DRAFTING THE NATURE RESTORATION PLAN: REPORT FROM THE URBAN LEADERS' FORUM

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Contents

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Quality Matters
INNOVATION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

1 Introduction

This report provides a summary of the discussions of the fifth meeting of the series of Leaders' Forum meetings held to inform the drafting of Ireland's Nature Restoration Plan. The meeting was held on 10th September 2025 in Dun Laoghaire with 60 attendees from 52 organisations attending (see Appendix for list).

Following a welcome and introduction to the day by Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin, presentations were delivered on the Nature Restoration Law and the expectations of the Independent Advisory Committee and Leaders' Forum meetings. Attendees were invited to share their input with colleagues at their tables over four sessions throughout the day, discussing:

1. Vision for Ireland's Urban Environment
2. What Actions Need to be Taken
3. Challenges and Risks
4. How the System can Best Support Implementation

Attendees were seated at 10 tables, with a mix of stakeholders at each table. Tables were facilitated through the four separate discussions, with note-takers recording a summary of all discussion points with approximately 80-90 pages of notes. These notes formed the basis of this summary report.

This report includes points that were raised by at least two tables, with some specific outstanding issues raised by only one table included in the 'Car Park' in the Appendix. The sections within this report correspond to the four table discussions and contain composite statements developed from a synthesis of the 10 table notes. Information is provided on the table numbers that contributed content to each point. Also provided is a count to allow readers to assess the prioritisation of issues, all commentary is ordered from the most raised to the least.

To keep the report as succinct as possible and avoid repetition, each theme is written out in full the first time it appears (starting in Exercise 1). When the same theme comes up again in later exercises, it is referred to in number and title, and "+ Exercise N" to indicate that the similar points in this exercise have been raised here. Any new points related to this theme are outlined.

This report will be shared with the Independent Advisory Committee, attendees of the meeting, and with the public via the website restorenature.ie. Future Leaders' Forum meetings will be held as the drafting of the Nature Restoration Plan progresses.

2 Vision for Ireland's Urban Environment

Dr Tony Holohan, Director of the UCD One Health Centre and former Chief Medical Officer, spoke of the Nature Restoration Regulation as an opportunity for us to reshape our understanding of environment and recognise the inter-relationality between the health of people and the health of the environment. He spoke of recognising that every hectare of restored nature is a hectare of restored health and reflected on the necessity of a Whole of Government Whole of Society approach to health and nature. He spoke of healthy cities, as referenced by the World Health Organisation, and reflected on the need to connect the socioeconomic background of children to their wellbeing and access to nature. He connected the One Health policy as one very relevant to the drafting of Ireland's National Restoration Plan and emphasised the need for collaboration across departments to ensure its success.

Following this opening address, attendees were then invited by facilitators at their table to choose an urban area - a city or town - and imagine it in 2050, thinking about housing, shops and businesses, schools and public buildings, transport, green and blue spaces, engagement, and activities. Below is a synthesised analysis of the responses across all ten tables.

Vision	Tables	No
1. Connectivity of Green and Blue Spaces • Map citywide green–blue networks linking parks, waterways & pocket habitats to create ecological corridors and connect urban and rural areas. • Ensure the ability of safe wildlife movement through ecological corridors incorporating hedgerows, dark spaces, and green routes for both day- and night-active species. • Zone and develop diverse green and blue spaces for nature refuges, shared human–nature areas, and recreational use to support biodiversity while providing multi-use amenities for residents.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	10
2. Reduce Car Dependency and Promote Sustainable Transport • Shift urban transport away from car dominance, reclaiming road and parking space to prioritise people, biodiversity, and low-carbon mobility. • Prioritise walking and cycling through safe, segregated, continuous routes, larger public pathways, traffic calming, and designated lanes. • Provide high-quality, diverse, affordable, and comfortable public transport. • Support low-carbon private and public vehicles, including electric and hydrogen options, with charging infrastructure, alongside water-based transport along canals, rivers, and coasts.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	10
3. Integrating Nature into Urban Development • Require all new residential, commercial, industrial, and public developments to integrate nature in their design, achieve biodiversity net-gain, and net zero	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7,	9

targets. Develop legally binding biodiversity areas, a minimum of 20% net gain in new developments, and a 2:1 green-to-urban space ratio. ● Prioritise derelict, vacant, and underused urban sites for renewal and green retrofitting, favouring infill and brownfield regeneration over greenfield development to enhance biodiversity within existing built areas. ● Integrate nature throughout the urban fabric facilitating the development of more gardens or communal green spaces, rain gardens, green roofs and façades, native planting, nesting/swift/bird boxes, sustainable water systems, community orchards, pocket gardens, and shared courtyards.	8, 9, 10	
4. Equality and Accessibility ● Embed the principle of equality and accessibility across housing, green and blue spaces, and transport networks to ensure all communities and abilities benefit equally and have access to high quality nature spaces. ● Address socio-economic barriers by prioritising access and nature investment in deprived areas, as well as prioritising mixed-income and cooperative housing, and ensuring affordable public transport. ● Design spaces, housing, and transport to accommodate people with disabilities and the ageing population, actively removing barriers to accessing nature. ● Support residents across all ages, from prenatal to elderly, using inclusive planning approaches such as the 8-80 city model, providing safe, navigable access to green spaces and amenities throughout life stages.	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	9
5. Access to Nature ● Ensure all residents can see and access nature through nearby, barrier-free green and blue spaces. ● Provide green space within walking distance of every home and opportunities for direct engagement with nature in daily life.	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10	8
6. Designing Permeable, Flood-Resilient Cities ● Adopt permeable infrastructure to create sponge cities, replacing hard surfaces with permeable surfaces and prioritising development of pocket parks, rain gardens, green corridors, native meadows, living walls, de-paved areas, and dry stone walls to absorb rainfall and support wildlife. ● Reduce flooding risk through land use planning, maintaining floodplains, setting development back from rivers, and designing spaces to work with water flows. ● Integrate water systems with urban greenery, ensuring they remain visible, support biodiversity, and prevent harmful runoff from fertilisers or chemicals.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10	8
7. Access to Services and Amenities ● Implement 15-minute city planning so most daily needs and ecological spaces are reachable within a 15-minute walk. ● Connect rural communities to services via regular, safe, and affordable public transport or on-demand transit options.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10	7

