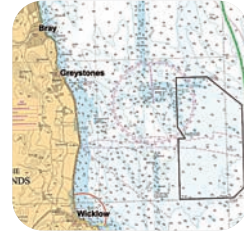




REWILD
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CODLING WIND PARK
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WICKLOW PASSPORT
page 12

DELIVERED TO HOMES & BUSINESSES IN: SHANKILL, ENNISKERRY, BRAY, GREYSTONES, DELGANY, KILCOOLE, NEWCASTLE, KILQUADE, ASHFORD, KILPEDDER, NEWTOWNMOUNTKENNEDY, KILMACANOGUE, LARAGH, MONEYSTOWN, ROUNDWOOD, RATHNEW, WICKLOW, GLENEALY, BRITTAS BAY, AVOCA, WOODENBRIDGE, ARKLOW, SHILLELAGH, TINAHELY, REDCROSS, BALLINACLASH, AUGHRIM, RATHDRUM, DONARD, DUNLAVIN, CARNEW, COOLATTIN, BALTINGLASS, BLESSINGTON.

Thursday 4th March 2021 First Floor, The Boulevard, Quinsborough Road, Bray. A98 R6D7. Tel: 01 - 2869111 E-mail: wicklowed@localtimes.ie www.wicklowtimes.net

BANKS TO CLOSE

Serious concerns have been raised about the future of a number of Bank of Ireland branches in Wicklow following the news that 103 branches across the country are set to close, including branches in Rathdrum, Tinahely and Carnew.

Sinn Féin TD John Brady has described the announcement of branch closures by Bank of Ireland as the wrong decision at the worst possible time, with serious consequences for customers and staff. He further said that the closures will severely impact rural communities across Wicklow.

"This comes in the teeth of a global pandemic and less than two weeks after Ulster Bank announced its withdrawal from the market. It is a

huge blow for customers and staff.

"Bank of Ireland has attempted to justify this announcement based on a fall in branch visits over the past twelve months. This is hardly surprising given the entire population has had its movements significantly restricted in response to a public health emergency.

"In reality, the bank is using Covid-19 for cover, punishing customers for following public health regulations. This is not just a cynical

move, but a slap in the face that will hurt customers, staff and communities.

"This knee-jerk reaction will leave vulnerable customers without access to essential services and will hit rural Wicklow hard.

"How can Bank of Ireland engage with and prepare these customers for branch closures when public health restrictions are in place? Why was there no consultation and no stakeholder engagement?



Noah, Keane and Clodagh Warner on their first day back to school this week at St. Fergal's, Bray.
Pic: Joe McQuillan

"The only conclusion I can draw is that they have no regard for their customers.

"This announcement will further damage communities that have already been economically left behind by government policy over the past decade.

"Research has found that bank branch closures reduce SME lending growth by 63 percent in affected areas, rising to 104 percent when it is the last branch in the area.

"We support the call of the Financial Services Union for a moratorium on branch closures until the end of 2022; once this pandemic has ended. I will be writing to the CEO of Bank of Ireland, the Minister for Finance and the Governor of the Central Bank. The Minister is a major shareholder in Bank of Ireland, while the Governor is charged with consumer protection. They have a responsibility

to do all they can to put the interests of customers and communities first.

"The taxpayer poured €4.7 billion into Bank of Ireland during the financial crisis - the least the Irish people deserve from the bank is respect. It is true that banking is changing and that is why Sinn Féin have called on the establishment of a Future of Banking Forum to discuss issues such as banking in a digital age, and how banks can best respond to serve customers and communities that rely on their services.

Green Party TD Steven Matthews also raised serious concerns regarding the closures. Speaking as a member of the Oireachtas Committee on Finance, Deputy Matthews said: "This news will have come as a shock for communities across Ireland both for customers, staff and businesses who use these branches. I was

particularly disappointed to see closures in Tinahely, Carnew and

Rathdrum, three vibrant and strong communities once again negatively

impacted by the loss of rural services.

Continued on page 4

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WICKLOW



Upskill yourself with a Practical Permaculture Design Course at at Carraig Dúlra, Glenealy. This course is in "Blended" format, which includes onsite teaching, practical experiences, as well as online live classes and curated resources. Photo taken at previous year's event. See details on page 17.

Breaking down Barriers: A conversation with Wicklow's female Councillors

Ever wondered what it's like to be a woman in local politics, or maybe you've thought about running yourself? Join 'Breaking down Barriers' on Thursday, March 11th, for a discussion between Wicklow County Council's female elected representatives and national experts on women in politics, to mark International Women's Day.

Claire McGing, author of 'Women Beyond the Dáil', and Caitriona Gleeson, CEO of Women for Election, will be talking to Wicklow County Council's women Councillors about local government, life in politics and how to support more women to enter politics.

Whether you are curious about campaigning, or just want to understand a bit more about how local government works, join this interactive discussion on Thursday, March 11th, from 7pm to 8.30pm by registering on Eventbrite. Once you are registered, a zoom link will be sent to you in advance of the event.

BirdWatch Ireland emergency fundraising appeal

BirdWatch Ireland have stated they would like to thank everyone who has donated to their COVID-19 Emergency Fundraising Appeal to date. The organisation stated "The past year has been the most difficult that BirdWatch Ireland has ever been through, with the cancellation of all of our membership recruitment and fundraising events and the postponement of many of our projects. As a charity, we would be unable to continue our vital conservation work without your generous support. We are well on our way to reaching our appeal target, but we still need your help to get over the line. Please, if you can, donate to our appeal today: Ireland's birds are counting on you." See birdwatchireland.ie

Wicklow families needed for new quiz show

There is a fun new family quiz for RTÉ called Home Advantage and they're looking for participants. And, with one player in studio and the rest of the family playing along from home, this

really is a team game!

You don't need to be a hard-core quizzier either. If everyone in the family knows a little, it might be enough to win a lot... because we've got a top prize of €5,000 up for grabs! So whatever your "family" is why not get in touch with us and find out more about taking part in the newest quiz on Irish TV! To apply see loosehorse.submit.com

Teams consists of 2 adults and 2 children. Children must be between the ages of 9 and 16. One adult will be playing in studio, while the rest of the team will play from home. Teams must be members of the same household. Top prizes of €5,000 are up for grabs.

Paint your pet art competition

Yazmin Jemima and Phoebe's Paint your Pet art competition invites you to paint or draw a picture of your favourite animal. Send your entries to pete@petfix.com and you can donate to madra.ie/donate. Winners will have their pictures shown on petfixclub.com. The top 3 winners get a Petfix hamper of goodies to the value of €100, €50, and €25, and free membership. Plus 6 extra memberships for runners up. Entry deadline is Friday March 26th. The cost for entry is €5. All proceeds go to Madra (Mutts Anonymous Dog Rescue & Adoption).

Water supply returns to normal

The issue affecting the quality of the raw water entering the Ballycoog Water Treatment Plant has been resolved and the plant has resumed operations. The plant was shut down due to a deterioration in the raw water quality entering the plant from the borehole, causing outages for local customers. Experts at the plant worked through the night to improve the quality of the borehole and restore the water supply as quickly and as safely as possible, in line with HSE guidance on COVID-19.

"Irish Water understands the inconvenience when an outage and low pressure occurs and thanks customers for their patience while we worked to bring the plant back online. Irish Water and Wicklow County Council regrets any inconvenience caused. Irish Water continues to work at this time with our Local Authority partners, contractors and others to safeguard the health and well-being of both staff and the public and to ensure the continuity of critical drinking water and wastewater services."

Free online training and workshops

Bray Area Partnership has a number of free upcoming online courses and workshops under its Social Inclusion and Community Activation (SICAP) programme.

Barista Essentials on 11th March will show you how to perfect your espresso and milk texturing techniques, with follow-up access to an online course certified by the World Barista Institute - a great qualification to have as hospitality starts to re-open.

Introduction to Cooking starts on 9th March and is a fun four-week course where you will learn how to cook from scratch on a budget

and master the basics.

The ongoing Creative Writing course welcomes new members, and the Partnership's Fáilte Isteach project offers conversational English classes for people from new communities.

Starting after Easter there will be a Yoga course with a focus on relaxation and meditation and a six-week Parenting Adolescents programme.

You need to have access to a smart phone,

tablet or laptop/computer and internet access to take part but if you do not, contact the Partnership as they may be able to help you with this.

To qualify to attend these free courses, you must be living in Bray, Delgany, Greystones, Kilcoole, Kilmacanogue, Newcastle Lower or Newtownmountkenedy, and certain other qualifying criteria may apply - find out more at

www.brayareapartnership.ie or call the Partnership on 01 286 8266. The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development and co-funded by the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.

Community biodiversity training offered by Wicklow Partnership

Are you interested in making your community more biodiversity friendly? Would you like a plan and guide on how to improve the biodiversity of your local area? Are you a member of a community group who is looking to upskill and learn how to protect and enhance the biodiversity around you?

Community biodiversity training is being offered for towns, villages and communities in Co. Wicklow. This is being organised by County Wicklow Partnership and the Heritage Office of Wicklow County Council. It is being funded by the LEADER Rural Development Programme.

Any one can get involved. Wicklow Partnership would like to hear from Community Development Groups, Tidy Towns, Mens Sheds, Sporting Groups, Pure Mile groups, Residents groups, Youth Groups and any other interested groups in your local area.

Please go to wicklowpartnership.ie to fill out an expression of interest form.

More information is available at Wicklowpartnership.ie. Expression of interest form should be received by 12th March at 2pm. Or email smehigan@wicklowpartnership.ie



A walker braves Bray seafront on a recent stormy morning. Photo by Joe McQuillan

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Anxiety and confusion over vaccine roll out

Shoreline Leisure Centre in Greystones has now been selected as the Covid-19 vaccination centre for North Wicklow. Originally Charlesland Golf Club was selected as the vaccination centre but that deal collapsed.

In the south of the county, Arklow Bay Hotel has been chosen as a second vaccination centre. The west of the county will be served by centres in Punchestown and City West.

However, the vaccine centres are simply in addition to the service being provided by GPs and pharmacies across the county.

The announcement came as the number of vaccines administered is expected to surpass 500,000 this week.

And the vaccinations for over-85s will be completed this week, while the vaccination of 80-84-year-olds will also begin.

In addition, those with specific medical conditions such as cancer and chronic kidney disease and the immunocompromised will begin to be vaccinated from next week, March 8th.

Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly said: "I'm delighted to see our network of vaccine centres being rolled out across the country."

"They will complement the services already being provided by our GPs and pharmacies."

"We have consistently had one of the best roll-

out rates in the EU and these centres will help us to continue that good record.

"We are making real progress but I would just ask the public to keep holding firm so we can continue to push the Covid numbers down."

Chief Executive Officer for Shoreline Leisure, Dominic Gunshenan, said he is delighted they are able to help in the fight against Covid.

"We are proud to assist the HSE in any way with the roll-out of the Covid vaccination programme. The double sports hall located within Shoreline is the ideal venue to carry out the most important function it has ever been called upon to complete."

This follows the collapse last week of a deal

to use the former Charlesland Golf Club as a centre.

There will be 10 booths and a capacity of 1,200 per day, meaning 33,600 per month.

Independent councillor Tom Fortune has criticised the Government's rollout of the Covid-19 vaccine, saying that there is a "big lack of consistency with supplies to clinics, which is affecting the care of some frontline staff".

Speaking about the vaccine rollout Cllr Fortune said "There has been a fantastic turnaround with making the vaccines. But rollout is a bit of a disaster. Europe is coming across as not being up to the task at hand. The European project costs a lot of money. We must get 1st class skill sets from them, that is not happening. Many people's lives are at risk here, what we getting is not good enough. We need urgent action not press statements."

"People are being paid salaries at corporate CEO levels, we must get far better service. There is a tendency to be focused on all kinds of habitats nowadays which is all good. But



Jennifer Whitmore TD

come on, let's give the human habitat some real priority." Social Democrats TD Jennifer Whitmore said there is anxiety and confusion regarding the vaccine roll out in Wicklow.

Deputy Whitmore says, "a number of constituents have been in touch with me about the process of rolling out the vaccine in Wicklow including one woman who was due to receive the jab only to be told her appointment was cancelled at the last minute without any explanation as to why. Others have reported being told they won't get the vaccine for another two weeks which for very elderly people is a very worrying thing to hear especially when

they may be unwell in the first place.

"The roll out programme is coming across as hit and miss to people and they are looking for clarity as well as certainty to how vaccines are being carried out. The Government needs to step up here and outline exactly what the process is for vaccine roll out, where people can access it and if there are supply issues, and whether people can get them in alternative settings. People need to know when they can follow up on any cancellations and get information on rescheduling appointments."

