



Gort Area Biodiversity Plan 2021~2024



Riailtas na hÉireann
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The LEADER Programme 2014-2020 is financed by the Department of Rural and Community Development under the Rural Development Programme Ireland (LEADER) 2014-2020 and by the EU under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas.



This biodiversity plan is one of six that came about as a result of the 2021 Community Biodiversity Training and Awareness Programme delivered by the Burrenbeo Trust and funded by Galway Rural Development. Up to eight participants from each community attended a place-based Biodiversity Training course, which included 10 hours of initial activity-based learning covering all aspects of heritage but focusing on Biodiversity. This culminated in each community creating a Biodiversity plan. Workshops on various topics were provided to the communities in order to give them the skills necessary to put their plans into action. Creating their own plan gives each community a strong sense of ownership and agency. Each of the six plans is unique and reflects the interests, skills and needs of the local community.

Introduction

Biodiversity relates to the variety and richness of habitats and species in any given area. Greater species diversity ensures natural sustainability for all life forms and provides essential ecosystem services that are important to our economy such as pollination and flood prevention. Even at a local level biodiversity can benefit our communities greatly. We are facing a massive loss of biodiversity across the world, through habitat loss, invasive species, pollution, climate change and over exploitation. However, there are ways to protect and conserve our local area and this plan hopes to address some of these.

The objective of the Gort Biodiversity plan is to promote awareness and develop actions that will help to enhance and protect existing habitats and establish new ones.

We also aim to provide information and advice for community groups, schools, businesses and individuals within Gort and the surrounding area.



About Gort

Gort is a noted heritage town whose Irish name, Gort Inse Guaire, means “The Field of the island of Guaire”.

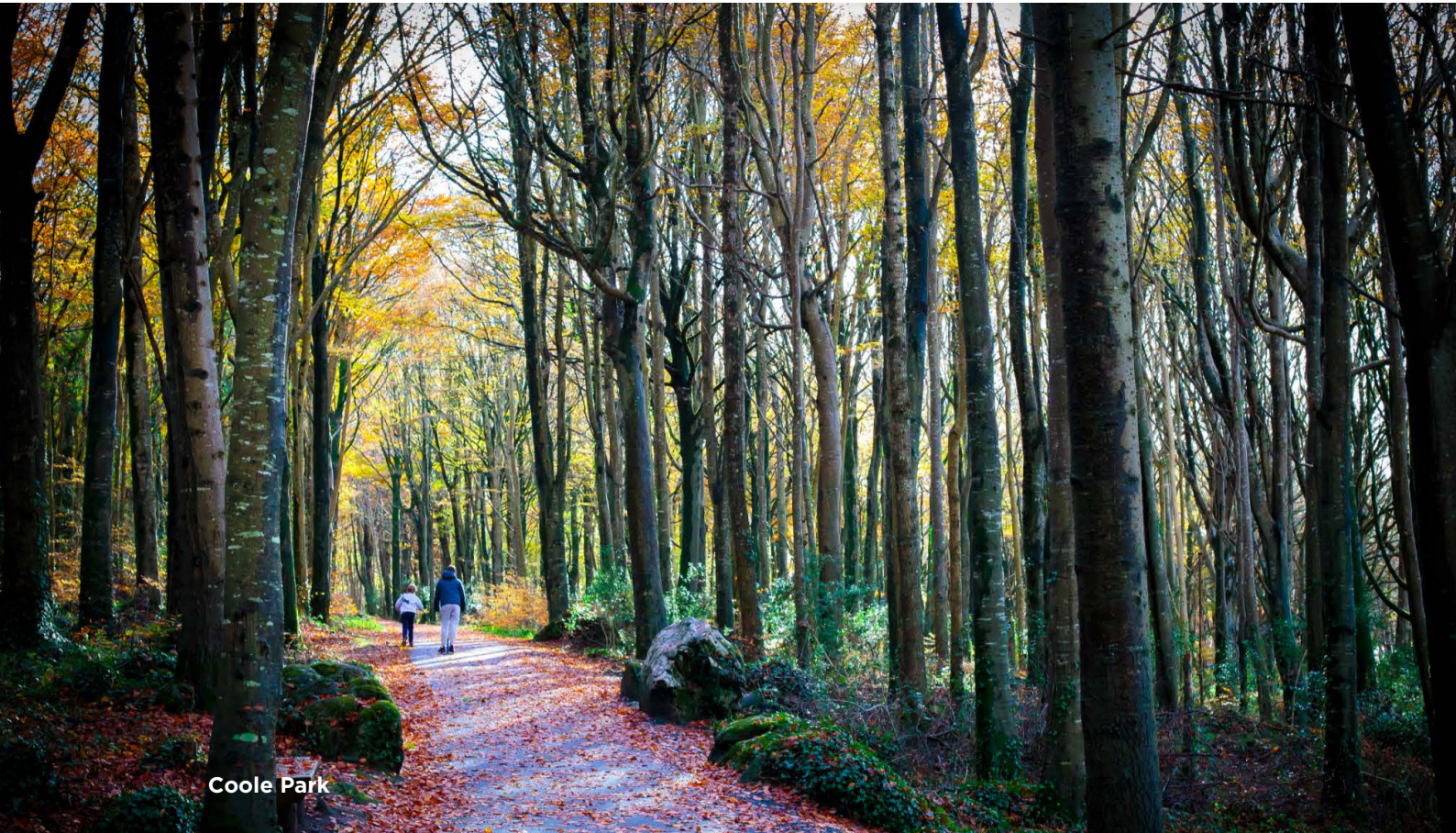
It is a name that conjures up images of a place steeped in nature, waterways, literacy and history.

