to apply for funding themselves.

In 2024-5 Hometree delivered the Dinnseanchas Project which was funded by Creative Ireland through the Creative Climate Action Fund. Artists were offered bursaries to work with specific communities in heritage-rich rural areas along the Western seaboard. Farms in these regions are small and usually family owned. These areas often have conservation designations for specific habitats or species, with mixed results that usually arise from policy clashes. Dinnseanchas sought to bridge the perceived gap between farming and environmental goals through the intervention of artists. The focus was on deep and empathetic listening, slow engagement, and the development of creative responses but not necessarily a completed 'artwork'. Artists carried out community 'deep mapping', which sought to capture the value that farming communities place on their land and landscape (Wells et al, 2025). The approach taken in this project will now inform the way in which Hometree plans their community engagements.

The annual summer school gathers supporters and practitioners for days of connection, learning, and discussion. Educational events like this have led some attendees to later join Hometree as staff or volunteers. The charity also communicates its mission through its writing, such as Under Summer Pastures and Dinnseanchas, and a wide range of outreach activities.

Funding

Hometree has developed a diverse funding model with three main pillars: project funding from various grant agencies; corporate contributions via ESG strategies, and private donations or membership fees. This mix of restricted and unrestricted income allows them to fund both project delivery and operational costs. From 2021 to 2023, income grew from €106,210 to €1,072,291, driven by donations, corporate backing, and state grants (Hometree, 2023). Though volunteers remain essential, the organisation now employs nearly 30 professional staff. National funding comes from a range of sources, including the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the NPWS. Dinnseanchas was funded by Creative Ireland Programme, which is supported by the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport. This diverse funding model reduces the risk of subsisting from one grant to another.

Drivers of Change

As landowners, Hometree are highly aware of the challenges facing both farming and native afforestation. They highlight that planting forestry can reduce land value, especially when native species are used, and that ecological returns may take generations. Hometree advocates for policy reform to enable existing native woodland pockets to expand naturally and for the introduction of ecosystem service payments for forestry and high-nature-value farming systems.

Where afforestation, often seen as a driver of change, is pursued, Hometree works to ensure it is done appropriately and sensitively. They aim to acquire demonstration sites across Ireland to illustrate how forestry can complement mixed or pastoral farming. Among these are Sitka Spruce plantations which they plan to transition into native woodland through continuous cover forestry techniques (Climate Conversations, 2021).

Smith and Ó Foghlú emphasise that Ireland's agricultural identity is historically tied to pastoralism and livestock, with little traditional knowledge of forestry compared to other European nations. Through education and demonstration, Hometree promotes an understanding of forestry not just for timber resources, but also for biodiversity and cultural value. All ecological interventions are guided by detailed site assessments to ensure responsible and informed land use.

Hometree Key Insights:

1. Hometree's combination of project grants, membership schemes, and corporate ESG income provides a replicable model of diversified income and entrepreneurial endeavour for other community-based groups.
2. Support for building internal structures (board development, compliance) is critical and should be appropriately funded.
3. NGOs like Hometree can play a vital role in enabling smaller or constituted groups to access funding and implement projects, and in turn benefit from the collaborative opportunities and relationship building this work provides.
4. Hometree demonstrates how community organisations attempt to influence policy through evidence-based advocacy and strategic communication.

CASE STUDY 5 The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Wildflowers in the Umbra, Limavady Co Derry/Londonderrry (Image: NLHF 2017)

Context

When the UK National Lottery was established in 1994, heritage was chosen by government as a good cause that would benefit. The Heritage Lottery Fund (renamed The National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2019, henceforth the Heritage Fund) was established for the purpose of distributing the money. Since 1994, the Heritage Fund has granted £9.5 billion to 53,000 heritage projects. The most recent Heritage Fund strategy (Heritage Fund, 2023) takes a broad view of heritage, which "can be anything from the past that people value and want to pass on to future generations".

Heritage Fund's highly impactful Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) has been superseded by Landscape Connections, a £150m Strategic Initiative fund over 10 years to help designated protected and other important landscapes to become better both for nature and people. The LPS funding stream and its roll out in Northern Ireland is the subject of this case study.

Heritage Fund Management

The Heritage Fund distributes funding to heritage projects across the UK, including Northern Ireland, where £290 million has been invested in 2,000 projects. Over 200 staff work in central, regional and country offices, with 13 staff currently employed in Northern Ireland. All those applying for Heritage Fund grants must first express interest by contacting a member of the Heritage Fund team. Strategic advice can be given at this stage, and expectations managed.

National Lottery Heritage Grants have two strands £10,000 - £250,000 and £250,000 - £10 million. Both strands can support grants for strategic initiatives. Large strand applications have two phases, initially, a development grant provides support to work on a project proposal, followed by a delivery grant. Grants allow for 'full cost recovery,' meaning that overheads and salaries can be funded. All capital projects require management and maintenance plans along with income and spending forecasts for five years following project completion.

Landscape Partnership Funding Scheme (LPS)

The LPS programme was launched in 2004. Partnerships typically comprised a mix of statutory agencies, local authorities, NGOs and community organisations. The lead partner - which entered into the formal agreement with Heritage Fund - was most often either a locally constituted trust or company, or else a local authority. Programme priorities encompassed conservation and restoration, community participation in local heritage, access and learning, and training in local heritage skills. Schemes were delivered through multiple discrete projects, all of which were located within a particular landscape area, defined by its own distinct character. The average scheme area was 260km2 and the average grant was £1.4m per scheme. Landscape Partnerships developed a Landscape Conservation Action Plan as part of their first-round, typically taking 12-18 months to develop, with the round two delivery phase taking anything from three to five years (Clarke, Mount & Anteric, 2011).

Evaluation of the programme by Birkbeck university in 2011 found that many project activities will result in long term benefits to heritage. Birkbeck observed that the programme is proving to be one of the most significant manifestations of a 'landscape approach' to heritage, and as such is an important element in the delivery of UK international obligations, in particular the European Landscape Convention (Clarke, Mount & Anteric, 2011).

Landscape Partnerships in Northern Ireland

UK-wide approaches did not always transfer well to Northern Ireland due to different cultural, legislative and administrative structures. Land ownership patterns in Northern Ireland more closely reflect those in the Republic. Nine LPS projects were supported. Schemes relied on good will and more "voices around the table" to effect change and maintain ongoing stakeholder engagement throughout delivery. Project development teams were smaller than those put together for project delivery, with a team comprising one member with good heritage skills paired with someone with excellent community engagement skills working particularly well.

Amongst other aims, the highly successful Heart of the Glens project sought to work with farming families to connect with their sense of place, and to plan for how they wanted to manage their land for their family and future. Farmers were assisted in drawing up farm plans that helped to deliver a range of operational improvements, and the success of these plans attracted other farmers who might initially have been suspicious of the project.

The Lough Erne Partnership benefited from having a facilitator from outside the area, who could work outside of perceived barriers to community participation and worked to bring communities together through sustained "parish hall hospitality". Allowing access to privately owned land emerged as an important aspect of this project, through farm access improvement schemes. Community co-operative work included clearing bracken and planting trees, with a barter system emerging for farmers to help each other improve their land.

Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership is a £4 million (NLHF grant £3.2 million) project representing a partnership led by the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust. This comprises 13 discrete projects, including work to assist farmers in retrofitting old farm buildings as accommodation for walkers and heritage tourists, working with prisoners on managing invasive Rhododendron on nearby farms and establishing a native tree nursery. Other strands included community archaeology training, along with a townlands and field name project. The area is due to achieve UNESCO Biosphere Status due to the work of this LP, which will finish in 2026 following delays due to Covid-19.

Key Insights

- Funded development phases improved delivery design and coalition formation. Ireland lacks a comparable rung. Recommendation: introduce small development grants tied to minimum standards for Landscape Action Plans.
- Templates required adaptation to tenure and political context, particularly in Northern Ireland. Direct transfer without institutional fit reduced performance.
- Effective teams paired technical heritage expertise with high-quality community engagement skills. Procurement should specify this pairing rather than headcount alone..

CASE STUDY 6 Isle of Eigg: A Model of Community Ownership and Sustainable Development

Laig Bay with the Isle of Rum on the horizon, Isle of Eigg (Image: Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust)

Context

The Isle of Eigg, a 7,400-acre Hebridean island of outstanding natural beauty and heritage, holds National Scenic Area and Special Scientific Interest designations. Its basalt cliffs and crofted lowlands have been inhabited since the Neolithic era. Historically under absentee landlord control, its modern transformation began with a community buyout in 1997 (Dressler, 1998; McIntosh, 2004).

Under 'Laird' Keith Schellenberg's ownership, a Shelter and Rural Forum study found two-thirds of residents lived in substandard housing, especially the elderly (McIntosh, 2004: 164). Schellenberg resisted housing improvements, citing conservation concerns (Dressler, 1998). This tension between conservation and socio-economic need inspired the formation of the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust (IEHT) in the early 1990s. Initiated by mainland activists, its goal was to empower residents and secure ownership in the public interest (McIntosh, 2004). Despite resistance, the Trust raised £1.6 million and, with the backing of the Highland Council, Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), and an anonymous donor, successfully purchased the island on 12 June 1997 (Satsangi & Purves, 2025).

Management and Governance

The IEHT operates as a three-way partnership between the Highland Council, SWT, and the Isle of Eigg Residents Association (IERA). Governance is weighted toward community control, with four out of seven board seats held by local residents (Satsangi & Purves, 2025). A non-resident chair ensures balance, consensus-building, and mediation when needed.

The Trust holds quarterly board meetings while local island-based directors meet monthly. Regular IERA meetings oversee and inform the activities of The Trust. Projects like Eigg Electric's expansion are presented to the IERA for feedback and resident voting, ensuring community consensus on infrastructure and other development.

Strategic planning began before the buyout, supported by public bodies. Today, the IEHT oversees three subsidiaries:

- Eigg Trading: Manages the pier building (An Laimhrig), hot desks, wood fuel sales, a tree nursery, camping pods, land sales, and leases (including to a microbrewery).
- Eigg Electric: Runs the island's pioneering renewable microgrid, aiming for net-zero by 2030 and attracting global interest.
- Eigg Construction: Renovates Trust-owned housing, improves infrastructure, and employs local contractors.

All subsidiaries operate commercially, with profits reinvested into the community. Volunteering is integral, with tasks rotated among residents and supported by seasonal SWT volunteers (Creaney & Niewiadomski, 2016: 224).

Socio-Economic Sustainability Balanced with Conservation

The IEHT was created to counter a conservation-only model that often ignored human wellbeing, as has been seen on neighbouring Rum (Dressler, 1998). IEHT currently supports 22 crofts, promoting hybrid income models that combine farming with remote work and tourism enterprises.

Challenges include balancing conservation and housing. Some questioned the value of converting an unrenovated croft into a museum during a housing crisis. The Trust defended this as preserving a historical perspective. Meanwhile, serviced sites and conversions are underway to meet growing housing demand, with a vision of renting over ownership, guided by the Trust's social housing strategy (University of Strathclyde, 2019).

Tourism underpins the economy but brings pressure on water and waste systems. The island is moving toward regenerative tourism through conservation volunteerism. Seasonality, limited infrastructure, and ecological impact all necessitate careful future management (Creaney & Niewiadomski, 2016).

The landscape itself is changing due to land use shifts; ageing crofters mean loss of traditional landscapes like hay meadows, and afforestation. Dressler warns that uncoordinated tree planting could threaten the island's scenic status and tourism value. The IEHT uses Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) tools and community workshops to inform land use and raise awareness.

Mechanisms for Community Engagement

Prior to the buyout, community cohesion existed, but fear of eviction limited its public expression. While the IEHT originated externally, it gradually transferred governance to the islanders. Community trust was built through presentations, inclusive governance proposals, and participatory workshops, particularly those introduced via the Highland Forum which allowed the community to find their voice (Dressler, 1998).

Shared/social learning with other rural communities, like Moidart and Bere Island, further empowers the islanders. Community learning continues through training trips and EU exchanges, ensuring Eigg stays informed and connected.

Funding

While the IEHT receives minimal rental income, it relies on grants for capital projects, like housing, Eigg Electric, and An Laimhrig, often requiring phased applications. Operational funding is not guaranteed, and the Trust aims to self-fund key roles in the future. The IEHT remains ambitious, seeking to grow and diversify income streams, streamline operations, and expand local capacity.

Drivers of Change

Eigg Electric's renewable grid is expanding, guided by community consensus and long-term sustainability goals. Other developments, like a community-backed microbrewery, contrast with proposals like a rejected fish farm proposed by Norwegian investors, which residents deemed environmentally damaging.

Afforestation and changing agricultural practices raise complex questions. Crofters, now effectively landlords, must consider collective impacts, as large-scale planting could alter views central to the island's scenic designation and economy.

Traditional and Scientific Knowledge

Crofting, once undervalued, is now considered ecologically sound and culturally vital. Corncrake reintroduction is just one success story linked to traditional land use. Older residents have shared skills, language, and customs with newcomers, preserving a living heritage.

Gaelic culture, house ceilidhs, and a community ceilidh band reinforce local identity. Traditional knowledge is now integrated with scientific tools like LCA and biodiversity audits, which guide development and education. Dressler has proposed using these tools for public exhibitions and deeper engagement with Eigg's landscape.

Isle of Eigg Key Insights

- Participatory governance ensures inclusive decision-making, with residents shaping policies through democratic structures like the IERA and IEHT.
- Eigg's renewable microgrid has replaced diesel dependency, positioning the island as a global model for community-led energy transition.
- Integration of traditional crofting knowledge with scientific tools like LCA enhances sustainable land use and landscape literacy.

CASE STUDY 7 Wild Ennerdale

Volunteers repairing a bridge Ennerdale, Lake District, UK (Image: Wild Ennerdale 2025)

Context

Human activity in Ennerdale - in Cumbria in the North of England - dates back to the Bronze Age, with evidence of over 400 archaeological sites. The land changed hands over centuries, with major shifts occurring in the 20th century: the Forestry Commission began planting conifers in 1925, the National Trust leased land for recreation in 1927, and United Utilities took over lake management in 1995. Ennerdale includes a variety of landscapes and important habitats, with nearly half designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). It is also part of the Lake District World Heritage Site.

By the 1990s, sheep farming and commercial forestry dominated land use. In 2002, ecological and economic concerns prompted the formation of the Wild Ennerdale Partnership, uniting major landowners and Natural England around the goal of managing the valley as a 'wild' landscape shaped by natural processes. This stakeholder group created a Stewardship Plan. Wild Ennerdale balances tourism with sustainability goals and co-operated landscape management based on carefully planned stewardship.

Governance and Management

The core leadership team includes staff from each partner organisation, operating under a memorandum of understanding. They are supported by an advisory group of experts and a Liaison Network including local community representatives, farmers, and user groups. Advisory and liaison members are consulted as needed, with farm tenants playing a central role in land management discussions.

Daily operations are led by a Partnership Officer, who coordinates volunteers and liaises with the community. Volunteers contribute around 2,000 hours annually, supporting conservation tasks like planting, fencing, monitoring, and archaeological work.

The Partnership integrates management tools like the Sustainable Land Management framework, aligning with broader conservation strategies and designations such as SSSIs. The Stewardship Plan for Wild Ennerdale, put in place by the stakeholders, is non-prescriptive, and aiming for adaptive, long-term goals. The valley is zoned to balance visitor access with conservation.

Balancing Socio-Economic Viability with Conservation

Despite improved tourism access, the area's remoteness and low population have limited business growth. The Stewardship Plan acknowledges unrealised economic potential, though it has delivered increased income for farmers through low-input grazing and expanded business areas.

The Partnership also contributed to the development of The Gather, a community-owned and run café and hub. One full-time post has been created through the Partnership Officer role, and tourism remains a priority, with ongoing work to understand and quantify its economic value.

Mechanisms for Community Engagement

The Partnership emerged following the 2001 Foot and Mouth disease crisis, amid growing interest in ecological resilience and the downturn in traditional farming and forestry. The founding partners, Forestry England, the National Trust, and United Utilities, adopted a shared vision focused on landscape-scale thinking, natural processes, long-term planning, and low-input management.

