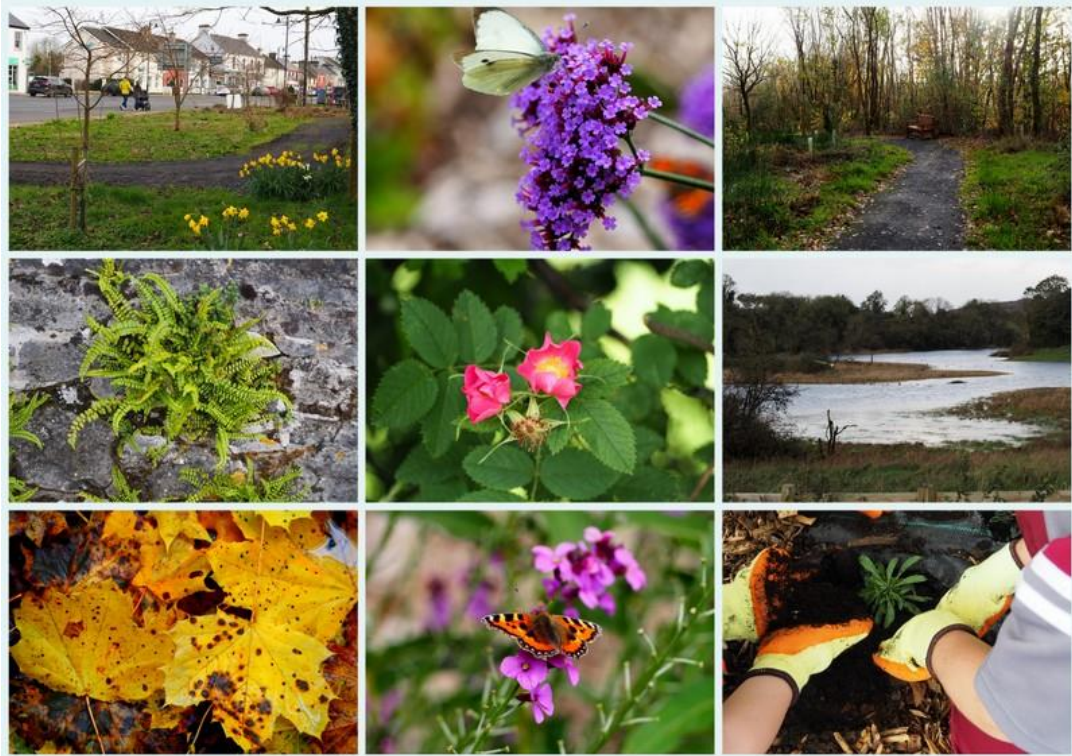


Balla Community Action Biodiversity Plan

2023-2028

Update 2025



 **The Community
Foundation for Ireland**



Balla Tidy Towns

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Balla Tidy Town group for the support in completing this plan. Thanks also both to Balla National School and Secondary school for their engagement in this project.

Community Foundation have funded this project through their Environmental and Nature Fund.



Executive Summary

This Community Action Biodiversity Plan has been funded by the Community Foundation through their Environmental and Nature Fund. Balla is a small town in central Mayo. The town has many biodiversity assets including Balla Town Park (Neighbourwood project) and Balla Turlough Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Focus for the plan included habitat surveys and work involved in the development of a sensory garden in the town. Habitats recorded within the area include improved grassland, turloughs, semi-natural woodland, hedgerows, amenity grassland, scrub, depositing / lowland rivers, flower bed and borders, buildings, and artificial surfaces, stonewall and other stonework, and a brownfield site.

The town is surrounded mainly by improved agricultural fields surrounded by hedgerows dominated by hawthorn. There are two small streams flowing through the town and several areas of amenity grassland.

Balla Turlough is a special area of conservation (SAC), while Drumadoon Turlough which lies to the north of the town is not. However, there is a bird hide at Drumadoon. Balla Town Parks is an important local amenity and attracts visitors to the town. It is also very important for biodiversity, supporting a range of tree species, woodland plants, and other wildlife.

The community garden is another important asset, and during the completion of this plan the flower beds were revamped with a good variety of pollinator friendly plants being planted.

The sensory garden is another work in progress and the focus has not just been on creating an accessible sensory garden, but also one that supports local biodiversity.

Several important species were highlighted in the plan as they are common in the area. These include oak and beech trees. While beech trees are not native, the large number of veteran beech in the area is an important biodiversity feature unique to Balla. Foxgloves and tutsan are plants that thrive in the woodland habitats.

The turloughs support a range of bird species, but whooper and mute swans were of particular note. A swift nest box has been placed in the community centre and has been successful in attracting swifts.

The community and schools took part in various events through the planning process including planting days and litter picks.

The action plan for the community lists fourteen actions. These include: Completing the sensory garden, continuing to enhance the community garden flower beds, managing the community wildlife areas, working with local artist to create nature murals, holding nature walks or events, building a sand marten wall, creating new wildflower habitats including a solitary bee bank, working with the golf course and GAA to increase biodiversity in their grounds, further development of school gardens, improvements to the housing estate management to support wildflowers (e.g. such as six week meadows), and to develop a community nature park and mini woodland.

Introduction

This Community Action Biodiversity Plan has been funded by the Community Foundation through their Environmental and Nature Fund. The grants scheme was established to enhance biodiversity in communities throughout the country by combining the expertise of qualified ecologists with the skills, experience, and enthusiasm of local community groups.

Balla Tidy Towns were successful in getting a grant through the scheme. Dr. Karina Dingerkus, ecologist from Giorria Environmental Services, was engaged to support the community group in carrying out community biodiversity projects and ecological studies in their local area and to develop a Community Biodiversity Action Plan.

An initial meeting was had with the group on the 16th February 2023 to discuss what an biodiversity plan was and the possible projects / actions that the community could engage with. Further follow up meetings were held throughout the year and the ecologist helped group complete a couple of projects namely the Community Garden flower bed and the sensory garden.

Balla Town

Balla is a small town in central Mayo. The population of the area is approximately xx residents. The village earlier had the name 'Ros Dairbhreach,' which can be translated as 'The Height of the Oak Wood.' The significance of oak trees to the community is evident in the 'Dawn Oak 2000' initiative. During the Millennium, a total of 2000 oak trees were planted in Balla Town Park.

