



Carrick-On-Shannon Tidy Towns

Community Biodiversity/Pollinator Plan
2023 - 2025

Our Actions for Biodiversity in Carrick-On-Shannon



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage





Contents

2	Introduction & Acknowledgements
3	Section 1. Introduction: Carrick-On-Shannon Community Biodiversity/Pollinator Action Plan
5	Section 2. Key Projects for Biodiversity in Carrick-On-Shannon
14	Section 3. Additional Biodiversity Projects for Carrick-On-Shannon 2023-2025

Welcome to the Carrick-On- Shannon Tidy Towns Biodiversity Plan!

This plan is to be used to guide the biodiversity work of Carrick-on-Shannon for the next 3 years. The plan was drawn up following consultation with members of the community group and a field visit undertaken in August 2022. The first section of the plan is an introduction to this plan and the work that gave rise to it as well as some biodiversity basics. Next, we outline the Key Biodiversity Projects – these will be projects that may take relatively significant resources for Carrick-on-Shannon Tidy Towns to complete. Finally, there are recommendations for some additional projects we suggest that the group would undertake over the next three years, the timeframe of this plan.



Acknowledgements

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Section 1. Introduction: Carrick-on-Shannon Community Biodiversity / Pollinator Action Plan

This Plan is a Biodiversity Project

Biodiversity has now become a key part of what local community action groups do. This project will help Carrick-on-Shannon to 'design' biodiversity considerations into their present and future projects and maximise the benefits for wildlife as well as people. As well as providing a schedule of actions the plan will also be useful in raising awareness of how biodiversity is considered in Carrick-on-Shannon. This may then empower individuals and groups such as residents' associations to make positive contributions for the benefit of both wildlife and people.

This plan will serve as a 'statement of best practice' for biodiversity and is hoped will also be useful in seeking financial or material support for future projects.

This biodiversity plan was drawn up following consultation with Carrick-on-Shannon Tidy Towns, an in-person visit with a focus on areas to be enhanced for biodiversity and liaison with the Leitrim County Council Heritage Officer.

What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life on Earth. It includes all living things (organisms) that make up the natural world (including humans). Biodiversity also refers to the places where animals and plants live (habitats) and the complex interactions between living things and their environment which we call ecosystems.

Why is Biodiversity Important?

Humans are a component of biodiversity and we are dependent on biodiversity to provide a range of ecosystem services. Human activities such as agriculture, forestry and fishing depend on services provided by biodiversity. We rely on biodiversity for the provision of clean air and water, food and medicines, natural landscapes, flood control, noise pollution control and much more. A healthy environment is important for human health and well-being. Biodiversity provides us with natural amenities to enjoy, parks and green spaces, wildlife and landscapes to admire and thus improves our quality of life. The attractiveness of our country as a tourist destination, a place to live and do business depends to a large extent on the rich biodiversity of the county. Our country's natural heritage contributes to the attractiveness of landscapes, villages and urban centres.

What is this Community Biodiversity/Pollinator Action Plan For?

The purpose of a Community Biodiversity/Pollinator Action Plan (LBAP) is to set out appropriate locally-based actions for the conservation, management and/or enhancement of habitats for the benefit of native species. This community biodiversity/pollinator action plan:

- makes recommendations for the conservation of biodiversity through appropriate actions for the protection, management or appreciation of an area of high ecological value.
- Identifies actions to improve or enhance local areas so as to increase their value as habitats for species.
- Encourages actions to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity and its conservation.

Biodiversity Awareness

Raising awareness of biodiversity and encouraging or facilitating people to engage with and appreciate wildlife is an important tool in biodiversity conservation. Providing opportunities for people to experience nature is useful to draw peoples' attention to conservation. Even more effective, however, is increasing the amount of time people spend outdoors connecting with nature. Furthermore, the health benefit of spending time with nature is widely recognised with positive impacts for both physical and mental wellbeing.

Raising awareness of biodiversity can be facilitated by organising wildlife-themed walks, bat walks, wildflower walks and bird watching or competitions, such as best wildlife-friendly estate, best garden for wildlife or a wildlife photography competition. Better still is providing opportunities for people to volunteer on a project, such as invasive plant species removal, tree planting or encouraging people to get involved in citizen science projects. It is often the social benefits of such events that will attract people to get involved.