The Wild Ennerdale Stewardship Plan outlines principles such as giving freedom to nature, only intervening when necessary, supporting appropriate business opportunities, and placing people at the heart of the environment. Management includes extensive grazing by native Galloway cattle (a breed traditional to the landscape), reduction of sheep numbers, expansion of native woodland, bog restoration, the successful reintroduction of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly and Arctic Charr spawning.

From its inception, Wild Ennerdale has engaged farm tenants and the wider community through consultation, meetings, and newsletters. Volunteers are integral to operations and advocacy, benefiting from training and social connection.

Initial scepticism among farmers, who had concerns about income, transparency, and land use changes, has been addressed through improved communication and practical support, like boundary fencing replacement. Community surveys show strong support for the project, and local collaboration remains central to its success.

Funding

The project operates on a modest budget, with each core partner contributing £7,000–£8,000 annually. This is supplemented by small grants and income linked to conservation designations. Government agri-environment schemes support tenant farmers. The approach emphasises local funding redirection over reliance on large external grants.

Drivers of Change

The decline in traditional land uses and the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak prompted a shift in management. The collaborative model and natural process approach continue to drive change. The recent spread of Larch Disease led to adjustments in forest management, highlighting the valley's commitment to ecological resilience. Landscape designations also influence actions, although there is debate about their current effectiveness.

Traditional and Scientific Knowledge

The Partnership collaborates with universities for research, including long-term river studies and biodiversity assessments. It values both scientific and traditional knowledge, such as the return to year-round grazing, reminiscent of historical practices.

Recording the Landscape

Ongoing monitoring includes biodiversity tracking, fixed-point photography, aerial imagery, and archaeology surveys. The aim is to understand how the landscape evolves under a wilding model and to protect its cultural heritage.

Wild Ennerdale Key Insights

- Integrated, collaborative governance, combined with clear formal structures and active engagement in decision making by community stakeholders creates clear, inclusive governance.
- The Stewardship Plan is non-prescriptive and adaptive, allowing flexibility over time and the balancing of ecological goals, visitor access, the continuation of farming and alignment with the relevant landscape designations all while making significant changes in land use within the project landscape.
- The project shows that natural processes and low-intervention management can be combined with farming. Initial scepticism from farmers can be mitigated through transparent communication and practical support (e.g. fencing). Regular community consultations, newsletters, and volunteer opportunities create trust and local buy-in.

CASE STUDY 8 Lemanaghan Co. Offaly

Lemanaghan monastic site (IMAGE: The Heritage Council)

Context

Lemanaghan, Co. Offaly, includes a historic monastic site, a 19th-century schoolhouse, and a collection of farms and homes at the edges of the bog. The monastic site lies on a small rise within the bog. The Heritage Council-funded conservation plan for the site (Quinlan and Moss, 2007) describes it as a historic complex centred on a monastic site dedicated to St. Managhan.

Lemanaghan is also a post-industrial landscape. Bord na Móna acquired the bog in the 1950s and mechanical peat extraction went on in the area until 2019/20. The bog includes archaeological features, especially in sections never used for milling. Bord na Móna's (2024) Lemanaghan Bog Cutaway Bog Decommissioning and Rehabilitation Plan 2024 maps the section where wind turbines are proposed as a constraint on the plan. This planned turbine installation have been met with local opposition

The site is steeped in folklore. According to legend, the land was granted to Clonmacnoise following divine intercession in battle. A togher links St. Mella's Cell, the holy well, and St. Manchán's monastery. St. Manchán's shrine, a 12th-century house-shaped shrine dedicated to Manchán of Lemanaghan (died 664), is now on display at Boher Catholic Church, outside Ballycumber, County Offaly. The Lemanaghan site remains a place of active pilgrimage and spiritual practice.

Management and Governance

Bord na Móna is the primary landowner, with some small, privately owned farms, located near the monastic site. Access to certain heritage features depends on individual landowners. Ownership complexities arise from land acquisitions, some under compulsory purchase orders. With locals no longer the main landholders, their influence on land use has diminished.

Mechanisms for Community Engagement

The Lemanaghan Bog Heritage and Conservation Group was formed in the late 1990s to care for the monastic site. Over more than two decades, they have improved access, carried out repairs, and promoted the site's continued spiritual use. More recently, the group has campaigned against the proposed installation of 15 turbines with an overall blade tip height of up to 220 metres in the surrounding peatland.

Drivers of Change

Renewables: Bord na Móna's planned wind turbine development has been met with resistance from the community. Concerns include its proximity to the active monastic site, which is still used for spiritual practice.

The group also fears the development will impact biodiversity and any potential in situ archaeology, citing past damage to toghers by peat extraction. They reference negative experiences from other communities near turbine installations.

While members acknowledge the need for renewable energy, they advocate for more transparent and inclusive planning. As one member of the group said, "Our vision is that we've given enough to energy production … now it needs to heal" (Finn, 2024).

Nature Restoration: Bord na Móna's 2023 report notes 5,500 hectares of peatlands restored, with a 5-year goal of 33,000 hectares. Lemanaghan is partially included in this plan, excluding the area marked for turbines. Restoration aims to stabilise the environment and re-establish peatland habitats.

The Peatland Climate Actions Scheme (PCAS) funds this restoration, supported by Bord na Móna. Measures depend on local bog conditions. Amenity development is outside PCAS's scope and would require a separate plan.

Restoration is well received locally. However, concerns exist about erasing the memory of peat extraction, which had a major social and economic impact locally. Locals want this history acknowledged and recorded. Concerns is also expressed that restoration may limit access, especially in the case of families that formerly owned the land.

Recording the Landscape

The conservation plan documents the site's archaeological and spiritual value (Quinlan and Moss, 2007). The Lemanaghan Crozier and St. Manchán's shrine are renowned, but other finds like shoes and axe-heads found in the bog during archaeological investigation reflect everyday ancient life. The plan serves as an unbiased record created before any development proposals, lending it credibility.

The former Irish Archaeological Wetland Unit of UCD compiled a record of 260+ archaeological sites in the area, supported by Bord na Móna. In 1998, archaeologists discovered a bog body, a discovery that is still celebrated and explored in local events like Culture Night 2022.

Heritage remains central to local identity. The heritage group worked with Kevin O'Dwyer and Griffin Murray in 2022 to develop a Lemanaghan Interpretive Plan, to coherently address key heritage sites in the area, specifically the shrine and Harry Clarke Windows at Boher Church, Lemanaghan Castle and the early Christian Monastic Complex. This work was funded by Offaly County Council

and the Heritage Council. The plan is only one aspect of how the community records and engages with this heritage-rich landscape. For example a short film made by local schoolchildren about the shrine's theft illustrates how stories connect generations to the land. These expressions strengthen community bonds and preserve cultural meaning.

Lemanaghan Key Insights

- The establishment of a participative and inclusive decision-making process for projects like turbine installations and nature restoration, could help communities understand what is happening in their landscape better and possibly reduce resistance. There are challenges to this approach and would require a willingness on the part of developers of all types to engage at a level beyond that required by the planning process, involving communities earlier in the development of such projects.
- Funds like Just Transition Funding are often not easily accessible to the communities that they hope to help, with timelines for reporting and payments perceived as too long to be manageable for communities with fewer financial resources.
- Despite the clear scientific and cultural value of places like Lemanaghan, and successive attempts of the local communities to stress the deeper cultural and spiritual value it holds for them, they feel that this is overlooked in favour of largescale national development projects.
- Groups that come together for a single purpose often change and adapt over time to address what is most important to their communities.

CASE STUDY 9 Tara-Skryne Landscape Conservation Area

Context

The Tara-Skryne landscape in County Meath is defined by ridges, valleys, and rivers, with the Hills of Tara and Skryne at its heart. The area's archaeological richness, dating from the Neolithic to early medieval period, and its association with the High Kingship of Ireland, endow it with deep spiritual, cultural, and political value. Numerous archaeological features such as henges, churches, holy wells, and historic field systems emphasise its long history of human occupation.

The proposal to build the M3 motorway in the valley between the Hill of Tara and Skryne sparked public controversy. In response, the Heritage Council proposed the area should be designated as a Landscape Conservation Area (LCA). In 2007 Meath County Council adopted its County Development Plan with an objective to designate the historic Tara Skryne Area as a Landscape Conservation Area under Section 204 of the Planning and Development Act 2000. Consequently, a national pilot project to establish an LCA which aimed to evaluate this statutory provision as a mechanism for proactive landscape management was launched in 2009.

The process, which was well structured and included extensive public consultation, encountered difficulty, particularly due to widespread concerns among landowners and residents that the designation would result in potential planning restrictions for businesses and individuals. Though the pilot project enjoyed significant community engagement, including pre-draft public events, stakeholder meetings and a participatory boundary workshop, no LCAs were created under the 2000 Act. In the 2024 revision to the Planning and Development Act, provision for LCAs was removed. Tara-Skryne therefore is an important case study in understanding the complexity of historic landscape designation in Ireland.

Management and Governance

The pilot project was a policy of the Meath County Council Development Plan (2007–2013, section 8.4.4), and subsequent development plans, which aimed to protect historic landscapes. A partnership between Meath County Council, the Heritage Council, and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government formed a steering committee to oversee the pilot.

The project was organised into three phases: background research, public engagement, and the drafting of a management framework model. The adoption of the LCA itself was a Reserved Function of the elected members under Section 204, meaning that final determination rested with councillors following consideration of submissions. The draft plan aligned with both national and international landscape policy frameworks, including the European Landscape Convention and the Burra Charter. A planning history study was conducted to inform a sustainable land-use approach.

A key management tool was a Geographic Information System (GIS) developed to analyse spatial data. The GIS facilitated the integration of environmental, archaeological, and land-use data, supporting evidence-based decision-making.

Socio-Economic Sustainability Balanced with Conservation

The proposed LCA aimed to deliver cultural, environmental, and economic benefits. Many community groups supported the plan, seeing it as a way to boost tourism and protect rural character. The Meath Archaeological and Historical Society emphasised its potential to support farmers, attract visitors, and stimulate local businesses.

The draft LCA proposed a schedule of "de-exempted development". The Council clarified in its responses to submissions that the Rural Housing Policy in the County Development Plan would remain unchanged and that current farming practices would not be affected. Many landowners nevertheless expressed concern that the proposal could restrict one-off housing, agricultural expansion or future development by their families. The statutory mechanism under Section 204 allowed for certain developments to be de-exempted if prescribed by the Minister, which contributed to uncertainty and mistrust among some residents. These concerns were reflected in a substantial number of submissions and coupled with political opposition at local level. A key deliverable, as stated in the Draft Landscape Conservation Area, was to provide a structure to develop and implement an Action Plan for the Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area. The aim of the plan would be to develop partnerships and initiatives that focus on:

- Maximising socio-economic benefits and cultural tourism opportunities.
- Interpreting and communicating the significance and values of the Tara landscape to a wider audience.
- Examining future management of the state-owned lands at the Hill of Tara
- Establishing working relationships with schools, sporting organisations, community groups and academic and research institutions to deliver future educational initiatives and research programmes

Significant progress was made during the course of the pilot project in laying the foundations for this element of the project which it was proposed would follow the establishment of the Tara Skryne Landscape Conservation Area. As the LCA was not adopted, the envisaged statutory framework and associated Action Plan were not progressed.

Mechanisms for Community Engagement

The pilot emphasised inclusive participation. The consultation process included hand-delivered letters, statutory notices, multiple public meetings and a participatory boundary workshop involving representatives of community groups and stakeholders. The initiative collaborated with 23 local community groups, launched a project website, and hosted the "Meath Landscape and People" seminar, attended by over 100 people. Attendees received materials explaining the project and were invited to provide feedback. A participatory workshop helped define the LCA boundaries, involving over 40 stakeholders. However, a number of submissions subsequently contended that consultation was insufficient, poorly timed, or unclear in relation to planning implications. This divergence between procedural consultation and perceived legitimacy became a central feature of the case.

Drivers of Change

The LCA proposal was catalysed by public backlash to the M3 motorway project, which highlighted threats from secondary development in the Tara-Skryne landscape. The Meath County Development Plan's objective to preserve unique landscapes and Ireland's commitment to the European Landscape Convention also drove the pilot project. The Tara-Skryne LCA was envisioned as a template for future national landscape strategies. Elected members of Meath County Council had the final decision-making power in relation to the adoption of the proposed Landscape Conservation Area.

Recording the Landscape

To inform the draft LCA, a comprehensive GIS database was created. It included data on topography, geology, land cover, heritage, biodiversity, and planning history. This allowed the team to analyse landscape changes over the previous decade and plan for sustainable development.

Traditional and Scientific Knowledge

The pilot consulted a wide range of stakeholders and integrated modern tools like LiDAR and aerial ortho-photography. It also incorporated the latest archaeological and historical research, alongside local insights from community groups, farmers, and businesses to define the area's character.

Tara Skryne Key Insights

- Communication pathways with the community and influential stakeholders should be open early, used frequently and involve two-way exchange of views and information. Statutory provisions for the protection and management of landscapes must provide clarity on their legal implications e.g. any proposed alteration to exempted development, as perceived risk to rural housing and farm succession can dominate public response.
- This case study points to a need nationally to address the impression that landscape designation prevents all development. Future landscape conservation initiatives should explicitly integrate statutory planning tools with tangible socio-economic measures within a national framework. Technical robustness and consultation alone are insufficient; alignment with elected members, clarity on future rural housing implications, and demonstrable local benefit are critical to securing durable support.

- The Tara–Skryne pilot demonstrates that the existing provisions for statutory landscape designation within a living rural landscape were institutionally and politically demanding. The initiative represented a good-faith and ambitious effort by Meath County Council and its partners to operationalise national and European landscape policy through a robust, evidence-informed planning mechanism designed for a complex rural setting. The concerns raised in opposition were not incidental but centred on rural housing, farm viability, intergenerational transfer and local decision-making authority, reflecting equally legitimate interests within the community. The case therefore illustrates that where landscape protection directly intersects with everyday livelihoods and development expectations, procedural compliance and technical robustness are necessary but not sufficient. Durable implementation requires political alignment, a clear and transparent explanation of how any regulatory changes would affect landowners and residents in practice and visible local benefit. Tara–Skryne underscores that advancing landscape governance in Ireland will depend as much on sequencing, trust and institutional design as on policy intent.

CASE STUDY ⑩ Catalonian Landscape Observatory

Recording traditional buildings for Wikipedra, a citizen science project to enhance and promote tradition of dry-stone construction. (Image: Arxiu d'Imatges de l'Observatori del Paisatge (Grup Drac Verd de Sitges (2025))

Introduction

Following the approval of the Catalan Landscape Act in 2005, landscape began to be integrated into territorial planning and sectoral policies such as agriculture, energy, tourism, and education. There has also been greater social appreciation of landscape and more local initiatives where it is used as a tool for identity and cohesion.

The Catalonian Landscape Observatory was created in 2004 and recognised by the Act, aligned with the European Landscape Convention. In accordance with the Observatory's work philosophy, community engagement in landscape management is best achieved through participatory processes recognising the landscape as a shared, living space. A key role of the Observatory has been the development of landscape catalogues that combine expert knowledge with the values and experiences of local communities.

Management Approaches and Governance

The Landscape Observatory of Catalonia is an advisory body to the Government of Catalonia and society on matters of landscape. It operates as a consortium of around thirty public and private institutions, including regional and local government, universities, research centres, professional associations, and civil society organisations. It is attached to the Department of Territory of the Government of Catalonia.

The Observatory sets out an annual work plan approved by its Governing Board. Working at territorial scale, it provides tools, knowledge, and guidance to guide and to assess public policy and planning. Although it does not directly implement local projects or include landowners, its governance ensures diverse representation across sectors.

By embedding community perspectives in planning, the landscape catalogues prepared by the Observatory guide policies sensitive to local realities and contribute to community viability. They also guide territorial planning and sectoral policies, turning the landscape into an asset for local development.

Mechanisms for Community Engagement

Landscape Catalogues included participatory processes designed to be inclusive, transparent, and open. Methods included workshops, working sessions, and consultations with residents, municipalities, associations, landowners, professionals, and others. Engaging participants early and maintaining dialogue created shared understanding and helped identify values, challenges, and opportunities. This contributed to fairer and better-informed foundations for landscape management.