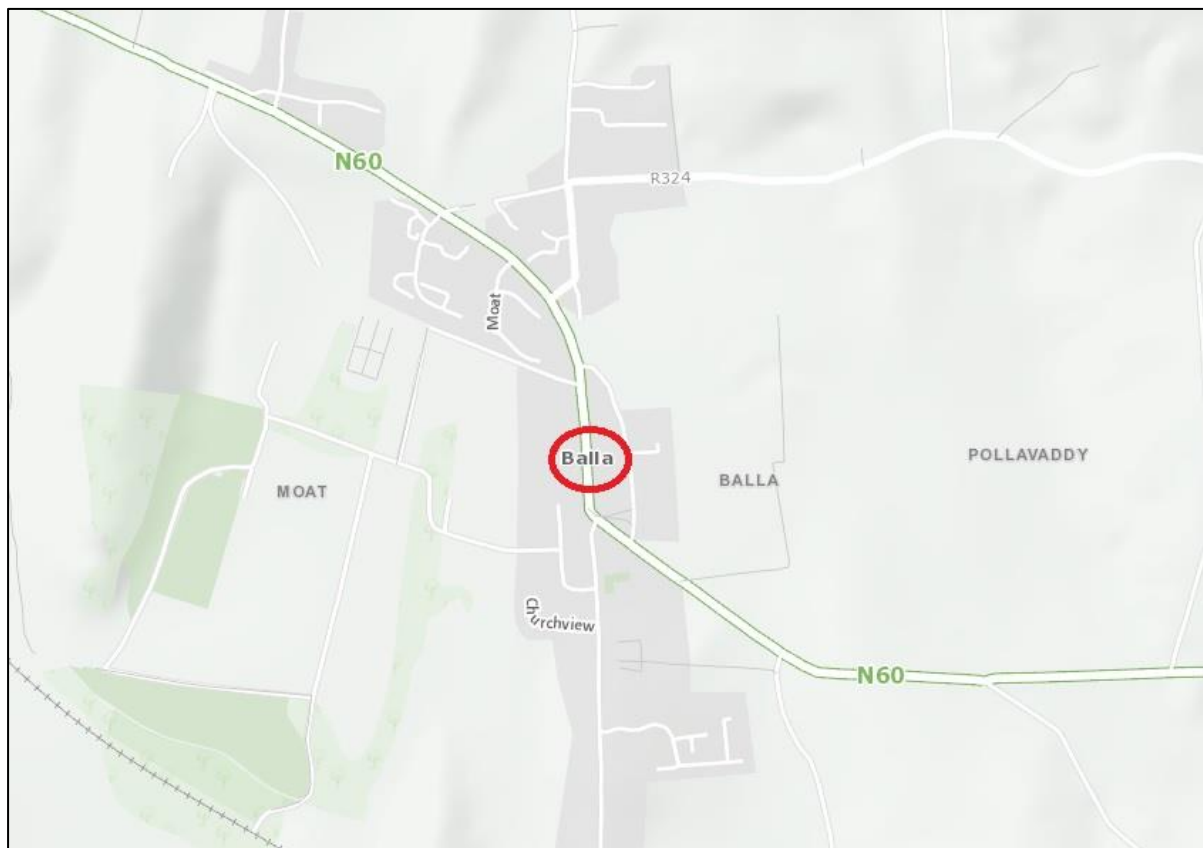
The town has many biodiversity assets including Balla woods, a woodland site left to the town by the landlord, which has been further enhanced by a neighbourhood wood scheme. In 2015, the community applied for a Neighbourwood scheme. An area of 35 acres of old estate wood was cleared of encroaching laurel and planted with 3000 young deciduous trees. These new trees, along with the existing old trees, now make a wonderful diverse woodland. The old trees include oak, beech, and horse chestnut. Public access is encouraged through a series of paths, benches, fairy trail and picnic tables.

Balla Turlough Special Area of Conservation (SAC), recognized as a significant wildlife conservation area at both European and Irish levels, selected and designated under the EU Habitats Directive lies just south of the town.

Engagement with the community group involved the ecologist attending various meetings to talk to the group about the action plan, as well as a walk when community members accompanied the ecologist and discussed ideas for action. Several planting day events were organised with local schools.

Survey Area

The area covered by the plan is Balla Town and Balla Town Woods. See Map 1 below showing location of town centre.



Map 1 Balla town and surrounds

What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity is fundamental to our survival. Biodiversity is essential for critical elements of life such as oxygen, food, and clean water. Moreover, biodiversity provides us with resources, help pollinate plants, and naturally regulates pests. Biodiversity is defined as: " the variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems."

In other words, biodiversity refers to all living things.

The most recent United Nations reports (2021) on world biodiversity loss paint a worrying picture of the state of our planet's natural diversity. These reports highlight that we are in the midst of a biodiversity crisis of unprecedented magnitude. The findings show that species are going extinct at an accelerated rate, with some estimates suggesting that up to one million species are at risk of extinction. This loss of biodiversity is attributed to a combination of factors, including habitat loss, overexploitation of resources, pollution, and climate change. The consequences of this crisis extend

beyond the natural world, affecting human well-being, food security, and the stability of ecosystems that underpin our survival. The UN's latest assessments serve as a reminder that urgent and coordinated global action is needed to address biodiversity loss.

The impact of the loss of biodiversity can also be seen here in Ireland. Of the species that have been assessed here, one in every five is threatened with extinction. For example, there are ninety-nine different types of bees in Ireland (twenty-one bumblebee species, seventy-seven solitary bees and one honeybee). Of these, one-third are threatened with extinction. Pollinators are declining for many reasons but two of the main threats are the lack of food and shelter. Thirty-seven species of bird are of high conservation concern. The corn bunting has become extinct since around 2000 and the once widespread corncrake is just lingering on in the western extremities of counties Donegal and Mayo.

It is up to all of us to do our bit for local biodiversity.

Why have a biodiversity action plan?

Communities like Balla have the potential to make changes which could potentially have many positive changes for local biodiversity. Balla Tidy Town are a very active group and have already completed some interesting biodiversity projects in their community. This has included the installation of a bird hide near the Turlough to allow people to get a close look at birds using the Turlough without disturbing them. They have also been actively involved in the development of Balla Town Park Woods, a neighbourwood project. There are many other biodiversity projects that the community can get involved in.

The National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021 sets objectives, targets, and actions for the country. The vision of the national plan is *“That biodiversity and ecosystems in Ireland are conserved and restored, delivering benefits essential for all sectors of society and that Ireland contributes to efforts to halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems in the EU and globally.”*

One of the objectives of the National Plan is to “Enhanced appreciation of the value of biodiversity and ecosystem services amongst policy makers, businesses, stakeholders, local communities, and the general public (Target 3.1).”

