



CASE STUDY:

MULLINGAR SHAMROCKS, CO. WESTMEATH



The challenge we faced:

Mullingar Shamrocks has been a GAA Healthy Club since 2018 and we've seen the benefit of our Healthy Club projects for the club and community.

There's a huge overlap between health & wellbeing and the environment and we wanted to build on the success of our Healthy Club initiatives by taking on actions that would benefit the environment and make the club a safe, healthy and welcoming place for everyone from across the community.

The solution we identified:

We decided to develop our club for biodiversity and did this as part of a 2019 entry into a Tidy Towns Special Award Category for Sustainable Development, which to our great joy we won.

Our club is beside both Mullingar's beautiful River Brosna and the majestic Royal Canal. We developed a club Biodiversity Walking Route by the river and canal and installed seventeen vibrant, informative and colourful biodiversity signs to place along the route. Since then we've engaged in new biodiversity projects every year, working very closely with other community groups – especially Tidy Towns – as well as local schools.

The actions we took:

- We created two natural wildflower gardens that have attracted lots of butterflies and bees and planted native trees including Hazel, Mountain Ash, Crabapple, Alder and Birch.
- We had a naturally occurring solitary bee embankment in the club and we've supplemented that with new bug hotels and bat & bird boxes.
- We've gone herbicide-free by replacing herbicide with a vinegar, soap and salt solution and by using lawnmowers and strimmers to maintain weeds.
- We commissioned a biodiversity and health & well-being mural for our club.
- We ran a competition for underage team members to colour and name a bumblebee biodiversity mascot for the club.
- We developed a Sensory Garden for the five senses as well as a Barefoot Sensory Walking Path.
- We worked with the local active retirement group, HSE frontline staff and Mullingar CBS TY students to plant pollinator-friendly window boxes.





The impact our project had:

- We're a very family-friendly club and our biodiversity actions were a chance for people of all ages and abilities to get involved in club activities.
- The community spirit and ethos of volunteering – both in club members and in the schools, workplaces and organisations with which we collaborated – has been reinforced by our projects.
- Our sensory garden has made our club more inclusive and has also brought additional life to the club. Local children visit this garden daily, where they sit with friends and play all around it. Even visiting teams for matches can't resist a look, a touch, a listen, a smell and even a taste of its produce.
- Local schools and crèches also get to enjoy our biodiversity signs & walkway, sensory garden & pathway, intergenerational window boxes, project facilities and benefit from these initiatives through SESE and PE, e.g., Orienteering, Outdoor Pursuits, Treasure Hunts and Nature walks. Mullingar Irish Wheelchair Association, Club Active 1428 and various local community and disability groups also frequent our grounds.
- We have transition year students, active retirees and Mullingar HSE employees who come to participate in Biodiversity Walking Group and intergenerational workshops with us each year.
- We've enriched the biodiversity of the area and provided food and habitat for pollinators, birds and wildlife. Through our herbicide-free project we've reduced our potentially harmful impact on the environment and on the river and canal.
- We've partnered with Mullingar Tidy Towns in their quest to win national Pride of Place award 2022, we came runners up in 2022 Tidy Towns Special Award Category for Sustainable Development and we won Mullingar Chambers of Commerce Business Awards Volunteer of the Year 2022 and Community Group of the year 2021.

Secrets to our success:

- We have a very supportive, forward-thinking club executive – we couldn't do it without them.
- We have a Green Champion in the club to drive our action.
- We started with small actions and have built up over time.
- We have fantastic partners – our partnerships have been central to our success.





Who we partnered with:

Our success has been built on our partnerships throughout the community. We have collaborated with and received support from:

- Mullingar Tidy Towns
- The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPro)
- Westmeath County Council
- Mullingar Shamrocks
- Mullingar Men's Shed
- Pocket Forests
- Local schools
- Local businesses

Funding we received :

Applying for grants can be very time consuming and can be disheartening when we're not successful but there have been some great funding initiatives that have helped us develop our projects.

- We received LAWPro Community Water Development Funding for our herbicide-free project.
- We funded our window boxes through HSE Staff funding Initiatives and Westmeath County Council Community Enhancement funding.
- We've received HSE Staff Health and Wellbeing Funding, HSE Midlands National Lottery and Westmeath County Council Local Agenda 21 funding .

For more details on Green Club projects in Mullingar Shamrocks see:
<https://pollinators.ie/mullingar-shamrocks-gaa-green-by-emblem-green-by-nature/>
and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XVQBuGm7x0

Details of the club's experience in going herbicide free can be found at:
<https://learning.gaa.ie/greenclub/biodiversity>