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BEECHGROVE LAWNS ESTATE

Local Biodiversity Action Plan

2021-2024



Actions for Biodiversity in our Estate

Contents

Welcome to the Beechgrove Lawns Estate Local Biodiversity Plan!.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	2
SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 About this biodiversity plan	3
1.2 What is Biodiversity?.....	3
1.3 Why is Biodiversity Important?.....	4
1.4 What’s the Local Biodiversity Action Plan For?	4
SECTION 2. ACTIONS FOR BIODIVERSITY	5
2.1. Habitat Creation & Management	5
2.1.1. Habitat Creation	5
2.1.2. Tree and Hedgerow Planting	5
2.1.3. Meadow grasslands and wildflower lawns.....	5
2.1.4. Making Meadows: Where and How to Encourage Wildflowers Naturally.....	6
2.1.5. Pollinator Friendly Planting	6
2.1.6. Plants for Pollinators: Naturally Native	6
2.1.7. Plants for Pollinators: Non-native but Beautifully Beneficial.....	7
2.1.8. Composting	7
2.1.9. Bee nesting habitat	7
2.1.10. Herbicides and pesticides	8
2.2 Protecting Biodiversity.....	8
2.3 Raising Awareness	8
SECTION 3. PROJECTS FOR BIODIVERSITY IN BEECHGROVE LAWNS	9
3.1 Brief Description of the habitats of Beechgrove Lawns Estate	9
3.2 RECOMMENDED PROJECT	10
‘Biosensory Garden’	10
3.2.1 BIOSENSORY GARDEN IDEAS	10
3.2.2 ‘BIOSENSORY GARDEN’ SKETCH	12
3.3 ADDITIONAL POTENTIAL PROJECTS	13
Potential Project 1 Tree survey	13
Potential Project 2 Signage for wildlife.....	13
Potential Project 3 All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.....	14
Potential Project 4 Biodiversity talk	14

Welcome to the Beechgrove Lawns Estate Local Biodiversity Plan!

This plan is to be used to guide the nature conservation work of Beechgrove Lawns Residents' Association for the next 3 years. The plan was drawn up following consultation with members of the Residents' Association and field trips undertaken in 2021.

The first section of the plan is an introduction and the project that gave rise to it as well as some biodiversity basics. Following that, we outline some recommended **Biodiversity Projects** – these will be projects that will take significant resources for the Residents' Association to complete. We suggest that the Committee would aim to implement these projects over the next three years - the timeframe of this plan.



Acknowledgements

This Local Biodiversity Action Plan was created by Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants for Beechgrove Lawns Residents' Association. The authors would like to thank the members of the Association for their support, with special thanks to Aoife and Josephine. The authors and the Residents' Association gratefully acknowledge the funding and support of Monaghan Integrated Development.

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 About this biodiversity plan

Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants were commissioned by Monaghan LEADER to work with clubs, groups and communities in Co. Monaghan to facilitate the development of local biodiversity plans. The principal aim of this LEADER initiative was to increase awareness of the importance of biodiversity to communities but also to empower individuals and groups to make positive contributions for the benefit of both wildlife and people.

Biodiversity has now become a key part of what local community action groups do. This project will help groups to 'design' biodiversity matters into their present and future projects and maximise the benefits for wildlife as well as people. As well as including detailed information on how to carry out projects, the plans will also be useful in raising awareness of how biodiversity is considered in these communities. This statement of best practice for biodiversity will also be useful to groups seeking financial or material support for future projects.

This biodiversity plan was drawn up following consultation with each of the participating communities which included field trips, review of past, present and proposed community projects and meetings with the organising committees.

1.2 What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life on Earth. It includes all living things (organisms) that make up the natural world (including humans). Biodiversity also refers to the places where animals and plants live (habitats) and the complex interactions between living things and their environment which we call ecosystems.



Bee on Allium © Peter Cuthbert, pollinators.ie

1.3 Why is Biodiversity Important?

Humans are a component of biodiversity and we are dependent on biodiversity to provide a range of ecosystem services. Human activities such as agriculture, forestry and fishing depend on services provided by biodiversity. We rely on biodiversity for the provision of clean air and water, food and medicines, natural landscapes, flood control, noise pollution control and much more. A healthy environment is important for human health and well-being. Biodiversity provides us with natural amenities to enjoy, parks and green spaces, wildlife and landscapes to admire and thus improves our quality of life. The attractiveness of our country as a tourist destination, a place to live and do business depends to a large extent on the rich biodiversity of the county. Our country's natural heritage contributes to the attractiveness of landscapes, villages and urban centres.



