

Action Plan for Our Natural Heritage in Abbey 2011- 2014



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Text: Dr Janice Fuller

Photos: Niamh Holohan, Annie Fallon, Janice Fuller

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Abbey	4
Biodiversity Action Plans	4
Process to produce the plan	5
Nature and Wildlife in Abbey	6
Community Action	7
Action Plan for our Natural Heritage in Abbey	11
Objectives of Plan	11
Monitoring and Evaluation	13
Funding sources	14
Useful contacts for more information	15
Further reading	16
Appendix 1:	17
Appendix 2:	18

Introduction

Abbey

Abbey is a beautiful and vibrant village in east Galway, located 19km south-east of Loughrea town and 13km west of Portumna. It lies in the foothills of the Sliabh Aughty Mountains and only a few kilometres west of Lough Derg.

The *Action Plan for Our Natural Heritage in Abbey* sets out a list of projects and activities that will run over the next three years in the Abbey area for the benefit of nature and wildlife, environment, and the local community. This document is a ‘Biodiversity Action Plan’ for the Abbey area.



Biodiversity Action Plans

Biodiversity Action Plans provide a framework for protecting, managing and/or enhancing natural heritage in the area through action led by the local community. The process of producing such a plan creates an opportunity to co-ordinate action among local groups, individuals, statutory bodies, and other organisations.

Many towns and villages, like Abbey, have active community-based groups such as Tidy Towns, schools, farming organisations, anglers, scouts etc. that work tirelessly for the benefit of their members and the community. The production of a local biodiversity action plan can help ensure that community-based projects will not have a negative impact on biodiversity, and may have positive impacts on nature, the natural environment and amenities in the area e.g. through raising awareness, habitat creation and/or appropriate habitat management.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity is another word for natural heritage, nature, wildlife, flora and fauna. Biodiversity includes all living things, the places that plants and animals live (habitats), and the interactions among living things (the web of life).

The natural world (i.e. biodiversity) provides us with many essential ‘goods and services’ – clean air and water, food, fuel, building materials, fertile soils, nutrient recycling systems, pollination of plants including many crops, control of pests and diseases, medicines etc.

Biodiversity has many benefits for local communities by providing natural recreational amenities (e.g. parks and green spaces, walking and biking routes, picnic spots, places for fishing and angling), local educational resources and environmental protection. Allowing room for nature and wildlife in our towns and villages makes them more attractive and interesting, protects our environment, and improves our quality of life.

Process to produce the plan

Biodiversity Training was provided for interested individuals and groups in Abbey in order to raise awareness of what biodiversity is, why it is important, where it is, and the many benefits of biodiversity for people, communities and the environment.

Residents from Abbey and the surrounding area met on three occasions with ecologist, Dr Janice Fuller, to develop the biodiversity plan (Appendix 1). Dr Fuller provided the training and facilitated the production of the local biodiversity action plan. The objectives and actions of the plan were decided by the local community. Following the Biodiversity Training, a local group was formed to implement the plan.

Various agencies and environmental organisations were consulted as the plan was developed in order to learn more about biodiversity in the Abbey area. These include: National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Vincent Wildlife Trust, Bat Conservation Ireland, Galway Bat Group, and BirdWatch Galway.

The project to produce a local Biodiversity Action Plan for Abbey was a collaborative effort between Galway County Council, Galway Rural Development, People and Nature Project, Galway County Heritage Forum, Galway County Biodiversity Steering Group and the local community. The

project to produce local Biodiversity Action Plans is an action in the County Galway Biodiversity Action Plan 2008- 2013, which is part of the Galway County Heritage Plan 2009- 2014. It was initiated by the Galway County Heritage Forum and the Galway County Biodiversity Steering Group, in partnership with Galway Rural Development.

Nature and Wildlife in Abbey

The village of Abbey has a rich built heritage with the Kilnalahan Abbey as its focal point. This abbey was founded in the mid-13th Century. It is probably home now to some of our native bats who flit about at night and like to roost in old buildings in the summer to rear their young. The village itself has many planted trees and several green areas. The local national school is undertaking several biodiversity projects that have greatly enhanced the grounds of the school and surrounding area.