Local communities are essential partners with the National Biodiversity Action Plan. A Local Community Biodiversity Action Plan focuses on how communities can actively participate in preserving local biodiversity. It serves as an outline for protecting and enriching biodiversity.

In recent decades, Ireland has experienced a significant decline in biodiversity, with the loss of hay meadows and the insect life they sustain, the disappearance of wetland habitats due to bog and agricultural field drainage, and the loss of hedgerows. The latest assessment of Conservation Concern for Birds in Ireland, published in April 2021, underscores the continuing challenges. It shows a 46% increase in the number of Red-listed bird species. It is crucial to recognize that humans are an integral part of biodiversity, and our actions have the power to both positively and negatively impact it.

Ireland is one of the least wooded countries in Europe. Therefore, having the Town Park is a huge natural asset for the community. Woodlands are particularly valuable habitats for all sorts of biodiversity, from trees, mammals, plants, fungi, birds, and invertebrates.

For many years Balla Tidy Towns have been activity competing in the national Tidy Towns Competition. Over the years the focus of Tidy Towns has moved away from annual flowers to more sustainable planting and Balla Tidy Towns have followed suit. They have had a community orchard for several years, and areas which are not cut during the summer months.

Native wildflowers have declined in Ireland with the loss of hay meadows and other flower-rich habitats. By providing native flowers and other flowering plants in our villages, schools, and gardens we can help replace this valuable resource.

There is much we can do to improve biodiversity in our towns. It is valuable therefore for communities to plan actions. When planning actions, it is important to know what plants and animals already occur in our area. It is important to know how we can best maintain what is there, but also to know how we can enhance by maybe managing in a more environmentally way.

This plan sets out actions for the community to protect and enhance the biodiversity they have in Balla.



Photograph 1: Spring Clean day with Primary school

The Biodiversity of Balla

Protecting existing biodiversity resources and areas rich in biodiversity is as important as creating new ones. Small towns and villages can be surprising rich in biodiversity, especially when these areas are surrounded by countryside. Balla, unlike some areas also has its own woodland – Balla Town Parks, heritage walks and turlough designated as Special Area of Conservation. All these habitats are important in supporting a wealth of wildlife. Conservation efforts for the community like Balla will go to make further improvements to these important areas, but also creating community spaces within the community for everyone to enjoy, such as the community garden and sensory garden. Local communities can do their part by becoming actively involved in protecting their natural surroundings, with initiatives such as local biodiversity action plans.

Ecological Surveys

Habitat Surveys

The focus of the habitat surveys was of the areas around the town and the wooded areas of Town Park.

On the 8th March the ecologist meet with some of the members of the group to look at areas within the town. Focus was on the flower beds and wildflower area at the entrance to the town from the Castlebar road and on the proposed sensory garden close to the play area. It was agreed that a plan would be drawn up to create a pollinator friendly perennial flower bed for the Castlebar road area.

A plan had previously been drawn up for the sensory garden and it was agreed that the ecologist would help with advice with a focus on native planting.

Surveys were also carried out on the 29th June, 10th August, 24th August and 14th November.



Photograph 2: Transition Year student and Balla Tidy Town planting bulbs in Sensory Garden

Habitats recorded in Balla and surrounding areas

Habitat Type	Habitat code*	Description	Habitats	Biodiversity value	Examples in locality
Improved agriculture	GA1	Improved pastureland used for grazing and silage, often with boundaries of hedgerows	Agricultural grassland	Low	Scattered throughout area
Turlough	FL6	Turloughs are temporary lakes that occupy basins or depressions in limestone areas, and where water levels fluctuate markedly during the year.	Freshwater	High	Balla Turlough SAC
Semi-natural woodland	WN	These woodlands are composed of a mix of native and introduced tree species, such as oak, beech, and Scots pine, coexisting with a rich understory of native plants and shrubs.	Native woodland	High	Balla Town Parks
Hedgerows	WL1	These linear ecosystems are important wildlife corridors, providing refuge, nesting sites, and foraging opportunities for numerous species, from birds and small mammals to insects and plants. Hawthorn is one of the most important components.	Hedgerows	High	Scattered throughout area
Buildings and artificial surfaces	BL3	Buildings, roads and hard standing	Built land and gardens	Low	Balla Town
Stone walls and other stonework	BL1	Stone walls can be important boundaries in agricultural fields and also support	Built land, garden, agricultural	Medium	Scattered throughout area

		birds, insects and some specialist plant species	stonewall boundaries		
Amenity grassland	GA2	Play area, pitches, and lawns	Short grass such as playing pitches	Low-medium	Balla GAA Pitch Balla Golf course Housing estates
Scrub	WS1	Scrub represents a diverse range of habitats found in various landscapes. Characterized by a mix of shrubs, young trees, and herbaceous plants, scrub provides shelter, foraging opportunities, and nesting sites for a wide range of wildlife.	Scrub / woodland	High	Some areas near Town Parks and along railway line
Depositing/lowland rivers	FW2	These rivers have slow-moving water and sediment-rich bottoms, and provide habitats for a variety of fish species, as well as aquatic plants and other wildlife. Lowland rivers play a key role in regulating water quality and supporting agricultural activities.	Rivers	High	Loughnaminoe (Stream) and Ardboley 34 (EPA Names)
Flower beds and borders	BC4	Flower beds and borders	Cultivated and built land	Medium	Community garden flower border
Brownfield site	N/A	An area of abandoned land, with areas of bare ground and grassland	Bare	Low-Medium	Area of N60 opposite churchfields

Agricultural grassland (GA1 Improved agricultural grassland)



Much of the habitat in the immediate surrounding the town is composed of grassland and on the whole, these are improved agricultural fields. The fields are generally separated by hedgerows. Agricultural grassland can have a low biodiversity value where it is managed intensively. However, many of the fields have good hedgerows, which form wildflower corridors to the wooded areas around the town.

Hedgerows (WL1) and Treelines (WL2)

Hedgerows are frequent field boundaries. Many of the hedgerows are dominated by hawthorn. Blackthorn was also present. Larger trees included ash and sycamore. Ivy and bramble were the most frequent climbers.

In rural Ireland, hedgerows are becoming more intensively managed, with hedgerows being cut to low square shapes, removing all fruiting and flowering aspects of the hedgerow. This reduced the biodiversity potential of hedgerows. There was evidence of ash dieback on ash recorded in some of the hedgerows.



Stone walls and other stonework (BL1)



Stone walls can be found as boundaries between fields and along roads in the surrounding landscape, although they are not as prevalent as hedgerows. Some stone walls have become vegetated (see also Hedgerows above). Lichens thrive on stone walls, and ferns like wall rue and spleenwort can also be found growing on them. Brambles are also found scrambling over stonewalls.

