

LEADER 2014-2020 NRN CASE STUDY

RESTORATION OF WALLED GARDEN IN MOUNTBELLEW

Summary

In the long term, the Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network aims to rejuvenate, conserve and develop the 18th century walled garden in Mountbellew, County Galway. Developing this existing heritage resource will provide a new amenity for the area. It will also complement other local heritage and recreation assets helping attract visitors to the area stimulating rural tourism. LEADER supported shorter-term goals of the project funding the preparation of a Development Plan for the walled garden site which is a protected structure. In the long term, this project will involve significant work, for example conserving original structures such as the limestone wall. The network aims to develop the project in line with best conservation practice and the Development Plan forms a key step in supporting restoration of the walled garden in line with this approach. LEADER funding has helped build research and evidence to guide the future development of the walled garden.

Context

The Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network was established in 2011. Its core objective is to: "Research, conserve and enhance the natural and built heritage of Mountbellew and its environs, for the benefit of the area". It has developed a wide range of projects supporting heritage and tourism in the area. These include the Bobby-Joe Gathering in 2011 targeting return migrants,

Project name: Restoration of Walled Garden in Mountbellew

Date: Mid 2018 to Mid 2019

Local Action Group: Galway East: Galway Rural Development Company

Implementing Partner: Galway Rural Development Company

Type of Beneficiary: Community group

Priority & Focus Area: Theme 1: Rural Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation/Sub theme: Rural Towns

Project Beneficiary Name/Organisation: Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network

Address: Mountbellew, Co. Galway

Further information:

<https://mountbellewheritagetourismnetwork.wordpress.com/>





fundraising for and erection of World War I and 1916 Easter Rising commemoration plaques. The Bobby-Joe Horse Shoe Throwing Competition and a local arts competition with the national school are regular annual events organised by the network.

Restoring and rejuvenating the Walled Garden in Mountbellew is a larger scale, longer term project core to the network's mission. A working group has been established to progress this project. Formerly part of the extensive Bellew estate, the 4.2 acre (1.7 ha) garden site is surrounded by six meter high limestone walls. It is a protected structure and an important part of Ireland's cultural and architectural heritage. Original features in need of restoration include the network of gravel stone paths and remains of a peach growing house and potting shed.



Aerial view of the walled garden site in Mountbellew. Image Credit: Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network

The network has tapped into community resources such as community employment and student volunteers. This has supported work on specific tasks such as ivy removal from the limestone walls and exposing original pathways. But to move the project forward in the longer term requires additional resources. Research and evidence is a central resource and starting point to spearhead the future sustainable development of the walled garden site. The need for a comprehensive survey to assess the site and its needs was identified to ensure preservation and restoration of this protected structure in line with best practice. LEADER funding was accessed through Galway

Rural Development to support historical research and a professional survey of the conservation needs of the Bellew Walled Garden site. The project was funded under the 'Rural Towns' LEADER theme and local development objective to 'Provide environmental and cultural awareness, development of the countryside and built heritage'.

The Bellew Walled Garden project also fits into local tourism development goals and complements other projects. The community envisions that alongside the Walled Garden, a number of projects will complement each other to develop a strong activity tourism offering in the area, such as the existing Forge Museum, adjacent forest walks and future development of amenities such as at Carrownagappul Bog Special Area of Conservation.

Objectives

- Prepare a Development Plan for the Bellew Walled Garden site.
- Development of a strong evidence base detailing the extent and nature of work needed to rejuvenate, preserve and develop the Bellew Walled Garden including historical research, conservation needs assessment and works programme.
- Assess the possibility of developing awareness raising measures relating to this conservation work, such as a training programme in conjunction with wall restoration, talks and/or an exhibition.
- Use this evidence base to inform future funding applications supporting the next phase and long term goals of the project's development.

Activities

The walled garden site is owned by Coillte. The network has built a strong relationship with its local Coillte office and both work together to realise common goals. The network secured a year-long lease to begin work on the site in 2017 and successfully gained a long term lease for the site in 2018. With long term access secured, research could begin on gathering evidence to help plan future physical works at the walled garden.





The Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network contracted Pat Meaney of Galway Building Surveyors as project manager to lead on research, surveying and analysis, as well as prepare the Development Plan. A comprehensive condition report has been carried out assessing work needed to preserve original features such as the surrounding limestone walls, gravel stone paths, peach house and potting shed. This work also included assessment of any concealed features. Grid mapping of the site and cross referencing to official Ordnance Survey maps was conducted. This has helped identify the network of gravel stone paths that need careful uncovering.

