

## Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Greenfort Estate Sligo Town



Collated in consultation with Greenfort Estate Residents.  
by Woodrow Sustainable Solutions Ltd.

Part of the Parks Quarter Biodiversity Training Programme.

Client: Sligo Tidy Towns  
March 2023

## Acknowledgements

This Local Biodiversity Action Plan was developed from input by volunteer members of Greenfort Estate in collaboration with Woodrow Sustainable Solutions Ltd (Woodrow). Woodrow would like to acknowledge and thank all members of Greenfort Estate who gave up their time to meet and share their thoughts and ideas.

This was part of a wider programme of training and development programme for residential communities of south Sligo Town in the area known as 'The Parks Quarter'.

The funding for this project was provided by the EU LEADER fund, following an application from Sligo Tidy Towns. Sligo Tidy Towns part funded the project.

**Front Page Image:** The communal grass amenity area of Greenfort Estate, Sligo.

**Source:** All pictures used are property of Woodrow unless otherwise stated.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	1
Aims of participation in the Park's Quarter Biodiversity programme .....	3
How this programme and Local Biodiversity Action Plan was developed .....	3
Existing Biodiversity in Greenfort Estate .....	4
Summary of Actions to enhance biodiversity in Greenfort estate .....	7
Details of the proposed actions for biodiversity and resources.....	9
Action 1: Plant spring bulbs.....	10
Action 2: Plant a Communal Herb Garden ` .....	11
Action 3: Plant pollinator-friendly shrubs, replacing existing rhododendron .....	13
Action 4: Plant more pollinator-friendly ornamental plants.....	14
Action 5: Erect bird boxes. ....	15
Action 6: Reduce mowing a discrete area to allow wildflowers to bloom.....	15
Action 7: Plant a Fruit & Nut Orchard .....	16
Action 8: Plant a Small group of Native Trees or Native Hedge.....	17
Action 9: Let Dandelions Bee. ....	17
Action 10: Create shelter (homes) for solitary bees. ....	18
Action 11: Erect Bird Feeders or Grow them! .....	18
Action 12: Erect bat boxes .....	18
Action 13: Create a bat garden.....	19
Action 14: Encourage safe disposal of oils/paints/toiletries.....	19
Action 15: Encourage Manual Weeding .....	19

## Aims of participation in the Park's Quarter Biodiversity programme

The aim of participation in this programme is to educate, enable and encourage residents to create more biodiverse areas in their gardens and communal areas.

## How this programme and Local Biodiversity Action Plan was developed

Sligo Tidy Towns secured EU LEADER funding in 2022 to deliver a biodiversity training programme for communities across the Park's Quarter of Sligo Town. Woodrow Sustainable Solutions Ltd (Woodrow) won the tender to deliver this training for Sligo Tidy Towns.

Representatives of Greenfort residential estate were contacted to determine if the residents were interested in being involved. Having expressed an interest, the residents of Greenfort joined this programme.

Resident volunteers from Greenfort met with staff of Woodrow to discuss ideas and opportunities to enhance biodiversity. From these discussions this plan outlines possible actions for the community to work on to enhance biodiversity in Greenfort. The proposed actions are relatively cheap and should be achievable by the community.

## Existing Biodiversity in Greenfort Estate

There are around 70 residential homes in Greenfort. Many of the homes face a large grass area (50m x 60m approx.) which forms the primary communal space in Greenfort Estate (Figures 1 & 2). This is a north-facing slope that drops in height. To facilitate this drop, this grass area has a sharp bank along the centre where it drops around 2m in height. There are some heathers planted on this bank. At the bottom of the grass area there are some access steps with planting at either side.



**Figure 1:** Steps up to the communal grass area. A leylandi hedge is visible on right-hand side (western side) and mature trees. Behind you can see the bank which separates the upper and lower communal grass areas. The bank has some heather plants growing on it.