"With two vaccine centres located in Wicklow clarity and further information will be vital in the smooth running of mass vaccinations especially as we begin vaccinating the general public."

"I will be seeking answers from the Minister of Health and pushing for greater clarity and information so that everyone is informed and prepared as the roll out of vaccination continues," concluded Deputy Whitmore.

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Cllr Tom Fortune

COVID-19 vaccinations are underway.

They're already bringing hope to our communities.

As more people are vaccinated, this should help reduce the harm caused by COVID-19.

- 1 If you're aged **85 or over**, you will be offered a free COVID-19 vaccine next. This starts from 15th February 2021, continuing as vaccines are supplied to the HSE.
- 2 You don't need to register in advance. As soon as your vaccine is available, your GP will let you know. After this group, people aged 80 and over, 75 and over, and 70 and over will be offered a vaccine in turn.
- 3 All vaccines are tested before they are approved for use in Ireland.
- 4 If you have questions about your COVID-19 vaccine, we have answers you can trust on [hse.ie](https://www.hse.ie)
- 5 Or you can call **HSElive on 1850 24 1850**



Visit [hse.ie](https://www.hse.ie)



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Cllr Jodie Neary in Darcy's Field, Greystones

Cllr Neary welcomes name change of new park at Marina Village

Social Democrats Cllr for Greystones, Delgany, Kilcoole and Newcastle has welcomed the change of name of the new park by the Marina Village in Greystones. Currently, the official name of the new park is Coastal Linear Park however, the area before it was development was colloquially known as 'Darcy's Field'.

Cllr Neary says "After speaking with members of the public a number of months ago I realised there was no colloquial or agreed name for the new park at the Marina. I thought this was something that could be addressed by proposing to the Council that a new agreed name be assigned.

"While I wanted the name change to go out to public consultation particularly with local secondary schools, it was agreed that due to the cumbersome nature of public consultations and the need to act quickly ahead of new signage being developed for the park it was unanimously agreed that Councillors would decide on the new name.

"Several names were suggested including Marina or Harbour Park, Jubilee and Castle Park, but we settled on Darcy's Field due to the history of the site which used to be a field and was used by football clubs as well as a popular hangout for young people back in the day.

"It was suggested that this name would unite past associations with the site for residents who have been here a longer time, and new residents in the area including at Marina Village. It will also help to mark a new relationship with the area which has had a contentious history, one I hope marks a positive future" concluded Cllr Neary.

Council makes funding commitment for feasibility study for West Wicklow swimming pool

Social Democrats TD Jennifer Whitmore has welcomed the publication of Wicklow County Councils' Capital Plan which has listed as a priority a pool for West Wicklow and committed to €50,000 towards a feasibility study for the project.

The Capital Plan includes a list of large-scale infrastructural projects to be prioritised for the next three years, if and when funding is made available.

Deputy Whitmore welcomes the development saying "The Capital Plan has designated the pool for west Wicklow a priority project depending on the availability of funding. The Plan also commits to €50k towards a feasibility study in conjunction with the Pool for West Wicklow Committee, and will further progress this much needed project.

"I'm delighted with this renewed commitment by

Wicklow County Council and acknowledge the efforts made to date and in particular by the Pool for West Wicklow campaigners and local sports groups.

"This will no doubt add more certainty to campaigners from the Pool for West Wicklow campaign and other local sports groups I've met with over the years who have been highlighting the recreational deficit in West Wicklow for a long time.

"A pool and recreational centre for west Wicklow won't just benefit Blessington, but the wider area and will provide physical, mental and social benefits for people of all ages and abilities. This in turn will help stimulate local economies too. I am eager to see this project progress and will continue to work closely with the Pool for West Wicklow campaign as well as local sports groups and supporters" concludes Whitmore.

Calls for major investment to support population growth in Greystones

Cathaoirleach of Greystones Municipal District Cllr Derek Mitchell has called for major infrastructural development to support all of the new houses being built in the area.

Nearly 1000 houses have been approved in the past year in Greystones Municipal District yet many infrastructure items have been pending since 2004. "Since Christmas I have been lobbying hard to ensure that the Council items are built quickly so the area can cope," he said.

"The Delgany to Blacklion Cycleway & Road has been waiting for the CPO since July, this is very frustrating. As for the N11 to Kilcoole link at Garden Village, this short stretch would take trucks out of Kilcoole Main Street going to the busy Industrial Estates, and would also help

Druids Glen access, Garden Village & the footpath to Kilcoole. Again, no progress so far. Delgany Church Road needs an improved path, and improved or new paths are needed around the big Farrenkelly development on the R761 and Priory Road. Delgany needs a better playground, community facilities, crèches, Enterprise Centre, Arts Centre, and Public Realm improvements.



Cllr Derek Mitchell

"I am hoping that most of these will be included in the shortly to be released Capital Plan."

Social Democrats councillor for Greystones Municipal District Jodie Neary has been calling for a community audit to identify shortcomings in the provision of numerous community facilities in the area as a result of unprecedented population growth.

"I have been calling for a community audit for a while now due to the

increased number of young families moving to the area. While this is very welcome, it means the needs of the area have changed and there is now huge demand on existing community facilities while more community facilities needed to address rising demand. As the town expands, there are parts of Greystones including Delgany and north Greystones still without access to playgrounds or public green spaces within walking distance," said Cllr Neary.

"As population continues to grow with new



Cllr Jodie Neary

housing developments on board, the lack of community facilities will likely be in contravention of the Local Area Plan which requires "that active open spaces be provided at a rate of 2.4ha per 1,000 population". I have asked that this be looked at by Wicklow County Council and I'm glad to hear that the Chief Executive and Directors are considering the needs of the area and what community facilities may be required.

"I hope the needs of all children, young people and adults of all abilities will be considered including inclusive playgrounds, children too old for playgrounds, children and young people not into sports and safe teen spaces for those young people who want a safe place to hang out locally.

"I look forward to seeing what the Council proposes and will work closely with them to see how the changing needs of our area can be catered to," concluded Cllr Neary.

BANKS TO CLOSE

Continued from Page 1

"As soon as the announcement was made, I wrote to the Chair of the Finance Committee to seek an urgent meeting with representatives from Bank of Ireland. I expect that this meeting will take place before the end of this month, and I look forward to engaging with the bank's representatives on behalf of the constituents impacted.

"We need to ensure that those employed in the banks are treated fairly and redeployed whenever possible. I will also seek to address the concerns of customers who in many cases will have been with the bank for decades. They need clear communication as to the next steps being taken by the bank. It is positive that Bank of Ireland customers may be able to use An Post facilities for many services but communicating this, reducing disruption and engaging with their customers must be prioritised by Bank of Ireland.

"I accept that many people do their banking almost exclusively

online and may not be impacted by the news, but we also must be cognisant of people, particularly those from an older generation who depend on having a branch in their town. These branches in Carnew, Tinahely and Rathdrum are not due to close until September, so Bank of Ireland have 6 months to get this transition right. "With the loss of these three branches by Bank of Ireland and the recent news that Ulster Bank will be pulling services completely, this will impact across all communities and businesses in Wicklow. I hope that the meeting with the Finance Committee will be confirmed in the coming days but I will continue to push for the bank to appear before the committee to answer key questions relating to how this will impact their customers," concluded Deputy Matthews.

Speaking on the issue Deputy Whitmore said "The closure of these branches will have an adverse impact on these rural areas which have already been negatively affected by the last

recession and the current pandemic. These closures will only continue the trend of rural decline as banking facilities will not longer be made available. In turn, the retreat of this essential service will reduce foot traffic in the area which will also impact on the local economy.

"As the State is the largest shareholder of the Bank, Bank of Ireland it has an obligation to consider its community role here and must engage with the communities affected in Rathdrum, Tinahely and Carnew before any such closures are considered.

"I am dismayed that the timeline for closures is this coming September after a planned reopening of the economy is due to take place following mass vaccination. Making the decision now whether to close in future or not is premature and I believe the communities affected must be fully consulted from here on out. I have written to the Minister for Finance on the matter and hope to hear how he will support the communities affected" concluded Whitmore.

The National Framework for Living with COVID-19



Coronavirus
COVID-19
National
Programme

Safe Reopening of Schools & Childcare

Thanks to continued adherence to public health restrictions, we can now plan for reopening of schools and childcare on a phased basis.

Phased Reopening is planned as follows:



**1
March**

Special Schools at 100% capacity

Junior & Senior Infants
First and Second Class

Final Year Leaving
Certificate Classes

**8
March**

Early Childhood Care
and Education

**15
March**

3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th
class at Primary Level

5th year post-primary

**29
March**

Early Learning &
Care, and School-age
Childcare

**12
April**

1st to 4th years
post-primary

COVID-19 is still a threat. A careful, gradual reopening of our society will protect our communities while we await supplies of COVID-19 vaccines.

In the meantime, financial supports for individuals and businesses will continue up to the end of June. Wellbeing and mental health supports also continue.

Current Level 5 restrictions will continue unchanged until Monday 5th April.

The following key factors will be reviewed weekly and will guide the lifting of restrictions after 5th April:



Controlling the Virus
We must continue to reduce infection rates in our homes and communities.



Decreasing Hospitalisations
We must continue to reduce the pressure on our health system and front line workers.



Securing Vaccine Supply
Vaccine supplies are organised on an equitable, EU-wide basis. Once supplied, vaccines are delivered swiftly in accordance with a carefully planned schedule.



Managing New Variants
New variants can have an impact on the course of the disease. Surveillance and monitoring of emerging variants will continue during phased reopening.

We must continue to reduce the pressure on our health system and front line workers.



Remember, we are still at Level 5 which requires that we stay at home, with limited exceptions.



Clean your hands often. Use soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand rub.



Wear a face-covering in indoor spaces, on public transport and outdoors wherever you see people gathered. Ensure that your face-covering is clean.



Always keep a distance of 2 metres from others.

More detailed information is available at gov.ie/COVID19
If you need to talk, free text HELLO to 50808 to start a conversation



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Landslide at North Beach in Greystones

Cliff walk closed after landslide

It was necessary to close the Cliff Walk between Bray and Greystones over the weekend due to a number of landslides as the cliff has become unstable in parts due to the prolonged period of very heavy rainfall on top of the very wet preceding months of January and February. Some of the landslides are visible from the walk but others are not and are considered dangerous as those using the walk would not be aware of same.

Wicklow County Council stated that "The landslides are being caused by surface water runoff from all of the lands above the walk. This situation is mainly occurring on the Greystones side of Bray Head where the walk is on the soft fine clay that is easily eroded by water and not on the Bray side where it is mostly on the exposed rock of the head. "Short term, it is necessary to close the walk as the cliff face is unstable. Please note that attempts to close the walk due to previous lockdowns have been problematic, as some walkers ignored notices and barriers. The co-operation of the public is requested during this temporary closure in the interests of health & safety.

"In the medium term the Council is assessing the situation to determine the extent of the collapse and possibilities for remedial action and investigating the feasibility of

an alternative route as a diversion over the most hazardous section and are arranging to put in place measures for the short-term protection of the public."

Sinn Féin TD John Brady has expressed concerns about other sections of the Bray-Greystones Cliff Walk following the landslide.

Deputy Brady said "I have serious concerns that further landslides could take place along this particular section of the Cliff walk. There is a 100m section that's really unstable along where the landslide took place that impacted on the actual walkway. It is very evident from the beach that a number of further landslides have taken place and the cliff face is unstable.

"The council has to be commended for taking immediate action to ensure the public's safety is protected. We must however ensure that the opening of the Cliff

walk is protected long-term.

"The East Coast Erosion study in which Iarnród Éireann commissioned ARUP to look at erosion rates along the coast between Ringsend and Arklow was recently published, the report also proposed solutions. In the report it is proposed to carry out Beach nourishment and a detached breakwater system at the Greystones North Beach area. This work however may be many years away and I fear this section of the walk will be well washed away by then.

"I believe the council must be proactive, and all measures need to be looked at, including moving the walk away from the cliff edge at this location. This may require the council engaging the adjoining landowner with a view of acquiring some land to allow this happen. This is a well-loved amenity and tourist attraction and it needs to be protected into the future."

Local brothers start petition to rewild National Park

A petition to rewild Wicklow Mountains has so far attracted almost 6,000 supporters in just a few weeks. It was started by brothers Danny, Simon and Ian Alvey originally of Wicklow Town.

It is in response to a press release from Fáilte Ireland in conjunction with the Office of Public Works (OPW), National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Coillte along with the National Monuments Service and Wicklow County Council on a Masterplan for the park.

"Rewilding the world around us by restoring habitats and improving biodiversity is an urgent and topical issue in the face of twin climate and biodiversity crises," said Danny from his home in Newtownmountkenedy.