Kilnalahan Abbey

The eastern boundary of the Sliabh Aughty Special Protection Area (SPA) occurs about 1.5km to the south of Abbey. This extensive area has important populations of the rare birds of prey, hen harrier and merlin, which breed there in the summer. Designation as a SPA indicates that this area is of international significance for nature conservation in Europe and thus very special.

The landscape around Abbey is largely agricultural grassland with extensive hedgerows, some coniferous and mixed woodland, wet grassland and peatland. A small stream (a tributary of the Cappagh River) runs through the village.



Community Action

Looking at the various organisations that have been established in Abbey parish over the years, it is clear that there was a distinct sense of the importance of community participation and of getting involved at a local level for the purpose of developing and benefiting the local area. This spirit of community involvement is still very evident.

The following organisations support community action in Abbey, and protection and conservation of our natural heritage:

Abbey Muintir na Tire - Set up in 1955 and subscribing to the ethos and ideals set out by Canon Hayes of Bansha, Co Tipperary the founding father of Muintir na Tire. Realising that the lack of a hall or centre as a meeting place for local groups was a huge drawback, this group set about raising money to build a Community Centre for the village. During the 1960s also, Abbey Muintir na Tire looked at the possibility of providing a Group Water Scheme for the area and a committee was formed for the purpose of investigating this. Abbey Muintir na Tire trustees continue to manage the Community Centre but many of the various activities are subsumed by Abbey Community Development Association.

Kylemore-Abbey Group Water Scheme – emerged in the late 1960s from the work carried out by the committee set up by Abbey Muintir na Tire to investigate the provision of a water supply for the area. Prior to this, very few families had a piped water supply from their own wells and most families got water by bucket from a local field well. A totally new Water Treatment Plant for the Group Water Scheme was opened in July 2011 and it is equipped to filter and treat the water

providing a supply of good quality water for the 140 families in the area. The raw water supply comes from a three hundred feet deep natural spring in an area appropriately called Wellpark!

Abbey Community Development Association – set up with the primary focus of providing work opportunities for the unemployed in the region and at the same time improving and enhancing Abbey village. The group's initial objective was to secure approval for a Community Employment project and this was achieved in 1991 when the first project, employing sixteen people, commenced. Since then, CE projects have been a feature of the development process of Abbey village and many unemployed people who worked on these projects have been successful in securing full-time employment. In 1993 the sponsorship of schemes was taken over by Galway County Council. In recent years, Abbey Community Development Association has focused on working with Abbey Tidy Towns committee to achieve the title of Galway's Tidiest Town in the Board Fáilte Tidy Towns competition. This was first achieved in 2005 and was repeated for the following five years. This work is ongoing and although Abbey came second in this year's competition it is hoped to progress its rating in the national competition in future years.

Abbey Tidy Towns – set up in the 1970s and with few exceptions Abbey has participated annually in the Tidy Towns competition. In the early years the focus was on litter, overgrown hedges and spraying whereas today the focus is very much on biodiversity and care for our environment. Much work has been done in improving landscaping in the village and in creating a greater awareness of our natural heritage. In the past year approximately 50 new Irish trees of different varieties were planted. Additional plants that attract wildlife were planted with a view to attracting further wildlife to the area and bat boxes have also been erected. A deadwood pile and an insect hotel have been created in the wildflower garden and a butterfly lodge has been installed. Bird feeders were replenished throughout the year and this has attracted a large increase in wild birds. Fourteen landowners have agreed to participate in establishing a Wildlife Sanctuary covering approximately 500 acres and it is planned to introduce pheasants and ducks to this nature sanctuary. There is a high level of community involvement and almost every house in the immediate village is represented on the Tidy Towns committee. This year our group participated in the 'Communities Working Together for Nature' biodiversity project facilitated by Dr Janice Fuller and this led us to look at developing nature walks. Our research prompted us to enter the Golden Mile competition this year and this involvement has brought other people from the wider community on board and created great interest and enthusiasm in the whole area of biodiversity. Elaine O'Riordan visited us in July and advised us on the natural heritage along the route of the Golden Mile. On a walk of the Golden Mile one of our committee carried out a survey and recorded twenty one different bird species.

