

Action Plan for Nature for Milltown

2011- 2014



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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, G.R.D, and Marie Mannion Galway County Council Heritage Officer helped develop the project, and provided assistance and guidance to the project manager, Dr. Janice Fuller, which is gratefully acknowledged.

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Introduction

Milltown

The village of Milltown is situated on the banks of the Clare River, 45km from Galway City and close to the Galway-Mayo border. Milltown has enjoyed much success in the National Tidy Towns competition over the years due to the many community-based initiatives to enhance the village's visual and natural amenities. The village lies in an area of gently rolling countryside.

This document sets out a list of projects and activities that will run over the next three years (2011-2014) in the Milltown area for the benefit of nature and wildlife, environment, and the local community. The '*Action Plan for Nature for Milltown*' is in effect a Biodiversity Action Plan for the area.



The Clare River

Biodiversity Action Plans

Biodiversity Action Plans provide a framework for protecting, managing and/or enhancing natural heritage in an 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 and villages, such as Milltown, have active community-based groups and organisations such as Tidy Towns, schools, farming groups, gun clubs, angling clubs, heritage groups etc. that work tirelessly for the benefit of their members and the community. The production of a local biodiversity action plan can help to ensure that community-based projects don't damage 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 where 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 Milltown in order to raise awareness of what biodiversity is, why it is important, and the many benefits of biodiversity for people, communities and the environment.

Residents from Milltown, 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 Milltown 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 Milltown 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 Milltown

Milltown has a particularly rich natural heritage in the village environs and wider area. The Clare River, which flows through the village, is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) as part of the Lough Corrib catchment. The Clare River, its tributaries and other local rivers are hugely important for wildlife and are also highly prized for angling. The local angling club, in co-operation with Inland Fisheries Ireland, the Office of Public Works, local farmers and Milltown Development Association have worked to protect and enhance the wildlife and angling value of these rivers. The Dawros River was developed in 2010 and 2011 as a first class spawning river for wild Trout and Salmon.



Entrance to the Clare River Walk and Heritage Park

The Clare River Walk and Heritage Park is a wonderful local amenity that gives people a chance to enjoy and appreciate the river. In 2000 the park won a National Tidy Towns 'Waterside Award'. Many native trees have been planted in the Park and there is a lovely 1600m walkway along the river. There are nature and wildlife information boards in the Heritage Park, along the Clare River Walk and at Cloondroon Lake. A three year plan to extend the river walk and link it to the Slí na Sláinte walk at Russelstown Bridge is underway and will be completed in 2012 (www.irishheart.ie/media/pub/slinaslainte/maps/milltown.pdf).



Another view of the Heritage Park

There are a few small lakes in the Milltown area, including Cloondroon Lake and Bellisland Lough. Cloondroon Lake is an important coarse fishing lake with an amenity area that was re-developed in 2010. This beautiful natural amenity has been developed in a sensitive manner to protect its valuable coarse fishing resource, the local environment and wildlife. A report on the ecology of Cloondroon Lake and its surrounding peatland habitats concluded that it is a 'gem of biodiversity in north County Galway'. The very rare Marsh Fritillary butterfly has been recorded in wet grassland near the lake. Otters have also been spotted in and around the lake. Both species are strictly protected because they are rare in a European context.

The Lesser horseshoe and Soprano pipistrelle bats have been recorded in the Milltown area. The lesser Horseshoe bat is very rare in a European context and as such is strictly protected under European and Irish legislation. The presence of these native mammals indicates a healthy local environment.

Rathbaun turlough occurs a few kilometres to the west of the village and is a proposed Natural Heritage Area. Turloughs are more or less unique to Ireland and as such are considered of high priority for nature conservation. They are often important for over-wintering water birds.

There are several areas of bog in the Milltown area, much of which has been cutover. Bogs are an internationally rare habitat and very important for wildlife, particularly nesting birds. Small areas of woodland also occur in the area, Knock Wood, Drum/ Killeerreen Wood, and Diskins Wood. There are in total 500 acres of young and semi- mature woods in the parish.

Community Action

Milltown Tidy Towns/ Milltown Community Council Ltd./ Milltown Development Association

These three groups are responsible for the development and implementation of village plans, including activities that have a natural heritage component, for example, planting trees and flowers around the village and environs. They have assistance from a FÁS Community Employment Scheme, the Rural Social Scheme and voluntary workers when needed. They maintain and develop amenities within the village e.g. the Heritage Park, Clare River Walk, the church and its surrounds. They also help the other parish groups and schools to organise litter picks etc. and assist in any plans or activities they may have which would be of benefit to the area.