8. Greening Transport Networks ● Provide transport networks that offer safe access to green and blue spaces, linking people with nature through walking, cycling, and public transport. ● Incorporate planting and green corridors into transport systems and minimise disruption to wildlife, maintain ecological integrity along transport routes.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8	7
9. Public Education and Awareness ● Ensure citizens of all ages and backgrounds understand the importance of green and blue spaces, habitat features, their role in wellbeing and ecological health and how to protect them. Using signage, digital communication, adverts, seasonal events, and community engagement to explain this. ● Support residents, businesses, and households in practical actions such as creating biodiverse gardens, adopting green technologies, and maintaining shared green spaces.	1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10	7
10. Urban Food Production ● Prioritise and enable local food production in urban areas. ● Implement policies supporting local food, including subsidies, tariffs on imports, public gardening projects, district composting systems, and integration of edible landscapes into urban planning. ● Engage communities in food production through co-managed gardens, allotments, foraging spaces, and inter-generational projects.	1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	7
11. Ecological Management Practices ● Prioritise native, traditional, and diverse plant and tree species, control invasive species, and avoid monocultures in urban green spaces. ● Embrace wild, organic, and regenerative design approaches that allow humans and nature to coexist in natural, "messy" environments rather than overly manicured landscapes. ● Minimise or eliminate unnecessary chemical use in green spaces.	1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10	6
12. Protection and Prioritisation ● Prioritise biodiversity and nature-based solutions in urban development policy. ● Protect green spaces, high biodiversity areas, and trees through active measures, permissions for removal, and "Do No Harm" principles. ● Integrate nature restoration considerations into all societal and governmental decision-making to achieve Nature Restoration Plan targets.	2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10	6
13. Participatory Implementation and Partnership Working ● Strengthen social cohesion, engagement, and inclusive decision-making through participatory and collaborative approaches. Engage communities and ecologists in partnership with authorities, from the earliest planning stages to managing and maintaining urban green and blue spaces - fostering ownership, pride, and accountability. ● Establish collaborative structures, such as citywide community conservation taskforces or infrastructure co-operatives.	1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10	6

14. Nature in Formal Education ● Integrate nature and biodiversity into educational curricula from nursery onwards, across a wide range of subjects. ● Engage students with green spaces through gardening, planting, and restoration activities to foster hands-on learning and connection with nature. ● Design schools with accessible green spaces, gardens, courtyards, and outdoor classrooms to enable daily interaction with nature.	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9	6
15. Health and Quality of Life ● Enhance physical and mental health, activity, and overall wellbeing by providing access to green spaces and urban biodiversity. ● Foster social connectedness through communal spaces, allotments, and local amenities that support engagement and community cohesion.	1, 2. 5, 8, 9, 10	6
16. Reduce Urban Sprawl ● Prioritise compact, high-density urban housing to limit sprawl, reduce commuting-related carbon emissions, and improve access to essential services. ● Achieve density through high-quality design, incorporating vertical living and integrated green or habitat spaces.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6	5
17. Balancing Built and Natural Environments ● Implement design approaches such as a 66:33 built-to-green ratio or the "3:30:300" principle: three visible trees, 30% canopy cover, and green space within 300 metres of every home.	4, 6, 7, 9, 10	5
18. Climate-Resilient Urban Development ● Use vegetation to reduce urban heat, mitigate the urban heat island effect, and create cooler microclimates in cities. ● Ensure housing/urban developments are energy efficient, incorporating low-carbon technologies, i.e. solar panels, wind turbines, and other renewable energy sources. ● Implement carbon neutrality targets and anticipate climate risks, addressing vulnerabilities like coastal retreat and topographic hazards before damage occurs.	2, 4, 6, 9, 10	5
19. Funding and Economic Support ● Increase grants and financial resources to support individuals, communities, and organisations for biodiversity initiatives. ● Incentivise participation by reducing barriers, lowering costs, and making engagement with biodiversity efforts appealing and feasible. ● Enable sustainable funding through contributions from multiple sectors and stakeholders, creating shared budget responsibility.	1, 2, 7, 8, 9	5
20. Light and Sound Pollution ● Reduce night-time lighting impacts on wildlife by minimising light pollution in low-need areas and protecting sensitive species such as bats.	6, 8, 9, 10	4

• Enhance urban soundscapes to support biodiversity, decreasing traffic and industrial noise while promoting natural sounds that indicate healthier ecosystems.		
21. Policy, Legal, and Planning Framework • Establish legal frameworks, and align national and local policy, ensuring biodiversity initiatives are mandatory and enforceable.	7, 8, 9	3
22. Adaptable and Resilient Planning • Design the Natural Restoration Plan to be regionally responsive, using sliding scales to address settlements of different sizes and contexts.	1, 2, 5	3
23. Leadership & Political Will • Support leadership from civil society and ensure political commitment to empower and enable communities and stakeholders to deliver required outcomes.	4, 5	2

3 What Action Needs to be Undertaken

This session explored the detail of the Nature Restoration Law as it applies to urban areas with a presentation from Lisa Clifford from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, who leads the interdepartmental Technical Working Group on Urban Ecosystems, and her colleague Colin Ryan. Lisa and Colin set out the objectives of the Regulation across the key articles: Article 8, which relates specifically to towns and cities; Article 4, which relates primarily to the Birds and Habitats Directives; Article 9, which focuses on rivers and their floodplains; and Article 10, which is aimed at pollinator populations.