**Figure 2:** Mature Leyland cypress hedge on east side of the communal grass area. Turning brown, it has been stressed, possibly by lack of water this Summer. Heathers are just visible on the rear bank. Leyland is a non-native fast-growing plant often used to screen areas.

This grassland is tightly cut which means it is of low conservation importance as this frequent mowing stops a variety of plant species from growing. There are a couple of mature trees, and some benches in place (Figure 3). Beside these benches are some shrubs and daffodils.



**Figure 3:** Bench located at the top of the park with some daffodils and shrubs, and a small planter is just visible at the end of the pavement. More pollinator-friendly bulbs and flowers could be added here.

There are also some rhododendron shrubs planted, surrounded by short wooden fencing (Figure 4) also in this communal grass area.



**Figure 4:** Rhododendron offers little for wildlife. These shrubs could be replaced by a variety of pollinator-friendly shrubs.

Near the leylandii hedge on the east of the area, was a tree stump where fungus was growing (Figure 5).



**Figure 5:** Turkey Tail (Bracket Fungus) growing on tree stump in the park. This shows the importance of deadwood for fungal diversity.

Aerial photographs show that there is a semi-mature treeline which runs along the back gardens which could be the primary habitat for local populations of birds and foraging bats. Flowering plants and small trees in private front and rear gardens will also make a positive contribution to supporting local pollinators.

Approximately 1km from Greenfort, is the scenic Lough Gill which is a recreational area enjoyed by many residents and visitors to the area. Lough Gill holds such important wildlife and habitats, it is designated of both national and EU importance: Lough Gill pNHA and Lough Gill SAC respectively,



## Summary of Actions to enhance biodiversity in Greenfort estate

This is a summary of activities for the Greenfort Residential Area that would help them make their estate more biodiverse and should also give residents pleasure.

No.	Proposed Action	Proposed location / method of action
1	Plant spring bulbs.	Crocus and snowdrops are lovely flowers to enjoy, and they benefit to pollinators. It is recommended to plant these bulbs among the existing daffodil bulbs and elsewhere.
2	Plant a communal herb garden.	In the beds, either side of the steps, a herb garden could be created for all to use and enjoy.
3	Plant pollinator-friendly shrubs, replacing existing rhododendron.	Rhododendron, begonias or petunias are of little value to pollinators. It is suggested these are removed and replaced with pollinator-friendly shrubs such as heathers, berberis, mahonia and firethorn.
4	Plant more pollinator-friendly ornamental plants in pots, gardens and raised beds.	There are many flowers such as salvia, asters, alium and grape hyacinth that provide flowers throughout the year that would look wonderful in front gardens in Greenfort and in some of the raised beds. These are also pollinator-friendly.
5	Erect bird boxes.	Whilst there are only a small number of mature trees in Greenfort estate, some bird boxes could be erected on these trees, and possibly in rear gardens where appropriate to provide shelter for garden birds.
6	Reduce mowing a discrete area to allow wildflowers to bloom.	Create a small, discreet area in which the grass is allowed to grow longer. This will allow wildflowers to bloom. You don't have to buy wildlife seed, just stop mowing! With a clear, sharp edge, it would be obvious that the growth is deliberate.
7	Plant a fruit & nut orchard.	Plant a small community fruit and nut orchard. Residents could harvest the apples, blackberries, elderberries, gooseberries and even walnuts!
8	Plant a native hedge or small group of native trees.	Due to the small numbers of trees in the central area of the estate it is recommended to plant a small cluster of native trees such as the attractive mountain ash or silver birch trees.
9	Let dandelions be.	Encourage the estate not to cut the grass in the central amenity area until after the first dandelions have bloomed. Bees emerging from winter hibernation are starving and dandelions are superfoods for bees when there is little alternative food sources/flowers available in early Spring.