St. Feichín's National School – For the past number of years, our local school has become very involved in biodiversity projects and has been awarded the school's Green Flag for the sixth consecutive year. The school is currently working towards a Biodiversity Flag.



Pupils from St. Feichín's planting a garden

The children have shown great interest and enthusiasm in the various biodiversity projects. Parents too have been involved through the organisation of slogan competitions and by responding to questionnaires issued to gather information and so to encourage other families to become involved. The children have made a map of the school campus and outlined the different habitats that exist. They have carried out a bird survey and erected different bird feeders to encourage other species of birds to visit their community. They planted vegetables and scented wild flowers and undertook the task of doing a project on all the wild flowers. A bug hotel and a butterfly lodge were put in place, and in addition the school changes flowers in the window boxes each season to encourage different food chains into the environment. The students also surveyed the river where they carried out a mini-beast hunt and found water shrimp, water beetles and bricíns (minnows).



Pupils from St. Feichín's studying local river

GAA – GAA in the parish of Abbey/Duniry dates back to the early 1900s when, with the help of some players from outside the parish, the club reached the county final in 1906. There is a very good record of the fortunes of the Abbey/Duniry club down through the years and it is interesting that today the club has once again amalgamated with Tynagh and is known as Tynagh/Abbey-Duniry. What stands out from reading the records is the fact that right up to the present day there has been great community participation and involvement and great examples of time voluntarily given to hand on the tradition and to create an awareness of our great heritage. The GAA is fully supportive of all local activities including various Tidy Towns' community initiatives.

30th Galway Abbey-Duniry Scouts Group – Starting out in 2006 as a satellite group of the Portumna Scouts, Abbey-Duniry Scouts became an independent branch in 2010. Members are encouraged to embrace the exploration of nature and to respect, appreciate and preserve what is natural and beneficial to man and the animal and plant kingdom. The central theme at the World Jamboree in Sweden in July 2011 incorporated the theme of biodiversity and asked the question: *'How can we make a difference in our homes and societies so that we can live in a more harmonious world for people and nature?'* Therefore the 30th Galway Abbey-Duniry Scouts Group plan to organise a number of workshops in the coming year, initially giving background to the biodiversity subject and learning about ecosystems in their area. Then in their many activities, they will work towards finding as many different species of plant and insect life as possible in their locality as they compete for the honour of being the most Biodiverse Scout Team in 30th Galway Scouts.

Action Plan for our Natural Heritage in Abbey



Objectives of Plan

1. Increase awareness of biodiversity and participation in community projects that aim to protect and enhance local nature and wildlife
2. Develop natural amenities in Abbey and environs
3. Increase local knowledge and skills in relation to protecting and enhancing nature and wildlife

	Action/ Project/ Activity	Lead Partner	Other partners	Timeframe
1	Produce leaflet outlining biodiversity in Abbey (what and where it is), and the projects/ activities in the biodiversity plan	Abbey Community Development Association – Frances Holohan	Abbey Tidy Towns, Galway County Council	November/ December 2011
2	Launch the biodiversity plan with open day and family fun activities	ACDA – Michael Behan	Abbey Tidy Towns, Galway County Council	Spring 2012
3	Put biodiversity plan and biodiversity information on Abbey website	Frances Holohan Niamh Holohan	Abbey Tidy Towns, Galway County Council	Spring 2012
4	Conduct habitat and wildlife audit of area and produce habitat map for Abbey Parish	ACDA/ Abbey Tidy Towns	BirdWatch Galway, Galway County Council	May - August 2012
5	Run nature and wildlife walks and talks e.g. bats, birds, trees, wildflowers, medicinal herbs	ACDA – Shane O’Neill Michael Behan	Galway Bat Group/ Vincent Wildlife Trust, NPWS, BirdWatch Galway, Galway County Council	Annual

