Clontarf Biodiversity Summary Action Plan

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for Clontarf Residents' Association and Clontarf Tidy Towns

Biodiversity

The term biodiversity covers all life forms, all bacteria, insects, birds, animals, plants, soils and the essential services they provide, which include food, fuel, clean water and aesthetic enjoyment. It is widely accepted that the quality of biodiversity is in decline and that urgent action is required by all sectors of society to reverse this trend.

The aim of the Clontarf Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) is to inform the community about the biodiversity present in Clontarf and what needs to be done to improve and enhance it.

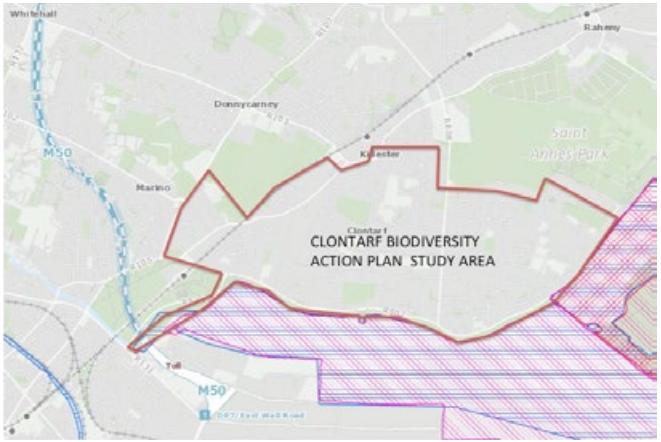
Clontarf Residents' Association (CRA) and Clontarf Tidy Towns (CTT) commissioned the plan. The brief for this study specified that it would:

- Review previous work carried out on biodiversity by statutory agencies and developers
- Identify, at a high level, the existing areas/features of highest biodiversity value in Clontarf, with a particular focus on less obvious or less well-known spots e.g. laneways, graveyards, churches, sports fields, veteran trees, hedgerows
- Identify areas which might lend themselves to biodiversity improvement and enhancement
- Suggest measures which could be carried out by Clontarf Residents' Association and Clontarf Tidy Towns to protect and enhance biodiversity.

In further consultations with Clontarf Tidy Towns the following aspects were highlighted:

- Guidelines for tree wells
- Guidelines for verges
- Guidelines for removing growth (grass and weeds) from around trees or benches
- How to distinguish wild from cultivated land.

The study area, shown below, was defined by the community to include all public areas managed by Clontarf Tidy Towns (excluding St Anne's Park and the Bull Island).



Study Area for the Clontarf Biodiversity Action Plan (area within the red boundary)

The report's contents cover the following areas:

Review of existing information about biodiversity

Unfortunately little written information on biodiversity is currently available about the terrestrial parts of Clontarf.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) web site provides access to their reports. NPWS reports focus on the designated areas and are produced for specialists not for the general public. They contain little information about biodiversity in the study area.

While the Heritage Council and NPWS has provided funds to the local authority to enable them to commission survey work, all results are not easily available to the public. These reports focus on areas of high biodiversity importance. Habitat mapping, where carried out, will miss small sites as there is a minimum size for mapping habitats 50mX50m.

Records from the National Biodiversity Data Centre are of value as they list all species recorded. While English names are used for species, thus making information accessible to the public, due to concerns with species safety, records

are not available for particular sites but for areas within a particular radius from 100m etc. This information would be useful for environmental education. However it may be outdated and could only be related to large areas. It is interesting to discover the low number of precise records for common species such as frog and hedgehog.

Results of surveys carried out by BirdWatch (Iwebs and Garden Bird Survey) are of limited use as the study area for Iwebs is only that part of the coast near the Wooden Bridge and results for the garden bird survey are processed by county only.

The biodiversity (plants, lichens and bryophytes) in the graveyard on Castle Avenue has been surveyed by a lecturer in TU Dublin to inform field studies carried out by students (Lyons, 2022).

Brent geese at Clontarf

Areas/features of biodiversity value in Clontarf and environs

Clontarf includes an area of international biodiversity importance featuring geese, wildfowl and waders, which can easily be appreciated by anyone living near or enjoying the sea front.

One of the important species protected by the area of international importance, the Brent Goose, a vegetarian, grazes on short grass (Habitat GA2) in large green open spaces within Clontarf including the promenade, the grounds of Scoil Uí Chonaill, Clontarf Rugby Club and Mount Temple School. This migratory species comes from the Arctic Circle over winter each year to enjoy more benign weather and accessible food. Areas with short grass are preferred as they are able to watch out for predators. Their distinctive faeces provide an indication of their presence and density. While a species of high biodiversity value their presence is unfortunately taken for granted by most residents.