1.4 What's the Local Biodiversity Action Plan For?

The purpose of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) is to set out appropriate locally-based actions for the conservation, management and/or enhancement of habitats for the benefit of native species. This local biodiversity action plan:

- makes recommendations for the conservation of biodiversity through appropriate actions for the protection, management or appreciation of an area of high ecological value.
- Identifies actions to improve or enhance local areas so as to increase their value as habitats for species.
- Encourages actions to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity and its conservation.

SECTION 2. ACTIONS FOR BIODIVERSITY

In this Section, we set out some of the actions that will be common to all of the participating groups and indeed all community groups interested in biodiversity. We also outline some of the guidelines that are accepted as best practice for biodiversity at local or wider levels.

2.1. Habitat Creation & Management

2.1.1. Habitat Creation

Habitat creation is one way to increase the diversity of habitats and enhance an area for biodiversity. Examples of small-scale habitat creation that may be appropriate and practical for community groups, schools and residents to undertake include managing an area as meadow grassland or wildflower lawn, planting hedgerows, treelines or groves of trees or creating a pond. Habitat creation should only be attempted in an area that is currently of low biodiversity value such as amenity grassland. Introducing a habitat uncommon in an area such as a pond may be of more benefit than planting more trees in an area that already has good tree cover. Creating a small complex of habitats such as a small woodland or grove of trees along with some meadow grassland around the edges to create a collection of semi-natural habitats will be of more benefit to biodiversity as it will provide resources for a greater number of species.

2.1.2. Tree and Hedgerow Planting

Planting native hedgerows, trees and woodlands provide food, shelter and niche habitats for a range of plant and animal life and is one of the easiest ways of increasing the biodiversity value of an area. Native trees and shrubs are best for wildlife. These species colonised Ireland naturally and are adapted to the environmental conditions here and other plant and animal life have adapted to co-exist within them.

2.1.3. Meadow grasslands and wildflower lawns

The traditional hay meadows once widespread in Ireland are now very scarce due to changes in farming practices. Meadows are a haven for wildlife in summer being rich in wildflowers and the insects, birds and bats that depend on them. Managing little used grassland areas as a meadow is one way to increase the resources available to wildlife. Not only does this allow the growth of wildflowers which provide essential pollen for our pollinating insects, long grass hosts a variety of other insects and invertebrates and produce seed, both important food sources for birds. Bat species will forage over a meadow grassland rich in insect life. Long grass also provides cover and nesting habitat for small mammals.

2.1.4. Making Meadows: Where and How to Encourage Wildflowers Naturally

Meadow grassland can be established in parkland areas or along grass verges. In general areas of meadow grassland or long grassy verges should be cut once a year in autumn and the cuttings removed. Removing the cuttings is important to prevent the build-up of nutrients in the soil. Wildflowers flourish in a nutrient poor soil where they can compete successfully with the more competitive grasses. Gradually over the years the number and diversity of wildflowers within the meadow will increase. It may take several years before you see an increase. However, avoid using commercially available wildflower mixes to enhance your meadow. These mixes often contain species that are not native to Ireland and are really only suitable for gardening and not for creating natural habitats such as meadows. In addition, some species in these mixes are plants of disturbed ground or arable fields and are unlikely to thrive in a meadow grassland.

2.1.5. Pollinator Friendly Planting

Much is spoken about the importance of pollinators these days, and rightly so. These are hugely important species for not only our wildflowers and trees but also for many of the plants on which we depend for food. Any biodiversity plan should have a strong focus on plants for pollinators. While native plants are best for wildlife and should only be planted in wild areas, there are a wide range of both native and non-native garden plants which provide food for pollinating insects which can be used in gardens and formal plantings. However, some garden plants are not suitable for pollinators. Planting a range of pollinator friendly plants which flower at different times throughout year will provide an important source of pollen and nectar for pollinating insects throughout the spring, summer and autumn.