During catalogue development, Landscape Quality Objectives were defined for all Catalan landscapes. These forward-looking goals express social aspirations for protection, management, and planning. Based on technical analysis and public participation, they reflect a shared vision between experts and society about how landscapes should evolve.

The Observatory also collaborates with other institutions in Ireland, the UK, and across Europe, though limited resources constrain exchange visits.

Drivers of Change

Catalonia has experienced major landscape transformations over the last 50-60 years: urban expansion from second homes and tourism, growth of infrastructure near transport corridors, rural depopulation, farmland abandonment, loss of agroforestry mosaics, and an increase in unmanaged forests.

Climate change has brought further shifts, including altered crops and vegetation, reduced winter snow, and heightened wildfire risks, worsened by poor forest management. Mitigation and adaptation projects include interventions to reduce tree density, improving resilience to drought, lowering wildfire risk, and ensuring more water reaches rivers. Many such projects are being carried out by public and private bodies.

Territorial and sectoral planning must integrate landscape (in its natural and heritage dimensions, with an integrated approach) from the outset. The Catalogues, identifying values, dynamics, and objectives, are key tools for anticipating conflicts and promoting balance between transformation and conservation.

Recording the Landscape

The creation of Landscape Catalogues has been central to identifying and understanding Catalonia's landscapes. Grounded in the European Landscape Convention, the Landscape Catalogues of Catalonia are planning and management tools that identify, describe, and assess the Catalan landscapes. They include detailed analyses of the natural, cultural, and perceptual values

of each landscape, as well as the dynamics and pressures affecting them. Catalogues document structures, patterns or landscape elements such as the combination of scenic backgrounds and landscape landmarks, trees in rows, unique plot structures, or nuclei in elevated positions, among others. They were developed by researchers and Observatory staff in collaboration with local organisations and communities.

Efforts were made to record intangible values such as oral heritage, traditions, place-based knowledge, and toponymy, which are vital to cultural identity. These catalogues are not static inventories but practical tools informing spatial planning, land use, and public awareness.

Traditional Knowledge/Science/Citizen Science

Wikipedra is a citizen science project promoted and coordinated by the Observatory to enhance and promote the tradition of dry-stone construction, together with local associations. It is a collaborative online platform where users can catalogue and consult information on dry stone structures. The project not only safeguards traditional craft but also raises awareness and encourages community participation. Although the technique is in decline, initiatives exist to train specialists to ensure continuity of the practice. UNESCO recognises the technique of dry-stone construction as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Funding

The Landscape Observatory is funded by the Government of Catalonia, provincial councils, and the City Council of Olot. This core funding supports its regular activities, while additional resources are sought for special projects.

Catalonia key insights

- Catalonia has institutionalised a collaborative model of landscape governance through the Landscape Observatory, integrating expert and public perspectives into policy.
- Landscape Catalogues function as a key participatory tool, combining scientific analysis and community knowledge to inform planning and set shared objectives for landscape futures.
- Despite significant pressures from urbanisation, depopulation, and climate change, landscape is increasingly used as a framework for resilience, cultural continuity, and sustainable adaptation.

7. Research Findings

This section presents the findings of the original research undertaken for this report. As described in the methodology section above, the data collected during interviews, case studies and surveys were subjected to analysis which saw themes emerge both inductively and deductively. Results from the interviews, case studies and the qualitative answers of the survey are all included in the thematic findings presented below. Qualitative analysis of the survey results is presented under the relevant research question. The results presented here address challenges and opportunities in community landscape management in Ireland.

The results are presented using the format of a SWOT analysis, followed by the presentation of findings and recommendations organised under each research question.

7.1. Survey Findings

The survey undertaken for this project yielded a modest number of complete responses relative to the wider stakeholder group, and the patterns identified closely mirrored themes already evident in the interview and case study material. As a result a decision was taken not to to report the survey results as a separate sub-section in this chapter. Instead, relevant survey findings have been incorporated into the thematic analysis for each research question, alongside the interview and case study evidence, and are referenced where they add nuance or reinforcement. This treatment allows the survey to inform the findings without placing disproportionate emphasis on a small, self-selecting sample.

7.2. Community management of landscape in Ireland

7.2.1. Strengths

- Ireland retains strong place-based identity and community cohesion which underpin potential for landscape stewardship
- Successful locally tailored results-based payment schemes focused on cultural heritage and archaeology have been undertaken and provide exemplars for further action
- Social learning, networking, and knowledge exchange across communities is already underway thanks to a range of heritage led initiatives
- Ireland has a strong culture of volunteering
- Ireland supports a range of natural heritage and environmental NGOs who are already empowering communities to undertake landscape management
- Sustainably managed tourism is contributing to economic sustainability
- Heritage Council initiatives focused on the revival of traditional skills are supporting the maintenance of cultural landscapes
- Women's leadership in innovation and community action is widespread

7.2.2. Weaknesses

- Fragmented, short-term funding and heavy administrative reporting burdens impede concerted action at landscape scale
- Poor coordination between state agencies and 'siloing' leads to unclear lines of responsibility for landscape
- Lack of a national Landscape Character Assessment standard causes issues
- Insecure roles for heritage workers and under-resourcing of heritage organisations
- Reliance on volunteer labour can lead to burnout and lack of organisational robustness
- Perceived relationship between strict planning regulations and housing shortages in rural heritage areas creates negative view of landscape designation
- Loss of intangible cultural heritage due to insufficient recording mechanisms
- Unfavourable status of many natural heritage habitats

7.2.3. Opportunities

- A national programme of participatory mapping as part of a national landscape character assessment could empower multi-level decision-making and grow appetite for local landscape governance
- Open-source tools and online resources create unprecedented opportunities for citizen science and community heritage research
- New funding streams are supporting urban and rural built heritage regeneration
- Social enterprises and membership-based funding models have been developed by a range of organisations and show promise
- Growing interest in heritage-led, regenerative tourism, the revival of traditional crafts, and local artisan food production
- Appetite for environmental sustainability and national awareness of critical biodiversity loss
- Community-owned energy projects, such as that on the Isle of Eigg, offer inspiring examples of local autonomy and locally instigated development of renewable energy
- Remote working and improved rural broadband are encouraging repopulation in areas that once experienced population decline

7.2.4. Threats

- Lack of coherent national leadership of, and appetite for, land use strategy and landscape policy in Ireland
- Lack of a national landscape policy following the lapse of the National Landscape Strategy in 2025
- Lack of political will to conserve and designate landscapes of high heritage value related to fears of impeding development

- Climate change is directly impacting cultural and natural landscapes
- Land speculation for commercial forestry, carbon offsetting or rewilding may threaten rural community cohesion in marginal areas
- Renewable energy and forestry developments are causing conflict when imposed without participatory planning processes
- Despite some success stories, ongoing rural depopulation and decline of local services continues
- Loss of traditional knowledge, particularly traditional landscape management skills, as older generations pass away

The following section addresses the findings of the original research undertaken by the project.

7.3. Overarching Research Finding: Holistic Approach

The finding that successful projects take a "whole of landscape'" approach to sustainable landscape management overarches all of the research findings. Successful projects investigated here as case studies take a holistic view of sustainability, encompassing social, economic, environmental and cultural heritage as the "quadruple bottom line" of their endeavours.

On the islands of Bere and Eigg, cultural heritage is not a 'nice to have' add on, but a pillar of broader strategic vision for establishing thriving communities. At Rathcroghan too, care for the rich archaeological landscape is one element of a multi-pronged approach that also foregrounds social, economic and environmental sustainability through tailored results based payments, reciprocal work arrangements and social learning fostering community cohesion.

In Ennerdale, though wilding is a key focus, the social sustainability of the community is encouraged through volunteering and the development of 'The Gather' community space, and economic sustainability is encouraged through results-based payments and efforts to develop the tourism economy.

While Tralee Bay Oyster fishers are concerned about and seeking to plan for social sustainability of their co-operative, they sustainably pursue their economic goals and the careful stewardship of their rich natural heritage resource. Hometree too, operate using the 'quadruple bottom line' - operating with environmental and economic sustainability in mind. Their strong ethos of volunteer effort underlines their social sustainability and Dinnseanchas upskilled the team in embracing cultural heritage as an aspect of landscape.

While the Heritage Funds Landscape Partnership scheme has funded work of the kind described above, the Catalonian Landscape Observatory seeks to record the multidimensional and multifaceted nature of landscape. The community at Lemanaghan have been careful stewards of their heritage landscape, and seek to extend sustainable management, but have met barriers due to semi state land ownership. The failure of the Tara-Skryne Landscape Conservation area related to a fear that valuing landscape would destabilise community and economic viability. Many case studies here act as counterfactuals to this idea.

This is a primary research finding that found little coverage in the literature reviewed for this study. Although integrated and adaptive landscape management approaches were reviewed, and UNESCO landscape management principles outlined in theory and practice share examples of

holistic practice, the idea of the 'quadruple bottom line' in early development stages. It is hoped that the research presented here makes a contribution to this important strategic planning instrument.

7.4. Research Question 1: Community Engagement

How can community engagement in landscape-scale, place-based management approaches be effectively implemented?

7.4.1. Land use policy as a way to tackle national challenges

Stakeholders interviewed for this research viewed tools like the National Land Use Review as essential for making coherent decisions in the face of overlapping pressures. This reflects a sophisticated understanding that land is not just a commodity but a nexus of ecological, cultural, and economic systems. While land use planning addresses functional allocation, the broader concept of "landscape" encompasses heritage, identity, practice, and community which must also be addressed by both targeted policy and dedicated manpower at departmental level.

As demonstrated in the policy review of this research, multiple policies and strategies directly impact the Irish landscape but there is now no one policy that foregrounds the importance of landscape as the National Landscape Strategy 2015-25 runs to the end of its coverage. There is strong support amongst interviewees for integrating land use policy with heritage and community development objectives to create holistic, equitable outcomes but as the Tara-Skryne Landscape Conservation Area case study demonstrates, there must be political will to plan for multidisciplinary stewardship of landscape driven by national policy.

7.4.2. Participation vs Consultation

Interviewees reported communities having strongly negative responses to consultative processes that were perceived or experienced as shallow, 'box-ticking' exercises. These processes tended to have short timeframes for responses, community engagement was via meetings where plans were presented.

Surveys and the opportunity for impacting the proposed actions was seen as limited. In order for a consultation process to be well received, interviewees recommended that it must be possible for the process to yield significant material changes to the initial plan.

Some interviewees expressed concern and resistance to participatory approaches that involve the public in large scale projects as this can impede project momentum. Furthermore, delays are often caused by mistrust, and community resistance. Changing the approach from project inception can help ameliorate this resistance. The Rathcroghan and Wild Ennerdale case studies demonstrate that it takes years to build up trust and a sense of shared common purpose with a community, but through building relationships and empowering communities to guide project work, notable success can be achieved.

7.4.3. Success in landscape management dependent on governance and management structures

A commitment to rigorous, participatory and transparent governance is a principle exemplified by initiatives such as the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, Tralee Bay Oyster Fisheries, Bere Island and Hometree. These diverse projects, while employing different organisational forms, share a common emphasis on open dialogue, collective input, and shared decision-making.

Rather than being passive recipients of policy or funding, community members are positioned as

central actors in shaping goals, monitoring progress, and adapting strategies. This high level of involvement and commitment fosters trust, ensures cultural relevance, and strengthens resilience against external pressures. As such, transparency and participation are not merely procedural ideals but practical necessities for the enduring success of community-led landscape governance.

7.4.4. Transition from informal to formal group structure

Established charities like the Irish Peatland Conservation Council (IPCC) and Hometree coalesced around issues that brought key players together, only to evolve into landowning charities with national aspirations. Early-stage community action often begins organically, driven by local passion and immediate concerns. While these groups enable rapid response and low-barrier participation, their lack of legal status limits their ability to enter contracts, apply for grants, or maintain financial records.

As initiatives grow in scope and ambition, the need for formal recognition becomes inescapable. This transition to formality is not typically motivated by a shift in values or a desire to professionalise for its own sake, but by the structural realities of funding ecosystems that demand accountability, reporting, and legal liability. Thus, informal groups serve as vital incubators testing ideas, building trust, and identifying leaders before evolving into more structured organisations.

7.4.5. Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) in the governance structure favoured

The CLG model is frequently identified as the preferred legal form for community organisations transitioning from informal action to sustained institutional presence. It has less administrative burden than registration as a charity while being formal enough that funders can be assured of the legitimate status of an organisation. This balance between credibility and manageability makes the CLG an attractive vehicle for accessing public and private funding, which often requires formal incorporation. Additionally, the structure allows organisations to pursue commercial or social enterprise to fund their work, opening pathways for diversified income and financial self-sufficiency. Farming Rathcroghan's status as a CLG allowed the company to secure bridging finance to continue project activities during a delay between funding drawdowns.

7.4.6. Cooperative models are particularly effective for managing common pool resources

Where natural resources such as fisheries, forests, or agricultural land are shared among community members, cooperative governance emerges as a highly functional model. Tralee Bay Oyster Fisheries aligns individual livelihoods with collective sustainability by developing a framework for equitable distribution of resources and any benefits derived from conservation activities can support economic development in the community while ensuring the conservation objectives are met. Here transparency and the equality of all members in the co-operative underpins management success.

Tralee Bay Oyster Fisheries commitment to the long-term ecological sustainability of the natural resource they manage has led them to seek out collaboration and partnership between marine scientists and conservationists in order to record the marine life of the bay and have 4200ha designated a marine protected area. The powerful Oyster Fishery Order, a legal instrument that allows the co-op to manage the oyster fisheries in the bay, affords them the autonomy of action to manage the landscape as a collective body, making long term plans and forging partnerships to protect the landscape.

7.4.7. Integration of paid staff and volunteers creates a resilient model

The literature highlights that the sustainability of community initiatives depends on a functional

synergy between professional staff and volunteer contributors. Projects and networks where there is a combination of paid staff and wider support for the work have much better hope of longevity. Paid staff bring essential continuity, administrative expertise, and capacity to manage complex funding requirements, particularly during transitions between grants. Landscape scale projects like Wild Ennerdale, Bere Island, and Farming Rathcroghan are vital to project longevity, impact and to adaptive management. Weiner et al. (2024)'s research focussing on the Maigue River's Trust also notes the vital input of the paid project officer as 'a champion'. Of the 21 groups interviewed for this project, those that had been in operation in some form or other for more than 15 years (13 groups), all but one have had paid staff for more than 10 years. Volunteers, on the other hand, extend the reach of initiatives, contribute local knowledge, and deepen community ownership – as clearly seen in the Wild Ennerdale, Hometree, Eigg case studies and via stakeholder interviews in organisations like the IPCC. Their roles span from grassroots activities like tree planting and monument restoration to strategic functions such as serving on management boards. This dual structure ensures both professionalisation and democratic participation. The interdependence of staff and volunteers creates a balanced ecosystem where expertise and passion are mutually reinforcing, enhancing both operational effectiveness and community trust.

7.4.8. Administrative oversight - a critical but underfunded component of community governance

Behind every successful project lies a complex web of administrative work: managing grant applications, processing tenders, maintaining financial records, and submitting detailed reports. Administrative work can be challenging to fund, while being essential to navigating the fractured funding environment. This administrative backbone enables access to funding and ensures compliance, but it is often delivered by individuals who are under-resourced or even unpaid. The lack of dedicated funding for operational roles threatens the sustainability of even the most innovative projects, as burnout and turnover disrupt continuity. This systemic gap between the importance of administrative/operational work and the support available for it represents a critical vulnerability in community landscape governance. In this context, multiple interviewees acknowledged the vital importance of the Heritage Council's Heritage Organisations Support Fund as one of the only supports in Ireland for sustained operational work. They appealed for a longer funding interval for this instrument, as essentially, heritage staff all over the country 'apply for their job every year'.