Stone walls are also important for small mammals such as stoats and mice and insects, providing cover and potential foraging areas. Many insects will hibernate at the base of these walls.

River (FW2 - Depositing/lowland rivers)

There are two small streams flowing through the town, namely Loughnaminoe (Stream) and Ardboley 34. Both these streams merge and flow into the Manulla River downstream, which is part of the River Moy SAC.

Both the LOUGHNAMINOO STREAM_010 and MANULLA_010 waterbody (EPA code: IE_WE_34M020650) has Water Framework Directive (WFD) River Status of "Moderate to Poor"

and a WFD River Water Bodies Risk status of “At Risk” based on EPA data: 2013-2018 reporting cycle. EPA has highlighted channelisation as a threat to the Loughnaminoe (Stream).

Amenity Grassland (GA2)

This type of grassland is improved, or species-poor and includes amenity, recreational or landscaped grasslands, but excludes farmland. These areas are regularly mown to maintain very short swards. Amenity grassland is found in Ball golf course, GAA pitch and in the green area near the new sensory garden, green areas around the church and in the green area of the housing estates.



Turloughs (FL6)

Turloughs are seasonal lakes that occupy basins or depressions. Water levels fluctuate often markedly during the year.

Balla Turlough Special Area of Conservation - This turlough lies in a north-south hollow just east of Balla, Co. Mayo. Along each side of its basin there are smooth, low ridges of glacial deposition, while to the east the land rises more steeply. The floor of the basin is probably flat but there is a considerable accumulation of peat in the basin, which forms a raised platform. Most of the turlough is open to cattle grazing. The turlough floods regularly and retains its habitat quality. The turlough and surrounding grasslands attract significant numbers of waders in winter including species such as Golden Plover, Lapwing, Curlew and Swans.



Drumadoon Turlough - is not a designated site but is another wetland area liable to flooding. A bird hide was erected along the Prizon Road a couple of years ago. This turlough also supports numbers of birds during the winter months including swans and mallard. Grey herons have also been recorded here.

Semi-natural woodland (WN)

Woodlands are very important habitats for a wide range of flora and fauna. Ireland is one of the least wooded countries in Europe and semi-natural woodland is particularly valuable. In 2015, the Balla community applied for a Neighbourwood scheme. An area of 35 acres of old estate wood was cleared of encroaching laurel and planted with 3000 young deciduous trees. These new trees, along with the existing old trees, now make a diverse woodland. The old trees include oak, beech, and horse chestnut trees.



Planted trees include conifers but also hazel and birch. Well laid paths, benches, picnic table, tree trail and interpretation boards all add to the visitor's experience.

Flower beds and borders (BC4)

This year the community revamp an existing bed in the community garden by planting it with a range of pollinator friendly plants and perennials. This bed attracted many bees and butterflies during the summer and also brought some lovely colour to the town.



Photograph 3: Area before pollinator flower bed was installed



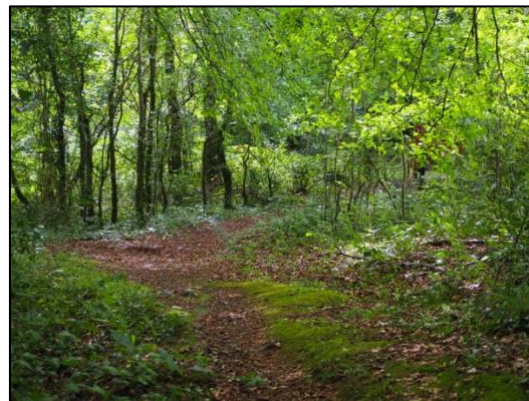
Photograph 4: Pollinator bed after planting

Local Biodiversity Areas

Balla Town Parks

Balla Town Parks is an area of approximately 14 hectares of old estate wood which was cleared of encroaching laurel and planted with 3000 deciduous trees. These new trees, along with the existing older trees, now make a diverse woodland. The old trees include oak, beech, and horse chestnut. Planted trees include conifers but also hazel and birch. The area is managed as a recreational woodland. There are paths, benches, picnic area, tree trail, fairy trail and interpretation boards.

The wood supports a wide variety of birds and insects. Mammal, including foxes use the area. Red squirrels have been reported but there has been no confirmed sighting. Woodland flora includes foxglove, wood avens and tutsan (an indicator of old woodland). Bramble, ferns, moss, and fungi are also common.



Photograph 5a, b, c and d: Town Parks Woodland

Community Garden

The community have worked hard to create a community garden along the N60. The garden includes fruit bushes, herbs, and plants. This year the largest bed of the community garden was revamped to include lots of pollinator friendly perennials and colour. The new plants were a great success attracting butterflies including tortoise-shell, red admiral, large white and fritillaries, as well as common carder bumblebees. Further planting will be done in future years to further enhance this area.



Sensory Garden

The community have been working for the last couple of years in developing an idea for a sensory garden. Balla Tidy Towns are leading on the project in collaboration with Balla CRD, South West Mayo Development Company and Mayo County Council. The garden is situated in an area with trees close to the children's play area. The area will also be accessible to all, including wheelchair users and anyone with mobility or intellectual difficulties. An ecological survey was conducted at the end of 2021 and a plan was developed for the garden. This year the community have been working at implementing the plan, and work is well under way. Transition year students have also been helping with planting thousands of bluebell bulbs and snowdrops bulbs in the garden.



Balla Turlough Special Area of Conservation

Located just east of the town, Balla Turlough SAC occupies a depression running from north to south. On either side of its basin, there are ridges formed by glacial deposits, with the eastern side having a steeper incline. While the basin's floor is likely flat, it has experienced significant peat accumulation, creating an elevated platform. This build-up of peat appears to be reducing the frequency of flooding. Balla Turlough occurs at the northern edge of the main range of turloughs in Mayo and Roscommon and is one of very few within the Moy catchment. The turlough supports a wide range of flora including Meadowsweet, Meadow Thistle, Marsh Cinquefoil, Marsh Stitchwort and Bogbean and numerous

Local Biodiversity – Species of Note

Oak

There are some old oak trees in Town Park. Oak is a deciduous tree grows very slowly but can live for about 300 years. Two types of oak tree occur in Ireland, sessile oak, and common oak. The acorns of the two trees are different - the acorns of the common oak have stalk and those of the sessile oak don't. The traditional Irish oak is the sessile oak. Old oak trees are very valuable, providing food for birds (especially jays) and small mammals in the form of acorns. Holes in old oaks provide roosting areas for bats. They support a wealth of insects.