## Greenfort Estate Biodiversity Action Plan

10	Create shelter (homes) for solitary bees.	Create earth banks, drystone walls, and holes in wood for pollinators. Locate beside the wildflower garden.
11	Erect bird feeders or grow your own bird feeders!	Put up bird feeders in gardens, and supply water in the winter. Or indeed grow flowers, such as sun flowers,
12	Erect bat boxes.	Bat boxes can be installed in trees or on the outside of buildings providing habitat for bat roosts. Careful night-time lighting, and provision of habitats and food, can increase the population of these protected mammals.
13	Create a bat garden.	Plant night-scented flowers which attract nocturnal pollinators, such as moths. This could encourage bat activity in the area.
14	Encourage safe disposal of oils/paints/toiletries.	Due to the proximity of the estate to Lough Gill, a site of European importance for wildlife and its habitats, residents could be encouraged to safely dispose of oil/paints and toiletries so that storm drains are not blocked, or to ensure harmful chemicals do not reach these special areas.
15	Encourage Manual weeding.	To reduce the use of harmful chemicals, it is recommended that manual weeding is encouraged.

## Details of the proposed actions for biodiversity and resources

This Local Biodiversity Action Plan LBAP includes a lot of actions that would help pollinators in Ireland. One third of Irish bee species are threatened with extinction from Ireland. This is because we have drastically reduced the amount of food (flowers) and safe nesting sites for pollinators. There are many simple actions outlined in the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) that communities can undertake to reverse this trend. Most of these actions revolve around providing food throughout most of the year. For example, shrubs, herbs and flowers are recommended that provide nectar and pollen from early Spring to late Autumn – not just in the Summer months.

Other actions relate to providing shelter, be it creating bee nesting sites, a small bee hotels or log-piles and hedges where birds and other animals shelter.

Ireland is now following the second AIPP which runs from 2021-2025. There is great free information, posters and resources at the website [www.pollinators.ie](http://www.pollinators.ie). Many of the proposed actions detailed in this section link directly to those proposed in the AIPP. An excellent resource is this community action booklet:

[https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Local-Communities\\_actions-to-help-pollinators-July-2021-WEB-JB.pdf](https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Local-Communities_actions-to-help-pollinators-July-2021-WEB-JB.pdf)

The competition handbook for TidyTown community is also packed with great advice for communities:

<https://www.tidytowns.ie/competition/handbook/>



Section from 'Gardens: actions to help pollinators

[https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Gardens\\_actions-to-help-pollinators-July-2016.pdf](https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Gardens_actions-to-help-pollinators-July-2016.pdf)

### Action 1: Plant spring bulbs

Many communities plant daffodils or tulips to provide colour in the Spring. But these bright flowers offer little food for pollinators. It is recommended communities plant between existing daffodils, bulbs such as crocuses and snowdrops. They provide nectar and pollen in late Winter/early Spring when there is little else available for pollinators. The beauty of planting bulbs is that they will flower year-on-year.

The ideal time to plant these bulbs is in November so they will flower the following February/March. They can be planted in most places – along edges of green areas, in rock gardens, under trees. This would be a nice activity for volunteers to get involved with in the estate.



## Action 2: Plant a Communal Herb Garden `

What better to have some fresh-growing parsley to pop into your soup? It is suggested that a herb garden is planted on the beds either side of the steps in **Figure 1**.