7.4.9. Effective volunteer and staff integration depends on professionalised management systems

Volunteers contribute thousands of hours to many of the heritage bodies interviewed for this study and to the case study projects. Investing in communication platforms, training, and formal appreciation mechanisms to manage, acknowledge and reward volunteers is not a luxury but a necessity for long-term success. The IPCC were an early adopter of the Investing in Volunteers Standard, and work with over 100 volunteers on a regular basis. Such accreditations help to institutionalise care and respect, ensuring that volunteer contributions remain vibrant and sustainable over time.

7.4.10. State support for community management of landscape remains vital

State support, including capacity-building, funding, technical assistance, and policy coordination remain vital. The absence of strategic frameworks, such as the largely unimplemented National Landscape Strategy 2015–25, is seen by many interviewees as weakening overall institutional capacity, leaving communities to navigate complex challenges without systemic support. State involvement does not necessarily undermine autonomy; rather, it can strengthen resilience by providing a scaffold for long-term planning and cross-sectoral integration. Whether through

transitional support in early stages or sustained partnership in ongoing initiatives, government engagement ensures that community efforts are not isolated but connected to broader national goals. In Eigg and Tralee Bay, state actors supported the communities to establish management in the initial stages and decreased this support as governance independence was gained – a 'scaffold and fade' approach.

Other projects, such as Farming Rathcroghan and Wild Ennerdale, have multistakeholder boards/ partnerships including state agencies which are vital components of project success. Longitudinal state support allows for the ebb and flow of energies exerted by local voluntary groups. Heritage and Biodiversity Officers act as repositories of expertise and knowledge that support actions when community capacity is in place. As the Irish Walled Towns Network co-ordinator noted, a community or group might 'go quiet' for a number of years and then be revitalised by renewed volunteer energies, the officer can help them to 'pick back up again' where work left off. Therefore paid staff are not just important at community level, officers who support heritage programmes within local government, state and semi-state organisations are also hugely important in empowering communities to manage landscapes.

7.4.11. Community-led practice as the engine of national policy innovation – a 'policy in practice' approach

Although not described in the case study, it is important to note that Scottish community land buyout policy was influenced by the community purchase of the Isle of Eigg. Eigg did not secure Scottish government funding to buy the island, but the subsequent policy and the establishment of the Scottish Land Fund followed. Through both practice and advocacy, Hometree are seeking to inform Irish forestry policy by advocating for natural forestry expansion based on ecosystem service payments. The idea that practice should lead policy represents radical inversion of traditional governance, where frontline experience, not bureaucratic expertise, becomes the source of strategic direction. Here community initiatives are read not as pilot projects to be scaled, but as laboratories of innovation whose lessons should be embedded in national frameworks. The repeated emphasis on this approach in stakeholder discussions underscores a shared frustration with top-down policy that fails to reflect on-the-ground realities. A 'policy in practice' model demands humility from institutions, requiring them to listen, learn, and adapt. It also affirms the value of local knowledge, positioning communities not as passive recipients of policy, but as active co-creators of national strategy.

7.5. Research Question 2: Conservation v Socio-economic Viability

Communities balancing the conservation of built, natural and cultural heritage with the socio-economic viability of local communities

7.5.1. Community-led strategic planning is a key part of future-oriented management

Throughout the data gathered for this research – from the review of UNESCO approaches to community, to the stakeholder interviews, to the case studies – is evidence of the value placed on local agency in shaping sustainable futures. Organisations and communities across the sector found deep value in allowing communities to make long term plans for themselves and work towards those goals. These strategic frameworks are not abstract or symbolic; rather, they serve as practical tools that integrate heritage, conservation, biodiversity, arts, and economic development into a cohesive vision. For example, the Isle of Eigg, Bere Island, and Wild Ennerdale demonstrate how long-term plans guide diverse actions across social, environmental, and economic domains. By grounding development in local values and priorities, communities avoid externally imposed

agendas and instead build legitimacy and commitment through self-determined pathways. The act of planning itself becomes a process of empowerment, building capacity and cohesion essential for enduring governance.

7.5.2. Plans most effective when community-led, dynamic, evolving rather than static blueprints

The success of strategic plans hinges on their adaptability and integration into everyday governance. Where these plans are most successful, they become community-led, living, hardworking documents that are constantly referred to and reviewed. This reflects a shift from linear, target-driven planning to iterative, responsive models. On Bere Island, for instance, the conservation plan has served as a roadmap for all community development and heritage projects, guiding initiatives over time while remaining open to revision. Similarly in Wild Ennerdale, while the Stewardship Plan facilitates diverse actors to collaborate at landscape scale, it does not have timescales, metrics and targets. The absence of rigid metrics in such plans does not diminish their utility; instead, it enhances their flexibility in responding to changing ecological, economic, and social conditions. Their function as ongoing reference points ensures that all stakeholders remain aligned and accountable. This living nature of planning fosters continuous dialogue, allowing communities to recalibrate priorities, integrate new knowledge, and respond proactively to emerging threats. Thus, the strength of community-led plans lies not in their permanence but in their embeddedness and adaptability in the ongoing life of the community.

7.5.3. Plan at landscape scale

Rather than treating heritage as a separate or ancillary concern, effective planning integrates it with community and economic development, conservation, and social well-being. They become the basis of discussion and planning and are used as a way to effectively respond to the drivers of change in a community. This holistic framing prevents the marginalisation of cultural or natural heritage, positioning it as a core component of sustainable development. By placing all important elements together in a coherent framework, communities ensure that heritage contributes meaningfully to livelihoods, tourism, education, and identity. This integration also strengthens the legitimacy of heritage within decision-making arenas, where it might otherwise be sidelined in favour of more immediate economic interests. The Bere Island Conservation Plan is an excellent example of this community-led integrated planning, where during a heritage conservation planning process, the local community demanded that the plan be holistic and encompass not only heritage but also socio-economic viability.

7.5.4. Local stake, stronger stewardship

The literature provides strong evidence that when communities have a direct financial stake in environmental outcomes, their commitment to long-term stewardship increases significantly. Examples such as the Tralee Bay Oyster Fishery and the community-owned Isle of Eigg illustrate how shared ownership leads to responsible, sustainable resource use. Similarly, results-based payment schemes in places like Rathcroghan and Wild Ennerdale tie financial rewards to measurable conservation outcomes, creating incentive systems where communities are managing landscape sustainably and deriving economic benefit for their actions. This alignment of economic interest with environmental health fosters accountability and embeds sustainable practices into the everyday economy. By making stewardship profitable, such models transform conservation from an abstract ethic into a tangible livelihood strategy.

7.5.5. Keep young people in place

Interviewees reported that younger people struggled to remain in their communities. Challenges include high rents in urban areas or complete lack of housing in rural areas, particularly in coastal

areas where the prevalence of second homes puts pressure on housing supply. In rural areas in particular this can have significant knock-on effects such as service closures, e.g. the local national school, G.P., Post Office. In upland areas farms with no successor may not be bought by another farming family, reducing the social viability of the local community. A widespread fear was expressed that investors interested in carbon sequestration or rewilding will begin to acquire large tracts of this marginal land, eroding the sense of social cohesion and traditional farming practices/ traditional knowledge embedded in the local community.

7.5.6. Remote work presents opportunities

The success of community Wi-Fi/rural broadband initiatives has been critical in making rural working from home possible, offering fast, reliable internet at low cost. These conditions enabled formerly impossible professional scenarios, such as salaried remote work, to become achievable, thus supporting long-term settlement and contributing new life to schools and local services. This remote working phenomenon was noted on both Bere Island and the Isle of Eigg, where part time remote work can be combined with crofting, tourism and a range of other economic activities. It is yet to be seen if this repopulation will have the same impacts in struggling country towns, though the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, Town Centre First Initiatives, The Historic Towns Initiative and the New European Bauhaus represent a multi-pronged funding approach to revitalise rural towns.

7.5.7. Women drive innovation

The central role that women play in heritage innovation and rural socio-economic sustainability is often under-recognised but was repeatedly raised by interviewees and was noted in case study data. Indeed, on the Isle of Eigg, Scotland, women led the campaign to purchase the island and still play a leading role in island life. Whether running artisanal food businesses or engaging more openly with environmental challenges like deer management, women often lead in practical adaptation and innovation. The leading role women play in Irish rural life has been recently acknowledged by the National Women's Council (National Women's Council, 2023).

7.6. Research Question 3: Mechanisms for Participatory Decision-making

What mechanisms for community engagement and participatory decision-making can be developed to ensure the inclusive and equitable involvement of all stakeholders, including indigenous populations and minority groups, in the conservation process?

7.6.1. Mapping stakeholders systematically

National initiatives like the National Land Use Review demonstrate exemplary stakeholder categorisation, but many grassroots projects lack the expertise, funding, or personnel to replicate such rigor. Community groups may have deep local knowledge but lack the technical tools to map stakeholders effectively. There is a strong desire in those working in the area to ensure that their practices are inclusive and reach a good cross section of any given community. This often means moving beyond digital notifications and using local noticeboards, parish newsletters and other forms of analogue communication. The Irish Uplands Forum notes the importance of identifying key influentials in any given area who have a keen interest in community development and can also motivate other community members. Their involvement adds to project initial momentum and increases the likelihood of success. While the Tara-Skryne landscape conservation area designation ultimately failed, the engagement programme was exemplary in its inclusion of a wide range of community groups, and concerted effort to reach dispersed rural residences with hand-delivered invitations to participate. It is a lesson that even the best planned participatory processes can face challenges.

7.6.2. Building participation capacity

Community participation skills can (and need to be) fostered in communities, in state, semi-state bodies and professionals working in the sector in order to establish participatory management of many heritage assets, including landscapes at scale. In both the Isle of Eigg and the Bere Island case studies the island communities benefitted from consultation processes where they grew their capacity to articulate collective concerns and future aspirations. On Eigg, this was through the Highland Forum, while on Bere this was through participation in the development of the Bantry Bay Charter. At Lemanaghan, the Bog Heritage Group has grown in confidence from an advocacy to a campaigning group. The group is demanding transparent and participatory processes in planning for the future of the bog, and the future of their landscape as their vision is at landscape scale and includes the monastic siteg.

7.6.3. Transparency builds trust

This finding underscores the non-negotiable role of openness in democratic governance. Experiences in Ennerdale, NI Landscape Partnerships and Rathcroghan reveal that initial scepticism, particularly among farmers who felt a lack of transparency about project impacts, can be addressed through responsive communication and tangible support. These adjustments signify that transparency is not simply managed by one static disclosure but is a dynamic, adaptive practice that evolves through feedback. The fact that similar concerns arose in three distinct locations suggests a recurring tension between institutional planning and community perception, particularly when information is perceived as unclear, withheld or inaccessible. By actively improving information flows and integrating practical supports, projects transform transparency from a procedural box-ticking exercise into a relational process.

7.6.4. Two-way communication is critical for adaptive management approaches

Projects like The Burren Project, Farming Rathcroghan and Dinnseanchas are exemplars where genuine engagement provided farmers with a platform to explain their stance, approach and concerns. This narrative challenges one-way models of information dissemination, where communities are simply informed or consulted. Instead, it promotes dialogue as a transformative practice, a space where power is redistributed, knowledge is co-constructed, and solutions emerge through exchange. Institutions learn as much from communities and vice versa. This dynamic is essential in adaptive management, where strategies must evolve in response to feedback and changing conditions.

7.6.5. Shared experiential learning builds capacity

Learning journeys described by Eigg and Bere allowed participants to observe real-world applications of energy transition and high nature value farming, blending education with peer exchange. Similarly, communal activities such as dry-stone walling, where farmers learn from an expert while repairing a neighbour's wall and reciprocating in kind, combine technical training with relationship-building. Here skill-sharing is not merely knowledge transfer, but 'social glue'. The act of learning together creates trust, solidarity, and a culture of mutual aid. These experiences transform abstract concepts into lived practice, embedding sustainability in everyday relationships. By linking learning to action and reciprocity, such initiatives produce not just skilled individuals, but resilient communities capable of self-organised landscape stewardship. Further social learning activities were mentioned by interviewees. Programmes like the Heritage Keepers helped those with shared interest in heritage 'places' working in separate groups/communities, to get together and share experiences. Other programmes like the Farming for Nature Ambassador Programme, Farm Walks and The Burren Programme's 'tea talks', which bring people together in the same place, often had positive long-term effects that were not necessarily the initial goal of the programme.

7.6.6. Shared community spaces enable inclusive engagement

The repeated emphasis by interviewees on gathering in a shared comfortable space with simple catering reflects an understanding that physical environment shapes social interaction. These spaces, whether purpose-built or repurposed, provide the backdrop for dialogue, decision-making, and relationship-building. The example of Lemanaghan, where an abandoned schoolhouse became a meeting and community programming space, illustrates how communities creatively reclaim underutilised assets to meet their needs. This narrative reframes infrastructure not as monumental or technical, but as intimate and accessible. A comfortable room with tea and chairs becomes a site of political agency, where trust is nurtured and collective identity formed. Sustainable engagement requires not just good intentions, but physical places where people can come together as equals – on Bere Island the community centre is regularly fully "booked out".

7.6.7. Combining GIS with deep mapping improves planning

This approach, described by the Irish Uplands Forum, brings together the modern and the traditional, where Geographic Information Systems (GIS) are not used for expert-only planning, but as participatory media through which communities envision their future landscape. Stakeholders use GIS to project demographic changes, resource needs, and desired landscape features, transforming abstract data into tangible visions. Simultaneously, "deep mapping" overlays cultural narratives, histories, and heritage values onto the physical terrain, ensuring that planning respects not just ecological but emotional and symbolic dimensions of place. Together, these tools support a holistic approach that validates both scientific and lived knowledge, empowering communities to co-create visions that are technically sound and culturally resonant. This fusion challenges the dichotomy between modernity and tradition, positioning technology not as a force of standardisation but as empowering for community-led future planning.

7.6.8. Artists can act as Cultural Mediators

Artists can act as 'cultural brokers', helping to bridge social divides, enliven intangible heritage, and create empathetic, human-centred spaces for dialogue, helping translate complex issues into accessible narratives that engage diverse audiences. Hometree's Dinnseanchas projects, for instance, documented how artists facilitated dialogue between farmers and ecologists, groups often positioned as ideologically opposed, by generating empathy through deep listening and seeking to understand each other's point of view. Artists can play a vital role in the revitalisation of intangible cultural heritage. Rather than merely documenting traditions, they animate them through performance, visual art, and oral storytelling, making heritage accessible to younger generations. Artist-led projects go beyond recording to enable a process of handing down stories and traditions, creating dynamic, living traditions rather than static preservation.

7.6.9. Sustained volunteering underpins delivery

From serving on voluntary boards to acting as 'communication conduits' on the ground, volunteers are embedded in the structural fabric of organisations like Hometree and Farming Rathcroghan. In Ennerdale, they contribute thousands of hours, bridging the project and the people. Volunteers often possess deep local knowledge and community trust, making them ideal conduits for engagement and action. Hometree and the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust were both founded on volunteer effort and both have evolved into robust and effective organisations. The trajectory of individuals moving from volunteer roles to paid staff positions, such as the 30 paid staff at Hometree (some of whom began as volunteers) demonstrates a pathway from grassroots action to institutional sustainability. This challenges the notion that volunteerism is temporary or supplementary, reframing it as a structural pillar of community-led management.

7.7. Research Question 4: Drivers of Change

How will the influence of key landscape change drivers e.g. afforestation, renewables, agricultural change and nature restoration interact with heritage conservation?

7.7.1. Participation and local benefit crucial for renewables

The evidence gathered for this report suggests that opposition to renewable energy is not about opposition to sustainability but about perceived injustice in implementation. Thus, while renewable energy serves national and global environmental goals, its local success hinges on democratic inclusion and equitable benefit-sharing. Delayed engagement creates a structural imbalance of power, where communities are presented with de facto decisions rather than open planning dialogues. The Isle of Eigg is a pioneer in creating an island microgrid with all energy infrastructure development agreed by the island community. They reap the benefits of clean renewable energy island wide, showcasing a model of collective ownership and consensus-based planning. In contrast, the case of Lemanaghan, where the site has been chosen for wind turbine development with, as perceived by the community, insufficient meaningful consultation, demonstrates how top-down imposition leads to local opposition.