Section 2. Key Projects for Biodiversity

Carrick-on-Shannon – An Overview

Carrick-on-Shannon is the county town of County Leitrim, and its largest town. It is located at the south-west tip of the county and is an important destination along the popular Shannon-Erne Blueway. Great efforts have been made in Carrick-on-Shannon over the years to enhance the liveability of the town, notably through attractive streetscaping, conserving its built heritage and enhancing green spaces and biodiversity. The town also performs very well in the annual Tidy Towns competition. A key green space which has been developed for both humans and nature in recent years is the River Front Amenity Park. This provides an excellent walkway by the River Shannon and several biodiversity initiatives have taken place here, including pollinator-friendly planting, 'low-mow' grass cutting regimes and the establishment of orchards and groves. There is a strong community spirit in Carrick-on-Shannon, with many willing volunteers who wish to continue improving the town for both wildlife and people!

Creating Meadows

Instead of mowing public spaces and verges on a weekly or fortnightly basis, they can be mown just five to six times per year. The cuttings need to be lifted each time to ensure the soil is not over-fertilised, as this suppresses flowering meadow species. This cutting method creates short-flowering meadow type habitats which support pollinators. It also saves on costly labour and fuel. The floral diversity of the verges should become richer over time, transitioning from a few grasses and flowering species like Dandelion, Buttercup and Daisy, to denser patches containing more of these, plus Clovers, Selfheal, Bird's-foot-trefoil and Ox-Eye Daisy.

The type and abundance of species in each piece of land depends on what is contained within the original seedbank in the ground. It may take 2-3 years for flowers to emerge fully, especially if the area has been regularly mown for a long time previously. For a more maintained appearance, leaving a 1m strip more regularly mown can work very well. It often helps to communicate why you are cutting grass less often too, with All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) signage or similar. A 6-week cutting regime can be carried out as follows. Just remember to cut AND lift!

- First cut after 15th April
- Second cut end of May
- Third cut – mid-end July
- Fourth cut – end August
- Fifth cut – after mid-October

Key Project 1: Mowing Regime – River Front Amenity Park

The wild biodiversity area with long grasses and mown paths, Hornbeam hedge and Willow tunnel, is brilliant. This, combined with the nearby woodland, or ‘Bird Sanctuary’, makes a haven for wildlife. In order to optimise the number of natural wildflowers emerging each year, the area will need to be managed like a meadow by being cut once a year in Sept/Oct, with the cuttings lifted and composted (paths can still be mown through it on a regular basis). More wildflowers will mean more food for bees. See ‘Creating Meadows’ for guidance, below.

It was noted that patches were sown with wildflowers, e.g. Cornflowers. While pretty, these are annuals and don’t always re-emerge unless seeds self-sow. It would be best to plant a mix of pollinator-friendly perennials, or a native wildflower mix. This can be achieved by either collecting local wildflower seeds to plant, or buying a suitable native seed mix from trusted sources, e.g. wildflowers.ie.

Throughout the Park, it was noted that many areas were tightly mown. Patches of short-flowering meadows are recommended here, which can be mown every 6 weeks. See ‘Creating Meadows’ section for details.

Project Period: 2023-2025



‘Low-Mow’ Management Options

The ‘low-mow’ area at Manorhamilton’s Star Fort (see image, right) is one of the best examples of a managed meadow we have seen at Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants. Instead of mowing all of this expansive area of grass (which would be a ‘desert’ for bees), a substantial area has been left for pollinators. The grass is cut and lifted once a year to allow the next year of meadow flowers to emerge. A range of grasses and wildflowers such as Buttercups, Meadowsweet, Ragged Robin, Clover, Self-heal and even wild Orchids have emerged here over time. Paths are mown through the meadow so that people can walk through and enjoy the beauty here. A few All-Ireland Pollinator signs have been installed nearby to show what is being done and why.

