

# Action for Biodiversity Conference Athlone 2023

## Suggestions and Learnings

Publication February 2024



# Executive Summary

Community Foundation Ireland has been working with Government since 2019 to promote biodiversity action in communities across the country.

As a philanthropic hub on a mission of Equality For All In Thriving Communities, the Foundation is committed to ensuring sustainable futures by responding to the biodiversity and climate emergencies.

The partnership has been hugely impactful with 217 Biodiversity Local Action Plans now in place supported by just over €1.7 Million in grants, of which more than €1 Million has been sourced from philanthropy.

As part of the grants programme Community Biodiversity Action Plans and Recommendations, the Community Foundation hosted a Conference called Community Action for Biodiversity in September 2023.

The participants were mainly the recipients of the grants over the previous four years. This programme is funded by Community Foundation Ireland and the NPWS through the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage.

The participants were updated on various biodiversity issues and actions by several speakers. They were asked for their opinions and feedback on the challenges and barriers, and the successes of working on their Community Biodiversity Action Plan and Recommendations.

While the barriers and challenges were common to all, the successes were celebrated and heart-felt. The enthusiasm and general level of knowledge was high and very positive.

The Conclusion and Recommendations on page 9 highlights what needs to be done to continue to engage and support communities throughout Ireland to play a major and strategic role in conserving, enhancing and protecting biodiversity as outlined in the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan.

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## Background

The conference brought together community activists for Biodiversity from all over the country. Most of the participants had been and are involved in overseeing the development of their local Biodiversity Action Plan. Many have completed the plan and are implementing its recommendations. The plan was informed and developed with a local ecologist, so it is science based and has expert input. The plan and the recommendations were grant funded by Community Foundation Ireland, and the Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage.

Our aim for the day was to inform and discuss how these groups can progress their plans and to ascertain what successes they may have had and the challenges and barriers to progressing further. We also launched a new resource from the National Biodiversity Data Centre - [www.actionforbiodiversity.ie](http://www.actionforbiodiversity.ie)

We wanted the groups/activists to know what was happening at national level and how it affects their work at a local level.

**Date: Saturday 16th September from 10am to 5pm**

**Venue: Athlone Springs Hotel**

**Audience: Local Community Group participants active on Biodiversity.**

**Participant numbers: 130**

For a list of speakers and agenda please see [appendix 1](#).

At the end of the speakers' presentations the participants were asked to work with the other participants at their table and to discuss, note and report back to the plenary on the successes, the challenges and barriers to working on their biodiversity plan and their broader biodiversity work. The feedback from each table was recorded and the following is a composite and distillation of their discussions and the broader discussions.

We will start with the challenges which were reflected at most tables and finish with the immense successes.

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# Challenges and Barriers

## **Enforcement**

Participants felt that there is little enforcement of present laws. That the people tasked with enforcing the laws were under resourced and weren't prioritising protection and conservation.

## **Funding**

While the participants found that funding was a great support it was felt that the type of funding which was not paid until the end of a project was a severe difficulty for small groups of volunteers. Many had to fundraise for months to get the project money, or a volunteer funded the project and then had to wait many months to get their funds back. The participants asked funding bodies to examine this practice and to see if another process could be found.

It was commented on by several participants that Community Foundation Ireland's funding was a great support as it was paid upfront, and the application was simplified.

The other issue with funding was the short timelines to apply for the grant. It was also felt that often that the grant was made later than advertised and that this left the volunteers with very little time to get the work completed and this was leading to burnout.

Most grant applications are complicated and from a volunteer perspective is a big ask. Funding is needed for the long term and not a one-off grant.

Participants felt that the various schemes were often at variance especially in the agricultural grants which are large and grants and local biodiversity grants which are small, rarely annual and with widely varying goals (e.g. the use of herbicides and pesticides which local groups are trying to eliminate the use of in their communities, but the same issue is not addressed in agricultural grants).

And finally, though not biodiversity participants felt there was a lack of support and funding for vernacular houses. They felt that although the county councils express how important they are for the heritage of the local area that there is no support or funding to conserve them.

## **Education, awareness, expertise and knowledge**

Participants felt that many of their fellow citizens had to be educated about biodiversity and that this education should start in primary schools. A better national campaign of education on biodiversity and climate change is needed. Urgency and the scale of the problem is not being communicated properly. Urgency, Urgency and Urgency is required as biodiversity is decreasing at a dramatic rate.