In the 7th century Guaire became the King of Connacht, and one of his royal residences was on an island formed by the river in Gort. There are many legends told of King Guaire, who was said to have one arm longer than the other on account of his generosity.

The town expanded in the 19th century to become the market town it is still known as, with much of the town planning and architecture still in use today.

Gort sits within a landscape of limestone, lakes and turloughs. The River Gort, which runs through the town, originates in the Slieve Aughties, disappears through swallow holes to repeatedly rise again further downstream with different names before reaching the sea at Kinvara.

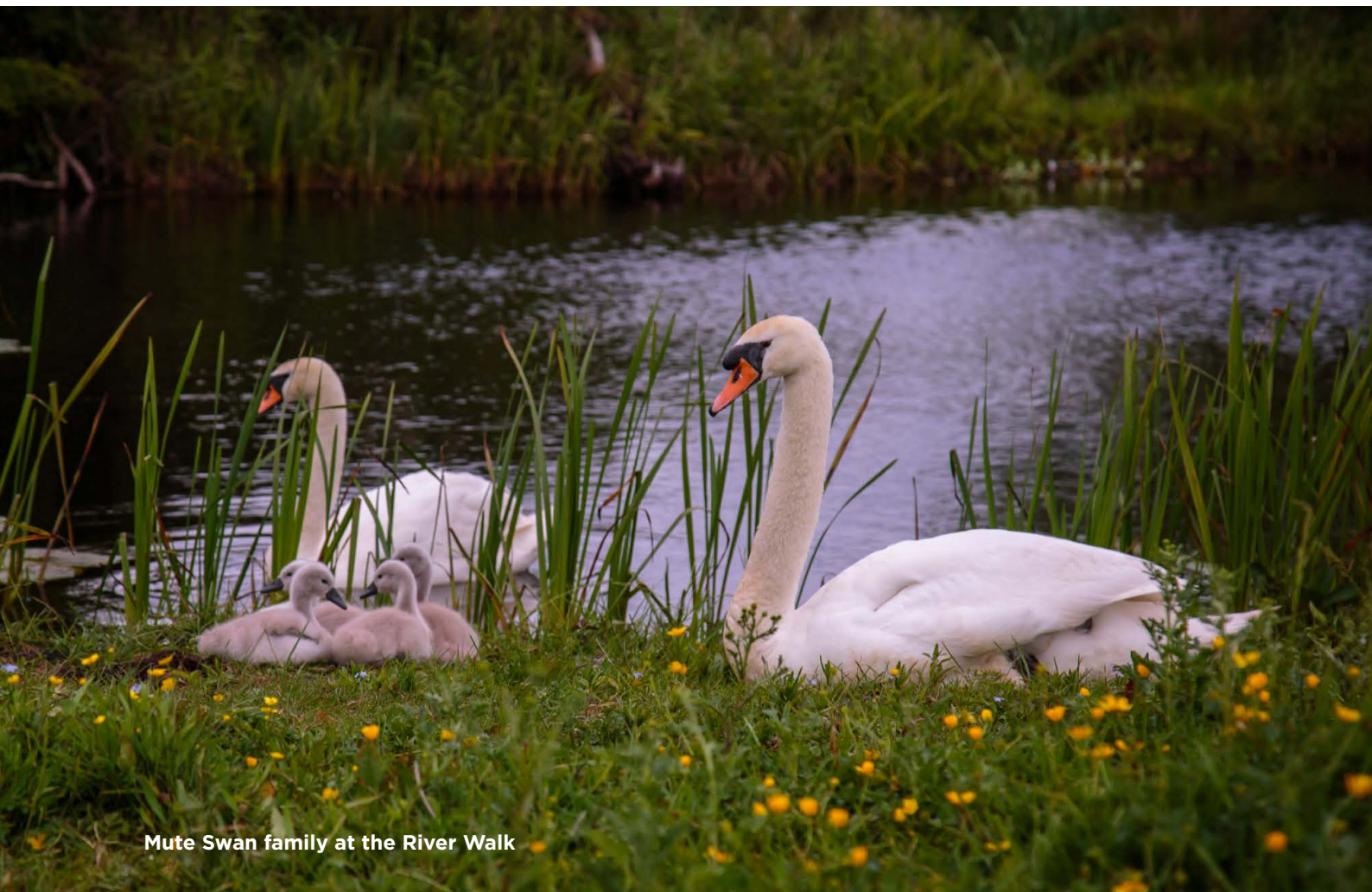
In the environs of Gort you will find Coole Park, Kiltartan Gregory Museum, Thoor Ballylee, KilmacDuagh monastic site, as well as a rich heritage of prehistoric and medieval remains of all types.



