



Cloone Tidy Towns

Community Biodiversity/Pollinator Plan
2023 - 2025

Our Actions for Biodiversity in Cloone



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





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Welcome to the Cloone Tidy Towns Biodiversity Plan!

This plan is to be used to guide the biodiversity work of Cloone 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 Cloone 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: Cloone Community Biodiversity / Pollinator Action Plan 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 Cloone 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 Cloone. 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 Cloone 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 in Cloone

Cloone – An Overview

The village of Cloone is located in south County Leitrim, with the nearest large town being Mohill, to the southwest. Cloone is An Chluain in Irish, meaning ‘the meadow’, which is easy to see as the village is sits among rolling drumlins with picturesque scenery and nearby lakes (e.g. Annamaconway) and the Cloone River. There is much heritage in Cloone and surrounding area, with the historical ‘Bóthar na Naomh’ or ‘Road of the Saints’ and St James’s Church of Ireland and graveyard. Esker Hill located at the Cloone Road/R201 junction is a unique feature of the village. A lot of work has been done in Cloone over the years to maintain and enhance its many natural assets, including the launch of the Bóthar na Naomh trail and the beautiful new Garden of Remembrance. More than 120 acres, including Bóthar na Naomh Park, has been set aside as a wildlife sanctuary.

Key Project 1:

Ecological Survey and Booklet – Bóthar na Naomh

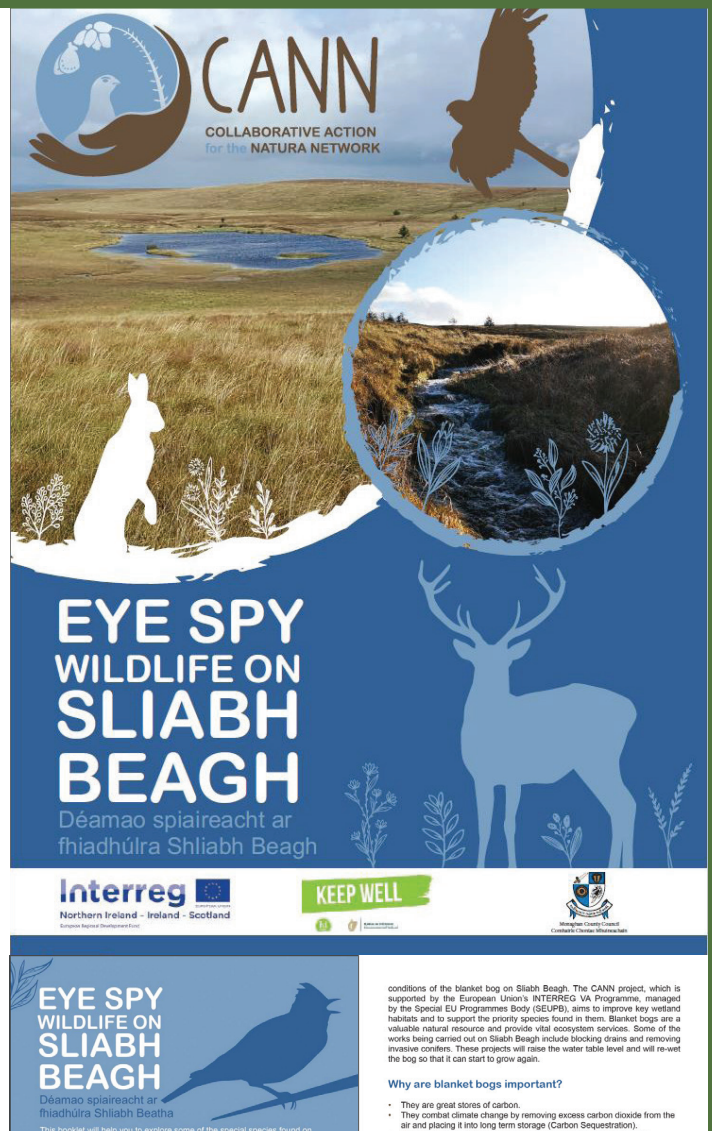
Bóthar na Naomh is a key project for Cloone and covers a large area that warrants its own detailed ecological survey by qualified ecologists. This may be a long-term option for the group, in addition to the creation of a high-quality website focused on the habitats and species of Bóthar na Naomh.

