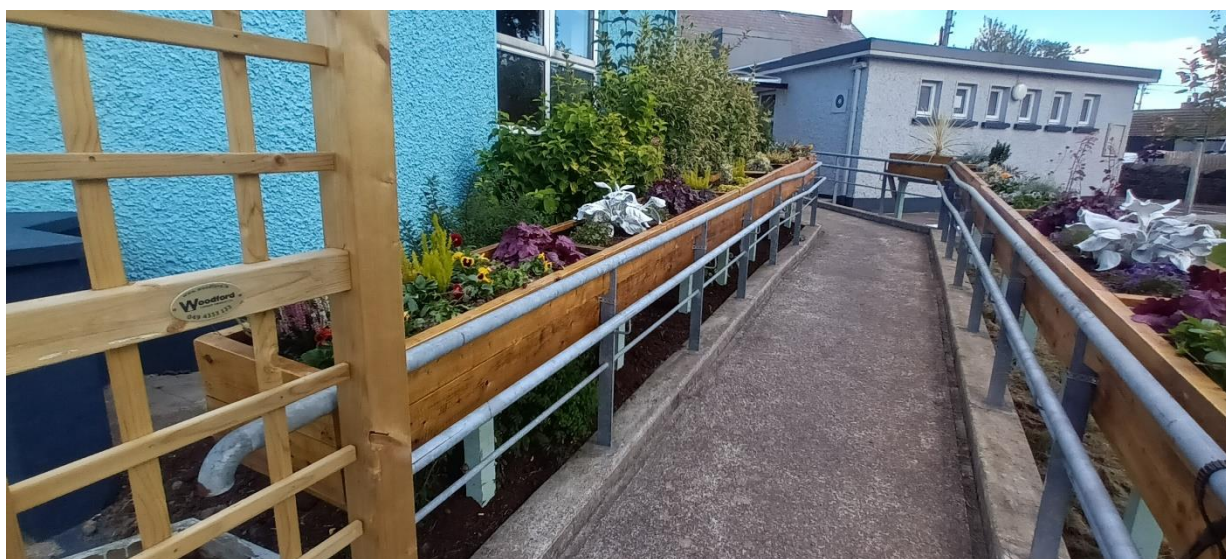


## Local Biodiversity Action Plan for Our Lady of Mercy Primary School Sligo Town



Collated in consultation with Our Lady of Mercy Primary School  
Residents Associations.  
by Woodrow Sustainable Solutions Ltd.

Part of the Parks Quarter Biodiversity Training Programme.

Client: Sligo Tidy Towns  
September 2022



## Acknowledgements

This Local Biodiversity Action Plan was developed from input by staff of Our Lady of Mercy Primary School in collaboration with Woodrow Sustainable Solutions Ltd (Woodrow).

Woodrow would like to acknowledge and thank all the people 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 new sensory garden at Our Lady of Mercy Primary School, Sligo Town.

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

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## 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.

Our Lady of Mercy Primary School was contacted to determine if they were interested in being involved. Having expressed an interest, the staff joined this programme.

Staff of Our Lady of Mercy Primary School met with staff of Woodrow to discuss ideas and opportunities to enhance biodiversity. The aim of this collaboration was to:

- Create a Biodiversity Action Plan for the school;  
and to
- Identify any Biodiversity Training or workshops Woodrow could deliver to raise awareness and knowledge in this area.

The proposed actions are relatively cheap and should be achievable by the school community.

## Existing Biodiversity in Our Lady of Mercy Primary School

Our Lady of Mercy Primary School is located on Pearse Road in Abbey Quarter North. The associated amenity grassland area is approximately 50 m x 5 m.

There have been a number of biodiversity enhancing measures already carried in and around this space, including; growing fruits and vegetables, the creation of a sensory garden, and planting native trees. Each of these actions makes a positive contribution towards local biodiversity.

The creation of the sensory garden was covered in local news. The project aimed to engage the senses to promote a sense of well-being.

Two new hedges have also been planted. One is a laurel hedge to block traffic noise from the road.

There are a number of semi-mature native trees on-site including a birch (*Betula* spp.) and an ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). Cherry saplings have also been planted in the green along with a number of shrubs.



A map of the grounds surrounding Our Lady of Mercy Primary School.



## Our Lady of Mercy Primary School Biodiversity Action Plan



*The green space at Our Lady of Mercy Primary School with new planting including a cherry sapling and laurel hedge.*



*A new hedge planted on-site this year with semi-mature trees in the background.*



*The green space used for playing by the children with some shrubs visible.*

## Summary of Actions to enhance biodiversity in Our Lady of Mercy Primary School

This is a summary of the proposed enhancement activities for the Our Lady of Mercy Primary School to create a more biodiverse play area.