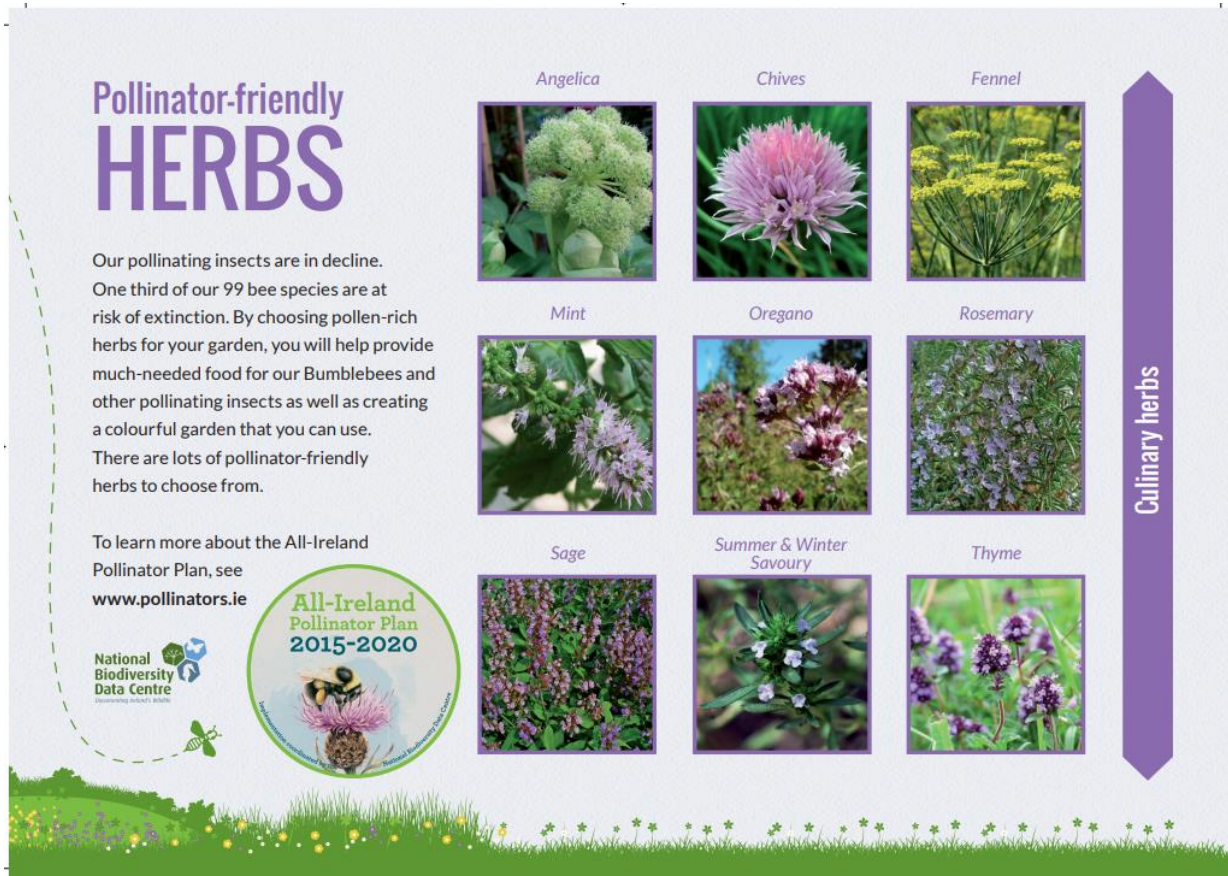


Images of a **Community Fruit & Herb Garden** at entrance to an estate in Newcastle, Co Dublin. Children have painted stones with the names of the herbs.



There is a great free flyer available listing suitable herbs.

<https://www.pollinators.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/AIPP-Herbs-A5-Flyer-PRINT.pdf>



List of herbs that could be planted are below. The brackets show when they flower.

Herbs: flowering time:

Basil: (July-Sept)

Borage:(April-Oct)

Lavender (June-Aug)

Oregano (June-Aug)

Rosemary (April-June)

Sage (June-Aug)

Thyme (May-Aug)

Action 3: Plant pollinator-friendly shrubs, replacing existing rhododendron

Rhododendron, begonias and petunias are of little value to pollinators. It is recommended that the rhododendron planted (Figure 5) is replaced with plants and shrubs that not only look great but are of benefit to pollinators.

It is not known what species of rhododendron is planted in Greenfort, but *Rhododendron ponticum* is the most common and is an invasive species. Planted in many Victorian gardens and estates, it has escaped and devastated many of the native woodlands by disrupting the local ecosystems in the country, such as in Sligo's Union Wood. As such care should be taken with the planting or disposal of rhododendrons.