2.1.6. Plants for Pollinators: Naturally Native

Here are some common (and sometimes overlooked) plants that are native to Ireland and Monaghan and are of great benefit for our insect pollinators:

Dandelion	Ivy	Bramble
Daisy	Blackthorn	Primrose
Bluebell	Hawthorn	Foxglove
Bugle	Forget-me-not	Rowan
Red & White Clover	Heather	Spindle

2.1.7. Plants for Pollinators: Non-native but Beautifully Beneficial

Here are some widely available plants that are good for pollinators but also look great in any planting scheme:

Nepeta	Ribes (currants)	Dogwood
Rudbeckia	Buddleia	Hebe
Aubretia	Hydrangea	Cransebills
Cotoneaster	Lavenders	Achillea
Berberis	Privet	Campanulas

2.1.8. Composting

Compost your garden and food waste in a designated composting area. Composting reduces the amount of waste going to landfill and provides a source of nutrient rich compost for gardening. This reduces the need to purchase garden compost often sourced from peat bogs contributing to the loss of these treasured habitats. Your compost heap also becomes a habitat! Worms, beetles, slugs and even hedgehogs will make themselves at home in a well-managed composting area.

Avoid tipping of garden waste into waysides or wild areas. Grass cuttings disposed of in waysides and other wild places smothers wildflowers. Beside watercourses, grass cuttings can pollute water and even kill fish. Garden plants which are disposed of outside garden areas can take root and spread. Some garden plants can become very invasive and spread to wild areas outcompeting our native plants and can lead to damage of our natural habitats.

2.1.9. Bee nesting habitat

Honeybees live in hives and are looked after by beekeepers. Our wild bees do not enjoy such protection and must find a suitable place to nest. Bumblebee colonies make their nest on the ground often in long grass or other vegetation. Cut such long grassy verges between September and March so as to avoid disturbing bumble bee nests.

Solitary mining bees make their nest in tiny burrows in south/east facing banks of bare soil, sand, or peat. Keep vegetation sparse on any earth banks or stony banks to provide nest sites for solitary bees. Scrape back to bare soil annually during October to February to create bare ground for solitary bees to burrow into.

Cavity nesting bees make their nests in south/east facing stonewalls, masonry, cavities in wood or dead plant stems. Visit such areas on a sunny evening from May -September. If bees are seen, protect these areas from disturbance and, in particular, ensure that there is no herbicides or pesticides used near these areas. Additional nest sites can be provided by drilling holes in fence posts (10 cm deep and 4-8mm in diameter).

2.1.10. Herbicides and pesticides

We would recommend that you avoid the use of herbicides and pesticides as they cause harm to wildlife directly and indirectly. For example, using slug killer might result in fewer thrushes, hedgehogs and other slug-eating wildlife. Using herbicides to control 'weeds' along grassy verges and around trees kills wildflowers which wildlife depend on for food and seeds.

2.2 Protecting Biodiversity

Conserving and protecting biodiversity is sometimes as simple as getting the time right. Scheduling management actions to avoid or minimise disturbance to wildlife is crucially important. Without management, hedgerows can become gappy, reducing their value to wildlife and their stock-proofing function. Under the Wildlife Act 1976 as amended, it is illegal to cut hedges between 1st March and 31st August in order to protect nesting birds unless there are clear traffic health and safety reasons to do so.

Hedgerows should be cut about every 3 years in rotation. This means that not all the hedgerows are cut in any one year but some are left uncut to provide resources for wildlife. Hedgerows can be cut between September and March but cutting hedgerows later in the autumn, in November or December is less disruptive to pollinating insects. Hedgerows should be cut to an A shape which allows sunlight to reach the bottom of the hedge promoting a full and dense growth. The top of the hedge should be left uncut to leave some fruit and seeds through the autumn and winter months for birds to feed on.

Similarly delaying the annual garden clean-up normally carried out in autumn until early spring provides some additional shelter for wildlife. Dead plant stems and fallen leaves provide places for invertebrates and other small wildlife to shelter and hibernate during the winter months.

2.3 Raising Awareness

Community groups play a really important role here. Raising awareness of biodiversity and encouraging or facilitating people to engage with and appreciate wildlife is an important tool in biodiversity conservation. Providing opportunities for people to experience nature and increasing the amount of time they spend outdoors is key. Furthermore, the health benefits of being out in nature are now widely recognised, with known benefits for both physical and mental wellbeing. Raising awareness of biodiversity can be facilitated by organising wildlife-themed walks, bat walks, wildflower walks and bird watching or competitions, such as best wildlife-friendly estate, best garden for wildlife or a wildlife photography competition.