"My brothers and I have spent our lives hiking and walking in Wicklow and can see how wildlife has been in decline. When we heard about a proposed masterplan for the park we were disappointed to see no mention of addressing this issue but rather a focus on the 'visitor experience' by building more car parks, roads and walking trails. Anyone who regularly visits the Wicklow Mountains, will agree it is a National Park in name only, instead the landscape is dominated by Sitka spruce plantations that are regularly clear felled for commercial gain. Anyone who

walks through the deathly silence of one of these monoculture woods will know that these plantations do not contribute to biodiversity or the 'visitor experience'."

The petition calls on the Minister of State for Heritage, Malcolm Noonan, to prioritise the removal of Sitka spruce plantations from within the protected boundaries of the park and the restoration of native woodland and other native habitats. It has

been shared widely on social media in community fora and by local Tidy Towns groups and councillors.

Older brother Simon, now living in Rathdrum, said: "During lockdown everyone has been walking and exercising outside much more and last year visitor numbers to the National Park increased considerably. Anyone who travels from one end of the park to the other will know there is no true wilderness left and we need to change this by creating and growing a zone for native woodland and other habitats in the centre. We welcome other

aspects of this proposed plan to improve the 'visitor experience' by building new infrastructure and dispersing visitors to different sites across the park, but the true 'visitor experience' begins with the condition of the land and its flora and fauna and integral to this process must be an active management plan for improving biodiversity."

Public consultation on the masterplan is currently underway and the brothers urge the people of Wicklow to share their views and sign their petition on change.org (just search 'rewild').



Wicklow brothers Danny and Simon Alvey.

Harris seeks Social Audit of Delgany after An Bord Pleanala decision

Wicklow Fine Gael Minister Simon Harris TD has expressed his disappointment with the decision issued by An Bord Pleanala in respect of the new housing scheme proposed for the grounds of the Carmelite Convent in Delgany.

Minister Harris said "I am disappointed that this decision did not address issues we all constructively raised around our public services, local infrastructure, school places, etc. We all appreciate the need for housing. We were attempting to constructively engage to ensure this was gotten right".

The Minister added "I now intend to do everything I can to assist in making sure the key issues we highlighted are addressed in terms of school places, traffic, playground and community facilities, etc.

"In light of An Bord Pleanala's decision I have written to the Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council requesting a Social Audit be carried out in Delgany concerning the additional needs imposed on the community for School Places, Public Transport, Road Infrastructure and amenities.

"In view of the work underway to prepare the County Development Plan I have asked the Chief Executive to meet me urgently on this. It is anticipated that the first draft of the County Development Plan will be published next month and there will be an opportunity by members of the public to make submissions.

"A Social Audit of Delgany's needs will allow the community make more informed submissions as part of the County Development plan to information the Council's Planners in their work".

Calls for Council to apply to OPW for funding of temporary flood relief measures at The Breaches

Minister Simon Harris TD has called upon Wicklow County Council to apply to the Office of Public Works (OPW) for funding for temporary flood relief measures at the Breaches in Kilcoole and Newcastle.

Minister Harris said "There has been a number of near misses in recent weeks as regards blockages at the Breaches and the possibility of local homes being flooded.

"This week I met with my colleague the Minister for Public Works regarding the need for the OPW to fund temporary flood prevention works to keep the Breaches clear until a long term flood defence scheme can be put in place.

"The prevailing easterly winds over the past

month has made the task of keeping The Breaches clear exceptionally difficult. I would like to thank Irish Rail and the Owner of Newcastle Aerodrome for the works they undertook to clear the blockages and prevent local homes being flooded.

"The OPW recently appointed an Engineering Consultant to examine a viable long-term flood defence scheme for the Breaches. While this is welcome, this examination will not be complete until the summer.

"In the meantime, I have requested a meeting with the CEO of Wicklow County Council and asked that the County Council apply to the OPW for funding towards temporary ongoing remedial works to keep The Breaches clear until such time as a permanent flood defence is in place."

An introduction to the Codling Wind Park project



Dear community members,

I would like to begin by introducing myself. My name is Arno Verbeek and I am Project Director for the Codling Wind Park project, a proposed offshore wind farm approximately 13km off the coast of Wicklow, between Greystones and Wicklow Town.

Codling Wind Park could provide enough locally-produced, low-cost renewable electricity to power the equivalent of up to 1.2 million Irish homes. This will make a significant contribution to the Irish Government's commitment to generating 70 per cent of Ireland's electricity from renewable energy by 2030. It will also go a long way towards enhancing Ireland's energy security, by reducing our dependence on imported energy.

Together with an excellent team of 40 people with expertise across a range of technical, environmental and social disciplines, we are currently in the early stages of planning what could be Ireland's flagship offshore wind project. Throughout 2021 we will be undertaking a range of site investigation works and offshore surveys to help us prepare an environmental impact assessment of the proposed project. This will be in preparation for a planning application, which we hope to submit at the end of this year or early next year.

"It is important to us that you, the local communities, are involved in the project and help us to shape it."

As we progress this work, we will be engaging regularly and openly with local communities and providing several opportunities for you to view our plans and provide feedback. I am writing this letter to you today to make you aware that the first of these opportunities is about to begin.

For a four-week period starting on Monday, March 1, you will be able to learn more about the project, ask

questions and provide your feedback to us, which is most important. Below you will find specific details on the timings and ways of accessing this engagement and consultation process.

Though nationally significant, Codling Wind Park will also be a local project and it is important to us that you, the local communities, are involved in it and help us to shape it.

This is the first of many opportunities you will have to see how our project is progressing and to share your feedback with us. As Covid-19 restrictions ease in the months ahead, we hope to return to face-to-face meetings and to also have physical exhibitions at a range of local venues. I look forward to meeting with many of you as part of these future engagements.

Codling Wind Park is at the start of its journey. I hope you will be part of this journey with us so that together we can create something that benefits Wicklow and Ireland for generations to come.

Yours faithfully,

Arno Verbeek

Arno Verbeek
Project Director
Codling Wind Park

Virtual Codling Wind Park Exhibition

Accessible via the project website, www.codlingwindpark.ie, this online exhibition will contain a number of exhibition boards with information about different aspects of the project. It will also contain some useful visuals, such as a map of the project site and early stage, indicative photomontages of the wind turbines from a range of coastal locations, and information for you to download and read at a later date. Finally – and most importantly – it will contain a feedback survey, through which you can provide us with your thoughts on the project to date.

This will be live from Monday, March 1 and will run until Sunday, March 14.

Codling Wind Park Webinars

During these two webinars, senior representatives of the project will provide a live online presentation of different aspects of the project. Those who attend will be able to submit questions via the chat box in the webinar and as many of these questions as possible will be answered during the live session.

The webinars will take place on the following dates:

Tuesday March 9: 7-8pm
Thursday March 11: 7-8pm

Details on how to register are available on our website, www.codlingwindpark.ie.

Information Clinics

We realise that having viewed the virtual exhibition, you may have some questions. To discuss these, members of the project team will be available for virtual calls with individuals and organisations between March 15 and March 27.

Appointments – including some in the evening and at the weekend – can be booked using our online calendar on www.codlingwindpark.ie. To book by phone, call our Community Liaison Officer **Liz Dillon on 087 101 1473**.

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BIFE staff and students visiting IT Tallaght. (BIFE have a formal 'Access to Higher Education' agreement with IT Tallaght and a number of other IT's).

Three new jobs in three weeks: how National Learning Network scored the perfect hat-trick

A year ago, Cian (not his real name) struggled to get a job. His anxiety and chronic shyness meant he struggled to get past the interview stage.

Then Intreo - the public employment service - referred him to National Learning Network in Bray and it was there he found the support he needed.

Working with his instructor on the job seeking programme, a good work placement was negotiated for Cian. The instructor acted as his support in conversations with the employer.

One of the key features of the job seeking course - Employer Based Training - is that the employer agrees to a training plan for the student so the student gets the most out of the placement.

The placement was a success and Cian integrated well with the other workers and gained a confidence he hadn't had before.

With his enhanced CV and new positive attitude he landed a great job last week with a local employer - in the middle of the Covid pandemic.

National Learning Network's local manager Deborah Coughlan says: "three students got jobs in the past three weeks. That's an amazing performance from the team here. It's the combination of determined job seekers and expert supportive training instructors that make these results happen".

National Learning Network is funded by the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB) to provide training and education to people who live with physical or mental health difficulties, or who need-

ed extra support in school because of a learning difficulty.

According to Deborah there has been an increase in young people applying to their programmes who have dropped out of school because of anxiety.

She sees re-engaging in education as critical. "School is not for everyone, some young people just want to leave it behind and get a job but they struggle with their anxiety, lack of learning and confidence and so that doesn't work for them either. That's where we can help.

"Cian says we opened the doors for him and the rest was up to him and no matter how tough he found being in the workplace initially, he knew he had the support of his instructor."

National Learning Network has a range of courses for job seekers and those who want to resume their education and get qualifications.

College Choice - Keep Your Options Open with BIFE

BIFE Open Afternoon - Wednesday 10th March (4pm - 6pm)

Bray Institute of Further Education is full steam ahead preparing for the new academic year and a return, hopefully, to relative normality in September after the unprecedented nature of the last year with COVID-19 restrictions.

BIFE, as the largest Colleges of Further & Higher Education and Training in the Wicklow/Wexford area, has always maintained a strong relationship with local industry and have identified emerging demands in key areas nationally. They have met these ever increasing and challenging demands from a diverse group of stakeholders by re-developing part of their institute over the past number of years. Now, the huge range of courses available at BIFE offers learners fabulous opportunities, for those not only looking for additional skills or hoping to go directly into employment, but also as an alternative route on to a college course in a university or Institute of technology in Ireland or abroad.

Their Virtual Open Afternoon next Wednesday 10th March from 4pm to 6pm will showcase the large variety of courses they have in the College ranging from Art & Design, Media, Sport, Psychology, Body Therapies, Science, Business, Nursing, Theatre/Dance and much more. "We have over 70 full-time courses to choose from, all progressing on to Higher Education Institutes in Ireland and abroad", according to Deputy Principal Gabriel Allen. "Further Education offers a learner, who may not have achieved the required CAO points, the opportunity to gain advanced entry onto honours degree programmes. Therefore, it is important to keep your options open and apply for a BIFE course now.

BIFE are introducing the following new courses this September:

- * Traditional Irish & Folk Music Performance - BTEC HND Level 6+
- * Brewing & Distilling Technology - QQI Level 5
- * Emergency Care Studies (Pre-paramedic, Fire & Ambulance) - QQI Level 5
- * Barista, Pastry & Baking - C&G/QQI Level 5
- * Tour Guiding - QQI Level 6

Over the past few years, graduates of BIFE have

achieved honours degrees across a wide range of programmes, opening up a myriad of career opportunities from graphic design to performing arts to psychology.

This year BIFE will offer Higher National Diplomas in the following:

- * Fine Art - Art Practice
- * Acting
- * Dance
- * TV & Film (Moving Image)
- * Music Production
- * Music Performance
- * Applied Social Studies
- * Graphic Design
- * Fashion Design

As Gabriel Allen explained, "These nine courses will allow graduating students to proceed to the final year of an honours Degree Programme in Ireland or Britain"

"Work Experience is an important part of all our courses. All BIFE students have the opportunity to participate in our Erasmus+ programme where they can complete their work experience in European countries such as Spain, Portugal, Finland, Poland and the Czech Republic."

Allen assured that there are many opportunities for mature students to study and progress at BIFE. "All courses have valuable certification and offer progression routes to Higher Education, yet you don't need CAO points to study at Bray Institute."

Applicants can find the Open Afternoon links (Wednesday 10th March from 4pm - 6pm) on the homepage of their website www.bife.ie. Just go to the course that you are interested in and click the open day link for that course. Full details of the above courses are available on their website. Applicants can apply online. There will be no interview this year for most of their courses due to COVID. There is no application fee.

Observation on West Wicklow wind farm application submitted

Social Democrats TD Jennifer Whitmore has submitted an observation to Wicklow County Council highlighting concerns in relation to an application for the development of a wind farm in West Wicklow. ABO Wind has submitted a planning application to develop a number of wind turbines near Baltinglass affecting the townlands of Kilranelagh, Colvinstown Upper and Boleycarrigeen.

Deputy Whitmore outlined in her submission:

"The archaeological quality of the area is vulnerable to large scale development and can be easily compromised. Kilranelagh Hill is an integral part of one of Ireland's most unique and ancient landscapes, the Baltinglass Hillfort Complex. Given the reference to this area in the County Development Plan, the potential for further excavation and other archaeological finds as well as the lack of sufficient reference to the

Hillfort Complex as a whole, I believe much greater consideration of this context must be given by the Council.