7.7.2. Conifer plantations are experienced as loss

Conifer plantations in particular carry a stigma and interviewees stated that this can be seen as the farmer 'giving up', framing afforestation not as environmental stewardship but as retreat. Even more striking, one interviewee described land being planted in forestry as being received as 'if it was a death in the family' in some rural communities, a metaphor that reveals the depth of emotional and identity-based attachment to open farmland. These responses indicate that monoculture plantations, particularly Sitka Spruce, colloquially referred to as 'pines in lines', are culturally coded as alien and industrial. The aesthetic critique is not superficial; it is intertwined with concerns about the loss of intergenerational land stewardship and rural livelihoods. In some Irish counties, such as Letrim, marginal land is being bought up and afforested at scale thanks to generous grants for planting commercial forestry. Grants for planting native forestry are far less advantageous, as trees take longer to come to maturity. In both the Wild Ennerdale and Hometree case studies, demonstrator projects are enabling the gradual replacement of commercial forestry with native woodland, showcasing how phased, adaptive management can align ecological goals with public acceptance. As noted in the literature review, far more work is needed to change attitudes to afforestation in Ireland.

7.7.3. Whole-of-landscape management supports tourism and heritage

On the Isle of Eigg there is a danger that landscape transformation could undermine economic sustainability through a loss of a scenic landscape designation due to afforestation. The Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust stresses that all land users must consider the collective impacts of their actions, pointing to the need for coordinated, landscape-wide planning. Meanwhile, tourism itself exerts pressure on the environment of the island revealing a dual challenge: protecting landscapes from ecological degradation while managing tourism's footprint. On both Eigg and Bere Islands, communities are seeking to develop heritage buildings as tourism destinations. In both cases, where the local community are 'in the driving seat' the plans not only focus on benefits to tourists, but also on both social and economic benefits for the local community. On Bere Island, Lonehort Battery is envisaged as a community greenspace with craft business start-up units. On Eigg, the island church will be an archive, exhibition space, community venue and provide accommodation.

7.7.4. Planning rules are perceived to block rural housing

The research recorded concerns about conservation policies that prioritise landscape aesthetics over demographic needs. In Rathcroghan, it was reported that community members perceive that strict planning regulations threaten social sustainability by preventing new 'one off housing' needed to house young families. The tension intensifies around second homes, which significantly impact housing stock in coastal areas but are rarely addressed in political debates about the housing crisis. The scope of this research did not allow for an investigation of whether strict planning regulations in areas of high heritage value impact the success or failure of planning applications. It did gather empirical evidence about the perception that planning is less likely to be received in heritage-rich landscapes. This perception echoes the concerns that ultimately stood in the way of the Tara-Skryne Landscape Conservation Area. It remains a challenge for heritage bodies to convince local communities that heritage designation does not stand in the way of local development

7.7.5. Climate impacts on management are already apparent

This is most evident in Tralee Bay where warming sea temperatures may prevent oysters from breeding. Across other case studies, climate change did not arise as a perceived immediate threat but in the survey it is clear that respondents see the impact as highly significant. This finding demonstrates that only in certain cases, where there is direct evidence of the impact of climate change, are communities aware and actively planning to mitigate for the threats posed.

7.7.6. Housing demand drives adaptive reuse

On Eigg, inward migration has caused a mini housing crisis, prompting the IEHT to adaptively reuse heritage structures for residential use and build new homes to create affordable rental stock. This dual strategy exemplifies a context-sensitive approach that respects historic fabric while addressing modern needs. On Bere Island, while inward migration is welcome, as are schemes to incentivise the reuse of derelict properties, the implementation barrier is structural as few derelict properties are available for reuse. This contrast demonstrates that while adaptive reuse is a viable and valued strategy, its scalability depends on material availability and institutional support. The success of Eigg's approach suggests that heritage conservation and social sustainability need not be in conflict - when communities lead the design of their future, both goals can be achieved.

7.7.7. Policy and legislation lack coherence

Interviewees expressed frustration that land use in Ireland lacks coherent, long-term planning. The tension between agriculture, biodiversity loss, housing, renewable energy, and carbon storage calls for an integrated conversation. The land is seen as a finite shared asset, critical to future wellbeing, and decisions must prioritise both community and ecological health. There was a strong call amongst interview and survey participants for a national dialogue on land stewardship that moves beyond voluntary schemes and piecemeal incentives. The National Land Use Review offers an opportunity to prompt a national conversation and concerted action. In the planning and implementation of the recommendations the review makes, community consultation and stakeholder buy-in will be vital. The National Land Use Review and its subsequent recommendations, according to a range of interviewees, should be delivered hand in hand with an updated landscape strategy or policy. It was observed that the existing strategy had not been implemented and that this was a missed opportunity for positive action. Any coherent long-term plan would require adequate resources to be achievable.

7.8. Research Question 5: Traditional and Scientific Knowledge

How can traditional knowledge held by local communities be integrated with scientific research to create adaptive management strategies that are both ecologically sound and culturally respectful?

7.8.1. Traditional knowledge is a living asset

The analysis of stakeholder interviews, case studies, and evidence from the literature review reveals a complex and deeply rooted system of knowledge transmission that is at once culturally significant and ecologically functional. TEK is sustained through intergenerational lived experience, serves as a cornerstone of cultural identity, contributes meaningfully to biodiversity conservation, and faces systemic threats due to its past marginalisation in EU wide Agricultural Policy (something addressed in more recent CAP cycles). The Burren Programme, Farming Rathcroghan, Wild Ennerdale and the Scottish Wildlife Trust's work on Eigg have foregrounded the importance of TEK to combat biodiversity loss. These case studies underscore a pressing need for institutional recognition, systematic documentation, and collaborative integration of traditional knowledge into ecological planning and cultural policy. Organisations like Farming for Nature are seeking to mainstream high nature value farming and a return to a more mixed farm economy, but more voices and greater central government support are needed to make this a 'need to' rather than 'nice to' approach.

7.8.2. Traditional knowledge is at risk

A recurring theme in the interviews undertaken for this study is that traditional knowledge is not being formally recorded, and much of it is vulnerable to being lost as older generations pass away. Interviewees lamented that knowledge of stories, placenames, farming rhythms, and local landmarks are held within individuals but not shared with wider society or being used to inform planning processes. If traditional knowledge is not actively captured and supported there is a risk to both heritage and ecological understanding. As the interviewee from the farming community said, 'when an older farmer dies a library is burned'. Much traditional knowledge is learned through doing, whether through seasonal work, domestic practices, or observation of older community members. Demonstration days, storytelling, and community-based workshops are key for passing this knowledge to younger generations. Interviewees noted that unless opportunities are created for hands-on engagement, these skills and insights will fade. Irish Georgian Society's Traditional Skills weekends and similar social learning opportunities are vital for transmitting skills. Demonstrating a commercial need for these skills to young people may foster renewed interest in traditional trades as viable career choices.

7.8.3. Traditional management has ecological value

Time-tested farming and land-use practices contribute significantly to biodiversity and habitat resilience, with scientific validation underscoring their ongoing relevance in conservation and landscape planning. Traditional farming and land-use methods, such as low-input grazing, hay saving, coppicing, and scrub control, are not simply nostalgic. They are practical, adapted techniques refined over time to fit specific environmental conditions. Traditional skills helped shape diverse, sustainable landscapes and remain highly relevant for ecological resilience, particularly in biodiversity hotspots like the Burren. They are now vital to scientific understanding of how unique habitats are maintained. Longitudinal recording of the crofted landscape of Eigg by the Scottish Wildlife Trust has demonstrated a range of biodiversity benefits, including the reintroduction of threatened bird species. The IEHT is investing in a Crofting Plan to ensure traditional practices are recorded and sustained (relating to TEK above). In Ennerdale, the switch from extensive sheep grazing and the use of continental cattle to extensive grazing by native Galloway cattle reflects a

partial return to traditional transhumance practiced in the area, with the native cattle breed also being hardy enough to over-winter outside. On Bere Island, some farmers have switched to lighter, native dexter cattle, better suited to harsh island winters.

7.8.4. Reviving traditional skills strengthens communities

Craft skills such as stone walling, hedge laying, and blacksmithing are not only important for conservation – they also embody cultural memory and sustainable practice. While these skills are often seen as heritage demonstrations, they have real ecological and economic value if reintegrated into land management systems and the circular economy. Supporting these skills through accreditation and funding (e.g., via Teagasc or Lime Trust (mentioned in relation to Eigg) or the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, ensures they remain part of contemporary rural life. At Rathcroghan, dry stone wall repair courses on farms are attended by members of the local farming community, creating reciprocal relationships where neighbours who assist each other in wall construction and maintenance. Similar dry stone wall construction training has been undertaken in Bere Island, along with hedgerow planting and bee keeping. In Catalonia, traditional dry stone walling techniques are being recorded and revived through a range of innovative approaches. Thus traditional heritage landscape management skills offer a range of community and landscape benefits.

7.8.5. Oral history can revitalise traditional practice

Prompted through their participation in the 'Heritage Keepers' programme, residents of Bere Island began an oral history project which is being supported by the Irish Community Archives Network (ICAN). These oral history recordings have not only helped to preserve the history of the island, but also the history of the island way of life. Oral histories mentioned the use of a quilting frame that was shared between island households; a new quilting frame is being made by the local men's shed. Some traditional skills revealed in oral histories, such as spinning, are being revived with the intention of creating craft startup businesses. This finding demonstrates that the recording of traditional knowledge can have knock-on economic and social benefits.

7.8.6. NGOs and community organisations act as key science communicators

In Ireland, NGOs have emerged as important champions and knowledge brokers for a range of environmental and landscape issues, from the Irish Upland's Forum to the IPCC, Rivers Trust and Hometree. Rather than imposing models, these groups work alongside communities, bringing scientific tools and guidance to support local goals, whether that involves probing bogs for carbon measurement or developing biodiversity action plans. This model of partnership empowers local leadership while leveraging external expertise in a collaborative, respectful manner. Organisations like the Irish Peatland Conservation Council act as vital bridges between expert knowledge and grass roots action. The Aarhus convention envisaged the emergence of organisations and groups promoting environmental protection as 'third spaces', and these NGOs are hard at work in the Irish landscape space.

7.8.7. Embedding expertise locally improves implementation

Interviewees observed that there can be scepticism about the expert arriving from 'Dublin', the 'Department' or other externality that can make adoption of new approaches unlikely. This is especially true in communities where there is a perception that the scientific advice being given is hostile to ways of living and/or working that have been sustained over generations (regardless of the accuracy of that perception). However, where projects embedded these 'experts' within the community, trust was built over time, using a range of stakeholder engagement practices like repeated visits to stakeholders, public events, and engaging with school children. The examples

cited included ecologists in the Burren, a community archaeologist in Rathcroghan, and the role of heritage and biodiversity officers in local authorities.

7.9. Research Question 6: Sustainable Funding

What sustainable funding models can be identified or developed to support the financial needs of landscape-scale, place-based management, ensuring equitable distribution of resources and benefits to local communities?

7.9.1. Long-term, phased funding improves outcomes

Sustainable landscape management requires multi-year financial support that allows for strategic planning, phased delivery, and organisational stability, contrasting with the limitations of short-term project cycles. Interviewees talked about multiannual funding as more desirable than current offerings. Those who had benefited from longer funding windows were clear that this had a multiplier effect on the heritage capacity of the local community thanks to the organisational stability it provided. Ideally new landscape-focused funding streams would be developed with 5–10 year horizons that support ongoing management, not just capital or 'innovation project' interventions. This would give projects the scope to plan long-term, build trust, deliver deeper impact and develop diversified funding strategies through entrepreneurial endeavour where possible. The Heritage Funds' Landscape Partnership Funding, which supports a short strategic planning phase (two years) followed by a longer project delivery phase (up to five years) offers an excellent model for funding landscape scale work. This funding stream was successfully delivered in Northern Ireland, where landholding patterns closely resemble those in the Republic, with high levels of success such as the achievement of UNESCO Biosphere status.

7.9.2. Locally tailored results-based payments are effective

One of the key aspects of European Innovation Programmes (EIP) investigated for this project is the success of the implementation of results-based payments for different activities. In Rathcroghan, a tailored results-based payments scheme, which uniquely targets the conservation of archaeological features amongst other aims, and is designed to be simple, fair and sensitive to local farming practices, has not only proved a success but has grown from supporting 30 farmers to supporting 60 farmers between two four-year funding cycles. Interviewees expressed frustration with the short funding cycles that EIP programmes are subject to. Finding long term funding to implement the programme once the initial trail phase proves successful can present significant challenges, with the Rathcroghan managing to secure Just Transition Funding to continue their work.

7.9.3. Action based payments aid access to landscape

Another action-based payments instrument is the National Walks Scheme, which creates access to the landscape by paying farmers to maintain pathways and other walk infrastructure. This scheme was universally acknowledged as simple and effective in that it formalises safe public access to landscape and discourages the public from walking across open farmland, where animals might be grazing, to access monuments. The National Walks Scheme was noted by interviewees at Rathcroghan and Bere Island as being a simple but important funding instrument. A similar scheme was praised for its simple effectiveness in Northern Ireland.

7.9.4. Restoration requires long-term payments

As yet, the only nature- based payments at play in the Irish landscape are run by the Department of Agriculture. The best-known example is the Irish Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES)

a national agri-environmental programme aimed at rewarding farmers for implementing climate, biodiversity, and water-quality measures on their land. Interviewees noted the importance of the scheme, but stressed the vulnerability of long-term impact to 5-year Common Agricultural Policy Cycles and stressed the urgent need for the development of ecosystem services payments. They also criticised ACRES for a lack of flexibility at local delivery level and delays in payments. Nature restoration is a process that demands long term ambition and long-term funding cycles, all of which is yet to be decided as Ireland strives to implement the Nature Restoration Law.

7.9.5. Operational and maintenance funding are needed at scale

A significant issue for the groups and organisations interviewed is finding sources of funding for operational, day to day costs. Where project funding might be available many programmes do not include overheads or salary for administrative staff. It is in this context that the Heritage Council's Heritage Organisation Support Fund was highlighted by a significant number of interviewees as being vital. This fund is almost unique amongst the different instruments available, as it provides for salary, professional fees, and overhead costs. This stream builds operational resilience and professionalism into project delivery and supports continuity. Maintenance funding was noted in the case of landscape work, where funds might be made available to a community group to plant trees, but no funds are then available for ongoing staking and pruning which significantly mars long term success.

7.9.6. Short term funding can be exclusionary

Due to the short-term nature of funding and the lack of support for core staff and operational costs, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds can often simply not afford to work in heritage. In many cases heritage is the 'second income' in a home – one interviewee volunteered through funding gaps because they could 'afford to do it', but many cannot. In this way the sector is demographically skewed and is missing out on vital voices who cannot afford to work unpaid for a time, or in arrears as some have reported doing. The heritage sector cannot be truly diverse until those to whom the sector seeks to 'outreach' to can also work in the sector.

7.9.7. Enterprise supports income diversification

The core work of the many groups interviewed and surveyed is not in itself commercial in nature and is focussed instead on positive outcomes for conservation, biodiversity, heritage and landscape. There are several challenges to developing commercial streams of income for groups who are loosely constituted. Some groups who have robust governance structures, such as CLG and charity status, do achieve commercially generated income. Their commercial activities include merchandise sales (IPCC), tours, plant sales (Eigg, Hometree), holiday rentals (Eigg), and in one memorable case, selling donated stamp collections to collectors across the world (an activity managed by a volunteer). The Tralee Bay Oyster Cooperative is an example of the management of commons by a community who all derive commercial income through joint endeavour.

7.9.8. Crowdfunding works best for specific projects

Groups engage in direct fundraising for specific projects and have had success doing so. For example, Lemanaghan funded a secure case for its relic following its brief theft in 2006. Some groups have also taken advantage of technology to reach a wider funding pool through crowdfunding platforms like 'Just Giving' or 'GoFundMe'. The Isle of Eigg is a notable example here, with the cost price for purchase of the island largely crowdfunded by the local community. The scale of the fundraising at Eigg was exceptional, but crowdfunding is now an acknowledged source of funding across many sectors. Hometree raises funds through plant 'pledges' where individuals or businesses fund the cost of planting a native tree via a small fee. This can constitute an effort

toward corporate social responsibility when undertaken at scale or the efforts of individuals to contribute to sustainable futures. This income is a valuable source of unrestricted funding that contributes directly to operational costs.