Biodiversity is nuanced, for instance, in the main it should be difficult to cut down trees (apart from commercial), but it isn't, sometimes it is needed to fell trees to let in light to the woods and sometimes there is blowback from the community as this is not understood.

There is a lack of general knowledge around biodiversity– what is a wildflower for instance– planting wildflower seeds (often non-native) instead of seeing what is in the soil which is the natural seedbank. It was remarked that the western world has separated itself from nature as it consumes more and more. Citizens themselves are being separated and isolated.

County Councils need to be educated about biodiversity, as often through their actions (and their contractors) biodiversity is damaged. Many felt that the councils did not educate their employees and their contractors so work that had been done was destroyed (e.g. cutting wildflower meadows or trimming invasive species which spreads the species or removing trees when topping would have been better). Educating County Councils is imperative. It should be the standard for County Councils to plant great trees and not to leave any town or village without trees. Participants felt that there are varying amounts of support from County Councils but mainly they are hard to deal with and, with few exceptions, unsupportive.

Many people are not aware of areas of conservation or SACs or Nature Reserves and that signage was needed to raise awareness and educate citizens. The same was felt about changes in practices that encourage biodiversity and support the pollinator plans; better signage explaining why certain actions were being taken would really help. The example was given of trying to get people to accept unmown grass (wildflower meadows), to change perception that untidy did not mean neglect. Many participants felt there was no national approach to shifting people's mindsets when it came to biodiversity. It was the same old 'neat and tidy' approach instead of conserving, enhancing and protecting biodiversity and heritage. They felt that being 'green' (supportive of biodiversity) was on the fringe and needed to be mainstreamed.

We need to raise awareness about the effect of poor development which eliminates biodiversity on development sites; tears down trees, hedgerows, doesn't encompass good biodiversity practices in the development e.g. swift boxes on all houses, the elimination of using pesticides and herbicides on the sites. We are not near strong enough when dealing with developers. All development should be a net positive gain for biodiversity.

Participants felt that the link between climate change and biodiversity is not clear enough. That interconnectedness of these two areas should be self-evident but isn't to date. That poor messaging and greenwashing is leading to a perception that we don't have a problem, as citizens get used to the 'new normal'. In addition, can corporates be stopped from greenwashing or biodiversity friendly advertising? Can corporate culture be moved from tokenism to real change?

There is a lack of expertise and knowledge on biodiversity and climate that is so badly needed within communities. Groups that have done their Biodiversity Action Plan feel that further expertise is needed. They can manage the regular work themselves but need the expertise to guide them. It was felt that a person to mentor them would be a fantastic asset. Then they could hire special expertise when needed. This is especially evident when dealing with invasive species or sensitive areas. Participants felt that there was a distinct lack of help when it came to invasive species and what could be done to tackle them. There is a need to get access to more citizen science training to assist with growing knowledge within communities and liaising with the National Biodiversity Data Centre. Participants also noted the swings in advice leading to disenchantment.

Many groups find there is a lack of awareness of resources that are in place and that the PPNs could assist more in this area. Building resources and resilience within communities is needed, like the need for food security and having local food growing and food trails.

## **Volunteers**

Participants felt that the demographics of the present volunteers involved in Tidy Towns, while bringing expertise and wisdom, often meant that the big physical jobs could not be tackled. That there are big schemes which people want to apply for but often they don't have the volunteers with the time necessary to carry it out. There is the same problem everywhere of getting volunteers with the various skills and experience necessary to carry out the work. There was a sense within communities that silos of different groups existed and were hard to engage with at times.

Volunteers themselves felt that the management and governance of local groups was a challenge. Everyone wants high standards within groups, but the time involved in administration was wearying. There is also a lack of cohesion between groups which can lead to misunderstandings.

Many groups want help with managing social media – please!

How does a new group get started – where do they go? Could the PPNs do more to help this cohort?

Groups want and need to engage with young people but feel there may be issues around garda vetting and are not clear on what the procedures are. They are also unclear as to the rules around GDPR and may inadvertently cause a breach without knowing why or how.

There can be conflict when it comes to saving an area like the woods or dunes. Locals may feel the Biodiversity Group is trying to stop them using the woods or dunes and, in some cases, this might be the best way to save the woods or dunes.

Volunteers need space and equipment to do their best work but often this is not available to them. There is often nowhere to store equipment or hold public meetings. They often don't have the correct equipment. They need space for circular economy projects but none is available in the local area.

