

Nature and Wildlife Plan for Athenry

2011- 2014



Athenry Castle and wildlife area

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Comhshaoil, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government



people & nature

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Galway County Heritage Forum and Galway County Biodiversity Steering Committee initiated the project, in partnership with Galway Rural Development. Miriam Stewart, Galway Rural Development, Marie Mannion and Elaine O’Riordan helped develop the project, and provided assistance and guidance to the project manager, Janice Fuller, which is gratefully acknowledged.

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Introduction

Athenry

Athenry is lively small town in east Galway, famed for its built heritage and located 20km south-east of Galway City. The town is surrounded by gently undulating countryside.

This document- *Nature and Wildlife Plan for Athenry*- is in effect a Biodiversity Action Plan for the Athenry area. It sets out a list of projects and activities that will run over the next three years for the benefit of nature and wildlife, environment, and the local community.



Biodiversity Action Plans

Biodiversity Action Plans provide a framework for protecting, managing and/or enhancing natural heritage in 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 and individuals, and statutory bodies and other organisations.

Many towns, such as Athenry, have active community-based groups and organisations such as Tidy Towns, schools, environmental organisations, farming groups, scouts, heritage groups etc. that work tirelessly for the benefit of their members and the community. The production of a local biodiversity

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 an 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 Athenry 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.

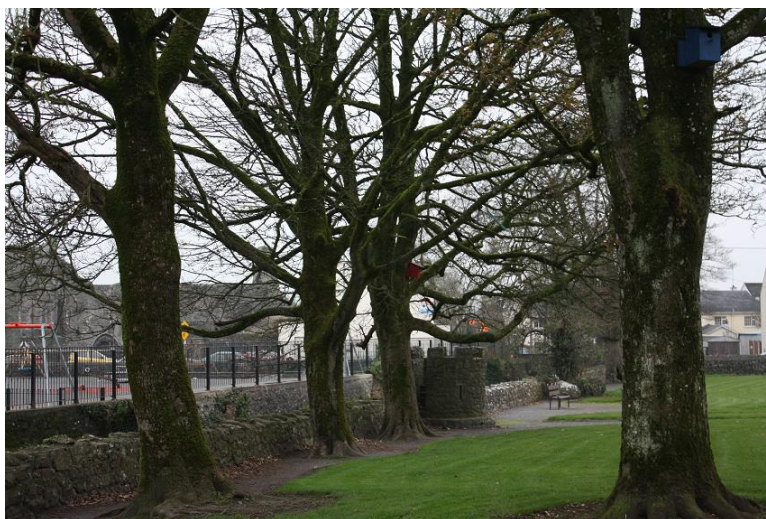
Residents from Athenry and the surrounding area met on three occasions with ecologist, Dr Janice Fuller, to develop the biodiversity plan (Appendix 1). Dr Fuller provided the training and facilitated the production of the local biodiversity action plan. The objectives and actions of the plan were decided by the local community.

Various agencies and environmental organisations were consulted as the plan was developed in order to learn more about biodiversity in the Athenry area. These included: 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 Athenry 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 Athenry

Athenry is an historic town situated on the Clarin River with a particularly rich built heritage that includes a medieval town wall with gate and towers, a Dominican friary and a Norman Castle. The many old stone buildings may provide a roosting habitat for bats such as the soprano pipistrelle bat, which has been recorded in the town. Many of the stone walls in the town are covered with a range of wall plants such as ivy-leaved toadflax, wall valerian and wall rue.



Mature trees with bird boxes near Athenry Castle and playground

The Clarin River runs through the town providing a focal point and a wonderful habitat for wildlife. Many native trees have been planted behind the castle and along the river. There are also many mature trees in and around the town. Large, old trees ('veteran' trees) provide an invaluable habitat for birds, bats and insects, as well as bringing life and colour into built-up areas.



Clarin River

In the outskirts of Athenry there are a couple of Coillte woodlands at Derrydonnell and Moyode, which are highly valued locally for recreation, as well as being important for forestry and biodiversity. A recent exciting development in the Athenry area is the establishment of community allotments where urban dwellers can have more space to grow food, vegetables and flowers.



Derrydonnell Woods

Community Action

Athenry Tidy Towns - There is an active Tidy Towns group in the town and their mission statement is as follows:

- For Athenry to retain its status as an attractive heritage town.
- Promote environmental awareness, civic spirit and pride in the community.
- Encourage active participation and involvement of groups and organisations in environmental initiatives.
- Create innovative and effective projects and initiatives with a view to addressing local challenges.
- Promote and develop competitions to encourage active participation of the community to foster pride in the town. Competitions are aimed at various sectors - the community at large, the business community, residents associations and school children.
- Provide for a cleaner, greener and more vibrant town

Athenry Tidy Towns have run several biodiversity projects and initiatives in recent years and their focus is increasingly on protecting and enhancing the natural heritage of the town, along with the rich built heritage. They have biodiversity information for Athenry residents and visitors on their website. For more information about Athenry Tidy Towns, and to get involved, see:
www.sites.google.com/site/athenrytt/athenry-tidy-towns.

Athenry Environmental Network (AEN) - Athenry Environmental Network promotes environmental awareness and environmentally-friendly practices for individuals and communities everywhere. AEN have been involved in several community-based projects including setting up community allotments, organising environmental and biodiversity walks and talks, and tree planting events. A recent exciting project developed by AEN in partnership with Galway County Council is the establishment of a Slí na Sláinte route through the town, which will provide opportunities for highlighting the rich built and natural heritage in the town. For more information about Athenry Environmental Network, and to get involved, see: www.athenryenvironmentalnetwork.com.