No.	Proposed Action	Proposed location / method of action
1	Create a Contemplation Corner	Relocate the seat to a quiet part of the playground.
2	Make a Mini-Beasts Sanctuary	Create bee-hotels using piles of wood for a variety of pollinating insects including solitary bees.
3	Create Wildflower Islands for Plants and Pollinators	The area/s dedicated to lawn can be improved for biodiversity reducing mowing in select areas and thus creating wildflower islands.
4	Plant Flowers for Pollinators	Biodiversity doesn't have to mean uncultivated. Choose pollinator-friendly horticultural varieties to create an impressive herbaceous boarder.
5	Allow Vegetables to Bolt for Pollinators	One vegetable bed could be left unharvested so that the vegetables can flower and provide resources for pollinators.
6	Plant Flowers for Birds	Some flowers once pollinated yield fantastic nutrient-rich seed heads. Birds go wild for these in the Autumn months. Good examples include; teasel, miscanthus, and sun-flowers.
7	Decorate and Install Bird Boxes with Non-Toxic Paints	Bird boxes could be built to create habitat for garden birds and the children could decorate them.
8	Apply for the Green-Schools Award	The Green-Schools award is curated by An Taisce and is Ireland's leading environmental management and education programme for schools.

## Proposed Training & Workshop Summary

This is a table of training events which will run by Woodrow through the Autumn months. This will form part of a wider programme of workshops and training activities to be delivered for the wider South Sligo Parks Quarter.

Proposed Workshop/walk / Talk	
Deliver a seed-collection and cuttings Workshop.	This workshop will focus on how to save money by collecting seeds, and also how to grow plants from cuttings. The practical elements of gathering, storing and propagating seeds will also be covered.
Deliver a Low-maintenance pollinator-friendly planting workshop.	This workshop will discuss low-maintenance planting schemes.
Bees and Pollinators Workshop.	This workshop will discuss the difference between social and solitary bees, their life-cycle, behavior, habitat preferences, and sources of food.
Activity workshop/s.	Create bird boxes or bat boxes or bird feeders.
Garden Bird Workshop.	This workshop could cover the basics of visual and aural bird identification for common garden visitors. It will also highlight their resource requirements.
Bat walk & workshop.	This workshop will cover the basics of bat ecology, including life-cycle, bat behaviour, and habitat requirements. The workshop would include an educational sunset bat walk using handheld equipment for species identification.
Tree planting activity/workshop.	Most cost-effective for community groups is using bare-root trees.



## Details of the proposed actions for biodiversity and resources

This Local Biodiversity Action Plan LBAP includes actions that would help support local biodiversity directly as well as helping the students connect with nature.

Increasing plant diversity is often the first step in this process as flowers provide food for pollinating insects and fruits provide food for our birds. Mature trees provide habitat for insects, birds, and bats. All these interrelated relationships create the wider ecosystem.

Ireland is now following the second All Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) which runs from 2021-2025. There is great free information, posters and resources at the website [www.pollinators.ie](http://www.pollinators.ie). There are many simple actions outlined in the AIPP that communities can undertake to reverse declines in biodiversity. Many of the proposed actions detailed in this section link directly to those proposed in the AIPP.