Beech



Beech trees are not native to Ireland, but many beeches, including some of those in Town Park are what we call veteran trees because they are so old. Beech is a deciduous tree that is native to Asia, North America, and parts of Europe. Beech can grow very tall, and they have a distinct smooth, grey-blue bark. Beeches produce beech nuts which are protected inside a small, triangular shell, which appears hairy on the outside. Beech nuts are a

valuable food resource for many small mammals and birds. Like oaks, holes in old trees provide roosting areas for bats.

Foxgloves

Foxgloves are native flowers that have tall spikes of purple, bell-shaped flowers with spotted throats. They can be seen flowering in June in July in open areas of the wood I Town Parks. They are a rich nectar source for bees such as white-tailed bumblebees.

Tutsan

Tutsan is a native woodland woody, semi-evergreen plant, with yellow flowers and oval leaves. The flowers later turn into non-edible berries that ripen to black. The plant can grow to 70 cm tall.



Swift

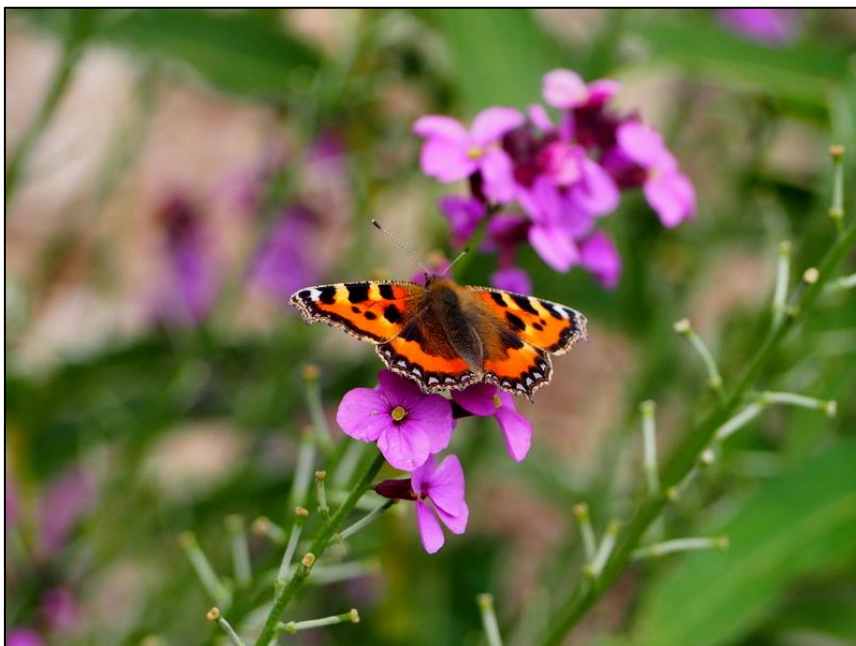
Swifts are red listed migratory birds that spend their summer in Ireland. They are roughly the same size as a Swallow, but all dark. They spend much of their life on the wing life, catching insects in flight. They only land to nest and can only shuffle on the ground (at the nest). They nest mainly in buildings in small recesses but will also use holes in trees or caves in uplands or coastal areas. In modern times loss of building nest sites is thought to have led to their decline. In Balla a swift nest box has been placed on the community centre and it has been successful in attracting birds.

Whooper and Mute Swans

Swans are large, majestic water birds. Mute swans spend the whole year in Ireland but Whooper swans are only winter visitors. Both are listed as having amber conservation status. Whooper swans can be identified by their yellow and black bill, with the yellow projecting below the nostril. Mute swans have an orange-red bill with prominent knob on the forehead, black nostrils and cutting edges. Both species feed on aquatic vegetation but will also graze on grasslands. Swans are commonly seen on the turloughs around Balla.

Small Tortoiseshell butterfly

Small Tortoiseshell are one of our more common butterfly species. They are often seen feeding on garden plants. These butterflies are mainly reddish orange with black markings and striking blue spots around the border. The underside is dark brown, almost black. The second brood of these butterflies hibernates as adults and are sometimes found hibernating in houses. These butterflies were recorded feeding in the newly planted bed of the community garden.



Community Outreach

Action planning

- Following the meeting with the group in March, the ecologist helped to draw up a pollinator planting plan for the community garden. This plan was implemented on the Mayo Day planting day (see below for details).
- On the 29th June the ecologist visited the site of the sensor garden where work had begun installing fencing.
- On the 10th August the ecologist meet with the group to discuss the sensory garden and to plan the native planting for the garden. Further actions were also discussed for both the sensory garden, community garden and the town as a whole.

Community Outreach

On the 28th March a spring clean was organised with the local primary school and secondary school. The ecologists meet with the schools prior to the Spring clean to talk to the students about biodiversity and what they would like to see in their community.

For Mayo Day (29th April) a planting day was organised for the pollinator bed. A large group turned out to help with the planting.

Transition Year from Balla Secondary School helped plant bulbs (bluebells and crocuses) at the sensory garden on the 12th October, with members from Balla Tidy Towns and ecologist.