There are many pollinator-friendly shrubs that look great in gardens, such as berberis, firethorn, heathers and mahonia. It could be that some of these shrubs are also grown on the bank in the middle of the communal area.

#### Action 4: Plant more pollinator-friendly ornamental plants

Even the smallest garden can plant a pot for pollinators. Likewise hanging baskets can be pollinator-friendly too with pollen-rich flowers such as Bacopa and Bidens – and these do well in containers. If the residents of Greenfort planted one pollinator-friendly plant in their front gardens, there would be a chain or necklace of feeding points for pollinators all around the estate.

Again there is an excellent flyer available at:

<https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/AIPP-A5-Flyer-Garden-2022-PRINT.pdf>



#### Action 5: Erect bird boxes.

Participants can support local populations of small birds by putting up bird boxes (and bird feeders – Action 13). They could be placed in rear gardens, on the few mature trees in the green or on some of the maturing trees on rear gardens. Aim to have them up before the breeding season (maybe by March). They can also be left out all year, providing shelter and a place to roost in the winter.

They should be positioned out of direct sunlight – best facing north or south-east; and away from areas where cats can easily access them. We often see these placed too high, or poorly made with entrance holes too large for the target species. If bird feeders are placed near a nest box, the nesting bird will spend a lot of energy defending its territory – so please don't.

There is a great information page with lots of FAQs about bird boxes:

<https://birdwatchireland.ie/irelands-birds-birdwatch-ireland/garden-birds/nestboxes/>

There is also an easy template on how to make your own bird box:

<https://birdwatchireland.ie/irelands-birds-birdwatch-ireland/nestbox-designs-for-birds-and-wildlife/>

A possible workshop in collaboration with a local Men's Shed could provide opportunity to show families how to assemble pre-cut parts to make a bird box.

#### Action 6: Reduce mowing a discrete area to allow wildflowers to bloom.

Part of the 'Don't Mow (yet) – let it Grow' campaign is to encourage people to let grass grow long and adopt a different mowing regime. When the grasses grow they can flower, and often seeds in the soil get a chance to grow also – such as cow slips or even some orchids. Communities could adopt a six or twelve week mowing regime. Whilst some may be concerned that it could look untidy, or abandoned, maintained a neat mown edge makes it obvious that the area is still maintained.

If you need to cut grass before April, consider leaving a margin of unmown grass to allow corridors of biodiversity.



## Greenfort Estate Biodiversity Action Plan



*Images from Maynooth University Campus where paths have been mown through longer grass areas.*



*Keadue, Roscommon, where section of grass is allowed to mow.*

This will benefit pollinators and save time and money for the community. Overtime this area will become richer with native flowers. This will save money and resources associated with lawn management.

### Action 7: Plant a Fruit & Nut Orchard

A community orchard is a wonderful resource to have within a community enabling people to come together to plant and cultivate fruit trees for shared use. The full range of traditional orchard fruits and nuts can be grown, including apple, pear, plum, damson, hazelnut and walnut. There is great advice on creating a community garden in the TidyTowns handbook:

<https://www.tidytowns.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Green-Spaces-and-Landscaping.pdf>

Guidelines to planting an orchard and strawberries are provided on the following site:

<https://www.bordbia.ie/globalassets/lifestyle/resources/organic-gardening-english/planting-an-orchard-and-strawberries.pdf>

#### Action 8: Plant a Small group of Native Trees or Native Hedge.

Due to space limitations, it is recommended to plant a small cluster of native trees such as the attractive mountain ash or silver birch trees.

Silver birch is an attractive tree with silver bark, and light foliage provides dabbled light. The following leaflet outlines trees that are suitable for planting in towns and villages.