Galway County Council designed a new sewerage scheme for the village and environs (works due to commence in 2012). The Development Association has campaigned for such a scheme for the past 40 years. When the scheme is completed in 2013/14, the quality of water in the Clare River should improve substantially. The Development Association encourages all individuals and groups within the area to be aware of the local environment and to protect it.

Community Council

The Community Council run the Community Centre as energy-efficiently as possible, and sort and recycle 90% of their waste. With the co-operation of the County Council they distributed over 200 subsidised composting bins to households and schools over the last five years (2007-2011). In co-operation with the local schools, shops and WEEE Ireland, they also organized and operate a battery recycling project. A scheme for recycling electric fence batteries is operated by the shops selling fence batteries. The centre also harvests roof water for summer flower bed watering and power washing.

Milltown Angling Club

Milltown Angling Club (MAC) is now both a coarse and game angling club. The club in co-operation with Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), and supported by the Milltown Development Association and Galway Rural Development, developed Cloondroon Lake as a catch and release coarse fishing lake/amenity area (2008- 2010). They also take responsibility for the lake and its surrounds. IFI continually restock the lake with coarse fish from Corrib and Mask and measure fish development. The angling club holds regular competitions and all tagged pike caught are recorded, measured and weighed and statistics returned to IFI for data analysis. Records to date demonstrate that the restocking programme is an outstanding success.

In 2010 the Angling club, assisted by the IFI, the OPW and in co-operation with local farmers, developed the Dawros River as a major spawning and nursery stream for wild Corrib brown trout and wild Atlantic salmon. MAC maintains the gravel beds annually to assist spawning. Initial surveys and Redd counts indicate it is a major success.

IFI, in co-operation with OPW, five local farmers and Milltown Development Association, are currently carrying out a major enhancement project to encourage spawning and enhance fishing for wild Atlantic salmon and wild Corrib brown trout on the Clare River from Russelstown Bridge to Milltown.



Cloondron Lake (Michael Burke)

MAC organises regular litter picks of the river banks and around Cloondron lake and keep check of pollution and illegal fishing. The three projects described above will have a positive effect on the biodiversity of rivers in the Milltown area and Cloondron Lake, for birds, plants, fish life and aquatic bugs and insects. When the Clare River enhancement project and River Walk extension are completed in 2013, a major native tree planting project along the river bank is proposed to further enhance the biodiversity of this area.

Gun Club

The Gun Club rear Pheasant and Mallard each summer to release into the local woods and rivers. In 2012 they hope to release 15 to 20 Mallard near the Clare and Dawros Rivers at the Heritage Park. They also keep control on local harmful vermin in the area and have successful mink eradication programme in operation at present.

GAA

Recycling within the club house and grounds is done in co-operation with Tidy Towns and Galway County Council. The club has solar panels for hot water for showers in its new dressing rooms and low energy bulbs are also being fitted. The ladies and senior men's teams undertook a successful scrap metal collection within the parish in 2011. They also participate in the litter picks around the area and, in co-operation with Galway County Council and the local Tidy Towns committee, have suitable signage erected in the dressing rooms to promote litter awareness and recycling of litter.

Foróige

The members and leaders of Foróige organise litter picks along the Slí Na Sláinte Walk and the Clare River Walk and after each Foróige night in the Community Centre.

Girl Guides/Brownies

The members and leaders of the local Brownies and Girl Guides organise and participate in litter picks of the Heritage Park including the tennis courts and after each session in the community centre.

Leaders continually make them conscious of waste reduction.

Belmont National School:

Belmont NS has been awarded two Green Flags through the An Taisce Green Schools programme.

They received their first flag for recycling and waste reduction, and a second flag for energy conservation. In order to gain their third flag they are working on water conservation. The school has established links with the Milltown Group Water Scheme to further this project. The children participated in the “Something Fishy” programme organised by Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI).