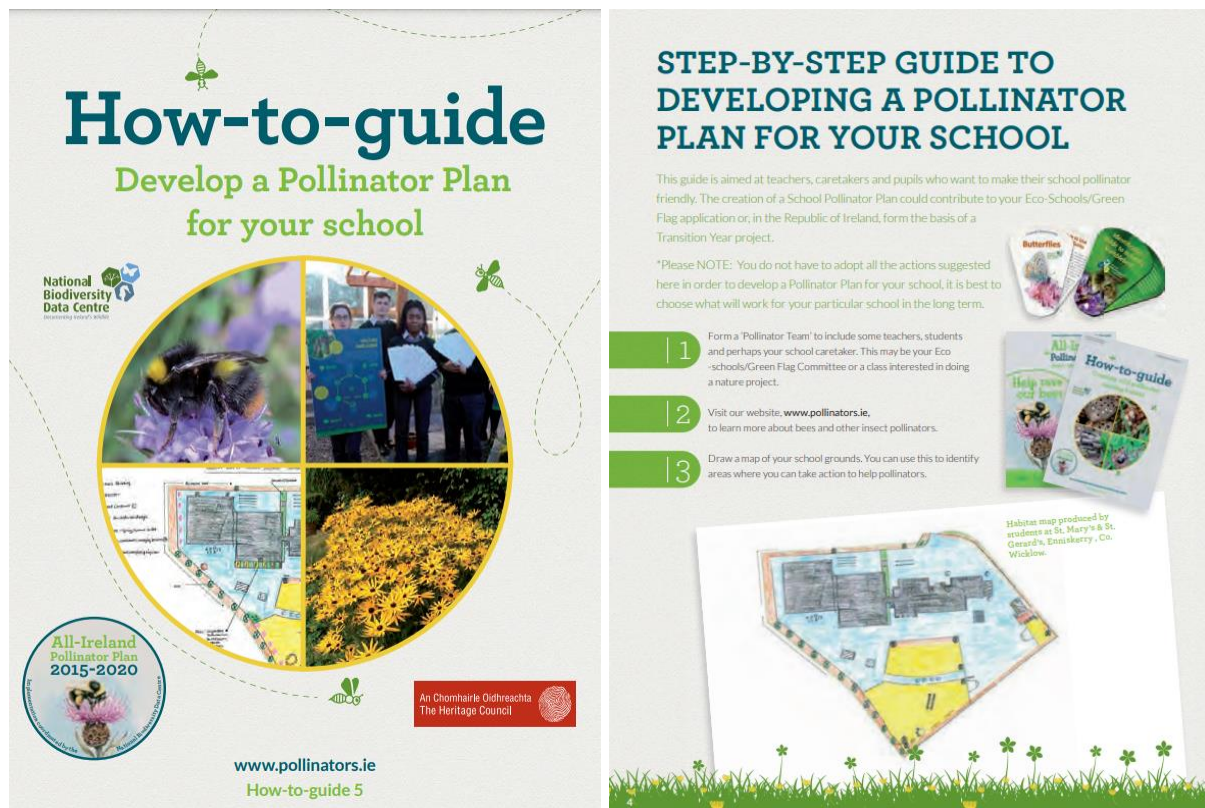


Image shows section from 'Develop a Pollinator Plan for your School'

Source: <https://pollinators.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/School-Pollinator-How-to-Guide-EMAIL.pdf>

The competition handbook for Tidy Towns community is also packed with great advice for communities: <https://www.tidytowns.ie/competition/handbook/>

### Action 1: Create a Contemplation Corner

The school yard can be a busy place and the 'contemplation corner' will provide a space to breathe for adults and children alike. The central feature of the contemplation corner is a beautiful art piece – a seat created during the Sligo Arts Festival in 1996.

It is to be relocated to the south-west corner of the green. This will provide colour to the dark corner and a feature of interest in the playground.

Plants with strong aromatic properties can be planted in this area to promote relaxation. English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) would be the obvious choice however it would need more sunlight than this shady area can provide. There are a number of fragrant ornamental plants which can tolerate partial to full shade.

Dwarf sweet-box (*Sarcococca hookeriana var. humilis*) blooms in winter months and releases a chocolatey scent into the air. It is evergreen and so will provide structure all year round. Farrer viburnum (*Viburnum farreri*) produces fragrant pink flowers during the Autumn months – as children start back to school. This shrub grows much larger than the dwarf-sweet-box, with an ultimate height of 1.5m to 2.5m.

A variety of variegated ivy could be selected for this area. Ivy is shade tolerant and holds its leaves throughout the year. It also flowers and fruits out of season. This means it provides essential resources for our pollinators and birds in the colder months when food is scarce. The ivy would climb the fence and as such may provide a softer look for the contemplation corner. A good garden centre should have a selection to choose from. For example, Paddy's Pride (*Hedera colchica* 'Sulphur Heart') has been awarded the Royal Horticultural Society award for Garden Merit and Plants for Pollinators.



*The creative art piece and seat which is to be moved into the green area.*

## Action 2: Make a Mini-Beasts Sanctuary

There are 100 species of bee in Ireland and 80 of these are solitary – meaning they do not live in colonies. Solitary bees are non-aggressive as they do not have large stores of honey to protect. In fact, they do not even have a sting. This means they are safe around children.

Habitats can be created for solitary bees and other insects. This can be done in a simple and innovative ways. It's so simple even kids can join in! Making a pile of logs and sticks can be a quick and easy way to make bug hotels. They can be made more visually appealing by making a house-like structure to contain the twigs (see image below). Bamboo canes are especially well suited for this purpose as the hollow centre provides a natural chamber where solitary bees can lay their larvae.

In this way, the mini-beasts sanctuary performs a similar ecological function to deadwood in a woodland – supporting the life-cycle of insects.



*An example of a mini-beast sanctuary or bug hotel which creates habitat for solitary bees and other insects.*



### Action 3: Create Wildflower Islands for Plants and Pollinators

There is a small green space at Our Lady of Mercy Primary School. This is an important play area for the children.