Coole Park



Turlough between Garryland and Coole Park



Mute Swan family at the River Walk

Fauna

We have many species of mammal in Gort. Otters have been seen down at the Riverwalk and we also have red squirrels, hares, badgers, hedgehogs, pine martens, rabbits and foxes. Fish species include trout, pike and perch. Eight of the nine Irish bat species reside at Coole Park, including the rare lesser horseshoe bat.

Many of the birds you see around Gort are birds of the countryside including wood pigeons, blackbirds, robins, song thrushes, wrens, chaffinches and blue, great, coal and long tailed tits. They rely on hedgerows, scrub and gardens to provide their habitat.



In Woodlands such as Coole you might see birds such as treecreepers and jays, wildfowl such as mute swan, whooper swan and waders including lapwing and the endangered curlew. We also have buzzards, kestrels, peregrine falcons, long eared owls and barn owls. Let us not forget the frogs and the precious bees.

Recording these species and where they have been spotted can be a fun family activity and can greatly help to provide valuable statistics for the National Biodiversity Data Centre. More information is provided in this link:

<http://www.biodiversityireland.ie/record-biodiversity/>



Wood anemone

Flora

Our most famous tree is the Copper Beech Autograph tree at Coole Park, where we also have Hazel, Alder, Birch, Ash, Oak and many other native tree species. Our wetlands down at the River Walk are rich in yellow flag, marsh marigold, bogbean, speedwell, meadowsweet, butterbur, common violet, primrose, bluebell, herb robert and loosestrife. We also have invasive species that we are working to safely remove such as Old Man's Beard (clematis). In the woods you will find Irish bluebells and wood anemones, and a variety of ferns.



Bluebells and Fiddlehead fern

The hedgerows and the extensive dry stone walls act as essential corridors for our animals, birds, bats and insects, as well as providing food sources. Whitethorn and blackthorn, bramble, elder, holly, guelder rose, gorse and ivy make up some of the local hedgerow species.