Balla Biodiversity Action Plan Table with progress up to September 2025

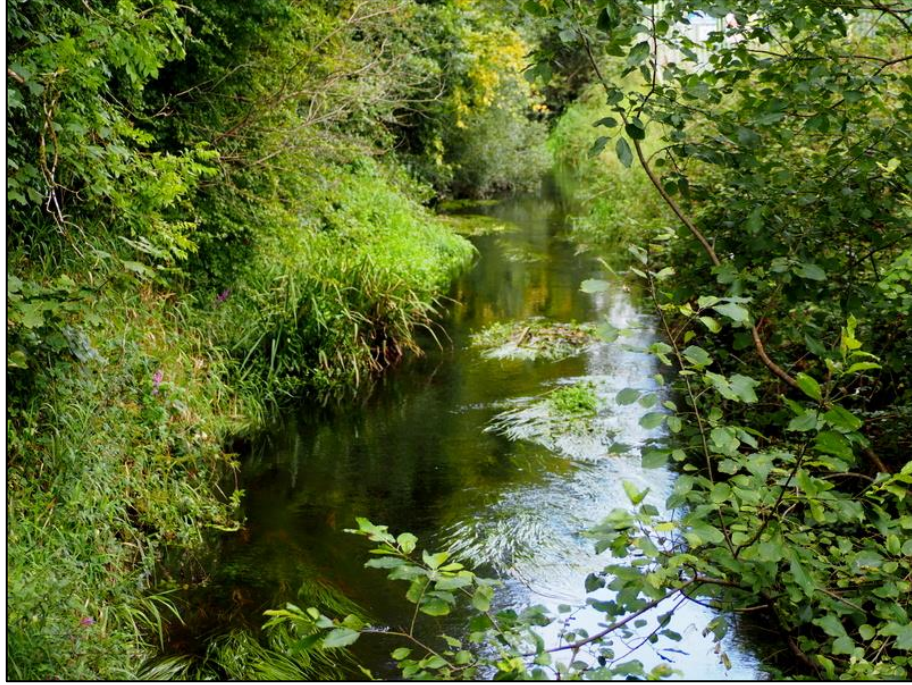
Action number	Action	Why	Proposed Locations	Who	Time-frame	Success measure	Actions to date (September 2025)
1	<p>Balla Sensory Garden</p> <p>Tidy towns have made huge progress on developing their sensory garden this year (2023). Over the next two years the site will be developed further in line with the sensory garden plan. Work still to be completed includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build additional willow structure. • Incorporate water feature. • Install 2-3 bird boxes at various locations within garden. • Make and Install hedgehog box in quiet corner of the garden. • Plant native shrubs under the trees. • Plant native hedgerow on the outside of the new fence. • Plant bulbs on roadside of new hedgerow. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support biodiversity and to help those with special sensory needs engage with nature in a safe and environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balla Sensory Garden 	<p>Balla Tidy Towns</p> <p>Local schools</p> <p>Other local volunteers</p> <p>Local contractors</p>	1-5 years	Sensory garden completed and open to the public	Sensory garden has been completed and is now open to the public. It is regularly used, and will be a project that the Tidy Towns will continue to develop over time
2	<p>Community Garden perennial flower beds</p> <p>This year (2023) one of the flower beds of the community garden has been totally revamp, and now it includes a variety of pollinator-friendly perennials. Further work to be completed in this area includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the new bed to ensure enough flowers have been planted. If 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support local biodiversity by proving food and habitat for insects, especially pollinators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Garden 	<p>Balla Tidy Towns</p> <p>Local schools</p> <p>Other local volunteers</p>	1-5 years	Number of areas planted	Two of the community-garden flower beds have now been revamped with new perennial planting. Further work with Balla

	<p>necessary, enhance with further pollinator friendly planting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revamp the smaller bed with a larger variety of herbs. • Work with local transition year students to keep area clear of weeds. 						Secondary school is planned.
3	<p>Community Wildflower Areas</p> <p>There are a couple of areas that area cut once a year. Generally, the number of wildflowers is low, and it would be good to increase diversity of plants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In August, cut and remove vegetation. • Sow Yellow rattle seed (yellow rattle parasitises grass and weakens it allowing more flowers to come through. • Scatter locally collected wildflower seed (see action 4 below) and / or native wildflower mixed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase diversity of wildflowers and biodiversity in general 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community garden wildflower area • Road verges opposite Churchfields • Other areas as appropriate 	<p>Balla Tidy Towns</p> <p>Local schools</p> <p>Other local volunteers</p>	1-5 years	Number of areas managed for wildflowers	One wildflower area has been created and managed for wildflowers.
4	<p>Nature Wall Murals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with local artists to create nature mural in sites within town • Liaise with local community to agree design. Look also at including other aspects of local heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase awareness of biodiversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National School • Community Centre 	<p>Balla Tidy Town</p> <p>School</p> <p>Local artists</p>	3-5 years	Number of murals completed	BallaTidy Towns decided to go for nature sculptures instead of a mural. A carved wooden fox and wooden owl have been added to the sensory garden.
5	<p>Nature walks and events</p> <p>Nature walks and events are perfect ways to increase awareness about local biodiversity among the general public</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To increase awareness about local biodiversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage trails • Balla Town Park 	Balla Tidy Towns	1-5 years	Numbers of events held per year	A nature walk was held for biodiversity week in 2025 and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise a nature walk for Biodiversity week (May each year), through the towns heritage trails and or Balla Town Park. Organise a bat walk in Balla Town Parks for Heritage week (August). 			Vincent wildlife trust			further walks are planned.
6	<p>Build a Sand Martin wall</p> <p>Sand Martins are a summer visit to Ireland and are an amber listed bird that breed in colonies in burrows dug into riverbanks or quarries. Artificial nests can be created to help this declining species.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help declining bird species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In area near turlough / bird hide 	Balla Tidy Towns	3-5 years	Number of artificial burrows create	This action is still to take place.
7	<p>Creating new wildflower habitats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Add wildflowers such primrose, foxglove, cats-ear, and red campion to steep soil on road up to gold course / GAA pitches. Can be added as plug plants or locally sourced seed in the autumn. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase number of flowering species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bank of road leading to golf course 	Balla Tidy Towns	3-5 years	Areas maintained	This action is still to take place but hope to start in Autumn 2025.
8	<p>Solitary bee soil bank</p> <p>Solitary bee - mining bees need access to bare soil in order to dig their nests. These bees prefer open, well drained, sheltered, sunny locations that are south facing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinstate bee bank at community garden. Look for other suitable areas to manage as bee banks - small areas of about 1 m² managed by just scraping back vegetation with a spade. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create habitat for solitary bees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community garden Town Park Bird hide 	Balla Tidy Towns	1-5 years	Number of bee banks created	A bank has been created and will look at where further banks can be installed.

9	Enhance golf course for biodiversity Work with golf course to improve area for biodiversity by adopting actions from the All Ireland Pollinator guidance for golf clubs (https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Golf-Courses-Pollinator-Guidelines-2022-WEB.pdf)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness of biodiversity among club members • Enhance area for biodiversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Golf course 	Balla Tidy Towns Golf club	4-5 years	Number of pollinator actions adopted by golf course	Plans to set up meeting with Balla Tidy Towns and ecologist and the golf course in the future.
10	GAA – Green clubs Work with local GAA club to adopt green club initiative (www.gaa.ie/my-gaa/community-and-health/green-clubs-sustainability/) and / or adopt actions from the All Ireland Pollinator Plan sports clubs (https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Sports-Clubs-Pollinator-Guidelines-2022-WEB.pdf)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness of biodiversity and sustainability among club members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GAA pitch 	Balla Tidy Towns GAA club	4-5 years		Plans to set up meeting with Balla Tidy Towns and ecologist and the GAA in the future
11	School gardens Encourage both national and secondary schools to grow vegetables, wildflower seeds and plug plants. Tidy towns to consider sponsoring a raised bed for national school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetables gardens support biodiversity • Help children learn about food and where it comes from • Sensory aspect can be important for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National School • Secondary school 	Balla Tidy Towns	2-5 years	Number of pupils engaged in growing	Transition year have helped with development of sensory garden. Plan to engage with secondary school transition year in wildflower growing workshop this autumn
12	Housing estate grassland management There are various ways we can manage grassland in a way that promotes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports wildflowers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing estates 	Balla Tidy Towns	2-5 years	Number of areas managed for wildflowers	This action is still to take place.