In 2009, the school participated in the “Corrin Hill Biodiversity Garden of School Merit Competition” and received an award of a nest box and school membership of Bird Watch Ireland. Belmont NS also participates in the “Heritage in Schools” programme each year and invite environmental experts to give talks and lead nature walks with the children. The school is also taking part in an on-going training programme for school gardens facilitated by the outreach programme of the Museum of Country Life in Turlough House in Castlebar. On an annual basis the school participates in the “Incredible Edibles” planting programme organised by Agri Aware. In co-operation with the Galway County Council and the Tree Council of Ireland, the school community has planted native trees in the school grounds. The school community also participates in Coillte-run woodland walks during National Tree Day in October each year. *See Appendix 2 for a list of the biodiversity-related projects planned for the school for the next few years.*

Milltown National School:

Milltown NS were awarded their first Green Flag two years ago. The school community prioritized litter reduction, recycling waste management and composting for the school vegetable and wild flower gardens. A programme is in place to constantly monitor targets and improve standards.

For their second Green flag the school is currently developing a project with an energy theme and all aspects of energy are being monitored i.e. doors, windows, insulation, radiator temperature settings, lights, and bulbs. Monthly electricity and oil bills are monitored and the project is supported by poster competition and talks.

The school also co-operate with the local Tidy Towns in the annual spring clean, the battery, mobile phone and reading glasses recycling projects, and an annual poster competition.

Day Care Centre

The day care centre recycle waste and use energy efficiently. Children are made aware of protecting the environment by disposing of litter carefully at an early age.

IFA

The local farmers are conscious of their responsibility in preventing pollution of rivers, lakes and streams in Milltown and the wider environment, and comply fully with all E.U. directives. Farmers co-operated with the Tidy Towns Committee by allowing access and right of ways over their lands, for the Cloondroon lake development and the extension of the Clare River walk. They recycle all their plastics and fence batteries. Rain harvesting is also used by the majority of the farmers to keep metered and treated Group Water Scheme water consumption levels low. It is hoped to further develop water harvesting.

Group Water Scheme

The Scheme provides treated clean water to c. 600 families within the area. All houses are metered and the group keeps regular checks on water wastage. They also provide useful information to households/farms in relation to water harvesting / conservation, leaks and how to keep water waste to a minimum.

Action Plan for Nature for Milltown

Objectives of Plan

1. To raise awareness, appreciation and understanding of biodiversity and natural heritage in Milltown
2. To protect and enhance nature, wildlife and natural amenities in Milltown

	Action/ Project	Lead Partner	Other partners	Timeframe
1	Conduct wildlife audit of Milltown and prepare habitat map	MTT	GCC, NUIG, schools, MAC	2012- 2013
2	Encourage and support wildlife-friendly measures in parish and schools e.g. bird and bat boxes, bird feeders, wildlife-friendly gardening methods (<i>see Appendix 2 for Belmont NS plan</i>)	MTT, FÁS MAC	Schools, Brownies etc.	On-going
3	Create a wildlife sanctuary in Heritage Park and Cloondroon Lake.	MTT, CLC	Gun Club, FÁS, MAC, NPWS, BirdWatch Galway	2013
4	Erect bird hide at Cloondroon Lake. Erect Pike, Roach and Bream Info signs at Cloondroon Lake	CLC MAC	MTT, GCC, NPWS	2012 2013
5	Organise nature talks/ guided walks to raise awareness of local natural heritage e.g. bats, birds, wildlife gardening	MTT	GCC, Galway Bat Group, Heritage in Schools, BirdWatch Galway	Annual
6	Develop and maintain additional stretches of Dawros River as a prime wild trout and salmon spawning river	MAC	IFI	2011- 2014
7	Erect interpretive signage on Dawros river on life cycle of the salmon, and peep hole to see redds	MAC	IFI, NPWS, MTT	2013
8	Run school project to raise awareness of value of local rivers for angling	MAC	IFI, schools, CMCWPG	Annual
9	Develop potential of Clare River as a prime angling, amenity and nature conservation area through walks, talks and events	MTT	IFI, GCC, MAC, OPW, NPWS	2011-2014

Action Plan for Nature for Milltown contd.