Small areas or 'wildflower islands' could be established in the grassland. This is easily done by reducing the intensity of grassland management. A six to twelve week mowing regime during the growing season should be sufficient to allow wildflowers to establish themselves. Overtime this area will become richer with native flowers. This will benefit pollinators. This is often called a 'Don't Mow (yet) – let it Grow' approach to grassland management.

Importantly, this does not need to apply to the full green space. Most of the green can be kept short to maintain easy access to area for play. Whilst some may be concerned that it could look untidy - a neat edge makes it obvious that the area is still maintained. The images below show wildflower strips at Doorly Park Playground.



*A wildflower lay at Doorly Park Recreational Area showing a mix of native and non-native species including red clover, cosmos and a small tortoiseshell butterfly (Aglais urticae).*



#### Action 4: Plant Flowers for Pollinators

Ornamental plants need more care and attention than their wild relatives. However, they can put on a fantastic display especially when a few select species are planted en masse. A well-designed garden will have a mix of shrubs, large showy perennials, and smaller herbaceous plants. This offers structure during the dull winter months as well as intense displays of colour throughout the summer.

Choosing contrasting colours will make for a fun and playful display. Try a mix of rudbeckia (*Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm'), catmint (*Nepeta* 'Six Hills Giant'), and ox-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*).

A good place to start is using the guide below. Select your favourite species from the list and search online for existing garden designs using these species. This will provide a good template for your own community planting.



Image shows a flyer depicting pollinator friendly plants

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

### Action 5: Allow Vegetables to Bolt for Pollinators

Growing vegetables on school grounds provides a good educational tool for children on food systems while also promoting healthy eating.

Allowing vegetables to bolt (flower) will provide important resources for pollinators. In order to achieve this, a vegetable bed could be planted outdoors and left un-harvested. This will allow plants to complete their life cycle namely, flower-fruit-seed.

In the image below there is a fennel plant which has flowered. Similarly, kale, broccoli, carrots, beetroot, garlic and onions will provide also nectar rich flowers for pollinators. Herbs such as rosemary, oregano, and thyme can be included as they also provide good forage for pollinators.

Joy Larkcom is a well-regarded gardener based in Ireland who made her career blurring the lines between ornamental and vegetable gardens. Her books are available and will provide good information on sowing times, planting plans, and select varieties for the Irish climate. A vegetable bed that was planted and allowed to flower would provide the dual function of education and supporting biodiversity.



*Pollinator friendly planting showing Salvia species, Aster species, and fennel, at Doorly Park Recreational Area, Co Sligo.*

### Action 6: Plant Flowers for Birds

During the Autumn and Winter months birds will forage on nutrient-rich high-calorie seed heads. These stores of food help local bird population survive these harsh months. Many of these species also provide a spectacular display in the summer months providing resources for pollinators. As such, they are multifunctional.

Some examples of species which produce attractive seed-heads for birds include; teasel, (*Dipsacus fullonum*), Sea holly (*Eryngium spp.*), Globe thistle (*Echinops spp.*), Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*), Rudbeckia (*Rudbeckia spp.*), Turkish sage (*Phlomis russeliana*), Hyssop (*Agastache spp.*). Further information can be found at the Royal Society for the Preservation of Birds (RSPB) available at; <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/nature-on-your-doorstep/garden-activities/leave-seedheads-standing/>

The seedheads of these species should not be cut back at the end of the growing season. Instead, they should be left to decay in-situ. This provides natural bird feeders all through the cooler winter months.



## Action 7: Decorate and Install Bird Boxes with Non-Toxic Paints

Local populations of small birds can be supported by putting up bird boxes. They could be secured in trees or along the fence. Aim to have them up before the breeding season when the birds begin to make their nests (March).

They should be positioned at least 2m above ground level and out of direct sunlight – best facing north or south-east. The entrance hole should just be wide enough for the target species. For example, Blue tit requires a small hole (25mm). Anything bigger will attract bigger species.

If bird feeders are placed near a bird box, then the nesting bird will spend a lot of energy defending its territory – so please don't.

The children can then decorate these boxes in a colourful manner to promote play and collaboration.

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

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



This is also an easy template on how to make your own bird box and can be downloaded at:

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



### Action 8: Apply for the Green-Schools Award

The Green-Schools award takes a collaborative approach to improving the environmental awareness in schools across Ireland. The programme is delivered by An Taisce and a series of resources are available online to help engage children on the topic.

For example there are online PDF document available for download to help children identify common birds, insects, and plants.

There are several themes involved in the programme, including; litter, energy, water, travel, biodiversity, and the marine environment.

The first step involves registration (<https://greenschoolsireland.org/apply/>) and then an information package will then be sent to the school.



The Biodiversity Starter Pack for Green Schools Award available online.

Source: <https://greenschoolsireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Animal-Biodiversity-Starter-Pack-for-Primary-Schools-1.pdf>