Groups of volunteers often have difficulty with identifying who owns the land and who they should talk to about biodiversity on that land. Even if the local authority owns the land how do they identify the needs of stakeholders and what is the owners plans for biodiversity enhancement. Where does responsibility sit?

How do we get armchair activists out of their chairs?

## **Litter**

This old chestnut is still with us. The type of litter is changing – we now have a preponderance of take-aways, vapes and energy drinks. The level of dumping and littering can be very disheartening. What can be done about it? Hopefully the new returns machines will stop the energy drinks and the Government plans to ban single use vapes by end 2025.

Marine litter is a big problem, and it is a huge undertaking by a voluntary organisation to collect and get rid of it. What special help can be given to these communities.

## **Tidy Towns**

Tidy Towns – the name and perception of it was one of the most discussed and divisive topics of the day. There were many Tidy Town Groups in attendance. We will cover the barriers in this section but it appears too in the success section.

The main issue was that it was felt by many that the name was out of date. Most participants felt that while it is a brilliant organisation that the time had come to change the name and the Markings by the adjudicators. 'Tidy' gave the perception of a 'clean' place with window boxes whereas participants felt that it was about protecting and enhancing the town/village/area for biodiversity and heritage.

It was suggested that the profile of the Tidy Towns needed to attract younger and experienced people and that these were put off by the image and name 'Tidy Towns' portrays (real or not).

Several participants felt that Tidy and Littering attracting the largest Marks was wrong and that Biodiversity, Circular Economy and Climate Change Action should be the leading Marks.

It was suggested that the demographics of the Tidy Towns needs to change and include groups like Men's Sheds, Women's Sheds, Scouts and lots of other organisations involved. Tidy Towns should be focused on the community and not just the 'Town' part – again it was felt that the name wasn't right. A suggestion from one group was that it could be changed to Tidy Town and Community Conservation.

## **Insurance**

Insurance and getting the right sort of insurance was difficult and expensive. It is a yearly overhead that groups had to fundraise for and found it challenging. Was there an answer to this question? All agreed it was difficult.

## **Measure of Success**

The participants discussed 'how we measure success'. Can this be part of the training and awareness raising? Participants felt that while they planted a road with hedgerow, in the next field a developer was pulling up all the trees and hedgerows and was allowed to do it by law.

Planning and development had to stop the elimination of biodiversity. No one was speaking up on behalf of biodiversity because the case for housing was so strong but the massive loss of biodiversity all around us is undeniable. What does success look like? If there are only pockets of biodiversity or zoos then we have failed badly. How can we be more strategic in our work?

## **Citizen's Assembly**

The Citizen's Assembly on Biodiversity recommendations will not be in law or enforced before the next election so what guarantee have we got that those commitments will be met? There was support from all on the Assembly's findings.



## Successes

### **Funding**

Participants felt that the various funding streams were very good – Leader, County Councils, Lawpro, various schemes and especially those like Community Foundation Ireland that gave the funding upfront. This was mentioned several times. Becoming ‘legitimate’ as a group with proper governance etc has led to more funding and access.

Tidy Towns gets a lot of grants and action going. Great to get unfettered funding like the Tidy Towns Gold award or other ‘special’ awards. The ability to use funding to lever further funding has been successful.

### **Education, awareness, expertise and knowledge**

The participants felt that having a local Biodiversity Action Plan really helped in educating the local community about what needed to be done and in what order. It outlined what species were in the locality and pointed out the various rare species too. Many people were inspired by the plan and it caused people to join the group.

Many groups talked about the joy of working with an expert ecologist who brought wonder and facts when working on the plan and inspired them to get out there and enhance the biodiversity of their area.

Participants had carried out a Heritage audit and again felt that this type of information inspired and spurred people on to do more.

Providing evidence to support a proposal drove further education and awareness, it deepened knowledge of particular species or places or general biodiversity.

Being at the conference itself was deemed a success as it was felt that the speakers imparted a lot of knowledge and food for thought and being in the same room with other volunteers that are passionate about biodiversity was uplifting and engaging.

## **Successful Initiatives, Actions and Tips**

The following have been implemented in many communities and deemed to be successful.