10	Run seminar on importance of protecting water quality and water courses for angling and water supplies	Group Water Scheme	MAC, TT, IFA, EPA, IFI	2012
11	Create digital photo archive of natural heritage in parish in 2011/ 2012 and on completion of the plan in 2014	Foróige, local Secondary Schools, Seán Nestor, MAC	GCC Tommy O'Connor	2012/13
12	Form a heritage group	Noel Carney Tony Murphy Joe Connolly	MDA	2012
13	Milltown Spring Clean (part of National Spring Clean)	MTT	Schools, An Taisce, FAS, Foroige, GAA, GCC	Annual (April)
14	Plant suitable trees along watercourses to increase biodiversity value and protect water quality (e.g. River Walk and Cloondroon Lake)	MAC, MTT, CLC	IFI, GCC	2012-2014
15	Enter Golden Mile competition: Cloondroon area - 2011	CLC	Local residents, MAC, MTT, GCC	2011
16	Erect and maintain hedge hotel and bug hotel in Heritage Park	MTT, FÁS	Tidy towns, schools, GCC	2011
17	Create a sensory garden for elderly/ children/ people with special needs.	MTT, Toghermore Rehab Centre	Day Care Centre/ HSE	2012/2013
18	Create an investigation/study platform for access for school children to study river life in local rivers	MAC	MTT FÁS,	2012/2013
19	Create a seasonal wildlife calendar each year	Milltown TT	MAC, Schools, MDA	Annual

MTT = Milltown, Tidy Towns, IFI = Inland Fisheries Ireland, CMCWPG = Carra Mask Corrib Water Protection Group, GCC = Galway County Council, CLC = Cloondroon Lake Committee, MAC = Milltown Angling Club, MDA = Milltown Development Association

Monitoring and Evaluation

A committee will be established to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the ‘Action Plan for Nature for Milltown’. 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 appreciation 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 a 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	Provides advice and information on 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	Provides advice and information on biodiversity, natural heritage, habitat mapping, community-based projects etc.	elaine.oriordan@nuigalway.ie (091) 495921 www.galwaycountybiodiversity.com
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/
Inland Fisheries Ireland	Responsible for the protection, conservation and management of the inland fisheries resource Local IFI inspector	Kevin Rogers, Senior Environmental Officer (091) 563118 Pat O’Gorman (091) 563118/ (087)2557056
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 091 471419 Tom Cuffe 097 20808

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 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	Conservation Ranger John Higgins (093) 47502
Carra Mask Corrib Water Protection Group Ltd.	The Carra Mask Corrib Water Protection Group was set up by anglers in direct response to the decline in water quality on the Carra, Mask and Corrib lakes and the resulting decline in the fishing resource.	Cmc7@eircom.net www.cmcwpg.ie (093) 36692

Further reading

Publications available from the Heritage Officer, Galway County Council

(www.galwaycountyheritage.ie; www.galwaycountybiodiversity.ie)

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

Reports consulted in the preparation of the plan

- Moore Group 2006. A Report on the Ecology of Cloondron Lake, Milltown, Co. Galway. Unpublished report for Cloondron Lake Committee and Milltown Community Council.
- Moore Group 2010. Statement for Appropriate Assessment & Appropriate Assessment Screening of the Proposed Extension of the Clare River Walk at Milltown, Tuam, Co. Galway. Unpublished report for Milltown Development Company Ltd.
- NUI, Galway. 2004. Biodiversity in Milltown. Report produced by Environmental Science students.

Appendix 1:

List of participants in biodiversity training to develop biodiversity plan

	Name
1	Pádraic O'Connor
2	Seán Nestor
3	Tommy Casserly
4	Noel Carney
5	Frank Glynn
6	Pádraig Coyne
7	Maureen McHugh
8	Howard Smith
9	Nuala O'Hara
10	Margaret Carne
11	Michael Rhatigan
12	Siobhán Molloy
13	Louisa McHugh

Appendix 2:

Biodiversity Action Plan for Belmont National School

Action	Lead Partner	Other Partners	Timeframe
School Spring Clean and environs	Teachers and children	An Taisce, FÁS, Tidy Towns	Annually
Take part in Tree Week	Teachers and children	Tree Council	Annually
School garden	Teachers and children	Parents, Caretaker	Annually
Plant native bluebells under trees	Teachers and children		October 2011
Construct fruit and herb garden	Teachers and children	RSS, FÁS, Parents, Irish Seed Savers Association	2012- 2013
Green Flag 'Water' theme	Teachers and children	An Taisce, GCC	October 2012
Create leaf mould compost area	Teachers and children	FÁS	October 2012
Participate in Heritage in Schools programme	Teachers and children	Heritage Council	October 2012

GCC = Galway County Council