Better still is providing opportunities for people to volunteer on a project, such as invasive plant species removal, tree planting or encouraging people to get involved in citizen science projects. It is often the social benefits of such events that will attract people to get involved. When residents understand more about wildlife in their local area, this can instil respect, remind them of the value of nature and lead to more effective conservation. Where appropriate, interpretative signage highlighting the biodiversity present in an area or promoting a particular project can be a beneficial component of a nature-friendly community and helps us to deepen our relationship with nature.

SECTION 3. PROJECTS FOR BIODIVERSITY IN BEECHGROVE LAWNS

3.1 Brief Description of the habitats of Beechgrove Lawns Estate

Beechgrove Lawns is a relatively large housing estate composed of over 200, mostly semi-detached houses, on the south side of Monaghan town. The development dates from the 1980s and each house typically has its own front and back garden. On entering the estate there is a row of trees on each side (primarily Poplars), most of which were saved by the Residents' Association after Monaghan County Council attempted to cut them down. They have been extensively trimmed back but are still managing to do well. A grassy slope containing some Birch trees and various non-natives, including Laurels, *Leylandii* and Cordylines, exists on the drive into the estate. There are green verges throughout the estate along the footpaths and between the houses. Grassy strips also line the avenue along the main entrance. A large triangular piece of unused land (measuring approx. 2,740m²) on the entrance side of Beechgrove Lawns has huge potential for becoming a 'Biosensory Garden', focusing on biodiversity and sensory aspects to benefit local residents, including those with additional needs. The aim of this garden is to make it a community hub where both adults and children living in the estate can learn about and enjoy nature, experienced through each of the senses. This plan will focus on a potential design and ideas for the proposed 'Biosensory Garden'.



3.2 RECOMMENDED PROJECT

'Biosensory Garden'

At the entrance side of Beechgrove Lawns there is a large, triangular patch of unused land, measuring approx. 2,740m² in area and approx. 250m in perimeter. This is a substantial tract of land which the Residents' Association would like to transform into a public space. The aim is for all residents to enjoy and learn about biodiversity, including sensory garden aspects to support local children with additional needs. The table below (3.2.1) and subsequent sketch on the following pages will give some ideas as to how this garden could look.