"There are also broader environmental and ecological concerns associated with this type of development. Kilranelagh is a refuge for flora and fauna and in close proximity to numerous rivers and streams. According to local community groups and residents, buzzards and peregrines are a daily sight over Kilranelagh and curlews have nested there recently. I would



Jennifer Whitmore TD

have concerns that if development is not carried out sustainably with the full environmental impact considered, this could have negative impacts on the archaeological value of the area.

"Furthermore, potential for sustainable tourism as well as educational and economic benefits from the archaeological value of Hill Fort area (including Kilranelagh) has not been fully appreciated to date. In absence of this I would urge the Council to proceed with caution in relation to this development until the full potential of the area has been considered and until it has been confirmed that any large-scale development would not compromise the culture heritage of this area."

Need training to get a job?

Employer Based Training-Job Seeking at National Learning Network in Bray is a free flexible training course with both online and on-the-job learning to give you the real-life skills you need to get and keep a job.

If you have had an illness, injury or have a disability and need extra support, this course offers you the personalised support you need to get a job and a QQI Qualification.

This course is funded by KWETB and eligibility criteria apply.

Find out more, contact us at:

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Garden Design
Furniture Design & Manu. Level 5
Furniture Design & Cabinet M. Level 6
Jewellery Making & design

MUSIC & COMPUTER GAMING

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Games Development
Music Production HND
Music Performance HND
NEW Traditional Irish & Folk Music Performance
Sound Engineering
DJ Techniques & Music Production

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Sports Injury & Soft Tissue Massage Therapy

SOCIAL STUDIES & APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

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Early Learning & Care - Advanced
Social Studies & Community Care
Applied Health & Social Care HND
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Arklow councillors launch Online Archive for St Gabriel's cemetery

Cllr Paul O'Brien from Wicklow joined Arklow Municipal District Councillors Pat Kennedy, Sylvester Bourke, Pat Fitzgerald, Miriam Murphy, and Tommy Annesley were in attendance to announce the launch of St. Gabriel's Cemetery Online Archive. Cllr Peir Leonard was unable to attend.

Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council, Cllr. Pat Kennedy, said: "I'm delighted to announce that funding has been secured to proceed with the developing of an online archive of St. Gabriel's Cemetery. I'm thrilled that this is now going to be done as I've been working closely with Cllr. Paul O'Brien from the Wicklow Municipal District after the successful completion of a similar project in Rathnew cemetery".

Cllr. O'Brien added "This is something I had been working on for over a year in conjunction with the County Council for the cemetery in Rathnew. The response has just been overwhelming, so when Cllr. Kennedy approached me to assist him with doing the same for Arklow, I was only too delighted to do so".

Cathaoirleach of the Arklow Municipal District, Cllr. Sylvester Bourke, said: "This is all thanks to an anonymous donor who came for-

ward with a substantial amount of money after they saw how successful the survey was in Rathnew."

All the graves will now have to be photographed & all the details logged onto irish-graveyards.ie. When that is complete all the information will go live in order to allow people make any alterations.

Then in the coming months the company will supply the council with signs and maps to be erected in the cemetery.

It is believed that the survey will commence as soon as the current restrictions are eased. Members of the public can visit the Irish Graveyards website, type in the name of the person they are looking for and all the details of that person will be found including dates, plot, section, and a photograph of the grave.

The details will be inputted as accurately as possible although there will be a mechanism to report inaccuracies.

Cllr Kennedy concluded by saying "I'd like to thank the anonymous donor for their very generous donation. I also want to thank Wicklow County Council for providing the balance of the funding required to make this possible and Cllr. O'Brien for his assistance."

Public consultation on Codling Wind Park opened

The first phase of public consultation on the Codling Wind Park project - a proposed offshore wind farm approximately 13 kilometres off the Wicklow coast between Greystones and Wicklow Town - began on Monday March 1st.

With an expected capacity of up to 1,500 megawatts (MW), Codling Wind Park has the potential to supply the equivalent of up to 1.2 million Irish homes - 70% of all Irish households - with low-carbon, locally-produced, low-cost electricity, and to save almost 2 million tonnes of carbon emissions every year.

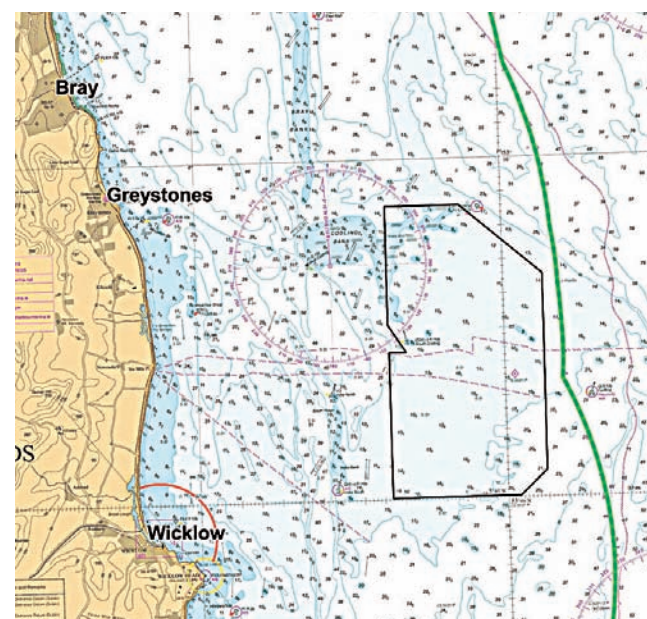
Representing one of the largest energy infrastructure investments in Ireland this decade, the project will deliver substantial benefits to the regional and national economy, including more than 1,000 construction jobs and 70 long-term, locally-based jobs.

Due to the current Covid-19 restrictions, face-to-face engagements are not possible and so a series of online consultation activities will take place from March 1st to March 27th. In addition to a two-week virtual exhibition, there will also be two webinars and a series of virtual information clinics to facilitate individual and small group meetings between community members and project representatives.

Further phases of consultation are planned for the summer and autumn, to share updated plans as the project progresses and provide further opportunities for feedback.

The virtual exhibition will display project plans as they currently stand, including indicative photomontages from a number of viewing points along the coast. It will showcase the important role Codling will play in helping Ireland to achieve its Climate Action Plan targets and set out the wide range of benefits that will arise from the project, including for local communities, as well as the wider benefits for the regional and national economy.

Codling Wind Park Project Director, Arno Verbeek said: "We are in the early stages of planning our project and this is the first of many opportunities people will have



Site map for the Codling Wind Park

to see our progress and provide their feedback. Listening to and engaging with the public is an important part of our journey. We want to deliver this project in partnership with the local communities and want them to feel involved in it at every stage.

"Feedback is an incredibly important part of this, and we hope that many people will take the time to view our initial plans and share their thoughts with us. This input will help us to shape and design the project in the months ahead."

The Codling Wind Park virtual exhibition can be accessed via the project website at www.codling-windpark.ie. Details of the webinars and information clinics, and how to register for them, are also available on the website. Information can also be obtained by contacting the project's Community Liaison Officer, Liz Dillon, on 087 1011473.

Social Democrats TD and party spokesperson for Climate Action Jennifer Whitmore has urged the public to engage in the Codling wind farm consultation process.

"I recently met with the Codling Wind Park team to get a sense of the scale and impact this development will have both on our renewable energy goals but also on local communities across Wicklow. At the meeting, I raised the need for full consultation with the public at each stage of development as well as the need for proper communication with local communities.

"I welcome this opportunity for the public to engage with and communicate directly with the company their concerns or issues they believe should be considered as the project develops. I also welcome the accessible format of the consultation process which includes a Virtual Codling Wind Park Exhibition, Codling Wind Park Webinars and information clinics which will help people to understand exactly what is involved in this large scale infrastructure project and how it will impact on Wicklow.

"People should also be aware of the huge potential the Community Fund will have and which will be developed alongside the development of the various wind parks due to be constructed. While details of the make-up of such a Fund are not yet drafted, now is a chance for local communities to input into what they believe should be prioritised.

"Many people and organisations will have environmental concerns regarding the construction of large scale turbines in the sea, something I am very much aware of and which I relayed to the team at our last meeting, and so I encourage environmentally conscious individuals and groups to have their say at this first phase of consultation and any forthcoming engagement with Codling Wind Park," concluded Deputy Whitmore.

Harris thanks parents for feedback on Wicklow School Places Survey

Minister Simon Harris has thanked the parents of Wicklow who responded to the online survey that he is conducting regarding the provision of school places in Wicklow.

Minister Harris said "I would like to thank everyone who to date has completed the survey. I am working intensively on increasing the capacity of our schools and seeking to progress a number of promised extensions, new buildings etc as we have a shortage of school places in the area. I am again meeting with the Department of Education's School Building Unit this week and the information parents have given me thus far is vital background information to assist me in making the case to the officials in the School

Building Unit of the urgency of the situation in North Wicklow regarding the provision of sufficient school places".

Minister Harris has sought a meeting between the five Wicklow TDs and the Minister for Education regarding the difficulties they have experienced engaging with the Dept of Education's School Building Unit. Writing to the Minister for Education regarding the announcement by the Department of Education that an additional 170 to 190 secondary school places need to be provided in the area of

Greystones/ Kilcoole for September 2021, Minister Simon Harris stated: "Over the past six months I along with the other Wicklow Oireachtas members have spent an enormous amount of time trying to impress upon the Forward Planning and Building Unit the crisis that has been developing in the provision of school places in the Greystones and Kilcoole areas.

The one consistent aspect of our engagement with the Forward Planning and Building Unit has been their confidence in their own data and assessment of the situation on the ground in North Wicklow and that the anxieties we were bringing to them on behalf of the community, school staff and boards

were merely anecdotal and would not be borne out by the facts".

The Minister expressed his annoyance at how the Forward Planning and Building Unit had not listened to the repeated joint pleas of all the Wicklow Oireachtas members and that the shortage of secondary school places for autumn 2021 is now huge and legitimate worry and annoyance across the community.

"I want to receive your views and feedback, so if you are waiting for a school place for your child or have concerns about school capacity in our community, I would be grateful if parents could take five minutes to share their information and thoughts".



Codling Wind Park Project Director, Arno Verbeek

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Shelly, Manami and Gian with their fully stamped Wicklow Passport and Wicklow Ambassador Certificate

From Asia to Wicklow: Meet Wicklow's Newest Ambassadors

Gian Santiago and his friends Shelly and Manami are Wicklow's latest ambassadors after successfully filling their Wicklow Passports with all 17 stamps in November and December 2020.

The Wicklow Passport, which is loosely inspired by the Camino in Spain, is a new initiative by Visit Wicklow. The idea behind the passport is to encourage locals and visitors to get outside and discover what is around them, by collecting stamps in various different places all over the county.

The passport stamps can be found in tourist spots, bars, outdoors adventure companies, restaurants, hotels and lodges all around Wicklow. Once you have 15 or more stamps, you receive an Ambassador Certificate, which is exactly what Gian, Shelly and Manami did.

Gian, who moved to Ireland in 2006 from The Philippines said: "I haven't really explored Ireland that much but after finishing our Wicklow Passport trip, it

gave me more things to look forward to and visit when we're finally able to travel again around the country."

They divided their Wicklow Passport mission into sections and started with Bray and Greystones, walking the cliff walk and collecting different stamps along the way.

On the second day they visited Blessington, Hollywood, Dunlavin, Baltinglass, Shillelagh, Tinahely, Aughrim.

On their last day they went to Newtown Mount Kennedy, Ashford, Wicklow Town, Avoca, Arklow.

Manami is from Japan and has been in Ireland since 2019 on a working holiday visa. She said doing these day trips not only gave her the opportunity to see beautiful places but also to meet new people. "If I hadn't

known about the Wicklow Passport, I probably would have missed lots of sights," Manami said.

Shelly, who has since returned to Taiwan along with her certificate, moved to Ireland to explore the rest of Europe.

Covid had coincided with Shelley's travel plans and her plans were suddenly changed- "the main purpose I am in Ireland is that I want to travel to Europe, but because of covid, I could only travel deeply within Ireland, and it surprised me how beautiful the scenery was."

The Wicklow Passport is a great way to encourage people to get outside and explore, meet new people, support local businesses and for Gian, Manami and Shelley, it made for a great souvenir!

Campaign to get Hydrotherapy pool in St Catherine's Special School

St. Catherine's Special School in Newcastle have a new school in the planning stages and have organised a campaign to raise funds for it to include a hydrotherapy pool.