6	Run Beekeeping Workshop	ACDA – Colin Killeen	Abbey Tidy Towns, Elaine O’Riordan, Galway Beekeepers’ Association	May 2012
7	Erect variety of bird nesting boxes	ACDA/ Abbey Tidy Towns	BirdWatch Galway, School, Scouts	Winter 2011 – to Spring 2012
8	Conduct owl survey	ACDA/Abbey Tidy Towns	BirdWatch Galway	Summer 2012
9	Promote wildlife-friendly gardening	ACDA – Michael Behan	Abbey Tidy Towns	Annual
10	Run training for grafting old varieties of fruit trees	Colin Killeen	Irish Seed Savers Association	Spring 2012
11	Plant native fruiting hedgerow	Colin Killeen	Irish Seed Savers Association	Spring 2012
12	River Management Workshop	ACDA/ Abbey Tidy Towns	Inland Fisheries Ireland, Galway County Council	March 2012
13	Run workshop on importance of water quality and protecting water resources	Group Water Scheme – Des Lynch	ACDA, Galway County Council, Inland Fisheries Ireland	November 2011
14	Golden Mile Competition	Frances Holohan	Abbey Tidy Towns, Galway County Council	Summer 2011
15	Conduct feasibility study for developing walking routes	Michael Behan, Frances Holohan	NUIG, Galway Rural Development	Spring 2012
16	Develop picnic areas in areas of natural beauty	ACDA, Abbey Tidy Towns	Galway Rural Development	2013

17	Develop wildlife sanctuary (<i>see Three year plan in Appendix 2</i>)	John Donnelly	Abbey Tidy Towns, County Galway Biodiversity Project	2011 - 2013
18	Encourage wildlife in sanctuary (e.g. hedgehogs, birds, waterbirds and bats); provide information leaflet for landowners	John Donnelly	Abbey Tidy Towns, County Galway Biodiversity Project	Spring 2012 onwards
19	Raise awareness of the problem of litter and dumping	ACDA/ Abbey Tidy Towns	Galway County Council	Annual
20	Village Spring Clean (part of National Spring clean)	Niamh Holohan	ACDA/ Abbey Tidy Towns, School, Scouts, Galway County Council	Annually in Spring
21	Erect heritage signage for walking routes	ACDA/ Abbey Tidy Towns	Heritage Officer, Galway County Biodiversity Project	2013

ACDA = Abbey Community Development Association

Monitoring and Evaluation

A committee will be established to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the ‘Action Plan for Our Natural Heritage in Abbey’. They will meet at least twice a year in order to set annual goals and to review progress to date. The committee will liaise with the Galway County Heritage Officer and the Galway County Biodiversity Project Manager.

Funding sources

Potential sources of funding that could assist with implementing actions in the plan include the following:

Fund/ Funding Body	Description
Galway Rural Development	This leader company offers full and part funding for a variety of community-led projects. Discuss potential projects with the Community Development Workers prior to submitting applications to determine if they meet the GRD criteria for projects.
The Heritage Council	The Heritage Council offer grants to community groups and individuals for heritage projects every year. The deadline for applications is usually in November but this can change. See their website for details of the grant application criteria and application process (www.heritagecouncil.ie)
Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund, Galway County Council	This fund is administered by the Environment Section of Galway County Council; it promotes sustainable development by assisting small scale, non-profit environmental projects at a local level. (www.galway.ie/en/Services/Environment/CommunityInitiatives/LocalAgenda21/)
Heritage Grant Scheme, Galway County Council	The objective of this Heritage Grant Scheme is to promote interest, education, knowledge and pride in, and to facilitate appreciate and enjoyment of the heritage of County Galway. Applications are invited once a year, usually in the Spring. (www.galway.ie/en/Services/Heritage/HeritageGrants/)
County Galway Biodiversity Project	The County Galway Biodiversity Project Manager, Elaine O’Riordan, applies for funding to wide range of funding bodies and organisations; community groups access this funding for biodiversity-related projects by contacting her directly. She will also assist groups with funding applications. (E-mail elaine.oriordan@nuigalway.ie)

