



## ACTIONS BIODIVERSITY

The GAA Green Club Toolkit contains simple and practical advice on actions clubs can take in the areas of Energy, Waste, Water, Biodiversity & Travel & Transport to protect their environment and future-proof their operations and facilities.

This section highlights how many of these Green Club actions also promote inclusion and engagement in clubs and communities and can be of particular benefit in bringing seldom heard groups into the life of the club. Part 1 here focuses on Biodiversity activities while Part 2 has more ideas for club initiatives, from gear swaps to lighting upgrades.

### Biodiversity & Belonging

Because they are often low-cost or no-cost, can be straightforward to implement, easy to take part in and are visible in the club and community, biodiversity actions can have a big impact on both inclusion and the environment.

The Green Club Toolkit at <https://learning.gaa.ie/GreenClub/Biodiversity> contains a range of simple but powerful biodiversity ideas for clubs of all sizes and locations. Here are some specific approaches to those biodiversity actions that promote engagement with the club and its activities.

### Planting for the future

Activities like tree planting and biodiversity planting in club colours can often be accessible for people of all ages and abilities and contribute to physical and social health and well-being. From Dr Crokes in Killarney to Milltown in Westmeath, simple tree planting and pollinator projects have had a big impact on older club and community members, new arrivals to towns and villages, and members of migrant groups, by bringing people together to take positive, enjoyable actions that benefit the club, community and environment.



### The cup of tea effect

As the country emerged from Covid lockdowns, Connacht GAA Centre of Excellence (CoE) organised tree planting events to bring some of the older and socially-isolated members of the local community together and back into GAA and community activities. In the chats over the cup and tea and sandwiches after the planting, it became clear that there was a need for more supports and activities for older people in the community. The Connacht CoE has gone on to develop a hugely popular programme of engagement that includes walking football, exercise classes and talks and workshops for older members of the community. All with the obligatory cup of tea and chat afterwards.





## Biodiverse Sensory Gardens

Several Green Clubs have developed sensory spaces in their club for both biodiversity and inclusion. Sensory gardens are enjoyed by all club users but can have an especially positive impact on neurodivergent children and their parents, ensuring that there is a place for everyone to enjoy and to be active and engaged in the club. While some clubs apply for funding for the development of sensory gardens, with the input and experience of club and community members, and reusing and repurposing materials and items, clubs can often develop sensory areas at a low cost to the club and environment. Green Club partners the National Biodiversity Date Centre have developed guidance on plants suitable for pollinator-friendly sensory gardens. <https://pollinators.ie/sensorygardens/>

Watch Gort GAA talk about the development of their sensory play area in this spotlight video

## Cúinní agus Ceapaí Personal Planting Plots

Biodiversity projects in GAA clubs also have the potential to promote powerful feelings of ownership and belonging. In Lámh Dhearg in Antrim – featured in the Green Club case studies at <https://learning.gaa.ie/GreenClub/CaseStudies> – different biodiversity spaces in the club are adopted by different people or groups, who take on the longer term care and management of those spaces and who in turn feel a sense of pride and ownership in having their own corner of the club.

In Galway Green Clubs Gort and Ballindereen, community club users including the Brothers of Charity and Foróige have taken on responsibility for specific biodiversity spaces in the club, creating a sense of purpose and belonging in the club across ages and abilities, and reducing the burden on existing club volunteers by broadening the volunteer base in the club.

## Spotlight on: Biodiversity Walkways

Walkways are an increasingly common feature of GAA clubs and an important inclusion tool in themselves, as a safe and sociable place for club and community members to keep active. The Green Club Toolkit <https://learning.gaa.ie/GreenClub/Biodiversity> contains great ideas for maximising the biodiversity potential of club grounds and walkways. The impact of club walkways on community engagement and inclusion can be enhanced by thinking about and talking action on both accessibility and awareness. Some ideas from Green Clubs include:

- Information signage along the walkway, as a great way to tell the story of the club and of local nature and biodiversity, further promoting club bonds and belonging.
- Where benches or outdoor seats are being installed along the walkway or throughout the club, that these are easy and safe for people with mobility issues to access and/or wheelchair adapted.
- Where the walkway is open to the community, that this is well communicated so that seldom head groups are aware of and encouraged to access the walkway as community resource.
- Checks in both design and upkeep of the walkway to identify and remove hazards that might stop people with mobility issues or disabilities in being able to safely access and use the walkway