So many community facilities are beyond the reach of many of their students but this would be a facility accessible to all. Many of their students who have moderate, severe and profound learning disabilities, would benefit greatly from a resource like this.

The hydrotherapy pool would help students with their sensory needs, physio needs and to help them relax.

It would be an amazing addition to a state of the art new school build - a school to be proud of. The school is seeking to raise €500,000. To make a donation, go to www.gofundme.com/f/hydrotherapy-pool-in-st-catherines-new-school.

Courthouse Arts Centre singing sessions

Traditional singer, Rachel Uí Fhaoláin will present The Courthouse Singing Sessions on Zoom and the free event will be live streamed on The Courthouse Arts Centre Youtube channel on Saturday, March 13th from 9pm to 11pm.

Special Guest on the night will be Daorí Farrell. Those wishing to sing and take part on the night please email Rachel at ceol-mochroi@gmail.com for login details. This promises to be a very special evening of traditional song so booking early is advised.

Laragh and Glendalough Tidy Towns Clean Up

"Our first clean up will start on March 6th, at 10am. With social distancing strictly followed by everyone participating. You can also help by working on your own garden, with biodiversity in mind, supporting ecological life by attracting insects/bees etc."

"It is that time of year again where we see an increase in rubbish and litter thrown around our beautiful woodland areas. We

urge any campers in the coming months of Summer to LEAVE NO TRACE (when the restriction of 5km is lifted). Camping is something enjoyed by many and we would not like to see this activity causing harm to wildlife and the environment."

Age & Opportunity

FitLine Age & Opportunity are delighted to announce that they are expanding their FitLine initiative in 2021 to reach more older adults right across the country. They are looking for more volunteer mentors, individuals or groups, to join our FitLine team, to help them deliver this very worthwhile initiative. FitLine, one of their Active programme initiatives, is a volunteer peer led telephone-based motivation line which encourages older adults to introduce physical activity into their daily lives. FitLine is designed to help people who want to feel a bit healthier but just don't have the motivation, confidence or information on where and how to take that first step. FitLine mentor volunteers are required to provide encouragement and ideas about how older adults can do simple physical activities as part of their day to day routine to suit their own lifestyle, and to provide information about clubs, groups and facilities in their own communities. Download and fill in the FitLine mentor volunteer application form at ageandopportunity.ie/about-age-and-opportunity/get-involved/

Rotary Ireland issues open invitation to people in Wicklow to join them for free day 'in'!

Rotary Ireland confirms its Virtual Conference 2021 will be open to public for free!

Wednesday 3rd March 2021. A medical emergency expert has warned that the race is on between the vaccines and the variants of the coronavirus and said its vital the most vulnerable people in society are vaccinated as quickly as possible before these variants begin to circle around.

Dr Ian Norton, a former head of the WHO's Emergency Medical Team Initiative in Geneva, who's from Cork, described vaccination as a privilege and urged people to get vaccinated.

"If you have the privilege of having access

to a vaccine please take it. There are so many other countries which don't have that privilege and when I see people not wanting to take it at home, I ask myself, do they really realise there are so many vulnerable populations in other parts of the world that have not got that privilege."

Dr Norton, founder of Respond Global, is based in Queensland, Australia and has previously led responses to Ebola, Diphtheria and measles outbreaks in various different countries. Dr Norton was speaking ahead of the Rotary Ireland Virtual Conference 2021 which takes place this Saturday.

Simply go to www.rotary.ie and click on the register for conference link

How much? It's free! But maybe you'll like what you see and consider joining your local Rotary club!

Worried about what happens to your pets if something happens to you?

Have you a plan in place for your pets should anything happen to you? The DSPCA's Pet Guardian Programme is a service available to loving pet owners across Ireland

Our pets are valued members of the family and it can be hard to think about what might happen them, should anything happen to you. The DSPCA's Pet Guardian Programme provides pet owners with peace of mind that ensures a solid plan is in place for a family pet(s) in the event of a death or becoming incapacitated.

When you sign up to the Programme, you are entrusting the care of your beloved pet(s) to the DSPCA at the time of your passing or move into residential care. We know it can be hard to think about, but it's important to make plans for your pet(s) in the event of a serious illness or death.

The Dublin Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (DSPCA), Ireland's oldest and largest animal welfare organisation, has re-launched their Pet Guardian Programme that is a free nationwide service for beloved pet owners.

Want to know more? Simply contact the DSPCA on our dedicated Pet Guardian Programme number 0860451756 or email petguardian@dspca.ie to receive your information pack.

Further details announced of virtual finale for The Story of Your Stuff competition

There is still time for Wicklow students to enter this year's EPA 'The Story of Your Stuff' competition and be in with a chance to claim the top prize - €500 for themselves and €500 for their school - as new details of the virtual finale event, held in partnership with the UCD Earth Institute, were announced last week.

Speaking at the announcement of the finale event, EPA Programme Manager, Dr Jonathan Derham said: "The finale of 'The Story of Your Stuff' is always a highlight in the EPA's calendar and I am delighted that a virtual event can take place this year. It is a wonderful opportunity to gain insight into the environmental and climate concerns of young people, and to see their creative expression of such concerns take centre-stage. There is still plenty of time to submit an entry and I would encourage students and teachers across County Wicklow to participate in this year's competition. Given the ongoing public health restrictions and school closures, it is a perfect activity to work on remotely and from home."

As part of the event, which is scheduled for April 2021, attendees will also hear from competition ambassador and candidate-astronaut, Dr Norah Patten. All shortlisted entries will be showcased, along with virtual demonstrations of research currently being undertaken at UCD - the EPA partner for this event. The event will culminate with the

announcement of the recipient of the Irish-language prize, the Climate Topic prize, and the overall winner of the top prize.

Now in its fifth year, the competition seeks to empower young people to make environmentally conscious decisions about their everyday 'stuff' and activities. Entrants are tasked with researching the life cycle of an everyday item or environmental impact of an activity, and creatively telling its story through a visual medium. Bringing together curiosity, creativity and science, it aims to get young people thinking about sustainability, climate action and environmental protection, spread the word among their friends and family and make lasting and impactful changes. The deadline for entries is Monday, 8th March 2021.

Full competition guidelines and tips are available at www.storyofyourstuff.ie. Entrants are encouraged to use the EPA's Ireland's Environment web resource, www.IrelandsEnvironment.ie when researching their project. The deadline for entries is Monday, 8th March 2021.

Council Launches 'Period Poverty' Initiative

Sanitary products are being made available free in the public toilets of Wicklow County Libraries and County buildings under a new initiative to tackle "period poverty."

Period poverty - loosely defined as not being able to afford to buy adequate supplies of sanitary products - is an ongoing issue and internationally, a number of countries have begun to supply products to school children free-of-charge.

Cllr Lourda Scott raised the issue at a recent Wicklow County Council meeting tabling a notice of motion that said: "Wicklow County Council notes a survey by Plan International Ireland showing that 50 per cent of Irish teenage girls find it difficult to afford period products and 61 per cent miss school as a result. Wicklow County Council acknowledges the work of organisations such as Homeless Period Ireland in collecting donated sanitary products and distributing to those in need".

Wicklow County Council responded to the issue by instigating a pilot scheme whereby sanitary products will be made available in the public bathrooms of each library and at County Buildings once they are back open to members of the public.

Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council, Cllr Pat Kennedy, praised the members of Community Cultural and Social Development section of Wicklow County Council for pursuing the pilot project and wished them every success with their endeavour.

Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council, Frank Curran, welcomed the initiative and highlighted the importance of the libraries playing a central role in the pilot.

Cllr Scott said: "Period products are an everyday item that should be available free-of-charge like toilet paper. Being unable to buy these products every month affects people's health, dignity and education and has been highlighted even more during Covid. There also still remains a stigma associated with periods and providing products in public buildings will go far to break this down, reminding people that this is a normal part of life."

"I'm delighted that Wicklow County Council has agreed to take positive action. This signals an important step on the way in restoring support and dignity to those who need it and reducing the shame around menstruation".



Cllr Lourda Scott with period products.

Funding for adult learners

Minister Simon Harris recently announced three projects in Wicklow will receive funding to help support education for adult learners.

They are; Vale of Avoca Men's Shed - Enhancing Members Lives; Bray Family Resource and Development Project CLG - New Ways of Learning; Wicklow Travellers Group - Funding for IT training and upskilling of Staff.

The funding to increase the participation of disadvantaged learners, particularly with the digital infrastructure including providing devices and software, and increasing their capacity to deliver online learning.

Speaking about the funding Minister Harris said: "We know that too many people in Ireland have difficulties with reading, with numbers or with digital skills. Some people may not have got the help they needed earlier in their lives, but what I want people to know is that there is friendly and non-judgemental help there for you now. There are services all

over Ireland which will gladly assist you with the skills you'd like to learn.

"One of the things that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted was educational inequality - be it a lack of devices like laptops or someone not having the connectivity to study online. The funding I am announcing today is specifically designed to tackle those inequalities and support access to community education."

"Education is for everyone, for all your life, and I am determined that my department will be part of building an inclusive Ireland where nobody is left behind."

The fund is aimed at supporting and engaging with disadvantaged learners, reaching out, encouraging and supporting learners to re-engage with education and training and attracting new learners to engage with education and training opportunities.

Crucially, it aims at helping build the digital infrastructure of providers, and their capability to ensure that online learning can be delivered in a way that meets the complex needs of all learners.

Wicklow community funding topped €4.64m in 2020

Grant funding of €4.64m was administered by Wicklow County Council's Community, Cultural & Social Development Directorate in 2020.

Wicklow did exceptionally well under the various Town & Village enhancement schemes in 2020, securing funding of €961,538 for 25 different projects spread across the county.

The Council's own Community Grants scheme paid out €200,000 to 300 groups while the Community Enhancement Programme saw €212,205 awarded to 163 different groups.

The 2020 Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme delivered €158,247 to nine projects under Measure 1 initiatives. Additional grant aid is expected under Measures 2 and 3.

The latest round of Rural Regeneration Development funding saw €2.67m allocated to regenerate the town of Baltinglass.

In the sports area, €41,000 was paid out to sporting clubs and initiatives in 2020, while €73,900 was allocated to Creative Ireland projects.

Under the Healthy Ireland initiative, €115,385 was allocated for Wicklow projects while Libraries received €145,619 specifically for COVID-19 expenditure.

The CLAR Programme delivered €60,000 to carpark projects in Knockananna and Askinagap.

Acknowledging this significant investment in the County, Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council, Cllr Pat Kennedy, paid tribute to the staff in the

Community, Cultural and Social Development directorate and to Minister for Rural & Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD, and her officials. Cllr Kennedy stated that these projects, spread across different communities throughout the county, will significantly enhance a large number of towns and villages and he congratulated all those involved.

Welcoming over €4.6m for projects in the County, the

Cathaoirleach of the Community, Cultural & Social Development Strategic Policy Committee, Cllr Gail Dunne, added his congratulations to all the community groups in the successful funding applications throughout 2020.

Wicklow County Council Chief Executive, Mr Frank Curran, added that the Council staff will continue to work in partnership with all groups in the county to advance even more projects in 2021.



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Maggie Pollard, aged 99, a resident at Firstcare Balinroe Lodge in Wicklow, who features in Valerie Cox's new podcast series on the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccine.

Wicklow residents feature in new podcast on vaccine rollout in nursing homes

Arklow's former harbourmaster, Tommy Myler, is among the residents of Blainroe Lodge in Wicklow who feature in the opening episode of a new podcast series chronicling the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccine in our nursing homes.

The series of six podcasts, presented by Wicklow journalist Valerie Cox, visits nursing homes across the Firstcare Nursing Home Group in Wicklow, Dublin and Kildare.

Residents talk about their lives during lockdown and the joy the vaccine brought, suddenly they feel safer and see a very positive future. Visits from family are so much closer now and they can begin to look forward to hugging their grandchildren again.

The podcasts also tell the stories of the care teams and the difficulties they encountered in keeping the residents safe and their own fears as they fought to stay Covid-free themselves.

There are nurses and carers who tell how they spent their days in heavy protective gear and who spent their evenings at a safe distance from their own families. Frank and honest, there were bad days and frightening days but the advent of a vaccine has changed everything.

But, most of all, this is a unique insight into the men and women who have made these care homes their own homes. They remember the lives they led as farmers, shopkeepers and tell golden stories from long ago. These are the people who made Ireland what it is today and who saw the nation thrive, people who raised families and who lived through tough times and survived.

They have now progressed to an active retirement and many of them are anxious to start going out into the community again.

"I think what really came across was how the residents see themselves as part of the local community and indeed many of them are living in the communities where they lived all their lives. And that community respects and appreciates their involvement and the interesting lives they have led. For many of them, Covid although unique, was just another challenge for people who have seen pretty much everything that life can throw at them," says Valerie Cox.