Brent Geese at Mount Temple Comprehensive School

Mount Temple school grounds are of high local biodiversity importance because of high habitat (15) and plant diversity (127), and the existence of a unique and detailed ecological review prepared to inform environmental education at the school.

Of high local biodiversity interest is a bank of semi-natural scrubby/grassy vegetation between the Tolka Estuary and Alfie Byrne and East Wall roads. This supports principally native species in habitats GS2, WS1 and WS3. Apple trees occur (from discarded apple cores) and the area features a green roof (with GS2) over the sports club building. Similar vegetation is found bounding Clontarf Rugby Club with Castle Avenue and along Dart lines.

The cemetery on Castle Avenue, St John the Baptist Church, is an area of biodiversity interest. The reports prepared by Dr Melinda Lyons, lecturer in Ecology in TU Dublin, based on fieldwork in 2021, highlighted the presence of five habitats and two rare mosses and provide short guidelines on management.

St John the Baptist Cemetery on Castle Avenue

Pollinator friendly planting by CRA beside the Clontarf Road

Many of the major streets in the area are associated with laneways (habitat BL3) which provide historic pedestrian access to areas or garages/ sheds. They are of biodiversity interest as the margins now support vegetation principally comprising native plants or weeds. A survey of the laneway between Copeland Grove and the Malahide Road recorded 22 native species, including those indicating a maritime influence.

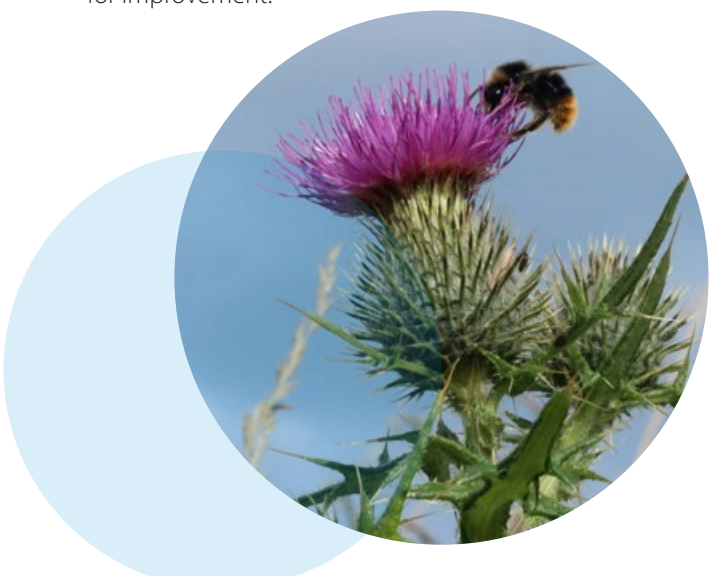
Within Clontarf are several linear vegetation corridors, some of which run along townland boundaries such as between the Rugby Club and Castle Grove, and bounding the west side of the field behind St Anthony's Church. Streets bounded by trees are very common in Clontarf and are identified as having the habitat WL2.

Green spaces beside streets and in parks are of biodiversity value as they are typically covered in the habitat GA2 (Amenity Grassland).

Streets typically have a grassland margin into which trees have been planted.

Adjacent to the study area is St Anne's Park, a biodiversity site of regional importance for which a Biodiversity Action Plan was prepared in 2004. As the park has a significant cover of semi-natural vegetation, it supports all forms of native biodiversity which could spread within the study area.

The report goes on to give detailed information on all habitats in Clontarf, their biodiversity value and the potential for improvement.



