



CASE STUDY:

BALLYCUMBER, COUNTY OFFALY



The challenge we faced:

The leylandii trees behind the goals at the Railway Station end of the pitch were causing issues for the club – footballs and sliotars were constantly getting stuck and lost in the dense leylandii and it was costing us to maintain the trees, with an annual bill for trimming them back and a larger bill every few years to keep the height down.

The club decided that the best solution would be to remove the trees and we were left with the questions of

- (i) how best to do this and
- (ii) what to do in the area that would be cleared.

The solution we identified:

The club decided that once the trees were removed a biodiversity area would be constructed, including a wildflower garden, fruit trees and native trees.

The club walking track runs by this area, so the project would also benefit club and community members using the walking track



The actions we took:

- Applied to the Offaly Local Development Company for funding support to cover some of the costs of clearing the Leylandii trees and planting the flowers, trees and shrubs in the biodiversity area
- Contracted a local contractor to clear and remove the trees
- Sought advice from local experts on what to plant
- Planted wildflowers, native shrubs, hazel and wild cherry trees
- Installed biodiversity information storyboards
- Planted a mini woodland with Pocket Forests (<https://www.pocketforests.ie/>) through the GAA Green Club Programme
- Planted a herb garden, with herbs available for club members to use

The project impact:

- There's been a great reaction in the club to the biodiversity area. It's a wonderful addition to the walking track and the wildflower area flowers in different colours throughout the season, so there's an ever-changing landscape in the club.
- Our Pocket Forest is dedicated to the memory of a club member who passed away. His family were involved in the planting and his importance to the club is commemorated in this beautiful leaf-shaped areas of trees and shrubs, that we created together as club and family.
- In place of the dense, homogeneous leylandii we now have a diverse area of flowers, plants, shrubs and trees that provide food, habitat and cover to native birds, bees, insects and animals. And we don't lose our footballs anymore!



Who we partnered/ collaborated with outside the club:

- Offaly Local Development Company (LDC) for part funding of the entire project
- The local Tidy Towns Committee
- A local forestry company, for wood for the beds for the herb garden
- The Offaly County Council Heritage Officer, who pointed us towards a responsible source for wildflower seeds
- The Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPro) Community Water Officer
- Pocket Forests

External funding or supports we received:

- Offaly Local Development Company (LDC) funding to cover 75% of the costs of clearing the Leylandii trees and planting the biodiversity area
- Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPro) funding for signage
- Funding from EIL Ireland for wildflower seeds and awareness raising
- Trees and planting support from Pocket Forests and trees from Easy Treesie, Coillte and Trees on the Land through the GAA Green Club Programme

Secrets to our success:

- We put out a call for volunteers and some fantastic people responded, including people who would have supported the club but had never been involved in club activities. One gentleman in particular brought a lifetime of expertise and great enthusiasm to the project and really helped make it a success while one of the members of the local CE scheme has a wealth of knowledge in biodiversity and planting that he shared with the club
- This was a real community project – we sourced many of our trees and plants from the garden centre in Ferbane, our signage was produced by a company in Ferbane, we employed local contractors and we collaborated with local community groups
- We had support from the club executive and from club members throughout
- The contractor we engaged to clear the Leylandii trees was able to remove and mulch the trees, which removed a potential problem for the club in disposing of the felled Leylandii





Challenges we encountered:

- We didn't encounter any major challenges. There's a bit of maintenance involved in the first year – especially in keeping the trees watered – but we were very lucky to have club members and volunteers who helped out a huge amount with this. There has been very little maintenance required since then, apart from the annual mowing and clearing of the wildflower area.
- We are trying to develop wildflowers naturally in a no-mow area behind the goals. We haven't had success yet; this may take another year or two to get right.

The next steps for Ballycumber:

We're developing a new indoor training area. We fundraised by walking the Grand Canal from Croke Park to Ballycumber in September 2021 and will be supported by Offaly LDC funding to complete the project.

This will be an energy efficient building, with PV solar generation on the roof, and we plan include rainwater harvesting to water our biodiversity areas.



Read more about Green Club projects at: gaa.ie/greenclub