This is confirmed by John O'Donnell, Managing Director of the Firstcare Group: "Everyone hears the statistics but sometimes we forget that there are real



Journalist and podcast host Valerie Cox

people behind them, people who are resilient and positive. During the worst of days they were engaging in new activities and offering fellow residents and staff encouragement and friendship.'

In the first episode Valerie also talks to Director of Nursing at Blainroe Lodge, Louise Moran and residents Maggie Pollard (99) from Avoca and Charlotte Bestell (96) from Redcross.

The first episode of "Meet the newly-vaccinated residents" is available now at www.firstcare.ie.

Host 'Virtual Bake for Brain Injury' and raise funds to make a life-changing difference to brain injury survivors

Get ready to raise some dough during Brain Awareness Week this March to support the work of Acquired Brain Injury Ireland (ABII) and help 'bake' the world a better place!

This annual fundraising event usually takes place within community centres, schools, business and households in Wicklow and nationwide. However, in the context of Covid-19 and in light of public health guidance, ABII is asking its Wicklow supporters to take their bake virtual this year by hosting an online event or fundraiser between March 15th and 21st.

'Bake for Brain Injury' is an important event on the ABII calendar, enabling the national organisation to raise vital funds to support survivors of brain injury as they work to rebuild their lives.

Every year in Ireland an estimated 19,000 people acquire a brain injury, resulting in life-altering, dramatic change. These injuries happen suddenly and are often traumatic, caused by road traffic accidents, stroke, assaults, concussion and viral infections like meningitis. Because each brain injury is entirely unique, every survivor requires dedicated supports and a tailor-made rehabilitation plan.

Acquired Brain Injury Ireland offers that specialist care. As Ireland's leading provider of community rehabilitation for those aged 18-65, the organisation delivers person-centred rehabilitation to an estimated 1,200 people annually, as well as support to their families and carers.

Speaking about the upcoming 'Bake for Brain Injury' event Jonathan Power, Head of Fundraising at ABII, explained: 'The past 12 months have been an enormous challenge for us all, but our teams nationwide have done incredible work throughout the pandemic to keep rehabilitation alive for our service-users and to keep everyone safe and well.'

This March we're asking the public to celebrate our staff and brain injury survivors by hosting a virtual bake in support of the work they do every day. You might organise a video call with friends, family or colleagues where you can a cup of tea, a treat and a chat, or even bake up a storm on screen. This is about having fun and doing something

enjoyable for your brain, as well as for Acquired Brain Injury Ireland.'

Once participants have organised their virtual bake they are encouraged to set up a fundraising page on the website Justgiving. This will make it easy for others to donate online and show their support for your baking efforts, while also helping Acquired Brain Injury Ireland.

Brain Awareness Week is a global campaign to foster public enthusiasm and support for brain science. Nationally the campaign is led by the Neurological Alliance of Ireland together with 30 member organisations, all aiming to promote greater awareness and understanding of the brain and brain conditions, as well as the need for more investment in services, research and prevention.

'Virtual Bake for Brain Injury' is one of dozens of events organised as part of Brain Awareness Week 2021. On Tuesday March 16th, ABII in the Midlands will host an online webinar with clinical psychologist Dr Brian McClean, focusing on building positive brain health. For more information and to register for all events visit www.abiireland.ie

Tusla launches new backpack initiative for children coming into care

Tusla Child and Family Agency is launching a new pilot initiative to provide children coming into care with care backpacks to help them settle in to their new homes.

In 2020, over 600 children came into care for the first time. When a child comes into care, they may not have many of their own belongings with them. Social workers will often source items for children, who for different reasons may have few belongings from their family homes.

Tusla is committed to ensuring the participation of children and young people, and so to help children who find themselves in this difficult situation, Tusla worked with children with experience of care to find out what items they felt would have made a difference to them.

The children in care listed the items they felt

could have made a difference to them when they entered into care for the first time. Eager to make a difference in the lives of other children following in their footsteps, the Fora members worked with their local Tusla teams to bring their ideas to fruition. In particular, they wanted to include messages of hope in backpacks."

"When you come into care, you can feel stripped of everything you usually have, but getting one of these backpacks is like getting a small piece back of something you lost. When you give the backpack it is like giving them this 'normal' bag with the essentials that will help

them feel like any other kid. From the children who have been through it before, here's something that we hope will help," says Sean, who is one of the young members of a Tusla's Children in Care Fora that participated in this initiative.

Each backpack contains a number of items such as pyjamas, underwear, toiletries, a cuddly blanket and toy for young children, and a diary. Importantly, they also come with a message of care and hope. The provision of these backpacks will initially be piloted in two

Tusla areas - Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow and Dublin

South East/East Wicklow.

Teresa Doyle, Social Work Team Leader in Dublin Mid Leinster, commented: "No one can truly understand what it feels like to walk in the shoes of a child being received into care. Sometimes it is planned but more often it is not; either way, it can be traumatic, even for the most hopeful child. These bags are not the branding or labelling of a 'child who is in care', rather a message to that child that we care. They will offer any child, of any age, a little colour on the greyest of their days and a message of hope by the children with lived experiences, who have in fact walked in their shoes."

Calls for Minister to expedite Arklow Wastewater Plant

Jennifer Whitmore TD raised in the Dail recently the issue of ministerial consent required in order for the Arklow Wastewater Treatment Plant to commence.

Deputy Whitmore raised the issue during Topical Issue in the Dail with the Minister of State for Housing, Malcolm Noonan. Speaking in the Dail Deputy Whitmore said "Residents in Arklow have been eager to see progress being made on the Wastewater Treatment Plant for Arklow and Irish water has been working hard to do so, but it is now sitting on the Minister's desk."

"A proposal for sign off was sent in at the end of last year by Irish Water seeking Ministerial consent, but it has been three months since and still no sign of Ministerial sign off on the project. The project need this before funding can be fully committed to the project and for construction to commence."

"It's important that this

project is expedited and I ask that the Minister that a commitment be made to do this."

"While I welcome the Minister's response that Ministerial consent is currently under active consideration I am concerned that many more steps may be required before we can see that including close scrutiny required by multiple Departments and further information from Irish Water. While scrutiny is certainly required for a project of this size, the Wastewater Treatment Plant has been on the cards for many many years now and we cannot afford any more delays."

"This important infrastructure will not only benefit Arklow but for the county as a whole and will hugely improve the local environment as a result. I will keep the pressure on to ensure the project can be expedited as is reasonably possible," concluded Whitmore.

Speaking about the long awaited Arklow Wastewater Treatment Plant, Green Party TD Steven Matthews said "Irish Water expects construction work on the Arklow Wastewater Treatment Plant to begin in the second half of



Steven Matthews TD

2021. Both the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Public Expenditure are expediting their consideration of the capital funding required to support Irish Water's plans to commence construction. I look forward to working with my Government colleagues to see this project come to fruition for the people of Arklow and the surrounding areas."

As part of Budget 2021, thanks to huge efforts from the Green Party, there was significant investment confirmed for improving public water infrastructure. I have been working closely with Irish Water and Wicklow County Council on plans for the Arklow Wastewater Treatment Plant. For years untreated waste water has been pumped

into the Avoca river and I have previously raised this in the Dail. Action on this is long overdue."

"Projects of this size require Ministerial consent to sign off on funding and I have been actively working with Minister Darragh O'Brien and my Green Party colleague Minister Malcolm Noonan to ensure that this project is prioritised. Plans for the delivery of the Arklow Wastewater Treatment plant are now at an advanced stage. The required licenses and planning have been secured by Irish Water and contract procurement is nearing completion. I welcomed the Minister's comments that he hoped to be able to provide a timely decision to support Irish Water in its delivery of the project once all the necessary scrutiny of the plans is complete."

"The construction of the Arklow Wastewater Treatment Plant will make a huge difference to residents in the area and the environment and will stop the practice of discharging untreated wastewater to the Avoca River, service the population of Arklow and improve the overall water quality in the Avoca River."



Jennifer Whitmore TD

Wicklow hoteliers call for urgent supports to safeguard jobs

Hotel and guesthouse owners in Wicklow are calling for an urgent review of business and employment supports for the hospitality sector following the announcement at the weekend that it is unlikely to reopen before mid-summer.

They are also asking the Government to intervene with the banks to ensure that appropriate supports and engagement processes are in place for business owners and their team members until Covid - 19 has been suppressed. Gerard O'Brien, Chair of the Wicklow branch of the Irish Hotels Federation warns that failure to act now will have long term implications that could take years to repair."

Mr O'Brien states: "Public health must always be the number one priority and we recognise the difficult balance the Government has to achieve."

However, if the all-important summer period is being eroded, additional supports are required now to safeguard businesses and the livelihoods they support until society reopens and the sector and wider tourism industry can recover.

"The news at the weekend resulted in acute frustration and anxiety for many people. Prior to this pandemic, some 13,900 livelihoods were supported by tourism and hospitality here in Wicklow with the sector contributing €135 million to the local economy. Hotels and guesthouses not only provide

local employment opportunities, they buy local services, source locally produced food and provide a vital infrastructure in support of local business and communities. In some parts, whole communities are built around tourism. A severely devastated tourism and hospitality sector would be a major loss to the economy and society here for many years to come. This can and must be avoided."

"It wasn't that long ago that in the aftermath of the last financial crisis tourism was the number one sector in terms of job creation. Government must step up with engagement and the required supports to ensure that the sector and its 270,000 community nationwide can recover," he said.



The Dublin Array windfarm has 4 vessels surveying the Bray & Kish banks for about 8 weeks. The 16m long Spectrum 1, pictured, will be based at Greystones Harbour for this time, the 8 crew being accommodated locally.

"These surveys are needed to plan details of the windfarm," said Cathaoirleach of Greystones Derek Mitchell. "I have been keen to get windfarm boats to use the harbour to provide business and later jobs for the area, especially as we are going to be looking at the completed turbines. The larger 42m Furgo Mercator could be seen surveying, from Bray Head, but this is not planning to use Greystones Harbour."

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Wicklow girl's whale of a poem earns her award

Ten year old Ruby Joyce from Wicklow was awarded for a poem she wrote about whales as part of the Explorers Whale Day competition. The Marine Institute's Explorers Education Programme recently engaged with up to seventy primary school children, as well as their teachers and parents, who took part in the Explorers programme that focused on learning about Whales and Dolphins, throughout February.

Carried out by the Sea Synergy outreach team, based in Waterville, Co Kerry, the team ran a series of Explorers online classes and projects for the children, learning all about whales and dolphins. "The children completed experiments learning about whale blubber, completed amazing projects - creating whale models, art work, infographic posters and dioramas of whales living under the sea, as well as puppet shows and short films. We are delighted with the response we got from parents and the children throughout the blended learning classes done at home. Their questions and the projects really showed their passion for the ocean and whales, which was great to see," explained Rebecca Murphy, Outreach Officer, Sea Synergy.

Adding to the success of the project, the Explorers team and Sea Synergy were also delighted to have Sibéal Regan from the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group (IWDG), join them online as a guest speaker in one of the classes. "Sibéal introduced the children to biofacts showing them the baleen from whales and answered some amazing questions the children had. This was an incredible opportunity for children to see and imagine the size of some of the largest mammals in the world as well as meet a marine scientist who inspires us all with the work the IWDG do tracking and monitoring whales and dolphins in Ireland and around the world. The IWDG also provided some of their newly published Ireland's Blubber Book as prizes, which I am sure the children will enjoy" Rebecca said.

All of the projects were entered into the Explorers Whale Day competition that was celebrated on Sunday (21st February) as part of World Whale Day.

The Explorers Education Programme team were delighted to announce the winners of the Explorers Whale Day Competition, from six counties including Donegal, Sligo, Galway, Wicklow, Kerry, and Dublin. "All of the entries for the Whale Day Competition were amazing, and we want to congratulate everyone that took part and the incredible effort everyone made," said Lucy Hunt, Managing Director of Sea Synergy.

The projects and films will be shown on the Explorers social media pages at Facebook:

@ExplorersMarineEducation and Twitter @explorersedu.

Cushla Dromgool-Regan, Strategic Manager of the Explorers Education Programme, the Camden Education Trust congratulated the team on their work throughout February connecting with teachers, children and their parents. "This has been a great opportunity to continue to engage with children all over Ireland from Donegal to Kerry and from Dublin to Galway. We want to thank the parents and children for taking part and providing such positive feedback about the excitement the programme brought to their homes. It has been an amazing way to help the ocean reach lots of children at their kitchen tables throughout Ireland. Well done to everyone involved."