3.2.1 BIOSENSORY GARDEN IDEAS

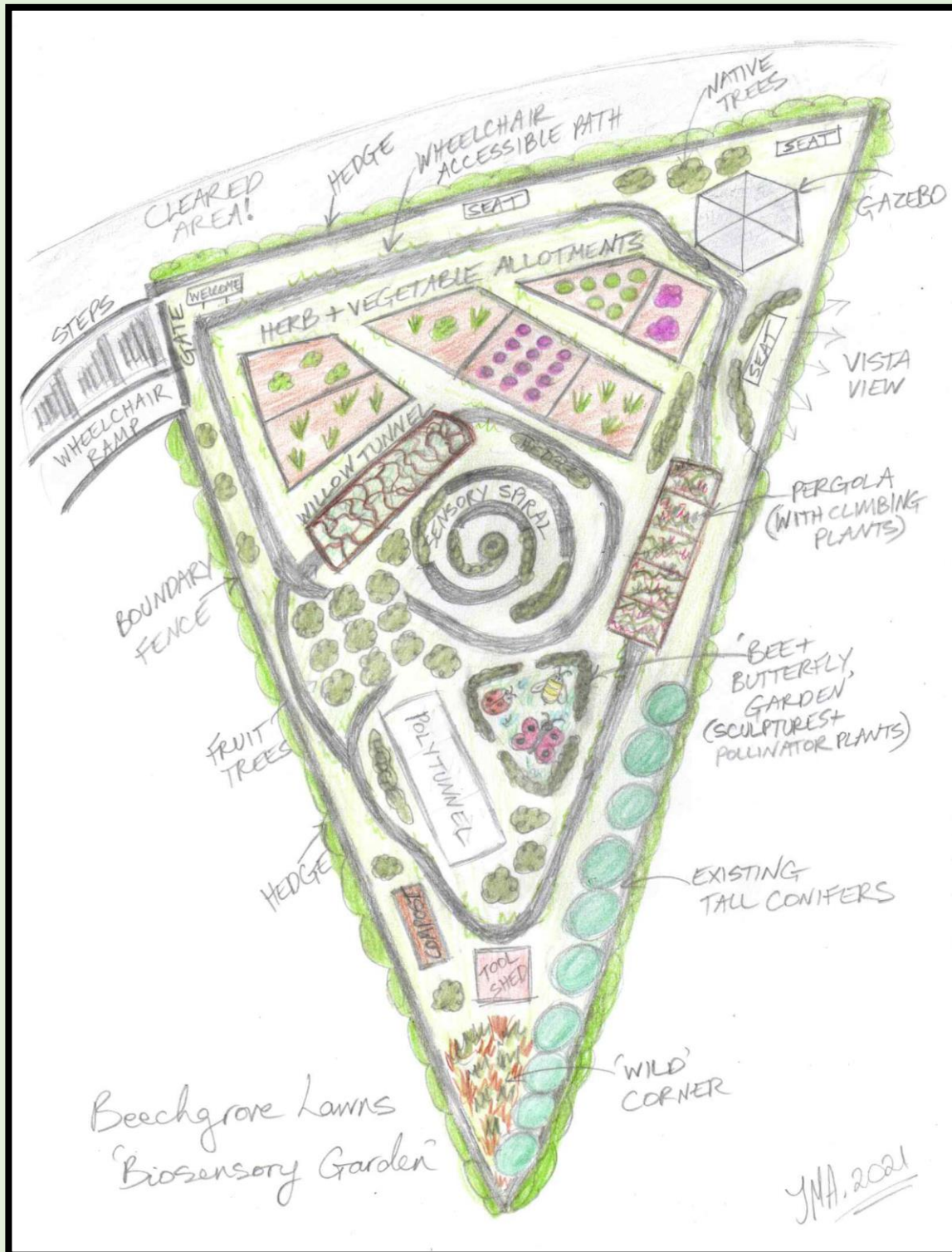
Idea	Description
Wheelchair access	It is important to provide wheelchair access both at the entrance to the garden via a ramp and gate and on the pathway around it. This will allow any residents or visitors with mobility challenges to access the garden fully.
Gazebo	A gazebo or similar structure would be ideal as an informal outdoor learning and demonstration space.
Allotments	Herb & vegetable allotments can be pollinator friendly, colourful, smell pleasant and are generally easy to grow. The allotments could be in the form of raised wooden plots, and some of these might be adjusted in height to allow those with mobility issues to use them also. Suggested vegetables are, e.g.: Tomatoes, Cabbages, Onions, Courgettes, Broad/Runner Beans. Suggested herbs are: e.g. Mint, Allium (edible Chives), Oregano, Rosemary, Thyme.
Pergola	Grow climbing plants over the pergola such as Clematis, Honeysuckle, Dog Rose or Jasmine. These are colourful when in bloom and great for pollinators, birds and bats.
Willow tunnel	Willows are brilliant for shaping into tunnels or huts and their blossoms and catkins are also great for pollinators.
'Sensory Spiral'	The sensory spiral could include vertical planting, interspersed with bright feature walls. Incorporating recycled pallets and a central point with a bird bath or small trickling water feature are suggested.
'Bug Garden'	A 'bug garden' can attract bees, butterflies and ladybirds with pollinator friendly plants. Some 'bug hotels' and 'habitat piles' could be added, with bright sculptures of insects (made locally perhaps). Plants that are colourful, have pleasant aromas and are inviting to touch are recommended, e.g. Lavender, Heathers, Allium, Dahlias, Calamintha. For reduced labour and costs, perennial shrubs/flowers are recommended. See pollinators.ie for an extensive list of planting suggestions.