[https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/conserving\\_enhancing\\_wildlife\\_guide\\_2005\\_480kb.pdf](https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/conserving_enhancing_wildlife_guide_2005_480kb.pdf)

Another very useful document is this Heritage Council funded publication:

<https://www.clarecoco.ie/services/planning/publications/heritageconservation/tree-design-guide-for-towns-and-villages-in-co-clare-2017-28115.pdf>

Alternativley, a native hedge could be planted as a prlacement when the Leyland cypress hedge reaches the end of it's life-cycle. This will better support local biodiversity. Leyland cypress is a fast-growing, non-native hedge. It blocks light, and offers little for wildlife. Suitable species for a native hedge include; hawthorn, blackthorn, rowan, spindle, dog rose, crab apple, wild cherry, bird cherry, guelder rose and elderberry.

#### Action 9: Let Dandelions Bee.

The war against dandelions is over! These flowers are packed with nutrients which are ideal for bees emerging from hibernation. If the Greenfort residents did not cut the first blooming dandelions, this would be a great food source for bees where there are little other food sources. Each dandelion head consists of individual flowers (florets) full of pollen and nectar. Nectar is the liquid bees feed on that is full of complex sugars (carbohydrates). Pollen provides protein and fats.



*Image courtesy of the All Ireland Pollinator Plan*

#### Action 10: Create shelter (homes) for solitary bees.

Habitats can be created for solitary bees including making small earth banks, drystone walls, and wooden bee hotels.

#### Action 11: Erect Bird Feeders or Grow them!

The RSPB (UK Wild bird conservation charity) recommends feeding birds throughout the year, not just in the winter. Feeders are a great way to get close-up views of birds. There are many different types of feeders– including ones that fit onto windows, that are perfect for excellent views. You can also make your own bird tables, or indeed grow your own bird food in the form of sunflowers! Just place them quite high, away from cats, and not too exposed.

Expert guidance on feeding birds can be found at the following website:

<https://birdwatchireland.ie/irelands-birds-birdwatch-ireland/garden-birds/feeding-your-garden-birds/>

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/how-you-can-help-birds/feeding-birds/when-to-feed-garden-birds/>

Many ask **what** we should feed birds: They should receive good quality food, for example, high-fat foods are beneficial in the winter. Do not feed birds:

- Salty foods; Loose peanuts, cooked food or Bread.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/nature-on-your-doorstep/garden-activities/open-a-bird-cafe/>

It is important to keep feeders clean and to prevent transfer of diseases. Move them if birds are not attracted to them. Sweep up any debris under feeders also. A lot of money is spent on buying bird food so try and ensure you know it comes from a good, environmentally responsible source.

#### Action 12: Erect bat boxes

These flying mammals are amazing animals. Like humans, they are warm blooded and suckle their young with milk. Some can eat up to 3000 midges a night. Bats are under threat through loss of habitats meaning they have less food and shelter, increased use of pesticides and increased lights at night. Residents of Greenfort can easily make a difference by providing shelter through provision of bat boxes.

Bat boxes can be installed in trees or on the outside of buildings providing habitat for bats to roost. In the Summer pregnant bats gather to have their babies. The offspring and female bats stay together in 'maternity roosts' until late Summer. Insulated boxes are better for winter hibernation roosts.

Bat conservation Ireland has a great leaflet available to show how to make basic wooden bat boxes. The leaflet also shows where and how to put them up.

[https://www.batconservationireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Leaflet\\_3\\_batboxes.pdf](https://www.batconservationireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Leaflet_3_batboxes.pdf)



### Action 13: Create a bat garden

The best thing for bats is to create habitats that they like, and plant flowers that attract food that they eat. Night-scented flowers are ideal and can be planted as part of a bat-garden.

<https://www.batconservationireland.org/get-involved/gardening-bats-wildlife>



*Moth flowers planted in a raised flowerbed in Kill, Co Kildare.*

### Action 14: Encourage safe disposal of oils/paints/toiletries.

Many household chemicals are harmful to the environment. It is important to safely dispose of these to ensure they are not unintentionally introduced to the environment.

### Action 15: Encourage Manual Weeding

To reduce the use of chemicals there are different ways to weed and reduce weed growth. This includes mulching, hand-pulling, hoeing digging, pulling weeds by hand before they set seed.