7.9.9. Membership schemes offer valuable source of unrestricted funding

Several organisations interviewed for this research have successful membership schemes that allow supporters to pledge a (generally small €20-€50) amount to support the organisations running. These appear to work best for communities of interest, where there is a broader appeal than a small specific location-based group, as is the case with the Irish Uplands Forum and Hometree. Unrestricted funding can be used for staff wages and other operation costs often absent from capital project funding. Weiner et al. (2024)'s research focussing on the Maigue River's Trust stressed the importance of membership schemes as a source of operational funding for landscape scale endeavour.

7.9.10. Capacity-building needed to help communities manage larger projects

This finding was noted by the Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN) Officer and the research of Osawe et al. (2023). Osawe et al. describe how "higher levels of CWDF funding, or repeat grants, are associated with either a higher likelihood of engagement with public and private sector stakeholders or participation in the river basin management planning process" (p.11). Similarly, the IWTN Officer noted that groups grow in confidence and capacity over time, at first undertaking modest projects for small grant sums, they can develop to manage complex conservation undertakings which require the use of multiple funding streams. This capacity building empirically maps the 'two stage' funding model of Heritage Funds Landscape Partnership Grants.

7.10. Research Question 7: Recording and describing the Landscape

Best practice in identifying and understanding the unique features, values, and dynamics of heritage-rich landscapes, including areas of high archaeological or cultural significance and high nature value farming.

7.10.1. National Landscape Character Assessment essential to align land-use planning and resolve competing priorities

Interviewees noted that this lack of a standard means that the LCA is inconsistent across county borders. Whereby a feature in one county might be considered significant but a similar feature just across the county boundary line might not be considered significant at all. Advocates of LCA favour a nationally consistent assessment which would potentially be a powerful tool to inform policy and practice on the ground. If properly applied using an agreed set of principles it could provide a coherent data driven basis of decision making in relation to, for example, recent legal cases regarding renewables, or other large-scale developments. While interviewees advocated a nationally agreed standard, there was also strong support for ensuring the active participation of communities in the LCA process and the embedding of cultural and an intangible heritage within the assessment process. Mapping of cultural practices, intangible heritages and the landscapes that they are connected to as part of an LCA process, could facilitate better understanding of those landscapes both by communities and developers as has happened in Catalonia.

7.10.2. Landscape recording can ease development processes

The example of the Catalonian Landscape Observatory foregrounds the importance of formal landscape assessment process as a tool for strategic development rather than as an impediment to

development. The Catalonian case study indicates that when participatory processes are formally embedded in LCA methodology, they enhance both the legitimacy and accuracy of assessments. Participatory practices can transform standardised tools from top-down instruments into vehicles for democratic governance, provided that participation is structurally integrated rather than tokenistic.

7.10.3. Citizen science builds awareness and engagement

Everyday landscape users such as hillwalkers and farmers possess untapped potential to contribute to scientific and heritage data collection. Biodiversity recording initiatives by groups like Hillwalking Ireland demonstrate the potential of a range of activities to double as opportunities for citizen science. Several of the projects investigated for this report have had success with implementing citizen science initiatives, where community members come together to count species or collate other information. The use of citizen science in the recording of natural heritage is well documented, the National Biodiversity Data Centre being the prime example of that success.

7.10.4. Long-term biodiversity monitoring can challenge assumptions

On the Isle of Eigg, Crofting was seen as an outmoded farming practice until the long-term monitoring by Scottish Wildlife Trust demonstrated the biodiversity benefits of what are now understood as high nature value farming. In Wild Ennerdale, it is emerging that biodiversity outcomes appear to be better outside the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), an observation only possible through long term monitoring and data analysis.

7.10.5. Open data tools democratise access

The theme of open access and shared knowledge ran through many interviews, with tools like Doug Boyd's oral history software cited as transferable models. In this way data is not exclusive to experts, but a common good, collectively built and maintained by communities. Initiatives like ICAN are supporting communities to engage in their own 'heritage archiving' activities to ensure the longevity of digitally created resources. Projects like Derelict Ireland emphasised low-barrier, replicable models that anyone can adopt, inviting wide participation through photography, mapping, and basic recording. The focus on simplicity and replicability ensures that these methods are not just impactful, but also scalable and inclusive. The Burrenbeo Heritage Keepers combined knowledge co-production amongst communities with training in a range of digital heritage resources that empowered communities to engage in the production and analysis of a range of primary heritage data.

7.11. Conclusion

The combined evidence from the survey, interviews and case studies points to a practical agenda for landscape-scale work in Ireland that is consistent with the earlier policy and literature review. Five key points stand out.

1. **Work at whole-of-landscape scale, pursue four outcomes together.** The strongest projects take a holistic view of sustainability, with social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes treated as interdependent. This pattern is visible across the case studies and aligns with international experience on cultural landscapes.

2. **Participation and clear governance matter more than format.** Durable initiatives have clear, locally understood structures, early and ongoing participation, and access to embedded expertise. The survey ranks working groups, workshops and funded roles

as the most effective engagement mechanisms, and highlights access to expertise, community spaces and simpler funding admin as essential enablers. Examples such as Wild Ennerdale show how transparent governance and adaptive plans build trust.

3. **Funding is a constraint.** Fragmented, short-term grants and heavy reporting loads limit scale, continuity and organisational robustness. The research and literature point instead to a plan-led framework with multi-annual finance and proportionate monitoring, so that communities can retain staff, cover core costs and work over realistic timeframes.

4. **Knowledge and data must be integrated and shared.** Long-term monitoring changes assumptions, traditional knowledge adds practical insight, and open tools plus participatory LCA improve both legitimacy and decision quality. Ireland lacks a standard for LCA, which weakens consistency; addressing this would link policy targets to locally grounded evidence.

5. **Policy alignment is incomplete.** Current instruments provide only partial scaffolding for landscape-scale stewardship, with weak cross-sector integration and limited routes for community roles in planning and finance. The lapse of the National Landscape Strategy leaves a gap exactly where the evidence shows a need for a national, plan-led framework connected to the National Land Use Review.

These findings lead directly into the recommendations that follow, which are organised across policy, semi-state, funding and community levels. They provide the levers to operationalise the five points above.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The proposals listed in this chapter are the authors' recommendations based on the research findings. The Heritage Council has not adopted these proposals and may take a different view following its own assessment of this independent research report.

The Research Findings (Chapter 7) showed that effective landscape work treats built, natural and cultural heritage as one system, is grounded in local governance and participation, depends on stable and well designed funding, uses shared data and monitoring, and requires stronger national alignment. In this final Chapter, the authors aim to turn those findings into actions at four levels: policy and legislation, semi-state and national agencies, funding programmes, and community and partnership practice.

Taken together, the measures propose a plan-led national framework linked to land-use and climate policy, clearer roles and guidance for delivery bodies, multi annual funding with proportionate reporting, and open standards for data, monitoring and evaluation. Each action is practical, within existing mandates, and sequenced so that early steps unblock later ones, allowing adoption without creating new structures unless strictly necessary.

Table 8:1 Policy Level Recommendations

PLR1	Create a multi-agency 'whole of landscape' planning committee or 'clearing house' to deliver on future landscape policy, and advocate for landscape in the drafting of other related policies.
Possible Actions: ■ Use the Land Use review stakeholder mapping to identify the required members of this committee.	
PLR2	Grow political will for community landscape stewardship in Ireland by foregrounding successful projects in national heritage discourse.
Suggested Actions: ■ Organise, and fund site visits to projects for key influencers (journalists, public sector staff, politicians, content creators). ■ Provide a platform for the publication of case studies showcasing success in sustainable community landscape management in short, accessible formats (blog, RTE Brainstorm, Podcasts etc). ■ Celebrate/Acknowledge the role of NGOs and community organisations as conduits for scientific, heritage and other information	
PLR3	Develop, by participatory means, a new national policy or strategy for landscape in Ireland that creates a national standard from which both funding can hinge and with which local strategic plans can benchmark.
Suggested Actions: ■ Instigate a rigorous participatory process for the development of a new national policy or strategy on landscape using the 'whole of landscape' lens and stakeholder data from the National Land Use Review	

PLR4	Agree a national standard for landscape character assessment to be rolled out at national or regional (not county) level. This creates an objective baseline for development and for the use of local communities in landscape stewardship planning, amongst many other things.
Suggested Actions: ■ Audit the processes by which landscape character assessments have been undertaken by local authorities, to date and extract best practice. ■ Provide training to regional/local authorities on landscape character assessments.	

Table 8:2 State and Semi-State Level Recommendations

SSLR1	Advocate for the adoption of best practice participatory management processes focussed on local communities by state agencies and semi-state bodies such as Bord na Móna, Coillte, and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, with a view to making them mandatory
Suggested Actions: ■ Include participatory practices in project feasibility and evaluation matrices. ■ Provide long form case studies to illustrate the effectiveness of this approach.	
SSLR2	Advocate for the creation of co-produced strategic plans for National Parks, woodlands and other natural amenities to showcase the ability of communities to engage in landscape level stewardship.
Suggested Actions: ■ Require and prioritise co-production and community led participatory practices in tenders for strategic plan development	
SSLR3	Design and deliver training in participatory methods for professionals working in the state and semi state sector, including in the areas of cultural heritage, built heritage, biodiversity, archaeology, intangible heritage and for staff in state operated heritage bodies.
Suggested Actions: ■ Convene a working group on participatory methods for heritage to source state of the art knowledge, skills and experience in order to create and deliver new training	
SSLR4	Create a 'one stop shop' national database for existing landscape data, which brings together in one place all the environmental, cultural, heritage, economic and other data related to landscape across Ireland.
Suggested Actions: ■ Create a database of all existing local authority landscape character assessments. Include reporting from the EPA, Heritage Council, Government Departments, etc.	

Table 8:3 Funding Recommendations

FR1	Develop a new funding instrument for landscape modelled closely on the Heritage Funds Landscape Partnership Scheme with a short cycle funded planning phase and a long cycle funded delivery phase.
Suggested Actions: ■ Consider adopting the 'clustered' project approach. Include operational /maintenance/ overhead in all funding calls.	
FR2	Support practices that are directly addressing drivers of change in the Irish Landscape by putting in place economic incentives for these practices
Suggested Actions: ■ Provide long term funding for locally adapted results-based payment schemes and their staff.	
FR3	Move the Heritage Organisation Support Scheme to a two-year funding cycle with bi-annual applications allowing operational staff two years between reapplication and reporting.
Suggested Actions:	
FR4	Simplify and streamline funding processes (application, reporting, project management) for accessing small scale (<€10K) funding to encourage communities to 'grow funding capacity' through achieving successful low level grant applications.
Suggested Actions: ■ Undertake an audit of funding related documentation in order to standardise the application documentation across funding streams. ■ Shorten lead times between reporting and funds draw down to the minimum time possible.	

Table 8:4 Community Level Recommendations

CLR1	Consider establishing a 'Heritage Council Community Landscape Network' that builds upon and learns from the success of the IWTN and Adopt a Monument
Suggested Actions: ■ Use the toolkit created for this research to inform pilot projects that utilise landscape scale thinking, holistic conservation planning and social learning which will help to inform the actions of the network. ■ Consider appointing a 'Landscape Officer' to work as part of the Heritage Council's multidisciplinary team and co-ordinate the development of this programme and national landscape policy development.	

CLR2	Create a 'National Landscape Day' as part of Heritage Week and suggest programmable activities where communities engage with, value and record the landscape.
Suggested Actions: ■ Engage organisations across landscape to participate e.g. Farming Organisations, Fishing Orgs, LIFE Projects, local heritage groups, Tidy Towns groups	
CLR3	Introduce communities to the concept of landscape stewardship by including 'landscape' as an 'area of interest' in Heritage Council Grant Schemes such as the Community Heritage Grant.
Suggested Actions: ■ Introduce the concept of working at landscape scale, even in smaller grant streams, to encourage community groups to grow the expertise and capacity required for landscape scale projects	

The future of heritage landscape management in Ireland hinges on a transformative shift in how we conceptualise, govern, and resource the landscape. This research has highlighted that heritage is not a fixed inheritance, but a dynamic process shaped by cultural, ecological, and social interactions. Similarly, landscapes are not static backdrops but lived spaces formed through continuous human and non-human engagements. Managing these landscapes effectively requires moving beyond narrow, siloed approaches and bringing communities together for effective landscape scale action, however those communities may be constituted.

A key finding from this research is the centrality of community in shaping sustainable heritage futures. While this is not a new conclusion, the current disconnect between existing systems for landscape management, institutional frameworks and lived realities has resulted in top-down practices that often fail to capture the values, knowledge, and aspirations of local communities. Participatory models offer a compelling alternative, one in which communities are recognised as active agents with the right and capacity to co-manage their environments.

Empowering communities in this way makes it possible to integrate the necessary developments to address the challenges presented by the most pressing drivers for change within Irish landscapes with community priorities. This approach can also reduce conflict in relation to difficult changes in practice by understanding and integrating those community values, cultural beliefs, and aspirations into actions at project inception.

Funding remains a significant barrier to the achievement of large scale and long-term project work at landscape scale. The fragmentation of financial support, short project cycles, and limited availability of operational funding constrain the ability of community groups to undertake long-term, strategic work at scale. Interviewees across Ireland expressed frustration with repetitive application processes, lack of support for administrative costs, and the difficulty of maintaining staff in precarious funding environments. Addressing these issues requires a reimagining of funding models, in particular putting in place long term funding streams.

Governance and organisational capacity are equally vital. As demonstrated in the Bere Island and Tralee Bay case studies, community-led structures, when supported by clear mandates, training, and financial backing, can deliver resilient, inclusive, and effective landscape stewardship. However, this potential is often stymied by weak participatory traditions in Ireland, and the absence of enabling policy frameworks, such as an active National Landscape Strategy. Strengthening support for landscape at government level is required, combined with dedicated investment in capacity building, peer-led learning, networking and sharing of knowledge for local communities.

The need for integrated strategic planning emerged strongly throughout the report. Both state-led and community-driven strategies must be aligned within a coherent national framework. As noted above, this includes reviving the National Landscape Strategy or devising another national landscape policy taking opportunities to embed expertise in communities, and investing in data collection and planning tools that reflect landscape-scale logic. Communities should be supported in developing their own plans, rooted in local priorities, but harmonised with broader environmental, conservation, heritage and development policies and planning.

Education, storytelling, and intergenerational knowledge transfer are critical to fostering long-term cultural and ecological resilience. Reviving traditional skills, documenting oral histories, and embedding cultural heritage within community and school curricula can help reinforce a sense of belonging and responsibility. Initiatives such as the Burrenbeo Heritage Keepers demonstrate how place-based learning can energise community action and inspire a deeper connection to landscape.

Climate change, biodiversity loss, and rapid socio-economic transformations present both threats and opportunities. Rather than viewing heritage as a barrier to development or a static relic of the past, this report calls for an adaptive approach that sees heritage as a framework for managing change. This means designing flexible governance systems, fostering innovation, and supporting communities in crafting heritage-led futures that are both inclusive and sustainable.

Ultimately, the preservation and flourishing of Ireland's heritage landscapes depends not only on protecting places but on empowering people. Heritage and landscape must be understood as interconnected domains of shared responsibility. A just and sustainable future will require co-creation, long-term commitment, and a renewed recognition that communities are not just heritage users, they are its creators, keepers, and advocates.

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10. Appendices

10.1. Detail of Methodology for Interdisciplinary Research

The study of the interaction between humans, the environment and cultural heritage requires knowledge, ideas and research methodologies from different disciples. This project required collaboration between natural sciences, social science, and the humanities. The project team used their expertise in these disciplines to assemble and evaluate research materials, extract relevant data and bring this broad data set to bear in analysing the wide range of issues involved in place-based, community-led, heritage landscape management.

The Methodology for Interdisciplinary Research (MIR) framework was built on a process approach, where the research question or hypothesis is leading for all decisions in the various stages of research.

