

Sinéad Breathnach
Chief Officer to Waterford LCDC

12th February 2026

Re: Our Nature Corridor IE31WAT103066

Dear Sinéad,

Thank you for your letter of the 14th January informing us of the decision taken by the Evaluation Committee at the Waterford Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) meeting held on the 11th of December 2025 to uphold the recommendation not to support our project.

The project eligibility criteria that were highlighted as not met were:

1. project outcomes were not clearly identified within a **definite timeframe** that was compatible within the 12- month contract delivery terms of LEADER funding,
2. the **scale** of the project was considered **too large** (to show demonstratable outcomes within the LEADER contract period) and
3. the lack of evidence of direct prior **engagement** with the **stakeholders** in the chosen area

We understand these points are central to LEADER to address and that a good option for us might be to not appeal, work on them and re-apply at a later date. However, due to the nature of the project as inherently large, emergent-outcome dependent, entangled in on-going citizen engagement and reliant on match-funding that may well not be accessible later in the year (representing 38K potential investment into Waterford nature), as well as the urgency of the biodiversity crisis, we have taken the decision to ask the evaluation committee to reconsider.

We hereby ask for a review of the LCDC decision to be conducted by the LCDC in the first instance. We send our response using the template you provided with the stipulated 30 calendar days of your notification. We look forward to your response within 60 days of this submission.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Sarah Prosser
CEO Bioregional Weaving Alliance Ireland CLG
Weaver of social and ecological change

Appeals Template

	Section 1	Project Information
1.1	LAG name:	Waterford LCDC
1.2	Implementing Partner name:	Waterford LEADER Partnership Clg
1.3	Project name:	Our Nature Corridor
1.4	Project number:	IE31WAT103066
1.5	Project Promoter number:	002972
1.6	<i>Project Theme:</i>	Theme 3 Sustainable development of the rural environment and climate change mitigation and adaptation
1.7	Project Sub-theme:	Sub theme 3a Sustainable development of the rural environment Strategic action, Support for exemplar projects in biodiversity
1.8	Project Promoter name:	Bioregional Weaving Alliance Ireland CLG
1.9	Project Promoter address:	Dunhill Eco Park, Dunhill, Co. Waterford
1.10	Date of receipt of application for funding:	3 rd of October 2025
1.11	Date of Evaluation Committee:	10 th of November 2025
1.12	Evaluation Committee Recommendation:	The Evaluation Committee did not recommend this project as the project outcomes were not clearly identified and undeliverable within the project contract period of 12 months. The scale of the project was considered too large to show demonstrable outcomes within the LEADER contract period. There was a lack of evidence of engagement with the stakeholders in the chosen area
1.13	Date of LAG meeting:	11 December 2025
1.14	LAG Recommendation:	The LAG upheld the recommendation by the Evaluation Committee not to approve the project
1.15	Date contract signed and returned by Project Promoter:	N/A
1.16	Rate of Grant Aid approved %:	Not approved.
1.17	Project cost:	€155,502.75
1.18	LEADER Grant Aid for Project:	€0
1.19	Date(s) of Inspection(s) / Audit(s):	N/A
1.20	Date(s) LAG notified of Regional Inspectors Appeal decision:	N/A

	Section 2	Synopsis of Project
2.1	Summarise and provide details of the project:	‘Our Nature Corridor’ (also now referred to as ‘Coun to Coast’) is, we believe, a missing dimension in delivering biodiversity ambitions in Waterford County and beyond. It is a digital infrastructure with ecological support services intended to inspire community and land-owners of all types to engage in their natural world through a common platform linked to their sense of place and community. The broad width and length of the emerging corridor functions at a scale that can accommodate ambitions for the common good and collective well-being. Being anchored in civil society and independent organisations, it can attract new partnerships and investors in flexible and multiplying ways. Beneficiaries will be land-stewards of different types (farmers, gardeners, urban and rural, estates and community spaces) who will actively pledge their own land and green spaces to nature positive activities, individually and part of an emerging collective. The project aims to integrate social, economic and environmental goals, ensuring that communities and nature will thrive together. The approach has proven very successful in other countries, it is timely for an Irish version to show the potential of this approach here in Waterford – thus placing Waterford as a forerunner in biodiversity flagship projects for other counties to replicate. The approach is environmental but also very human, with outreach carefully designed to engage landowners and communities of all sizes and shapes. This first demonstrator phase of the corridor is proposed to follow a broad (up to 8km wide) and long (approx 40km) stretch from the streams and tributaries of the Knockmealdowns, joining the Blackwater River, embracing St Declan’s Way and ending at the coast from Youghal and Ardmore. The benefits of the project extend well beyond biodiversity alone, linking the potential for trails, wildlife, access to nature, investment portfolios for private businesses and social sustainability issues including physical and mental well-being. By restoring many small areas of nature we can begin to piece together a jigsaw puzzle that leads to core ecosystem restoration. In this way, communities will be directly generating valuable ecosystem services: enhancing water quality, building climate resilience, supporting pollinators and creating recreational assets. It is an ambitious project that from investing wisely at the start can, in the longer run, bring together rewilding principles, sustainable farming practices, regenerative