Eimear Fox, of Transport Infrastructure Ireland, then set out the technical realities of delivering urban green space and tree canopy cover in urban environments. She also shared an example of her 'hero tree,' which was planted in Dublin City Centre after a complex process that effectively illustrated both the challenge and the opportunity ahead of us. She emphasised that poor planting infrastructure is one of the main reasons urban tree planting fails. She also shared a case study of Grangemocklar, demonstrating what can be achieved for communities when considering the health and wellbeing of those using urban spaces. She highlighted the importance of volunteer groups such as Tidy Towns and the positive effect this locally-based competition can have for the biodiversity of urban environments.

Following these presentations, a facilitated discussion was held at each table on what is needed to achieve the vision that was articulated in the previous session: the key issues to be addressed and the actions that need to be undertaken. A synopsis of the themes that emerged are set out below.

Key Issues	**Tables**	**No.**
23. Leadership & Political Will + *Exercise 1&2* ● Counteract lobbying and commercial pressures by establishing mechanisms such as laws, mandates, or cross-departmental entities to ensure consistent support for the Nature Restoration Plan despite changes in government or resistance from powerful interests. ● Address complacency, inertia, and lack of political commitment	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	9
19. Funding and Economic Support + *Exercise 1&2* ● Increase dedicated funding for National Parks & Wildlife Services (NPWS) and establish a multi-annual budget overseen by a Minister for Nature to ensure continuity, stability, and accountability in financing biodiversity initiatives. ● Expand private sector financing, community benefit funds, and loans for nature restoration projects; review state subsidies and dormant funds to integrate environmental goals, highlight opportunity costs of inaction, and communicate available community grants more effectively.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	9

● Ensure that NRP activities are properly costed, financially sustainable, and de-risked to attract private capital, while considering risks such as economic recessions and competing funding priorities (e.g., Climate Infrastructure Fund).		
9. Public Education and Awareness + *Exercise 1&2* ● Support facilitators and champions, including local community groups, educators, NGOs, corporate volunteers, and national biodiversity ambassadors. ● Overcome distrust and apathy by targeting communications to marginalised or disconnected groups, reframing nature restoration as part of broader solutions, and increasing eco-literacy.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10	8
21. Policy, Legal, and Planning Framework + *Exercise 1&2* ● Review specific plans, policies, and regulations affecting urban biodiversity, including the Arterial Drainage Act, land ownership transparency, EU environmental regulations, and WHO greenspace guidelines, ensuring mandatory inclusion of nature protection in planning frameworks. ● Address contradictions and inconsistencies by establishing multidisciplinary committees, auditing local authority implementation of the Nature Restoration Plan, creating a central innovation hub for urban restoration, and coordinating across local, national, and international policies.	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10	7
13. Participatory Implementation and Partnership Working + *Exercise 1&2* ● Mitigate burnout among community champions and reduce dominance of a few voices. ● Promote public ownership and behaviour change through community involvement plans, local restoration projects, and messaging that emphasises personal responsibility for biodiversity and nature restoration. ● Address engagement challenges linked to short development timelines of the National Restoration Plan by ensuring meaningful consultation with key stakeholders.	1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10	7
24. Quality Standards, Enforcement, and Anti-Greenwashing + *Exercise 2* ● Strengthen accountability by preventing pre-sale land clearance, addressing industry-related pollution risks, and implementing Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directives with plain-English, metric-based reporting. ● Incentivise transparency and societal/environmental impact, ensuring that enforcement prioritises biodiversity quality over quantity—for example by not using hanging baskets that die, replacing trees with non-native saplings that don't support wildlife, or using building materials that	3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10	6

are ineffective—so that restoration delivers genuine ecological outcomes rather than tokenistic measures.		
12. Protection and Prioritisation + *Exercise 1&2* ● Protect native species (e.g., honeybee, Old Irish goat, Kerry cow, Cladoir sheep) and genetic diversity. ● Leverage tools such as legislation, special amenity area orders (e.g., Howth SAAO), participatory mechanisms, awareness campaigns, and EU leadership to support and enforce biodiversity protection.	1, 4, 6, 9, 10	5
25. Professional Capacity & Resources + *Exercise 2* ● Expand ecological careers and professional roles, including ecological accountants, eco-data managers, tree engineers, and biodiversity specialists, to bridge gaps between data, planning, and implementation. ● Establish multidisciplinary biodiversity teams within authorities, supporting engagement, education, and creation of interconnected green spaces, and provide sufficient resourcing for NGOs and community groups to assist restoration while ensuring continuity and knowledge exchange.	1, 4, 5, 6, 7	5
27. Good Practice and Knowledge Sharing + *Exercise 2* ● Promote accessible, visually clear guidance and manuals for urban nature restoration at local authority level, building on examples such as Dún Laoghaire Rathdown's Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets. ● Encourage knowledge sharing and recognition through networks, communal gatherings, campaigns, and awards (e.g., Tidy Towns, Hometree, Irish Seed Savers, "Tree of the Year"), incentivising collaboration and the exchange of best practices.	1, 2, 6, 7, 8	5
26. Monitoring Systems, Tools, and Institutional Roles + *Exercise 2* ● Maintain and update metrics using networks such as Citizen Science initiatives, and nationally agreed systems for measuring and reporting biodiversity net gain. ● Support digital tools and accreditation schemes, including apps that allow individuals to track biodiversity and nature restoration in gardens, green roofs, and parks, and ratings/assessments for sustainable companies to encourage broader participation and accountability.	3, 4, 7, 9	4
28. Evidence and Data + *Exercise 2* ● Address gaps and shifting baselines in data by defining datasets for restored nature, providing education for relevant stakeholders on interpreting data, and creating demonstration projects to anticipate future maintenance challenges.	1, 3, 8, 10	4
1. Connectivity of Green and Blue Spaces + *Exercise 1&2* ● Maintain and update landcover maps, such as Tailte Ireland, to reflect current conditions and support planning for green–blue connectivity.	7, 9, 10	3