Biodiversity Action Plan

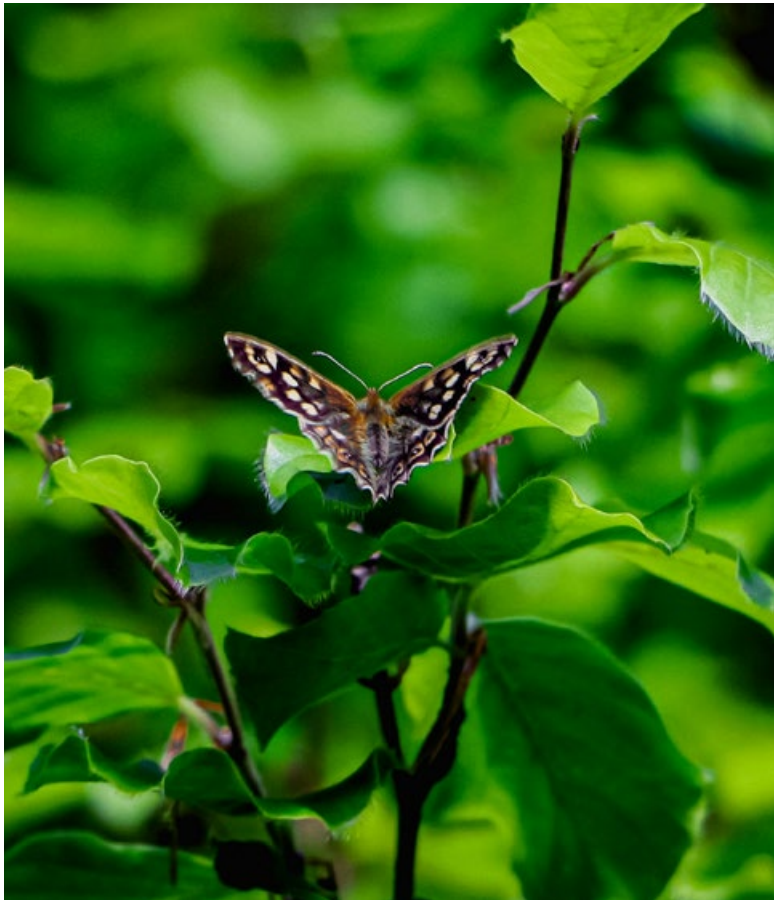
The first stage of this plan describes areas and features of biodiversity importance and general suggestions for habitat management. Suggestions for the type of actions which could be taken by the community in Clontarf to protect and enhance biodiversity follow from this analysis. As the community will be principally responsible for the implementation of the BAP, close consideration should be given to these draft actions. It is suggested that a meeting should provide for a discussion of these initiatives, following which a draft action plan specifying timelines and persons responsible would be added to this draft.

The particular potential of a Biodiversity Action Plan for Clontarf relates to the presence of Brent Geese grazing in various locations over winter, and its proximity to Anne's Park, which is a biodiversity hotspot. It could be exploited indirectly as a source of native biodiversity to parks and gardens, as species from the park would be encouraged to move from the park into private gardens and roads.

The interest of residents in gardening, the presence of institutional grounds, sports clubs, church grounds and apartment surrounds all offer potential for improved landscaping to improve habitats for native species. Within the community are residents who have gardening and or ecological expertise and could be encouraged to support community based related initiatives. The community also contains photographers and artists who are well known for their representations of the landscape and wildlife.

While the community has a history of involvement in responding to plans for flood relief works, the implementation of the BAP offers an opportunity for a different type of planning i.e. strategic/forward planning in contrast to a response in reaction to proposals for development.

The current organisation of the Tidy Towns has allowed groups of volunteers to become familiar with particular areas. This plan could offer them an opportunity to approach landowners and residents to encourage more biodiversity friendly landscaping.

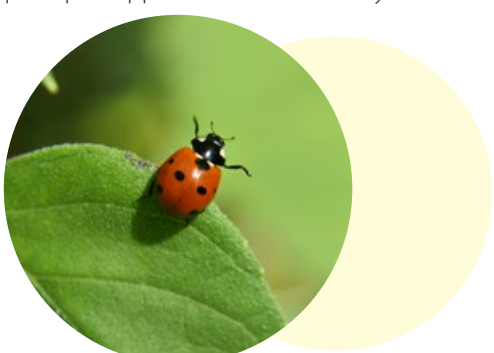


Suggested Actions

1. Develop and promote an Action Plan

A launch should be arranged for the BAP. The launch could happen as a social event, possibly featuring short talks by a range of speakers, attendance by a local notable (sympathetic politician/ environmental activist) and possibly accompanied by a display of images of species.

Following the launch a short Action Plan, specifying timelines and persons responsible, should be developed by CRA/CTT in cooperation with the local community. A copy of this Plan should be sent to your Biodiversity Officer, who will be your principal support from the statutory sector.



2. Arrange for access to all relevant reports about biodiversity commissioned by DCC, Mount Temple School and private developers

Obtain access to reports in DCC through your councillors and Biodiversity Officer. Ask Mount Temple for sight of their Biodiversity Action Plan. Obtain information about all badger and bat surveys carried out locally. Initially draw up an inventory of all relevant local studies, containing information on their contents etc. and access arrangements. In the medium term a location should be identified locally where interested residents could view this material in hard copy or digitally.

3. Maximise the use of local media (traditional and digital) to promote awareness of local biodiversity

Within websites or Facebook pages a species, a habitat, or a personal story about nature should feature every month. This type of activity could be related to seasonality and would be particularly appropriate during Biodiversity Week.