Useful contacts for more information

Name (Group/ Individual)	Activities/ Expertise	Contact details
Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer, Galway County Council	All matters relating to heritage including biodiversity and funding.	mmannion@galwaycoco.ie www.galwaycountyheritage.com (091) 509198
Elaine O’Riordan, Galway County Biodiversity Project Manager	Biodiversity, natural heritage, habitat mapping, community-based projects	elaine.oriordan@nuigalway.ie www.galwaycountybiodiversity.com (091) 495921
Inland Fisheries Ireland	Responsible for the protection, conservation and management of the inland fisheries resource	Contact: Kevin Rogers, Senior Environmental Officer (091) 563118
Galway Bat Group	Organise walks and talks on bats in Galway	galwaybatgroup@gmail.com
Vincent Wildlife Trust	Promote conservation of bats and other wildlife; provide information and advice; organise walks and talks on bats	katemcaney@vwt.org.uk
BirdWatch Galway	Promote conservation of birds and their habitats; conduct surveys and organise birdwatching events	www.galwaybirdwatch.org
Irish Seed Savers Association	Promote conservation of genetic crop resources; provide advice and information about native varieties of fruit and other crops; sell fruit trees	www.irishseedsavers.ie
Galway Bee-keepers’ Association	Promote and support bee- keeping in Galway	galway.beekeepers.com

Galway Rural Development	Support and work with community groups to develop new initiatives in their area; provide funding for community-based projects	www.grd.ie 091 844885
The Heritage Council	Promote conservation and management of Irelands' heritage; provide information and advice to community groups; also provide funding for heritage projects	www.heritagecouncil.ie
National Parks and Wildlife Service	Responsible for the protection of Ireland's natural heritage, particularly sites designated as Special Conservation Areas, Special Protection Areas, Natural Heritage Areas, and Nature Reserves etc., and species of conservation concern e.g. hen harriers.	Conservation Ranger Jacinta Murphy (091) 870340

Further reading

- Galway County Biodiversity Action Plan 2008- 2013
- Galway County Heritage Plan 2009- 2014
- Biodiversity Guidelines for Communities (Galway County Council)

(all available from the Heritage Officer; www.galway.ie).

Appendix 1:

List of participants in biodiversity training to develop biodiversity plan

	Name
1	Frances Holohan
2	John Donnelly
3	Shane O'Neill
4	Colin Killeen
5	Mike Behan
6	Olive Burke
7	Maria Burke
8	Brenda Ford
9	Barry Ford
10	Des Lynch
11	Tom Pierce
12	Paddy Kelly
13	Eamon Kelly
14	Gerard Abberton
15	Martin Finnerty
16	Derek Brogan
17	Eve Abberton
18	Eamon Hynes
19	Fr John Hickey
20	Niamh Holohan
21	Therese Murphy

Appendix 2:

Wildlife Sanctuary Plan

3-Year Plan for Wildlife Sanctuary – John Donnelly

2011

- 1 Establish wild life sanctuary with agreement of 14 farmers covering 500 acres approximately
- 2 Liaise with Bird Watch Ireland for advice – Workshop in October/November
- 3 Pupils of Abbey National school to carry out a survey of wild life in the sanctuary
- 4 Release some pheasant and duck in September/October
- 5 Erect signage ‘No Hunting and Shooting’ in sanctuary

2012

- 1 Erect some feeding and nesting boxes in October 2011
- 2 Encourage people to replenish feeding tables
- 3 Hold workshop to evaluate progress and plan for latter half of 2012 and 2013
- 4 Investigate the possibility of developing some habitats based on information from surveys

2013

- 1 Encourage people to participate in feeding song birds during the winter months
- 2 Plant some feeding areas for pheasants and duck
- 3 Survey area to evaluate change in habitat over the 3 years
- 4 Workshop with Bird Watch and publish results of the project