• Minimise disruption from infrastructure, high walls, and driveways that block opportunities to integrate nature and maintain ecological corridors.		
16. Reduce Urban Sprawl	4, 6	2
11. Ecological Management Practices + *Exercise 1&2* • Implement programmes to collect and propagate seeds locally to support native species planting.	7, 10	2
3. Integrating Nature into Urban Development	9	1
5. Access to Nature	9	1
6. Designing Permeable, Flood-Resilient Cities	10	1
18. Climate-Resilient Urban Development + *Exercise 1&2* • Reduce dependency on fossil fuels and limit the influence of the fossil fuel industry by accelerating the transition to renewable energy sources in urban planning, development, and infrastructure.	9	1
20. Light and Sound Pollution	10	1
2. Reducing Car Dependency and Promoting Sustainable Transport + *1&2* • Promote car-sharing specifically for local streets to reduce private vehicle use.	10	1
4. Equality and Accessibility	7	1
14. Nature in Formal Education	8	1

What Action Needs to be Undertaken	Tables	No.
21. Policy, Legal, and Planning Framework + *Exercise 1* • Strengthen policy and planning coherence by extending planning cycles to 20 years, embedding the NRP in city and urban plans, aligning to national frameworks such as the National Planning Framework and Housing Guidelines, and addressing contradictions within overlapping regulations that limit local ownership and innovation. • Review and update specific policies and instruments, including the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023, cooperative and social enterprise law, tidy towns biodiversity criteria, biodiversity net gain legislation (adapting from the UK model with clear Irish guidelines), zoning and density rules, corporate sustainability policy (e.g. Businesses for Biodiversity Ireland), and long-term frameworks such as inclusive and community wealth models. • Learn from international examples including Barcelona, Utrecht, Germany, and Paris.	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	9

19. Funding and Economic Support + *Exercise 1* ● Extend grants and funding to institutions and organisations—including libraries, schools, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, and colleges—to support the creation and maintenance of green spaces and nature-restoration projects. ● Provide targeted incentives for businesses (reduced rates for green activities), households (BER-like recognition schemes for depaving or greening gardens, with benefits extending to renters not just homeowners), and private landowners (support for rewilded verges, greenways, and biodiversity improvements on commercial and private land), using mechanisms such as biodiversity credits and rate reductions. ● Source funding through central government and EU programmes, government departments (Agriculture, Housing), corporate contributions, trusted platforms, and partners (e.g., Benevity, ReFarm), and national strategies such as Mary Reynolds' ARK (Act of Restorative Kindness) to support wild space maintenance, greenway development, and measurably advance biodiversity outcomes.	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	9
13. Participatory Implementation and Partnership Working + *Exercise 1* ● Increase collaboration and partnership programmes between local authorities, planning departments, city/town planners, developers, ecologists, architects, engineers, landscapers, environmental scientists, academics, research centres, NPWS, NBDC, and citizens to share best practices, identify gaps, and implement multi-disciplinary approaches to nature restoration. ● Support community-led initiatives through co-creation, co-design, and flexible consultation, providing tools, enhanced authority for biodiversity officers, and multi-fund structures to enable localised action across urban areas, incorporating grassroots groups, active conservation volunteers, and organisations such as Friends of the Earth ● Learn from examples such as Lisbon's CLLD Eco Bo Vista and Google's funding for wetland restoration in Wicklow.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	9
3. Integrating Nature into Urban Development + *Exercise 1* ● Expand the range of measures used to integrate nature into urban areas, including small wild spaces in dense centres, greening of pavements and verges, and repurposing private land such as golf courses for public use. ● Learn from examples of good practice, drawing on international models such as the UK biodiversity net gain framework, Malmö's solar–green roof policy, Brighton's conversion of golf courses, and the Netherlands' homeowner paving removal incentive.	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	9
24. Quality Standards, Enforcement, and Anti-Greenwashing ● Enforce biodiversity commitments through results-based metrics, and management of developer bonds ensuring obligations are met.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10	8