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Gort Tidy Town Group

Community Participation

Gort Town has a vibrant and active community and has numerous groups and organisations which have successfully brought about many positive benefits to the area. Inclusivity is at the heart of this biodiversity plan and one of the key objectives is to promote awareness and engagement through community groups and individuals within the locality.



Gort River Walk volunteers



Gort Tidy Town Group Gort River Walk volunteers burning Old Man's Beard, which is an invasive species



Gort River Walk Volunteers



Gort River Walk Volunteers



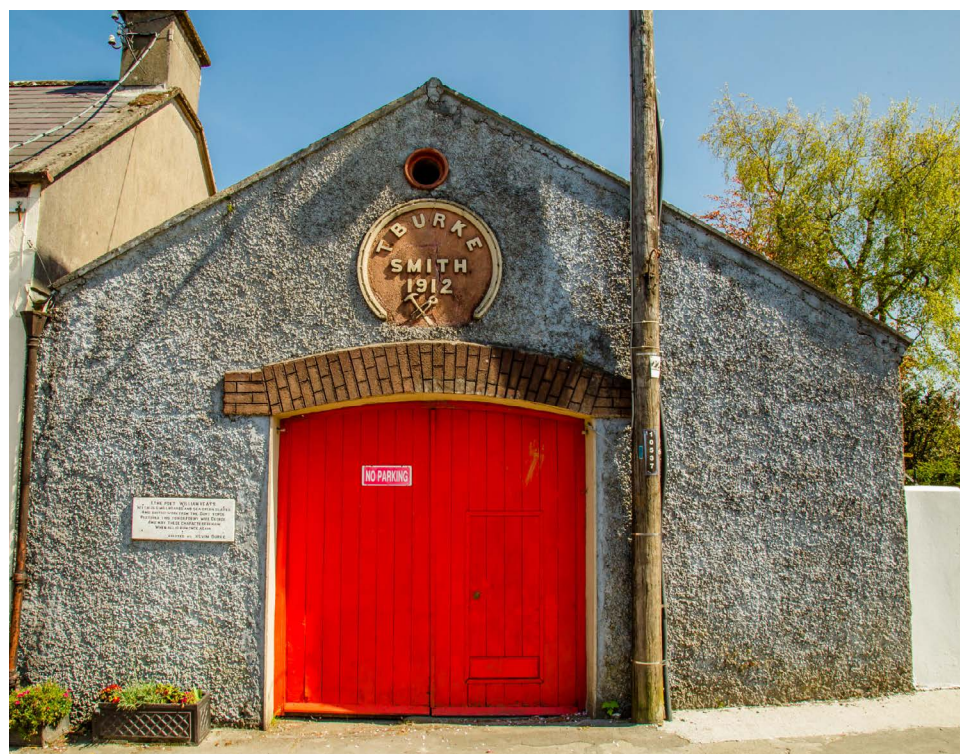
Bolands Lane 1830s

Built Heritage

Gort has a wealth of built heritage. Examples include from the town itself include Bolands Lane from the 1830s, the Fever hospital from 1839, the Weigh house (locally known as The Crane) from 1760 and the Forge from 1912 (which stands on the site of an earlier forge). These and many more historical buildings in Gort are described on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Database (www.buildingsofIreland.ie). Older monuments nearby include Kilmacduagh Monastery.



The fever hospital 1839



The Forge 1912



The Weigh house 1760

General Tips and Advice

LET IT GROW... long grass promotes habitats for bees, butterflies and insects. To create a traditional meadow, cut grass once a year and remove the cuttings. Cutting grass on a 6 weekly basis from April the 15th also benefits biodiversity as it allows some wildflowers to grow. These methods can be applied to gardens and amenity areas, roundabouts and verges. Alternatively allow a section of your garden to grow wild!

PLANT... Consider planting pollinator friendly trees, shrubs, hedges and flower species in your garden

FEED... Keep a bird feeder in your garden, these can be an important food source for our garden birds especially during the winter season.

WEED... Pesticides kill not only the plants but are also harmful to humans and wildlife. Consider using alternative weed control methods such as hand weeding, flame weeder tool or power hose.

PROTECT...

Protect our built heritage like graveyards, stone walls, buildings, monuments.

Protect and mind our existing species and habitats.