		tourism and marine conservation activities, all underpinned by communities. Powerful partnerships also may be possible within the public, private, and civil society sectors and open opportunities for major natural capital investment and significant national and local policy deliverables. BioSEI's delivery partners, Dulra and Habitats, have demonstrated their deep understanding of how to work with communities and nature-positive organisations in Ireland. To bring their skills, experience, and inspiration to Waterford, and work on such a blue print of a model for other areas of Ireland, would be great thing for the County.
--	--	--

	Section 3	Appeal Details
3.1	Is this a Pre-payment or Post-payment Appeal:	Pre-payment
3.2	State issue(s) being appealed:	i. Project outcomes possible within 12 months ii. The scale of the project relative to its ability to show demonstrable outcomes within 12 months iii. Evidence of engagement with stakeholders in the area

	Section 4	Grounds of Appeal
4.1	Refer to the relevant section(s) of the Operating Rules and/or circular(s) that are pertinent to the Appeal.	3.5 Theme 3; Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment and Climate Change Mitigation & Adaptation 6.4 Added Value of LEADER, Section 9.5 Expiration of contracts, 15.7 Durability of investment and repayment of funding.
4.2	Refer to the relevant section(s) of the EU Regulations that are pertinent to the Appeal.	United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027 EU Rural Pact and EU Rural Action Plan European Green Deal A Long-Term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas.
4.3	List the relevant sections and page numbers of the Project File that are pertinent to the Appeal.	The original application submission, Sections 8 & 9 (page 5-6), described the need for joined-up thinking and holistic nature recovery and how this project offers these in an innovative manner. The business plan outlined the connection to LCDC strategic goals, the longer-term management plan and the financial prognoses. Additional information is submitted below in Section 4.4 as part of this appeal. This provides further evidence of i) the timescale

		for outcomes, ii) the scale of project further evidence of stakeholder engagement and iii) interest from engaged stakeholders to potentially participate.
4.4	Additional information pertinent to the Appeal.	See below

Section 4.4 Additional Information Pertinent to the Appeal

1. Demonstrable outcomes within 12 months

We are not in a position to say that X number of pollinator projects or X number of ponds or hedgerows will be restored because that is part of the ground-up discovery of what motivates each land/garden steward, each playing off each other, to join a bigger platform.

Considerable extra relevant detail is available in the tender documents by Habitats/Dulra submitted as part of the original application, though we understand the demonstrable outcomes need clarification.

Documenting emerging nature outcomes in this aggregated visual way depends fundamentally on having an IT infrastructure to record their spatial location upon (interactive web maps and website). Building this ready for use **will take 5 months**.

During these same initial 5 months we will root and deepen inspiration and enthusiasm through community activities that are also an invitation to begin considering what a nature recovery pledge could mean for them. Knowing that these can (realistically not theoretically) be added to the digital platform covering a broad and wide area is part of the experience.

We estimate that in-depth contact with **140 corridor stakeholders** (farmers, land managers, community groups, etc.) will be had by **month 5** and by the end of the year **40 of these** will have been guided by ecologists on actions they can take to restore biodiversity. The end of year outcome is a tapestry of nature commitments: some will be underway and visible and others will be in planning for year two and beyond.

By the end of year 1, a minimum of 40 pledges will be signed, indicating actions for nature being taken (please view the example of what this can look like: <https://www.wealdtowaves.co.uk/actions-for-nature/>).

Dairy farmer and BRIDE EIP project manager, Donal Sheehan is part of the successful team delivering the project. We recognise his land is not in the corridor but that his proven ability to inspire and mobilise other dairy and other farmers within short time frames (the early months of the BRIDE) is very much part of the team delivering outcomes.