Athenry schools - There are several primary schools in Athenry town and environs that are participating in the Green Schools Programme run by An Taisce. Some of these are working on the Biodiversity Theme for the Green Flag and are conducting lots of interesting nature and wildlife projects. These include building bug hotels and recording the wide variety of creepy crawlies that visit or take up residence there; putting up bird boxes and bird feeders in the school grounds, learning to identify native trees and shrubs, and planting flowers to attract butterflies. Athenry Tidy Towns are working with local schools to plant thousands of native trees and shrubs in the Athenry area.

Nature and Wildlife Plan for Athenry

Objectives of Plan

- Raise awareness, appreciation and understanding of Athenry's rich natural heritage
- Protect and enhance biodiversity and natural amenities in Athenry

	Action/ Project	Lead Partner	Other partners	Timeframe
1	Run biodiversity awareness events: -Woodland and wildflower guided walks -Bat and bird guided walks -Talk on management options for local rivers -Wildlife gardening talks and demonstrations	AEN	ATT, GCC, IFI	Annual
2	Develop walking trails highlighting natural (and built) heritage in Athenry town and environs	AEN	ATT, GCC, Slí na Sláinte, GRD	2011
3	Produce leaflet on natural heritage in Athenry (upload to AEN website)	AEN	ATT	2012
4	Develop river walks	ATT	AEN, GCC, IFI, Athenry Angling Club	2011- 2013
5	Develop tree planting scheme for the town	ATT	AEN, GCC, GRD	October 2011
6	Plant native trees and native varieties of fruit trees in and around town (following best practice guidance in relation to built heritage)	ATT, AEN	Heritage Officer, ISSA, Teagasc	Annual
7	Erect interpretive signage highlighting natural heritage	AEN	Slí na Sláinte, GCC	2012
8	Erect and maintain bird and bat boxes, and bird feeders in appropriate locations	ATT	AEN, Schools, GCC	Annual

9	Conduct nature and wildlife audit for Athenry (information gathered to be continually updated on website)	ATT	AEN, GCC, Heritage Council	Ongoing
10	Run Annual Spring Clean	ATT	AEN, Schools, GCC, Residents Groups	Annual
11	Harvest rainwater for town planting and gardening projects	AEN, ATT	GCC	2012
12	Develop arts and biodiversity project	AEN	GCC	2012
13	Build hedgehog hibernation shelters in appropriate locations	ATT		Annual
14	Support biodiversity projects in primary schools (through Green Schools programme e.g. tree planting, running art competition with biodiversity theme, develop wildflower gardens etc.)	Schools, ATT	An Taisce, GCC	On-going
15	Develop community biodiversity noticeboards	AEN	Library, Credit Union	2012
16	Enter Golden Mile competition	Local committee	ATT, AEN, GCC	2012
17	Conserve and upgrade seating areas to aid appreciation of built and natural heritage.	AEN	Donncha Cahill	Spring 2012
18	Develop river management and enhancement strategy	ATT	IFI, GCC, NPWS, AEN, Athenry Angling Club	2011- 2013

ATT = Athenry Tidy Towns;

AEN = Athenry Environmental Network;

GCC = Galway County Council;

IFI = Inland Fisheries Ireland;

GRD = Galway Rural Development

Monitoring and Evaluation

A committee will be established to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the '*Nature and Wildlife Plan for Athenry*'. 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 Heritage Officer and the County Galway 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. (www.grd.ie)
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	<p>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.</p> <p>(www.galway.ie/en/Services/Heritage/HeritageGrants/)</p>
County Galway Biodiversity Project	<p>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.</p> <p>(E-mail elaine.oriordan@nuigalway.ie)</p>

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 (091) 509198 www.galwaycountyheritage.com
Elaine O’Riordan, Galway County Biodiversity Project Manager	Biodiversity, natural heritage, habitat mapping, community-based projects	elaine.oriordan@nuigalway.ie (091) 495921 www.galwaycountybiodiversity.com
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 Rural Development	Support and work with community groups to develop new initiatives in their area; provide funding for	www.grd.ie (091) 844885

	community-based projects	
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The Heritage Council	Promote conservation and management of Ireland's 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 Rebecca Teesdale (091) 870340
Coillte	Commercial forestry company; also charged with managing proportion of estate for nature conservation purposes.	Forest Manager Mick Donnellan (090) 9679076
Shane O hEithir, Community, Enterprise and Economic Development Unit, Galway County Council	Provides groups with support for Tidy Towns including advice on a wide range of topics and issues	soheithir@galwaycoco.ie (091) 476502 www.galway.ie/

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).

See also Athenry Local Area Plan

www.galway.ie/en/Services/Planning/DevelopmentPlans/LocalAreaPlans/AdoptedPlans/AthenryLocalAreaPlan/

Appendix 1:

List of participants in biodiversity training to develop biodiversity plan

	Name
1	Christiane Gottschalk
2	Eileen Hawkins
3	Jim Reidy
4	Tadhg Costello
5	Damian McGreevy
6	Michael Glynn
7	Patrick Creed
8	Desmond Glynn
9	Marion Quirke
10	Eddie de Vere
11	Stephanie O'Regan
12	Celia Donnelly
13	Elaine O'Riordan
14	Anne Glynn
15	Paddy Mc Gee
16	Eilis Ward