LEAVE NO TRACE.... Leave nothing but your footprint, take nothing but a photograph. Take your litter home!

REDUCE... Consider an alternative to single use plastic, bring your own shopping bag, bring a water bottle, reduce packaging and consider ethical/local sourcing of products.

Action Plan 1 ~ 5

	Project/Activity	Why	Location	Stakeholders	Time Frame
1	Conservation, protection and enhancement of existing green/wild areas.	To prevent any further habitat loss.	Gort area	Gort Tidy Town, Burren Lowlands, River Walk Group, Galway County Council (GCC), Gort Golf Course, farm lands and others	5 Years
<p>Example projects:</p> <p>1: Carry out a habitat survey of the Gort area to identify wild habitats that should be protected.</p> <p>2: Work with the community to promote awareness of Biodiversity.</p>					
2	All planting in or around the town to follow the All Ireland Pollinator plan.	To protect and feed the bees, butterflies and insects.	Gort Area	Gort Tidy Town, Burren Lowlands, River Walk Group, Individuals, pitches and amenities, farm lands GCC and others.	5 Years
<p>https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/FINAL-All-Ireland-Pollinator-Plan-2021-2025-WEB.pdf</p>					
3	To ensure the footpaths/river walks are fully accessible to all users e.g. Wheelchairs, Elderly, Parent and Babies etc.	Accessibility issues due to poor surface or illegal parking.	Gort Town	Galway County Council.	3 Years
<p>Example Projects:</p> <p>1: An annual survey of the footpaths and public awareness campaign to highlight the dangers caused by illegal parking on footpaths.</p> <p>2: Wheelchair access to the Gort River Walk</p>					
4	Support and maintain the further development of the Gort River Walk and its natural habitat.	Developing a natural amenity for the people of Gort and surrounding areas. To protect and enhance our wetlands and waterways.	Gort River	River Walk, Galway County Council	7 Years
<p>Example project:</p> <p>1: The setup of a River Walk Trust</p> <p>2: Citizen science</p>					
5	Eliminating invasive species	Invasive species are the second largest cause of Biodiversity loss.	Gort River, Coole Park	Gort River Walk, NPWS, Landowners	ongoing

Action Plan 6 ~ 8

	Project/Activity	Why	Location	Stakeholders	Time Frame
6	Engage with the wider community to set up projects and workshops to encourage involvement in exploring biodiversity.	To create a sense of ownership and awareness within the community.	Gort Area	Schools, Gort Tidy Towns, An Taisce, Galway Heritage Office,	5 Years
<p>Example Projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Orchard Centre, Brothers of Charity are setting up a Community Garden to grow vegetables, encourage wildlife and seed exchange. 2. Gort River Walk to hold a Plant Identification workshop with botanists 					
7	Visual improvements of the town.	There are illegal dumping and littering issues. There are a number of derelict/empty buildings.	Gort Town	Gort Tidy Towns, An Taisce, Galway County Council, Gort Community School, Gort Scouts	ongoing
<p>Example Projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Run Seasonal "Spring" Clean 2. Painting or decorating empty buildings 3. Murals and street art 4. Litter collection 5. Flower planting 6. An annual survey of the town for derelict buildings and sites. 					
8	Promote the history and culture of Gort Inse Guaire.	To pass on our history, legends and lore to our children and visitors. We have a rich history including WB Yeats, Lady Gregory, St Colman, King Guaire etc	Gort Town	Galway County Council, Gort Tidy Towns, Burren Lowlands, Galway Heritage Office, Co. Galway Arts Office.	5 Years
<p>Example Projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: Signage 2. Guided walks. 3. Website, online presence. 					