A Whale Tale

By Ruby Joyce

Whale, oh whale you're so beautiful,
Perched on your back is a white seagull
Giding through the bright blue sea,
There's always room for you and me.

Fishermen, whalers, to name a few,
Are always trying to capture you.
Stay away from Iceland and Japan,
And be sure to swim as fast as you can.

There are many different types of whales,
And they all have giant splashy tails.
There are humpbacks, minkes, and pilot whales too,
And don't forget the huge big blue.

I hope that whales never face extinction,
And we should all come together as one big nation
To protect these creatures we love so much,
So children in the future don't only see them in books.

Signal Arts Society's Online Members' Exhibition 2021

Monday, 1st March - Sunday, 14th March 2021, at signalartscentre.ie

Signal Arts Centre is pleased to present the 21st Annual Exhibition of works by members of the Signal Arts Society.

This exhibition is a showcase for members of the Signal Arts Society and, being a group show, includes a diverse range of content, a varied selection of mediums and always something to delight even the most discerning of palettes.

The Signal Arts Society was launched in 2001 and is affiliated with Signal Arts Centre. The Society consists of artists working in many different arts practices, however membership is not exclusive to artists - anybody with an interest in the arts can join.

The Society offers a range of facilities and discounts to members. For more information on Signal Arts Society go to www.signalartscentre.ie and click on the Society's tab. Alternatively the Society may be contacted through Signal Arts Centre.



Two walkers enjoying the waves on a wild morning on Bray Seafront. Photo by Joe McQuillan

Signal Arts Centre presents: 'The Socially Distant', an Online Exhibition By Karen Hickey

Monday, 15th February - Sunday, 28th February 2021

'The Socially Distant' is a collection of works exploring how our day-to-day habits and thoughts have changed over the course of the last year.

In this exhibition Karen's imaginary, colourful characters narrate their thoughts and feelings. They express their new habits and observations during the period of time. Their stories tell of the mundane yet are humorous and familiar.

A lighthearted observation on how us humans have recoiled, readjusted and altered our minds to fit a new normal.

With an out of the blue transformation in how we connect with others and fill the days how does a head cope with the simple things in life suddenly turning complicated?

Does the brain become more creative in its thoughts, does the banal become more profound, do we care more now about the small things? In the end, we wonder are we changed people when life returns to normal?



Learn Permaculture at Carraig Dúlra

A 2021 Practical Permaculture Design Course is going to be held in Glenealy this Spring/Summer. This course is in "Blended" format, which includes onsite teaching, practical experiences, as well as online live classes and curated resources. It will be the 8th year of this fully accredited (UK Permaculture Association) course at Carraig Dúlra.

The course is Subject to demand and due to potential restrictions. Two full PDCs are being offered with smaller groups that include a networking weaving overlap session for both groups.

Both options include a total of 10 days of hands-on learning at Carraig Dúlra permaculture farm, plus two online group sessions and

specially curated online resources for you to use before and after the course, plus an additional and optional 2 extra days back at Carraig Dúlra for a harvest meitheal later in the year.

There are 15 places available on each course and booking are being taken now.

"As well as on-site experience,

we also got to do distance learning and I found this added to the course. The videos and extra materials were invaluable and I could work at my own pace," said Alva Brennan, 2020 PDC participant.

"It was an awakening to so many possibilities and a chance to really reflect on what my life plan could be, but also how to make small but significant changes. Everything has changed for me since - the way I grow food to how I think about everything," said Anne Walsh, 2020 PDC participant.

2020 PDC participant Ashleigh Connors said "I walked out of the course with my certificate in hand to a whole new world and way of thinking along with a whole host of new like-minded friends from all over the country to share this journey with and a whole network of skilled people I can tap into at any moment with any questions to help along the journey. The teaching team have wholeheartedly put their hearts and soul into the design of the course. I feel so supported by the teaching team the entire time, before the course, during and even now, long after the course! The experience and knowledge each of the organisers of the PDC have is invaluable."

See dulra.org/courses/pdc for more information or to book your place.



Zoom public 'drop in' session for Glendalough masterplan

The next and final Zoom 'drop in' session with the consultant team for the proposed Management Masterplan for Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park will take place on Thursday 11th March.

A Visitor Experience & Management Masterplan for Glendalough and the Wicklow Mountains National Park has been commissioned by Fáilte Ireland, working with its strategic partners the Office of Public Works (OPW), National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Coillte along with the National Monuments Service and Wicklow County Council.

The aim of the Masterplan is to improve the visitor experience in Co Wicklow and the consultant team, led by Consarc Design Group, are asking the public for their input into the project. Public consultation is taking place between February 22nd and March 12th.

All the agencies involved are very keen to get as much public input as possible and submissions can also be made to the following email address: wicklow@paul-hogarth.com

The Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains National Park Masterplan covers the full range of visitor attractions and activities available in the area, with a particular focus on active outdoor activities - primarily walking and cycling, and the visitor experience in the Glendalough valley.

There is evidence to suggest that the significant increase in participation in outdoor activities, triggered by the COVID-19 restrictions, will be a permanent feature and it is going a long way to replace the temporary loss in international visitors as a result of the pandemic.

Research, surveys and the ongoing consultation process have identified a number of issues in relation to outdoor activities which are mirrored across all types of visitor experience including: congestion at key sites, concerns over security, capacity and quality of car parking and visitor services, issues

with local access, and erosion and degradation of the environment.

The proposed solutions to those issues include dispersal of visitors to a wider variety of sites throughout the county, improving the capacity and sustainability of the most popular sites, and improving car parking and visitor services provision across the area.

A number of Visitor Experience Hubs have been identified around the county where there is a particular focus of visitor attractions, building on work in Wicklow County Council's Outdoor Recreation Strategy and other initiatives. Development of these hubs will build capacity, encouraging longer stays and greater investment in the area.

In addition to these proposed 'hubs', there are established activity sites throughout the county, many of which need further development in order to become more sustainable. The team is developing detailed plans for walking, mountain biking and family cycling which will involve a mixture of enhancing and

extending existing provisions, investing in environmental impact management and in new provisions, especially for off road family cycling.

The Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council, Cllr Pat Kennedy, strongly encourages Wicklow residents and those who like to visit Wicklow for outdoor recreation purposes to have their say. "Is it important to listen to the views of local residents and the wider community and to hear their thoughts and ideas on this plan which will shape the future of tourism in our County," he stated.

Following the public consultation, Fáilte Ireland along with the OPW, NPWS, Coillte and National Monuments Service will review the responses and use them to shape draft proposals. These will be reviewed with Wicklow County Council and be the focus for a further period of public engagement that will inform refinement prior to finalisation. See eventbrite.com/o/the-paul-hogarth-company-32440056885



Bray climbs to 7th in Irish business against litter league

Bray has been assessed as the being 'Clean to European Norms' in the latest Irish Business Against Litter League (IBAL).

Last year Bray was tied at 19th in the league but this year the town has risen to 7th overall.

An Taisce, who carry out the survey, commented: "Main Street, Bray Head, Bray Harbour, Sidmonton Park, Car Park Strand Road, Killarney Road, Quinsboro Road and Bray Promenade were all very much deserving of the top litter grade - not only were they very good with regard to litter but they were all very well presented and maintained".

Cathaoirleach of Bray Municipal District, Cllr Anne Ferris, said: "We are pleased that Bray has again performed well in the litter survey. This is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the Council's crews who are out seven days a week."

Further improvement was noted for Bray at a time when most towns are slipping. With eight out of the ten sites surveyed getting the top litter grade, some deserve special mention e.g. Main Street (consistently a top-ranking site); Sidmonton Park (a small public park); Bray Head and the Car Park at Strand Road - these sites were not just good with regard to litter, but overall presentation and maintenances were excellent.

Bray Municipal District works with established community groups such as the Tidy Towns and Bray Coastcare and congratulations must also be made to the contribution these groups make to the town.

Council announces annual Tidy Towns and Environmental Awards

Wicklow County Council has announced the winners of its annual Tidy Towns and Environmental Awards.

The environmental awards recognise best practice projects in a range of topics covering Climate Action, biodiversity, protection of resources and prevention of waste. Prize winners included Tidy Towns groups, schools and businesses.

While the national Tidy Town Competition was postponed in 2020, groups throughout the county remained active, caring for our towns and local environment and delivering new projects on sustainability and biodiversity.

It was a challenge for communities in Wicklow to keep projects going when COVID-19 restrictions limited opportunities to work together.

Many projects had to stop and preparations for the summer Tidy Towns campaign were temporarily halted. Groups went online to organise their work, often working individually on projects and coming together to carry out planned projects outdoors when easing of restrictions allowed.

With more people out and about in their local communities over the last year, this led to many new volunteers requesting litter clean-up materials, revamping green areas on estates or undertaking a project to protect local biodiversity.

All of the 29 Tidy Towns groups continued to work with local businesses to present main streets and town centres at their best.

Hollywood, Dunlavin and Greystones were judged best in county during the summer. Litter management was excellent, planted areas well maintained and shopfronts had clearly received some attention and work done during lockdown.

Cllr Pat Kennedy, Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council, congratulated the Tidy Towns groups and other award winners thanking all who gave their time to care for their communities in 2020 and who have contributed to projects that build a more sustainable future for all of us.

Estates also featured in the competition and stan-

dards were very high this year with many reporting increased involvement and an increasing solidarity with neighbours looking out for each other.

A greater focus on making space for biodiversity featured in estates and green areas were left unowned for pollinators. Brennan's Parade in Bray and John Paul Ave in Arklow won the top awards.

Mr Frank Curran, Chief Executive, Wicklow County Council, thanked all the groups involved saying 2020 was a key year for Wicklow with Climate Action increasingly in focus. He noted that community groups have a vital role in mobilising citizen engagement for Climate Action.

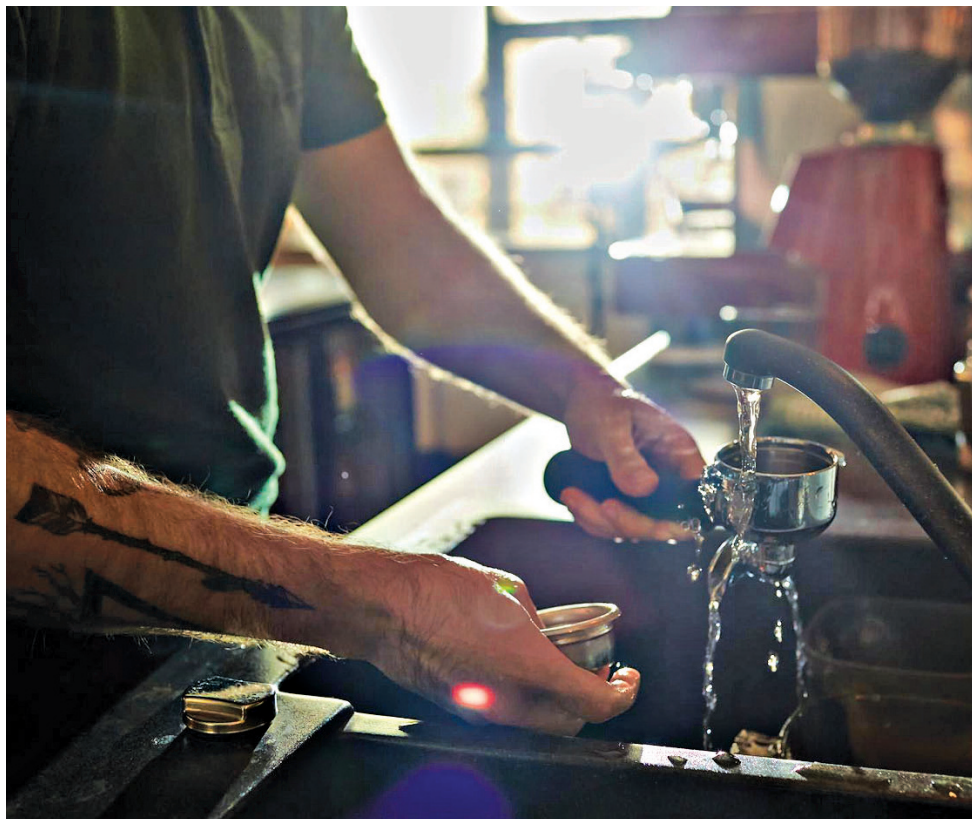
Three schools received awards: Scoil Realt na Mara in Brittas Bay; Sacred Heart in Aughrim and Ballycoog NS.

Businesses recognised included Poppies of Enniskerry; Healthy Matters in Bray and Wicklow Wines - all leading by example in the move towards a more sustainable economy.

Climate Action included Arklow Tidy Towns work with local industries to offset carbon emissions and tree planting with schools and residents while Laragh worked to engage the local community in energy efficiency and renewables through the Sustainable Energy Communities programme. Arklow also received a water conservation award.