	wildflowers which in turn supports biodiversity. Look at creating couple of areas of “six-week meadows” or “no mow May” areas			Estate committees			
13	Nature Park Develop a Community Nature Park to include a wildflower alley, biodiversity meadows and contemplative park. Area will include seating, picnic and outdoor meeting area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance area for biodiversity • Increase awareness of biodiversity • Positive mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing area on the old Castlebar and Kiltimagh road 	Balla Tidy Towns Mayo County Council	1-4 years	Area created and open to public	This action is complete and area is open to public.
14	Mini woodland <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at creating a mini woodland on road verge of N60 on southern side from College Woods to Churchfield. • Have wildflower area in front of the trees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance area for biodiversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southern side of N60 between College Woods to Churchfield 	Balla Tidy Towns	2-5 years	Number of trees planted	15-20 trees have already been planted close to the sensory garden.



Photograph 7: Loughnaminoe Steam

Appendices

Appendix 1 - List of species recorded in Balla

Flora recorded during surveys

Common name	Scientific name	Group
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	Tree
Angelica, wild	<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>	Flowering plant
Arum lily	<i>Zantedeschia aethiopica</i>	Flowering plant
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	Tree
Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>	Tree
Bindweed	<i>Calystegia</i> spp.	Flowering plant
Birch	<i>Betula</i> spp.	Tree
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>	Tree
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.	Climber
Buttercup, creeping	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Flowering plant
Buttercup, meadow	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	Flowering plant
Cleavers	<i>Galium aparine</i>	Flowering plant
Clover, red	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Flowering plant
Clover, white	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	Flowering plant
Coltfoot	<i>Tussilago farfara</i>	Grass
Cow parsley	<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Flowering plant
Daisy	<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Flowering plant
Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i> agg.	Flowering plant
Dock Spp.	<i>Rumex</i> Spp.	Flowering plant
Enchanters-nightshade	<i>Circaea lutetiana</i>	Flowering plant
Foxglove	<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	Flowering plant
Gorse	<i>Ulex europaeus</i>	Shrub
Harts tongue fern	<i>Asplenium scolopendrum</i>	Fern
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Flowering plant
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Tree
Herb robert	<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	Flowering plant
Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	Climber
Horse chestnut	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	Tree
Horsetails	<i>Equisetum</i> Spp.	Flowering plant
Iris, yellow	<i>Iris pseudoacorus</i>	Flowering plant
Ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>	Climber
Meadowsweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>	Flowering plant
Mint	<i>Mentha</i> Spp.	Flowering plant
Nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Flowering plant
Oak	<i>Quercus petraea</i>	Tree
Oat-grass, false	<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	Grass
Ox-eye daisy	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>	Flowering plant
Parsley, hedge	<i>Torilis japonica</i>	Flowering plant
Plantain, ribwort	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Flowering plant
Ragwort	<i>Senecio jacobaea</i> / <i>Jacobaea vulgaris</i>	Flowering plant
Sedges	<i>Carex</i> Spp.	Sedge

Selfheal	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	Flowering plant
Silverweed	<i>Potentilla anserina</i>	Flowering plant
Sitka spruce	<i>Picea sitchensis</i>	Tree
Sow-thistle,	<i>Sonchus arvensis</i>	Flowering plant
Speedwell	<i>Veronica</i> spp.	Flowering plant
Spleenwort	<i>Asplenium adiantum-nigrum</i>	Fern
St John's-wort	<i>Hypericum</i> spp.	Flowering plant
Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Tree
Thistle	<i>Cirsium</i> Spp.	Flowering plant
Thistle, Marsh	<i>Cirsium palustre</i>	Flowering plant
Thistle, meadow	<i>Cirsium dissectum</i>	Flowering plant
Thistle, spear	<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Flowering plant
Tutsan	<i>Hypericum androsaemum</i>	Flowering plant
Vetch, bush	<i>Vicia sepium</i>	Flowering plant
Vetch, tufted	<i>Vicia cracca</i>	Flowering plant
Willow	<i>Salix</i> Spp.	Tree
Willowherb spp.	<i>Epilobium</i> Spp.	Flowering plant

Fauna recorded during surveys

Common name	Scientific name	Group
Small tortoise	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	Butterfly
Drone fly	<i>Eristalis</i> spp.	Hoverfly
Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	Butterfly
Common carder bee	<i>Bombus pascourum</i>	Bumblebee
Silver-washed Fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>	Butterfly
Large white	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	Butterfly
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Bird
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Bird



The sign features a central circular image of a bumblebee on a purple thistle. The text 'Arna bhainistiú ar son an fhiadhúlra' is at the top in green, and 'Managed for Wildlife' is below it in blue. The Irish text 'Plean Uile-Éireann um Pailneoirí' is curved around the top of the circle, and 'All-Ireland Pollinator Plan' is curved around the bottom. The National Biodiversity Data Centre logo is in the bottom left, and the website 'www.pollinators.ie' is at the bottom center. The sign is decorated with small bee icons and a grassy field at the bottom.