In the short-term, there is much data already gathered, which could be used to develop a booklet detailing the habitats of Bothar na Naomh, including key tree and plant species, along with bird, bat and invertebrate species. Images and artistic drawings alongside a minimal amount of text would be key here, so that the booklet would appeal to a range of audiences and age groups. In addition, the Cloone Tidy Towns Facebook page could be used to promote aspects of the booklet over a series of weeks or months.

One example of a well-laid out and accessible booklet on local nature is ‘Eye Spy Wildlife on Sliabh Beagh’ commissioned by the CANN Project and Monaghan Heritage Office. It is an interactive and colourful booklet which appeals to both adults and children. The booklets were made available in local libraries and from the heritage office. Library windows were painted with the animals of Sliabh Beagh during the booklet launch period. It can be viewed online at cannproject.org.

A snapshot of a page from inside the ‘Eye Spy Wildlife on Sliabh Beagh’ booklet is shown on the right.

Project Period: 2023-2025



Key Project 2 : Bóthar na Naomh & Wildlife in Schools

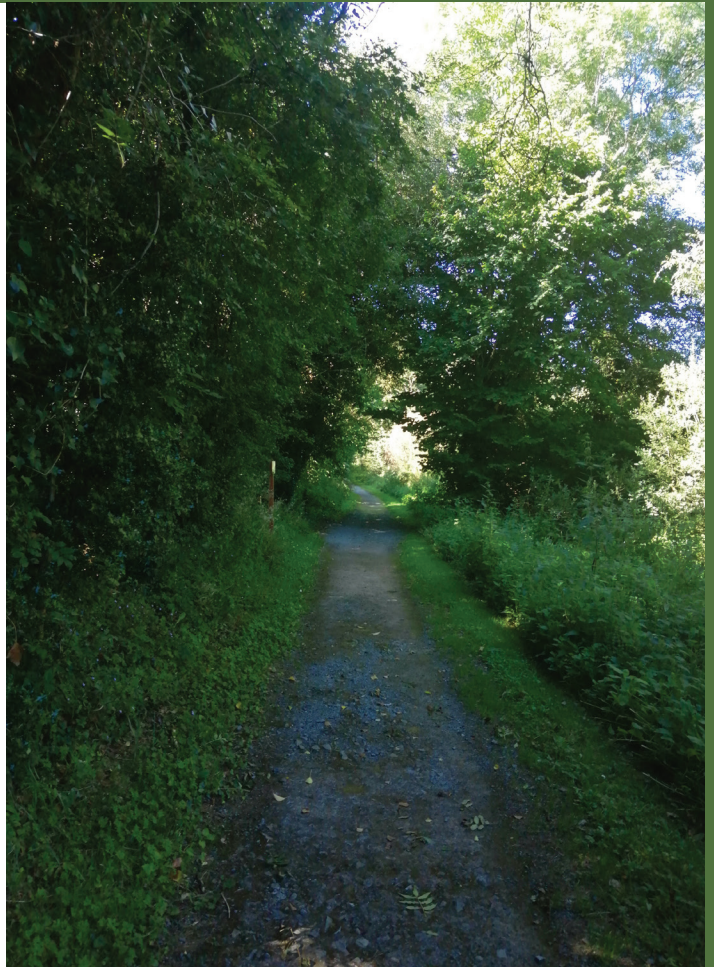
The booklet idea outlined in Project 1 can form the basis of an education programme for local schools. Ensuring that local schoolchildren are aware of the importance of Bóthar na Naomh and its natural and cultural heritage might encourage them to understand and protect this special area into the future.

While modules for primary level children might be more basic in conjunction with their nature or art lessons, secondary level children might benefit from doing projects and assignments on Bóthar na Naomh in relation to Geography or Biology subjects. On a more creative level, the wildlife and habitats of Bóthar na Naomh might be used to inspire works of art in painting, sculpture or woodwork!

