

**CLAN COMMUNITY CENTRE SENSORY GARDEN.  
OUGHTERARD, COUNTY GALWAY, IRELAND.  
ROADBRIDGE LTD.**

**BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category:** Small Scale Permanent

**Project overview**

Creation of a sensory garden (approx. 250m<sup>2</sup> area) for children with special needs at a local community centre in Oughterard, a town approximately 8km from the Galway Wind Park site. This work involved the provision of plant machinery, topsoil, shrubs, flower bulbs and tree saplings (purchased from a local plant nursery) as well as the provision of ground operatives (3 no.) and machine operatives (2 no.) to prepare the ground for planting. Site management also teamed up with members of the Community Centre to help with the planting. An insect hotel, a log pile as well as bird and bat boxes were also placed in close proximity to the sensory garden to further enhance the biodiversity.

The costs for the delivery of this project donation of plant machinery, labour and materials was valued at €1,950 (£1,635) in total.

**Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?**

There were no planning conditions or contractual obligations for Roadbridge to complete this project. In all large-scale construction projects that Roadbridge undertake there is a company CSR commitment to protect and where possible enhance the local environment. Roadbridge strive to leave a positive impact on local communities post construction. The idea for this project arose by contacting the Community Centre and asking if they had any planned projects that required support.

**What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?**

The area of low ecological value consisted of marginal grassland overgrown with weeds and thistles. There were no plants or flowers growing that would have provided a suitable habitat for pollinating species or other wildlife.



*Photo 1: Placing Topsoil*

### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

A wide variety of native flora (including; Sage, Primrose, Heather, Fuscia, Lavender, Rosemary, Honeysuckle, Mountain ash and Crab-apple) selected by our project ecologist were planted. These flowers, plants, shrubs and trees will offer overlapping bloom periods providing food sources (pollen and nectar) for bee populations and other pollinators such as; Dragonfly, butterfly and hummingbird. These flowering plants will also provide colour all year round with flowers and variegated foliage.

As this garden matures and blossoms we hope that it will be visited by both children and adults who have sensory processing issues, including autism and other disabilities. Other features to further enhance biodiversity were added to or adjacent to the garden such as; an insect hotel (built from waste site materials such as timber off-cuts, logs, wooden pallets, broken bricks and plywood), a log pile and wooden bird and bat boxes (built by a local branch of the Men's Shed community group - <http://menssheds.ie/>).

Though this sensory garden covers a relatively small area it should, over the coming months and years, become a place rich in biodiversity. It is believed that this newly created biodiversity area will raise ecological awareness among all those who pass through it and also provide a quiet, reflective space for those who wish to sit, listen and observe nature.

This garden was a new innovation for the town and a new endeavour for our company. This type of project would be easily replicable and the Community Centre with its very active gardening group will ensure that the area is well cared for and maintained in the years to follow.



Photo 2: Constructing the Insect Hotel

### How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

### Further information

This project began with the removal of low value grassland, rocks and stones. Good quality topsoil was then delivered to site which was levelled out and raked. A plastic geotextile was then placed over the topsoil to prevent the growth of weeds and thistles. A wide variety of native flora (as outlined above) were then planted. A circular raised platform was constructed to provide an area for children and adults with special needs to sit and enjoy the biodiversity around them. Other features added to enhance the biodiversity of the garden include an insect hotel, a log pile and bird and bat boxes.

This project will require visits throughout the year (for weeding, pruning and general maintenance) which will be carried out by members of the local community. The sensory garden will hopefully raise awareness of biodiversity among the local community as well as provide a therapeutic sanctuary for children and adults with special needs. Since the development of the sensory garden in April/May 2016 there have been many sightings of a variety of insects and birdlife in the garden. As the plants and flowers grow and bloom this should lead to further increases in biodiversity.

We believe that we have succeeded in meeting our objectives in establishing a new area of biodiversity at a location that had been previously neglected. This work has been well received by the local community and has featured in local newspaper publications (The Connaught Tribune, the Corrib News and Moycullen Matters).



Photo 3: Bat and Bird Boxes

### What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

The Community volunteers gave me an insight into the activities that the Centre is committed to with limited resources. As the Environmental Manager for Roadbridge I was interested in how best we could support the centre's environmental projects. I believe a sensory garden/ biodiversity area would be of great benefit.