Orchard	Plant an area with fruit trees, which people can walk through, e.g. Crab Apple, Pear and Plum varieties.
Polytunnel	Install a polytunnel for growing a range of vegetables, herbs, fruits and flowers. This should be located where plenty of sunlight can access it, as suggested in the sketch below.
Tool shed	Include a tool shed to store garden tools, etc. for neatness, security and safety reasons.
Boundary hedge	The existing hedge surrounding the site is 'gappy' in places and may need to be replanted in places with species like Hawthorn, Hazel, Elder & Guelder Rose.
Fence & Gate	A fence is recommended to be installed around the inside of the boundary, along with a lockable gate at the entrance to ensure the site stays secure from potential vandals or anti-social behaviour.
Short hedges	Short hedges can be planted to 'break up' the various sections of the garden. Again, species like Hawthorn, Hazel, Elder & Guelder Rose are good to plant, as well as fruit trees/bushes.
Native trees	Plant a few native trees in various areas of the garden to introduce colour, shade and visual interest where necessary, e.g. Rowan, Hawthorn, Hornbeam, Birch.
Composting unit	A compost unit would allow waste generated in the garden (or indeed that of residents) to be disposed of and create compost over time. Good signage and regular management of this unit would be required however to get the best results.
'Wild corner'	Letting the rear corner go 'wild' with brambles and long grasses, etc will give cover to wildlife here, allowing insects, birds and small mammals to thrive.
'Low-mow' regime	A 'low-mow' regime throughout the garden is recommended, with longer meadows along the edges and shorter meadows within the garden and pathways. It's better for pollinators – and cheaper!
Simple seating	Simple seating should be included at various points to allow people to enjoy the various aspects of the garden and its associated nature value.
Welcome sign	A welcome sign at the entrance would invite people into the 'Biosensory Garden', while describing its biodiversity and sensory aspects and benefits.
Existing tall conifer trees	The existing tall conifers along the boundary are not ideal for the garden, nor especially beneficial for birds or pollinators. They will also shade out sunlight, preventing it from reaching the polytunnel and vegetable plots, etc. It is recommended to remove these conifers and replace them with native tree species in future.



3.2.2 'BIOSENSORY GARDEN' SKETCH

The sketch below gives an idea of how the proposed 'Biosensory Garden' might look when completed. While this is not an exact design, it shows how the various biodiversity and sensory aspects can be incorporated throughout the space.



Design ideas for the Beechgrove Lawns 'Biosensory Garden'. Sketch: Jennifer Mc Aree

3.3 ADDITIONAL POTENTIAL PROJECTS

Potential Project 1 Tree survey

A tree survey on the existing poplars, birches, conifers and other tree types within Beechgrove Lawns is recommended.

This survey should be carried out by a qualified arborist who can advise how to manage and care for the existing and future trees in the estate.

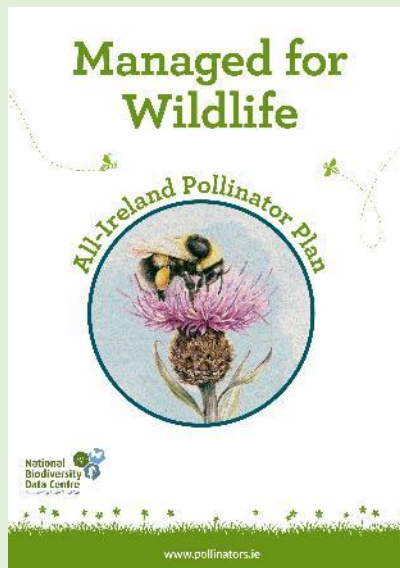


Potential Project 2 Signage for wildlife

It is recommended to use some AIPP signage (freely available online) in strategic places around the garden which inform people of 'low-mow' regimes and that it benefits our pollinators.

Over time, more natural meadow flowers will emerge, making the perseverance with the regime worth it.

The AIPP signage or other versions can be used, indicating plant species and/or the wildlife that may be present.



Potential Project 3 All-Ireland Pollinator Plan

The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan is the largest-scale conservation project in Ireland and one of the first of its kind in the world.

It encourages groups, communities, companies, schools and other organisations to play their part in conservation measures that are urgently needed to conserve our pollinating insects.

It is suggested that Beechgrove Lawns Residents' Association joins these efforts by becoming a partner of the AIPP (if not one already).



Potential Project 4 Biodiversity talk

An initial biodiversity talk could be held before and/or after the new 'Biosensory Garden' is created.

One or two local or national experts on biodiversity and gardening, along with key residents, etc could present short talks or demonstrations.

All residents in Beechgrove Lawns could be invited, encouraging as many people as possible get involved and take an interest in the project as it evolves.