An additional point of relevance that part of the BRIDE project was developing and using the 'Farming with Nature App' as a method for farmers and other land managers to record biodiversity species and trends on their land. Donal has confirmed that this app is available for use in the 'Coom to Coast' corridor project and could feed into the digital platform while also enabling increased knowledge of biodiversity for land stewards along the corridor. The potential for outcomes is therefore increased. The new biodiversity tools recently developed by the National Biodiversity Data Centre will also speed up the time it takes to map and document what can be done on each land package.

2. Large scale of project

The large **geographical scale** of the proposed project is intentional; it is due to the fact that the corridor extends from source to sea, meaning it is an interconnected ecosystem. To fragment it would mean fragmenting a natural linkage of ecosystems.

We recognise that the scale is considered a financial risk for this project application, while also recognising that without the scale the project changes beyond its boundary conditions.

The increased number of diverse land-owners in the area of interest should make it easier, not harder, to show demonstrable outcomes. A smaller area could become stranded in local barriers and personalities that a large-scale project can absorb.

The project provides Waterford with a **flagship biodiversity platform** of a scale that would set it apart from smaller isolated interventions.

In the original application, the corridor was described as being in the vicinity of St Declan's Way (though much broader than the trail itself). We recognise that we had not engaged with the St Declan's Way Steering Committee before including this in the proposal and that this will be key before trust and engagement is possible. We hope that can be addressed over the coming months by accepting their invitation to present our proposal and look for mutually beneficial outcomes.

We also recognise that our original submission did not express the fundamental point that this project follows the integrity of a river catchment approach, from uppermost tributary until it reaches the sea. A map of a proposed focus area is **given below (Fig. 1)**. This means the approach is aligned with nature (and also related heritage/trails) - this is similar to Weald to Waves where human corridors lie within the nature corridors.



Figure 1: Proposed nature (blue following rivers) and human (red following heritage) corridor area

The large financial scale: The application submitted has a total cost of 155K Euros which is a major amount of investment. At the same time BWA is offering to cover 25% of this (38K) as required by the regulations. This contribution by BWA is in itself is a large new investment to supporting biodiversity the County. If this

appeal is unsuccessful, these BWAI funds, which need to be spent in 2026, will be redirected to other applications and projects and may therefore be lost to this particular biodiversity initiative.

A significant point is how much inward investment this platform can attract going forward. This is presented in the Business Plan for the Nature Corridor presented as part of the BWAI wider portfolio.

We recognise future management and investment of time and budget will be needed to guarantee that this first year of investment in the digital and human infrastructure is to succeed in years 2-5. BWAI has spoken to Weald to Waves about the human and financial capital required and built this into the business plan.

The large scale and collective nature of the project increases the power of the project to be a framework for large-scale nature-, biodiversity and other kinds of resilience-credits. Individual farms are not big enough to connect to the biggest financial actors. The collective nature of this corridor means collective dividend structures can be designed – bringing benefit to whole communities and nature rather than private land-owners often with considerable financial means already.

The large scale of the corridor, but small than national projects, is the right scale to deliver a missing link from Nature Restoration Laws: how to connect policy with people? These corridors will provide evidence-based data by the people on the ground, that can be used for national policy

Additional Pertinent Information, copied from the Nature Corridor Business Plan the original application:

The Need for a Civic Nature Corridor

Waterford's Development Plan is aligned with Article 10 of the Habitats Directive in the EU that recognises the importance of ecological networks that connect habitats **outside** of designated protected areas.

The Our Nature Corridor project is inspired by its UK sister project to expand the notion of what **non-designated land** can be included to contribute to ecological and nature networks. The need is also expressed indirectly via the support for Biodiversity Action Plans, the Protection of Hedgerows bill, the All Ireland Pollinator Plan, Community Catchment approaches, organic farm incentives and others.

Waterford City and Council ecological corridor work:

The Waterford City & County Development Plan 2022 – 2028 includes ARCGIS story maps. Map 5 is the Natural Heritage Map. In there is a nature conservation designation map as well as a combined map. This is a view-only map made by the Council to communicate current status. It does include habitats and heritage sites, but not include a corridor focus in its mapping.

As we understand it, the Biodiversity Officer and colleagues were actively mapping designated sites and the possibility of linking these by restoring habitats between them. There is less overlap on the land-stewardship, pledges and the inclusion of a wider categories of land.

Earlier mapping by the council in 2013 mapped habitats for species such as squirrels, bats and otters, summaries in a preliminary habitat corridor map by F.H.O'Neill et al. An animal, but not human corridor and no digital infrastructure.

How far the single project would go to address biodiversity and human-nature challenges in the County?