Greystones Tidy Towns took the Biodiversity award for its planting at the Shoreline Leisure Centre and incorporation of pollinator friendly planting in schemes across the town.

Ballycoog Tidy Towns, Blessington Tidy Towns and Greystones Kilcoole Community Garden received landscaping and gardening awards while Delgany Tidy Towns was recognised for its citizen science approach to monitoring and protecting the Three Trouts River. The rebuilding of the old blacksmiths by Knockananna Tidy Towns was also recognised. Reservoir Cogs in Blessington won the waste minimisation award for their thorough greening of their annual cycling event with Bray Crafters also recognised for reuse of materials in their crafts.



COMHAIRLE CONTAE CHILL MHANTÁIN WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

THREE MONTH WAIVER OF COMMERCIAL RATES

On 30 December 2020 the Government announced Level 5 restrictions including the closure of non-essential businesses from close of business on 31 December until 31 January 2021. Further restrictions were announced on 6 January 2021. To reflect these restrictions and to continue the supports available for ratepayers, and in recognition of the impact of the ongoing trajectory of COVID 19, a further waiver of commercial rates will apply to Specified Businesses in the first quarter of 2021. This 3-month waiver has modified criteria and accordingly is a separate, standalone waiver scheme to the previous 2020 scheme.

There is no application process required for this scheme. Wicklow County Council will automatically apply a 100% credit in lieu of commercial rates, for a 3-month period, to eligible classes and categories of occupied rateable property where the occupying business falls under the broad headings outlined below.

- Hospitality
- Miscellaneous entertainment
- Essential retail (excluding large Supermarkets, great than 500M2)
- Service Stations
- Childcare
- Leisure including sports clubs
- Non essential retail (shops and warehouse)
- Airports
- Health
- Personal Care
- Post office

The credit does not apply to the following Excluded Categories:

- Public Service
- Vacant Properties (all vacant property as is ordinarily understood for rates is excluded from the waiver)
- Global Utility Networks on the Central Valuation List
- Properties in the "Office" Valuation Category
- Properties in the "Industrial Uses" Valuation Category
- Properties in the "Miscellaneous" Valuation Category
- Properties in the "Minerals" Valuation Category
- Properties in the "Utility" Valuation Category
- Supermarkets greater than 500M2 (Categories Supermarket 2 and Supermarket 3)
- Properties with the valuation category of "Department Store" but which are occupied either partially or wholly by a supermarket which sells food and/or groceries.
- Banks, Building Societies and Credit Unions
- Pharmaceutical manufacturing
- Premises contracted to provide services related to the COVID 19 pandemic to/on behalf of the State, where the State is already compensating for rates as part of the contract between the occupier or service provider and the State.

The full list of Eligible and Ineligible Categories can be found on the Wicklow County Council website at www.wicklow.ie/Living/YourCouncil/Finance/CommercialRates/ThreeMonthWaiverOfCommercialRates.

In recognition of the fact that there may be ratepayers in the excluded category above that have been severely impacted by the pandemic these ratepayers should engage directly with Wicklow County Council on this matter and **Documentary Evidence** will be requested to support their eligibility. In these circumstances, please apply to finrevenue@wicklowcoco.ie.

The closing date for making these applications is 16th April 2021.

Please note that appeals and application of the waiver to public sector properties and vacant properties are not permitted under this scheme.

Businesses called on to get involved in new Water Stewardship Programme

Chambers Ireland and Irish Water have announced a new partnership by calling on Wicklow businesses to get involved in Irish Water's Water Stewardship Programme, which includes taking the Water Conservation Pledge, carrying out free Online Water Conservation Training and finally enrolling to become a Certified Water Steward.

Water is a critically important resource, fundamental to both homes and businesses. But it's also a limited resource with water shortages becoming a global reality. Protecting our precious water is becoming as important as reducing our energy use with water now ranked as the third greatest risk to global growth in the next 10 years according to the World Economic Forum.

Irish business uses circa 510 million litres of water every day in Ireland (the equivalent of 10 times the amount needed to supply a city

the size of Limerick), which is why supporting businesses to become more sustainable in how they use water is critical to safeguarding our supplies for the future. Chambers Ireland will work with Irish Water to raise awareness of the Three Steps to Sustainable Water Management, to support businesses to lower water consumption and reduce operating costs while protecting the environment.

Yvonne Harris, Irish Water Head of Customer Operations, said "Safeguarding our precious water resources is a

top priority for Irish Water. For that reason we are delighted to launch this water stewardship partnership with Chambers Ireland. Conserving water not only helps protect your local supply - it can also protect the environment, boost your reputation, and reduce your bills."

Small changes such as identifying water waste on site, setting a baseline for water use, raising awareness amongst staff and customers or upgrading to water efficient devices can help to save water and money.

Ian Talbot, Chambers

Ireland CEO said "Chambers Ireland encourages Irish businesses to move to sustainable water management. Irish Water's Water Stewardship Programme provides an opportunity to improve your green credentials by taking the water conservation pledge and online training to support your business to use water sustainably, in a way that benefits people and the environment."

Businesses can find out more information on the Water Conservation for Business Hub at www.water.ie.



COMHAIRLE CONTAE CHILL MHANTÁIN WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

SPREADING OF ORGANIC OR CHEMICAL FERTILIZERS ON LAND

Wicklow County Council wish to remind farmers of the precautions to take when spreading organic or chemical fertilizers on to land in order to protect the quality of our drinking water supplies and watercourses.

Organic and chemical fertilisers or soiled water shall not be applied to land in any of the following circumstances —

- the land is waterlogged;
- the land is flooded or likely to flood;
- the land is snow-covered or frozen;
- heavy rain is forecast within 48 hours, or
- the ground slopes steeply and there is a risk of water pollution having regard to factors such as surface runoff pathways, the presence of land drains, the absence of hedgerows to mitigate surface flow, soil condition and ground cover.

Please check the weather forecast as issued by Met Éireann in advance of spreading

Check for the presence of nearby sources of water supplies and do not spread within the buffer distances as outlined below

Organic Fertilizer (Slurry and Manure) and Soiled Water

Water Supply/ Resource	Buffer Distance
Water Scheme serving a Population less than 50	25m
Water Scheme serving a Population of 50 or greater but less than 500	100m
Water Scheme serving a Population 500 or greater	200m
River	5m (doubles to 10m between 12-26th January and 15-29th October)
Lake	20m

Chemical Fertilizer

Water Supply	Buffer Distance
Water Scheme/River/Lake	5m

Farmyard Manure Held in Field prior to Land Spreading

Water Supply	Buffer Distance
Water Scheme serving a Population less than 50	50m
Water Scheme serving a Population 50 or greater	250m

Wicklow County Council would like to thank you for your co-operation on this matter. Further information and queries to pollution control at envadmin@wicklowcoco.ie

New Mercedes Benz C-Class - new benchmark in the luxury segment

Three decades since its original introduction - as successor to the old 190 model - the Mercedes-Benz C-Class has proven its success with just under 11million units sold worldwide - the majority to owners attracted by its status as the entry model to the luxury car segment.

In its latest version, set to launch here next September, C-Class has taken another leap forward in terms of its importance to Mercedes-Benz - evident by the presence in it of features just recently introduced in their flagship S-Class range. Items falling under that umbrella include the latest generation MBUX infotainment system,

optional rear-axle steering and the comprehensive electrification that powers its various elements.

Redefining its significance also is the claim by Mercedes-Benz that, in its new form, C-Class is 'the most stylish and exclusive ever' thanks to its aesthetics, sporty proportions, and extraordinary interior ambience - characteristics seen in its rear spacious-

ness, interior ambience and high-quality workmanship.

In Saloon and Estate models, its short front overhang, long wheelbase and rear overhang reflect its dynamic proportions, accentuated by a sporty bonnet with power domes. In what Mercedes calls its 'cab-backward' design, windscreen and passenger cell have moved gently towards the rear. From the side, its sculptured surfaces - with lines reduced to a minimum - light effects accentuate its shoulder line. In Estate models, its roofline combines with an inclined rear window to give it an added sporty appeal, seen also in its wide track and flush 17"-19" wheels.

In front, all models have a central star with louvers whose design varies slightly from base model to the AMG Line version diamond pattern grille. Rear design is typi-

cally Mercedes-Benz with redesigned lights. Three new colours - spectral blue, high-tech silver and opalite white have been added.

Inside, more front and rear space is provided with greater elbow space and added rear head and knee room. Features and focal points include a dashboard covered with man-made leather with nappa-look beltlines and new veneers in brown and black tones. Most evident is the latest -generation MBUX and 'Hey Mercedes' multimedia and voice-activated assistance systems with touch screen functions.

Bringing even more digital and intelligent support to driver and passengers, information is conveyed on a split wing-like section with screens that can be individualised in Navigation, Assistance and Service modes and in three display styles, Discreet, Sporty and Classic.

Longer and wider, Saloon and Estate models are considerably larger than before. A 25 mm longer wheelbase increases comfort for front and rear passengers. The drag coefficient of its predecessor is retained despite its larger dimensions. Beneath the retractable cover in Estate versions, height and length of the load compartment have been increased with an extra 30 litres boosting capacity to 1510 litres - helped by 40:20:40 split folding rear backrests



with push button operation. Electronic tailgate operation is also standard on estates.

Five petrol and three diesels are available at launch, all with four-cylinder, turbo charged engines and 9G-TRONIC automatic transmission. Petrol models are: C 180 (1496cc/Nm 250 torque), C 200 and C 200 4MATIC (1496cc /Nm 300), C 300 and C 300 4MATIC (1999cc/Nm 400). Diesel models are: C 200 d (1951cc/Nm 380), C 220 d (1992cc/Nm 440) and C 300 d (1992cc/Nm 550). Plug-in hybrid versions with an electric range of around 100 kilometres will follow. Plug-in hybrid versions with an electric range of around

100 kilometres will follow.

In Ireland, models most likely to appeal to owners are C 180 and C 200 d. Prices will be announced closer to its arrival date in September. Comparing it to its predecessor, Ciaran Allen, sales manager for Mercedes-Benz passenger cars, said: "In all but name, the new C-Class is pure S-Class in so many respects". "Coming immediately behind the flagship model, it raises the bar beyond what owners might have expected from a first-tier offering in the luxury segment. In that regard, it sets a new benchmark for Mercedes-Benz itself and others," Allen added.

A new suspension delivers agile handling and high ride and noise comfort. Optional rear-axle steering, operative at speeds below 60 km/h, means fewer turns are required to reduce the turning circle. Sport suspension with continuously adjustable damping is also optionally available.

Latest generation driving assistance features deliver more comfortable and safer driving with functions that include distance assist, steering assist, lane keeping assist, and a feature that can detect and raise the body height in anticipa-

tion of an impending collision.

Improved surround sensors give the driver even better support when parking and manoeuvring at low speed while emergency braking functions protect other road users. An optional trailer-driving feature delivers precise and safer usage on Estate models. High Performance LED headlamps are standard while the optional items catalogue includes a host of passenger comfort, safety and wellness features already familiar in the S-Class and other Mercedes-Benz models.

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PLANNING

WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

I, Thomas Murphy, intend to apply for permission for development at Friar House, Friar Hill, Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow. The Development will consist of an agricultural shed and associated site works. The planning application may be inspected or purchased at a fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of making a copy at the offices of the planning authority during its public opening hours.

A submission or observation in relation to the application may be made in writing to the authority on payment of the prescribed fee, €20, within the period of 5 weeks beginning on the date of receipt by the authority of the application and such submissions or observations will be considered by the planning authority in making a decision on the application. The planning authority may grant permission subject to or without conditions, or may refuse to grant permission.

WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

Dermot Martin & Anne Farrelly, seek Planning Permission for Single Storey Front & East Side Kitchen/Dining Extensions with 2 No. Bay Windows at East Side and Rear and minor alterations to existing Kitchen Window at Rear plus PV Solar and Vehicular Access Gate on to Florence Road. Retention Permission is sought for First Floor Extension on East Elevation, 2 No. Windows on West Elevation plus Dormer to Rear at Bragleen, Florence Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow. The planning application may be inspected or purchased at a fee not exceeding the reasonable cost of making a copy at the offices of Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Wicklow during its public opening hours and a submission or observation in relation to the application may be made to the authority in writing on payment of the prescribed fee within the period of 5 weeks beginning on the date of receipt by the authority of the application.

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CLASSIFIEDS

Matthew 16;13-19 Gospel

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. 'But you,' he said, 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Christ' he said, 'the Son of the Living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon, son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So, I now say to you: You are Peter and, on this rock, I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.'

C.J.

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