● Ensure quality by measuring outcomes that prioritise true biodiversity, linking regulations and monitoring to local authority oversight. ● Avoid greenwashing by requiring genuine, high-value natural solutions and preventing superficial measures such as non-native monocultures, astroturf, or token tree-counting exercises.		
23. Leadership & Political Will + *Exercise 1* ● Support emergence of leaders for nature restoration, across national and local government, local authorities, planning departments, and interdisciplinary bodies such as a proposed Nature Forum or develop an advisory consortium modelled on the Water Forum or Climate Change Advisory Council. ● Strengthen leadership by coordinating departments, breaking silos, involving ecologists in planning, ensuring the NRP is adopted into council development plans, managing developer-created biodiversity resources, and supporting locally driven taskforces that share knowledge and deliver cumulative small-scale actions.	2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	7
9. Public Education and Awareness + *Exercise 1* ● Provide tools for education and awareness, including biodiversity packs for homeowners, technical advice and equipment for communities, and behaviourally informed communications to increase engagement and understanding. ● Require that all new development have accessible legacy documents to support property management and biodiversity goals once building development is left, monitor implementation so green space is not lost ● Teach the public about local biodiversity and ecosystems, sustainable action they can take, nature restoration, eco-based planning, and sustainable transport, ensuring content is factual, user-friendly, and tailored to build emotional and multi-sensory connections with nature. ● Support teachers and facilitators, including government staff, corporate volunteers, NGOs, community groups, and educators, through training, guidance, and resources to enable effective delivery of biodiversity education and participatory initiatives.	1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9	6
1. Connectivity of Green and Blue Spaces + *Exercise 1* ● Expand mapping scope to surrounding landscapes, ensuring plans connect with beyond city boundaries. ● Increase UNESCO human and biodiversity reserves, and sites approved or restricted for development, rezoning for biodiversity and creating nature zones where development is prohibited. ● Learn from good practice examples, including Dún Laoghaire County Council's natural zone protections and Gothenburg's mandatory eco-corridors and green roofs to enhance biodiversity and climate resilience.	1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10	6

25. Professional Capacity and Resources ● Increase staffing and expertise by ensuring every developer employs a planning ecologist, every city council has a town architect with biodiversity experience, and sufficient building control officers are in place. ● Expand professional pathways by promoting well-paid apprenticeships and jobs, as well as training in ecology, horticulture, land management, and biodiversity management. ● Scale up resources and funding for biodiversity officers and community-based staff to ensure equitable access to expertise, reduce overreliance on volunteers, and ensure sustainable implementation of biodiversity measures.	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9	6
14. Nature in Formal Education + *Exercise 1* ● Include visits from experts and field trips to natural sites, to teach restoration and biodiversity across different sectors. ● Strengthen third-level courses in fields such as engineering and architecture with dedicated biodiversity content to promote ecological literacy. ● Recognise achievements in biodiversity education through initiatives such as the Nature Heroes Award.	1, 3, 6, 7, 9	5
11. Ecological Management Practices + *Exercise 1* ● Encourage native species and control invasive species through education, increased nursery capacity for native saplings, selective species lists, and systematic removal and monitoring programmes. ● Learn from good practice, such as France's national law since 2011 supporting chemical-free management of public green spaces.	2, 5, 6, 7, 8	5
26. Monitoring Systems, Tools, and Institutional Roles ● Assign councils, national parks and wildlife services, and other relevant bodies to conduct biodiversity audits, monitor habitats, and apply planning standards to support urban nature restoration. ● Utilise tools such as geo-mapping apps, baseline surveys, 3D and day/night monitoring, and social value impact metrics to measure ecological health, track species survival, and evaluate outcomes for communities.	2, 5, 6, 7, 8	5
8. Greening Transport Networks + *Exercise 1* ● Locating multi-storey parking on the edge of developments – freeing space for nature on streets, increase ground cover and trees along sidewalks, and use hedges as barriers to protect green space in high-density areas. ● Learn from good practice, including Bordeaux's light rail ecological corridors and Utrecht's reallocation of car space to create green areas.	1, 2, 4, 8	4
2. Reducing Car Dependency & Promoting Sustainable Transport + *Exercise 1* ● Reduce car reliance through promoting car-sharing, reforming parking policies, and discouraging free or mandatory parking. ● Make public transport more agile, demand-driven, frequent, affordable, accessible, and clean, particularly in rural areas.	2, 4, 7, 8	4

27. Good Practice and Knowledge Sharing ● Showcase national and international examples of successful urban nature restoration, including lessons from the Offshore Wind Industry, case studies from Ireland and Europe, and local expertise from organisations such as the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland and the Dublin Naturalist Field Club, to inform policy and implementation.	1, 2, 6, 9	4
18. Climate-Resilient Urban Development + *Exercise 1* ● Embed grey water recycling into building and infrastructure design to reduce urban water wastage. ● Learn from international good practice, including Scottish wind farms providing local energy benefits, Brittany's coastal adaptation and flood mitigation, and the urban cooling initiatives of Barcelona and Toronto.	2, 7, 8	3
28. Evidence and Data ● Ground planning and decision-making in empirical research, expert knowledge, and performance metrics to ensure effective, evidence-based urban nature restoration. ● Provide comprehensive, accessible national and local biodiversity and nature-based solutions data, including social value metrics, to support collaboration and informed decisions across sectors.	1, 2, 6	3
15. Health and Quality of Life	2, 9	2
12. Protection and Prioritisation	2, 6	2
10. Urban Food Production	1, 2	2
6. Designing Permeable, Flood-Resilient Cities + *Exercise 1* ● Learn from Gdańsk's programme to unseal hard surfaces.	7, 8	2
20. Light and Sound Pollution + *Exercise 1* ● Learn from good practice examples, including the Czech Republic and France removing blue light emissions, and Moon Gardens designed to benefit both people and nocturnal wildlife.	8	1
7. Access to Services and Amenities	9	1
4. Equality and Accessibility	7	1