In our MIR methodology the conceptual and technical design of the project are by definition interdisciplinary teamwork, whereas the respective team members undertake (mono) disciplinary parts of the literature review or fieldwork and data analysis on a modular basis. When all evidence is collected, an interdisciplinary synthesis and analysis follows through which conclusions are inputted for the final report by the whole team. This means that the MIR framework allows bringing this mixed methods project with qualitative and quantitative datasets together to create a synthesized whole.

Technical Tools:

Google Drive was used by the project team so that single documents could be edited synchronously. The annotated bibliography and long form literature review were generated via a Google Form into Google Sheets. Data gathered was specified by the project social scientist.

Zoom, Teams and Read AI: were all used to record and transcribe interview audio. All transcriptions were then reviewed and edited for accuracy.

10.2. Interview Questions

These are the questions used to guide discussions with those who agreed to be interviewed for this project.

Can you talk about what works and what doesn't work about your specific organisational structure? How has your structure changed from your organisation's origins? How would you improve it for the future? Are you taking specific steps to ensure its sustainability?
How are decisions made amongst the group and also how are decisions made with the wider community, do you have any particular community consultation approaches?
In terms of your group, do you have all the people you need involved in the group to make impactful decisions about managing the landscape, as in, do you have landowners as part of the group, or local representatives etc? How did you involve them if they weren't initially involved? How would you like to see those decision makers be involved in future projects?
How challenging is it to gain a varied mix of stakeholders? Do you feel you have a varied mix of people involved? What groups would you like to have that you are missing? How would you like to see them participate in the future?
How useful would it be for you to network with other similar organisations facing similar challenges or undertaking similar projects? How useful would it be to visit similar areas in Ireland/ UK/Europe to see how landscapes are managed/challenges overcome?
Are there key figures in your group who drive certain aspects of the project/undertake specialist tasks? How do you succession plan for these or indeed any committee members?
Has your community group/organisation been approached by universities or other research performing organisations to become involved in projects? How well do you feel you were consulted/supported in this process?
Do you have experience of any good approaches to dealing with stakeholder conflict?
How does your organisation's work support the long-term socio-economic viability of the community? How do your efforts support your community to long term sustainability?
Where do you think that capacity building needs to happen in terms of this kind of work? Training in engagement, participatory government, technical skills, financial literacy?
Do you have a business plan/strategic plan for your project? Or are you using your funding application as a business plan?
Do you have annual action plans? how are these agreed?
Have you ever engaged in any futures planning? as in gaining consensus by discussing future scenarios you can agree on?
Have you received training in any kind of business planning, management, adaptive heritage management? if so from where? Was the training free? Was it useful?
Is your project based upon short term funding? Do you have a plan to bring your project into any kind of financial sustainability after the financial cliff? Who is out there to help you with this? Is ANYONE out there? Or are you looking to leapfrog to another funding stream?
Does the funding currently available allow you to undertake the kinds of landscape scale activities you want to carry out? Do you sometimes find the calls are too constrained so that you end up doing what the funder wants rather than what the community want?

What is impacting your landscape? From what sectors are the biggest changes being implemented?
What are the challenges your community is facing?
What are the positive changes you see happening in your community/area of work?
Imagine your project/landscape in 20 years' time? What would you like it to look like? What will get in the way of that? What will make it possible for that to come true/be successful? What needs to be in place?
Have you seen climate action, changes in government policy, nature restoration action interact with the heritage of and within a landscape, for good or for bad? How did that affect the community? What kind of engagement was there with the community about those changes?
How is climate change impacting your landscape? How are you planning to mitigate these changes?
Does your landscape have any special heritage or environmental designations? What are the development plans for your landscape and how do these interact with conservation or preservation designations?
Are schemes like ACRES impacting farming practice in your area in any tangible way? What is the relationship between your organisation and local agricultural agencies/producers?
Does your area have a strong tradition of folklore, storytelling or traditional music? Is this well documented? Are there particular local names for landscape features? Are these documented?
Do you have unique landscape features created through traditional craftsmanship such as dry-stone walling, hedge laying, coppicing? What about built heritage features like thatching, lime mortar building, carved stonework etc. Are there craftspeople in the area to help you maintain, conserve or renew these features?
Do any traditional approaches to farming survive in your area? For example, mixed and rotational farming? If so, how are these surviving, are they under threat? This can be as simple as not cutting/ploughing the ends of fields (there is a name for this) and other older, nature friendly approaches.
Where do science and heritage interact in your work/projects?
How do conservation efforts affect the local community's livelihoods? Do you think conservation efforts can support local communities as viable places to live and work in the future? What does that look like to you?
There are many 'citizen science' projects that see the recording of landscape, ecology etc undertaken by individuals. Would you like to build this kind of project? What supports would you need?
Public consultation: have you participated in a public consultation? What do you think about that process?
Has your community group/organisation been approached by scientists, researchers, universities or other research performing organisations to become involved in projects? How well do you feel you were consulted/supported in this process?
What can funders do to better facilitate the work communities do to balance the conservation of built, natural and cultural heritage with the socio-economic viability of local communities?

Can you imagine in an ideal world or if it was up to you what would funding come available for in the future? What would that look like? How would it be managed?
Have you implemented projects/work that has generated income/jobs for the community/within the landscape?
How do you find the right funding streams for what you want to do? Or can you?
How do you approach funding? Look for funding for the work or look at funding available and see if that could be of benefit to your community?
What are the biggest funding challenges for your work?
How do you manage funding requirements regarding reporting, recording keeping, admin etc?
Who is benefiting most from the funding currently available for landscape work?

10.3. Survey Questions

This survey was delivered electronically to key stakeholders, using SurveyMonkey and the results for part of the Thematic Analysis in the Findings Section.

What makes a landscape significant in cultural, historical or environmental terms?
How can we best steward heritage landscapes? (Select up to 5 of of the options below)
How can we effectively engage key stakeholders in landscape management?
Governance in landscape management involves setting rules, making decisions, and coordinating efforts. What governance approaches work best in your experience?
What is your experience of dealing with funders when attempting to engage in landscape level projects?
Which of these are the most effective approaches to funding landscape work? (Please select your top 3 options)
How can we effectively engage key stakeholders in landscape level work? (e.g. participatory methods, public participation networks, artist engagement, payment schemes, peer support etc)
What resources (excluding money) are required in communities to make landscape level work possible? (Please select your top five)
Do you have a project or work that you think could stand at the model, best practice, most effective approach to this work?
What is the role of volunteers in landscape level work?
How can traditional knowledge be used to support landscape level work?
What are the most pressing drivers of change in relation to the Irish landscape? (Please select your top three most pressing drivers)
How do you think these drivers of change will interact with heritage landscapes?
In an ideal world, money no issue, time no issue, you are in charge and can give yourself the resources needed. What would the funding, project development, planning, implementation in the sphere of landscape work look like in 10-20 years? What happens in the landscape? Let us know what your ideal feature looks like.

10.4. People Interviewed

Name of Interviewee	Organisation
Byrne, Stella	Head of Investment, Northern Ireland, The National Lottery Heritage Fund
Casey, Shane	Carlow County Council
Corcoran, Kenneth	Lemanaghan Group
Corcoran, Seamus	Lemanaghan Group
Corcoran, Sean	Lemanaghan Group
Corns, Anthony	Discovery Programme
Curley, Daniel	Rathcroghan Visitor Centre
Dressler, Camille	Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust (Scotland)
Dunford, Brendan (Dr.)	Burrenbeo Trust
Farrell, Richie	Farming Rathcroghan
Fingleton, Lisa	Artist, Brilliant Ballybunion
Foley, Karen (Dr.)	UCD
Foley, Ronan (Dr.)	NUI Maynooth
Guinan, Loreto (Dr.)	Meath County Council
Halligan, Sean	Lemanaghan Group
Kelly, Josephine	Cairde Na hEirrgle
Kelly, Lorna	Wicklow Uplands Council/Irish Uplands Council
Kenny, KK	Lemanaghan Group
Lane, Deirdre	Natural Capital Ireland
Lawless, Helen	Mountaineering Ireland
Madigan, Nuala	Irish Peatland Conservation Council
McKenna, Labhaoise	Isle of Eigg (Scotland)
Minogue, Ruth (Dr.)	Environmental Consultant
Newman, Conor (Prof)	UCG
Ó Foghlú, Ray	Hometree
O'Connell, Cathy	Forbairt na Dromoda
O'Connell, Eimear	Irish Walled Towns Network
O'Connor, Frank (Dr.)	Derelict Ireland
O'Shea, Denis	Tralee Bay Oyster Fisheries
Oakley, Rachel	Wild Ennerdale
O'Keeffe, John	Discovery Programme
O'Regan, Terry	Landscape Alliance Ireland

Name of Interviewee	Organisation
Pedlow, Amanda	Offaly County Council
Puigbert, Laura	Observatori del Paisatge de Catalunya
Ray, Karen (Dr)	UCC
Riddell, Helen	Bere Island Projects Group
Roche, Nessa	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Scott, Mark (Dr.)	UCD, The Land Use Review
Sherry, Jude	Derelict Ireland
Smyth, Paul	ICMSA – Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association
Taylor, Lucy	Hometree - Dinnseanchas
Tubridy, Mary (Dr.)	Irish Uplands Forum
Whelan, Kevin (Dr.)	Notre Dame Dublin
Williams, Tony (Dr.)	The Irish Landscape Alliance/TCD

These are 44 of the interviewees engaged for this project. A further 9 interviewees prefer to remain unacknowledged but were happy to participate and add their views to the cumulative results of this report. They came from a similar cross section of sectors, organisations and institutions to those listed above.

All project data was managed in accordance with GDPR and the data management agreement put in place between 12Foot Insight Ltd and the Heritage Council at project inception. Upon completion of this project the transcripts and recordings will be deleted entirely, except for the anonymised material, organised thematically, which will be handed over to the Heritage Council. Interviewees were offered a copy of their interview recording and transcript, but none have availed of that offer.

10.5. Policy and Legislation relevant to landscape

International	National	Policy	Application	Sector
Aarhus Convention 1998; Directive on Public Access to Environmental Information (2003/4/EC); Directive on Public Participation (2003/35/EC)	S.I. No. 352/2010 - European Communities (Public Participation) Regulations 2010.		Public Participation Network; Citizen's Assemblies; Citizen's Advice Bureaus; Planning Consultation Processes;	Environmental Justice; Participation; Consultation; Environmental Information;
Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027; Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC)		The CAP Strategic Plan 2022-2027; Fifth Nitrates Action Programme 2022-2027; Farm to Fork Strategy 2020; Foodwise 2025	Currently under significant review: EIP; GLAS; ACRES; Leader;	Agriculture; Environment; Cultural landscapes; Archaeology;
Marine Strategies Framework Directive; Marine Spatial Planning Directive 2014;	National Marine Planning Framework 2021	Expanding Ireland's Marine Protected Area Network 2020;	Fisheries Local Action Group	Fisheries; Cultural Landscapes; Natural heritage; Archaeology
Common Fisheries Policy Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013				
	Critical Raw Materials Act;	Policy Statement on Mineral Exploration and Mining		
EPowerEU			Innovation Fund; Emissions Trading System (ETS)	Renewables;
European Communities Birds and Natural Habitats Regulation (S.I. No. 477/2011)	EU Nature Restoration Law (2024);	Biodiversity Action Plan (2023–2030); National and Waterways Ireland Climate Action Plan (2030); 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023–2030; Natura 2000	Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland 2019; LIFE Projects;	Natural Heritage; Wildlife; Cultural Landscapes; Agriculture;

International	National	Policy	Application	Sector
	Wildlife Act (1976) (Amended 2000);			
European Green New Deal; European Climate Law;	Climate Action and Low Carbon Act Development Act 2015 (amended 2021)	The Climate Action Plan 2024; Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025(no mention of traditional skills)	Just Transition Fund; Social Climate Fund; EU Solidarity Fund; Various EIP;	Natural heritage; Built heritage; Cultural Landscapes; Agriculture; Renewables
UN Sustainable Development Goals				
European Landscape Convention (ELC)		The National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025; Irish Regeneration and Housing Act of 2015	Landscape Character Assessment;	Cultural Landscapes; Archaeology; Built Heritage
UNESCO World Heritage Convention; UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro 2005); Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EU/2024/1275, EPBD); Convention for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage of Europe (revised) (Valletta, 1992)	National Monuments Acts (1930–2014);	Built Heritage and Heritage and Climate Adaptation Guidance for Local Authorities 2024; The Built and Archaeological Heritage Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan 2019; Policy Brief	Monuments Service; National Museum of Ireland; OPW; State of Conservation Reports Skellig Michael & Bru na Boinne;	Built Heritage;
	Historic and Archaeological Heritage and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023	Built Cultural Heritage Integrating heritage buildings into contemporary society (2020);		Archaeology;

International	National	Policy	Application	Sector
		Heritage Ireland 2030		
Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) - European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 722 of 2003)		Water Action Plan 2024:	LAWPRO; Waters of LIFE; Rivers Trusts	Wildlife; Cultural Heritage; Agriculture; Built Heritage; Inland Fisheries; Climate Change; Flood Management;
		Waterways Climate Action Plan 2024; River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027		
	Bunreacht na hÉireann (Article 43) Planning and Development Act 2024; Urban Regeneration and Housing Act, 2000;	The National Land Use Review Phase 1; Town Centre First Policy; Our Rural Future; Rural Development Policy 2021-2025	Phased implementation over existing legislation; Landscape Conservation Area designation removed;	All
EU Forestry Strategy 2030	Forestry Act 2014	Afforestation Scheme 2023-2027	Coillte;	Natural Heritage; Cultural Heritage

10.6. Detail of Key Literature Reviewed

Table10.6.1 Synthesis of literature reviewed in Governance and Management Approaches for Landscape

Approach / Model/ Author	Key Principles / Features	Stakeholders Involved	Strengths	Challenges / Limitations
Participatory Heritage Governance (OMC, 2018)	Shift from government to governance; heritage as a common; people as primary stewards; co-creation and participation.	Communities, heritage professionals, state bodies, NGOs.	Increases legitimacy, fosters local ownership, sustains cultural value.	Requires trust, capacity-building, and institutional support; participation risks tokenism.
Village Design Statements (2012 Adaptive Co-management (ACM, Plummer et al., 2017)	Collaboration, learning, flexibility; iterative monitoring and adaptation; resilience-focused.	Communities, scientists, policymakers, NGOs.	Builds resilience and local capacity; ecologically and socially responsive.	Needs long-term funding, facilitation, and shared authority; complex to coordinate.
Commons / Common Pool Resource Management (Ostrom, 1990)	Eight principles: boundaries, collective choice, monitoring, sanctions, conflict resolution, rights to organise, proportionality, nested governance.	Resource users, community groups.	Proven long-term success in local resource stewardship.	Works best where communities are cohesive, resource-dependent, and able to self-regulate.
Cultural Heritage Governance Types (Sokka et al., 2021)	Four types: Governmental, Corporatist, Service-led, Co-creative; vary in state, market, civil society, citizen roles.	Public authorities, civil society, markets, citizens.	Offers a typology to analyse systems; recognises plurality.	Some models risk over-centralisation or lack of local agency.
Local Participatory Governance Models (Danielsson et al., 2018)	Four models: Instrumental (top-down); Interest-based (mediated); Deliberation-based (reflective); Functional (co-produced).	Local authorities, citizens, NGOs.	Differentiates depth of participation and power-sharing.	Many practices remain instrumental or consultative rather than co-creative.
Integrated Catchment Management & Rivers Trust Model (Weiner et al.; 2024).	Top-down meets bottom-up; community stewardship aligned with EU policies; scientific monitoring.	Rivers Trusts, local authorities, LAWPRO, local volunteers	Strong example of operational governance at landscape scale; data-led.	Core funding insecurity; relies on champions and voluntary engagement.