Our Nature Corridor is one 'concept' that emerged from continued conversations between BioSEI and local stakeholders (not only in the proposed area) over the past three years. The other eight- ten concepts range from new kinds of farms and farming, to how older people can be 'unleashed' as changemakers for better food, soil and health, to supporting potential new cooperatives for grain, meat and milk, to new funding mechanisms for local food producers based in a basic guaranteed income. Demonstrable impact has been made in all other concepts in time frames of 1, 2 and 3 years. After an initial year of activity, the Nature Corridor has been waiting for the correct level of investment and interest to move forward.

No one project will address the complex challenges facing our nature and our societies. That is why BioSEI works to nurture synergies between social and ecological innovations and create enabling conditions for them to flourish in solidarity with each other. Our Nature Corridor will benefit from being part of the wider portfolio in direct ways such as access to funding from alternative sources than other community or public bodies, as well as access to insights from established trusted local networks that include lands stewards of different types – farmers included.

3. Evidence of engagement by stakeholders:

As referred to above, we acknowledge the limited degree of engagement directly with landowners in the proposed corridor, or with the St Declan's Way Steering Committee. We look forward to being able to do so soon – within the LEADER funded project or outside of it if alternative directions have to be investigated due to limits on match-funding and other criteria mentioned in the introductory letter.

Indirect enthusiasm for the project has been described in earlier documentation. In addition, we took direct contact with some landowners and other stakeholders along the proposed corridor during this review process to test their response to the idea for the project. We include three letters of support for the corridor project concept and their desire to learn more and become part of the project when it is funded.

Please see the Letters of Support in Appendix 1 below, including the information sheet all responders received.

Otherwise building engagement is embedded in the nature of the project: Weald to Waves started with a very few, highly inspirational and visionary landowners and has blossomed from there. We hope to design and deliver an equally transformational journey within the Coum to Coast corridor and across the county with time. We hope this is in partnership with LCDC irrespective of this appeal but hope that LEADER funding could be innovatively allocated to help us on our way.

Signed:



Dr. S.D. Prosser, CEO of BWA

Date: 12th February 2026

E-mail address: sarah@prosser.tc

Phone number: 0820981121

Appendix 1:

A Information sheet provided to landowners and users of the area proposed for first phase of the Oum to Coast Nature Corridor. We also had phone calls with several of them to provide more in-depth overview.

‘From Coum to Coast’

Help us build a great big nature corridor with potential major benefit for local nature and communities

Imagine:

1. Giving a simple **pledge** to do a **nature action** on your land patch (your garden, farm, GAA ground, churchyard or window box)
2. **Getting advice** on what might suit best in your land and community
3. A place to plot your pledges plat on a **common map**.
4. A **digital jigsaw puzzle** gradually emerging on the map that connects habitats into a **great big nature corridor**
5. It all developing into a potential **financial investment** object to bring lots of new income into the local landscape and its communities.

Inspired by successful examples elsewhere (*do a search for ‘From Weald to Waves’*), The ‘Coum to Coast’ Nature Corridor will be the first of its kind in Ireland and could be an inspiring blue-print for connecting people, nature and economy. It could also be the missing link in connecting the actions of local people to Ireland’s ambitious nature politics and new kinds of economic flows to local land owners and communities.

The area for the first stretch of the Irish ‘Coum to Coast’ nature corridor



A patchwork of emerging pledges Weald to Waves nature corridor (Sussex)



The strategy and planning is ready for the first stretch of Our ‘Coum to Coast’ Nature Corridor. The focus will be from the streams and tributaries of the Knockmealdowns, joining the Blackwater, looping in St Declan’s Way and ending at the coast.

An application has been submitted to start building ‘Our Coum to Coast Nature Corridor’. Feedback says we need to demonstrate support and potential engagement along the corridor. Are you on board?

Will you help us by signing your support?
 Send an email to news@bioregion.ie


Bioregioning
 South East Ireland
 Website: bioregion.ie

B Letters of Support provided as an editable template, signed and commented on by landowners and users below.

February 2026

To Whom it May Concern,

Expression of support for Phase 1 of 'Our Nature Corridor - from Coum to Coast'

I have been informed of the plans for a broad nature corridor project, the first phase of which is designed to reach from the Knockmealdown uplands, along the lower reaches of the River Blackwater and out to the Youghal to Ardmore coast.

As I understand it, the aim of the project partners, currently led by Bioregioning SE Ireland, is to inspire many types of landowners to pledge to undertake different kinds of actions for nature and to gradually build a continuous jigsaw from fragmented smaller pieces. In the future, the corridor could potentially (no guarantees) build into a major zone for investment with collective benefits for biodiversity, communities, soil and water.