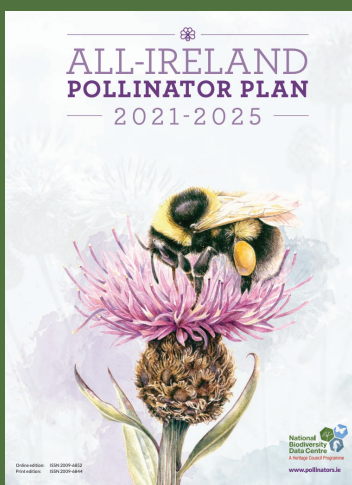




‘Low-mow’ strips and mown paths at Causeway Hospital, Co. Derry. Images: Donna Rainey



‘Low-mow’ sign at Causeway Hospital (Image: Donna Rainey) and AIPP ‘Grow- don’t mow’ sign, Manorhamilton.



A startling one-third of Ireland’s bee species are under threat of extinction by 2030. This is very worrying as bees and other pollinators provide essential ‘services’ to us humans. They pollinate our crops and plants. Without them, we would go hungry – and our world would be a more desolate and colourless place. A very positive project to address this threat was started right here in Ireland, called the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP). The AIPP is the largest-scale conservation project in Ireland and one of the first of its kind in the world. It encourages groups, communities, companies, schools and other organisations to play their part in conservation measures that are urgently needed to conserve our pollinating insects. The AIPP dedicated website, pollinators.ie is a mine of information on pollinators, with amazing facts and resources aimed at helping everyone to take simple actions to protect our precious pollinators. Everyone needs to know about the AIPP and do their little bit for bees! Carrick-On-Shannon Tidy Towns can join these efforts by becoming a Supporter of the AIPP (if not one already).

Key Project 2 : Orchard – River Front Amenity Park

The mini orchard is a lovely area. This space could be enhanced by planting 10-15 more native fruit trees of the Apple/Plum/Pear variety, plus 15-20 fruit bushes, e.g. Blackcurrant, Redcurrant, Strawberry, Raspberry and/or Gooseberry. If possible, the pumping station might be screened along the fence by planting a native hedge mix, e.g. Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Hazel, Guelder Rose, or by planting Climber species, e.g. Honeysuckle, Clematis.

While wildlife will benefit from eating the resulting fruit, it would be great if local people could too. This would prevent much of it going to waste. Ideas include fruit-picking days in the autumn, followed by a jam making or apple pressing event!

Project Period: 2023-2025



Key Project 3 : Signage Boards and Solar Lighting – Amenity Park

The biodiversity area of the River Front Amenity Park is excellent but could be enhanced by a couple of clever and creative signage boards that will help locals and visitors interpret the space and understand what is being done to enhance biodiversity and why.

Topics could include meadow management, some of the key species present, wildflowers, birds, pollinators and small mammals. The sign on the right (seen in Leitrim!) is an example of a creative, appealing, colourful sign that draws the eye while providing useful information.

Many people use the park throughout the day, including into the evening as it gets dark. Providing some low-level lighting, preferably powered by solar, would be ideal around the biodiversity area. It would be important to ensure the lighting level does not interfere with bat activity, where possible, as many bat species are deterred by bright light. Advice on bat lighting can be found at batconservationireland.org or bats.org.uk.

Project Period: 2023-2025



Key Project 4 : Willow Hut and Benches – Outdoor Learning

There is a lot of potential in the wild biodiversity space of the Riverfront Amenity Park for outdoor learning and events/activities. Children already take part in creative outdoor activities, blending artistic and wildlife themes here.

To enhance the space and provide a centrepiece, a Willow hut or 'beehive' type structure such as that pictured, right, would be ideal for encouraging further outdoor learning opportunities.

For visitors of all ages visiting and using the biodiversity space, a bench or two would be very useful. Seating that fits in with the area is important, for example, the natural bench pictured right, made from carved wood (located at the biodiversity garden, Shannon Airport). People can sit while learning in the outdoor space, or simply enjoy the natural surroundings.

Project Period: 2023-2025



Key Project 5 : 'Mini Wildlife World'

There were creative little objects left around the biodiversity area of the Riverfront Amenity Park. Some additional, more permanent features, e.g. wooden 'stepping stones' could lead to a tree trunk base up to a 'Mouse House' for instance. A nature-themed sculpture might also go well here, fitting with local wildlife, e.g. see the 'Wolf hut' image below. Other ideas might be to create stone circles/spirals, or a 'stone gallery' from the little stones with messages currently dotted around the space. More can be added over time!

Project Period: 2023-2025





Wolf Sculpture, Rossmore Park, Co. Monaghan.



