



**Tidy Towns Management Plan for
Ashbrook Estate
2010 - 2012**

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Ashbrook Estate Residents Committee**

**Ashbrook
Rathmoyle
Abbeyleix**

Feb 2012

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BACKGROUND

Ashbrook estate in Rathmoyle, Abbeyleix is comprised of 20 houses which were completed in summer '06. All houses were occupied by summer '07 and since then an active community spirit has developed in this small estate. A residents group was established in summer '08 with the aim of developing the community network and improving the landscape and environmental quality of the estate.

The group has been meeting on a monthly basis and has since produced a number of positive outcomes. These include:

- Set up group bank account and arranged from all residents to contribute to a fund for miscellaneous jobs on the estate. For example, the group arranged to pay a local handyman to maintain the lawns and flower beds and a stone name plaque was placed on the entrance to the estate.
- Organised social outings including a Christmas meal at Preston House in Abbeyleix
- On-going bi- monthly communication briefing all residents on developments and minutes of meetings.
- Erection of bird and bat boxes to encourage wildlife on our estate
- Establishment of plants and trees on the common green area

The residents group is now looking to build on achievements to date and to seek community grant funding to bring about further amenity, landscape and environmental developments in the estate.

PROPOSALS

A Amenity works including landscaping and development of open spaces:

Plant additional trees to replace failures

Traditional varieties of apple tree - which were previously typical of the local area (Bloody Butcher, George, Sam Young varieties) - will be sourced from Seedsavers in Scariff who are the sole suppliers of traditional Irish varieties of apple trees.

The trees will be planted in the dormant season. They will be staked and secured by tree ties. Mulch mats will also be laid down to minimise root competition and to reduce maintenance requirements.

As well as the obvious landscape enhancements, planting these trees will help to perpetuate traditional varieties of apple tree all but lost to the area.

Progress to Date:

This has been completed

Put down mulch mats on existing trees

Mulch mats will be sourced and put down around existing trees which were planted by the developer in 2006. The mats will encourage the existing trees to develop at a faster rate through reduced root competition and will also reduce the maintenance requirement.

Progress to Date:

This has been completed

Planting of herbs and shrubs on lawn terraces

The open lawn area on the east of the estate is situated on a slope which has been broken up by a series of three terraces. The earth faced terraces are exposed and subject to drought in dry periods. As a result, many of the previous plantings have failed.

Suitable hardy perennial species will be sourced and planted in the terraces in spring and early summer 2009.

Progress to date:

The terraces are progressing well. Following consultation with a horticulturalist we realise that we need to put in more ground cover plants to fill in the gappy areas. This will improve the appearance of the area and also cut down on the maintenance requirement by suppressing weeds.

Planting of climbers on walls

The external walls on the estate have an unpainted plaster finish. Lonicera and Clematis climbers will be planted at intervals against these walls to soften their appearance and to create cover for wildlife. Wire will be attached to the wall with steel nails to provide support for the climbers.

Note that all the proposed plantings above are for trees/ perennial plants which will provide long term benefits on the estate. The group will continue to fund a handyman to maintain the lawns, plants and general area and residents will also play their part in carrying out maintenance work. The proposal to lay down mulch mats will also cut down significantly on the need for maintenance and cutting of grass around trees etc.

Progress to date:

We have established climbers along a number of the bare spaces and put up trellises where necessary. There are still some gaps on the exterior walls which would look better with climbers.

B Environmental/ amenity initiatives that benefit local community

Improve the biodiversity resource on and around the estate by putting up bird boxes and bat boxes.

It is proposed to put up bird boxes and bat boxes on the mature trees which fringe the stream.

A variety of bird box types (open fronted as well as boxes with entry holes of different diameters) will be put up with a view to attracting in the maximum range of species. This will complement the work of a number of residents who routinely feed the birds during the winter season.

Three Schwegler type bat boxes will also be put up adjacent to the stream. These boxes, which are made up of a 75% wood sawdust, concrete and clay mixture, will be used as they have the highest rates of occupation of all box types.

Progress to Date:

This has been completed. At least two of the bird boxes are occupied. Not sure about the bats.

We have cleaned out the boxes in early spring each year before the nesting season.

Arrange and Energy Audit.

It is proposed to undertake an energy use audit on the houses in the estate. One option might be to conduct the HALO audit in one or two of the houses and then to circulate the resulting report to all residents. This is a possibility given that all of the 20 houses are more or less identical

Progress to Date:

This action has been completed and the audit report has been circulated to all houses on the estate.

Participate in Clean Up Laois Week

We intend to use the Clean Up Week initiative as a means of carrying out a spring clean on the estate and also on the winder Rathmoyle area.

Progress to Date:

We participated in the above initiative in both 2010 and 2011. The County Council picked up and removed all of the rubbish which was collected.

Arrange first aid training for residents

We lost Michael Berry (formerly of No 8) to cardiac arrest in autumn 2008. On the night in question, the emergency services were slow in arriving and unfortunately nobody was skilled in the use of the defibrillator devices which are distributed around the town. Following on from the tragedy the group resolved to become better equipped to deal with such situations.

Since then one of our residents has been trained as a cardiac responder and we are currently in the process of compiling and distributing a list of other residents with basic first aid skills.

We are looking into organising a basic first aid training course for all interested residents and are also considering arranging a more comprehensive occupational first aid course for perhaps one to two residents. The plan would then be distribute an updated list with names and contact details of all trained persons.

Progress to Date:

Mark Clancy has qualified as First Aider and details of cardiac responder training have been circulated to residents.

WORK PLAN FOR 2012

New Planting:

Following consultation with Maeve Flynn, we understand that we need to carry out some more planting on the three terraced flower beds and also on the linear bed adjacent to the stream. We anticipate that one more round of planting will close up the “gappy” areas and more or less complete an attractive and low maintenance area.

We have obtained a quote from Dunnes Nurseries for suitable plants and will also be getting in some additional topsoil

The climbers that we planted last year are establishing well and we plan to go with more climbers this year. We will also use more of the attractive fan shaped trellises which we used last year to train the climbers.

We intend to apply for support under the community grant scheme to contribute toward the cost of purchasing the ground cover plants, shrubs and climbers.

Flower Tubs at front of the estate

We will renew the plants in the tubs with colourful annuals.

Grass cutting:

We have already started our grass cutting program and will be continuing this as needed up until the autumn. We are not including this work in our application.

General maintenance of estate and hedge cutting:

We will maintain the general site by getting in a local maintenance man when necessary and will also arrange to get the residents on the job when the long summer evenings permit. We are not including this work in our application for funding.

Maintenance of Bird Boxes

We have already cleaned out the nest boxes before the 2012 nesting season

Energy Initiative

Following our energy audit last year it has come to light that many residents have not been servicing their boilers. This raises the risk of failure of the burners and also means that the appliances are undoubtedly burning inefficiently and therefore wasting fuel.

We intend to negotiate a group discount and arrange for a technician to come in to the estate and service a number of homes on the one occasion.

House Painting

The majority of the houses are now ready to be painted and as above we are looking to arrange a group discount with a painting contractor. This would also have the benefit of ensuring that a consistent painting scheme is followed.