3 Challenges and Risks

The third session focussed on concerns and barriers to nature restoration into the future. A panel discussion explored the 'how' of creating space for nature in developed areas, with valuable perspectives from Dr Tadhg McIntyre (Associate Professor, Maynooth University), John Stack (Senior Executive Engineer, Dublin City Council), and Anne Murray (Biodiversity Officer, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council). The panel discussed the importance of communicating the right message to the right people when promoting nature restoration. Like community engagement, top down and bottom-up messages are necessary to getting buy-in at corporate/local government level and community level. The panel emphasised the value of connecting nature and health: both international and national research data has shown that nature saves lives by benefitting physical health and social wellbeing, while increasing social interactions and engagements. For urban parks it is about integrating solutions into cultivated, manicured spaces to enable movement, activity, and play. Digital can be part of the solution, allowing a narrative-led and data-led approach. Furthermore, the panel outlined how a focus on water has had positive implications for nature work. Dealing with stormwater and surface water cannot be done in isolation – it has to be part of bigger plans that incorporate green spaces, tree and shrub plating, wetland restoration, and protection of the aquatic environment. Holistic approaches that break down silos can deliver additional benefits, which are evident to people once they see them. The Santry River Restoration Scheme and the Rainscapes Sustainable Urban Drainage project were given as successful examples. The group heard how Biodiversity Officers will be vital in incorporating the Nature Restoration Plan in on-the-ground actions, both through the Local Authority and communities, as they are developing Local Biodiversity Action Plans, which will be informed by the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the Nature Restoration Plan. For Biodiversity Officers, having the time and resources to engage fully with all sectors - internally and externally - will be crucial for implementing the plan. The panel was followed by a facilitated discussion at the tables. Participants were invited to outline the concerns and risks that could potentially undermine the achievement of the vision for urban environments in 2050. The responses are synthesised below.

Challenges and Risks	**Tables**	**No.**
23. Leadership & Political Will + *Exercise 1&2* ● Counteract lobbying and commercial pressures by establishing mechanisms in law, cross party mandates, and cross-departmental entities to ensure consistent support for the NRP despite changes in government or resistance from powerful interests. ● Address complacency, inertia, and lack of political commitment through engagement of leaders across sectors, Departments, and communities	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	9
19. Funding and Economic Support + *Exercise 1&2* ● Increase dedicated funding for National Parks & Wildlife Services (NPWS) and establish a multi-annual budget overseen by a Minister for Nature to	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	9

ensure continuity, stability, and accountability in financing biodiversity initiatives. ● Expand private sector financing, community benefit funds, and loans for nature restoration projects; review state subsidies and dormant funds to integrate environmental goals into existing funds. ● Highlight opportunity costs of inaction. ● Ensure that NRP activities are properly costed, financially sustainable, and de-risked to attract private capital, while considering risks such as economic recessions and competing funding priorities (e.g., Climate Infrastructure Fund).		
9. Public Education and Awareness + *Exercise 1&2* ● Develop champions and leaders, including local community groups, educators, NGOs, corporate volunteers, and national biodiversity ambassadors. ● Overcome distrust and apathy by targeting communications to marginalised or disconnected groups, reframing nature restoration as part of broader solutions, and increasing eco-literacy.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10	8
21. Policy, Legal, and Planning Framework + *Exercise 1&2* ● Review specific plans, policies, and regulations affecting urban biodiversity, including the Arterial Drainage Act, land ownership transparency, EU environmental regulations, and WHO greenspace guidelines, ensuring mandatory inclusion of nature protection in planning frameworks. ● Address contradictions and inconsistencies by establishing multidisciplinary committees, auditing local authority implementation of the NRP, creating a central innovation hub for urban restoration, and coordinating across local, national, and international policies.	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10	7
13. Participatory Implementation and Partnership Working + *Exercise 1&2* ● Mitigate burnout among community champions by providing networks and supports also making efforts to reduce dominance of a few voices. ● Promote public ownership and behaviour change through community involvement plans, local restoration projects, and messaging that emphasises local responsibility for biodiversity and nature restoration. ● Address engagement challenges linked to short development timelines of the NRP by ensuring meaningful consultation with key stakeholders.	1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10	7
24. Quality Standards, Enforcement, and Anti-Greenwashing + *Exercise 2* ● Strengthen accountability by preventing pre-sale land clearance, addressing industry-related pollution risks, and implementing Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directives with plain-English, metric-based reporting. ● Incentivise transparency and societal/environmental impact, ensuring that enforcement prioritises biodiversity quality over quantity — for example by	3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10	6

not using hanging baskets that die, replacing trees with non-native saplings that don't support wildlife, or using building materials that are ineffective — so that restoration delivers genuine ecological outcomes rather than tokenistic measures.		
12. Protection and Prioritisation + *Exercise 1&2* ● Protect native species (e.g., honeybee, Old Irish goat, Kerry cow, Cladoir sheep) and implement measures to manage their genetic diversity. ● Leverage tools such as legislation, special amenity area orders (e.g., Howth SAAO) to support and enforce biodiversity protection.	1, 4, 6, 9, 10	5
25. Professional Capacity & Resources + *Exercise 2* ● Expand ecological careers and professional roles, including ecological accountants, eco-data managers, tree engineers, and biodiversity specialists, to bridge gaps between data, planning, and implementation. ● Establish multidisciplinary biodiversity teams within authorities, supporting engagement, education, and creation of interconnected green spaces, and provide sufficient resourcing for NGOs and community groups to assist restoration while ensuring continuity and knowledge exchange.	1, 4, 5, 6, 7	5
27. Good Practice and Knowledge Sharing + *Exercise 2* ● Promote accessible, visually clear guidance and manuals for urban nature restoration at local authority level, building on examples such as Dún Laoghaire Rathdown's Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets. ● Encourage knowledge sharing and recognition through networks, communal gatherings, campaigns, and awards (e.g., Tidy Towns, Hometree, Irish Seed Savers, "Tree of the Year"), incentivising collaboration and the exchange of best practices.	1, 2, 6, 7, 8	5
26. Monitoring Systems, Tools, and Institutional Roles + *Exercise 2* ● Maintain and update metrics using networks such as Citizen Science initiatives, and nationally agreed systems for measuring and reporting biodiversity net gain. ● Support digital tools and accreditation schemes, including apps that allow individuals to track biodiversity and nature restoration in gardens, green roofs, and parks, and ratings/assessments for sustainable companies to encourage broader participation and accountability.	3, 4, 7, 9	4
28. Evidence and Data + *Exercise 2* ● Address gaps and shifting baselines in data by defining datasets for restored nature, providing education for relevant stakeholders on interpreting data ● Create demonstration projects to anticipate implementation and maintenance challenges.	1, 3, 8, 10	4
1. Connectivity of Green and Blue Spaces + *Exercise 1&2* ● Maintain and update landcover maps, such as Tailte Ireland, to reflect current conditions and support planning for green–blue connectivity.	7, 9, 10	3