4. Improve the potential of local schools to educate pupils about local biodiversity

Consider the potential to implement the recommendations of the Mount Temple Environmental Plan. Develop a project to make use of the lane beside the Church of Ireland linking Seafield Road and Kincora Road as a teaching area/school trail. This area includes rough grassland, shrubbery and mature trees and houses leaf cages. It is easily accessible from the school and is dominated by native species.

5. Actions to protect, improve local biodiversity and communicate with the public

It is recommended that the Clontarf BAP should highlight the presence of Brent Geese and the development of biodiversity corridors from St Anne's Park to private land and gardens in its vicinity. These biodiversity corridors should focus on songbirds and pollinators.

To highlight Brent Geese an annual fun/educational event should take place each year to mark either the arrival or / and the departure of the geese. This could include a talk, video, and walk at a convenient location. News of their arrival/ departure should be reported on social media.

Corridors from St Anne's would focus on adjacent roads and housing. A plan should be developed over five years to provide more appropriate landscaping. Types of works at sites are in Appendix 4. Pick one corridor /year, and develop and implement a plan to improve its condition.

As well as targeting these corridors, efforts should be made to promote pollinator friendly gardening and land use throughout the area. Hard copies of popular publications such as Gardening for Biodiversity should be obtained and made available for free in local shops or /and distributed through schools.

6. Enter competition for Pollinator Friendly Village in Tidy Towns competition

In the medium term Clontarf Tidy Towns/Clontarf Residents Association should aim to win the prize of pollinator friendly village in the Tidy Towns competition. The likelihood of this happening would be improved if the following initiatives occurred:

- TT to continue to remind residents to stop using pesticides.
- Manual methods of weed control should be promoted to all owners of private gardens. (As part of Biodiversity Week, residents are already urged not to use pesticides or weedkillers).

When planning landscaping works and providing planters, only the species listed in "Top-Ten-pollinator-plants-Guide" by pollinators.ie and listed in Appendix 4 are planted.

The community would become involved in citizen science projects related to pollinators, such as FIT (Flower–Insect Timed Count) promoted by the National Biodiversity Data Centre.

7. Develop relationship with agencies and organisations to support communities' efforts to manage biodiversity

At the launch of your plan a relationship could be initiated with individuals within the County Council including the Biodiversity Officer, Heritage Officer, Environmental Awareness Officer and Climate Officer. To support actions related to Brent Geese, contacts should be developed with BirdWatch Ireland.

8. Arrange for further ecological surveys

An opportunity should be taken to involve a professional ecologist in monitoring and assisting in the management of the historic graveyard.

If research support is available, surveys should be commissioned on the following aspects of biodiversity:

- A bat survey to discover the nature of bat biodiversity and the location of roosts, as rare and protected bats are likely to be present in Clontarf. This should be organized in conjunction with Bat Conservation Ireland, an organization that works closely with communities.
- A hedgerow survey to check on the quality of surviving remnants in co-operation with owners.
- Resurveys of St Anne's Park and Mount Temple School to discover trends in local biodiversity.
- Examination of the status of invasive species particularly Japanese knotweed.

Information should be provided to adults and children (through schools) about interesting Citizen Science projects offered by various organisations. See section in Appendix 1 covering projects concerned with butterfly monitoring, frog monitoring, and plants in flower in winter or garden bird survey.

These opportunities could be promoted through digital media, newsletters or/and in the school etc. Results should be communicated through local Facebook pages.

Habitat biodiversity in Clontarf and potential for improvement

Location	Habitat	Current biodiversity interest	Potential for improvement
Grazing areas of Brent Geese - The Promenade, Mount Temple, Scoil Uí Chonaill, Clontarf Rugby Club and sports grounds.	**GA2 - Amenity grassland** i.e. all areas with mown grass in gardens, street verges and parks.	Dominated by a few common grass species, often introduced. While of low biodiversity for floral biodiversity as plants are not allowed flower and set seed, they are of great value to Brent Geese.	In areas used by geese maintain short grass through regular mowing, uninterrupted views and minimise disturbance by people and dogs. Consider a different mowing regime where geese are not present. In these areas, follow a mowing regime which will increase their biodiversity value. This involves delaying mowing until after species have flowered and set seed and removing all cuttings. Maintain tidy edges to improve visual appearance.
In Mount Temple grounds and abandoned lands.	**GS2- tall uncut grasslands** **WD1 - (mixed) Broadleaved woodland** i.e. mainly planted woodland with broadleaved trees. **WD5 - Scattered trees and parkland** i.e. mixture of grassland and planted trees.	Medium biodiversity value as common species are allowed flower and set seed providing extra food for invertebrates and hiding and feeding areas for small mammals and birds. Nettles valuable for butterflies. Native trees most valuable. Very mature Sycamore valuable. Of medium value for invertebrates, flora and fauna. However poor woodland understory Of medium value for invertebrates, flora and fauna. Could offer roosting sites to bats or even sites for epiphytes.	Retain all as tall uncut grasslands. Ensure scrubby trees and bushes do not colonise all grassland. Introduce a shrub layer of native species or pollinator friendly types. Introduce a herb layer to the grassland with native herbs