A monthly or seasonal walk built into the local schools' curriculum would ensure that children can see first-hand what is in their nature booklets.

Themed walks and talks could be undertaken by specialists at least once a year, geared for the children, e.g. Bat Walks, 'Wildflower Hours' or Butterfly netting. A 'Bioblitz' might be held at Bóthar na Naomh by the Tidy Towns, in conjunction with local schools once a year, e.g. during Biodiversity Week.

Project Period: 2023-2025



Wolf Sculpture, Rossmore Park, Monaghan. An idea for Bóthar na Naomh?

Key Project 3 : Esker Hill – Maintenance & Conservation

Conservation action has already been taken at Esker Hill. Invasive Gorse has been controlled and the growth of Wild Orchids, Hawkbit, Red and White Clover as well as Ox-Eye Daisy is encouraged to come through via a careful maintenance regime.

Going forward, it is recommended to reduce mowing of grass nearest the road so that just a 1m strip is kept more regularly mown. The excess scrub such as Willow, Gorse, Blackthorn and Bramble should be removed manually so that scrub encroachment is halted.

Areas of rank grass can be strimmed away to allow natural wildflower species to come through. A yearly 'cut and lift' at Esker Hill, in Sept-Oct, resembling meadow management, would encourage more species rich grasses and flowers to emerge over time. As a managed calcareous grassland area, wild Orchids such as the Common-Spotted Orchid (pictured right) should appear in greater numbers over the years, along with Hawkbits, Ox-Eye Daisy, Clovers and potentially species like Knapweed and Devil's Bit Scabious. Annual surveys should be carried out to record species and report to the NBDC at biodiversityireland.ie

Project Period: 2023-2025



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



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

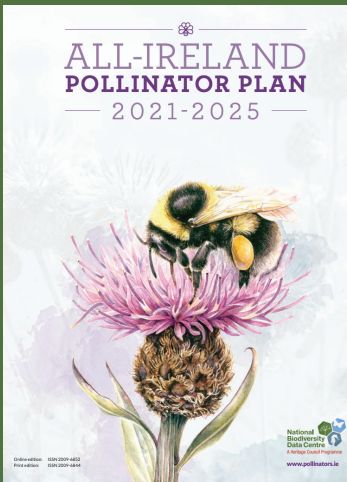


‘Low-mow’ sign at Causeway Hospital (Image: Donna Rainey) and AIPP ‘Grow- don’t mow’ sign, Manorhamilton.

‘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.





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! Cloone Tidy Towns can join these efforts by becoming a Supporter of the AIPP (if not one already).

Key Project 4 : Grounds at Old National School

The old national school in Cloone is maintained well by the Tidy Towns volunteers. Herbs have been added to the pots in recent times, which are great for bees and humans! A little sign here and a mention on social media might entice people to use the herbs, e.g. sharing recipes or remedies made with the herbs growing here.

The lawns to the front and back of the school were tightly mown on the site visit. An alternative management method would be to trial a 'low-mow' regime, leaving the central area or smaller patches uncut for 6-week periods to create a short-flowering meadow. Natural meadow flowers, e.g. Clover, Dandelion and Self-Heal will get a chance to grow and feed the bees! For details on the 'low-mow' method, see 'Creating Meadows' section.

Planting spring bulbs in the school grounds 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 some of the latter species could be mixed in too.

In addition, a small number of trees (c. 5-6) such as Rowan, native Cherry and Birch would be beneficial to plant at the rear of the school. One or two Oaks would be lovely here and are the best trees for biodiversity. However, they will grow up very tall eventually!

Project Period: 2023-2025



Key Project 5: Enhancing the Wild Garden

The Wild Garden is currently well maintained and looks inviting to spend time in. The space might be used more if a couple of raised vegetable and herb beds were added here, benefitting both pollinators and humans! Planting some simple salad leaves, Chard, Beetroot and herbs like Rosemary, Thyme & Basil, would be a good way to start. Tidy Towns members, schoolchildren and local enthusiasts could take turns to look after the vegetables - and then share the resulting produce! A few more native Apple, Plum and Pear tree varieties would go well here also. A bench or two would encourage people to sit and take in the surrounding nature and great views. Like the school grounds, a more 'low-mow' approach is recommended here. Existing flowers and shrubs that have died back in autumn need to be cut back and lifted for best growth the following year.