A mini 'mouse house' with 'stepping stones'.



Solitary Bee House – in a mug. Image: biodiversityinschools.com

Key Project 6 : Signage for Key Trees

There are a number of mature and semi-mature tree specimens in the Riverfront Amenity Park that would be good to highlight with signage, e.g. Birch, Alder, Willow. The Latin and Irish names alongside the English name should be included, in addition to a couple of sentences on key tree characteristics and benefits to nature.

Project Period: 2023-2025



Key Project 7 : Spring Bulbs by the Path

There are beautiful maturing trees, e.g. Birches, along the bank/upper path of the Riverside Amenity Park. Spring bulbs would add great colour and much-needed early nectar/pollen for bees. These can be planted in lines and/or patches across the green space.

Snowdrops, Crocuses, Muscari and Bluebells are recommended to plant over Daffodils and Tulips for their pollen/nectar value, although a few of the latter species could be mixed in sections too.

Project Period: 2023-2025



Key Project 8 : Town Park Enhancement

The Town Park is a pleasant space by the Leitrim County Council Offices, full of mature trees and dotted with flowerbeds. The beds nearest the tennis court may need to be enhanced. This can be achieved with pollinator-friendly perennials, e.g. Heathers, Lavenders, Catmint, Achillea, Allium, Potentilla fruticosa, Geranium sylvaticum. For a more extensive plant list, see pollinators.ie. For springtime, bulbs such as Snowdrops, Crocuses and Muscari would also be ideal to plant, dotted around the green in bunches. The lawns here were quite tightly mown on the survey day, so there is opportunity to mow less, at least in patches or strips. A 'low-mow' regime based on a short-flowering meadow, involves mowing the grass every 6 weeks instead of every week/fortnight (see 'Creating Meadows' section). This will mean less grass cuttings need to be disposed of and natural meadow flowers, e.g. Clover, Dandelion and Self-Heal will get a chance to grow and feed the bees!

Project Period: 2023-2025



Key Project 9 : Community Garden

On the survey day in Carrick-on-Shannon, the need for a community garden space, including a polytunnel, was highlighted. The possibility of starting a garden to the rear of the Council Offices was suggested (to be discussed and agreed with Leitrim County Council, of course). A polytunnel, raised beds and compost bay would be a great start to creating a community garden for Carrick-on-Shannon, helping to enhance both biodiversity and community spirit!

Project Period: 2023-2025



Key Project 10 : Area Behind Clock Tower

This is a somewhat tricky space to enhance as it lies behind the Clock Tower, so it is visible, but not accessible to the public. Some power-washing of this corner would help to clean the surface and clear any 'weeds' coming through the cracks.

Ideas to improve it might include either power-washing the current surface once a year or adding a layer of fine gravel on the surface.

Installing 2-3 planters with pollinator-friendly perennials such as Lavenders, Verbena or Potentilla, in between the trees would add colour and food for bees, e.g. see image on the below right for inspiration.

Project Period: 2023-2025



Section 3. Additional Biodiversity Projects for Carrick-on-Shannon 2023-2025

These are suggested projects the Tidy Towns group could carry out within the timeframe of the plan. They aim to correspond with the key projects laid out in Section 2, as well as raising awareness of biodiversity within the local community.

No.:	PROJECT:	DESCRIPTION:	PROJECT PERIOD:
1	One Biodiversity Event	<i>The Tidy Towns group will organise at least one bio-diversity-themed awareness event for the residents of Carrick-on-Shannon and the wider public. Themes could include a riverside walk and talk, bird identification skills or talks on managing natural meadows.</i>	Annually, 2023-2025
2	Become a Supporter of the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP)	<i>Becoming a Supporter of the AIPP may galvanise efforts to protect pollinators in the local community. It will help everyone to understand why certain actions are being taken, e.g. ‘Low-mow’ regimes.</i>	2023-2025
3	Annual ‘Bioblitzes’ and ‘FIT Counts’	<i>Bioblitzes are a great way to record the species present in the locality, as well as fun ways to get people involved in noticing nature. A Flower-Insect Timed (FIT) Count is another fun way of recording and getting locals involved in Citizen Science. All records gathered can be sent to the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) for their database. See biodiversityireland.ie for more details.</i>	Annually, 2023-2025