Action Plan 9 ~ 10

	Project/Activity	Why	Location	Stakeholders	Time Frame
9	Promote waste reduction and recycling.	Start initiatives to reduce the amount of plastic disposed of. Maximise recycling and make people aware of upcycling and other options. Switch plastic to paper bags.	Gort Town	Second Hand Shops, Businesses, Galway County Council, Schools, The Centre, GAA, St.Colman’s playing field,	3 Years
<p>Example projects:</p> <p>1: The installation of filtered water coolers in our schools and sports grounds. This will reduce the use of single use plastic bottles from the environment, the associated waste and the cost of purchasing bottled water.</p> <p>2: Educate the public on selling or re-homing items that might otherwise end up in landfill e.g. Facebook market place.</p>					
10	Promote the creation of wildlife corridors and pocket forests.	To provide a separate space for wildlife from human activities. This will allow for wildlife to migrate safely and to thrive.	Gort Area	Gort Tidy Towns, Galway County Council, River Walk, Farm lands, Land owners	ongoing
<p>Example projects:</p> <p>1: Densely planting of trees on any space (big or small) to give shelter pockets to animals and insects.</p> <p>2: Joining up wild areas along the Gort River to give wildlife a connected corridor to migrate along.</p> <p>3: maintenance of dry stone walls, vital for insects, small mammals and plants.</p>					

Action Plan 11

	Project/Activity	Why	Location	Stakeholders	Time Frame
11	Create and maintain outdoor activity/recreation areas	A need for more public outdoor activity areas to cater in particular for young people.	Gort Town	Galway County Council, Gort Tidy Towns, Gort Playground	5 Years
<p>Example Project:</p> <p>1: The setup of a pump/skate park. There is sufficient land under County Council ownership around Gort to facilitate the construction of a modest size pump track.</p> <p>2: Teenager area that has benches/swings/active forms of play that are age appropriate. i.e. that allow for a level of risk</p>					

Useful Resources

All Ireland Pollinator plan (remember what is good for pollinators is good for nature) <https://pollinators.ie/>

Community actions to help pollinators https://pollinators.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Local-Communities_actions-to-help-pollinators-2018-WEB.pdf

Burrenbeo - <https://burrenbeo.com/>

Wildflowers in Ireland: <http://www.wildflowersofireland.net/>

Heritage maps - What is protected in my area? <https://www.heritagemaps.ie/>

Conservation areas, site synopsis, protected habitat data (like above) <https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites>

Ireland's Citizen Science Portal and lots more <https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/>

Invasive species list <https://www.biodiversityireland.ie/projects/invasive-species/>

Some Websites with Information and Advice on Biodiversity and Wildlife

Vincent Wildlife Trust <https://www.vincentwildlife.ie/>

Irish Peatland Conservation Council <http://www.ipcc.ie/>

Irish Wildlife trust <https://iwt.ie/>

Birdwatch Ireland <https://birdwatchireland.ie/>

Bat Conservation Ireland <https://www.batconservationireland.org/>

Gort River Walk <https://gortriverwalk.wordpress.com>

<https://burrenbeo.com>

gortgreenways@gmail.com

Possible Grant Sources

County Council Community Support Grants - <http://www.galway.ie/en/services/communityenterpriseeconomicdevelopment/grantschemes/>

Local Leader Company, Galway Rural Development- <http://www.grd.ie/>

Foras na Gaeilge <https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/funding-schemes/?lang=en>

Failte Ireland <https://www.failteireland.ie/Identify-Available-Funding.aspx#:~:text=F%C3%A1ilte%20Ireland%20helps%20to%20support,grant%20schemes%20and%20strategic%20partnerships>

LAWPRO - <http://watersandcommunities.ie/community-water-development-fund/>

The Heritage Council <https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/funding>

Creative Ireland Climate fund - <https://www.creativeireland.gov.ie/en/blog/creative-climate-action-fund-seeks-to-spark-artistic-imaginations/>

Laurie Healy Credit Union Fund - <https://www.caracreditunion.ie/the-lauri-healy-community-sponsorship-awards-now-open-for-applications/>

Community Foundation for Ireland - <https://www.communityfoundation.ie/grants/types-of-grants>

Other options include local sponsorship and crowdfunding using websites like fundit.ie.

The Wheel Funding handbook has excellent advice on how and where to apply for grants https://www.wheel.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-09/the_wheel_EPA_Fundinghandbook_web.pdf



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This document was created by members of Gort Tidy Towns and Gort River walk Group.



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Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council



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Credits for photography: Nadin Reichel, Dave Murray (drone picture of Gort)
Thank you to Gort Tidy Towns and to the Biodiversity Website of Ireland for the picture of the Otter.