I hereby express my support for the general concept of 'Our Nature Corridor'. As a custodian of land or other stakeholder within the corridor area, I appreciate the potential benefits of the Nature Corridor for community-driven nature restoration. It is time for more joined up thinking to allow nature to recover across our landscapes, and this corridor would be an important step in that direction.

I would like to stay informed about the progress of the 'Coum to Coast Nature Corridor' with the possibility of becoming involved with the project at such time as funding is secured and the real work for our common futures can begin.

Thank you.

Supporters signing the above letter:

1. Name: Henry Wilks

Location: Camphire House Farm, Cappoquin, Co Waterford P51 H5P2

Details of land I care for and/or any other comments:

I own a farm of 138 acres within the proposed nature corridor which borders directly onto the River Blackwater, including an island of 1 acre in the river. I am passionate about farming with nature to protect this unique habitat and welcome the nature corridor plans of Bioregioning SE Ireland to bring landowners together and to help them benefit biodiversity, communities and the River Blackwater.

2. Name: Chloe Dempsey

Location: Mallow

Details of land I care for or engage with and/or any other comments: Blackwater valley, I walk forage and interact with the valley.

3. Name: Pieter Ploeg and Nakyta Grimm, Terranu Farm

Location: Glenaknockaun West, Knockmealdowns, Lismore

Details of land I care for and/or any other comments: We manage 29 acres organically, with mixed horticulture, grassland and forestry right at the very top of the Owenashad catchment in the Knockmealdowns. We love the corridor idea and could imagine contributing locally with other landowners on topics such as tackling invasive species, river and riparian restoration, planting native woodland and creating upland innovations, e.g. with berry crops and ecotourism

4. See next page



February 2026

To Whom it May Concern,

Expression of support for Phase 1 of ‘Our Nature Corridor - from Coum to Coast’

I have been informed of the plans for a broad nature corridor project, the first phase of which is designed to reach from the Knockmealdown uplands, along the lower reaches of the River Blackwater and out to the Youghal to Ardmore coast.

As I understand it, the aim of the project partners, currently led by Bioregioning SE Ireland, is to inspire many types of landowners to pledge to undertake different kinds of actions for nature and to gradually build a continuous jigsaw from fragmented smaller pieces. In the future, the corridor could potentially (no guarantees) build into a major zone for investment with collective benefits for biodiversity, communities, soil and water.

My wife and I have a great interest in the whole area of nature restoration and indeed am delighted to be presently working with Leader on a feasibility study for a nature markets funded nature restoration solution our 200 acre home farm (aerial view showing land abutting River Blackwater) which is on the eastern side of the river Blackwater at Kinsalebeg, Co. Waterford – opposite the town of Youghal (Project Title: Woodbine Hill Farm Nature Restoration, Project Ref: No.: IE31WAT103071).



We have also recently acquired the 26 acres of land known as the Lookout in Ardmore (aerial view adjacent), of which 17 acres are agricultural and 9 acres are cliff. We intend to also establish a biodiversity project on this land which will enhance the community, the Cliff Walk and a wonderful ending to pilgrims walking Saint Declan’s Way.



We hereby express our support for the general concept of ‘Our Nature Corridor’. As a custodian of lands described above, I appreciate the potential benefits of the Nature Corridor for community-driven nature restoration. The results of the feasibility review will be available later in 2026 for sharing with other landowners. It is time for more joined up thinking to allow nature to recover across our landscapes, and this corridor would be an important step in that direction.

Sam & Petra Roch-Perks, Woodbine Hill Farm, Kinsalebeg, Ardmore, Co. Waterford

We look forward to our continued co-operation with 'Coum to Coast Nature Corridor' and would be delighted to be involved.

Thank you.

Name: Sam and Petra Roch-Perks

Location: Woodbine Hill Farm, Kinsalebeg, Co. Waterford and The Lookout, Dysert, Ardmore, Co. Waterford. Herd number W1890290

Details of land I care for and/or any other comments:

Woodbine Hill Farm is presently a 200 acre suckler beef farm with 185 acres of land in Kinsalebeg and 15 acres of land onto Caliso Bay, West Waterford. We now calve 50 stabilier cows annually and over the past 5 years have reduced the number of animals on the farm from 220 to 150 due to our interest in nature recovery.

The Lookout is a 26 acre holding in Dysert, Ardmore comprising of 17 acres of tillage land and 9 acres of cliff face, divided by the iconic Cliff Walk.