● Minimise disruption from infrastructure, high walls, and driveways that block opportunities to integrate nature and maintain ecological corridors.		
16. Reduce Urban Sprawl	4, 6	2
11. Ecological Management Practices + *Exercise 1&2* ● Implement programmes to collect and propagate seeds or saplings locally to support native species planting.	7, 10	2
3. Integrating Nature into Urban Development	9	1
5. Access to Nature	9	1
6. Designing Permeable, Flood-Resilient Cities	10	1
18. Climate-Resilient Urban Development + *Exercise 1&2* ● Reduce dependency on fossil fuels and limit the influence of the fossil fuel industry by accelerating the transition to renewable energy sources in urban planning, development, and infrastructure.	9	1
20. Light and Sound Pollution	10	1
2. Reducing Car Dependency and Promoting Sustainable Transport + *1&2* ● Promote car-sharing for local streets to reduce private vehicle use.	10	1
4. Equality and Accessibility	7	1
14. Nature in Formal Education	8	1

4 Systems Thinking – What's Needed to Support Change

The final session centred on the question of how we deliver nature restoration in a complex urban environment with multiple competing objectives. A panel discussion was chaired by Coilín O'Reilly (CEO of Carlow County Council and member of the Independent Advisory Committee on Nature Restoration), with Lorraine Fitzgerald (Head of Sustainability, Glenveagh Properties), Aebhíin Cawley (Managing Director, ScottCawley) and Keith Sunderland (Registrar, Engineers Ireland). The panel discussed the need to create a whole new mindset around nature restoration: it is not just a rural issue, it's urban too. This needs to happen across disciplines, including engineering and planning, but we can't take it for granted that everybody understands the benefits. It's sometimes difficult for people to see the value of restoring nature: in the context of a housing crisis, a cost-of-living crisis, and significant challenges around the provision of essential infrastructure, nature doesn't always factor in.

The panel outlined how nature needs to be embedded in development plans at Local Authority level so that conflicting priorities can be faced head-on. Compact growth, lower emissions, open green space, near transport, healthy nature are all parts of the jigsaw, but pieces have to be made to fit, which is not easy. Good guidance and funding are vital to enable the development of consistent approaches that cascade down from national to regional and local governance systems and avoid a 'wild west' approach, with everyone doing their own thing, reinventing the wheel, and making the same mistakes. The example of Biodiversity Net Gain was given as a potentially valuable tool to define how development can be done in existing green spaces while simultaneously meeting biodiversity objectives. However, without a policy or a rulebook, there is a risk of unintended negative consequences. It was noted that we don't want to be in a "housing versus nature" debate, so smarter approaches are needed that maximise the middle ground. Training and knowledge-building was acknowledged as being vital here, for Local Authority staff and for Councillors as well. The dialogue then moved to the tables, where facilitators posed questions to participants around the structural changes that are needed to achieve the 2050 vision – the results of these conversations are synthesised below.

Systems Thinking	**Tables**	**No.**
19. Funding and Economic Support + *Exercise 1,2&3* ● Nationally adopt a shared philosophical framework, such as donut economics, to guide structural change and align all stakeholders. ● Resource existing initiatives, including the Dublin Bay Biosphere, and fund flagship projects through the Department of Housing. ● Reallocate subsidies and tax polluting industries, leveraging private funding through mechanisms such as the Corporate Social Responsibility Directive, with examples like ReFarm guiding investment into nature restoration.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	10

• Assess broader funding streams, including the European Regional Development Fund 2040, and explore dedicated tourism levies to support biodiversity, with incentives for businesses that actively increase biodiversity.		
13. Participatory Implementation and Partnership Working + *Exercise 1,2&3* • Establish a reporting and collaboration framework for the NRP, like the National Biodiversity Action Plan, requiring all public bodies to document and coordinate their actions on an annual basis.	2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	8
21. Policy, Legal, and Planning Framework + *Exercise 1,2&3* • Enable public and private stakeholders—including community groups, social enterprises, schools, and businesses—to actively restore nature by providing tailored guidance, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and allowing independent and collaborative initiatives in urban green spaces. • Develop long-term (25–100 year), politically resilient plans adaptable to environmental change.	1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10	7
23. Leadership & Political Will + *Exercise 1,2&3* • Assign the Department of the Taoiseach to oversee cross-departmental collaboration and share responsibility for coordinating the NRP at national level.	1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10	7
28. Evidence and Data + *Exercise 2&3* • Create a publicly accessible dashboard displaying biodiversity local metrics and gains, allowing citizens to track progress and foster a sense of connection and ownership in restoration efforts.	2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9	6
9. Public Education and Awareness + *Exercise 1,2&3* • Run simple, clear marketing campaigns to increase public buy-in, using examples like the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan and campaigns such as "Love Your Nettles" or "Love Your Weeds." Include a central website consolidating guidance for citizens, businesses, and developers on effective nature restoration practices. • Establish NRP ambassadors to lead public engagement and act as trusted communicators. • Introduce mandatory ecological literacy training for construction industry professionals and planning authorities (e.g., members of An Bord Pleanála) to embed biodiversity knowledge across sectors.	2, 3, 4, 5, 9	5
27. Good Practice and Knowledge Sharing + *Exercise 1&3* • Integrate indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge, as well as practices from migrant communities, into urban nature restoration. • Use successful agri-environmental schemes, such as the Burren Life Project, and legislative templates like the 2024 Protection of Hedgerows Bill, to guide preservation of landscape features and inform urban biodiversity initiatives.	1, 5, 7, 8, 9	5
24. Quality Standards, Enforcement, and Anti-Greenwashing + *Exercise 2&3*	2, 3, 4, 8, 10	5