**Arna bhainistiú ar
son an fhiadhúlra**
Managed for Wildlife

Plean Uile-Éireann um Pailneoirí

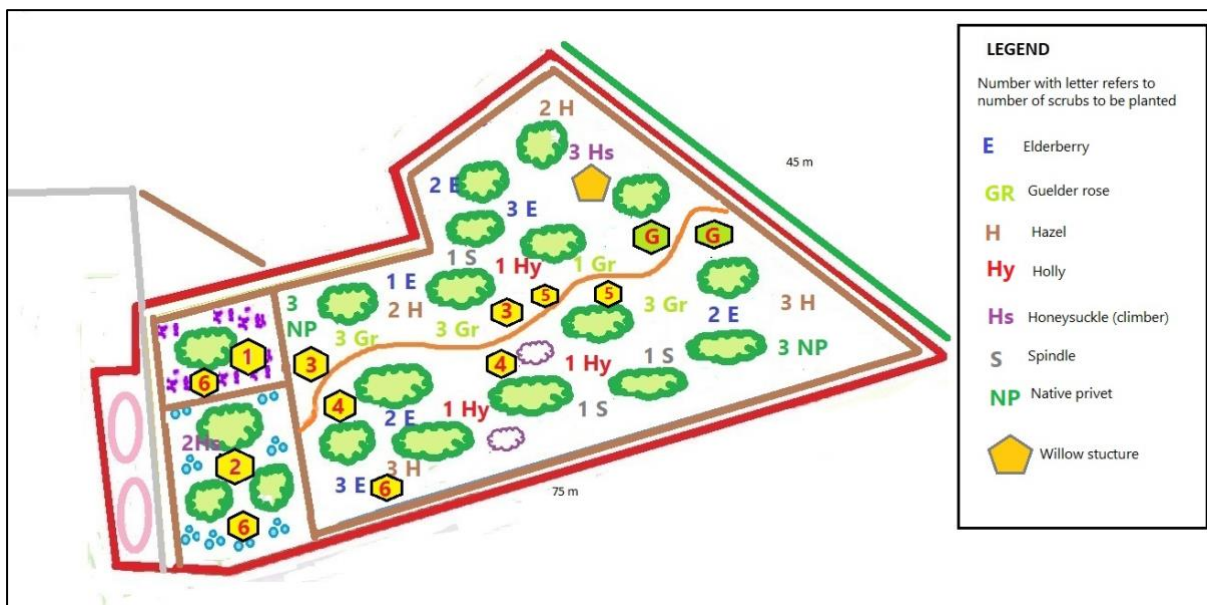
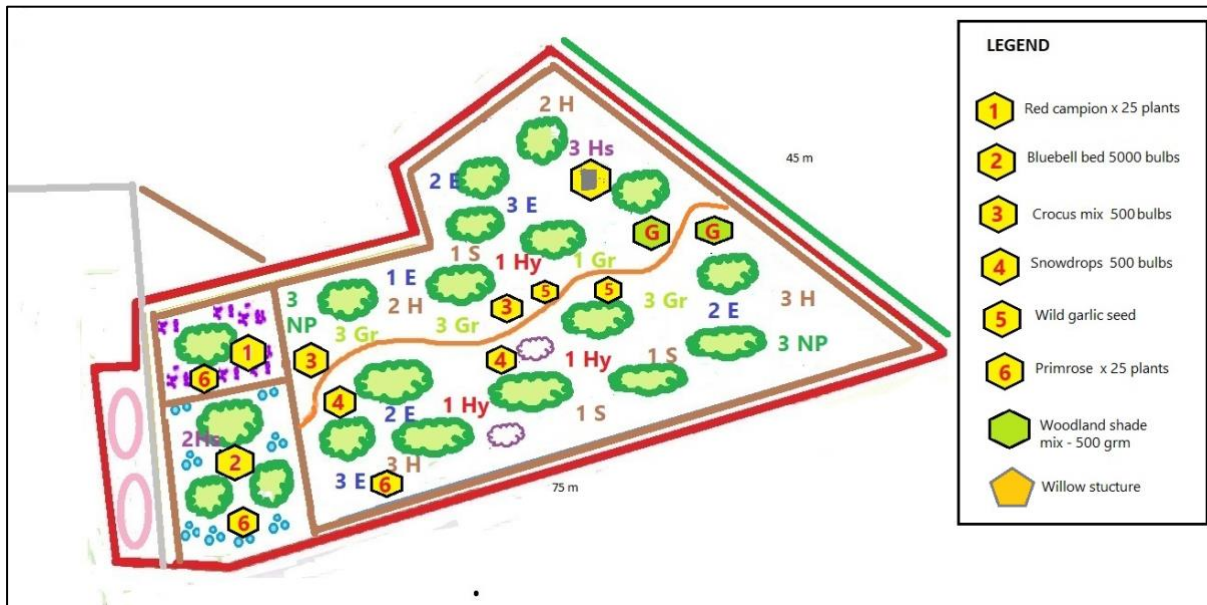
All-Ireland Pollinator Plan

National Biodiversity Data Centre
Fioschúir na hÉireann a dhíomáil
Decompany Ireland's Wildlife

www.pollinators.ie

Appendix 3 – Sensory Garden Plans

Planting Plans for Sensory Garden



Information about installing in-built swift bricks and boxes from the Saving Swifts (https://birdwatchireland.ie/app/uploads/2019/10/Saving-Swifts-Guide_pdf.pdf) for new builds.

Advice: installing in-built Swift brick and boxes

What is a Swift brick?
Commercial Swift nest bricks are made from hollow brick or concrete composite designed to allow access by Swifts and manufactured to modern building regulation standards. They can be integrated into the walls of buildings during the construction phase.

Swift bricks provide safe, permanent, low-cost nesting sites for Swifts for the lifetime of the building. They are best installed into new-builds or during extensions and renovation works. Unlike externally fitted boxes they blend into the fabric of the building and for this reason are often the preferred choice for architects.

Choosing bricks
Swift bricks are available commercially and come in various sizes, shapes and colours, so it should be easy to find a brick that fits your building design. Manufacturers will supply technical information on Swift brick types to help you at the design stage.

Why use Swift bricks?

- They are as close as it gets to a "natural" nest site.
- The brick is available to nesting Swifts for the life of the building. Once occupied, it could be used by a single pair for many years.

Positioning bricks

- ✓ **Do:** Place bricks any aspect N, S, E or W. Bricks tend not to overheat the way that externally fitted boxes can.
- ✓ **Do:** Place bricks at least five metres above ground. Boxes can never be too high, so, if in doubt, go as high as possible.
- ✓ **Do:** Face brick entrances onto an open aspect – no overhanging vegetation, trees, walls or other obstacles – so that the birds can fly directly in and out unimpeded.
- ✓ **Do:** Place bricks side by side in rows.
- ✓ **Do:** Keep out of reach of pets or other potential predators.
- ✗ **Don't:** Place bricks near plate glass windows because they are a known collision hazard for birds.
- ✗ **Don't:** Place bricks directly above ledges or other obstructions. Swifts drop before taking flight and can collide with obstacles below the nest entrance.
- ✗ **Don't:** Stack bricks one above the other.
- ✗ **Don't:** Place Swift bricks near spotlights or later fit spotlights near Swift bricks.

Fitting the bricks
Swift bricks are designed to fit alongside standard building materials and can be fitted by any experienced tradesperson.

How many bricks should be used?
Swifts nest in colonies, so any number between two and twenty is advisable. Bricks are relatively cheap. You might install four bricks in a single house or twenty bricks in a large school or commercial building.

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Biodiversity Plan for Balla

December 2023

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