- The Biodiversity Action Plan and implementing the recommendations.
- Working with passionate and professional ecologists has been an inspirational journey of discovery.
- Getting the right ecologist for the job (ie sand dunes and riparian ways)
- Creating a Biodiversity Orchard
- TLC – Team Limerick Clean Up throughout the county
- National Spring Clean
- Pure Mile
- Green Schools – a must for every community
- River clean ups
- Flossie and the Beach Cleaners – an amazing young woman
- Surveys of Birds, Bats and Butterflies
- The National Biodiversity Data Centre – easy to access and so helpful
- The watercourses protection scheme which supports farmers and has helped change many farms across the country.
- GIY – Prataí – Grow your Own Food – especially Potatoes!
- Community Gardens has been a fantastic success. An idea that has spread throughout Ireland with food, flowers and art interwoven. This is where kids can get involved!
- Water butts are a successful practice and will become more and more important as the squeeze on water for growing food is increasing.
- Wildflower Meadows are a definite success. The trend is toward native meadows with the seeds coming from the soil or the local area instead of seed packets.
- Many communities are gathering local seeds and planting them for apple trees or hedgerows or vegetables.
- Free trees and the planting of native species only has been going on for a while now and several groups talked about their first thinning of trees. Bug safaris, tree planting, swift and owl boxes are all great activities.
- Free plants from Woodies, Lidl etc that they are about to dump. A little TLC and water often bring them back to life. Free plants from local people from their garden not only is a successful initiative but builds community.
- Free topsoil from local builders – watch out that it is not bringing invasive species though. Ask where it originated.
- Citizen science and River Trusts that have taught volunteers to test water quality has had a great impact as it not only highlights the water quality to locals but teaches them how to find out the level of pollution in their streams. Participants who have done the training said it had a big impact on them personally and made them look at their local waterways in a different way.
- Pollinator friendly plant tables offering locals plants for flowers and vegetables that have been locally grown for their garden and vegetable patch.

- One participant group said that they had a local cameraperson make a six-minute video of their area highlighting the biodiversity and it is on their website and also used as a tourism promotion.
- Networking with local authorities and other NGOs, when given the opportunity, proved very successful as it meant that they knew you existed and were aware of your work.
- Green spaces for Health in Cork, is a city-wide, community led initiative. We are an Eco Social Group; one of the most important aspects of our work is fostering a reverence for nature.
- Lawpro was mentioned several times as a 'brilliant organisation'.

## **Examples of Participant Groups successes**

Every group attending had great successes and the following are a few examples:

- Skerries Carder Bee Project – the result was that small groups of Carder bees joined together across the new meadows, and this has benefited other wildlife species too.
- Tramore – 15 owl boxes put up and this year they have three owls roosting in them. A fantastic success to see this happening. Over 5,000 trees planted over the last five years. They propagate local seeds for plants. Swopping ideas has been a great motivator too.
- Kinvara – tree planting, established a biodiversity focused film club, brought a pesticide motion to their local county council. They have established a Rights of Nature Group to bring a motion to their county council in the near future. They support the Citizen's Assembly on Biodiversity and underpins their biodiversity principles.

## **Volunteers**

The vast majority of those who attended the day are volunteers. Participants reflected on the many successes that Biodiversity groups have on their community:

- Biodiversity brings the community together.
- It encourages people to get out and have a great time – 'no kings or queens may apply'.
- Engaging landowners has been very successful and if they got support, they would be open to engaging further.
- Participants found that entwining Art and Music in their activities and events reaches bigger crowds than the 'usual' volunteers.
- There was unanimous agreement that this type of work bring fantastic social capital to an area.
- In one area, that had an annual orchard project, that provided fruit trees to plant in local gardens (and in hedges too now) has become a social event.

- There was total support for the Citizen’s Assembly findings and the participants felt that it was a great success in itself.
- The groups that felt they had lots of good volunteers said that they asked their volunteers to do particular work or a small task and not to overload them.
- Self-education is encouraged especially in areas of interest and a group might naturally form around an area of interest e.g. swifts or barn owls etc.
- The advice from one or two groups was to get young people involved in social media.