Location	Habitat	Current biodiversity interest	Potential for improvement
Graveyard on Castle Avenue	**GS1 – dry calcareous and neutral grassland** (i.e. not sown, but natural grassland).	High biodiversity interest, as rare grassland species found.	Rare habitat in Clontarf. Just about present in graveyard. Should be defined and subject to appropriate management to maintain its value.
Bank of scrubby/grassy vegetation between Tolka Estuary and Alfie Byrne/East Wall roads	**GS2 - Dry meadows and grassy verges** i.e. tall uncut grasslands. **WS1 - Scrub** i.e. scrub with native bushes. **WS3 - Ornamental non-native scrub** i.e. with Butterfly bush	Medium biodiversity value as common species are allowed flower and set seed, proving extra food for invertebrates, and hiding and feeding areas for small mammals and birds. Nettles valuable for butterflies. Rare habitat providing safe nesting and feeding habitat for small birds and food for invertebrates. May be useful for biodiversity if bushes produce flowers and seeds and dense growth provides safe nesting sites for songbirds.	Maintain lax mowing regime but ensure scrubby trees and bushes do not colonise all grassland. Ensure Japanese Knotweed is removed. Manage scrub to form small clumps adjacent to tall grassland. Ensure only biodiversity friendly shrubs are grown.
Along railway line and in derelict sites.	**WS1 - Scrub** i.e. scrub with native bushes. **WS3 - Ornamental non-native scrub** Found along railway line and in large gardens.	Rare habitat providing safe nesting and feeding habitat for small birds and food for invertebrates. Common habitat often dominated by Buddleja in unmanaged areas.	Retain all areas with WS1. Manage scrub to form small clumps adjacent to tall grassland. Replace Buddleia with biodiversity friendly shrubbery.

Location	Habitat	Current biodiversity interest	Potential for improvement
Buildings and Laneways	**BL3 - Buildings, and artificial surfaces** i.e. all hard surfaces including roads, walls and lanes	While buildings and roads are of low value for biodiversity, lanes and drystone walls of limestone are the exception as they usually have high native plant diversity, particularly in the walls where lime mortar is used between stones.	Adding additional features such as swift and bat nesting boxes; growing biodiversity shrubbery near boundary walls will make buildings more biodiversity friendly. Sensitive approach should be taken to vegetation removal from walls and edges with the preferred retention of native plant species. See latest guidelines produced by the Dublin Naturalist Field Club: Protecting the Threatened Flora of Old Walls 2024 | The Dublin Naturalists' Field Club

Location	Habitat	Current biodiversity interest	Potential for improvement
Mount Temple boundary with the golf club, along the Malahide Road, bounding rugby club with Castle Grove and bounding the west side of field behind St Anthony's Church.	**WL1 Hedgerows** Linear features planted by farmers to stockproof their land. **WL2 - Treelines** i.e. lines of trees planted in parks, sports grounds and along roads and streets.	Unusual habitat featuring native trees and shrubs. Vulnerable to disturbance and planting with garden species. Usually non-native but will provide commuting routes for birds. If native will provide food for invertebrates, sites for epiphytes and even fungi.	Retain all hedgerows even in poor condition. Restore them by removing garden species and replacing them with natives, such as hawthorn and hazel. Retain and replace with native species if possible.
Green spaces between streets and in parks	**GA2 - Amenity grassland** i.e. all areas with mown grass in gardens, street verges and park	Dominated by a few common grass species, often introduced. Low biodiversity value as plants are not allowed to flower and set seed. Never used by geese so measures to improve biodiversity most appropriate.	Follow a mowing regime which allows flowering and improves plant diversity. Consider planting native trees and shrubs in distinct clumps to mimic natural patterns.
Flower beds, bee shelter near the Tram Shelter and planters throughout.	Habitat BC4 Flower beds and borders.	Good for biodiversity if they provide food for invertebrates, butterflies, hoverflies and bees.	Plant biodiversity friendly species in all planters.

CLONTARF TIDY TOWNS

clontarf RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

pobal government supporting communities

SuperValu TidyTowns Caring for our environment

Full report available online

https://www.loveclontarf.ie/biodiversityplan