• Develop and apply societal value metrics to monitor and evaluate the impact of restoration on local communities, informing decision-making and complement ecological performance measures.		
26. Monitoring Systems, Tools, and Institutional Roles + *Exercise 2&3* • Strengthen and expand citizen science initiatives to measure urban biodiversity, giving participating groups greater recognition and broadening the range of species and habitats monitored.	2, 4, 8, 10	4
25. Professional Capacity & Resources + *Exercise 2&3* • Embed Community Biodiversity Officers within local authorities to support local nature and habitat restoration projects, complemented by new Community Engagement Officers for the Nature Restoration Plan. Establish regional hubs to coordinate these officers and facilitate local implementation and knowledge exchange.	2, 4, 6	3
12. Protection and Prioritisation	1, 10	2
4. Equality and Accessibility	1, 9	2
14. Nature in Formal Education + *Exercise 1,2&3* • Utilise underused outdoor spaces across schools (approximately 470 hectares nationally) to create biodiverse areas, supporting early connection to nature and integrating "Nature Play" into the National School Curriculum.	6, 10	2
18. Climate-Resilient Urban Development + *Exercise 1,2&3* • Ensure climate-resilient design anticipates future climate conditions — for example, recognising that some native tree species may no longer be suitable in 30 years — and adapt planting and planning decisions accordingly.	8	1
1. Connectivity of Green and Blue Spaces + *Exercise 1,2&3* • Promote pilot projects that link large public green spaces (e.g., Phoenix Park, Grangegorman, Botanic Gardens) through private gardens, canals, and streetscapes. • Encourage community-led initiatives such as connecting front gardens within estates or converting residential streets into biodiversity hubs to create continuous, people-driven nature networks.	10	1
11. Ecological Management Practices + *Exercises 1,2&3* • Establish standards and regulations to protect soil health, seed banks, and soil biodiversity during urban development, excavation, and landscaping, formally recognising soil as a protected and living ecosystem within ecological management frameworks.	1	1
20. Light and Sound Pollution	1	1

5 Appendix

5.1 Points Raised by One Table

Below is a list of points raised by singular tables and which did not fit into other themes.

Exercise 1 - Vision and Principles

- Promote population growth in towns facing depopulation or out-migration to sustain local services, opportunities, and community vitality (Table 1).
- Support practices and lifestyles that are less technology-dependent and more closely aligned with natural systems (Table 1).

Exercise 2 - What Action Needs to be Undertaken

- Create accessible public swimming areas close to urban centres (Table 2).
- Review and revise insurance-related restrictions that discourage tree planting and biodiversity enhancement (Table 9).
- Raise ambition in planning and policy to proactively offset negative environmental consequences (Table 10).

Exercise 4 - Systems Thinking

- Establish and promote green tourism in cities /towns to encourage local investment (Table 2).

5.3 Attendance List

1. Association of Landscape Contractors Ireland * 2
2. Birdwatch Ireland * 2
3. Bohemian Football Club
4. Business for Biodiversity Ireland
5. Cairn Homes, Head of Landscape and Urban Design
6. Carlow County Council
7. Catalyst Group
8. CIEEM - Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management * 2
9. Clúid, Head of Environmental Sustainability
10. Dark Sky Ireland/ Mayo Dark sky Park
11. Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment * 2
12. Department of the Taoiseach
13. Dublin City Council (Planning Department, Biodiversity Officer & Landscape Architect)
14. Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council (Biodiversity Officer & Parks Service)
15. Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly
16. Energia
17. Engineers Ireland
18. Fingal County Council
19. Glenveagh Homes - Head of Sustainability
20. Glenveagh Properties
21. GoGreen Next * 2
22. Grangegorman Development Agency
23. Hedgerows Ireland
24. Independent Advisory Committee
25. ICP Inlecom commercial pathways (representing JUST nature)
26. Irish Green Building Council * 2
27. Irish Landscape Institute
28. National Biodiversity Data Centre
29. Nature Story, Director O'Brien
30. Office of Public Works
31. Old Irish Goat Society
32. Pocket Forests
33. SAP Landscapes
34. Shaffrey Landscaping Ltd.
35. South Dublin County Council
36. Studio Red Architects
37. The Environmental Pillar
38. The Irish Wildlife Trust
39. The Land Development Agency
40. Tipperary County Council
41. Transport Infrastructure Ireland
42. Trinity College Dublin
43. UCD – Director of One Health Centre
44. University of Maynooth
45. WaterLANDS/UCD/Habitat