Table 10.6.2 Balancing Socio-Economic Viability with Conservation in Landscape

Approach & Author(s)	Key Principles / Features	Stakeholders Involved	Strengths	Challenges / Limitations
Whole-of-Landscape Heritage Planning (Van Assche 2010; Sullivan 2005)	Includes broader landscape, acknowledges multiple meanings and living heritage.	Planners, local authorities, communities, developers, heritage professionals.	Holistic and inclusive; considers heritage beyond monuments.	Difficult to reconcile development and conservation; bureaucratic resistance.
World Heritage Cultural Landscape Principles (Mitchell et al., 2009)	Principle 6: management should contribute to a sustainable society; focus on guiding change and people–landscape relationships.	UNESCO, heritage managers, communities, local government.	Encourages adaptive, community-centred management.	Implementation is uneven; dependent on institutional and financial support.
Traditional farming and practices to maintain cultural landscapes (Villalón, 2012)	Revival of traditional practices via tourism, heritage houses, intangible heritage recognition.	Indigenous communities, UNESCO, NGOs, tourism agencies.	Supports cultural revival, tourism income, heritage pride.	Outmigration, youth disengagement with traditional farming, economic pressures on manual farming.
Integrated Landscape Management – ILM (Denier et al. 2015; Sayer et al. 2013)	Cross-sector, multi-stakeholder land use planning integrating livelihoods and ecology.	Governments, farmers, NGOs, private sector, communities.	Aligns SDGs, biodiversity and economic development.	Often excludes culture; complex coordination; needs long-term funding.
Culture as Fourth Pillar of Sustainability (UCLG 2010; Sabatini 2019)	Heritage, identity, crafts and culture as essential alongside economy, society and environment.	Cultural organisations, local authorities, heritage bodies.	Repositions culture as central to sustainability.	Rarely implemented; overlooked in policy and finance.
Tourism for Heritage Preservation (Lennon and Taylor 2012; Butland 2018)	Tourism used to support traditional skills, crafts and landscapes.	Local communities, tourism boards, heritage organisations.	Provides funding and livelihoods; valorises tradition.	Risk of commodification and dependency; uneven benefits.

Table 10.6.3 Mechanisms for Community Engagement in Landscape Management

Approach / Mechanism/ Author	Key Principles / Features	Stakeholders Involved	Strengths	Challenges / Limitations
Participatory Landscape Management (Selman, 2004)	Engagement beyond consultation; shared responsibility; preference for small-scale, purpose-driven initiatives.	Local communities, local authorities, landowners, NGOs.	Builds trust, integrates local knowledge, increases willingness to implement.	Limited scalability; voluntary capacity; relies on motivated groups.
Three Foundations of Participatory Planning (Healey et al., 2002)	Knowledge base, relational base, mobilisation capacity.	Professionals, community groups, local agencies.	Provides structured basis for collaboration.	Weakness in any foundation undermines effectiveness.
CHeriScape Landscape-Heritage Approach (Fairclough et al., 2020)	Landscape as dynamic and shared; governance tools; landscape as commons; storytelling and education.	Communities, policymakers, heritage professionals, researchers.	Encourages democratic participation and landscape as living process.	Requires translation into policy and legal frameworks.
Community Stewardship (Peçanha Enqvist et al., 2018)	Locally relevant knowledge, increased agency, collective identity for stewardship.	Local residents, volunteers, civil society groups.	Builds long-term commitment and social-ecological resilience.	Can be fragile without support or institutional backing.
Stakeholder Empowerment Mechanisms (Liu, Jim & Dupre, 2022)	Joint heritage valuation; addressing power imbalances; psychological empowerment; brokers; digital platforms.	Citizens, heritage bodies, mediators, NGOs.	Levels playing field; increases ownership and legitimacy.	Requires facilitation, digital access, time to build trust.
People's Transition Model (TASC) (McCabe, 2020; TASC 2023, 2024)	Community mapping; anchor institutions; inclusive climate and development planning.	Community organisations, residents, schools, NGOs.	Ensures inclusion; builds on social fabric.	Time-intensive; depends on trusted facilitators.
Social Learning (Reed et al., 2010; Daly et al., 2016)	Collective understanding; embedded change across communities of practice.	Community groups, agencies, facilitators.	Enables long-term behaviour to change and adaptive governance.	Requires trust, ongoing interaction, and facilitation.
Facilitation and Mediation Skills (Lennon 2012b; Gill et al., 2020)	Listening, neutrality, empathy, cultural awareness in participative projects.	Project leaders, heritage managers, mediators.	Builds trust and reduces conflict.	Often underdeveloped in heritage professions.

Table 10.6.4 Funding Community Landscape Management

Approach & Author(s)	Key Principles / Features	Stakeholders Involved	Strengths	Challenges / Limitations
Conventional Landscape Funding – Urban/Rural Planning & Regional Development (Gouardères, 2025)	Government schemes, EU funds, agricultural schemes; supports infrastructure, climate transition.	National/regional governments, EU institutions, local authorities, communities.	Provides large-scale resources; aligned with regulation.	Top-down; fragmented access; difficult for small community groups.
People's Transition Model – Community Climate Solutions (TASC 2020, 2023, 2024)	Community mapping, anchor institutions, inclusive planning for climate solutions.	Community organisations, NGOs, local authorities.	Builds legitimacy and inclusion; aligns climate with local needs.	Time-intensive; reliant on facilitation and external funding.
Natural Capital Funding Guidelines (Ní Dhúill et al., 2024)	Calls for national restoration plan, political will, long-term funding, monitoring.	Government, NGOs, funders, landowners.	Supports integrated heritage and landscape projects including staff costs.	Requires political alignment; as yet fragmented financial landscape.
Landscape Partnership Funding (Clarke, 2015)	Bottom-up, multi-agency partnerships funded by Heritage Lottery/National Lottery.	Community groups, councils, NGOs.	Clarifies systemic financial exclusion.	Competitive; requires administrative capacity by funder and funded party.
Access to Landscape Finance – Barriers (Louman et al., 2022)	Identifies barriers: limited collateral, insecure land tenure, poor financial literacy.	Small farmers, financial institutions, NGOs.		Mistrust; differing perceptions of risk; lack of precedents.

Table 10.6.5 Drivers of Change in Landscape Management

Approach & Author(s)	Key Principles / Features	Stakeholders Involved	Strengths / Opportunities	Challenges / Limitations
Landscape Change Drivers in Europe (Novotny et al. 2021)	Migration, marginalisation, agriculture, biodiversity loss affecting land use patterns.	Rural communities, farmers, policymakers, environmental agencies.	Provides comparative European context for Ireland.	Rural decline, land abandonment, loss of traditional practices.
Obsolescence of Traditional Landscape Drivers (Selman, 2007)	Modern farming and industrial systems are not creating cultural landscapes in the same way as traditional farming and industry.	Heritage organisations, rural communities, planners.	Explains loss of distinctive landscape character.	Modern landscapes may lack cultural attachment or aesthetic value.
Wind Energy Development and Landscape Conflict (Pasqualetti, 2011; Warren & McFadyen, 2010; Harvey & Moloney, 2013)	Wind farms alter landscape character and create tensions with heritage values.	Energy developers, local communities, planning authorities, state agencies.	Supports climate targets and renewable energy goals.	Inadequate consultation, visual impact, community opposition.
High Nature Value Farming (Dunford et al., 2025)	Low-intensity, biodiversity-supporting farming systems.	Farmers, EU policymakers, agri-environment schemes.	Supports rural identity, diversification and biodiversity.	Economically marginal; reliant on subsidies.
Climate Change and Heritage Risk (DHLGH, 2019; Barker & Corns, 2023)	Climate change poses risks to cultural landscapes, heritage and 'sense of place'.	Heritage authorities, local authorities, climate researchers, communities.	Raises awareness; encourages adaptation planning.	Resource constraints; reactive approach to heritage protection.

Table 10.6.6 Recording the Landscape

Approach & Author(s)	Key Principles / Features	Stakeholders Involved	Strengths / Opportunities	Challenges / Limitations
Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) – (Fairclough et al., 2018; European Landscape Convention, 2000)	Systematic method to classify and describe landscapes; informs planning, conservation, and land management.	National and local authorities, planners, heritage agencies, environmental consultants.	Integrates heritage and ecology; embedded in European policy; supports place-sensitive decision making.	Implementation varies between countries; can become detached from communities.
Reframe Landscape Character Assessment Toolkit – (Minogue et al., 2024)	EPA-funded toolkit offering a robust, standardised model for LCA in Ireland..	EPA, local authorities, planners, community groups, researchers.	Provides structured national approach; supports decision-making at landscape scale.	Uncertain adoption; dependent on political will and resources.
A Landscape Circle – (O'Regan, 2008)	Seven-step participatory approach; community-based landscape assessment.	Local communities, schools, heritage groups, facilitators.	Builds deep local ownership and stewardship; democratic and bottom-up.	Time-intensive; may lack legal or planning authority; dependent on facilitation.
Deep Mapping – (Geertz, 1973; Least Heat-Moon, 1991; Bodenhamer, 2010; 2015)	Digital humanities method using layered cultural, historical, ecological and narrative data; integrates story, GIS, memory and place.	Academics, digital humanities researchers, local historians, communities.	Rich, multi-sensory, place-based understanding applied to interactive maps.	Rarely influences planning policy; remains academic output; digital presence may not be long lived.

Table 10.6.7 Citizen Science

Approach & Author(s)	Key Principles / Features	Stakeholders Involved	Strengths / Opportunities	Challenges / Limitations
Citizen Science - (Bonney et al., 2009; Irwin, 1995; Haklay, 2013)	Public participation in scientific research; contributory, collaborative, or co-created; values local expertise.	Scientists, community volunteers, NGOs, policymakers.	Generates large-scale data; builds stewardship; bridges science-public divide.	Data quality concerns; top-down models; sustaining long-term participation.
Historic Graves – (Tierney et al., 2024)	Community-led graveyard surveys; Creative Commons licensing; open data.	Local heritage groups, genealogists, researchers.	Sustainable (13+ years); shared ownership; global genealogical & tourism value.	Requires funding; volunteer fatigue.
Meitheal Logainm – (Placenames Database of Ireland, 2025)	Crowdsourced minor placename recording; preserves toponymic heritage.	Public users, local historians, Irish language communities.	Preserves local knowledge; supports identity and cultural heritage.	Lacks official planning influence; requires moderation; uneven geographic coverage
Citizen Science & Stewardship – (Haywood, 2014; Fritz et al., 2019)	Citizen science as stewardship; integrates local knowledge with care for place.	Local communities, NGOs, environmental agencies.	Builds stewardship and ownership; enhances environmental outcomes.	Needs institutional support; risks tokenism without co-design.
Critical Citizen Science – (Phillips et al., 2019; Strasser et al., 2019)	Emphasises inclusive, ethical and reflexive practice; attention to power and data justice.	Scientists, funders, communities, institutions.	Increases legitimacy and equity; promotes shared ownership.	Time-intensive; requires institutional change.

Table 10.6.8 Traditional and Scientific Knowledge

Approach & Author(s)	Key Principles / Features	Stakeholders Involved	Strengths / Opportunities	Challenges / Limitations
Traditional Skills & Low-Carbon Landscapes – (Selman, 2007)	Carbon-neutral futures need traditional materials and maintenance methods.	Builders, craftspeople, environmental policymakers.	Promotes local, low-impact construction and repair.	Shortage of trained practitioners; weak incentives.
Traditional Ecological Knowledge – (Wilkins, 1998; Wichmann & Köbbing 2015)	Livelihood–craft link (e.g., snap-net fishing & cot building; reed production & thatching).	Local communities, practitioners of traditional crafts, local historians.	Shows deep ties between people, rivers and crafts.	Few academic studies; knowledge at risk of loss.
Indigenous Landscape Knowledge – (Ross et al., 2010)	Integrates creation stories, archaeology and resource care in management.	Indigenous communities, heritage agencies, legislators.	Holistic, community-led stewardship model.	Rarely applied in Irish/ European policy.

10.7. Project Team

Cathrine Agnew is an experienced Project Manager with expertise in delivering complex initiatives, coordinating stakeholders, and developing effective communication strategies. She has led projects involving digital transformation, programme development, and organisational redesign, successfully managing timelines, budgets, and cross-functional teams. With a strong background in stakeholder engagement, Cathrine has worked extensively with diverse communities, membership groups, and public stakeholders to build collaboration and gather meaningful feedback for project development and policy planning. Her communication experience spans creating public engagement strategies, managing digital identities, producing press materials, and implementing internal communication frameworks to support project delivery. Cathrine combines strategic thinking with practical project management skills, ensuring successful outcomes across cultural, community, and organisational contexts.

Shane Clarke is an experienced urban landscape manager with over 20 years of award-winning expertise in place-based management and urban design. With advanced qualifications in World Heritage Conservation and Urban Design, and as an Academician of the Academy of Urbanism, Shane specialises in developing strategies that integrate cultural, natural, and archaeological heritage into vibrant urban environments. His experience spans complex stakeholder governance, participatory decision-making, and community engagement through diverse methods, from public consultations and town hall events to digital engagement and collaborative governance structures. Shane has led the management of historic urban areas rich in cultural and built heritage, embedding their histories into contemporary projects, branding, and capital developments to create dynamic, sustainable, and community-driven urban landscapes.

Dr Silvia Gallagher is a social scientist with over 15 years of experience in multidisciplinary research, policy development, and stakeholder engagement. She specialises in designing and implementing full research cycles, from conception to evaluation, across sectors including education, sustainability, health, and technology. Skilled in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, Silvia has extensive experience conducting interviews, focus groups, surveys, literature reviews, and complex data analysis using tools such as NVIVO. Her expertise includes developing criteria for evaluating best practices, producing high-quality academic and public reports, and creating accessible, innovative outputs such as podcasts, videos, and gamified resources. With strong abilities in policy scoping and development, she has led the creation of inter-institutional policies aligned with local, national, and European frameworks.

Peter Massini is an ecologist and green infrastructure practitioner with extensive experience and expertise in policy development. He has played a leading role in shaping innovative frameworks for integrating nature into urban environments, including pioneering strategies for green infrastructure, urban greening, and biodiversity enhancement. With deep experience in land management and land-use planning, Peter has advised on biodiversity action planning and developed practical solutions for delivering nature-rich, resilient landscapes. He combines strategic policy knowledge with hands-on ecological expertise, supporting public and private sector clients in creating multifunctional green spaces that deliver environmental, social, and climate resilience benefits. His work focuses on aligning policy with practice to achieve sustainable, forward-thinking solutions

Dr Claire Nolan is an archaeologist and cultural heritage specialist with expertise in contested landscapes, community engagement, and values-based approaches to heritage. She has conducted extensive qualitative research in complex heritage contexts, including World Heritage Sites, port towns, and former industrial peatlands, facilitating consultations and exploring community perspectives on cultural landscapes. Claire's work integrates archaeology with wellbeing, drawing

on her experience in community mental health to design inclusive heritage practices that enhance social connection and improve quality of life. Her research also focuses on ecocultural identity and the role of values in heritage management, contributing to innovative approaches for balancing cultural, natural, and community needs in the care of challenging or contested landscapes.

Dr Danielle O'Donovan is a cultural heritage specialist and architectural historian with expertise in built heritage research and community-focused heritage management. Her work spans surveying historic structures, cataloguing cultural materials, and conducting in-depth research on medieval architecture, local history, and the heritage of female religious communities. Passionate about fostering public appreciation for heritage, Danielle develops innovative learning experiences within historic environments, transforming observers into active stewards of cultural heritage. She has extensive experience in socially engaged heritage projects, designing participatory programmes that connect communities, schools, and diasporic groups with their heritage. With advanced training in social research and experience in oral history, she integrates stakeholder engagement, qualitative research, and participation design to deliver meaningful, community-driven cultural heritage initiatives.

Jack O'Donovan Trá is a landscape management specialist with expertise in biodiversity conservation across rural, coastal, and marine environments. He has developed and implemented endangered species conservation plans, designed pollinator-friendly land management strategies, and collaborated with stakeholders to protect sensitive ecosystems. Jack's work combines scientific ecological knowledge with participatory management, engaging farmers, community groups, and indigenous communities in co-developing practical conservation solutions. His experience includes mitigating human impacts in sea turtle nesting areas, supporting curlew conservation through on-the-ground nest protection, management planning and local engagement, and working with NGOs to engage communities, state agencies and industry on the implementation of Marine Protected Areas. Jack is committed to creating sustainable, inclusive approaches to biodiversity management that balance ecological, cultural, and economic needs.

12 FOOT
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