The network actively engages the local community, such as through public meetings and educational events at the walled garden site. For example, in 2018 events included tree planting with the local national school and a workshop on the traditional skill of hot lime mortar. Public meetings are important to update the local community on the project's progress, gain input to direct the project in line with community needs, as well as motivate increased engagement and support. In January 2019 approximately 100 community members attended a public meeting discussing achievements, challenges and next steps for the project.



“When we started working on the walled garden first people from the parish came to me and said that they didn’t know the walled garden was there at all. They knew there was a large, high wall but they didn’t necessarily know the hidden gem that was behind it”.
Jimmy Noone, Chairman, Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network

Project Manager, Pat Meaney, Galway Building Surveyors, carrying out mapping of the walled garden site Image Credit: Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network

Separate but complementary to the Development Plan preparation, the garden has also been surveyed by a professional garden designer. In 2017, the Walled Garden was among seven projects selected from over 50 applications by the Heritage Council under the ‘Adopt a Monument’ scheme. Projects are provided with specialist expertise and mentoring. Members of the network have received training under the Adopt a Monument Scheme, such as a day-long training course in tour guiding. This scheme also supported renowned garden designer Finola Reid, with expertise in Victorian and Georgian garden projects, to carry out a review of the garden site in July 2018. Her report makes a series of recommendations that provide good practice guidance to shape the restoration and development of the walled garden. This report works hand in hand with the LEADER funded project.

Results

The Development Plan for the Bellew Walled Garden site is expected to be complete in March 2019. The final Development Plan will include historical site research, a comprehensive condition report and works programme accounting for ecological considerations. It will also assess the possibility of including a training programme on stone wall repair and other relevant conservation work as part of future development, alongside other awareness raising measures.

To progress the project beyond its preliminary phase, the Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network plans to apply for further LEADER funding to support implementation of the evidence-based actions emerging from Finola Reid’s garden design report and the LEADER funded Development Plan. The project has increased awareness of local cultural heritage and the walled garden site. Network members note how locals were aware of the limestone walls, but did not always have knowledge of the heritage value of what is located behind them.





Expected future results include the development of a heritage-based local tourism amenity that can support local job creation. It is also expected that in the long term this project will have strong return on funding investment. Once the project is fully completed it aims to become self-sustaining, generating its own income from tourism. Long term, up to 10 year plans, may for example include the development of a coffee shop and interpretive centre at the walled garden site.

“The money invested in the community is for the good of the community. This is a major project but at the end we hope there will be jobs and a tourist attraction there. Linking with other local attractions such as the Forge Museum, adjacent forest walks and local raised bog, we should have a full day package”. Jimmy Noone, Chairman, Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network

Lessons

The Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network is proactive and continuously taps into private community and business funding. A weekly 50/50 lotto draw gives the network a small but regular income. Alongside this, a variety of public funding sources and supports have come together to progress the walled garden project in Mountbellew. But these are often small amounts of finance. Larger scale funding is limited and LEADER support is vital to the project. Raising adequate finance to support projects of this scale, as well as support their phased nature, would not be possible without funding sources such as LEADER.

A combination of local and external expertise is important to develop heritage restoration projects in a sustainable manner in line with best practice. The Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network is well connected and effectively accesses support available from a range of local and national organisations that help it effectively combine local and expert knowledge. These include Galway County Council, Coillte and The Heritage Council. The group has also actively worked to engage and gain input from the wider local community in the walled garden project so it develops in line with community opinion and needs.

The Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network has learned the importance of not expecting short-term results but to focus on long term benefits. The members need to have a strong commitment to the project. The group is focused on an evidence based best practice approach to heritage restoration and conservation which supports effective project development.

“A challenge for our network was to accept that restoring the walled garden wasn’t going to happen in 12 months or even two years. Having the external expertise on board is crucial to ensure we work within best practice. The LEADER funding went towards research and analysis to produce a history and survey report. LEADER was very important to support this as we would not have that level of funding. The evidence is crucial as we don’t want a situation that we look back in a few years and we think we shouldn’t have done it that way”. Jimmy Noone, Chairman, Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network

Funding

Total project budget (i)+(ii)+(iii) =	€18,222.78
+ (i) Rural Development Programme support (a)+(b)	€16,400.50
+ (a) EAFRD (EU) contribution	€10,299.51
+ (b) National / Regional contribution	€6,100.99
+ (ii) Private / Own funds	€1,822.28
+ (iii) Other funding sources	n/a

Contact details

Project beneficiary name	Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network
Contact person	Jimmy Noone
Email	mountbellewheritageandtourism@gmail.com
Telephone	n/a
Address of beneficiary or implementing body	Mountbellew, Co. Galway