Project Period: 2023-2025



Key Project 6: Biodiversity in Open Spaces

There is a pleasant open, public green area that is currently a bit overlooked in Cloone, near the new school. Like the old school grounds, this would be ideal for establishing a low-flowering meadow in patches. Longer grasses could be allowed to grow along the wall for a 'wildlife run'.

Perhaps this green could serve as an outdoor learning space for the school and/or community hall? A Willow hut, such as that picture below, may be ideal to place here, surrounded by a 'low-mow' area with a path up to the entrance.

There is opportunity at green spaces in residential areas around the village to trial the 'low-mow' method. There is also a lot of available green space at the church graveyards. 'Low-mow' patches can be trialled at the new graveyard, where a space has been identified. Weedkiller should be avoided for verges as it is harmful to all wildlife (as well as humans). Patches of short-flowering meadows could be achieved quite easily in these areas, with strips regularly mown to preserve a more maintained look.

Project Period: 2023-2025





Example of a Willow hut, National Museum of Country Life, Co. Mayo. Image: National Museum of Ireland.

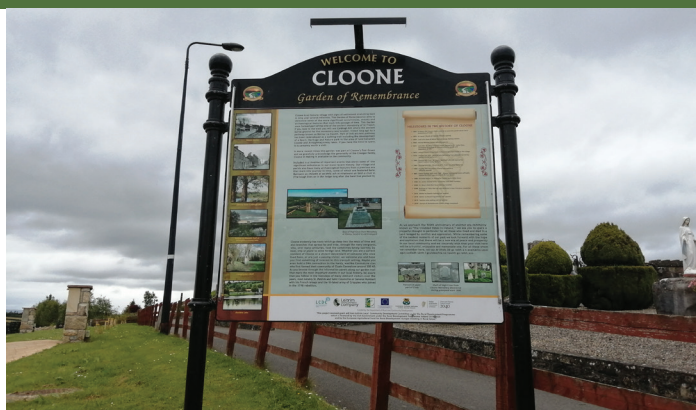
Key Project 7 : Garden of Remembrance – Future Planting

A range of tree species including Alder, Birch, Rowan and Hawthorn have been planted in the Garden of Remembrance. While some of these trees are thriving, others were not faring well at the time of the field visit for this Plan. This may have been due to water stress, though these will have to be monitored. If they fail to improve during the next growing season they will have to be replanted. Native species as above, with local provenance are the best best to yield healthy trees.

Some native hedging would go well along the inside of the wooden boundary fence here in future, e.g. Hawthorn, Hazel, Spindle and Guelder Rose. Native hedge species are fantastic for pollinators and birds as they produce fruits and flowers throughout the seasons.

Again, some patches and/or lines of pollinator friendly spring bulbs would brighten up some sections, e.g. around bases of signs and along the hedge/fence. Crocuses, Snowdrops and Muscari are favoured by pollinators over Daffodils and Tulips, though these might be sprinkled in too.

Project Period: 2023–2025



Section 3. Additional Biodiversity Projects for Cloone 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 biodiversity-themed awareness event for the residents of Cloone and the wider public. Themes can be centred around Bóthar na Naomh and events held in cooperation with the Tidy Towns, schools and other local groups where possible.</i>	Annually, 2023-2025
2	Moving Away from Herbicides	<i>Cloone Tidy Towns aims to avoid using herbicides in its day-to-day activities, as highlighted in the recent 5-Year Plan. The Tidy Towns group could campaign for the end of glyphosate-based herbicides in Cloone and the wider area.</i>	2023-2025
3	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
4	Survey and record species (e.g. flowers, birds, bats) regularly and record with NBDC.	<i>Surveying and recording a range of species around Cloone, including at Esker Hill and Bóthar na Naomh, will help to grow the dataset and form a picture of species diversity in the area. Register species recorded with the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) at biodiversityireland.ie.</i>	Annually, 2023-2025