## **Tidy Towns**

While many participants felt that the name was out of date (and did Tidy Towns a disservice), the vast majority said that the Tidy Towns initiative was ‘brilliant’. It was a powerful motivator of action within the community. They felt the mindset was changing within the Tidy Towns Groups. Through Tidy Towns many participants had accessed funds for the activities within their community. Other successes of their Tidy Towns:

- It brought the community together.
- The county of Kilkenny has a Tidy Towns Forum which is very supportive of the various Tidy Towns throughout Kilkenny.
- Many Tidy Towns groups felt that their group was very social and that is why they stayed.
- Many groups felt that there was a big change in attitudes within Tidy Town groups towards biodiversity and sustainability.
- Community Clean Ups and Litter Picks developed into social groups of all ages.
- Several Tidy Towns had extended their names, for example to X Tidy Town, Community, Biodiversity and Heritage to show the range of the work they did.
- Several participants spoke of how they coordinated with other Tidy Towns in their regions.
- Tidy Towns was the action centre or hub for a lot of activities, including biodiversity, sustainability, circular economy, and litter control.

And finally it was felt that the new [ACTIONFORBIODIVERSITY.IE](http://ACTIONFORBIODIVERSITY.IE) was a fantastic initiative and one that was badly needed in this area.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Ireland is very lucky to have people at a local level so dedicated and passionate about biodiversity. They are satisfied and delighted to have a Biodiversity plan of action to get them started on enhancing and conserving what biodiversity is around them. Many feel that the urgency of the situation is not to the forefront of people's attention and the voice of biodiversity is weak. The protection of nature is weak and not a priority. The participants have had great success at a community level and want to scale up their response which should include farmers and other landowners.

- Messaging and Communications needs support to get the top-level communication companies working on this area.
- Enforcement of present laws – is there a way local people can help?
- Funding needs to be simplified and enlarged; a certain amount of funding needs to be unfettered.
- We should aim to have Biodiversity Action plans in every community with an ecologist attached for mentoring when the recommendations are being worked on.
- A plan of action to bring best practices on biodiversity to county councils. Education, awareness raising of staff and contractors is imperative.
- Recognition that this is a long-term problem and offering one-off grants is not sufficient.
- Ask Tidy Towns to review this document.
- Support the National Biodiversity Action Plan and ensure that the local plans dovetail with it.
- Ensure we have ecologists coming through in sufficient numbers to meet the demands.
- Funding needed for space and equipment.
- Clarity on insurance. What is needed and where does a group get it.
- An examination and review of biodiversity in the planning laws is needed and then enforcement of same.

# Appendix 1

## BIODIVERSITY IN ACTION

### Conference Programme

- 10.00am**                    **Welcome and Community Foundation Ireland Overview**  
Tina Roche – Community Foundation Ireland
- 10.10am**                    **Government Overview**  
Deirdre Lynn – Scientific Adviser, National Parks & Wildlife Service  
Q&A
- 10.30am**                    **Ecologist Overview**  
Dr. Fiona McGowan – Consultant Ecologist and Botanist  
Q&A
- 11.00am**                    **Comfort Break**
- 11.10am**                    **Presentation of three exemplary Community Action Plans**  
Abbeyleix Tidy Towns, Cork Nature Network, Newtownforbes Tidy Towns  
Q&A
- 12.00pm**                    **Citizen Assembly and Communities**  
Art O’Leary – Leader, Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity Loss  
Q&A
- 12.30pm**                    **Tidy Towns competition and how it is evolving**  
Sharon Eastwood – Woodrow Sustainable Solutions  
Q&A
- 1.00pm**                    **Lunch Break**
- 2.00pm**                    **Launch of website – Action for Biodiversity**  
Juanita Browne – National Biodiversity Data Centre  
Q&A
- 2.45pm**                    **Workshop – Successes and Challenges**
- 3.45pm**                    **Rapporteur Feedback, Q&A and solutions**
- 5.00pm**                    **Closing and Networking**

# BIODIVERSITY IN ACTION CONFERENCE

## Speakers

### **Deirdre Lynn – Scientific Adviser, National Parks & Wildlife Service**

Deirdre is involved in policy formulation and review such as the development of the National Biodiversity Action Plan. She is the national focal point for the UN [Convention on Biological Diversity](#). She has been involved in the set-up of the [Business For Biodiversity Ireland](#) platform, [Peatland Finance Ireland](#) and also supports the Community Foundation Ireland Environment and Nature Fund. She also manages the biodiversity monitoring and Blanket bog scientific portfolios with a particular emphasis on EU and Global reporting obligations.

### **Dr. Fiona McGowan – Consultant Ecologist and Botanist**

Dr Fiona Mac Gowan, a Consultant Ecologist based in Ballyroan, Co. Laois has been working both professionally and voluntarily in the area of scientific habitat and wildlife assessments and environmental impact surveys for over twenty years. She has worked both in the public and private sector on projects such as: the evaluation of proposed SACs and NHAs for the NPWS; preparing management plans for SACs and NHAs; the restoration and management of peatland habitats; baseline ecological surveys and Screenings for Appropriate Assessment and Natura Impact Statements of various developments. Fiona has written ecological management plans for sites featuring various habitat types such as native and mixed forests, raised bogs, lakes and fens for the NPWS as well as several Biodiversity Action Plans for different local community groups around Ireland.

### **Art O’Leary – Leader, Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity Loss**

Currently Art O’Leary is Chief Executive An Coimisiún Toghcháin/The Electoral Commission. His career has included a period of seven years serving as Secretary General to the President (2014-2021). Prior to that he was Secretary to the Constitutional Convention, a two-year citizen-led initiative to consider constitutional change in a wide number of areas, from the electoral system to marriage equality. He also led the Citizens’ Assemblies on mayoral government (2022-23) and biodiversity loss (2022). Mr O’Leary also worked in the Houses of the Oireachtas for over 20 years, primarily as a member of the senior management team as Director of Parliamentary Committees, Information & Communications, Human Resources and as head of a number of procedural functions.

## **Sharon Eastwood - Woodrow Sustainable Solutions Ltd**

Woodrow is an environmental consultancy set up by Sharon Eastwood and her partner in 2011. Sharon, a biologist by training, leads on community development work within the company, . Linked to this she is proud of her work since 2009 as a National Adjudicator for the TidyTowns competition – Europe’s longest running and biggest community programme. TidyTowns encourages ‘bottom-up’ action and has evolved in line with National Policies to achieve appropriate change. Sharon, and her co-adjudicators, have helped steer the competition accordingly focusing on the newer categories following the themes of sustainability and biodiversity. The competition is also helping Ireland advance the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as the work of TidyTown’s volunteers on the ground supports many of the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## **Juanita Browne – National Biodiversity Data Centre**

Juanita Browne is a Biodiversity Communications Specialist working with the National Biodiversity Data Centre on the development of a web portal as a resource to support the production of local Biodiversity Action Plans. This new website [www.actionforbiodiversity.ie](http://www.actionforbiodiversity.ie) will act as a library of all the local Biodiversity Action Plans being produced across the country, as well as offering lots of resources on how to create a community biodiversity plan and the variety of biodiversity actions communities can take. The aim is for this website to be a one-stop-shop for communities interested in developing their own Biodiversity Action Plan. The National Biodiversity Data Centre works to make biodiversity data and information more freely available in order to better understand and assist the protection of Ireland’s biodiversity.



## Community Action Plans – Presenters

### **Abbeyleix Tidy Towns**

Abbeyleix Tidy Towns Committee was established over 62 years ago in an effort to galvanise the community to work together to make Abbeyleix a great place to live, work and visit. Over the years the committee grew and successfully forged alliances with Laois County Council and other Government bodies, as well as local schools and a range of community groups. Our activities are now focused on placemaking and on reimagining our beautiful heritage town as a smart and sustainable community that is fit for the 21st Century. Key to this is the preservation and enhancement of our biodiversity. We were very grateful for the support provided by the Community Foundation Ireland (CFI) to help us to develop a Biodiversity Action Plan which serves as a valuable roadmap to guide our activities. CFI has also followed up with capital funding which has helped us greatly to make a start on delivering a number of key recommendations from our plan including: 1) native tree and hedgerow planting; 2) establishment and management of native hay meadows; and 3) pollinator friendly planting schemes.

### **Cork Nature Network**

Cork Nature Network aims to promote and protect Ireland's wildlife through education, conservation, and research in order to restore a healthy ecosystem for all species and peoples of Ireland. At the heart of our ethos is a bottom-up approach which empowers people to engage and participate at an individual and community level. Through our emphasis on public involvement, we are not only raising awareness, but also providing people with the capacity, skills, and incentive to take a hands-on approach to research and conservation.

### **Newtownforbes Tidy Towns**

The first time we benefited from a Community Foundation grant was in 2019. This allowed us to have a professional biodiversity plan carried out by Dr Catherine O'Connell on our local bog and wetlands. This plan was the basis for us developing a 3.8 km Biodiversity and Nature trail through agricultural land and forestry. We subsequently received Longford Co Co funding and permission from 15 landowners to create our trail which opened in June 2022. We are very proud of our achievements which could not have happened without the initial support of Community Foundation Ireland.